

Vincentian Charities

Newsletter and Chronicle of Activities
DIOCESAN COUNCIL--SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT de PAUL
Serving God's Poor in this Community Since 1865

Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

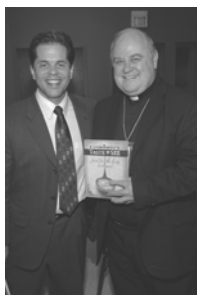
Christmas 2008 Edition

Vol. XVII, No. V

Taste & See It's Here



On December 1st a semi rolled into our parking lot with thousands of copies of our new cookbook. We were so excited to open that first box! The first copy that came out of the box was beautiful and went well beyond our expectations. It's one thing to see a bunch of draft pages for proofreading. It's a whole 'nother thing to see the final product. What a thrill!



This special book has some delicious recipes, but more importantly, captures the spirit of our charitable work and contains powerful stories about the people we help every day. Guess who got the first book? The Society thought a lot about this honor and we decided to officially present the first copy to Bishop Robert Muench at our Annual St. Vincent

de Paul Feast Day Mass in recognition of his support of our local Society. He has previewed the book and given it his full endorsement.

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Tradition Continues

2008 has been a challenging year. From economic turmoil to devastating hurricanes, our state has certainly seen its share of ups and downs. But in a way, challenges and uncertainty just make Christmas more special. This sacred time is an annual reminder of what's really important in life and inspires us to reach out and share our blessings with others.

One of the special events at St. Vincent de Paul is our annual gift distribution by Bishop Robert Muench, also known as St. Nick. Again this year, Bishop Muench will be at our dining room at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 20th, ready to serve as our not-so-traditional Santa. Actually, it's appropriate that we should have a Bishop distributing gifts at Christmas time. St. Nicholas was a Bishop in the fourth century and his tradition of generosity continues today. We'll need to collect a lot of gifts before December 20th
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'Twas the Night Before Christmas...



This was the theme we chose for the 2008 Christmas season here at St. Vincent de Paul. This is such a joyful time of year, and the anticipation grows with each passing day. The weeks before Christmas are filled with church activities, decorating the tree, cooking our favorite dishes and sharing good times with our families. And then comes Christmas Eve, a special time when things finally slow down a bit, and preparations for the celebration are almost done.

The perfect image of Christmas Eve is a young family sitting together on a sofa with a fire crackling in the fireplace. A plate of cookies and a glass of milk is waiting for Santa, stockings are hung, and there are lots of presents under the tree. The children, in their pajamas, snuggle close as mom reads them a story about the birth of Baby Jesus.



For the poor and homeless, reality may bear no resemblance at all to the scene described above. For some, Christmas Eve will be a lonely search for shelter from the cold. Others – both young and old – will go to bed hungry. Somewhere, someone will be taking the last pill from their bottle of life-sustaining medications. And many low income parents will be dreading the next morning when
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175 Years of Worldwide Service



In 1833, in Paris, France, Frederic Ozanam, a nineteen-year-old college student, and some of his classmates decided that they wanted to make a difference in the world. And they did. They formed the first St. Vincent de Paul Conference. That first Conference helped them to grow spiritually and since that time has spread throughout the world. Today St. Vincent de Paul is one of the largest lay Catholic ministries in the
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In this Special Holiday Issue:

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- League of Angels

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world. The local St. Vincent de Paul Society celebrated this 175th anniversary by coming together at our Annual St. Vincent de Paul Mass on December 3rd. As part of this celebration, a number of Society volunteers were recognized for their volunteerism. Joe Ellis and James Kelly were recognized for 25th years of dedicated service to our local Society.



The award ceremony ended with the *Top Hat* award. The name of the award comes from Frederic Ozanam who founded the Society 175 years ago and visited the poor in his top hat. Tim Mueller, this year's *Top Hat* recipient, has worked hard, dedicating countless hours to making the Gospel come to life in Sacred Heart parish. In addition to

serving as our Council Vice-President, he has played a critical role in heading up Council training programs, as well as redeveloping our website for Conference activities. The Society was very pleased to present Tim with this most prestigious honor for his volunteer service.

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Along with the Bishop's endorsement, Chef John Folse has fully supported this effort. He wrote the foreword for the cookbook, which begins with this quote: "God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but our standard of giving." Chef Folse also has an entire section of recipes in the book, and we count our blessings for his support.

You need to get a copy of this book! It will nourish the body and soul. In addition, it will make a great gift for Christmas, birthdays, or other special occasions. Copies can be ordered through our website at www.svdpbr.org or see the order form below. If you would like to purchase the book as a Christmas gift, call us at 383-7837, extension O.



Our Bishop Ott Shelter Program presented the *Be a Light* Award to Kathy Bishop. Kathy has served meals for many years at our Bishop Ott Shelter Program. These years of service led her to come up with the concept of a cookbook that would raise awareness and generate much needed funding for our charities. This innovative *Taste & See* cookbook is now a reality and available for purchase just in time for Christmas.

The next presentation was the *Sts. Cosmas and Damian* award. These saints are the patron saints of pharmacists. Lawrence and Ann George, a couple who has donated more than ten years of their time to our pharmacy, received this year's award. What a wonderful example for other couples who want to serve together.



The St. Vincent de Paul Store Program recognized a key staff leader who has done so much for the needy in times of disaster. During the last three years, we have been affected by two hurricanes in different ways. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed our stores when approximately 50,000 evacuees came to us in need of basic necessities. In 2008, Hurricane Gustav literally blew the roof off our Plank Road store. This year's award recipient, Pat Davenport, went above and beyond the call of duty after both storms. She spent many nights and weekends putting the Plank Road store back together again, better than ever.

This year's *Heaven's Helpers* award went to a true angel. Mrs. Rosemary Rolfsen has been a regular volunteer for many years and her presence brightens the dining room week after week, year after year, as she serves the needy who come to our Dining Room for this most basic of necessities.



Order Your Taste & See Cookbook!

Please send me a copy of the *Taste & See* cookbook at \$21.95 plus 9% tax – a total of \$23.93, plus shipping and handling of \$3.99 for a total of \$27.92. (To order more than one copy or to pick up your book to avoid shipping costs, call us at (225) 383-7837, extension O.)

My check for \$_____ is enclosed.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Mail your order to *St. Vincent de Paul, P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0127* or call us at (225) 383-7837.

WJBO Collection Drive a Success

On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, Bill Profita and WJBO rolled out to do a live radio show at the Wal-Mart on College Drive to collect items for St. Vincent de Paul. This effort created public awareness about the important work we do at our dining room, pharmacy, shelters and housing facilities. We collected much needed items that night, and because of the awareness this show generated, many people dropped off items to make this year's Thanksgiving meal a true feast for our dining room guests.

We thank WJBO, Bill Profita, Mike Norwood, and the good people at Coca-Cola that helped sponsor this important community-wide activity. We'll be out again for a Christmas collection drive, so keep your radios tuned to Bill Profita's show Monday through Friday at 5:00 p.m.

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they have to tell their children that Santa didn't stop at their house this year. For many of the people we serve, like those in the photos throughout this newsletter, the scene above is just something you see on Christmas cards. At St. Vincent de Paul, we do everything we can to make sure that Christmas is a special and blessed day for those who come to us for help, but our ultimate goal is to carry the Christmas spirit of good will and giving throughout the year.

By the end of this year, we will serve over 200,000 meals, which is a remarkable accomplishment in itself. Last year, we served 200,000 meals, but many of those were served at Renaissance Village, a FEMA trailer park that is now closed. This year, we'll hit the 200,000 mark again, which actually indicates an increase in the local demand for our dining room services. We are able to meet that growing need because of the generosity of people in our community and the volunteers who come out to help us.

Volunteers also assist our small pharmacy staff as we fill more than 30,000 prescriptions annually for people who can't afford the medicines their doctors have prescribed. Our pharmacy is a prescription bank for our community, and we help thousands of people every year.

This year, we will provide approximately 20,000 guest nights of shelter. Our housing facilities are full of men, women and children who need a second chance. When you're living from paycheck to paycheck, an illness, a lay-off, or an unexpected expense can be catastrophic. If you can't pay your rent, homelessness suddenly becomes a reality you never thought you would have to face.

Whether someone is a guest at our dining room, pharmacy or shelter, they are all recipients of a very special gift – the gift of love – from people like you. You are one of the gifts God has given to the poor, and we are grateful to have you as a member of our St. Vincent de Paul family. On behalf of the needy we serve, we wish you a merry Christmas and God's blessings in the coming year.

League of Angels



If you haven't joined the League of Angels yet, please consider doing so. All you have to do is remember the Society in your estate planning. So many people are already members. Won't you join the league by including the Society in your will, life insurance policy, charitable remainder trust, or some other form of estate planning? The amount is not critical, but your thoughtfulness will mean the world to those we serve.

For more information on the League, contact Michael Acaldo at (225) 383-7837, ext. O. If you have already included us in your estate, please let us know. If you wish to remain anonymous, we will certainly honor that desire, but it's important for us to know what your wishes are so that we can make sure those wishes are fulfilled in the years to come. We thank you for keeping our mission of charity in your thoughts and prayers.

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rolls around, but fortunately, the students, faculty and staff of St. Louis King of France School will continue their support of this growing community effort again this year. In addition, St. Aloysius school students, faculty and staff have adopted this program as a project. The staff of the Catholic Life Center are also continuing their support of this effort. But we need your support as well.

You can help by donating new toys to this effort. Toys can be dropped off at our offices at our charitable campus or you can make a financial gift to help St. Nick, c/o St. Vincent de Paul, P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821.

As we get closer to the date of the gift giveaway, we check all the presents that have been donated to see what gaps we have. For instance, we may be short on gifts for infants, or seven-year-old boys. Once we determine what is needed, we go out to Wal-Mart or some other discount store and buy gifts. We are only able to do that because of the generosity of people who support this effort financially, so please consider making a financial contribution to this year's effort. If you need more information, call us at 383-7837, ext. 202.

Retail Store sets the Stage for Christmas

The Stage store located on Siegen Lane has generously set up a Christmas tree with names and items needed at our homeless shelters and facilities, items that will help us put smiles on the faces of needy men, women and children this Christmas season. Each ornament is labeled with an item we need for someone staying at one of our shelters. The idea for this drive came from Stage store manager Patricia Boudreaux. Patricia had volunteered at St. Vincent de Paul on a holiday some years ago with Bishop Hughes, and what she saw touched her heart. She has been a Stage store manager in another part of the country and when she was transferred back to Baton Rouge, she remembered that special day and wanted to help.

Patricia was also instrumental in obtaining some really nice Christmas decorations for St. Vincent de Paul. Stage had updated their decorations, but the previous ones were still like new. So all those beautiful decorations were donated to our dining room, and are sure to lift the spirits of our guests.

We encourage anyone that would like to support this effort to go by Stage on Siegen Lane and also their stores in Zachary and Gonzales. Take a look at the tree and select an ornament with a name and item listed on it. Bring that item back to the store and we'll get it to someone that will be so grateful just to get one gift this Christmas season.

Bishop Ott Collection Drive Continues

Since 1992, our collection drive has been going strong, making a difference in the lives of the homeless in our community. Many items are still needed. For information on items needed most, contact us at 383-7837, extension O. The next time you're at the store, please consider picking up an item and dropping it by one of our shelter facilities.

Our Local Economy *is* Affected

It amazes me when I read a newspaper or turn on the evening news and hear an economist saying that our local city and

state economies won't be affected by what's going on during the current financial crisis. Throughout 2008, we have seen wild fluctuations in gas prices. For low-income individuals who were fortunate enough to have a car, just getting to work and back took money from budgets that were already stretched thin. High gas prices affected everything from food costs to utilities. People were forced to use credit cards for basic necessities, or resort to payday loans that they still haven't been able to pay off.

Even when gas prices began to come down, the cost of food and utilities remained higher than they were a year ago. A trip to the grocery store has become downright painful. In addition, there has been a shortage of decent affordable housing in our area for years, and rental costs continue to rise despite a slowing economy. We've seen a lot of new faces at our Dining Room, and we expect that trend to continue as individuals and families struggle to make ends meet. Not only the poor are being affected. A roller coaster stock market affects almost everyone in one way or another. For instance, while the demand for our services continues to grow, we recognize that some of our supporters may not be in a position to be as generous as they were in the past. No one can donate money they no longer have.

Recently, a reporter from a local television station asked me, "Where are you going to cut back if you don't receive those stock contributions?" That was a tough question, one that I had already given a lot of thought. There is really nothing to cut when there's no fat in a budget. 93% of all the financial and in-kind donations we receive goes to direct services to help people in need. Only about 3.5% goes to administration and management, with another 3.5% going to development activities. We've had people retire or leave for more lucrative careers in the for-profit world, and we have not replaced those individuals. We have also cut back on the number of trucks we have on the road and the number of staff members at our thrift stores. We have done all these things in order to position the Society for success in a tight economy.

We ask you to keep us in your thoughts and prayers. Share the good news about the Society, buy a *Taste & See* cookbook, help us in any way you can. You are the lifeblood of our organization, and we thank you on behalf of the people we serve.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

--Michael J. Acaldo, President & CEO - St. Vincent de Paul Charities

Watch the *Beacons of Light* program! We encourage you to tune in to Cox Cable Channel 15 for a great show on the work of St. Vincent de Paul: Sundays at 3:00 p.m.; Tuesdays at 1:00 p.m.; Wednesdays at 9:00 p.m. and Saturdays at 8:00 p.m.

Address Service Requested

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

