

Serving in *Hope*

a publication of National Council
of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc.®



FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FOUNDERS

You Immerse Neighbors in Love & Mercy

YOU MIGHT IMAGINE that the day someone is released from prison would be the best and happiest day of their incarceration. But that's not always the case.

Many agonize over leaving. Why? Because they'll walk out to freedom with no more than *that*. No clothes, money, phone minutes, or even a valid ID. No job — and often not a single friend or family member they can go back to. Alone on a bus at the end of the line, they have no idea where to go or what to do next.

Having the right kind of help in those first hours and days is critical to making a successful return to society. So is having **ongoing help** for weeks, months, and even years to come.

Thanks to support from generous donors like you, Vincentian volunteers are receiving the spiritual formation and training they need to serve neighbors in need with the most effective person-to-person assistance possible. The success of the Society's Immersion Reentry Program is one example.

Begun in early 2019, Immersion provides citizens returning to their communities with caring and compassionate support from Vincentian volunteers along every step of their journey. Immediate help includes providing transitional services during the first 72 hours after release, as well as basics like food, clothing, and shelter. Longer-term support includes mentoring, employment assistance, education, help reconnecting with loved ones, advocacy, and securing permanent housing.

"We are following in the footsteps of our founders," says Peter Kortright. He and Diana Reeves co-founded Immersion in their Attleboro, Massachusetts Council. Frédéric Ozanam and the first Vincentians encountered these same situations nearly two hundred years ago. The first Home Visits they carried out eventually became the

Continued on page 2



**"Service is a means,
not an end ...**

... to the works of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We are walking with people out of poverty not for credit to ourselves, but for love alone. By serving Christ in the person of the poor, we are getting the benefit by drawing closer to one another, and to Christ. This is at the heart of what it means to be formed as a Vincentian.

God created us for community, to grow with and through each other. It is in sharing our growth with others that they can grow. That makes us better servants and we all grow together in spirit."

– Tim Williams
National Vincentian Formation Director



You Immerse Neighbors in Love & Mercy *Continued from page 1*

Society of St. Vincent de Paul. They offered practical and prudent ways to reflect God's mercy.

"Visiting the prisoner who is preparing to reenter the community is quite like a Home Visit, God is asking us to pay special attention to those least of us who may need it."

Immersion currently serves over 400 people in Attleboro, Des Moines, Green Bay, and Orlando. Donor gifts to the National Council are supporting its planned expansion.

"Nobody anywhere gets paid to accompany someone so closely for so long in their journey back to self-sufficiency," Kortwright says. "Vincentians do it for love, with the traditions, mission, and zeal of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and guidance from the Holy Spirit."

The power of praying together, listening, empathizing, organizing, and taking action means the world to brothers and sisters who are rebuilding their lives.

Over 2019 – 2021, volunteers accompanied Christine step-by-step following her release from prison. Along the road they offered grocery gift cards, bus passes, clothing, and rent to enter a "sober house" for two months. There were empowerment classes, job applications, and help to regain custody of her children. There were shared tears and cheers, and many prayers of gratitude.

Last July, with the Society's assistance in funding a security deposit, Christine moved into her own space — the biggest step so far in her journey forward. "It's small and it's kind of ugly, but it has a lock on the door and it is mine," she said with a smile. ●

DIVINE MERCY:

God's Love in Our Hands

ON THE OCTAVE OF EASTER, CATHOLICS CELEBRATE DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY.

Recently Bishop Donald J. Hying spoke about how donors and volunteers of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul serve to further God's mercy through their association with the Society.

"Mercy is at the very heart of Christianity. Mercy is what love does when it encounters people who are suffering."

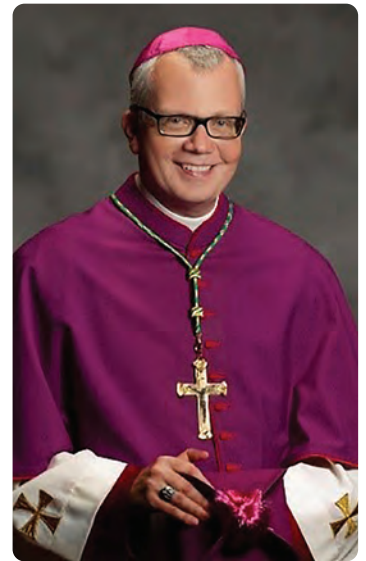
Bishop Hying thinks of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection as God's great rescue mission. Seeing humanity trapped in sin and death, He sent His Son to save us. So every time someone offers an act of charity in Jesus' name, they are extending what Jesus did, "whether it's feeding the hungry or helping someone with rent, or just listening."

Providing material aid is important. But it's not the central meaning of the work itself, Bishop Hying notes. "If the Society found itself without money or food or furniture to share with people in need, we would still go to them and offer what they need even more: the love of God and Christian friendship.

"We would listen to them, pray for them, help them realize that they have infinite value. This is our fundamental work.

"After all, an atheist can feed someone who's hungry. But for Christians, this same act has profound spiritual dimensions." ●

Bishop Donald J. Hying serves as the Bishop of the Diocese of Madison in Wisconsin and as National Episcopal Advisor to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.



"The Society of St. Vincent de Paul takes Jesus' resurrection a step further in the world by extending his love and mercy to every individual as a son or daughter of God. When someone chooses to share their treasure with the Society, it is an act of faith, almost as if they are putting money in Jesus' pocket to help the poor."

– Bishop Donald J. Hying