

A PUBLICATION OF



The Miraculous Medal Shrine

THE MESSAGE

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Hearts on Fire.

Celebrating 170 years of the Vincentians in the Philadelphia region.

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Central Association of the Miraculous Medal

The *Miraculous Medal Digest* is a publication of the office of Marketing and Communications of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal.

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MESSAGES

My Dear Friends,

2019 is a special year for us at The Miraculous Medal Shrine in Philadelphia, as we celebrate two anniversaries in Germantown. If you are from the area, you know that the neighborhood that the Shrine calls home is Germantown, one of the many neighborhoods in Philadelphia. It played a significant role in the Revolutionary War, and the Battle of Germantown is commemorated annually.

One hundred and seventy years ago, the Vincentians arrived in Germantown. The story of that arrival is recalled on pages 12-19. Most notably, 30 years after the 1849 arrival of the Vincentians, the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, now the Miraculous Medal Shrine Chapel, was dedicated.

While a great deal has occurred during those 170 years, the constant has been the presence of generations of Vincentian Fathers and Brothers.

Our new publication offers us an opportunity to come to know how the Vincentians and their colleagues are serving the Church in 2019. I believe that you will find the accounts inspiring and edifying.

Enjoy our new publication.

Be assured of my prayers and those of all my brother Vincentians throughout the year.

Sincerely in Mary Immaculate,

Fr. Michael Carroll, CM
*Director, The Miraculous Medal Shrine
Spiritual Director,
Central Association of the Miraculous Medal*

Dear Family,

I send each of you my warmest greetings and welcome you to the first edition of our *Miraculous Medal Message*. I'm excited, not only about our new look, but about expanding the magazine to include more engaging stories of faith and hope. As you'll see, the heart of our magazine—and our mission—remains the same: promoting our Blessed Mother and her Miraculous Medal. Several articles (see pages 20-23 and 40-41) attest that Mary and her Medal continue to touch lives and souls today.

Supporting the work of the Vincentians also remains part of our mission, and this year commemorates their 170th anniversary in Germantown. As you read about their amazing history and myriad ministries, you'll notice that the seeds they planted continue to grow deep and wide, benefitting the poor not only in the Philadelphia region, but throughout the world.

This year, we'll also be broadcasting our weekly Miraculous Medal Novenas on local media, and continue reaching out through other venues to bring our Blessed Mother and her Son to wider audiences. Join us on this journey, as we ensure the Shrine and the Vincentians are here for the next 170 years. And when in the area, stop and say "Hello."

Yours in our Blessed Mother,

Mary Jo Timlin-Hoag
*President and CEO
Central Association of the Miraculous Medal*

PLANTING THE SEEDS

Did you know that on the grounds of St. Vincent's Seminary and the Vincentian Family Office in Germantown, adjacent to The Miraculous Medal Shrine, lives a more than 100-year-old oak tree grown from a seed of St. Vincent's oak, which still stands near his birthplace? Similarly, the seeds of the Vincentian family's legacy, the focus of this issue, were planted 170 years ago.

The original massive oak tree outside the Berceau, the birthplace of St. Vincent de Paul, was planted sometime between 1200 and 1230. Thus, it was alive during the time in which St. Vincent lived (1581–1660).

The great oak tree, the Lou Bielh Cassou (the old oak) in Gascon, is centuries old and laced the countryside familiar to a young Vincent. The account of St. Vincent placing a small statue of Mary in a fold of the trunk and then praying there is legendary.

In 1951, a selection of the best acorns was harvested from the tree. Experts performed the "marriage of the oak," since they placed a huge white veil over the tree to ensure that it would produce acorns of a pure seed. Some acorns were harvested and distributed to many countries, guaranteeing that the original oak's descendants would flourish. One acorn made its way to the current location of the Eastern Province motherhouse in 1901. It has thrived there ever since (pictured).

Features



CELEBRATING 170 YEARS

From humble beginnings, the Vincentians built a legacy of service, spirituality, and love in the legacy of St. Vincent.



MARIAN DEVOTION

Through the intercession of the Miraculous Medal, people find a way to cultivate a deep relationship with Our Lady.



COMMUNITIES SERVED

While it took Vincentian Priests to organize, the immigrant parishioners are who make this ministry remarkable.



MINISTRY PROFILE

St. Vincent told others to open their hearts to those who mainstream society deems most unpopular. The Vincentians did.

Departments

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MINDPRINTS

Henry David Thoreau coined the term, "mindprint," to depict the world's intimate connections between an object and the mind behind it. Discover a sampling of mindprints from the Vincentians' 170 years in Germantown.

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NEWS & EVENTS

The Eastern Province is vibrant with activities, events, and news that perpetuate St. Vincent's mission of service, charity, and love.

32

PEOPLE

People are the Vincentian community's greatest assets. Read the stories of how these special devotees inspire others to live a better life, while also helping others along the way.

50

PROMOTERS & RAYS

Messages by and remembrances from the Miraculous Medal community.

MINDPRINTS

An artifact is an object recovered by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest. A mindprint,* however, has a life, a story, and a vitality of its own. It leads one to trace the path of a life, turning attention on the human influence.

Mindprints should not be forgotten, sparking new realizations, and compelling one to reflect on the mind that once shaped it. Here are a few mindprints from 170 years of the Vincentians in Germantown.

**Term coined by Henry David Thoreau*



FR. SKELLY BIBLE

Judging from the ragged pages, Fr. Joseph Skelly, CM, founder of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, regularly opened his bible for spiritual guidance and reflection.

ST. JOAN OF ARC STATUE

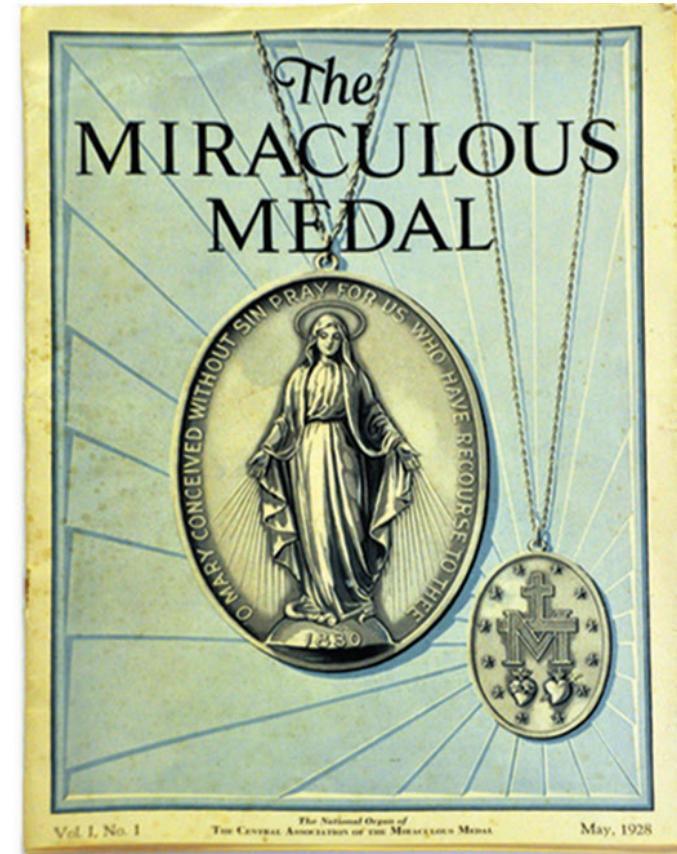
A fixture on the desk of Fr. Skelly.

MEDAL MOLDS

In the early years when the Miraculous Medals were minted, several molds were created for varying sizes.

COMMEMORATIVE MEDALS

These medals were minted in celebration of Fr. Skelly's 35th and 50th ordination anniversaries.



1ST ISSUE OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL MAGAZINE

Fr. Skelly founded, wrote, and produced what has now become the *Miraculous Medal Message* magazine.

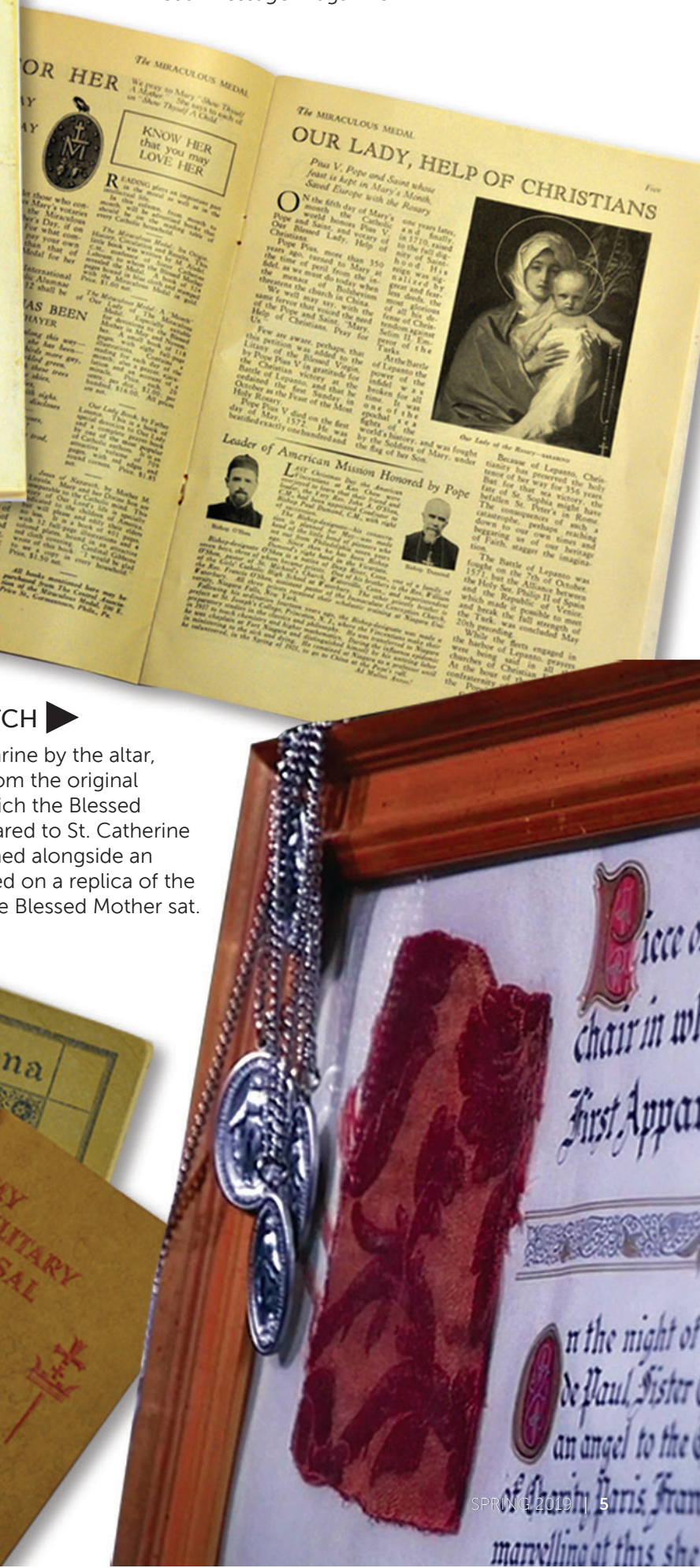
EARLY NOVENA BOOKLETS AND MILITARY MISSAL

Young Pvt. Charles C. Glunz carried these with him into battle during World War II. He kept them his entire life.



SACRED SWATCH

Located in The Shrine by the altar, a swatch taken from the original upholstery on which the Blessed Mother first appeared to St. Catherine Labouré. It is framed alongside an affidavit and placed on a replica of the chair on which the Blessed Mother sat.



Anniversary Celebration of the Founding of the Congregation of the Mission

The Vincentian family and Philadelphia community gathered together on January 25 at The Miraculous Medal Shrine in Philadelphia to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission and the impact of its founder, St. Vincent de Paul. Fr. John Freund, CM, began the services with a reflection on the significance of St. Vincent's commitment, heart, and soul, in creating a visionary movement focused on a lay-centered church, a recovery of the ideal of a church for the poor, a practical vision of the role of women in ministry, and a commitment to forming priests. Several members of the Congregation were in attendance, joined by community members and staff from the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal.



Annual Christmas Concert



On Saturday, December 1, 2018, The Miraculous Medal Shrine hosted a community Christmas concert featuring traditional and lively holiday songs. The choral groups performing included: St. Vincent de Paul Gospel Choir; the Holy Angels Parish Constantia Choral Group; Mercy Career High School Ensemble; and Servants of Christ United Methodist Church Choir. Special songs were performed by the Holy Angels group, whose repertoire consisted of Korean Christmas music. Special thanks to Frs. Tim Lyons, CM, and Sylvester Peterka, CM, for their assistance in coordinating.

Eastern Province Receives O'Dwyer Award

On March 7, the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers of the Eastern Province (Congregation of the Mission) were awarded the Paul O'Dwyer Award for their impact through education in New York City especially Brooklyn, as well as for their charitable ministries with immigrants and care for the poor and marginalized of society. The award was established in honor of Paul O'Dwyer, an Irish-born American politician and lawyer and the younger brother of New York City Mayor William O'Dwyer. Brian O'Dwyer, son of Paul O'Dwyer and the 2019 Grand Marshall of the NYC St. Patrick's Day Parade, presented the award to Fr. Joseph Foley, CM. Fr. Foley has been an active member of various ministries, which encompass education at St. John's University and parish ministry in New York. Additionally, he served as the Vincentian International representative to the United Nations.

Trilingual Celebration Unites Parish

On November 27, 2018, St. Mary's Catholic Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, hosted a trilingual celebration of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. The parish, which was originally Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal when the Vincentians took it over in 1939, brought together the parish community for prayer in three languages: English, Vietnamese, and Spanish. Frs. Thomas Sendlein, CM, and Joseph Linh, CM, shared the history of the Miraculous Medal and its importance for our time of prayer to more than 100 participants, and distributed blue-corded Miraculous Medals. The parish youth group served refreshments compliments of the Vincentian community at St. Mary's.

~ Fr. William Allegretto, CM



Youth & Young Adult Programs

The Miraculous Medal Shrine recently launched a young adult program, "Young Adults...in Mary's Arms," which seeks to introduce and educate youth and young adults to Mary's graces; the life and mission of St Vincent de Paul; and vocations. The Shrine just completed its third in a series of events focused on the formation of lay and secular vocations and participation in Vincentian ministries. The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal's (CAMM) Director of Faith Formation, Deacon James Mahoney, worked in conjunction with Fr. John Maher, CM, Director of the Vincentian Vocations Office for the Eastern Province, and Sr. Regina Hlavic, DC, Vocations Director for the Daughters of Charity, to host the events, which feature an evening on discovering vocations through brief readings, prayers, songs, and reflection. Participants also had an opportunity to speak with Fr. Maher and Deacon Mahoney. CAMM's Youth and Young Adults program offers a network of resources and information to promote community outreach and foster growth in Vincentian vocations and ministries.



To learn more about upcoming events and programs, visit MiraculousMedal.org/YoungAdult



DO WE MATCH?

DOUBLE or TRIPLE your contribution to The Miraculous Medal Shrine through employer Matching Gift programs.

Contact CAMM Office of Institutional Advancement, 215.848.1010, x.212 or email smcgirl@cammonline.org.



Fr. Carroll Special Guest on Catholic TV

Fr. Michael J. Carroll, CM, Miraculous Medal Shrine Director, was a special guest on the October 2 edition of "This is the Day" on Catholic TV from Boston. Fr. Carroll shared his vision of the ministry of The Shrine as it celebrates the venerable story of the Miraculous Medal and the new vision for promoting devotion to the Blessed Mother. He also outlined some of the new initiatives to broaden the outreach of the Monday Novena via live streaming on the Shrine's website and Facebook page. To listen to the interview, visit MiraculousMedal.org/media.

Timlin-Hoag Named 1st Female President/CEO of CAMM

Mary Jo Timlin-Hoag has been named the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal's (CAMM) first female President and CEO. Mary Jo has served as CAMM's Senior Executive Director since January 2018, bringing extensive corporate and non-profit experience to CAMM. Since joining CAMM, she has centralized operations and expanded the visibility of CAMM, The Miraculous Medal Shrine, and the Apostolates of the Vincentians' Eastern Province.

Our Lady of Good Health Vailankanni

On Saturday, September 8, 2018, The Miraculous Medal Shrine hosted the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Good Health Vailankanni in collaboration with the Indian Catholic community and St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Forane Church, Philadelphia. Hundreds of faithful participated in a special day of prayer for the sick, novena prayers, solemn high mass, a procession of Our Lady of Good Health statue, and recitation of the rosary in several languages. After the ceremony, the community gathered in the Lower Shrine for refreshments.



Celebration of the Three Kings



Local Hispanic-Latino community members celebrate a mass and Novena in Spanish on the first Tuesday of every month. Each monthly mass is special, and January's celebration in honor of the Three Kings was no different. The service included a trio dressed as the Three Kings, who visited Jesus as a child sometime after the Nativity; a husband and wife dressed as Mary and Joseph; and children dressed as angels. The Three Kings presented gifts to the baby Jesus, and the children received gifts donated by the Philadelphia Sheriff's Department. Pictured is Fr. Stephen Grozio, CM, Provincial of the Eastern Province of the Congregation of the Mission.



Aid for Friends

The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal Youth and Young Adults program collaborated with the Bucks County Youth Group on Saturday, February 23, for the Friends Service Project. A room full of participants spent the day assembling breakfast bags for shut-ins associated with Aid for Friends. Donations were collected by participants and the Bucks County Youth Group. Items included dry cereal, hot cereal, granola bars, breakfast bars, and fruit cups. Volunteers delivered the bags to the Aid for Friends facility located in Northeast Philadelphia.

Giving Tuesday 2018

The Miraculous Medal Shrine participated in the 2018 National Giving Tuesday on November 27. The Shrine's theme of the global giving movement was taken from the words of St. Vincent de Paul: "All our work ends up in action." More than \$8,000 was raised as a result of the generosity of the Shrine's faithful. The financial contributions directly support the wonderful works of the Vincentians: soup kitchens; food pantries; prison re-integration programs; drug rehabilitation; higher education; promoting our Blessed Mother and her Miraculous Medal; preserving The Miraculous Medal Shrine; and so much more.

Catholic Business Network

The Central Association of the Miraculous Medal is proud to present the Catholic Business Network, an exciting series of events that unite local Catholic business professionals to create opportunities for networking, support faith-driven dialogue, and exchange ideas. On February 21, dozens of professionals gathered to hear guest speaker, Fr. Robert Hagan, OSA, discuss "Keeping the Faith in Everything We Do." Fr. Hagan served as chaplain at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia and at the University of Maryland, College Park, and received a master's in theology from the Washington Theological Union in 2003. He is a past member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, the Delaware County Bar Association, and the Delaware County Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys. He also serves as the chaplain for the Villanova men's basketball and football teams.

Nature Adores the Blessed Mother

One of the smallest of God's creatures found its way to The Miraculous Medal Shrine. CAMM staff member, Paulette Mican, discovered this praying mantis doing, what else, but "praying" to Our Lady. But whether this tiny creature was praying or crawling, it is inspiring to see it paying reverence to the Blessed Mother.



St. John's University Founder's Week Marks Vincentian Mission in Action



Photos courtesy of St. John's University

The theme of St. John's University's 2018 Founder's Week celebration (September 20–27), "Be Vincentian: Called to Action," echoed that exhortation to Vincent's followers. Through lectures, reflections, and direct service opportunities, the entire University community was reminded of the many ways they can create systemic change around issues of poverty and social justice. Founder's Week is both an annual celebration of the University's Vincentian heritage and an opportunity for the St. John's community to actively participate in its mission of serving those most in need. With a goal of inspiring others to similar action, these signature events, such as the Vincentian Convocation, University Service Day, and the Administrators, Staff, and Faculty Luncheons, spotlighted the good work being done in the name of St. Vincent de Paul. Visit www.stjohns.edu ~ *Courtesy of St. John's University*

Vincentian Youth Gathering 2019

The 2019 Vincentian Youth Gathering was held January 17-21 preceding the International World Youth Day in Panama. This year's theme, "Joy of Being Vincentian," was in response to an invitation by Pope Francis to unite indigenous young people to celebrate their faith from the perspective of the millennial richness of their culture. More than 500 young people from 15 nations gathered to share their challenges and hopes. Delegations from Argentina, Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela were among those participating in the gathering consisting

of Marian Youth, members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, MISEVI, as well as Congregation of the Mission Priests and Brothers, and Sisters of the Daughters of Charity.

Fr. Joseph Fitzgerald, CM, Executive Secretary of the National Coordination of Indigenous Ministry, noted, "[The Vincentian Youth Gathering] is a wonderful opportunity to respond to the Pope's invitation. In this way they can move forward with hope and participate in the construction of a new world."

The gathering began with a mass celebrated by the Congregation of the Mission's Superior General of the Vincentian Family, Fr. Tomaž Mavrič, CM, the 26th successor to St. Vincent de Paul. Fr. Mavrič told the gathered group that, "The joy of the Gospel comes from the conviction that, as Vincent de Paul said, 'We continue the mission of Jesus on earth. We are called to announce through our words and work that we are at the service of the poor, and in fact, at the service of Jesus Himself.'" ~Fr. John Maher, CM

Niagara University Announces New Location in Canada

On February 7, Niagara University announced the establishment of an additional location in Vaughan, Ontario. The site is the first-ever university to be established in the Vaughan and York Region, and supports Niagara's commitment to becoming the premier, bi-national university. For 35 years, Niagara has offered programs in Canada, which provide opportunities to better serve students, faculty, and alumni with the culture, resources, and support necessary for success in the University's mission-based academic programs. The site encompasses more than 12,000-square-feet and includes seven classrooms, faculty and administration offices, and student lounge areas. There are nine full-time faculty, administrators, part-time faculty, and supervisors. Currently, more than 300 students are pursuing Bachelor of Professional Studies and Master of Science in Educational Leadership degrees. Visit www.niagara.edu.



Photos courtesy of Niagara University

Niagara University Students Help Hurricane Relief Efforts

Living the mission of Niagara University's patron saint, St. Vincent de Paul, three dozen students took personal time from their Christmas break to travel to Houston, Texas, to assist the Hurricane Harvey relief efforts, primarily repairing and rebuilding homes damaged during the hurricane more than a year ago.

The trip was organized through Niagara University's Office of Campus Ministry, and was part of the biannual program Brothers And Sisters in Christ (BASIC). Working in the small rural communities of West Columbia, Holiday Lakes, and Richland, the home improvement work



Photos courtesy of Niagara University

included: installing insulation; hanging siding; painting; building a porch; hanging dry-wall; taping, mudding, and sanding dry-wall; interior wall texturing and painting; and installing floors.

The groups began each day with a prayer for their work, safety, and the homeowners, and concluded each day

with reflection, which included journaling, partner discussions, and group sharing.

BASIC trips are service-immersion trips that take place over winter and spring breaks and allow students opportunities to travel, meet new people, build community, learn, and serve in the Vincentian spirit.

~ *Courtesy of Niagara University*

Your gifts are a blessing.

New ways to offer support for Eastern Province Vincentian missions include: Employee Matching Gift Programs, IRA/Required Minimum Distribution, United Way Donor Choice, and Planned Giving Programs.



Central Association
of the
Miraculous Medal

Contact Marie Killian: 215.848.1010, x. 233,
or mkillian@cammonline.org for details.

LENTEN VIDEO REFLECTIONS

Beginning Ash Wednesday, March 6, the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal once again presents our Lenten Video Reflections Series. This year's theme is "Seeing Christ in Every Person."

Join us for an incredible 40-day journey toward self-reflection in preparation for Holy Week and the Resurrection on Easter.

Through personal stories and reflections, listen to and be inspired by how others seek God's help to live a better, more fulfilled, and holy life.



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Mary's Miraculous Medal Family

Celebrating 170 YEARS in Germantown

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL TOLD HIS CONGREGATION THAT “THE POOR ARE OUR INHERITANCE.” He wanted his missionaries to have hearts on fire and to bring that fire of love everywhere—to the poor, the abandoned, the outcast. It’s no wonder, then, that Germantown was the very spot where Vincentian Priests would re-ignite that spark of faith.



HEARTS ON FIRE

VINCENTIAN HEARTS

He looked in the chalice with dismay. It happened again. The Precious Blood had become a small chunk of ice. Fr. Felix De Andreis, CM, summoned the altar servers, who brought a small fire to the altar to melt the frozen sacrament, so he could consume it. Although he was born and raised in Piedmont, a region of Italy that sits at the foot of the Alps, this intense cold was unlike anything he experienced at home; the biting air felt like it was piercing his every limb.

The year was 1818, and Fr. De Andreis was in the territory of Missouri, a diocese six times the size of Italy. Less than 20 years later in 1835, the U.S. Congregation became an independent province—the first Vincentian province outside of Europe—and Fr. John Timon, CM, was appointed its first Provincial. Little did he know that in Philadelphia, the seeds of the Eastern Province were beginning to take root.

MISSION TO PHILADELPHIA

The bishop of Philadelphia, Francis Patrick Kenrick, was appointed the third bishop of Philadelphia, and in 1832, founded St. Charles Seminary to expand and educate the next generation of clergy. At that time, there were approximately 100,000 Catholics living in the Diocese of Philadelphia with 25,000 of them residing in the city. As Bishop Kenrick eyed the situation, he could see that his 38 priests were not enough to minister to the needs of so large a community.

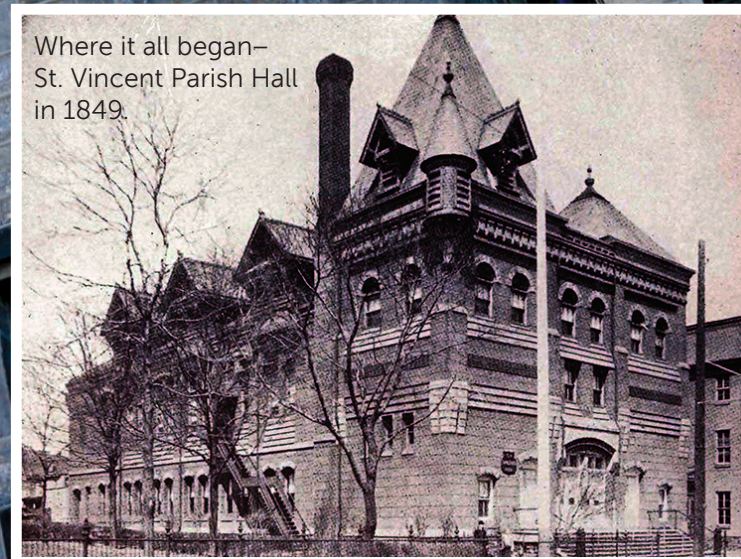
Slowly, as the number of seminarians at St. Charles Borromeo grew, Bishop Kenrick asked Fr. Timon for *confreres* to staff and manage it. This mission ended up holding an added bonus for the Vincentians. As the young seminarians experienced St. Vincent’s charisms, many of them joined the Congregation.

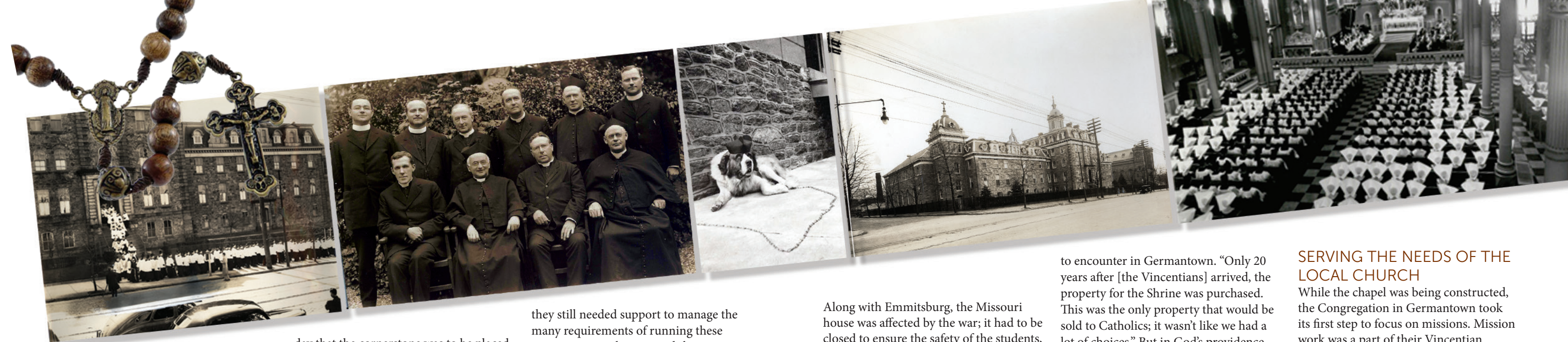
While running the seminary, the Vincentians also served Catholics in Hamilton Village (West Philadelphia), Kellyville, Concord, Chester, Nicetown, and even as far away as Burlington, Camden, Pleasant Mills, Port Elizabeth, and Salem. The seminary flourished under their tutelage, and the number of students increased annually. This success inspired the bishop to leverage the Vincentian magnetism: establishing the first Catholic church in Germantown.

Early photo of Immaculate Conception Chapel before the Shrine was built.



Where it all began—
St. Vincent Parish Hall
in 1849.





BREAKING GROUND

At the beginning of the industrial era, when transportation, expansion, and the middle class were on the rise, the Congregation of the Mission was the second largest religious community in the United States, following only the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). It was during this period that the Vincentians were invited by Bishop Kenrick to establish a Catholic parish in Germantown to minister to the small, but growing, Irish immigrant community. He asked Fr. Michael Domenec, CM, who had been pastor at St. Stephen church in Nicetown while also working at the seminary, to be the pastor of the new church: St. Vincent de Paul.

Fr. Domenec encountered myriad difficulties in his attempt to establish St. Vincent's parish. While some people claimed it was foolish to build a Catholic church in the area, others tried to prevent him from achieving his work, including the Know-Nothing party, a group opposed to immigrants, especially Roman Catholics. On September 2, 1849, the

day that the cornerstone was to be placed, Fr. Domenec and Bishop Kenrick were surrounded by seminarians and friends, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who were eager for St. Vincent's to be built. Amongst the crowd, however, were people who tried to interrupt the ceremony by jeering and throwing rocks

Through it all, Fr. Domenec and Bishop Kenrick were resolved to peacefully continue their celebration, and soon the unruly contingent departed. Bishop Kenrick solemnly blessed the cornerstone and placed it in position at Price and Lena Streets. It took two years to build St. Vincent's, as the congregation was small and poor. During that time, the building was frequently referred to as "Father Domenec's folly."

During the 1850s and 1860s, the Vincentians continued responding to the numerous requests of the bishops, even those that had never been part of the Vincentian apostolate, such as establishing parishes. Yet, in this mission land, they adapted to the needs of the Church and accepted the bishops' requests, agreeing to found a seminary in Buffalo, to create a parish and school in Brooklyn, and to accept parishes in Maryland. While they staffed the seminaries themselves,

they still needed support to manage the many requirements of running these institutions, so they opened the seminaries to lay students. This was the genesis for the Vincentian universities: the seminary of Our Lady of the Angels, founded and named by Fr. John Lynch, CM, became Niagara University; likewise, St. John's and De Paul started as seminaries (see article on page 46 to learn how St. John's University is instilling Vincentian values in its students).

THE SHIFT TO THE EAST

It's not surprising that the American Province, which spanned the United States from Missouri to Philadelphia, would also respond to—and feel the effects of—the Civil War. The Emmitsburg house was "within earshot" of the battle at Gettysburg, and the Daughters of Charity, as well as other religious sisters and priests, ran to the battlefield to assist the men on both sides of the conflict.

Men had come from the South and the North to join the Congregation, so at a personal level, loyalties were divided. However, while Fr. John Timon, CM, was provincial, he vehemently opposed slavery. His sentiments, coupled with the fact that most of the Vincentian houses were in the North, aided the Congregation in supporting the Union.

Along with Emmitsburg, the Missouri house was affected by the war; it had to be closed to ensure the safety of the students, many of whom were southerners who moved to St. Louis and then Germantown. This helped solidify the shift from the center of the Province from the West to the East.

The American provincials—two priests, five seminarians, eight novices, and two lay brothers—made the journey to Germantown. As soon as they arrived, they went to St. Vincent's parish and were greeted by the pastor and Sr. Mary Gonzaga Grace, a Daughter of Charity, who was renowned for her tremendous help during the Civil War.

It was clear that with this transition, an official seminary needed to be erected, so the Congregation set about finding property and building St. Vincent's Seminary. As Fr. John Moore, CM, wrote in 1904, the only property that was available "was out in the woods; corn fields were all around, and farm houses stood where now stand many beautiful residences."

Fr. Michael Carroll, CM, The Miraculous Medal Shrine Director and Central Association of the Miraculous Medal (CAMM) Spiritual Director, explains the conflict the Vincentians continued

to encounter in Germantown. "Only 20 years after [the Vincentians] arrived, the property for the Shrine was purchased. This was the only property that would be sold to Catholics; it wasn't like we had a lot of choices." But in God's providence, this property, and the chapel that was subsequently built, would have far-reaching effects, not only in Germantown, but throughout the world.

St. Vincent's Seminary was completed in 1872. A year later, the plans for a chapel for the Vincentian Priests and Seminarians began. Upon hearing about the chapel, Bishop James Frederick Wood, who succeeded (St.) John Neumann as the bishop of Philadelphia, asked the Congregation to alter their original plans so that the chapel would be open to the public. In humility and obedience, the Congregation agreed and changed the design so that the entrance of the chapel faced Cheltenham Avenue.

On a sunny day in July 1875, a large crowd of people gathered for the ceremony of laying the cornerstone, during which Bishop John Ryan, CM, of Buffalo preached. But, like the Vincentians experienced while building St. Vincent's parish, the lack of funds prolonged the construction. It wasn't until November of 1879 that the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (currently known as The Shrine of the Miraculous Medal) was solemnly dedicated by Bishop Ryan.

SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

While the chapel was being constructed, the Congregation in Germantown took its first step to focus on missions. Mission work was a part of their Vincentian inheritance, but their pastoral and seminary work in America left little time and resources for them to dedicate to a widespread mission program. In July of 1873, the Vincentians created a full-time group of missionary priests whose home base would be St. Vincent's Seminary. Yet, since there were still so many needs within the local church, it wasn't until many years later that extensive mission work was fully realized.

The parish of the Immaculate Conception, which served predominantly Irish immigrants, was founded by the Vincentians in 1875. Later, Italian immigrants came to Germantown seeking work and homes for their families. The Vincentians came to their aid as well, renovating the basement of the Immaculate Conception Chapel and offering it to the community for their use. They served the Italian community for over a decade and eventually helped them establish their own parish, Holy Rosary.

Likewise, when the *confreres* saw the needs of the African American community, they ministered to them at St. Vincent's parish, and later helped them build St. Catherine of Siena's parish. St. Katherine

1816

The first Vincentian missionaries arrive in the United States, landing in Baltimore.

1818

Second group of Vincentian missionaries arrives in U.S. via Philadelphia, and after some difficulty, reach Perryville, Missouri, on Jan. 5, 1819.

1841

Vincentians are invited by Phila. Bishop Francis Kenrick to direct St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. They remain as directors until 1853.

1846

Vincentians become the second largest community in the United States following the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits).

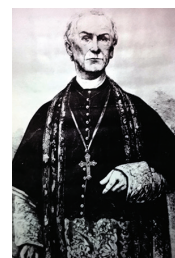
1849

1st Catholic church in Germantown is established by the Vincentians, named after their founder, St. Vincent de Paul.

Bishop Kenrick blesses the cornerstone of St. Vincent de Paul Parish located on Price St. in the Germantown section of Philadelphia.

1856

The Congregation accepts a seminary appointment for Bishop John Timon of Buffalo (right), which moves to north of Niagara Falls.



1865

3 Vincentians are appointed bishops in the East: Bishops John Timon of Buffalo, John Lynch of Toronto, and Michael Domenec of Pittsburgh.

Vincentians purchase what eventually becomes St. Vincent's Seminary.

1866

The central house of the Congregation of the Mission's American Province is transferred from St. Louis, Missouri, to Germantown.

1868

Due to the Civil War, Fr. Stephen Ryan, CM, moves the seminarians from St. Louis to Germantown. They arrive in Philadelphia on Jan. 17.





For more information about the celebration of 170 years of the Vincentians in Germantown, visit www.MiraculousMedal.org/170years.



Drexel herself helped pay for the parish's convent and school, and contributed generously toward the building of the church and rectory.

FR. SKELLY, CAMM, & THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL SHRINE

Instilled in him by his mother, Joseph A. Skelly, a Germantown native, had a intense devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Miraculous Medal. When he left home to study for the priesthood at the age of 16, his mother placed a medal around his neck and told him to "wear this medal always." Little did she know that her tiny gesture would have lasting effects, not only in Germantown but throughout the world.

Fr. Skelly was professed as a Vincentian in 1895 and was ordained a priest in 1900. After his ordination, he served in the Immaculate Conception parish in Germantown and then worked at St. Vincent's Seminary, where he was often heard to say that "the Chapel was the seminarians' most important classroom." Only 12 years into his ministry, Fr. Skelly was charged to raise funds to build St.

Joseph's College in Princeton, New Jersey. Whether divine inspiration or remembering the Miraculous Medal his mother placed around his neck, he enclosed a Miraculous Medal in each of the appeal letters he sent. There was nothing new about his promoting the Medal. Since the days of St. Catherine Labouré, the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentians made every effort to spread devotion to Our Lady and her Miraculous Medal. Yet, Fr. Skelly was not prepared for the incredible generosity from the people who received the medals. He knew this outpouring could only be due to the Blessed Mother, and he decided to find a way to thank her.

Establishing the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal (CAMM) to promote Mary and her Miraculous Medal was Fr. Skelly's way to thank the Blessed Mother and grow the Vincentian missions to support the poor through Vincentian services, educate seminarians, and care for infirm and aged priests.

But for Fr. Skelly, more needed to be done. In 1927, he commissioned the building of a shrine to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in the Chapel of the

Immaculate Conception. He chose the spot where the altar of St. Vincent de Paul was originally placed. Three years later, on Monday, December 8, 1930, he created the Perpetual Novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Many people think that this Perpetual Novena is an ancient devotion, but its beginning was at the Germantown Shrine. During World War II, 15,000 people came to the Shrine every Monday. The crowds were so great that the city ran extra trolley cars on Cheltenham Avenue to accommodate the throngs of devotees.

Through everything, Fr. Skelly and his devotion to the Blessed Mother remained simple and pure. He frequently lit vigil candles at the Shrine, and then searched his pockets for the money to put in the offering box. He always carried Miraculous Medals in his pocket to distribute. He furthered the cause of canonization for St. Catherine Labouré. He was an integral part of building the Miraculous Medal chapel, St. Vincent de Paul chapel, and St. Louise de Marillac chapel within the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. (Unfortunately, the day the chapels were being dedicated, Fr. Skelly was laying in his sick bed).

At the time of his death in 1963, it was estimated that 75,000,000 Miraculous Medals and 40,000,000 booklets about the Blessed Mother had been mailed by CAMM. Fr. Skelly corresponded with people as far away as the Philippines, and countless visitors came to the Shrine and his CAMM office, yet he refused to be called a founder. In his typical humor, he preferred to be called "a letter writer."

GERMANTOWN AND BEYOND

Through the Vincentian houses and parishes—as well as the works of the Vincentians, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Daughters of Charity—the Vincentians and their founder slowly became more recognized throughout the United States. And with that recognition came additional requests and opportunities for the Germantown Vincentians to serve the poor. Once again, they were well-situated to respond to these appeals courageously.

Requests to build parishes and missions abounded and soon the Eastern Province *confreres* were invited by the bishop of Panama to serve the Americans who were building the Panama Canal. The Vincentians continue to work in Panama—

in Colon, one of the poorest cities in the western world (second only to Port Au Prince, Haiti). Fr. Carroll explains that there are so many poor there that in many ways, Colon is an abandoned city. "It's one of the toughest places where our Province works," he says, "and our *confreres* are admirable in the wonderful work they accomplish."

In 1915, the archbishop of Philadelphia, Edmund Prendergast, wanted to establish missions in the Slate Belt area of Pennsylvania for the Italian immigrants, who worked in the quarries. He approached the Eastern Province to open two new parishes—Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Roseto, and St. Vincent (now Our Lady of Good Counsel), Bangor—to serve the Italian community (read the article on page 32 to learn how Vincentian Priests continue to work in this area).

The bishop of Mobile, Alabama, also invited the Vincentians to his diocese. At its earliest stages, they encountered many difficulties, not the least of which was one Priest being attacked as he was on his way to minister to the sick. Later, one of his assailants, a Catholic, was struck by a train,

and the *confrere* went to the hospital to administer the sacraments to his attacker. During the influenza pandemic of 1918, the Vincentians responded heroically to the sick and dying, knowing that their own lives were in danger of contracting the life-threatening flu infiltrating the city.

Although the first Vincentians arrived in China in 1699, the Superior General of the Vincentians was asked by Rome to send missionaries to China. The Eastern Province enthusiastically volunteered, and a group of priests and students from St. Vincent's Seminary journeyed from Philadelphia to the Jiangxi Province in July of 1921. In *Historical Survey*, Fr. John Rybolt, CM, wrote: "American Vincentians remained in [Jiangxi] until expelled by the Communist government. For about 30 years, they had suffered from nearly constant wars and unrest: nationalist insurgents, the Japanese during World War II, and then the Communist revolution. In 1952, almost immediately after their expulsion, two Priests with missionary experience journeyed to Taiwan, where they began to minister to mainland Chinese Catholics who had fled

1868

A group of Vincentians arrive at St. Vincent de Paul church from Missouri.

The cornerstone is laid for the present-day dining room wing of St. Vincent's Seminary on July 26.

Fr. Stephen Vincent Ryan, CM, is consecrated bishop in St. Joseph's Cathedral in Buffalo, New York.

1873

Fr. James Rolando, CM, meets with his new Provincial Council to institute a full-time Mission Band to be stationed at St. Vincent's Seminary.

Fr. Rolando is authorized to erect a chapel on the seminary grounds, which would be accessible to the public.

1875

The Immaculate Conception Chapel's (current-day Shrine) cornerstone is laid by Bishop John Quinlan, DD, Bishop of Mobile,

1888

Fr. Antoine Fiat, CM, Superior General, writes to the American *confreres* informing them of the division of the American Province.

The American Province is divided into the Eastern and Western Provinces.

1900

12 additional Vincentian communities are formed in the early 1900s.



1911

The bishop of Panama invited *confreres* from the Eastern Province to serve the Americans who are building the Panama Canal.

1914

Beginning of the Eastern Province Vincentians' permanent presence in the country.

St. Mary's Church in the Panama Missions is established.



1915

Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, a society devoted to Marian interests, is founded with Fr. Skelly as its 1st director.

1927

Miraculous Medal Shrine is built in the Immaculate Conception Chapel by extending the west transept where the St. Vincent altar is.

1930

The Perpetual Novena begins as an outgrowth of the four Novenas conducted annually for the four major feasts of Our Lady.

1932

This same Novena devotion begins to branch out from the Shrine to other churches and chapels.

1939

The Vincentians set up a new mission at St. Mary's parish in Greensboro, North Carolina, the poorest section of the city.



“Our community began to grow because we opened a seminary here,” explains Fr. Carroll, “and as the community began to grow, our service in Germantown also began to grow.”



In Germantown, the Vincentians continue to respond to the many needs of the changing Church.

there. This mission grew, and by 1987, the American missionaries, together with their Chinese and Dutch *confreres*, joined to form a new Province of China.”

The Germantown Vincentians also readily volunteered to serve in the different branches of the military as chaplains: in World War II (after the United States entered the War), the Korean conflict, and Vietnam. Fr. Frederic Gehring, CM, not only served in the China mission for six years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he volunteered as a Navy chaplain and served during the Guadalcanal Campaign. Fr. Gehring was the first U.S. Naval Chaplain decorated with the Presidential Legion of Merit for his outstanding bravery.

The Eastern Province also responded to invitations to open a parish in Florida; minister on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation near Niagara; establish mission houses in Massachusetts, Ohio, Canada, and North Carolina; and staff high schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Today in Germantown, the Vincentians continue serving the poor and the marginalized through a wide variety of ministries. In imitation of St. Vincent, who was a chaplain of galley slaves, the Vincentians established PAR-Recycle Works (PAR), a program that provides transitional employment to people returning from prison. As Fr. Timothy

Lyons, CM, explains, “Our society has responded to our social problems by putting people in jail, treating them harshly, letting them out, and then re-arresting. It’s taking a giant amount of resources, yet we’re doing nothing—or very little—for their rehabilitation. In the free world, we’ve turned prisons into a business, but we haven’t turned the rehabilitation of people into a business. PAR is a little, tiny project, but it works. If you help a person who has never had a job or an opportunity, it makes a huge difference.” (See pg. 28 for story.)

At St. Vincent de Paul parish, hundreds of meals are provided for anyone in need; on-site social workers and drop-in legal

services are available; and programs for art and writing are offered. Other ministries that found their origins in St. Vincent’s parish include Vincent de Paul Youth and Young Adult Center, which offers homework and SAT/ACT preparation assistance, and gives young adults throughout the country the opportunity to serve those who are materially poor; and Inn Dwelling (see page 36 to learn about Brother Alfred Smith, CM, and the programs he has developed at St. Vincent’s Parish).

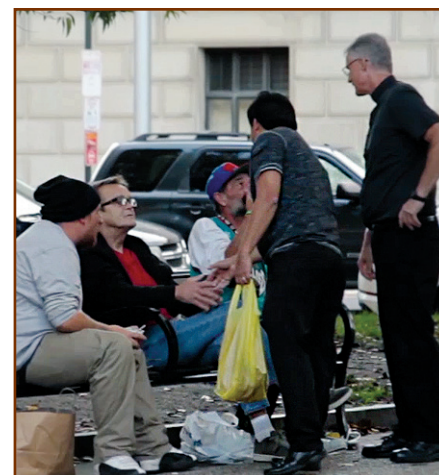
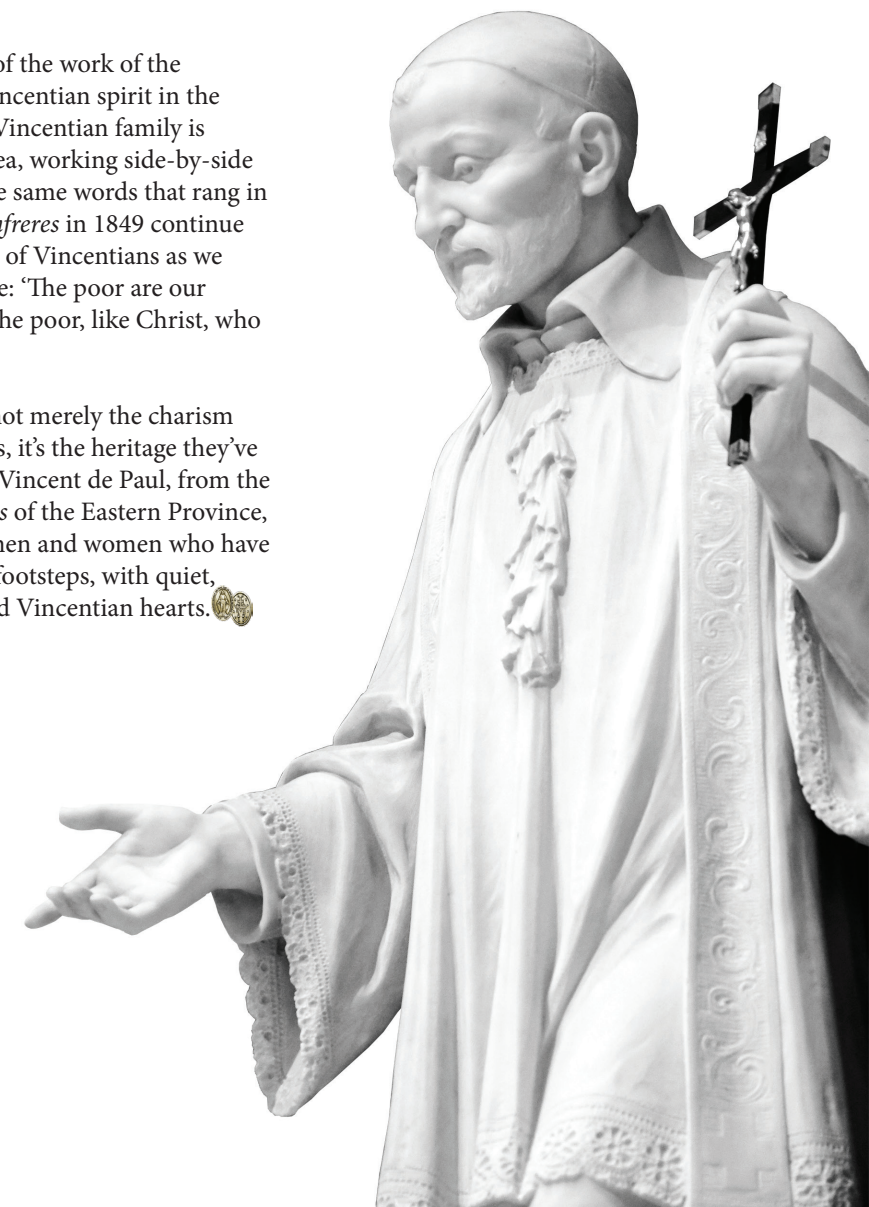
Germantown is a huge part of who the Vincentians are. “You don’t stay in a place unless the place has your heart,” Fr. Carroll says, smiling. “And the Vincentians continue to make this a place that people

come to because of the work of the Shrine and the Vincentian spirit in the community. The Vincentian family is invested in the area, working side-by-side with the poor. The same words that rang in the ears of the *confreres* in 1849 continue to ring in the ears of Vincentians as we move in the future: “The poor are our inheritance. It is the poor, like Christ, who (*sic*) we serve.”

Of course, that’s not merely the charism of the Vincentians, it’s the heritage they’ve received from St. Vincent de Paul, from the founding *confreres* of the Eastern Province, to the countless men and women who have followed in their footsteps, with quiet, humble lives—and Vincentian hearts. 🕯️

“Our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love.”

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



Photos courtesy of Joyful Films

1941

During World War II, 24 *confreres* serve as military chaplains.



1943

Our Lady of Lebanon Parish is established in Niagara Falls, New York, another poor section in a poor city.

1953

The St. Lazare Retreat House is founded in Spring Lake, Michigan.



1989

Ghebre Michael Inn opens in the former Immaculate Conception Convent to serve homeless men (now DePaul House).

1995

Fr. Vincent Finnerty, CM, appointed Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Spanish-speaking Diocese of Charlotte, NC, parishioners.

1996

The Hispanic Evangelization Team of Eastern Long Island creates a mobile ministry to the Hispanic population of the North and South Forks.

2000

St. Francis of Assisi parish provides service opportunities for economically distressed young people in Germantown.

2000

Fr. Thomas McKenna, CM, Provincial, establishes St. Vincent de Paul Young Adult Center to work with youth and young adults.

2001

The Vincentian *confreres* provide counseling (including counseling in Spanish) at Ground Zero to victims of the Twin Towers attack.

2002

The Congregation officially establishes the Vincentian Solidarity Office to raise funds for the international Congregation of the Mission.

2007

The DePaul Foundation establishes DePaul USA, Inc. and opens DePaul House (formerly the Ghebre Michael Inn).

2008

The Miraculous Medal House for the formation of college-level seminarians is established near St. John’s University.

2010

St. Mary’s Parish in Greensboro builds its final building, the Priest’s Residence.

2012

The Parish of St. Vincent de Paul in the Soloy Region of Panama is established for the indigenous, the Ngobe.

2015

The Vincentian Family Executive Committee establishes its 1st international office for the Vincentian Family in Philadelphia.

2017

Celebrations are held to mark the 200th anniversary of Vincentians in the United States and 400th anniversary of their founding.



..... Cristina Aguilar, a student at St. John's University in Queens, New York, dons her daily accessory of five medals featuring the many devotions she cherishes. "Medals are close to my heart, just like my family."



Close to the HEART

DEVOTION TO MARY TRANSCENDS GENERATIONS.
It reaches all people, all walks of life, regardless of one's background.
Often instilled in us as a young child by our parents, our faith grows, changes, and develops over time.

She was awakened by a soft voice, "Sister, sister, sister." Startled, she gazed at the beautiful child standing next to her bed; he was surrounded with resplendent light.

"Get up quickly and come to the chapel," he said quietly, "the Blessed Virgin is waiting for you there." Catherine dressed into her habit and followed the child down the hall. She noticed the candles in the corridor were burning brightly. It was after eleven o'clock—far too late for any of the sisters to be up—and none of them would have lit every candle. She was perplexed.

What happened that night in July of 1830 was the beginning of events that would change the history of the world. Catherine was asked by the Blessed Mother to "have a medal struck ... All who wear it will receive great graces; they should wear it around the neck. Graces will abound for persons who wear it with confidence." Thus began the modern Marian era.

The Blessed Mother's message to St. Catherine Labouré is as relevant today as it was in the 19th century. It serves as a message of love, hope, and a personal connection with Our Lady.

TODAY'S MARIAN DEVOTEES

Meet Cristina Aguilar, who wears a perpetual smile on her face and a thick, silver chain with dangling medals around her neck. A student studying for a master's in biology at St. John's University, Cristina believes in the power of the Miraculous Medal. This belief comes naturally to her; faith has always been a part of her family. As immigrants, her family had struggles learning the language and adjusting to their new home. "My father would sit with us for hours, teaching us English and helping us with our homework," she says. And whenever they encountered problems, they turned to their faith.

This past year, they started praying the rosary as a family every day. Distance has not deterred this ritual.

Although she's in college, Cristina picks up the phone and calls home to join.

Cristina's devotion to the Miraculous Medal began when she traveled to the Immaculate Conception Basilica in Washington, DC, for the March for Life. When she saw the Medal, she thought, "I need this." But she didn't want to just "wear it for fashion"; she wanted to do something that would have spiritual significance. So, she decided to pray the Miraculous Medal Novena before attaching the medal to the chain.

"During that time, [my family was] going through some difficult problems," she said, "so, I prayed it for my family." After praying the Novena, she noticed something different, "You feel like you have a little more room in your heart, another treasure that you gained and can store there."

The Medal is a constant reminder of her prayers for her family during difficult times. And, she



Prayer, reflection, peace. These women have found a home at the Shrine and through the Miraculous Medal. Their devotion is an inspiration to their family, friends, and community.

“When you see someone wearing the Medal, you feel connected—there’s a sisterhood, a brotherhood; we have something in common.”
JULIE CURTIN

knows that Our Lady played a role in that. “I feel Mother Mary’s love every day.”

Betty Deithorn, a short-haired woman with sparkling eyes, is a member of Mt. Carmel Church in Doylestown. Her deep relationship with the Blessed Mother has lasted for decades. “Mary is my best friend,” she says. “I talk to her every day.”

Betty’s story started with her grandmother. A devout woman, she gave Betty a Miraculous Medal ring for her First Holy Communion, which she wore constantly. After getting married, she expanded the back and continued to wear it.

Her mother encouraged the Miraculous Medal devotion,

too. “My mom enrolled us in the Miraculous Medal every year. She did that for all her kids and then her grandchildren.” Her mother, who lived to 98 years of age, planned her funeral 25 years before she died. Betty recently found her mother’s notes, which read: “Friends and relatives are to be notified to donate to The Miraculous Medal Shrine.”

Julie Curtin first came to the Shrine the day after Mary Jo Timlin-Hoag, President and CEO of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, gave a Marian reflection at her women’s group at Mt. Carmel Church. She had heard about the Shrine but had never visited. After listening to Mary Jo’s presentation, she decided, “I’m going to go tomorrow.” “Tomorrow” was not

just an ordinary day; it was the day her second grandchild was going to be born. So, Julie came to the Shrine “to get Mary’s help.” The Priest asked her about her intention for the Mass. “I told him it was my first time there, and I was praying for all my grandchildren, but especially the one that was about to be born.” After Mass, her son texted her, informing her of the safe delivery. While it had been a difficult year for her family, Julie felt wearing the Miraculous Medal gave her strength. “When you see someone wearing the Medal, you feel connected—there’s a sisterhood, a brotherhood; we have something in common.”

Kathleen Cox is quiet and reflective. She, too, is a member of Mt. Carmel Church, has

faced many trials, and has found strength by leaning on the Blessed Mother. “I find myself calling on her; she’s always there. She’s our protection and help.” Kathleen wasn’t always devoted to Mary, but upon hearing her friends talk about their devotion, she wondered, “Where’s my devotion?” She began building a relationship by praying three Hail Mary’s daily; then she started praying a decade of the rosary. Now, she prays an entire rosary every morning. “It’s my comfort prayer,” she says, adding, “When I hold the Medal, I feel at peace.”

The first time Kathleen came to the Shrine, she was in awe of its beauty. “I’d seen it in pictures, and it’s very pretty, but it’s not until you stand in front of that statue that you realize just how awesome Mary is—for us and in our lives.” Then she poignantly adds, “I want

to be closer to her. No one knows when their last hour on earth will be, so I ask her, ‘Will you please be there to hold my hand when it’s my time?’”


Eleanor Farzetta grew up praying the rosary. “My grandmother lived with us; we never saw her without a rosary in her hands,” she says.

Eleanor’s mother had many miscarriages; the doctor told her she couldn’t have children. “Mom just continued to pray the rosary and novenas. She had 12 kids. We all felt blessed and special—in God’s eyes and Mary’s eyes.” She talks about the tiny miracles that happen every day, the ones that are so easily overlooked: a sick friend who finds the strength and health to come to the Shrine, a problem that miraculously disappears. “They’re small things,” she says, “but when they work out

and fill you with peace and joy, to me that’s Mary’s miracle.” Another member of Mt. Carmel Church, Eleanor turns to our Blessed Mother for everything. “She is always there; it’s me who doesn’t always acknowledge her.”

WE ARE FAMILY

The Blessed Mother and St. Catherine created a family—a family connected by the Miraculous Medal. Since 1832, the Vincentians have been promoting the Medal and devotion to our Blessed Mother, creating a family of believers. Wearing the Miraculous Medal is a constant reminder that those who wear the Medal will receive great graces.

Kathleen says it perfectly. “People should come [to The Shrine] and look at the sheer beauty of the place. Take it in, and then take it home with you.” 

“When I hold the Miraculous Medal, I feel at peace.”
KATHLEEN COX

A Community by INVITATION

A GROUP OF VINCENTIAN MEN, RESPONDING TO THE NEED IN A COMMUNITY that lacked support for its faith, started a revolution of immigrants returning to their Catholic faith.

When people think of the Hamptons, they initially envision affluent residents vacationing on beautiful beaches, donning floppy straw hats, and living in mansions. But upon a closer look, there lives an immigrant population nestled in the midst of this popular beach town, a vibrant and strong community not always associated with the area's prosperity.

The Congregation of the Mission, more commonly known as the Vincentians, has a ministry on the eastern end of Long Island, which serves the Hispanic-American community. The genesis of this Hispanic apostolate, also referred to as Hispanic ministry, began around

1990 on the western perimeter of Long Island. Fr. Kevin Lawler, CM, a missionary priest in Panama, was transitioning back to the United States and hoped to continue working with a Hispanic community. He identified a need in Long Island, where many underserved communities in the area of Nassau County could benefit from a Hispanic ministry.

In the fall of 1992, a plan of Hispanic evangelization was put into place, and the ministry commenced. In 1993, Fr. Gregory Semeniuk, CM, joined Fr. Lawler in this ministerial work. It began with a simple gesture—a knock on the door of potential parishioners—that ended with an invitation to

participate in Sunday mass. From there, this ministry expanded to administer the sacraments, organize lay faith formation programs, preach God's word in Spanish, and, most importantly, evangelize and spread the Good News within the community.

Fr. Semeniuk recounts how he, his fellow *confreres*, and leaders in the community reached out to the Hispanic population and invited them to participate in the ministry.

"There were about 20 people dedicated to that service, and once a week they would go out at night to visit the apartment buildings and areas where the Hispanic population lived."

This direct contact and invitation ignited the community to grow grassroots style into the thriving, active community it is today.

Hesitation and skepticism were commonly felt by those on the receiving end of this Hispanic ministry, who had been overlooked before, resulting in a lack of trust and confidence. Therefore, Fr. Semeniuk, along with the entire evangelization team, knew their words needed to be backed by action. Connecting with the community, training the leaders, and visiting every home in the parish were top priorities. The team drew a map of the community and divided it among themselves. Weekly, they paired up to knock on doors and visit Hispanic

parishioners delivering their simple introduction and invitation to participate in the faith.

"I didn't know Catholics did this," says one parishioner, who was caught off guard by the visit and invitation.

What happened next is nothing short of a miracle.

People were returning to church and participating in the lay faith formation programs. During this early time of the ministry, Fr. Semeniuk recalls visiting a young woman and her two-year-old child. While the visit was short, it was effective. The following week, he saw her in the communion line. Their eyes met, and she

was smiling. It affirmed to him that the simple gestures of visitation and invitation served as bridges to bring her back to the faith. It may be hard to say what the final outcome of that specific visit was, but it proved to Fr. Semeniuk that they had discovered the basis for developing a true community, where people socialized, came together to volunteer and deepen their faith.

Fr. Semeniuk reminisces about the changes he has witnessed over the years.

"We began with only 25 people in the church, a church that could fit 650 people. There was a lot of empty spaces at that time—a ton of potential but a ton of empty space. Now when I go back, the church

"We are all Catholics, but the way we express it is very unique to the people."





Hispanic-American parishioners participate in cultural festivals to help raise funds that support fellow parishioners experiencing financial difficulties.



A PARISHIONER PROFILE

Young parishioner Andrey has been a part of the Hispanic apostolate for 24 years. A native from Costa Rica, he began coming to the Long Island community at the age of five and became more involved over the years. From being an altar boy, to a lector, to catechist, he credits the Vincentian Priests and the welcoming community with deepening his faith.

“Growing up in this community and being involved with all the activities of the community was a great influence,” says Andrey. “It sets certain values in me that helped me understand to be humble, to be honest, to love God, to be loving toward others, and to help others as much as possible. That’s what the Vincentians are all about—helping others.”

is full, and there is standing room only. It attests to the power of the Spirit and God’s providential care that He wanted this community to grow and flourish; it was our investment, as Vincentians, in planting the seeds that allowed this community to flourish and develop. It shows the importance of being committed to a community.”

What is so special about the community and the people is how they support each other during tough times. Fr. Stephen Grozio, CM, Provincial of the Congregation of the Mission Eastern Province, recounts his many years serving the apostolate.

“I worked with the people who mowed the lawns, trimmed the hedges, were carpenters and painters, those who cared for the children as nannies, those who cooked and cleaned houses. They were such hard workers and good people. Those were the people whose work allowed the Hamptons to function and to go forward. It is hard working in Long Island for the people. It is an area that thrives in the summer, but there is not much work in the winter. Many people had to struggle through the winter. So while they did well in the summer, it wasn’t enough for the whole year.”

The Vincentian Priests noticed this specific struggle during the winter months and worked with the parishioners to create

what they call, *Encuentros de Cultura* (Cultural Festivals), special fundraisers hosted in the fall in which community members bring authentic food, dress in traditional garb, celebrate Mass in their native tongue, and share their culture with others. The communal support, generosity, and money raised is then distributed to those who struggle financially in the wintertime, helping to pay for heat, car expenses, rent, or groceries.

Fr. Marvin Navas, CM, the new director of the ministry, is currently in his second year serving the community. When talking about these fundraising events, he says, “The reason we do these fundraisers and activities is because many of our people don’t work in the winter, or can’t make ends meet, so they come to the church looking for help. The money we are able to raise allows us to provide help. The people are very generous; they know they are contributing to something that will help us carry out our mission to be generous to those who need it in the wintertime.”

Fr. Grozio shares a story about a parishioner who sought help with her rent. When asked why she needed assistance, the woman responded, “During the summer, I cleaned five houses each week. Then one of the women whose house I used to clean passed away. So then I only cleaned four. I lost one fifth of my income, but I still have enough to get through the winter. Then my car broke down,

and I needed to pay \$2,000 to repair it, and I don’t have enough to pay the rent this month.” The Long Island apostolate quickly came to her aid.

Tania Maza, originally from Ecuador, has been a part of the Long Island apostolate for 16 years. She was invited by friends to visit the apostolate and quickly realized how different the Vincentian priests are, and how valuable the apostolate is for the community.

“Vincentian priests for me are gifts from God,” professes Tania. “They live the way they preach and follow in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul. They are like angels. Our priests are open to the people and ask us what we are looking for. They love to help [and] are very compassionate with what a person needs. They take care of everyone and are looking out for those who really need help.”

Tania was on the receiving end of that help back in 2005 when her husband was murdered, and she was left a widow, raising her daughters on her own. It was Fr. Grozio who supported her throughout this difficult time, and who held her hand as she navigated this life without her spouse. He taught her to be different, to be tough, to be a strong woman, to be a strong mom, and, most importantly, to be a servant. She will never forget the kindness and support he gave her and her daughters. Her eyes are glassy, holding

back tears, as she says, “He is like a father figure. To have him is to have God with me as a person. I respect him so much, and he is greatly missed by the parish.” Moments like this are testaments to the impact the Vincentians have had on individuals within the community.

The ministry in Long Island is very diverse. While all are Hispanic, each has its own culture. Fr. Navas notes, “We are all Catholics, but the way we express it is very unique to the people.”

Parishioner and Pre-Cana instructor, Tania Pillco, has been a part of the apostolate for eight years. She appreciates how the Priests understand the differences in cultures. “It is important because we are people coming from different cities, different countries. We are Hispanic, but that does not mean we have the same values as every culture or family. When we understand each other, we have the tools to work together.”

“One of our pastoral principles is if they ask and we can do it, then we will do it,” reflects Fr. Semeniuk. “We are an international community, so we have resources that go beyond what a diocese would have. Therefore, we can call upon another province when we are in need of a specific language to support our mission, such as the Vincentians in Colombia, who can provide additional personnel to support Long Island. That made a big impact because not only were the people

being served linguistically, but now they are being served by one of their own. It makes a difference [to the community] to be preached to by a native speaker.”

The Vincentians serving in the Long Island apostolate are truly working in a missionary style. While they minister to seven parishes in Long Island, they use a missionary spirit in the institutionalized parishes. They are successful in this manner, because they ask the people exactly what they need and meet them where they are. An example would be how the Hispanic youth groups are organized. It was noticed by the Priests that the Hispanic population was not attending the normal weekly youth programs provided by the parish. The Vincentians questioned the parents why their children did not participate, and discovered that most parents were still working at the time the youth group met and were unable to provide transportation for their children. Based on their input, the Vincentian Priests organized a youth program that took place at eight on Saturdays mornings, at a time requested by the majority of the apostolate. The result: parents, youth, and children quickly began participating in this and other programs during a time that worked for their schedule.

Fr. Semeniuk is proud of the Vincentian impact and how his missionary vocation re-ignited the Long Island apostolate.

“The Vincentians have a missionary call; being called to serve the Hispanic immigrant population is a realization of that call. The time I spent in Long Island was my experience being a Vincentian missionary.”

The Long Island ministry has grown into a vibrant community of Hispanic-American immigrants coming together to express their Catholic faith by organizing faith programs, bringing together different cultures, and supporting those in need during tough times. However, it is the people who make the Long Island ministry a remarkable community. They open their hearts to the faith, to the Vincentian teachings, and to their neighbors and the traditions of others.

Tania Pillco sums it up best. “This is my home. The people that are here, the Priests, it feels like friends. It is a family. It motivates me to continue to learn and grow in the faith.”

A walk in my SHOES

IT IS THE INVISIBLE PEOPLE THAT ST. VINCENT DE PAUL worked with and whom the Congregation of the Mission continue to serve up and down the Eastern Province and throughout the region of Panama.

For many, one decision is all it takes. One choice, one mistake that alters a life in a way never anticipated. Maurice Jones sits visibly uncomfortable and contemplative as he recollects what went through his mind the day he was arrested. A day so engrained in his memory, 13 years ago seems like yesterday as the emotions flood back to his body and through his mind.

“It was a Thursday. I remember it very, very vividly, September 23. I had on a black t-shirt and khaki grayish blue pants. I was a young 24-year-old. I should have known better.” He stops, takes a deep breath, and sighs, “I could have changed that moment.”

This story is not about Maurice’s journey through our criminal justice system. It is not a story that debates why roughly 2.3 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States or why more than 60 percent of men and women re-offend within the first three years of being released.

Rather, this story serves as a reminder to open our hearts, to find compassion, and to have empathy for those whom mainstream society deems most unpopular.

Maurice’s story is not unique. He walks us through his life: growing up in a tough urban neighborhood, trying to avoid the street life, living in a foster home, traveling to the suburbs to receive an education but understanding that he was only there as he states, “to show a sprinkle of color in a place where there was no color.” Through the thick of it, he always kept his head above water and credits going to a school where he was removed from the social environment he was accustomed to at home. After graduating high school, he entered the military and served for four years. Upon his return, he recalls, “I came home to a place that didn’t want me,” a feeling many young adults can relate

to while transitioning from their teenage years, to college years, to adult years.

While Maurice was able to secure steady employment the majority of the time, he was still homeless. At some point when it all seemed like too much to handle, Maurice made a decision that ultimately changed the next six years of his life.

It was one decision. One choice. One moment that altered more than a half of a decade of his life, a felony crime he has always regretted committing.

During those six years of incarceration, Maurice matured. The men inside taught him how to be a real man. They knew he didn’t belong behind bars; he had too much potential. He knew he had to do something different.

“On February 24, 2011, I hit the ground running when they let me out.”

“We need to ask ourselves, ‘How can we act like God in giving incarcerated individuals a second chance?’ We need to help them to get out and to get better in our own minds and hearts.”

FR. MARTY McGEOUGH, CM

a group of lay individuals, PAR supports returning citizens in finding stable and meaningful employment, one of the best ways to combat recidivism (a person’s relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person received sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime). Studies have shown that jobs can help deter people from falling into the cycle of recidivism; ninety percent of people who have jobs do not go back to prison or re-offend. PAR is the supporting hand returning citizens need to re-adjust into society and avoid re-incarceration.

Maurice explains why transitional employment opportunities are so important to the success of returning citizens. “After coming home from prison, returning citizens are analog bodies in a digital world. Things have changed so much from when someone who was incarcerated went away to when they are free again. We help returning citizens get acclimated to this world through hard work, gaining more experience, and peer-to-peer community building.”

Malik Bandy recounts the time he worked as a technician at PAR. He depicts it as an additional stable resource that provided him extra support and guidance as he re-integrated into society. “I was incarcerated for 20 years. I’ve spent more time incarcerated than free.”

It is hard to imagine Malik behind bars. This towering family man, well-dressed and well-spoken, holds a degree from Villanova University, certifications in various trade roles, and currently works as a researcher at a local Philadelphia university. Malik’s straightforward attitude when talking about prison is refreshing and down-to-earth. He speaks in metaphors as he discusses rehabilitation, and addresses men and women returning home from prison.

He reflects on the importance of helping others and of service. “PAR is a place where men can see other men, who are just like them, developing, growing, being successful, raising families, and teaching. People say I am a success story. I can only be successful if I am pulling someone else out. I can only be successful if I am using my knowledge to help other people not fall into the same pitfalls, helping them get out of the situations they are in.”

Since then, Maurice has not let a moment pass him by. Currently the operations manager at People Advancing Reintegration (PAR) Recycle Works, a non-profit electronic recycling organization, Maurice manages and mentors to the staff technicians. PAR Recycle Works hires and provides transitional, stable employment for men and women returning home from prison, often referred to as returning citizens. Maurice challenges the people he meets by saying, “What’s your faith walk look like?”

For Maurice, it’s a personal walk. “If you don’t give the creator what’s due, the creator is going to take it. We, as servants of the creator, need to do our part in serving the creator.” PAR Recycle Works is just one small way Maurice takes his personal faith walk in serving the creator.

Many Vincentian Priests and Brothers have made it their ministry to serve the population of incarcerated men and women. They have taken decisive steps to build PAR as a re-entry program. Established by Fr. Tim Lyons, CM, and

Malik Bandy has a straightforward, down-to-earth attitude when talking about prison. Today, he counsels others on rehabilitation and returning home from prison.

SERVING THOSE MOST IN NEED

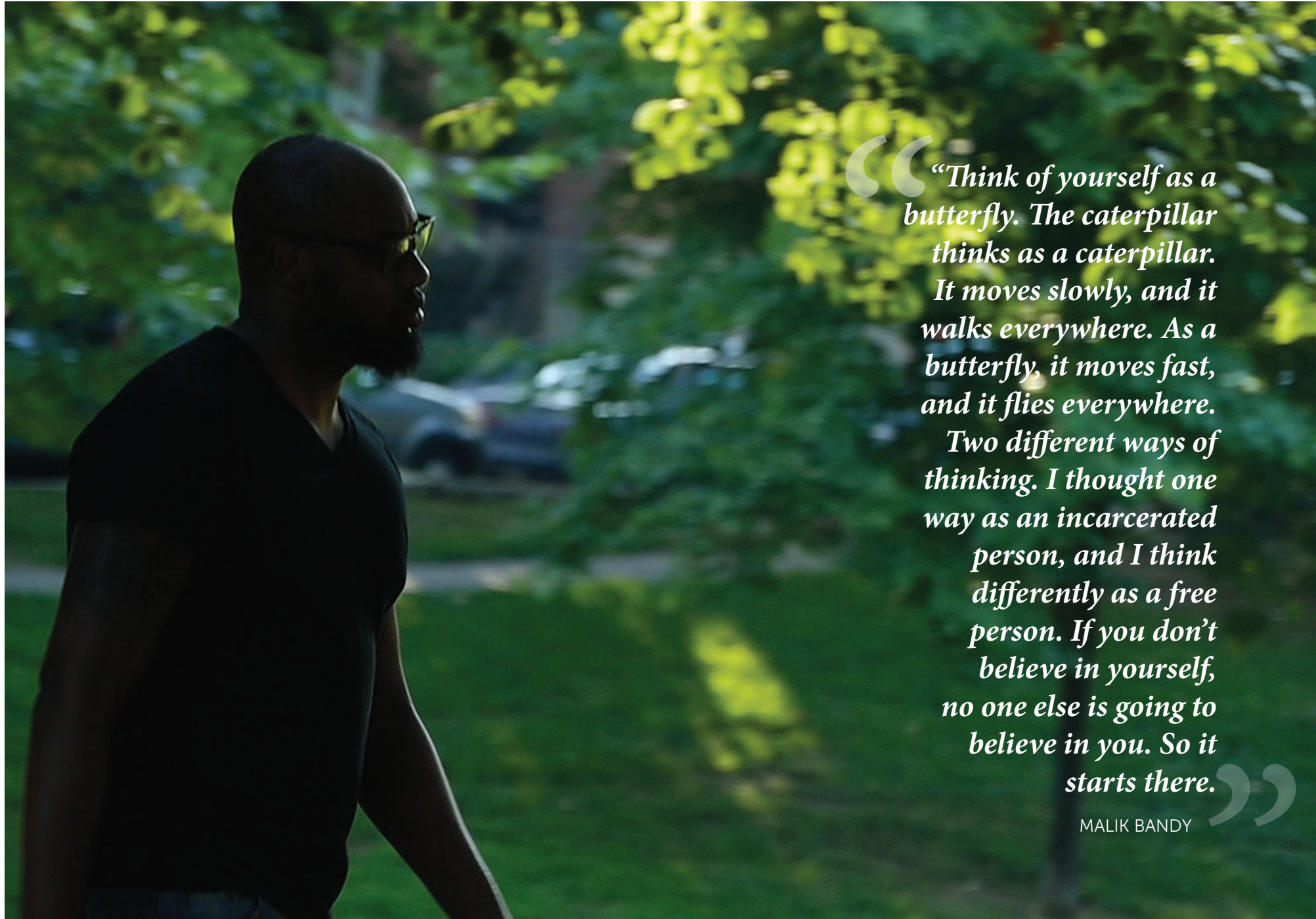
The Congregation of the Mission follows in the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul, who believed we are all obliged to attend to the salvation of souls anywhere that God calls them, above all, in places where there is the greatest need.

During his time with the Trenton Diocese as coordinator for prison ministry, Fr. Marty McGeough, CM, worked in three different prison levels: federal, state, and juvenile. He crossed paths with men, women, and youth from all different backgrounds and directly served them by hosting masses; offering confession and bible studies; and providing one-on-one counseling.

When reflecting on his ministerial work, Fr. McGeough is direct about his approach. “It is important to understand that re-incarcerated people have made mistakes, and that we also make mistakes. But, God gives us all a second chance. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves, ‘How can I act like God in giving these people a second chance?’ We are all very ready to let them rot, but we need to help them to get out and to get better—in our own minds and hearts, we need to change the way we view incarcerated individuals. We need to stop lumping everyone into one big basket.”

“I walked four to five miles. I could have changed that day. At any one of those steps, I could have said I’m going to go home. I could have done something different.”

MAURICE JONES



“Think of yourself as a butterfly. The caterpillar thinks as a caterpillar. It moves slowly, and it walks everywhere. As a butterfly, it moves fast, and it flies everywhere. Two different ways of thinking. I thought one way as an incarcerated person, and I think differently as a free person. If you don’t believe in yourself, no one else is going to believe in you. So it starts there.”

MALIK BANDY

Photos courtesy of Joyful Films.

Fr. Gregory Cozzubbo, CM, served more than 12 years as a prison chaplain in the Philadelphia area, and admits it is a time during his priesthood when he felt “most Vincentian.” Seeing the same people be released and then return back behind bars can be disheartening. However, Fr. Cozzubbo quickly realizes it often isn’t what he says that matters, but instead that the inmates have someone who listens to them and genuinely cares for them.

He recounts a heart-stirring story that has stayed with him throughout his 34 years of priesthood. “One of the most difficult things to do as chaplain is to tell an inmate a family member has died. Maybe even more difficult than that is having to tell a family member that their son or daughter, who is in prison, died. But that is part of the ministry.” He recalls one specific

incident. “I had a call from a mother of an inmate one day saying she’d like to come in and see her son. It was not his visiting day, but she needed to tell him his brother was killed. Her son was a big, tall guy, and she was a medium-sized woman. She sat with him, took his hand saying, ‘Son, I have something to tell you, and it is going to be very difficult. Your brother was killed last night.’ He fell in her lap; it was like watching the Blessed Mother hold Jesus, an image I will never forget.”

BECOMING AN ADVOCATE

As a society, it’s easy to turn a blind eye to the 2.3 million people who will eventually become free citizens in the United States. We can pass judgment and wonder an infinite number of why’s about what led Maurice to take that five-mile walk. We

can criticize Malik for a fault he made as a young man that took away 20 years of his life. We could blame the foster system Maurice experienced at a young age, the broken homes Malik was passed between, or the housing projects that breed violence and drugs.

But placing blame does not create solutions. The actions of Vincentian Priests like Frs. McGeough, Lyons, and Cozzubbo encourage others to become advocates for those whose voices are not heard. They encourage others to live St. Vincent’s legacy to make a difference by volunteering at local non-profits, altering the opinions of others, giving a voice to the less fortunate, providing monetary donations when able, and, most importantly, keeping those struggling around us in our hearts and prayers.

NATIONAL STATISTICS ON RECIDIVISM

Bureau of Justice Statistics studies reveal high rates of recidivism by released prisoners. One study tracked 404,638 prisoners in 30 states after their release from prison in 2005. The researchers found that:

67%

Within three years of release, approximately two-thirds of released prisoners were re-arrested.

76.6%

Within five years of release, about three-quarters of released prisoners were rearrested.

56.7%

Of those prisoners who were rearrested, more than half were arrested by the end of the first year.

82.1%

Property offenders were the most likely to be re-arrested for a new crime.

76.9%

Drug offenders who were re-arrested

73.6%

Public order offenders who were re-arrested

71.3%

Violent offenders who were re-arrested

2018 Stats compiled by the Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice

PEOPLE

A PRIOR *Commitment*

One Family.
Four Priests.
A Shared Vocation.

MANY FAMILIES ARE BLESSED WITH TWO OR MORE VOCATIONS, and each who is called by God has a unique journey, as well as similarities experienced with their siblings. Such is the story of the Priors, four brothers who shared a lifetime commitment to priestly service through the Congregation of the Mission.

PICTURED (l-r): Frs. Jim and Tom Prior still actively serve in Vincentian ministries.



PICTURED (l-r):
Frs. Frank, Jim, Bob and Tom

Meet the Fathers Prior.



BOYS FROM BAYONNE

If there's a special place in heaven for the mother of a priest, then Anna Marie Prior has prime real estate in paradise. Of her five sons, four became priests, most notably Vincentian priests.

The Prior family story begins in Bayonne, New Jersey, where Anna Marie and Abraham, two devout Catholics, settled to raise a family. Their first three sons, Frank, Jim and Bob, were born in close succession. Their younger two sons, Tom and Jack, came a few years later. The growing family lived a peaceful, faith-filled life surrounded by relatives and a tight-knit community of religious believers. According to Frs. Jim and Tom Prior, CM, their mother's extraordinary devotion to family and faith is the key factor that influenced their vocational discernment.

"Mom went to mass every day of her life," says Fr. Tom, son number four. "She would take all five of us with her to church every day, and then walk us across the street to school. From this early start, mass and devotion to a religious life became influential aspects of our lives."

While their mother's spiritual influence began their formation, it was the actions and admiration of a Vincentian Priest that helped sort their desire for the clerical role and actual vocation. Fr. Frank Hinton, CM, a Vincentian, whose sister was married to one of the Prior family cousins, inspired the brothers through personal accounts of his ministries.

At the tender age of 13, Frank, the oldest son, asked his parents if he could learn more about the Vincentians. His father and uncle obliged and took him to St. Joseph's College, a high school and college seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. It took one trip to convince Frank that this was the path he wished to follow.

In rapid succession, brother after brother followed the same journey attending the Vincentian Seminary Minor for six years, and then two years at the novitiate at the Eastern Province USA Vincentians in the Germantown area of Philadelphia followed by six years at the former Mary Immaculate Seminary in Northampton, Pennsylvania. While youngest brother Jack did not become a priest, he did enter the seminary for six years, so that at one point all of Anna Marie and Abraham's sons were in the seminary together.

PATHS CROSS

The brothers have crossed paths throughout their religious careers. At one time, Frs. Frank and Bob both taught classes and worked in the administration at St. John's Preparatory School in Brooklyn, New York (Fr. Frank eventually became headmaster of the school). They were so loved and appreciated by the school community that students affectionately referred to the school as Priors' Prep.

Fr. Frank spent the bulk of his ministry in education. He was a well-known and respected member of the Niagara University community (a Vincentian-

run school of higher education in New York) for more than 30 years. He served in a myriad of capacities: English professor, vice president for institutional advancement, member of the pre-medical and pre-dental recommendations committee, and the university judicial board. For a time, he also coached the debate team.

On the 50th anniversary of his ordination, Fr. Frank was awarded the university's highest honor, the President's Medal. In his role as vice president for advancement, he raised millions of dollars for academic programs, building projects, and scholarships. He was instrumental in securing the largest single gift in the history of the university, a five million dollar donation from an alumnus. He was also associated with another Vincentian university, St. John's, where he served on the board of trustees and was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. Fr. Frank passed away in 2006.

Fr. Jim has been a fixture at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, an Italian parish nestled in Roseto in the heart of the Slate Belt in Pennsylvania, for more than 50 years. His ministry began in 1964, when he was "loaned" to the Diocese of Allentown to serve as principal of Pius X High School across the street from the church, a position he held for 18 years. He eventually became assistant pastor and then pastor in 1993.

When asked about his longevity at the parish, he laughs. "I think my warranty is wearing out."



“The main ingredients of our vocation are family life, and devotion to Mass and the Eucharist.”

Fr. Tom served in several ministries, including St. Vincent's parish mission school in Panama, St. Thomas More High School (Archdiocese of Philadelphia), and St. John's Preparatory School in Queens, New York. Years later, he became part of the Miraculous Medal Novena Band for 28 years, traveling the eastern United States and giving novenas in honor of the Blessed Mother. For the last 14 years of this ministry, he was stationed at St. John's University in Queens, New York.

Fr. Tom joined the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel parish community about two decades ago, serving as an assistant pastor alongside Fr. Jim. The brothers enjoy living and working harmoniously in their parochial duties. Additionally, they minister to the sick in six regional hospitals and four nursing homes. When Fr. Tom joined Fr. Jim at Our Lady, fellow priests questioned how well they would get along working together. For them, it was never a problem.

"We get along well," said Fr. Tom. "Jim does all the paperwork, which frees me up to take care of the hospital visits."

The religious journey for brother number three, Fr. Bob, was not as direct as that of his siblings. A year before beginning his diaconate, he left the seminary to take care of their mom. During this time, he taught at St. John's Preparatory School and Holy Family in Bayonne, New Jersey.

After Anna Marie's death decades later, Fr. Bob hoped to return to the seminary to

finish his religious instructions, but was nervous he would not be welcomed back after his long absence. Fr. Jim recalls how this was to the contrary.

"The Vincentians welcomed him back with open arms," says Fr. Jim. "Of all of us brothers, Bob was the most suited to be a priest." By the age of 66, he completed his studies and preparation for the priesthood and began his ministry in education.

Fr. Bob died November of 2018. During his homily at the funeral Mass, Fr. Frank Sacks, CM, recounted Fr. Bob's attributes. "*Confreres* who attended St. John's Preparatory School remember Fr. Bob fondly as an excellent teacher—some would say their best teacher. He was noted for his good sense of humor, his willingness to always be helpful, and, not surprisingly for a true Prior, his support for the Yankees."

SECRETS TO OUR SUCCESS

"We were never, ever forced to be priests," Fr. Tom emphatically states. "We always had our own clear paths, and no one ever tried to convince us otherwise."

So, what was the secret element that the Priests believe led them to their religious vocations?

Fr. Jim simply states, "The main ingredients of our vocation are family life, and devotion to Mass and the Eucharist." They agree their parents set the stage by cultivating a strong, holy familial

environment and strict observance to Catholicism. When asked why they chose to follow a Vincentian vocation, their answer aligns with that of St. Vincent's mission.

"It's a practical ministry—the hands-on ability to bring Christ to the people and St. Vincent's primary concern for the spiritual salvation of the poor," says Fr. Jim.

"There are many factors that attracted us to the Vincentian ministry, but I think the most important ones are the *confrere* support in a communal atmosphere, and the many and varied types of ministries we can serve whether it be parish work, global missions, or teaching," acknowledges Fr. Tom

His brother agrees. "I appreciate that all my *confreres* have always supported me equally in my priestly life. That bond has made my priestly calling much easier. And as I get older, I realize how blessed I am being a priest, especially a Vincentian."

TOP PICTURES (l-r):

Anna Marie Prior

Left to right are Frs. Frank, Tom, and Jim at Tom's ordination.

Fr. Frank with mom at their Bayonne home.

Brothers Frank and Jim.

“As a Vincentian Brother, I am called to love and serve God and my neighbor, especially the poor. And I want to be sure I’m doing God’s will. To do this, I must see Jesus Christ in each person I meet, whether they are rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, friendly or unfriendly, good or bad. I must see some good in everyone. This can be hard at times, but I must carry this out as instructed in God’s Word in Scriptures.”

BROTHER ALFRED J. SMITH, CM

The Journey of an Inner City SERVANT

MANY CATHOLICS KNOW THE ROLES PRIESTS PLAY IN THE CHURCH, but are less familiar with other vocations to the ordained and religious life. To some, the Vincentian Brother vocation is one of the best-kept secrets in the Catholic Church. Just ask anyone who knows Br. Alfred J. Smith, CM.

A BROTHER LIKE NO OTHER

“What can a brother do in a parish?” asked an incredulous parishioner way back in 1957, when newly professed Vincentian Br. Alfred J. Smith, CM, was first assigned to St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Germantown. That question prompts a chuckle from Fr. Sylvester Peterka, CM, the parish’s current pastor, as he recounts the many ministries and lives changed in the 62 years since Br. Al began his ministry in the city. He has been at St. Vincent’s ever since, a symbol of stability and a beacon of hope for the people he has helped in his ministries over the years.

“Br. Al lives out the Vincentian charism of working with and for the poor,” says Fr. Peterka, adding, “There is no other individual in our Province who does more with and for the poor in our Germantown community than Br. Al.”

HEALING AND CALLING

Several years before he entered the seminary, Br. Al experienced seizures; tests revealed a brain tumor. He told no one about it, not wanting to worry his parents. He took medication, which initially allowed him to work as a bank teller, but eventually made him too drowsy to perform his duties. So, he reduced the dosage, which put him at risk of having seizures.

He suffered from these attacks sporadically for the next three years. His new doctor, unaware of the previous doctor’s diagnosis of a brain tumor, thought the seizures had to do with epilepsy.

“Because of the seizures, I was given a medical discharge from the National Guard. As this was 1953 and we were engaged in the Korean War, I was quickly drafted. However, when the medical examiner saw my medical records, I was immediately rejected from military service.”

During these three years, he would attend daily mass before work each day with his mother at his local parish, Our Lady of Mercy in Colonie, New York. Thoughts of a vocation to religious life were often in his mind and heart, and he prayed for divine direction. He occasionally dated, but as he explains, “I felt called to a life different from married life.”

Things became clearer in 1954 for young Alfred Smith when he attended a solemn, nine-day novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal at his parish. He decided to ask God, through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, about his vocation in life and for direction in following the Lord’s will. The preacher for the novena was Fr. James Twomey, CM, a Vincentian Priest. As Br. Al recalls, “His words touched my heart in a deep way, and ... I was sold. I realized I wanted to be a Vincentian and follow the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, St. Vincent de Paul, and be of service to the poor.”

Although he didn’t know the requirements or any details about the Vincentian community, he had a strong certainty that God was calling him to become a Vincentian Brother. “Why would God call



“It takes a lot of work to encourage people to become more independent and self-sufficient. They will fight you all the way. They will be angry and resentful, but I promise you that if you have perseverance and believe in what you are doing, they will succeed and be very grateful that you supported them, trusted them, and believed in them that they could succeed. It takes time, effort, and a lot of love.”

me to be a Vincentian Brother if I couldn't be accepted? I just knew in my heart that God was calling me to the brotherhood.”

Not only did Br. Al receive direction for his vocation during the novena, but he also felt strongly that he was healed physically. Stepping out in faith, he recalls, “I placed everything in God's and Mary's hands. Without consulting doctors, I stopped taking all medications, as I felt it was God's plan.” To this day, he has not had a seizure.

Upon entering the seminary, Br. Al received an extensive medical examination. His health was so good he passed the physical exam with flying colors. Later, in the early 1980s, he had to get an MRI due to suffering from migraine headaches. “I feared a recurrence of the brain tumor, but the results showed there was no sign of any abnormality in the brain, proving beyond a doubt that I was healed [during the novena] on December 8, 1954.”

In March 1955, he entered the seminary. “As I was the first Brother vocation in many years, they had to figure out what to do with me,” he said with a smile. He was sent to Mary Immaculate Seminary in Northampton, Pennsylvania, for a six-month postulancy, and entered the novitiate in Philadelphia on November 7, 1955.

Three years after receiving his calling, the 23-year-old Albany native professed his vows in 1957 and began his ministry in Germantown. His primary assignment was to work at St. Vincent's Seminary as secretary to the Vocation Director, and as sacristan at The Miraculous Medal Shrine. He also attended Pierce College and worked part-time at St. Vincent de Paul Parish coordinating the CYO program in addition to coaching basketball, baseball, and the boys and girls track teams.

In 1969, Br. Al was assigned to St. Vincent de Paul Parish on a full-time basis, his ministries expanding or changing as needed. Almost immediately, his pastor assigned him to be the Director of Youth, training altar boys and teaching fourth- and fifth-grade religion classes twice a week in the parish school. Later, when the need arose, Br. Al became certified to instruct children with special needs to better address their requirements.

The pattern was set. As more and more responsibilities arose, Br. Al met them head-on. At the invitation of his pastor, he then took on the role of Director of Social Outreach, running a food cupboard in 1969, and ministering to shut-ins and parish senior citizens. In 1974, he became Director of Human Services in the parish, started a furniture bank, and expanded the food center.

THE MANY MINISTRIES OF BR. AL

“Most of the ministries have sprung from being asked to do something,” says Br. Al, who strives to follow in the footsteps of St. Vincent by serving the poor and marginalized. “You do what you can, and then see if there are others who can help you to make things better. We need as many people as we can get to help grow these ministries in order to help more people.”

Having studied finance in college, Br. Al wrote grant proposals and founded and directed several non-profit agencies: St. Vincent's Senior Center, Villa Vincent (the location of the former St. Catherine Labouré Medical Clinic), and St. Vincent's Soup Kitchen in 1984, which was taken over by Sr. Eileen in 1989 (it has since expanded to become the non-profit organization, Face-to-Face).

In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Br. Al assisted Sr. Ruth Maher, DC, and 35 other volunteers in ministering to 550 elderly and ill shut-ins. The volunteers would shop for them, provide transportation, help them pay their bills, or assist them as needed. Sometimes, people who were shut-ins had serious psychiatric disabilities that prevented them from bonding well with others, including family members. Br. Al recounts one man whose behavior drove his family away. When he passed away in his 90s, “No one showed up for the funeral except Sr. Ruth and myself.”

The bottom line is that Br. Al is willing. Willing to do what needs to be done, to be the face of Christ for those who need Him most—those coping with the messy side of life, whether dealing with a person in the midst of a mental health crisis, tending to the open bedsores of an incapacitated person, or scraping off years of mold and grime when restoring a person's home.

Some might call him a “risk-taker,” but he is not afraid to approach those who need his help; nor is he shy about approaching those who can help assist him in his efforts. He is not afraid to step out in faith, as long as he knows he is doing God's will.

INN DWELLING

Asking Br. Al which of his ministries has meant the most to him is like asking a parent who is their favorite child. How can he choose?

Yet, one ministry does stand out. “The longest-running and most successful program in terms of having the most impact serving those in need is Inn Dwelling. It began in 1981, was incorporated in 1983, and is still running today.

“Inn Dwelling's initial mission was to restore certain neighborhoods that were run-down,” says Br. Al. He and his team of volunteers began by rehabbing abandoned houses that were either purchased or donated, and then teaching families financial responsibility in order to obtain the homes. After three years in this rigorous program, these families would acquire mortgages in order to live independently.

Since 1997, 60 families have become first-time homebuyers through the program, which has caused a ripple effect, restoring hope and transforming communities as neighbors were inspired by the difference in the newly rehabbed homes in their neighborhood. We learned as we went to press that the last home in the program had just sold (the week of January 18, 2019), bringing to a close that chapter of the ministry's focus.

In 1993, Inn Dwelling formally expanded its mission to include a tutoring and mentoring program for at-risk youth in the community. As Br. Al explains, “The board made a decision three years ago that we can't split our efforts, so we decided to devote our full effort toward the education component, because of the success of the students and the fact that the greatest way to overcome poverty is through education.”

Inn Dwelling's education programs are now the main focus of the ministry, changing lives in Germantown starting at a younger

age. Br. Al works with Sr. Rosemarie Jefferson, MSBT, to ensure that children who have academic ability and the drive to succeed are not held back because of their family's financial situation, but instead are given support and motivation to succeed in school. The program includes after-school tutoring programs for 51 high school students at two locations, and a newer program for students in grades 6-8 known as the Sophia Program, which began in 2012 to help prepare students for admission to selective college-preparatory high schools. This year, there are 36 students in the Sophia Program, which is housed at the Holy Cross Mission School in Mount Airy. This program will be expanding to the other Independence Mission Schools in the near future, once funding has been procured.


These students go on to attend selective Catholic high schools and colleges. “Every student who has gone through this program has gotten a scholarship to college (either full or partial),” says Br. Al. So far, 200 students have been recipients of college scholarships through the program.

WHY DOES HE DO IT?

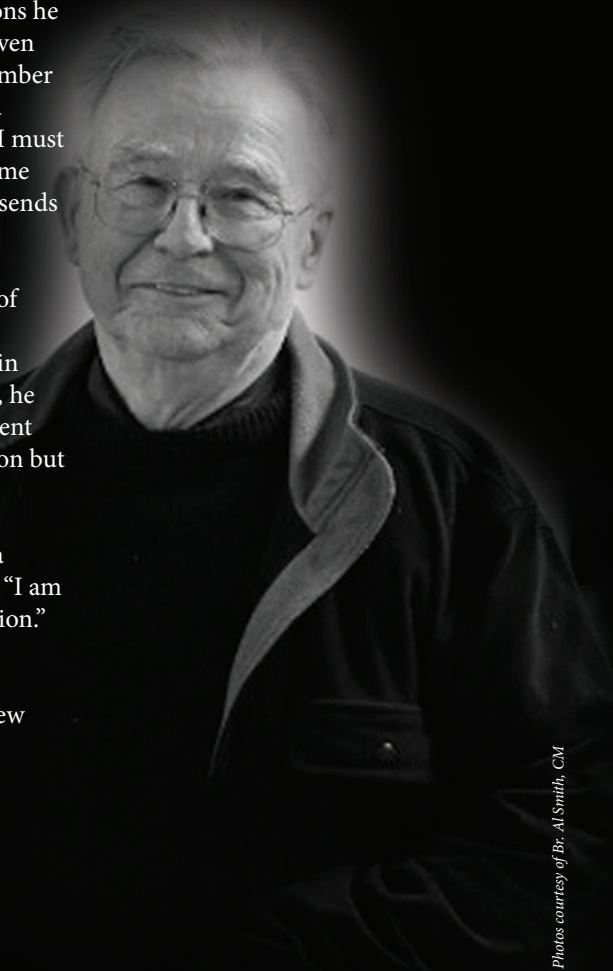
Reflecting on some of the dire situations he has helped people face, Br. Al says, “Even with difficult people, we have to remember that God is in there somewhere. It is a reminder that I cannot do this alone. I must realize that God is with me and gives me whatever I need to serve whoever He sends my way.”

Of the hundreds—if not thousands—of lives Br. Al has impacted, he remains humble in what he has accomplished in his six-plus decades of service. In fact, he laughs as he recalls how his appointment was not originally a permanent position but contingent on his performance.

“I was sent to St. Vincent's parish for a six-month trial period,” laughs Br. Al. “I am still waiting for the six-month evaluation.”

Fortunately, for those who have been recipients of his ministry, Br. Al's review would be off the charts. 

“Even with difficult people, we have to remember that God is in there somewhere. It is a reminder that I cannot do this alone. I must realize that God is with me and gives me whatever I need to serve whoever He sends my way.”



Photos courtesy of Br. Al Smith, CM

A Special Band of BELIEVERS

MANY LIFELONG RELATIONSHIPS HAVE HAD THEIR START AT THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL SHRINE in Philadelphia. So, it is no wonder that friendships and faith communities have found a home at The Shrine, where connections through Mary's Miraculous Medal intercession are not just any relationships—they're sacred bonds.

Five Marian devotees—Pat Sharkey, Rita Dougherty, Angela McGowan, Pat Salomone, and Joe Coll—have bonded as a community through their shared devotion to our Blessed Mother and the intercession of the Miraculous Medal. This affable group shares their Shrine stories and experiences, which bear witness to the belief that the Virgin Mary is lighting their way. Each has her and his own Miraculous Medal anchor for spiritual support and emotional comfort.

Pat Sharkey is a strong and consistent supporter, devotee, and promoter of the Shrine and the Miraculous Medal, and the unofficial organizer of this band of believers. She has been coming to the Shrine since 1959 and is imbued with the belief that the Virgin Mary is guiding her and her fellow devotees. It has become her personal mission to strengthen and share Mary's Miraculous Medal with as many people as she can.

"We built a community [of devotees] by inviting people to the

Shrine and gathering friends," says Pat. "Love of Mary brings people to the Shrine and unites us."

Rita agrees.

"The Shrine is a very peaceful, serene place; I come every opportunity I can," states Rita, whose first experience was attending a Novena at the Shrine as a teenager with her then-boyfriend. "My faith has always been at the core of who I am, and coming to the Shrine perpetuates my devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary."

“Their devotion to the Miraculous Medal led to a bond of kindred spirits, a union they all cherish.”

Rita also recalls how the Miraculous Medal was a familial rite of adulthood; she and her 11 siblings received gold Miraculous Medals at age 21. This religious

initiation symbolized what would become the advent of her devotion at the Shrine.

It was Angela McGowan's husband, John, who first introduced her to the Shrine through his close association with the Vincentians. Growing up in the surrounding neighborhood, John was an altar server for Immaculate Conception parish, a Vincentian-run faith community, and regularly attended Shrine Novenas and services. She laughs as she recalls her husband once saying that local boys came to the Shrine to meet a "nice, Catholic girl." Years since her husband's passing, Angela continues to visit the Shrine as a connection, albeit a spiritual bond, to her husband and a fulfillment of her prayer life.

Pat Salomone has frequented the Shrine since childhood. Living only a few blocks from the Cheltenham Avenue site, both her parents regularly attended services and Novenas, and her father served as an usher. Upon graduation from Little Flower High School, Pat worked part-time in the administrative office,



SHOW US YOUR MIRACULOUS MEDALS.
Pictured left to right are Angela McGowan, Joe Coll, Pat Sharkey, Rita Dougherty, and Pat Salomone.

eventually becoming a full-time employee. She is proud to admit she had the opportunity to work under the leadership of the Central Association of the Miraculous Medal's founder, Fr. Joseph A. Skelly, CM.

"Fr. Skelly's office was across the hallway from my space," Pat remembers. "He was a bit of a curmudgeon and not very communicative to us, but we all knew he was a very busy person with a clear vision. We admired his devotion to the Shrine and the Vincentian mission."

Joe Coll's family also lived in close proximity to the Shrine and he recalls his grandmother's strong devotion to the Blessed Mother. As a boy, Joe was an altar server at The Shrine. He remembers

the "old days" when the Shrine was packed for hourly Novenas, and a trolley car was specifically assigned to bring devotees directly to the church from across the city.

"I have always thought of the Shrine as being part of my DNA," Joe professes. "There is something special about this place, and I want to tell everyone about it."

Joe doesn't just talk the talk, he walks the walk. He frequently accompanies people—young and old, troubled and downtrodden, faithful and faithless—to the Shrine to help them find solace in times of need and despair.

"I see myself as a vehicle, as someone who should evangelize and take the Shrine's message to others," believes Joe. "The

Blessed Mother's message here is powerful."

Rita appreciates the spiritual ambiance of the Shrine, as well.

"We are fortunate to have the Shrine in Philadelphia," notes Rita. "It is a great place to have in our neighborhood and the answer to our prayers."

To this special band of believers, the Shrine is its own unique kind of sacred space, and the Miraculous Medal connects them in a personal way to Mary and, through her, to Jesus. They encourage others to discover the Miraculous Medal and this peaceful sanctuary for prayer, meditation, and pilgrimage.

“There is nothing I can’t do.”

EVELYN ROGERS

In a CLASS of her own

GOD SURE PACKED A LOT INTO THE PETITE FRAME OF EVELYN ROGERS. But don’t let her size fool you. Evelyn was a trailblazer whose dedication, passion, and imagination overcame discrimination, poverty, personal loss, and illness.

All who knew Evelyn Rogers admired her strength and tenacity to motivate and inspire others throughout the Philadelphia region. Her faith, intelligence, and never-say-never attitude will always be remembered by her family, church, and community.

Evelyn had a humble beginning. Born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1928, Evelyn was the only daughter of three children. She knew racial inequality firsthand but had a strong faith and close-knit family life. Tenacious and determined even as a child, her cousin, Sylvia, always admired her inner fortitude and ability to get her voice heard.

“Evelyn always made it a point to get her point across,” says Sylvia.

Her daughter, Kimberly, recalls her mother’s stories of growing up in the South where racial segregation prevailed. On one occasion during her teen years, Evelyn was frantically taking her father to the hospital after he apparently suffered from a heart attack. Their only means of transport was via the bus. Upon entering, she and her father were instructed to

move to the back and sit with the “colored” passengers. She defied the driver and seated her father in the front. Stunned, the bus driver obliged.

A studious and popular child, Evelyn often assisted teachers in the Richmond Public School System by grading her classmates’ assignments. After completing high school, she enrolled at Virginia Union University eventually earning a bachelor’s degree in social work. (She would continue her studies later in life and eventually obtained a master’s degree in education from Antioch University.) Upon college graduation, she enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1951, where she served as an instructor in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) for five years, attaining the rank of Sergeant First Class.

After honorable discharge from the military, Evelyn moved to Philadelphia to escape the segregated South. Here she met and married Marion Rogers, a former marine. They had five children: Mark, Pam, Kevin, Kimberly, and Craig. The family

settled in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, where the Rogers children attended St. Vincent de Paul School situated alongside the church. Kim recalls a happy childhood in which her parents served on numerous school-related groups and programs. At home, Evelyn was always organizing fun activities for the children, as well as the neighborhood friends.

“Our house was always the playhouse,” Kimberly says. “Mom would make popcorn, and we would watch movies. It was always obvious to us that our family was her greatest joy.”

At age 53, Marion lost his battle to cancer. While devastated, Evelyn knew she had to hold her family together. She held numerous positions to support her children, including social worker and counselor in the Philadelphia School District, and school counselor and substitute teacher for several local school districts.

AMAZING EVELYN

Br. Alfred J. Smith, CM (see article on pg. 36), who has conducted his ministries through St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Germantown for 62 years, worked with Evelyn for 50 of those years. He sadly misses her

dynamic presence and leadership.

“Evelyn was well-educated, feisty, and determined,” Br. Al says. “She always had a passion for St. Vincent’s, the community, and racial and social justice.”

Religion was a major facet of her life, so when the Rogers family moved to Germantown, they went to St. Vincent’s church to sign up as new parishioners. At the time, ethnic separation—even among churches—was still prevalent. They were told that St. Catherine’s was for “black” parishioners. True to her personality, Evelyn stood her ground and insisted she preferred to be a member of St. Vincent’s. Today, everyone is glad she did.

Evelyn was a faithful motivator and devoted model parishioner at St. Vincent’s. There wasn’t an aspect of St. Vincent’s she didn’t touch. She not only volunteered on myriad parish programs, she initiated several others to benefit not only the parishioners but the Philadelphia community.

“Evelyn was totally dedicated to the church and God,” says Fr. Sylvester Peterka, CM, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish. “It was obvious in how she helped make

LEFT to RIGHT:

1951: Sergeant First Class and Instructor in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), U.S. Army

Graduation from master’s degree in education program from Antioch University

Regular lector at St. Vincent’s parish

the parish a more welcoming place for all.”

With gumption and unbridled enthusiasm, Evelyn took her avocation of church and community service to heart, making a difference with ideas and initiatives. One such initiative she created was the Learning Lab, an education program that helped adults learn basic reading and writing skills in preparation for GED completion. She recruited local teachers as volunteer instructors to ensure the students were getting the best education.

“She valued education as a means for people to get better jobs and learn how to help themselves,” states Br. Al.

Another project she single-handedly initiated and organized was the church Thrift Shop. When it became apparent to her that many of her fellow parishioners and community members couldn’t afford clothing and other basic daily necessities, she took action. She also taught a nutrition class and partnered with various local companies to help with job placements. She and her husband served as president and vice president of the Home and School Association of St. Vincent’s Hospitality Committee and were members of the church’s pastoral council. She was a long-time Eucharistic Minister, church lector, and member of St. Vincent’s African-American History Group. She acquired public transportation tokens and briefly partnered with Br. Al on his program, Inn Dwelling, a non-profit corporation dedicated to assisting poor families in the Germantown and Northeast sections of Philadelphia on education, housing and career development programs. She also

TOP to BOTTOM:

Fr. Sylvester Peterka, pastor at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Germantown, and Evelyn worked together on many parish and community programs.

Fr. Thomas McKenna, CM (left), and Br. Al Smith, CM, presented Evelyn with an official proclamation with the Congregation of the Mission.

Evelyn at her desk at St. Vincent's.

worked with the St. Vincent Senior Community Center.

But her greatest accomplishment at St. Vincent's was the Food Cupboard. While Br. Al started the program, Evelyn eventually took over in the 1980s. Along with a team of volunteers, she helped organize and provide daily food assistance to the community. For more than 40 years, she distributed turkey breasts at Thanksgiving and Christmas in addition to distributing more than 200 turkey baskets annually. She also organized a network where local schools adopted families in need, which required collecting and distributing toys and clothing every Christmas. She coordinated food donations and financial support from several prominent Philadelphia organizations. For more than 35 years, Evelyn was the force behind this very successful program, and as Fr. Peterka notes, "She ran it until her last breath."

Her generous spirit and dedication to service are true to the Vincentian mission of service to others. Fr. Peterka sums it up best: "She is a living example of St. Vincent."

Her daughter, Kimberly, views her as a true entrepreneur whose favorite quote was "There is nothing I can't do." She loved to read, had a keen interest in keeping current on politics, believed in promoting holistic natural remedies, and swore by vitamin C. She was a great Christmas card correspondent, and Kimberly remembers their home was decorated floor to ceiling with holiday cards from all over. "She may have been a tiny little thing, but she was a tough character," Fr. Peterka smiles as he describes her. "You always knew she was in charge."

WORTHY OF RECOGNITION

Her life's achievements were not overlooked. Evelyn received numerous awards and honors: a recipient of the Aid for Friends Rita Ungaro-Schiavone Award given for extraordinary volunteer service and long-term commitment to the isolated, frail, elderly, and disabled homebound; an affiliate of the Congregation of the Mission; a member of the St. Martin de Porres Committee, an early advocacy program for promotion of an annual Black History Month; a recipient of the St. Vincent de Paul Award presented to those who reflect the values and virtues of St. Vincent de Paul; and the Daughters of Charity Award for her services for the spiritual family at St. Vincent's.

She was also generous to a fault, making annual contributions to Catholic Charities, Special Olympics, African charities, Philadelphia Library Fund, St. Martin De Porres School, paralyzed veterans and wounded veterans organizations, and The Miraculous Medal Shrine.

DYNAMIC 'TIL THE END

Sadly, in September 2018, Evelyn was hospitalized with a torn aortic valve. Fr. Peterka recalls visiting her in the hospital the Sunday before she died. As he entered the room, he was greeted by a half dozen parishioners, who came to visit her. She died a few days later.

But even though she is gone, her words still echo in the hearts of her family and friends, and the halls of St. Vincent's parish community: "One person can make a difference. It doesn't matter where you come from; it's all about where you're going."

"Evelyn was well-educated, feisty, and determined," Br. Al Smith says. "She always had a passion for St. Vincent's, the community, and racial and social justice."

TOP to BOTTOM:

Evelyn holds one of her great-grandchildren.

Always smiling and energetic, Evelyn's legacy will always be remembered.

Evelyn and her husband, Marion, on their wedding day in 1958.



"Our house was always the playhouse," says her daughter, Kimberly. "Mom would make popcorn, and we would watch movies. It was always obvious to us that our family was her greatest joy."



More than an EDUCATION

ALL WALKS OF LIFE, ALL ETHNICITIES, ALL
DENOMINATIONS can be educated to be caring,
empathetic, and charitable members of the Vincentian family.

Students, faculty, and staff at St. John's University, a Catholic educational institution, walk the walk in the footsteps of St. Vincent's vision of service and charity.

Caitlin Capri Neier oozes a vibrancy that radiates throughout her entire body. Her eyes open wide with excitement and a smile broadly forms as she shares about her 17-day service trip to Ecuador this past January, an opportunity provided to her as a part of the intensive service-based Ozanam Scholars program at St. John's University. This program "provides a platform for students to critically examine the systems that perpetuate poverty and take action to advance social justice through academic scholarship, Vincentian service, and global citizenship."

The energy this St. John's University third-year student exudes is infectious. Working toward a degree in adolescent education and holding two minors (one in social justice, a requirement for all Ozanam Scholars, and one in international studies), Caitlin is a remarkable young woman eager to make her impact on the world.

St. John's University (Queens, New York) is one of three Catholic universities in the United States that embraces the beliefs of St. Vincent de Paul; Niagara University (Niagara, New York) and DePaul University (Chicago, Illinois) also follow St. Vincent's teachings. These Catholic universities focus on educating the whole person while incorporating a Vincentian perspective

into the curriculum. Students receive a well-rounded, Catholic education, while developing spiritually in their faith and deepening their relationship with their communities through service activities. Vincentian traditions are incorporated into the academic teachings, helping students to gradually integrate an alternative perspective, opening their minds and hearts to different views. All students are required to partake in a predetermined number of community services hours, while their teachers often incorporate local service opportunities within their curriculum. This element of service is a deep-rooted value at the core of all Vincentian teachings.

Originally coming to the United States to train clergy and to teach in seminaries, Vincentians have always been involved in higher education. In fact, St. John's University and Niagara University both started out as seminaries. Yet, in order to keep the seminaries operational, the Priests opened the doors to the public, hence universities were born. These universities provide an affordable Catholic education to many first-generation immigrant families. Vincentian Priests and Brothers believe all people who want a first-class, private Catholic education—regardless of socio-economic status—should have access to it. Fr. Michael Carroll, CM, Director of The

Miraculous Medal Shrine, states, "Our schools are often referred to as opportunity schools. I remember being at an event on Ellis Island, where I was surrounded by bishops from Ireland asking me, 'What type of people go to your school? Do the Kennedys go to your school?' I laughed saying, 'No, our schools are opportunity schools. They are not schools for people who have made it, but for people who are on their way to becoming someone.'"

Caitlin is one of those students who is becoming someone exceptional.

Since St. John's embraces the charism of St. Vincent, students are exposed to a particular Vincentian character with a focus upon the poor. This Catholic institution works to incorporate community service opportunities as integral parts of the education process. A concerted effort was made in the 1990s to develop a program that effectively combines Catholic academics and the Vincentian charism. Engaging faculty as catalysts for implementing this innovative curriculum required educating them. As a result, Sr. Margaret John Kelly, a Daughter of Charity, developed the Vincentian Center for Church and Society (VCCS). Currently, run by Fr. Patrick Griffin, CM, the VCCS hosts educational events for faculty and

the local community to facilitate research opportunities, cultural programs, and discussion groups throughout the year in order to spread the Vincentian spirit and traditions.

Fr. Griffin believes, "One of the greatest resources of a university, particularly a Catholic university, is its faculty, not only to the students but to the wider community. To make use of the resources of the faculty and use their knowledge and insight for different programs is our greatest asset. The faculty helps out because they are connected to the mission of the university. When I need to run a program, I find it very easy to get faculty who are willing to collaborate with me."

In 2007, the Office of University Mission developed the Vincentian Mission Certificate (VMC) program, which allows full-time faculty members the opportunity to participate in a 16-month professional development program. The VMC is meant to "empower administrators to live the Vincentian mission as mission leaders and is meant to bridge the gap between a theoretical understanding of the Catholic and Vincentian mission and its practical application to today's society."

Dr. André McKenzie, Vice Provost for

Academic Support Services and Faculty Development and Adjunct Associate Professor, was one of the first people to volunteer to participate in the VMC program. An educator at St. John's University for 32 years, Dr. McKenzie is very thoughtful and deliberate in the words he uses when discussing Vincentian traditions: "Being from Chicago, I was a die-hard DePaul University basketball fan. I had no idea there was an actual person behind the name DePaul."

Reflecting on the VMC experience, he explains, "It is one of the best experiences I have ever had. It is an evolutionary process where you have me, a kid from Southside Chicago, not Catholic, not knowing who [Vincent] de Paul was other than they were amazing at basketball and now, three decades later, I am a facilitator for Vincentian mission workshops. I never would have thought that when I started in August of 1986. I have a greater closeness to this mission, and what it is all about."

Unfamiliar with the Vincentians and their beliefs when she first arrived in 2016, Caitlin reflects on how from year to year she noticed the Vincentian perspective silently emerging into her regular studies. Connecting the dots on how her studies could be influenced through a Vincentian lens, she saw education

and service as necessities to be incorporated in everyday life.

"It hits you in the face, but it is a really good thing," admits Caitlin. "It almost takes over your life in a way. It makes you a new person. Maybe not a new person, but there is a new form of you that you've never seen before, and it's a new Caitlin that I am definitely going to put into action."

Dr. Charles Clark, Professor of Economics and Chair of the Economics and Finance Department, explains how he integrates the Vincentian perspective into his classrooms. "We are taught to help the poor because Jesus told us to do so. St. Vincent de Paul also taught us to help the poor but to help them become self-sufficient, so they are no longer poor. I challenge my students to understand this through their service at soup kitchens, and to question 'Why do these people keep coming back here?' It helps them delve deeper into the economic side of the situation that exists and try to find a realistic solution."

When speaking with Caitlin, faculty, and other students at St. John's University, it is hard not to get bit by the Vincentian bug. What makes these schools unique is that



being Catholic is not a requirement for being Vincentian. It is the Vincentians' commitment to Catholic academic excellence and the passion to educate the whole person that defines Vincentian higher education institutions.

When she graduates, Caitlin hopes to work at a New York, inner-city public school to help restore students' dignity to those who may feel lost and forgotten by an overwhelming school district. She states confidently, "I feel I have a responsibility to take what I have learned and what I have experienced through service and put that knowledge into action."


OZANAM SCHOLAR PROGRAM

The word "opportunity" is one that frequently pops up when referencing these Vincentian-sponsored, Catholic educational institutions. Fr. Carroll recognizes that, "Vincentians often provide options to those who may not have as many resources available to them." The Ozanam Scholar Program afforded

Caitlin with an opportunity that she could not pass up. Ironically, Caitlin was originally waitlisted for St. John's University and ended up committing to another university in New York. Shortly thereafter, a spot in the Ozanam Scholars Program became available, and Caitlin knew she had to take full advantage of this special learning experience.

The program provided she never imagined were possible. She studied abroad in Rome, Italy, her sophomore year. A memory that stays with her during this particular semester abroad was when she volunteered at a refugee home for single mothers and children fleeing from war zones. She worked with young children teaching them English. She laughs saying, "Here I am with these children who mostly speak Arabic, trying to teach them English, while we are both learning Italian. I was with this one little four-year-old girl, who had been badly burned on her feet and as a result was wearing two hospital boots on each leg. She was running around without

a care in the world trying to ride a bike. I remember thinking, 'This little girl has been through so much pain, but she is still so happy.' Seeing her come from such a hard place but still smiling and laughing, brought me so much happiness."

The Vincentian Priests and Brothers continue to grow and develop their institutions but, more importantly, remain steadfast in providing all who are interested, the chance to receive a faith-based, service-driven, and first-class educational experience. 



The purple streaks that flow subtly through Caitlin Capri Neier's ('20) hair are revealed as she animatedly moves her head and hands describing what it was like building classroom walls for four different Indigenous communities in Ecuador. Calling it a "beautiful and enriching experience," this is just one of the many Ozanam Scholars Program service stories she holds close to her heart.



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Please pray for our recently deceased promoters from June 2018 to February 2019.

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Mrs. Daryl Ritchie Sr, Rothesay, NB Canada
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TO HEARTS ON FIRE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

2019 marks the 170th anniversary of the Vincentian Priests and Brothers in the Philadelphia region. Join us throughout the year as we share stories of the rich history, influence, and experiences of these missionary men. Our year-long observance is a reminder of these actions and dedication of the Vincentians, who continue to create a societal impact by tackling the world's greatest challenges.

Sign up to receive the newsletter at: MiraculousMedal.org/monthlynewsletter

Below are a few of the hundreds of favors reported since March 2018 to February 8, 2019.

WAYS

I grew up in an environment where my family prayed the weekly Novena. Years later, I began to wear the Miraculous Medal daily and said the Novena for Our Lady's blessings. In December 2012, while driving to work, I misjudged a red light and drove into traffic. I was hit by a car, spun around, and ended up in a small empty field. After the car finally stopped, my windows were broken, and my driver's door was crushed. I immediately grabbed my medal, thanked our Blessed Mother for being alive and asked for Her blessings. I was taken to a hospital where I was thoroughly evaluated; only small pieces of glass were found in my scalp. The car was totaled, so I know for certain it was Our Lady of The Miraculous Medal who watched over me. In December 2013, I fell down cement steps to a small landing at the bottom of the staircase. I was transported to shock trauma, where a CAT scan found only a small fracture of the facial bone beneath the left eye. Again, I was wearing my medal and knew Mother Mary was with me. One year later, I had another car accident on Christmas Eve. Once again, I had to have all types of testing done. After a thorough review of tests, I was discharged. My Medal is with me every day. I pray to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal daily, and she has been with me during these episodes and taken care of me each time. I thank her for all she does for me daily.

After the death of my wife of 50 years, I was inundated with the devil's attack on my faith. A letter from the Association said that if I was having problems in my life, just turn them over to Jesus, and He will handle my entire life. I can spend my life working to get closer to Jesus and His Blessed Mother, who would become my intercessor for my every need. I worked diligently for that to happen, and thank God, it has. I pray that this message may cause others to do the same. Thank you, Lord.

I prayed to the Blessed Mother, and she answered me. I was genetically tested for a hereditary disease and found that I was negative and cannot pass this on to my children as well. Truly, the most blessed day of my life.

I had a cardiac procedure recently and asked Our Lady to hold my hand and ask her Son to keep me well. And, I am so grateful for her warmth and love. I believe Mary of the Miraculous Medal helped me. I am doing fine. Praise God!

My husband and I were married on August 11, 2018. We went into our marriage knowing that we wanted to have children, if it was God's will. At the beginning of September, my husband went to have his yearly doctor's appointment. His doctor discovered that it would most likely be more difficult for him to father a child than we anticipated. Saddened, but hopeful, we avoided the medicine that was prescribed for him and turned to Our Lady instead. On October 2, we arrived at The Miraculous Medal Shrine in Pennsylvania. We were overwhelmed by the Shrine's beauty. The first thing we did was stumble upon the area of little shrines. We prayed in each one, specifically for the blessing of a child. Afterwards, we went to the Shrine's gift shop and decided to spend some time looking for souvenirs and holy items while we waited for Mass to begin. While we browsed, we separated from each other. While we gazed at the shop's possessions, one of the women working there that day came up to us individually. The same woman greeted us again, and began to ring us out. As she did, she made small conversation. "So, where are you two from?" "Cleveland," we replied. "Oh, wow! And you brought your BABY with you!!!" She beamed at us. We exchanged looks, because we had no child with us... and as soon as she realized this, she said, "OH MY GOSH, I am SO sorry! I don't know why I said that! Oh my! Please forgive me..." she continued profusely. I said, "No, no! That's okay! We were literally just praying to have a baby! So, maybe....there might be..." I trailed off. She said, "Really? Please let me know if you are!" Weeks later, I took a pregnancy test and it was positive. I took another one just to be sure, and it immediately came back positive as well. The next day, I contacted the woman in the gift shop and told her our good news. She replied, "I remember when I said that to you and felt so convinced but then so confused!!!" This is the story of our miracle.

Albert, a very faithful Catholic, always had a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother. When he served during the Korean War as a medic, he worked with an Irish Catholic Air Force Captain, who was like a big sister to him. She gave him a Miraculous Medal, which he has worn constantly for 66 years. Little did Albert know how important that Miraculous Medal would be for him someday. In September 2018, Albert was at his home, when he began to feel pain in his stomach and back. He thought it was a kidney stone and decided to wait to see if he could pass it, but his condition grew worse. The next day, Albert, wearing his Miraculous Medal, was rushed by ambulance to the hospital, where a medical team told him that he had a stomach aneurysm that ruptured. The Miraculous Medal was removed from his neck for medical reasons and placed into safe keeping. The critical surgery lasted six hours; Albert survived. The medical team called him "the one percent miracle," since so few in his condition survive. Upon hearing about this, his family immediately contacted The Miraculous Medal Shrine in Philadelphia for a prayer request on his behalf. Many prayers and Novenas were said, especially to the Blessed Mother, by friends and family. Weeks later, Albert's family received a call that he went into respiratory failure and was in critical condition. That same day, his daughter and her mother visited him in the ICU. At one point, he turned to his daughter and said, "A beautiful lady in white and blue is standing next to you." No one else in the room saw it, yet he proceeded to get out of bed, saying, "The Blessed Mother is calling me and holding her arms out to me. She's beautiful!" He also told them the Blessed Mother said he would be alright. The family prayed for a miracle, and to the amazement of the hospital staff caring for him, they believe this was truly a miracle.

NOTE: These accounts have been condensed and edited for space.



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