

St. Vincent de Paul, Sacred Heart Conference

The St. Vincent de Paul Conference has been an integral part of Sacred Heart Parish life almost from the Parish's founding in 1949 under Fr. Gordon Dill. The first president was Mr. Elmer Hatton and other early presidents were Dr. Rene Simard and Mr. Gerald O'Neill. One of the longest serving presidents was George Weisz who held the post for over 13 years.

By late 1950, and with a new pastor, Fr. James Kelly, a reorganization was undertaken. And, official status was sought and approved. The Official letter of Aggregation was received and dated November 28, 1956.

That same year. The Conference, along with the Catholic Women's League and the Sarnia Social Services Bureau lead by Msgr. J.A. Cook, opened a store to provide low-cost merchandise. It was called the Family Surplus Centre and was the precursor to today's St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Stores. In 2008, the local Conference joined together to open the Food Bank/Help Centre on Davis Street. The Conference continues to provide financial support to the Food Bank.

Through the years, the Sacred Heart Conference has been active in a number of outreach programs. The primary role of the Conference has been to provide assistance to the needy within Parish boundaries. All requests were evaluated by two-person teams using each requester to gain an understanding of their situation and needs. In addition to request for food and other basic necessities, there were requests for lodging assistance, occasionally furniture and even travel. For many of the food requests, the Vincentian pairs would do the actual shopping and return with the items. Also, for a period of time pairs of Vincentians would carry out monthly visits to the Sarnia jail where they provided treats and reading material to the inmates. The opening of the Food Bank provided a central location where anyone in the city can obtain assistance.

An ongoing activity for the Sacred Heart Conference has been regular visits to the three nursing homes within the Parish boundaries, at those homes, Vincentians conduct bingos with a nominal prize pool for the residents. With the arrival of COVID 19, these visits have had to be suspended until such time as visitors are allowed back in.

Another major activity of the Conference has been its participation in the annual Yule Glow Christmas Hamper program. This program provides a food hamper at Christmas time to those in need. A large part of this program is the Irish Miracle canned food drive conducted by the students at St. Patrick's High School. The goods collected form a basis of the hampers delivered just before Christmas. Annually the Sacred Heart Conference has assumed the delivery of about 200 hampers.

None of the activities of the Sacred Heart Conference would be possible without the generous support that it receives from the Parishioners of Sacred Heart.