**Christmas that magical time**

**October and Christmas work has started in so many conferences. Yes some presidents started long ago, as far back as September or late August when they met with the school principles to get their agreement and commitment on fall and Christmas help. Of course, killing two birds with one shot, they also sought a Thanksgiving food drive commitment.**

**As Vincentians we commit and look forward to serving our neighbour in need in the best possible way.  Each year we try to improve on the past year. All we have to do is ask ourselves what we would do if it was our children or parents we were serving. Ask ourselves what our benefactors would want. It's up to us to make that magic. As Vincentians we grow by service.**

**As Vincentians we have the privilege, opportunity and obligation to make each Christmas the best ever. This is our goal and we are not alone. Christmas is the time of the year that many of us find the Lord walking beside us helping make things happen. We willingly took on this obligation when we committed to the vocation of being a Vincentian. And, Yes, it is an obligation and we owe it to ourselves, our conference and our neighbours in need to fulfill this obligation to the best of our ability.**

**Will we inconvenience ourselves in the service of those in need?  Most certainly we will. We understood this when we committed to the vocation of being a Vincentian. While we are volunteers we still must make and fulfill our commitments.**

**There are many different ways of making a great Christmas for those we serve.**

**I don’t suggest that the following suggestions are the only way. They are one way. No one way is more correct than the other as long as we achieve the objective of serving those neighbours in need with Love, Respect, Justice and Joy. However, all the different ways involves hard work, commitment, probably some late nights and long days and maybe a bit of worry. When we take a short cut or delete something we have to ask ourselves what is the risk, what is the possible effect?  Do we have a right to take that risk? We certainly don't want a negative effect. Rather, we want a Christmas that, as a conference and individuals, we can be proud of. Each year we should challenge ourselves and our conferences to do better for those we serve than the year before. If we are to live and believe our faith we know that the Lord will walk with us to see this happen.**

**When we pack the food box we should use our best judgment and put everything in the box that we can.  Pack the box with Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner in mind. Please don't insult the person with stale dated food.  That last can of soup that you jammed in the box might be one more meal for that family. It all counts. Be as generous as you can.**

**Christmas presents are generally plentiful for the younger children. Don't be afraid to give a child several gifts.  Gifts for teens and adults are scarce and often you will get gift cards to fill this need. Regardless of that, all people deserve and want a gift the same as you enjoy getting a gift. Mothers generally want gift cards for food and are not concerned about themselves but, please don’t leave them out. Don't give a gift to one of our neighbours in need that you wouldn't give to your own family.  Let that be your litmus test.**

**The gifts come from many sources such as;**

* **Schools offering to do families**
* **Individuals doing a family or more**
* **Businesses**
* **Parishioners**

**Many of the gifts will come from our parishioners. The generosity of the parishioners is generally quite humbling and they look forward to the opportunity of giving.**

**Initially we call each mother or father, probably in early November, and asked what each person would like for Christmas. We gathered as much information as possible on each family sheet. While we were talking to them we tell them what day we are doing Christmas and give them the choice of picking up their Christmas order at the church or having it delivered. Ideally, our delivery day should be as close to Christmas as possible and ideally no more than a week away. This gives more time for money to come in as well as giving the parishioners more time to purchase gifts. If we do the Christmas too early the food will be gone by Christmas and probably the presents will be opened. The date should be selected for the benefit of those we serve rather than for our convenience.**

**Next gift tags are made out for each individual gift with as much information as possible. The Tag as one example might say; Family 43 Mother would like a pink sweater in medium. You might also add that the gift should be in by a set date. The gift tags might be put in baskets in the church and before and after mass the parishioners will pick the ones for which they want to get a gift. A conference might put some on the Jesse tree. No, not all the gifts will come back for various reasons so we will allow for this by putting in gift tags with a G rather than family number. These will be generic gifts. In the final outcome we will still not have enough gifts for the teens and adults and should be prepared to purchase things such as socks, chocolates etc., to ensure every person in the house receives a gift.**

**We generally put a Christmas letter in each family order. We wish them a Merry Christmas and also put in the mass times for Christmas and invite them to join us for Christmas mass if they can. And some do.**

**Sure we respect boundaries but if a family is out of your boundary and there is no conference to serve them, what will you do? What would your benefactors want you to do?  Could you go to bed knowing that you refused them and they might not have Christmas? I think not. As Vincentians we don’t think that way, we will serve them with "Love, Respect, Justice and Joy". Remember, if you commit to serve them, the Lord will provide as He always has.**

**When the family opens the gifts and the mother tearfully tells you it was the best Christmas ever you know you succeeded and made a difference. That is your reward and a great reward. Many of our best benefactors will tell you that Saint Vincent de Paul came to their house when they were small. Surely, some day some of the children you are serving this Christmas will be benefactors to the Society in years to come.**

**Getting resources for Christmas is often a challenge but we must remember that we are not in this alone.  I firmly believe, and I know many Vincentians who agree, if we are willing to do the work, the Lord will provide. And, often in amazing ways. But we must do the work. Wishing is not enough.  Rely on your faith and plain old fashioned hard work and you will do a Christmas for your families you will be proud of.**

**Very often we are overwhelmed with gifts, especially for the small children. Often other conferences can use them and put some aside to use through the year. It is so nice when you visit a family to have some gifts to bring along through the year.**

**For us, our reward is going to bed Christmas eve tired but knowing that we made a difference and served everyone as well as we possibly could. That is what will give us a happy and Holy Christmas.**

**William Graham, Vincentian**