

VSC WEST

NEWSLETTER | FALL 2014



www.vscorps.org

A year of service makes a lifetime of difference.

WELCOME MESSAGE

Just in the last month, we have seen and heard about many injustices and turmoil happening not only in our cities but also in other states and countries. Homelessness, poverty, illegal immigration, the Ebola scare, toxic waste, and terrorism are just some to name a few.

One might ask, what are we doing to make a difference to resolve these injustices? Are we bringing optimism and trust to alleviate the pain and sorrow of the many injustices that people experience? Do we believe that we can make a difference?

The Season of Advent which begins again today restores this prospect of hope. Stay awake! Be alert! (Mark 13:33) Once again, Advent, the season of hope is here; waiting for the coming of the Lord. As Catholics, we don't equate Advent in comparison to time. We don't presume or assume the end of days. As Catholics, we use the opportunities of our daily lives to grow in our relationship with God while still being aware that this world is not our final home. We celebrate the season of waiting while anticipating the joy of Christmas. The Season of Advent calls us to live in the present while looking forward to the future.

As you read through the apostolic reflections of four VSC members, (pages 3&4) there is no question that each one of the members has entered into his/her deepest self. They are living the present while looking forward to the future. There is no doubt that each one of them is discovering the movement of the Holy Spirit that urges them to hope. Each one of them **hopes for the best** for each person they serve because we are all told "that nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37) because those who hunger and thirst for justice, will be satisfied.

As we begin this new Liturgical Year, like Mary, can we also say the words, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."? (Luke 1:38) As we anticipate the coming of the "light of the human race", how do we prepare for Jesus' arrival? How can we make a new beginning, so that we too can begin to be people of hope?

As you prepare for the happiness of Christmas, the staff and I would like to wish you a holy and peaceful celebration.

-Sr. Frances Vista, DC



famvin **Advent Reflections** vinformation

Each day this Advent, our friends at **Famvin.org** are sharing an excerpt from Catholic Social Teaching followed by a few reflection questions.

This is a great way to pray alone or with others this season. Here is the reflection for Day 1:

The Church, sharing in mankind's joys and hopes, in its anxieties and sadness, stands with every man and woman of every place and time, to bring them the good news of the Kingdom of God, which in Jesus Christ has come and continues to be present among them. In the midst of mankind and in the world she is the sacrament of God's love and, therefore, of the most splendid hope, which inspires and sustains Every authentic undertaking for and commitment to human liberation and advancement.

How do you define "standing with every man and woman of every place"? Where do you see God's love displayed in your life? How does knowing this help you love others?

Find the daily reflections online at
vinformation.famvin.org/advent-calendar/

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Advent Prayer

Loving God,
I sense that
all is your creation
and everything, and all of us,
are being drawn back
toward your loving heart.

Help me to be
a person of peace,
to speak about it
in an uneasy world,
and to live it
among the people
you have put into my life
every day.

Light in me a desire
to prepare for your coming
to stand in the darkness,
waiting, eager
and filled with joy.

Prayer found online at
Creighton University
Online Ministries

OFFICE SPACE

BAY AREA VINCENTIAN FAMILY GATHERING



VSC with Father Ray Van Dorpe, CM and Bishop McElroy of San Francisco

This year's gathering was held at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Daly City, CA.

2014 CVN CONFERENCE

VSC staff attended the annual Catholic Volunteer Network Conference in Denver, Colorado. This year's conference was co-hosted by Colorado Vincentian Volunteers with the theme *Hearts on a Mission*. We reflected on the passage below from Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel*. It was a great time of learning and fellowship with presenters and friends from other volunteer



programs. This was also a wonderful way to celebrate CVV's 20th anniversary. Congratulations to Bill and Mary Frances Jaster and the entire CVV family!

My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an "extra" or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others. But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs. We stop being a people. (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 273)

VSC WEST CALENDAR	
DECEMBER	
7	Sunday Family Night—Christmas Edition
8	Feast of Immaculate Conception
25	Merry Christmas!
JANUARY	
4	Feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
16-19	Reflection Weekend Three Rivers, California
19	Martin Luther King Day
FEBURARY	
14	Valentine's Day
18	Ash Wednesday

Discovering Faith and Perseverance

By Adavia Thornton

Adavia is an Employment Specialist at Chrysalis.

I have been requested to arrive at work a little bit before 8 am. I remind myself every day that “Uh oh hurry up! You can’t be late” as I rush out of the house at 7:15 am (Note: it takes me about 40 minutes to get to downtown LA). I usually make it with JUST enough time to spare and catch my breath before I open the front door of Chrysalis. I am greeted by the secretary and by patient or really anxious clients. This is my first image of God throughout the day.

As I walk to my office I realize that right now I am here to support the 10+ men and women I might serve today. When I look at them and they tell me, “Adavia I have a felony that is over 20 years old; I have work experience and I am a good man,” I can’t help but understand their frustration.

I see that God is present in the face of the man or woman that society has cast away. I often wonder why is it that the criminal justice system has seemed to fail



the men and women who are placed back into society. I question the rehabilitation process and how can a person become self-sufficient if an employer won’t hire them based on a mistake in their past? Instead of pondering on my many questions I look at my clients honestly and ask, “What brought you to Chrysalis today? What are your short term and long term goals? Let’s make them happen.”

Not only do Chrysalis clients face the challenges of unemployment but often times they are residents of transitional housing programs in Skid Row. On top of their job search they are trying to keep a roof over their head.

I’ve learned that although I have been put in a position to listen, serve and support my clients, each of them have opened

my eyes to a raw reality. Faith and perseverance has been revealed to me in the purest form possible. Matthew 20:16 says, “So the last shall be first; and the first last.” I believe that God is working in the lives of the people I see every day. They are faithful in their job search and they trust me. I am humbled by their stories and their success.

By 5 pm on Monday through Friday, I will have met numerous clients who smile, joke, curse, or even yell due to the frustration of their life circumstances but I always remember I was placed here to be patient. I’m here to support and encourage and be humbled by the fact Jesus can be present in the man or woman whose hand I shake every day.



Returning To Ourselves

By Jordan Bouchard

Jordan is a Program Aide at St. Vincent de Paul Society Wellness Center

Wellness—it is defined as ‘the state or condition of being in good physical and mental health’. At the Wellness Center it is a simple word that embodies a community supporting one another in taking care of our whole being; mind, body, and soul.

I lead a guided meditation at the beginning of our weekly journaling class. That week we focused on being grateful. We took a moment to bring awareness to our eyes, recognizing that they allow us to see color, smiles, the sunrise, and lastly ourselves in the mirror.

At the end of the meditation I asked the group of about fifteen participants how the experience was. A man who regularly comes to the Wellness Center raised his hand and shared, “It was great, until I had to look in the mirror. I went ‘Ah!’” as he put his hands up and turned his face from what would be his reflection in front of him.

I was taken back. Why would he turn?

Through years of trauma and abuse, including years of substance abuse, this acceptance of one’s self is buried away somewhere that is lost. I see at the daily Substance Abuse Support Group at the Wellness Center each individual working through the 12 Steps of Recovery to find this part of them. They are taking their time to try to accept their wounds and no longer be ashamed, and recognize the person in the mirror who God loves unconditionally, faults and all.

Father Greg Boyle of Homeboys Industries shared that we are called by Alice Miller to be ‘enlightened witnesses’. These are people that through our kindness, tenderness and focused attentive love return people to themselves.

At the Wellness Center in my own way I hold a mirror up to each participant that walks in. By taking the time to see their wonderfulness I hope to show them what it is we at the Wellness Center see in them as their #1 fan in their recovery and their ‘well-briety’. It is about being a way for people to see how they are loved unconditionally.



Learning From The Students

By Megan Fitzpatrick

Megan is a Teacher's Aide at St. Vincent School

My days at St. Vincent's never fail to keep me on my toes. Though my official title is Teacher's Aide, there have been days that I have been assigned such various tasks as stuffing envelopes,

making multiple runs to Office Depot, checking sick children's temperatures or serving the school cafeteria lunch.

It had been a particularly crazy, all-over the place, want to go home and take a three hour nap sort of day when 3:15 pm rolled around, which meant that the kids who have not already been picked up by their parents to go home then head to daycare. There happened to be a much larger amount of students at daycare than usual ensuring more chaos to ensue than a typical afternoon. The kids filed in, sat at desks, and began attempting, at most, to start their homework. I looked around the room, jam-packed full of children and felt a headache coming on. Students immediately started raising their hands and calling out my name asking for help on their multiplication tables or fluency charts. At one point, there was a line with five or more children waiting for me to assist them. As I raced around, trying my very best to attend to each student and their questions, I felt a rise of frustration and aggravation rise up in my chest.

Just as I was turned around to scold a second grader for continuously calling my name, I felt two little arms wrap around my right leg. "Ms. Megan! I missed you!" I looked down to see a Kindergarten looking up at me with his two, big brown eyes. "Yeah, how was your day, teacher?" asked his buddy standing beside him. In that fleeting moment, I felt immense gratitude, humility, transcendence, and most of all—love. Everything else melted away.

Each day at work, the kids teach me so much more about how to live life and how to love one another than I could ever teach them about grammar or social studies. I feel humbled and incredibly blessed to be here with them on a miniscule part of their journey.



Where do you see God?

By Jose Lopez

Jose is a Donations Coordinator at The Gubbio Project

One of my housemates always challenges us to find God in what we are doing; to find God in the service we do. She always tells me that this is what her Vincentian faith is rooted in; that if we don't think about this then we are missing a major compo-

ment of our service. Coming from a Vincentian school myself one of the things I was taught early on at DePaul University was "service without reflection is just work". I am blessed to be able to say that this year at VSC West has been filled with God. Here is where I see God in what I am doing this year:

I am living with five other volunteers. Volunteers who just like me didn't really know what we were getting ourselves into this year. None of us were professionals in the fields we were going into here in San Francisco. As we all went through our orientations and starting learning more about our placements and work, I saw my housemates' dedication and focus. Hearing stories of their days and interactions they had with the people they were meeting was proof to me that my housemates care about the people they are serving and working with. Diving head first into the sea of people suffering from injustices and completely immersing themselves in those people's lives is uplifting. We live in a world

where we have to remind ourselves that there are good people out there; I live with five. It is genuinely inspirational to live with people who radiate with passion. This is where I see God.

This year I am working in the Tenderloin of San Francisco at The Gubbio Project. Our mission is to provide sacred sleep and rest to people who need it. We open the doors of St. Boniface Church at 6am; folks can then come in and lay down in the pews of the church. In the four months that I have been here my coworkers have taught me so much. I see them keeping up with laws and policies being implemented in the city and being truly disturbed when it negatively affects the population we serve here. I see them kneeling on the floor holding guests as they break down or are in need of medical attention. I see them honestly believe in our mission and the positive impact we can have to this suffering population. I see them dedicate their time to living out the mission of St. Vincent de Paul. This is where I see God.

I have met and created relationships with many of the guests we serve at Gubbio. These relationships are not all enjoyment and pleasure; they come with a lot of pain and sadness. I have met 17 and 18 year old homeless brothers. I have seen people fall and have seizures throughout the church. I have heard stories of suffering from addiction and eviction. I have seen bloody faces and torn up feet. I think about one guest in particular every day. When I first started I would always see him lying down in the pews; he was quiet and reserved. One day he asked for my name and we slowly became friends. He was the first guest to start calling me by my name. A couple of months later he came up to me and asked for a blessing, he asked me for help. I talked to him for a bit and haven't seen him since then. Seeing the struggles and pain every day, and then seeing the happiness and laughter that can still happen on top of everything else is heartfelt. This is where I see God.

PICTURES!



Left to Right, Top to Bottom: The whole crew starting the day with yoga at the Wellness Center during our October Reflection Weekend. Molly praying the labyrinth at Seton Provincialate. Megan, Pamela, and Jose sharing some jokes over pizza. Jordan, Pamela, Jose, and Molly enjoying yard work at the Epiphany Center. SF Crew joins Lorraine Moriarty for Society of St. Vincent de Paul of San Mateo's Walk a Mile in My Shoes. LA Crew beautifying California with Tree People. Together in the chapel.

ALUMNI UPDATES!



Thank you **Mandi Reichmuth ('08-'09)** for helping to plan Sunday Family Night. *Mandi after summiting Mt. Whitney (left)*



Congratulations to **Kevin and Jaclyn Tarrant ('10-'11)** for the birth of Avila May! *(left)*

Thank you **Grace Burke ('11-'12), Angela Chite ('12-'13), Daniel Echeverry ('13-'14), and Carrie Muehlbauer ('12-'13')** for helping with recruitment efforts all across the country.

Thank you **Hannah Petcovic, Gino Altamura, Tyler Butterfield, and Hope Cornelis ('13-'14)** for joining the communities for a Formation evening.

We are constantly amazed by former volunteers and their families who generously share their time, energy, and financial resources to give back to VSC.

Do you have any cool news you would like to share with the rest of the "formers" or greater VSC family? Interested in getting involved? Know a good joke? Please let us know. We love hearing from you!

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Vincenian Service Corps West
25 San Fernando Way Suite B
Daly City, CA 94015-2065

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

☎: 650-991-6465

☎: 650-991-3905

✉: vscwest@dochs.org

www.vscorps.org