



# VOICES OF CHARITY

A publication of the  
Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

WINTER 2024

## LIVING THE VINCENTIAN MISSION





SISTERS OF CHARITY  
OF LEAVENWORTH

## Chapter 2022 Directional Statement

NOW, WITH GOD'S GRACE, we are called in these days

“...to give freely of ourselves and our goods for the sake of the Kingdom...” (*SCL Constitution*, Norm 14)

In the spirit and charism of Vincent, Louise, Xavier, and our founding Sisters, we step into our future with a renewed sense of mission.

Through the lens of integral ecology, we will:

- tend to the care of marginalized people and the fragile earth;
- use spiritual and tangible resources to meet the critical needs of God's people and earth;
- broaden collaboration with local and global groups working to achieve systemic change;
- explore our relationship with sponsored works;
- clarify the structure of our governance model.

As Gospel-centered, ecclesial women rooted in Christ, we are called to love and serve in these times and in these places and to stand and pray with those who suffer, who grieve, who hope.

NOW, WITH GOD'S GRACE.

### ON THE COVER:

Hermana Laura Rumiche (right side of page, wearing University of Saint Mary shirt) after Mass in the chapel at the Holy Family shelter. Members from the Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Notre Dame de Nanur, Franciscans, and Marist Brothers were represented along with volunteers. Her story is on page 8.



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WINTER 2024

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## Voices of Charity

published by the

Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

Cantwell Hall

4200 South 4th Street

Leavenworth, KS 66048-5054

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Printed on recycled paper by  
McDonald Business Forms,  
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The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth trace our roots to the spirit, spirituality, and outreach of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. Founded in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1858 by Mother Xavier Ross, the SCL Community continues this Vincentian tradition through ministering to and on behalf of the poor and those on the margins of society.

*Voices of Charity* seeks to remain faithful to the charism of St. Vincent, St. Louise, and Mother Xavier. Looking through the lens of integral ecology, these articles hope to educate, highlight ministries, and inspire readers to continue the mission of charity.



## FROM THE Community Director

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Sister Eileen  
Haynes, SCL

What have you been focused on lately? Your favorite sports team? Your family? Have you begun wondering about the upcoming holiday season and considered what your plans will be? Do you enjoy each day as it comes? How have you placed your focus on the needs of others?

Although we were not alive when St. Vincent de Paul was, we know through his words and actions where he placed his focus, encountering Christ in the other. He allowed himself to be vulnerable to God's creative grace working within and through him so that his circles of influence were expanded to inspire others to care for those caught in the grip of poverty.

These circles also intersected with care for God's creation. At times, they served as an intervention to break systemic poverty. At other times, they took the shape of organizing a meal for those in need or providing opportunities for spiritual nourishment.

His life spoke clearly of the interweaving of God's words and actions. One cannot make a positive impact without the other. The same is true for today; our words, interlocked with our actions, provide a guiding light not only for ourselves but for those who yearn to know this light in their lives.

Ultimately, St. Vincent de Paul challenges us to consider how we show up daily to bring God's Good News to all. Those living in poverty have many faces and carry profound stories. Let us be vulnerable enough to encounter Christ in the other, whoever that may be, and whatever the need. It is in this place that we then encounter Christ within us.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL". The script is cursive and elegant.

Sister Eileen Haynes  
SCL Community Director



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# THE VINCENTIAN MISSION

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## The Power of Presence



Sister Linda Roth, SCLM

While offering a reflection during Mass on the feast day of St. Vincent de Paul, September 27, 2024, Sister Linda Roth shared this story, “I occasionally babysit my niece’s three young daughters, which includes getting them ready for school in the morning. The five-year-old often comes downstairs dressed but without her socks, which are required. For reasons unknown to me, she is afraid to go back upstairs alone to retrieve them. Despite my creaky knees and countless reminders to her, I accompany her upstairs because I know my presence gives her comfort.”

Sister Linda’s example of solidarity, being present for her great-niece and empowering her to finish a task, is a personal example of the Vincentian mission. On a larger scale, giving comfort is the core of the mission of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. St. Vincent de Paul said, “May our presence and care to those most in need reflect the gentleness, esteem, and dignity we see reflected in the life and work of Jesus.”

We are called to do what we can,  
wherever we are, with love.

Mission is not only about tasks but also about how a person shows up for others. Sister Linda further said the Vincentian mission is about “presence—who we are and how we are—with everyone we encounter.” Whether caring for the poor, educating students, or supporting one another, the Vincentian spirit calls all to mutual vulnerability and solidarity.

Vincent moved easily among the rich and poor in 17th-century Paris. He motivated the upper class to use their resources to alleviate the needs of the poor, knowing that in caring for others, they could also find healing for their own spiritual poverty. Following his example, we are invited to expand our circles of influence and inspire others to care for God’s people, whether that be through prayer, accompaniment, or service.

“If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday,” the prophet Isaiah proclaimed. As Christians navigate this place in history, the Vincentian mission calls us to consider what it means to be present and offer our gifts. We are called to do what we can, wherever we are, with love. 🕊





# Back to Where It All Began

## Continuing the Mission at Cristo Rey

*By Iva Magana*

My name is Itzel Ivanova Infante Magana, “Iva,” and Cristo Rey Kansas City High School changed the entire trajectory of my life.

At a young age, my parents brought our family to the United States from Mexico for a better life. Little did I know the influence the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth would have on me and that one day I would return to Cristo Rey to continue their mission.

I came to Cristo Rey as a 9th grader in 2007. I didn’t know anything about working at an office...nothing about being a professional...about dressing professionally. When they sent us out to our corporate work-study jobs in an old green van, I was a little concerned. Hadn’t my parents warned me about never getting into a van with strangers? Luckily, they weren’t strangers for long. Both my teachers and my co-workers were there to help me learn everything I needed to know.

I worked at an engineering firm called Lankford and Associates for all four years of high school. I performed

administrative work, got the mail, made phone calls, and helped with everyday tasks. At first, they thought, “What are we going to do with this kid?” But then the office administrator saw what I could do. She said she was so happy to have me there to take some of those tasks off her plate. Each year I worked there, I was trusted with more responsibility. By the time I graduated, I was interacting with a lot more adults in a business setting.

This work-study experience gave me so much more than just practical skills. It made me feel responsible, like I had a say in my education. It wasn’t all on my parents; I was contributing toward my education and to my family. I felt accomplished in the way I was helping my family, earning my education, and learning how to be a professional.

The Vincentian values that guide Cristo Rey—the belief in the dignity of every person and the transformative power of education—became a core part of who I am. After graduating, I went on to study



“I see the Vincentian spirit in every student, teacher, and staff member at Cristo Rey. It’s in the way we challenge our students to see their own potential, and hope that one day they’ll give back to their communities. It’s the commitment to serving the poor and marginalized that has defined this school from the very beginning.”

— Iva Magana

education at Universidad Veracruzana in Mexico, with a focus on teaching English as a Second Language. As a bi-lingual person, I thought, “I have this skill already, why not use it?” I also wanted to take the skills I had gained and use them to uplift other underserved communities, just as Cristo Rey had done for me.

After graduating, I thought, “As someone who grew up in the U.S. education system, how can I bring that here to Mexico?” So, I put my ESL teaching skills to work, starting an English program in the elementary and kindergarten schools in my hometown of Colima. Until I started, English was only taught to middle school students. I think that I impacted a lot of kids. I still keep in touch with many of my co-workers. They tell me that what we started with that English program has gotten more funding from the state in Colima. Now, it has expanded to more schools. I’m pretty proud of that and that it’s continued even as governors in the region have changed but they’ve kept funding for that program.

In 2023, I moved back to the U.S. and came knocking on the doors of Cristo Rey, hoping to be a part of the school’s mission once again. This time, instead of sitting in the classrooms, I joined the Institutional Advancement team—the critical behind-the-scenes work that keeps the school running and allows it to fulfill its Vincentian promise to students.

As I sit in Sister Linda Roth’s old office, it’s incredibly rewarding to see Cristo Rey from this new vantage point. I get to witness firsthand how the school’s model, rooted in the values of St. Vincent de Paul, continues to transform the lives of young people. The support of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth and the passionate investors who believe in our mission is what allows us to provide students, like I once was, with the tools they need to succeed.

I see the Vincentian spirit in every student, teacher, and staff member at Cristo Rey. It’s in the way we challenge our students to see their own potential, and hope that one day they’ll give back to their communities. It’s the commitment to serving the poor and marginalized that has defined this school from the very beginning.

I think that education not only opens a path to opportunity but opens us up to empathy toward others. As you learn about other cultures, you become more empathetic toward them. I think that ties into the Sisters’ mission to help these children who otherwise couldn’t have gone to college or even had the opportunity for a good academic career.

As my mother once said, “You came here when you were six, you left, and then you came back. You always come back to the place where you were the happiest.” And for me, that is true. Kansas City and Cristo Rey are my home. 🐦



# Massage as Ministry

## Care Through Touch Institute



Sister Eileen Marie Johnson, SCL, back row, left side, stands next to Mary Ann Finch, with members of CTI.

Sisters, Associates, and staff know the SCL mission well: to “offer every loving service in our power to meet the critical needs of God’s people.”

Based on the example of St. Vincent de Paul, our Sisters are committed to serving the poor and marginalized with compassion, dignity, and respect. To shine a light on the Vincentian charism at work in the world, we present this story of an organization outside of the traditional SCL ministries that has a similar mission.

The Care Through Touch Institute (CTI) is one example of the embodiment of the Vincentian tradition. Based in San Francisco, its mission is to be present with human suffering and promote healing through human connection. CTI trains those who are called to care for society’s most traumatized and isolated as massage therapists. Its 19 volunteers then offer free chair massages to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the Tenderloin District. The organization was founded during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s by Mary Ann Finch, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth’s 2023 Vincentian Charism Awardee.



Tent village in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco.



Sister Eileen Marie Johnson, SCL, with one of CTI's clients, “Cowboy.”





Men receive chair massages from CTI members.

Sister Eileen Marie Johnson, SCL, ministered as one of CTI's massage therapists before returning to the Mother House in 2023. She initially questioned whether the ministry was right for her but said that Finch was persistent: "She will seek you out if she senses that you have a heart for the poor and marginalized."

CTI places an emphasis on the faith aspect of caring for the poor. Johnson recalls one Holy Thursday when, while giving a client a foot massage, he remarked, "Didn't Jesus do this?" She responded with a laugh, "Yes, he did! That's why we're doing this." This shared understanding of the spiritual roots of their work fosters a deep sense of connection and spiritual upliftment.

Recipients of CTI's services often describe the therapist-client connection as healing. One client shared that massage was a crucial part of his mental and physical recovery. Others noted that having a caring person to talk to was immensely helpful.

Through massage, CTI's practitioners hope to change the public's view of the value and dignity of those on the margins of society. Their acts of caring help restore the recipient's dignity and heal their mind, body, and spirit. In the same spirit as St. Vincent de Paul, CTI seeks to alleviate some of the suffering of the unhoused in their community. 🐦



## Prayerful Hands

By Sister Eileen Marie Johnson, SCL

This essay originally appeared in *Massage & Bodywork* magazine.

I started my massage career late in life. I have been a certified massage practitioner volunteer since I finished massage school in Oakland in 2012. I have done chair massages in San Francisco in the Tenderloin (homeless and marginalized district) with Care Through Touch. I am now 79-years-old and still loving my massage ministry!

One client who didn't know I was a Sister and had lost his husband was crying as I finished his chair massage and said, "I feel like you have massaged a prayer in my body." Another said, "This is indeed a spiritual experience!" Another regular client said, "I don't come to Hospitality House for the massage; I come for the relationship, conversation, and the attention and love I receive."

Another wonderful experience was doing foot massages in the spring on Holy Thursday. What a privilege and blessing to be able to give a loving touch to so many people who could otherwise never afford any kind of positive, caring touch! They have no community support system. I have a whole plethora of stories to tell.

I moved to the Midwest and am now doing massages for the Sisters at our Mother House (a whole different clientele). They come to the massage room on foot or with their walkers, and for those who can't leave their rooms because of physical limitations, I massage them in their easy chairs or beds or walkers. They tell me I have "magic hands."



“My faith has been strengthened by accompanying people in the difficult moments of their lives, seeing the face of God very present in them. I am sure that He lives and does not abandon us in times of danger and dehumanization.”

— *Hermana Laura Rumiche, HCL*

# Living the Vincentian Mission

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## My Ministerial Journey from Peru to the U.S. Border

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*By Hermana Laura Rumiche, HCL*

As a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth, my life has revolved around service to the most vulnerable. Born and raised in Peru, I first met the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth when they visited my grade school. Through Sister Elena (Helen Therese) Mack, I was influenced by the Vincentian mission, which emphasizes service to those in need. My journey to religious life began with a desire to help others, and my ministry has taken me from Peru to the southern U.S. border in Texas. Along the way, my faith has been challenged, deepened, and strengthened by seeing God through the resilience and faith of the people I serve.

### Ministry in Peru: Healing and Empowering Others

In Peru, my ministry focused on health and rehabilitation. I practiced reflexology, physical therapy, and rehabilitation. I always hoped to bring both physical and spiritual healing to those I encountered. I also worked with Vincentian Volunteers of Piura, offering them spiritual companionship and listening to their stories. This was an essential part of our shared mission: to empower others to recognize their own gifts and talents, especially women, and to encourage them to serve with love and patience.

The Vincentian charism was my guiding light. I prayed for the gift of perseverance, asking God to give me the strength to serve with love and joy. This charism helped me to

see beyond immediate needs and to focus on helping the people I served find their paths of healing and growth. In Peru, the communities I worked with taught me as much as I taught them, and I saw Christ in each person.

### A New Mission: Serving on the U.S. border

In recent years, I felt a call to work with immigrants and refugees at the southern U.S. border in Texas. The situation there, with people fleeing violence, poverty, and insecurity, resonated with the Vincentian mission that had shaped my life. I wanted to be present amid their suffering, offering hope, faith, and love.



Hermana Laura (right side of page, wearing University of Saint Mary shirt) after Mass in the chapel at the Holy Family shelter.





Hermana Laura receives a certificate of appreciation for her work in Texas.

The decision to work on the southern U.S. border in Texas was not easy. I would leave my ministry in Peru and enter a completely new one. However, the experience was more fulfilling than I had hoped for. Working in the migrant community has allowed me to grow spiritually and broaden my perspective. Living in unity with a diverse population has shown me the strength of solidarity in responding to the urgent needs of migrants and refugees.

### Seeing Christ in the Migrant

One of the most profound experiences I have had at the border was meeting Marleny, a 32-year-old woman from Tumbes, Peru, who had fled with her two children. Her journey was dangerous and included an attack that left her with serious injuries. When she arrived at the El Paso shelter, her face was disfigured, but her faith remained. As I cared for her injuries, she shared her gratitude to God for protecting her and her children.

It was a moment of connection for both of us. We were both from Peru, and in that moment, I felt God's presence. It reminded me that even in suffering, God is with us, walking beside us.

### Challenges and Growth on the Border

Serving at the southern U.S. border in Texas was challenging. I had to adapt to a new environment

and reality, often depending on the support of the Sisters I stayed with. Witnessing the poverty, violence, and abandonment of immigrants and refugees was heartbreaking. However, these challenges deepened my faith. I saw God in the migrants—in their hope and courage and in the support of the wider community working for justice.

My faith has been strengthened by accompanying people in the difficult moments of their lives, seeing the face of God in them. I am sure that He lives and does not abandon us in times of danger and dehumanization.

The Vincentian charism of love has guided me in balancing the spiritual and practical aspects of my work. Every day, I strive to offer immediate help and long-term hope. By listening, healing, and accompanying migrants on their journey, I try to make real the Gospel call to serve "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40).

### A Call to Compassion

The struggles faced by migrants and refugees call all of us to compassion. As I think about my work at the border, I am reminded of the importance of solidarity. Religious communities like the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth can advocate for justice and care for those in need. We are called to witness God's work, living lives of love and service.

To the citizens of the United States, I ask you to open your hearts to the plight of immigrants. Show them the same compassion and mercy that Jesus modeled for us. Welcome them with kindness, dignity, and love, and work together to build a more just and compassionate world. 🕊️



Hermana Laura with migrant children in Texas.



# The Food Security Project

## A Partnership of Hope and Sustainability

By Sister Claudette Prevot, SSAF

The Sisters of St. Antoine of Fondwa in Haiti are devoted to supporting their community through education, healthcare, and agricultural development. This mission has been strengthened by their relationship with the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth in Kansas, who have played a crucial role in supporting their efforts over the years.

A visit to Fondwa, Haiti, by a group of Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth in 1998 began a relationship with the Sisters of St. Antione, which has deepened through the years.

More than 25 SCLs have visited Fondwa, and Sister Claudette Prevot, Sister Simone Achille, and several other Sisters of St. Antione have been welcomed to the Mother House for retreat, rest, and health care.

During one of these trips to Leavenworth, SCL Associates Keith and Ellen Hustings and their friends invited Sister Claudette to speak to several local parishes, and a bond of friendship and support was built. Through their efforts, the Kansas Friends of Haiti was

born. They continue to support the Sisters of St. Antione with donations.

### **The Gordon Wallace Farm: A Community Effort**

The Gordon Wallace Farm became a reality thanks to the Gordon family. John and Marilyn Gordon supported the Sisters of St. Antoine for a number of years, particularly their efforts to grow their own food and acquire livestock. John and Marilyn's daughter, Jennifer, was an SCL for more than 20 years. Sharing her Vincentian spirit and the SCL mission with her parents led to their giving generously of their time and resources through the years. John died several years ago and before Marilyn's death last year, she asked Jennifer to see that the Gordon Family Foundation donated to the Sisters of St. Antoine farm project.

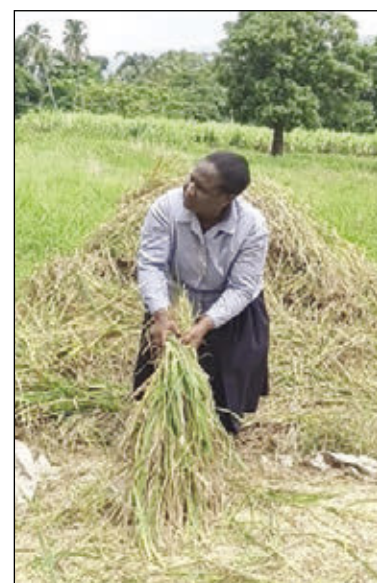
Marilyn also invited longtime family friend, Mike Wallace, to match that donation. Thanks to the generous donations from these two families, the Sisters of St. Antoine have a working farm. With deep gratitude, Sister Claudette declared the farm was to be named the Gordon Wallace Farm. The Gordons had come to know Sister Claudette on her visits to Leavenworth over the years.



Sister Simone and a farm worker harvest corn.



Sister Simone processes rice.



Sister Claudette gathers rice.



As the Sisters of St. Antoine of Fondwa continue to develop their farm and strengthen their collaboration with local farmers and organizations, they remain committed to their goal of reducing poverty and hunger in rural Haiti.

The Gordon Wallace Farm addresses food insecurity by encouraging collaboration with local farmers and community groups. The Sisters have built a space where people can share knowledge, work the land, and produce food for those in need. Among the key collaborators are local groups, as well as the Faculty of Agronomy at the University of Fondwa. Each brings unique expertise and experience to the farm, turning it into a true community garden.

This cooperative approach is essential to realizing the Sisters' vision of increasing food production to feed families and provide sustenance for orphans and poor families. The Faculty of Agronomy has been particularly instrumental, offering technical support and training three times a year to the local farmers. This partnership has allowed the farm to expand, ensuring the local community has the tools and knowledge necessary to sustain itself.

### Supporting Sustainable Agriculture

On the logistical front, the Sisters have made significant strides in building the necessary infrastructure to support their growing operations. A new farmhouse,

equipped with bedrooms and storage facilities, provides a comfortable space for workers and interns from the University of Fondwa. This ensures that those who come to work and learn on the farm have the resources they need to contribute effectively to its ongoing development.

### Expanding Agricultural Resources

The acquisition of essential agricultural equipment has also supported the farm's development. The purchase of a corn mill, rice mill, rototiller, and irrigation pumps has increased the farm's productivity and ensured that its crops are efficiently processed and maintained. They have four hectares of swamp land dedicated to rice production and 10 hectares allocated for other food crops.

The ability to grow and harvest rice three times a year has not only provided food for the community but the straw from the rice crop is used to feed the farm's animals, such as chickens and pigs, further enhancing the sustainability of the project. The same goes for the corn crop, whose by-products also feed the farm's livestock. This self-sustaining system is a miracle for the Sisters, who rely less on external feed sources for their animals.

### Gratitude for Collaboration and Support

As the Sisters of St. Antoine of Fondwa continue to develop their farm and strengthen their collaboration with local farmers and organizations, they remain committed to their goal of reducing poverty and hunger in rural Haiti.

Through relationships with other congregations of women religious, like the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, the Gordon Wallace Farm can continue sustainable development and address food insecurity. The ongoing partnership between the Sisters of St. Antoine of Fondwa and the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth reminds us of our interconnectedness and responsibility to God's people. ☕



Sister Claudette feeds the chickens the straw from the rice and corn harvest.



# The Growing Storm

## Understanding Today's Climate and Poverty

*By John Shively, Executive Director of Mission*



Recent devastation from Hurricanes Milton and Helene serves as a stark reminder of how climate change continues to reshape our world. These storms, growing more intense each year due to warming ocean temperatures, reveal a deeper truth: we are facing dual crises of poverty and environmental destruction that threaten millions of lives worldwide.

For those experiencing poverty, climate change isn't just about property damage—it threatens their very ability to live with dignity and purpose. The intersection of these crises creates a perfect storm that demands our immediate attention and response.

### **The Nature of Our Crisis**

While extreme weather events capture headlines, the ongoing violence experienced by marginalized communities due to poverty and climate change often goes unreported. The devastation runs deep, creating systemic problems that affect those least equipped to handle them.

Consider the Northern Triangle countries—Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Here, migration patterns are increasingly driven by environmental factors:

unpredictable rainfall, deteriorating soil quality, and frequent floods make agriculture increasingly unviable. These environmental challenges combine with extreme poverty and economic instability to drive mass displacement and social unrest.

The impact is equally visible in the United States. During Hurricane Milton, one mother of five couldn't evacuate simply because she lacked the financial resources to house her children elsewhere. This exemplifies how poverty restricts people's ability to prepare for and recover from climate disasters.

The health impacts are equally severe. Low-income communities suffer disproportionately from both direct and indirect environmental effects. Rising temperatures increase the spread of mosquito-borne diseases like malaria and dengue, while air pollution has become a particularly deadly threat, accounting for 700,000 deaths annually among children under five.

### **The Urgency of Now**

This imbalance isn't accidental. The world's wealthiest regions contribute most to environmental destruction while having the greatest access to recovery resources.



Meanwhile, those experiencing poverty bear the brunt of climate change's consequences without the political or economic power to effect change.

Recent studies from coastal communities show that for every inch of sea-level rise, approximately 100 feet of shoreline is lost—affecting primarily low-income fishing communities and agricultural zones. The displacement of these communities creates a cascade of social and economic challenges that ripple through entire regions.

In times of crisis, the Vincentian tradition offers a powerful framework for response. Our charism, born during Europe's Little Ice Age, emerged from St. Vincent de Paul's recognition of how environmental crisis and poverty intersected to create human suffering. Today, as we face similar challenges on a global scale, this tradition continues to light a way forward.

### Learning from Our Founders

St. Vincent's approach to crisis remains remarkably relevant. He understood that effective response requires both direct intervention and community organization. As he said, "We should assist the poor in every way and do it both by ourselves and by enlisting the help of others...to do this is to preach the Gospel by word and by work."

His wisdom extended beyond immediate assistance. As he noted, "It is not enough to do good, it must be done well." This principle guides us in developing thoughtful, sustainable responses to environmental challenges. He further advised, "The poor suffer less from a lack of generosity than from a lack of organization," a testament to the importance of systematic approaches to crisis response.

### Faith in Action

St. Vincent emphasized the importance of faith during trials: "All ships are exposed to storms but are not thereby doomed to perish." This echoes Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, reminding us that faith, prayer, and trust in God remain essential as we face today's environmental challenges.

St. Louise de Marillac added her own wisdom about divine support, encouraging us to "Turn to Him often, as children look to their father and mother in their needs." St. Vincent emphasized practical action, stating, "Love is inventive to infinity," encouraging creative solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems.

St. Vincent also said, "Let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow." Our response to climate change must combine spiritual devotion with practical action. 🙏

## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR COMMUNITIES

Drawing from Vincentian wisdom, here are specific ways to implement these principles:

- Join or support local environmental justice organizations
- Advocate for climate-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable communities
- Support disaster preparedness programs in low-income areas
- Contact legislators about climate policies that protect vulnerable populations
- Volunteer with organizations helping communities recover from climate disasters
- Form parish-based environmental stewardship committees
- Create community gardens that provide fresh food for local food banks
- Organize energy-efficiency upgrades for low-income housing
- Develop neighborhood emergency response networks
- Start sustainability education programs in schools and parishes



# A Look into the Foster Care System

By Sister Michael Delores Allegri, SCL

Caring for orphans is part of the mission of St. Vincent de Paul. He told the Daughters of Charity that “orphans were to be their children.” He is often depicted with an infant in his arms and holding the hand of another.

Today there is a system in place that was designed to care for children. But many have found that system to be consistent but unstable, worldwide yet local, and impressive but a failure. Foster care is a system full of contradictions, but it is one that we could and should make a solid, top-of-the-line, healthy system because our children deserve our best efforts.

For 25 years, I was involved in the foster care system. These 25 years have been some of the most challenging but also the most exciting and rewarding that I have lived. It is such a great gift to be a part of a child’s growth from living in a state of trauma to healthy childhood antics!

The hardest part has been working within the system. Social workers who work in child welfare see and hear some of the most horrific situations, and yet they still get up and come to work the following day. What can be frustrating for social workers, as well as foster parents,

is that their caseloads are too heavy, so treating each case with the amount of time, effort, and expertise each deserves is difficult. Some of the most dedicated professionals work in child welfare, but the conditions I just mention can lead to some



Sister Michael Delores Allegri, SCL, with one of the 106 children she cared for during her 25-year ministry.

who “just seem to be putting in their time” before retirement. Also, there are lawyers, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) who sometimes seem “pressured” to win the decision. In a perfect world, all of these professionals would agree on what is in the child’s best interest. Also, there are times when the caseworker’s supervisor is anxious to “close the case” because other cases need to be staffed, and “they” are willing to settle for a not-so-perfect ending. We should never settle for less when a child’s life is at stake. It can seem to be impossible to have so many professionals agree on the right outcome. But when there is a common goal, the common goal should be what is best for that child. In order to break the cycle, it might be necessary to provide a number of services for the family before and after the case is closed. The child should always be at the heart of the process.

As a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, what obligation do I have to support, nurture, and protect that child? Children in the foster care system do not have the support, nurturing, and protection that they need unless we give it to them. Perhaps by becoming aware of the plight of the foster care system in your area and not remaining comfortable we can learn to do what Jesus told us in the Gospels: “Let the children come to Me,” (Matthew 19:14) and “Whoever welcomes a child welcomes Me.” (Mark 9:37) 🐦





# Associates in Action

*By Don Stubbings, Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Director of Associates*

**“Always do what is expected of you, and more, much more.... As long as it remains to be done, it is your work.” Mother Xavier Ross**

Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Associates follow Mother Xavier Ross’ instructions and have partnered with organizations and even founded their own mission-focused ministries. Associates all over our country find like-minded organizations committed to the same service and Vincentian spirit as our Sisters.

So, how do Associates continue the mission and fulfill the needs of our underserved communities?

Montana has been home to hundreds of Sisters and Associates over the years. For over 30 years, since the introduction of Associates in the Community, Associates in sponsored ministries have found direction from the SCL Community. In the past, this was in hospitals, schools, and other areas focused on the mission of our founding Sisters.

Today, with fewer SCLs in Montana, it is common to see Sisters and Associates work side-by-side with Vincentian organizations such as the Society of St. Vincent DePaul (SVDP), whose mission is “To give priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most

rejected by society.” Monthly, Associates meet with Sisters at the SVDP in downtown Billings to make sandwiches for those in need. Sister Eileen Hurley, SCL, who often joins the Associates and other Sisters, emphasized the importance of finding partners in the mission: “We are all here to serve the poor and marginalized. Having like-minded organizations in our community is a blessing.”

In Boise, Idaho, Associate Heidi Gainan shared that she lives the mission by serving on committees at Emanuel Lutheran Church, such as BIC (Becoming an Inclusive Church), which provides outreach to those who feel they are not welcome because they feel marginalized by the church. Heidi said, “Showing love and compassion for all” mirrors the mission and charism of the SCL Community.

Brad Grabs, SCLA, has made the mission his life and career by founding The Learning Club in Kansas City, Kansas. For over 20 years, The Learning Club has been serving the Kansas City, Kansas community by “Believing that each child is inherently good and immensely valuable. We strive to create an environment in our classrooms and in our neighborhoods where it is easier for youth to do good, to dream, and to succeed.” In 2024, Brad founded

Friends in Faith, which provides “social and spiritual support to teens through one-on-one relationships with adult volunteers and inspires positive transformations for teens and adults alike.”

All around the country, SCL Associates find unique Vincentian ministries that embody the values of the Vincentian spirit: service, collaboration, courage, and compassion. 🐦

Sister Eileen Hurley, SCL, and Associates Tracy Neary, Patricia Roberts, Mary Landry, Elaine Wurscher, Rosalie Foster, and friend, Deborah Simmen, prepare meals for the needy.





# A Legacy of Love

## The Work of the Ladies of Charity

St. Vincent de Paul said, “Charity is the cement which binds Communities to God and persons to one another...” Through their volunteer efforts, the Ladies of Charity build relationships with each other and those they serve. Vincent’s words are attractors that have found many calls, many paths to like-minded hearts to form a life-giving community for themselves and, in outreach to others’ needs.

### **The Vincentian Mission: Building Connections Through Service**

The Ladies of Charity, founded by St. Vincent de Paul in 1617, have always centered their work on building relationships with those they serve. Their mission began with the care of the sick and the poor, but over the centuries, it has grown into something deeper: a ministry of presence, compassion, and community. The Kansas City chapter, founded in 1952, is a living example of this tradition, with its members volunteering thousands of hours each year at places like Seton Center and Villa St. Francis.



Ladies of Charity Ruth Noel and LaNora Hughes with Sister Paula Rose Jauernig, SCL.

At Seton Center, the Ladies of Charity distribute food and run a second-hand clothing store. Additionally, as they gather backpacks for children in August or distribute toys at Christmas, they engage with the individuals they serve, learning their stories, understanding their needs, and walking alongside them in their struggles. The work provides material goods and hope and shows that someone cares.

At Villa St. Francis, Kansas’ largest not-for-profit skilled care center, the Ladies of Charity also develop connections with those they serve. Operated by the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, it cares for a large population of Medicaid recipients and provides long-term care, short-term rehabilitation, and memory care. The Ladies of Charity play an active role in the lives of the residents. The ladies transport them to daily Mass, staff the gift shop, organize activities like bingo, and even sew wheelchair and walker caddies to make their lives a little easier.

### **A Spiritual Family Rooted in Vincentian Love**

Influenced by the work of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the Ladies of Charity spirituality is rooted in the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac.

Sister Charlotte White, SCL, was the spiritual moderator for the Ladies of Charity for many years. Her role was to ensure that meetings always kept the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul at the forefront. “The importance of prayer and the types of prayer were practically indistinguishable from what I experienced in the SCL Community,” she said, “Any SCL would feel at home with the Ladies of Charity.”

Catherine Powers, the current president of the Kansas City chapter, has been a member for 15 years. “The number one goal of our strategic planning process has been to weave Vincentian spirituality into everything we do,” she explained. “As we reconnect after the challenges of the pandemic, we are focusing on remembering our founding saints and their mission.”





Ladies of Charity Sharon Khoury and Eleanor Raggett at work.

Coming out of the pandemic, they have reconnected through prayer, gathering every other month for a Rosary, Mass, and dinner.

And as they move forward, the Ladies of Charity continue to emphasize the importance of relationships. For example, members knit, crochet, or sew for those in need. Recently, they even purchased a special loom to weave plastic bags into sleeping mats for the homeless, turning a simple craft into a way to care for the unhoused members of the community.

### A Legacy That Lives On

A current Lady of Charity, Karen Brinker, recalls a Lady of Charity who inspired her. Henrietta, was one attracted to the organization by the charism of service and who served faithfully for many years. As she was dying, at age 101, Brinker visited her, and Henrietta told her with great clarity, "I know you; I saw you in heaven." That life of service allowed a peek into heaven. The community that marked her long life continued, even as she left it. Whether serving children at Seton Center, caring for the elderly at Villa St. Francis, or working on special projects for those in need, the Ladies of Charity continue their unique mission and spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. 🕊

# Employee Reflections on Living the Mission

I share the spirit of serving others in my parish community, where I serve on the Parish Council.

Compassion, understanding, and listening are key roles in my job, and I lend a hand to staff and residents every chance I get. All learn something daily from each other and how we deliver. This is done by showing God's love to any person we encounter.

Being a member of the Employee Mission Team allows the opportunity to plan events/activities so that all employees can participate in fulfilling the SCL mission.

I volunteer for several community-oriented organizations that share the common thread of 'serving those in need' or improving society.

I have been involved in the All-Community Meals, soup and clothing drives, and donated food to homeless shelters to serve the marginalized people of Leavenworth. We held a winter coat drive and collected spaghetti for dinner at a local church. I collect calendars from several area churches each year for the Prison Ministry program. I gave a stranger on the corner water and food. I offer every loving service in my power to the community of Leavenworth 'to meet the critical needs of God's people.'

I keep an open table at home and try to lend a helping hand when I can.

I learn new things every day, not only how the Sisters affect the community but also how the community affects them. As an employee working in their organization, I think it is my responsibility to make sure I am helpful to the Sisters as well as my coworkers and the visitors that come in.

In my personal life, I am fulfilling the mission of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth by getting involved, helping those in need, and being a supportive presence in my community.

I aim to embody the spirit of compassion and service in everything I do and strive to live out this mission through my actions and interactions with others.

I am a licensed foster parent and an education advocate for children whose parents cannot do so.

Seeing Jesus in everyone and helping however I can. 🕊



Nurses Tishelle Crittendon, Kena Ellington, and Julie Butler are some of the SCL employees who live the Vincentian mission.





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A publication of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

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