

## Bringing Christ and Seeing Christ

Ministries of service – especially those reaching out to those in need – are essential for so many reasons. In particular, these ministries provide an important opportunity for people to truly connect on a personal level.

“I think there’s power in the personal contact,” says John Stengel, who serves as the President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, or SVdP, at St. Maximilian Kolbe. “We just sit and we’ll talk. We determine where they’re at and how we can best help. We’re looking for the face of Christ in these people and in their need, and hopefully they can feel a bit of that in us, too.”

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in 1833, with a vision to care for the poor. The first conference in the United States was founded in 1845, and since then, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been one of the primary ways that the Church has served those in need within their local communities. The SVdP’s main mission is helping those in need, generally, within the parish boundaries. The type of assistance provided ranges from help with rent and utilities, to providing food and clothing for those who are struggling.

“Our primary focus is to provide



emergency temporary assistance,” says John, who has been involved for the past five years. “A lot of times, they’re facing an eviction or utilities are being disconnected. We try to offer the assistance they need to get over that hump.”

Unlike many agencies or other forms of assistance, SVdP places great emphasis on the importance of personal connection – members go out in pairs to meet those they serve and get to know them.

“Some people really need someone to talk to, rather than just going to an agency or something like that,” John says. “I think the

personal contact makes a difference, to let them know that somebody cares about their situation. We’re there to be a witness to Christ. We try to offer them a little bit more, a little bit extra.”

John notes that, importantly, SVdP members often bring grocery gift cards or personal care packages with them on visits.

“A lot of times, if you’re struggling to feed your family, you can’t buy deodorant and little things like that really touch people,” John says.

It is the hope of those who serve with the SVdP that their actions will

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# : The Society of St. Vincent de Paul



help those who are struggling to know that they are not alone.

“We want them to know that there are people who care about their situation,” John says. “We’re not just an agency, but somebody who is truly interested in helping them. We can’t solve all their problems, but we’re interested in listening and caring.”

John has found that he has grown spiritually, both from the encounters he has had with those he visits, as well as through meeting with other members of SVdP.

“A lot of times I feel like I get more out of the encounter than I’ve been able to offer,” he says. “You’ll meet somebody who is struggling to make it every day – yet, they’ve taken in a family member or a family member’s kids because they are worse off. They’re struggling – and yet, they’re still reaching out to help somebody else. That’s the kind of thing that really stands out. It’s like the widow putting the two coins in the temple treasury, not just people giving out of their abundance.”

“One of the primary focuses on SVdP is to grow spiritually,” John continues. “A third of our meetings are spent on prayer, reflection and spiritual growth.”

For John, the experience of being involved with SVdP has really opened his eyes.

“It helps me grow in looking for the face of Christ in other people,” he says. “Seeing these different situations, and what people are going through – it can’t help but change you.”

John encourages those who are interested in learning more to come to one of the SVdP’s bi-weekly meetings, held on the first and third Thursdays of the month, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the church. Active members participate in meetings and home visits, and associate members attend meetings and commit to provide spiritual and prayer support for the mission.

“We encourage people to come to a meeting or invite them to go on a visit and experience what that’s like,” John says. “Pray about it. Take that step out of your comfort zone. It’s important to fulfill the mission that Christ gave us, to reach the poor, to have that encounter. You get back so much more than what you give.”

*For more information, or to become involved with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, please contact John Stengel at 513-509-0525. SVdP is supported by generous donations from parishioners, whether through the monthly envelope collection for SVdP, or through donations designated through our online giving option, Faith Direct.*