



# Vincentian Service Corps-Central

A Year of Service Makes a Lifetime of Difference

Winter 2008-2009

VSC-Central

by Kristina Schliesman

## It was a Mary Christmas



As a young child, I was taught by my parents to honor Mary as the Mother of Jesus. The Lady in blue was so mysterious to me, almost magical, always talking to angels and surrounded by a bright light.

The earliest images I can recall of Mary are of her at the manger in Bethlehem watching closely and lovingly over her newborn Son. She was wearing a blue dress and head-covering and had the finest porcelain skin.

I can almost pinpoint the exact moment that I realized that the Caucasian Mary of this all-too-familiar Nativity scene and the "Black Madonna" of Czestochowa which hung in a frame outside my bedroom door were actually the same person. The same Blessed Mother, with two completely different faces.

When I entered my teenage years, I became aware of the obvious youthfulness portrayed in various images of Mary. This Woman among women was only a young girl, like me, when she gave that courageous "Yes!" and bore the Christ-child.

My devotion to Our Lady grew deeper as I entered Saint Mary's College. In moments of fear and worry and doubt, Mary's story became my own. She became a confidant, a true friend to whom I took all my concerns. I trusted her wisdom because I trusted her story. I

longed for her courage and confidence. I held her up as a model to follow.

Not until my final master's project, a recital telling the story of Mary, at Notre Dame did I realize that I was being called to do more, much much more, than honor and look up to this Most Blessed of women. During my last year of study I was pushed and challenged in more ways than I ever had been before. I slowly began making significant changes so that my life would more closely reflect the values I held. I became much more conscious of the effect of my attitude, words, and actions, on my friends, family, community, and world at-large.

I decided it was time to face the facts about Our Lady. Fact: Mary was young, probably a teenager. Fact: Mary was pregnant and single. Fact: Mary was at risk of losing her betrothed, her dignity, and her life as she knew it. Fact: It wasn't easy. Fact: Mary is a woman, Blessed among us. Fact: Mary was called. Fact: Mary said, "Yes!"

And then it was time to face the facts about myself. Fact: I was 23 with nearly two degrees to my name. Fact: I was single, with no future commitment in mind. Fact: I wanted to do good. Fact: I said I believed in a lot of really great and worthy things. Fact: I wasn't living my ideal. Fact: I was being called. Fact: It was time to say "Yes!"

Which brings us to the present...to my time in ministry at Our Lady's Inn. Once again I find my relationship to and image of Mary shifting. In a small way, I am now living the ideal I had always claimed to strive for. In early December, I attended Mass for the

**VSC MISSION STATEMENT**  
Responding to the call of the Gospel in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, lay women and men of the Vincentian Service Corps serve those who are poor, while growing in prayer and living in community.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception and heard my favorite Mary story, The Annunciation. I heard that story this time with more joy and hope than ever before, because I am finally living my own "Yes!"

This year, throughout the Christmas season, I re-read the Gospel narratives of Jesus' birth. I've been listening to the stories of Christ's birth for 24 years now. I know every detail; I know exactly what will happen next. And yet, as I read this year, I was caught completely off guard. I'd never heard, read, or studied these stories the way I did this Christmas season. The difference in this Christmas? I've lived with women through their pregnancies, through trials and pains and joys, and I've witnessed the labor and birth processes. And through these experiences, the Christmas story was brought to life for me. I know this story, and Mary's story, better now than ever before. As I listened and read, I replaced the name Mary with the names of any of the mothers I have met at the Inn. Their stories are Mary's story. Like Mary, they have witnessed the loneliest of times, the darkest moments of despair; they have faced and overcome adversity, met with courage and dominated obstacle after obstacle and triumphed over heartache upon heartache. They have given their own "Yes!" to bring little sons and daughters of God into our world, that all of creation may benefit from their precious lives here with us.

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When I was going through a particularly rough time during my graduate studies at Notre Dame, I remember visiting the grotto one evening and begging to be like Bernadette, and for Mary to come to me so I could see and know for myself I was not alone. I wanted so badly for Her to take my hand and lead me forward out of my sadness. She didn't come to me at the grotto that evening. She didn't come to me in a dream that night, or visit me through some miraculous sign late that week. Sure, I had faith she was there beside me, guiding me and praying for me, but, I wasn't like Bernadette. And, while I always felt Her with me, I never saw Her for myself.

Until this Christmas...As I read that familiar story set so long ago, so very far away, I realized just how close that manger is to where I am right now. As I replaced the name Mary with the names of my new friends and sisters, I realized that I had seen the Blessed

Mother. And she didn't come in a vision or a dream or a miraculous, abstract sign. She stands right in front of me, walks beside me, laughs and cries with me. I see the face and touch the hands of Mary every single day at Our Lady's Inn. I knelt down next to all of these Marys, beside the manger, and I beheld the tiny Christ-child in each of their blessed babies. I look to the women next to me as sisters and as partners in this journey, which began for each of us with that simple three letter word—Yes. And I thank them for bearing God's children with courage and dignity, and for walking with me. Their hearts and bodies and spirits may be worn by the trials of this world, but in their eyes I see a tiny glimmer of hope as the Light of Christ shines upon them from that little crib, touching and healing their brokenness with the simple gift of life, of joy.

A very Mary Christmas, indeed.



VSC Advisory Board Members

- Julie Gryskiewicz-Chair
- Sr. Julie Cutter, D.C.
- Liz Foshage
- Jason Gray
- Gabriella Hearn
- Fr. Dan Kearns, C.M.
- Sr. Kieran Kneaves, D.C.

Vincentian Service Corps is pleased to welcome Gabrielle Hearn to the VSC Advisory Board. Gabrielle came to St. Louis from New York City fifteen years ago. When she first came to St. Louis, she worked with elderly and people with mental illnesses. From there she moved to work in the Special School District in a classroom setting where she says that she "found her true passion". She then went on to work at St. Louis Catholic Academy with fourth graders. Currently Gabrielle is employed at Marian Middle School. Marian Middle School has had several VSC volunteers over the years as well as volunteers from other programs so Gabrielle is quite familiar with VSC. She will bring much to VSC as an Advisory Board Member and we all look forward to working with her. Thank you for your "Yes" Gabrielle!



An open letter to VSC Volunteers past and present from Sr. Judy Warmbold, DC

Dear VSC-ers,

Privileged to "drop into" your groups for the past several year has moved, renewed and challenged me. Whether we were learning skills of community living, deepening our self understanding through the Myers-Briggs, sharing the special Beginning and End-of-year moments and evaluations, you revealed sensitivity toward each other, lives nourished by personal and communal prayer, and eager commitment in ministry to persons who are poor. You ritualize and pass on your Wisdom to the next group with pride and maturity. VSC's for a year, yes...leading beyond to lifetimes of generosity and simple justice living, celebrating life and community in art, service, song, advocacy, work, prayer and Spirit-listening. Jesus' call, "Come follow me" is evident in you. Thank you.

Vincentian Service Corps—Central is a member of Catholic Network of Volunteer Service (CNVS)

Sister Judy Warmbold

# Many Thanks to Our Generous Donors

We give special thanks to those who have so generously donated to the VSC Program during this past quarter.

Your support helps the VSC Members in their service to persons who are poor and marginalized.

If you are able to help support the volunteers in their service, please return your donation in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you so much for your generosity and prayerful support.

- |                          |                         |
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Dear Friends,

I would like to reflect with you on the Scripture passage taken from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and paraphrase this passage to reflect the journey of our current Vincentian Service Corps Volunteers.

There is a time for everything under Heaven, a time for new beginnings. The VSC volunteers have returned from their Christmas break and are settled back in and ready to begin once again in this new year.

Over the past weeks there has been a time for building and creating community. There has been time for participation in some trivia nights, truly a St. Louis tradition. There has been time for cooking and eating together, for praying together, having fun and sharing life. There has been time to be comfortable with each other at home. There has also been time for sharing in the parish community by introducing themselves at a parish Mass and hosting an open house for the people of the parish.

Over the past few weeks there has been time for service of persons who are poor through ministry. This time has been spent in regular ministry with the homeless, the elderly, small children, infants and new Moms, the incarcerated, school age youth and at risk youth. There has also been time for work on the Society of St. Vincent DePaul breakfast bus, for writing to pen pals who are incarcerated and for chaperoning High School youth to the march for Life in Washington D.C.

Over the past few weeks there has been time for prayer and formation. There has been time for a workshop on Catholic Social Teaching, for reflection on the life and spirit of Elizabeth Ann Seton, for reflection on the International Vincentian service program, for reflection on the Vincentian family and who they are and where we stand in the family. There has also been time for a journey to Bosnia and time to enter into the culture of these people who are numerous here in St. Louis.

This is the time for gratitude; for peace; for giving and for loving.

This year is the time for the VSC Community 2008-2009.

Thanks for sharing in this time with us, for your financial support and for your prayer.

This is the time to believe that truly A YEAR OF SERVICE MAKES A LIFETIME OF DIFFERENCE

Bless each of you for giving your time and for sharing the journey with us this year.

God Bless You,

Sister Teresa Daly, D.C.  
Director: Vincentian Service Corps—Central



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Vincentian Service  
Corps-Central

A Year of Service Makes a Lifetime of  
Difference

[www.vincentianservicecorps.org](http://www.vincentianservicecorps.org)

Address Correction Requested

## Vincentian Service Means...

To stand up.

To feed' em first.

To leave God to find God.

To empower residents to rebuild neighborhoods.

To pray often.

To know that you will be judged by your actions  
not your words.

To be worthy of the call you have received.

To work until your hands bleed.

To believe that now is the best time  
to make a difference.

To reflect often and hesitate less.

To trust the tradition of a 17<sup>th</sup> century peasant.

To know that Jesus said, "Thy will be done."

To hear the Gospel in the Poor.



VSC Volunteers at the November Renewal Weekend  
Front left to right: Elena, Kelly, Caryn, Jessica  
Back left to right: Sarah, Molly, Kristina,  
Sr. Judy Warmbold, Sr. Teresa Daly, Emma

Vincentian Service Corps-Central is sponsored by the  
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