



Vincentian Charities

Newsletter and Chronicle of Activities
SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL
Louisiana, Capital Region
Fall Edition 2020 Vol. XXIX, No. II



*Serving God's Poor in our
Community Since 1865*



A Prayer for Sweet Dreams

Isn't it great to wake up in a comfortable bed, after a good night's sleep and a wonderful dream? This is just one of the many everyday blessings most of us took for granted before the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, at our Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter, we constantly hear mothers saying that their lives seem like a bad dream. Homelessness is indeed a nightmare, especially during a pandemic. That's why our Sweet Dreams Shelter is here – to put an end to the nightmare of living in a car, or even worse, on the street.

This year's Sweet Dreams campaign is critical to those we serve, like little Libby in the photo. We are seeing more women and children that have been sleeping in their cars or on the street. Recently, an entire family came to us – mother, father and children – who had been calling their car home.



Challenging times because of the pandemic – a struggling economy, rising costs, layoffs and cut-backs – affect everyone, but the ones that are hardest hit are those that can least afford it. Too often, it's single parent families, like Kianna and her daughter in the photo, that are most severely affected. And children don't understand how they became homeless,

Continued on page 2; see A Prayer for Sweet Dreams



St. Vincent de Paul recently lost Sister Johanne Pedersen, CSJ, a long-time and beloved volunteer when she went to her rest in heaven.

Volunteering throughout her eighties and even at ninety years old, she was an inspiration to all of us at St. Vincent de Paul! She did what she could to

Continued on page 2; see Sister Johanne Pedersen, CSJ



Rosie Martina, center, with daughter Patricia and Michael Acaldo. Rosie is 97 years young and continues his volunteer commitment to St. Vincent de Paul's efforts to serve the poor and homeless.

Rosie Martina 2020 Golden Deeds Winner

Long-time member and St. Vincent de Paul Top Hat Hall of Fame recipient Rosie Martina has been named the 2020 Golden Deeds Award winner! Rosie will be honored on November 10th with the award, established by the Inter-Civic Council of Greater Baton Rouge and The Advocate to recognize hard-working volunteers for their good works.

Rosie was nominated for the award by Keith Horcasitas, whose wife, Maria Horcasitas, volunteered for many years alongside Rosie to pick up donated food items from local grocery stores for the St. Vincent de Paul meals.

In 1982, Rosie was among volunteers who founded the first St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room, which originally opened in a shotgun house on South 21st Street, and only served 20 to 50 people a day. No menu was prepared in advance, since the meals were based on the donated items that were left on the back porch each morning. Today the Dining Room is in **Continued on page 3; 2020 Golden Deeds Winner**



New Emergency Shelter Project Construction Completed & Opened

Despite the pandemic, we were able to complete construction

on our new 3,500 square foot building on the St. Vincent de Paul Campus. It opened and was prepared to serve the homeless for Tropical Storm Christobal, but, fortunately, as we know Christobal did not affect our area. This exercise prepared us for Hurricane Laura, when we were able to provide shelter for ten single individuals and two families (a family of 3 and family of 4).

Continued on page 2; see New Emergency Shelter Project

In this issue – Pat's Coats for Kids

SVDP's COVID-19 Response

A Prayer for Sweet Dreams Continued from page 1

but they know their lives have been turned upside down. Their worlds have collapsed, and the adults they trusted to take care of them are struggling with an enemy they have never faced before – homelessness during a worldwide pandemic.

Thank God, St. Vincent de Paul is here to let them know that someone cares enough about them to provide a home, safety and food until their lives can return to normal.

So many homeless mothers, fathers and children need our help, and this year’s Sweet Dream’s effort is more important than ever. The poorest families in our community have been hit hard by the pandemic and the struggling economy. This is the perfect storm. A layoff, a missed paycheck, or catching the coronavirus can lead to a desperate situation.

Our Sweet Dreams Shelter is the answer to the prayers of mothers and fathers in desperate need. We provide a helping hand-up and a safe place to stay. This year’s Sweet Dreams campaign will generate critical dollars we needed to respond during this crisis. During these difficult and uncertain times, we need your support, so that we can offer these families shelter, security, and the time they need to get back on their feet.

There are two ways you can help us turn their nightmares into sweet dreams. You can support this year’s Sweet Dreams effort by saying the Sweet Dreams prayer that is included in this newsletter. Cut it out and put it in a special place, but most importantly, make it part of your daily prayer life. You can also support this program financially. Please consider making a contribution via svdpbr.org or by writing a check and mailing it to P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821.

We like to refer to our charitable works as “*come and see them*” programs because you can come by our main charitable campus any day and see our special works in action. Just give Michael Acaldo a call at (225) 383-7837. If he’s not at his desk, leave a message. Watch us as we turn nightmares into sweet dreams for the most vulnerable people in our community.



**Help Us
Help Pat!**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is delighted to partner again with WBRZ-Channel 2 and Pat’s Coats for Kids.

Our Essential Needs Distribution Center is playing a key role in this effort. We will collect all gently used coats that are donated, organize them, and make sure they go to children who would otherwise suffer from the cold this winter. Needy children will be so grateful for the warmth provided by these coats.

Pat Shingleton has made such an impact over the last 31 years through this important program and has touched the lives of so many vulnerable children. His commitment and vision have ensured that needy children have felt our community’s compassion and care during their time of need.

We ask you to keep this effort and the needy children we serve in your thoughts and prayers. For more information go to WBRZ.com.

Sister Johanne Pedersen, CSJ Continued from page 1
make the world a better place for the needy.

Back on Thanksgiving Day 2014, she, Sister Joan Laplace and Sister Carolyn Brady were on the front page of The Advocate newspaper. It was a beautiful photo entitled, “Turkey Time,” which was taken when they were in the kitchen with other volunteers, carving turkeys for Thanksgiving. What an inspiration it was to see the sisters and volunteers giving the gift that only they could give: themselves.

When she was at St. Vincent de Paul, Sister Johanne uplifted everyone around her, and made us feel good about what we are doing. It’s only through the hard work and dedication of people like Sister Johanne that St. Vincent de Paul has become a symbol of hope to the needy in our community. She was an inspiration to all of us. Through her words and actions, she brought joy and happiness to each of us. Please join us in praying for her and the Sisters of St. Joseph.

New Emergency Shelter Project Continued from page 1

Without our shelter, the homeless individuals and families we served would have had no place to call home and be safe. As the temperatures begin to drop, the important night service will become even more critical, especially during freeze nights.

During the day, our shelter provides the additional space to spread out. St. Vincent de Paul is continuing our commitment (even during a pandemic) to sheltering our most vulnerable residents. This new program is helping us, not only to provide shelter, but also critical case management and other services, which are essential to successfully giving a hand-up to self-sufficiency and permanent housing. An official ribbon-cutting has been delayed due to the pandemic, but will be happening in the near future.

Sweet Dreams Prayer

*Lord God, Giver of Life,
Fill us with your Spirit.*

Use our hands to shelter the homeless;

Use our hearts to enable sweet dreams;

Use our voices to end homelessness.

May our actions improve life for others

And reflect your abundant love.

Through Christ our Lord, AMEN.

2020 Golden Deeds Winner Continued from page 1

its third location at 222 St. Vincent de Paul Place and serves over 200 to 450 hot meals a day at lunchtime and an equal amount of brown bag suppers. Last year, over 260,000 meals were served.

Rosie has many fond memories of the early days of the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room. He and his beloved wife, Laura, worked side by side serving the poor and homeless at our Dining Room for many years. Rosie remembers the other founders of the program – Fred Griggs, Vernon Broussard, Marvin Ourso, Bill LeBlanc, Jewel Newman, Claude Doucet, and a long list of others, worked together to make this food ministry a reality.

Rosie has been active in his local St. Jude St. Vincent de Paul Conference ministry, which does a great job of serving the poor. In the early days of that effort, Rosie and Laura began with a food pantry in their garage. Rosie's daughter Patricia recalls, "we gave up our garage." Rosie and Laura's children have given countless hours of volunteerism and efforts to help the poor and homeless. They even help Rosie make food pick-ups.

Yes, even at 97, Rosie continues to make food pick-ups and coordinates a small army of volunteers who also pick up donated food from local supermarkets, bakeries, and restaurants. Rosie can certainly tell some wonderful stories about our Dining Room Program.

Right now, Michael Acaldo, President & CEO of St. Vincent de Paul Charitable Programs said, "We have officially asked Rosie to quarantine for now. At first, Rosie didn't want to do it, but we explained to him that he was too important to us to be put at risk. That's why Rosie is in St. Vincent's Top Hat Award Hall of Fame, and won the Golden Deeds Award. He is willing to put his life on the line for others."

St. Vincent de Paul recognizes and thanks Rosie for his many decades of volunteer leadership and services. We congratulate him on this well-deserved award.



Preparation for Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is not that far away, and this year will be very special because it is going to give all of us an opportunity to count our blessings during a very difficult time.

Our St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room and Holiday Helpers efforts will ensure that we reach the poor, the homeless and forgotten – anyone in need of a meal – on Thanksgiving Day. This year, all our efforts will be modified to reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meals will be served on a to-go basis and will also be delivered.

Check out our upcoming newsletter where we will highlight the congregation of B'Nai Israel, whose Turkey Train is a critical part of our Thanksgiving efforts. We will also highlight the wonderful people at the Raising Cane's River Center who work so hard to ensure that our community reaches people who are hungry on Thanksgiving Day.

We ask you to pray for our efforts. Your prayers are needed more than ever.

SVDP's COVID-19 Response

For 155 years, St. Vincent de Paul has responded to community challenges. Whether it's COVID-19 or the pandemic of 1918, the Great Depression of the 1930's or the current economic crisis, St. Vincent de Paul has been here, ready to respond. During hard times, the demand for our services grows, and we continue to be here to serve the poor and homeless who have been hardest hit by the pandemic.

During this current COVID-19 crisis, St. Vincent de Paul hasn't missed a day of service and continues to work hard to reach out and provide services to the poor and homeless.

We have focused our efforts on continuing to serve to-go meals, provide night shelter and fill prescriptions for people who rely on us for their very survival. Our work utilizes our core strengths – meal services, prescription medicines and shelter services to people in need.

Our work is so important to people who would otherwise go hungry. Our Dining Room continues to serve between 200 and 450 people a day.



Our Bishop Ott Shelter Program continues to be a safety net for individuals and families that are homeless. As mentioned in our article entitled, "A Prayer for Sweet Dreams," without us, our guests would not have had a place to call home. Keeping our doors open is very important to many of our homeless guests who suffer from underlying disease and suppressed immune systems. Thanks to the wonderful work of our small staff, we have kept our doors open and people safe.



Finally, our pharmacy is filling prescriptions for those who currently rely on us for life-sustaining prescription medicine, as well as, those who have recently lost jobs and insurance because of this pandemic.

The hard part is just beginning for us. The fall and winter months are going to present additional COVID-19 challenges. Please keep our volunteers and small staff in your thoughts and prayers. God bless you for your support!

St. Vincent de Paul Strategic Planning Process

We have just launched a strategic planning process. As a part of our St. Vincent de Paul family, your input is critical to us! Please visit svdpbr.org in October and give us your input. Our past strategic plans have helped our organization accomplish some great community outcomes. As we have previously mentioned, we just opened a new homeless day center and emergency disaster shelter. We also continue to take the steps necessary to construct a chapel on our campus and open it soon. We further see an opportunity, over the course of the next several years, to continue to strengthen our current programs and make future program visions a reality. Help us to continue our excellence in serving the needy in our community by giving us your input.

Society of St. Vincent de Paul
P. O. Box 127
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0127

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Baton Rouge, LA
Permit No. 1272

Address Service Requested

Everyone is a Child of God

Everyone in our community will remember 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. No one was unaffected. Whether you caught the virus or lost your ability to live a normal life or worst of all, lost a loved one, we all shared the unforgettable experience of living through a pandemic. We all shared a sense of horror as cases of those infected and those who died continued to rise. Even individuals who were spared by the virus itself, will never forget the devastating loss of life.

As the pandemic continues, something wonderful has also happened. The spirit of Christmas has arrived months ahead of schedule, and there has been an outpouring of love and kindness. Everyone wants to help – even people who have been affected. They have made homemade masks for the homeless, said prayers for those in need, put themselves at risk by volunteering and have given financially to help keep our doors open, so we can be there for those who have nowhere else to turn.

So you see, the Christmas Spirit does not just come on December 25th. Yes, Christmas is a celebration of Jesus' birth, but it's also a reminder of God's love, which is present every day and for all time. We are all children of God! We are all priceless! We do our work because we love all God's children!

If only everyone could live every day as if it were Christmas. If every thought was compassionate, every word was kind, if every action was a reflection of His love and mercy, what a wonderful world it would be! This is something we can all hope for and work toward.

On behalf of the needy we serve, I want to thank you for being a part of the St. Vincent de Paul family and for putting your faith into action! Thank you for being a family that loves God and His children! -- *Michael J. Acaldo, President & CEO*

If you missed our 2020 St. Vincent de Paul Virtual Mass, you can still see it by visiting svdpbr.org. It was a great event, where we celebrated another year of making a difference by serving all of God's children in need!



It's hard to believe that Christmas is right around the corner. We are already collecting gifts for needy and homeless children. Please consider donating a gift for a needy child. You can buy a toy in the \$10 to \$20 range and drop it off at St. Vincent de Paul. If you'd rather make a financial gift for the purchase of Christmas toys, you can do so by sending a check to St. Vincent de Paul at P. O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821 or go to svdpbr.org to make a gift. Your support will help us to bring the Christmas spirit to needy children.