

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

Practicing Charity with Faith and Hope

“When he returned to Capernaum, sometime later word went round that he was in the house; and so many people collected that there was no room left, even in front of the door. He was preaching the word to them when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men, but as they could not get the man to him through the crowd, they stripped the roof over the place where Jesus was; and when they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, ‘My child, your sins are forgiven.’” (Mark 2: 1-5)

I trust everyone is familiar with this piece of Gospel. However, there are a number of things that merit our close look.

A “paralytic” is someone who cannot move freely and requires people to look after.

The “four men” could be the relatives or friends of the paralytic. They wholeheartedly wanted to help the paralytic, to bring him to the Lord and be cured by Him.

“They stripped the roof over the place where Jesus was” – it was not an easy task to strip the roof because of its height and there were a lot of people inside the house and Jesus was preaching there too. If not careful, it would cause objects falling from the roof and hurt the people in the house or they might also fell from the roof.

“When they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay” – this action was said easier than done. If anyone of the four failed to synchronize with the others, the paralytic lying on the stretcher would fell on the ground. The four men must have a good action plan for carrying out this charitable act.

This piece of Gospel also reflects the faith of everyone involved. The four men strongly believed that Jesus could cure the paralytic, same as the latter. The paralytic also had faith over the four men that they could bring him to Jesus from the roof top safely.

When I read this piece of Gospel, I deeply felt that the service of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is just like this. The four men look like us or any piety group, helping our weaker brothers and sisters.

We provide our service to the needy with faith and love, hoping that they would get the assistance they need through our service. Walking together with the needy, we are leading them to know more about our Lord through our deeds and words.

Before providing our service to those in need, we must make a comprehensive plan. During our visitations, we have to listen carefully to their needs and then decide what kind of support is appropriate. When organizing activities, we should work together to provide the most suitable venue, transportation, meals, programmes, etc. so that they could participate in our activities with joy and peace. Relying on the blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ, we deeply believe that, with our care and company, our brothers and sisters in need would receive their healing and one day would overcome the difficulties confronting them at the moment.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for granting us good health in the past year so that we are able to serve other people. We would like to thank Bishop Michael Yeung, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha and Rev. Dominic Chan, VG for their continuous support and guidance given to us over the year. We are also grateful

for all spiritual advisors of our conferences for their teachings and advice rendered to members.

Time flies. It has been three years since I took up the position of President of the Central Council. I would like to thank every one of you for your support in the Central Council President Election held in July this year, allowing me to be re-elected. I will continue to work hard to lead our Society to move ahead in the delivery of our charitable services.

The Central Council Meeting

The Central Council holds monthly meetings every Wednesday of the third week of the month.

Conferences and Membership

We have a total of thirty-one parish conferences and one youth conference, with over six hundred formal and auxiliary members.

Our charitable services and activities

In 2017-2018, the Central Council worked hard to organize various charitable services and activities. These included retreats, refugee activities and prayer meetings, visits to homes for the elderly, workshop on visitation skills, photo contest, recruitment of new members as well as the preparation for the 9th Pan Asian Conference (PANASCO 9) to be held in Hong Kong next year. Conference services include dinner for the grassroots, homework tuitions, accompanying the needy to attend medical appointments, home visitations, catering for families in need, the intellectually disabled and the sick, etc. A brief summary of the work of various Groups of the Central Council during the year is given below for your information.

Charity Community (China) - During the year, the Group visited various dioceses and districts in the Mainland, focusing on visiting the poor and the needy together with local parishioners and offering some financial supports. The Group promotes mutual support among local parishioners and shares with them our service experience. In view of the present uncertain situation, the Group has suspended its work until a more suitable time to come.

Communication Management Group - During the year, the Group held four meetings and published four issues of quarterly e-Newsletter. The Group has also organized a “Services in Hope” Photo Contest inviting conferences to submit photos of the loving moments during their services. The Group received 41 entries from various conferences and 15 of them were shortlisted for the second round of selection. The best five photos were selected by votes casted by some members of

clergy and by all conferences. The results have been covered by the Kung Kao Po. In the mean time, the Group is actively working on the official web site of PANASCO 9 to be held in Hong Kong in November 2019.

Documentation Management Group - The six members of the Group come from different conferences and meet once every two months at the Ozanam Comprehensive Services Centre to maintain and safe-keep documents that are worthy for permanent retention. In addition to those historical records relating to the charitable work performed by the Society, it also retrieves and keeps correspondences and articles between the Society and various Government departments and other major organizations such as the Social Welfare Department, Inland Revenue Department, Community Chest, etc.

During the year, the Group visited the Holy Spirit Seminary to dig out reports about the Society in the past issues of Kung Kao Po kept there. Besides the information and photos published by the CGI and conferences, recent materials about the Photo Contest, Retreat and Spirituality sharing for conferences involving in refugee work as well as some founding information of conferences are duly preserved. It is the aim of the Group to keep these precious historical materials in good condition for references in the future.

Extension and Development Group - The Group continues to run the “Walking with Conferences” whatsapp groups with the presidents and vice-presidents of conferences. Conferences are welcome to report problems they encountered to the Group at any time with the Group responding within 24 hours. Timely advice and support would be provided according to the guidelines and rules of the Central Council. This is also an effective means for the Central Council to disseminate news and messages.

The Group also assists conferences in recruiting new members by introducing the Society to other parishioners and catechumen at their parishes. In the past year, we have recruited more than 30 members into our Vincentian family.

Regular gatherings were held with the core members of four to five conferences each time. Participating conferences revisited the mission, rules and the usage of various forms of the Society together, and discussed problems and areas of concerns they were facing. Conferences get to know each other better through sharing in these gatherings.

The Group also organized a “Communication and Visitation” Workshop on 28 April 2018 with an aim to enhance members’ visitation and communication skills, promote members’ spiritual growth and deepen their sense of belonging to the Society.

Financial Management Group - The Group held meetings during the year to discuss financial problems encountered by conferences and provide recommendations for their consideration. One of the main tasks of the Group is to appraise and recommend to the President, funding applications of charitable works exceeding HK\$ 8000 per case from conferences based on the Funding Approval Guidelines.

Incident Support and Special Event Group - The Group organized visits to the St. Joseph's Home for the Elderly in Sheung Shui and the St. Mary's Home for the Aged in Wong Chuk Hang run by the Little Sisters of the Poor on 11 November 2017 and 2 June 2018 respectively bringing the elders a happy afternoon through our performances, games and gifts.

Ozanam Comprehensive Services Centre (the Centre) - The Ozanam Management Committee manages and oversees the operation of the Centre through regular meetings convened to assess, audit and align the directions for the operation of the Centre. The Centre also assists the Society in communicating and coordinating charitable work and activities of parish conferences. The Centre provides a variety of services to the community adhering to the teaching of love and care which Christ gave us. Throughout the year, the Centre had continued its services to the people in need, including:

- Tutorial Classes: we provided after-school homework tutorial classes for primary students. There were 1,846 headcounts enjoyed the services last year;
- Free Medication and Acupuncture: the Centre collaborated with teams of voluntary qualified Chinese medicine practitioners to provide high quality free medication and treatment. There were 2,439 headcounts received the services from the free clinic last year; and
- Caring Elderly Neighbours: the Centre collaborated with the Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council - Sham Shui Po to arrange visits for members of the Society, bringing seasonal gifts, warm regards and blessing to the elderly in the district, both solitary and couples alike, during festivals.

The Chinese medical practitioner, Mr Ho Shui-kong who had served the Centre for over 8 years had sadly passed away in the year. We sincerely thank him for his selfless service over the years. May his soul rest in peace and may perpetual light shine upon him. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all Chinese medicine practitioners, teachers of the tutorial classes and staff of the Centre for delivering such amazing charitable services under very limited resources of the Centre.

PANASCO 9 Organizing Committee - The 9th Pan Asian Conference (PANASCO 9) will take place in Hong Kong in 2019 for the first time. To prepare for this important event, the Central Council set up an Organizing Committee in early 2018. Monthly meeting has been held since March 2018 and a second members' donation from conferences in place for fund raising since May 2018. It has been decided that PANASCO 9 will be held from 11 to 14 November 2019 with the theme "Serve in Hope ·Walk with Christ" at the Community Hall of Caritas Centre, Central and the Auditorium and meeting rooms at the Diocesan Centre nearby. The objectives of this regional conference are to produce realistic outcomes that will enhance our charitable works, to provide a platform for Vincentians of different places to share experience, knowledge and future goals so that we can learn from each other on how to serve our little sisters and brothers in need. The conference also provides an occasion for Vincentians to demonstrate our solidarity and renew our faith.

Refugee and Protection Claimant Services Group - The Group is responsible for coordinating the services rendering to refugees and protection claimants by various conferences. Through this, the Society could better manage resources to provide services as needed. We conduct home visitation to families of refugees and protection claimants through the "adopting a family" approach.

During the year, owing to the suspension of the St Teresa's Parish Conference and the closure of the Ss Peter & Paul Parish Conference, we have invited the Annunciation Parish Conference and Resurrection Parish Conference to participate in this charitable work. Currently, a total of 14 conferences is taking part in conducting monthly home visitations to some 80 families. Through home visitations, members have better opportunities to understand the situation and the needs of families, and bear witness to the love of God. The Group met once every month to exchange experiences, to share information and to align practices among conferences. Through discussions and exchange of views in the monthly meeting, the Group took opportunities to update and review our practice and services, if necessary.

To put into practice of "journeying with friends" (theme of our retreat in 2017), we organized two prayer sessions for families of Christian faith on 10 December 2017 and 24 March 2018 respectively. Both events were well received by both families and members.

To enable members to re-fuel in the spirituality aspects, we organized a one-day retreat titled "Realizing the Presence of God in Our Home Visitation" on 30 June 2018 in Sing Yin Secondary School with Sisters Eugenia and Renata from the Contemplative Missionary Fraternity as our spiritual advisors. Sisters led us in studying messages of His Holiness Pope Francis for the "First World Day of the

Poor”. Pope Francis asked all of us to practice - *LET US LOVE, NOT WITH WORDS BUT WITH DEEDS*. Members found the retreat very inspiring and enlightening on how we might realize the presence of God in our home visitation to the refugees and protection claimants.

The Group also organized two summer activities for the families. In the “Day Camp” held on 19 July 2018 in the Lei Yue Mun Park, some 120 adults and children attended and enjoyed the recreational facilities there. The families enjoyed the Day Camp so much that they requested for re-organizing it in 2019. On 25 August 2018, a “Fun Day” was held at Tuen Mun Catholic Secondary School in which some 140 adults and children attended and had fun in attending various game stalls and face painting, etc.

Spirituality Group - The Group organized a retreat for members at the Sheung Shui St. Paul’s House of Prayers from 25 to 26 November 2017. We were pleased to have invited Rev. Johanes Kusno Bintoro, former Provincial of China Province, Congregation of the Mission, to be the spiritual advisor of the retreat. The theme of the retreat was “The way of Charity Saint to Meet the Poor”. Through the lively presentation of Fr. Kusno and the sharing of his long service and spirituality experience it deepened our knowledge of the Saint as well as his spirit of service. Surely it will guide us and our beneficiaries to find the presence of Christ through our service.

Vincentians Caring Group - The Group was formed in December 2017 with the role to liaise with our former conference presidents, spiritual advisors and board officers, and to show our care and concern of them through visits and gatherings. The Group welcomes other conference members to join in the visits. During the year, the Group visited Fr. Gabriel Lam, former Spiritual Advisor of the Central Council, Br. and Mrs. Fok Pak Kuen, former member of St. Margaret’s Parish Conference, Sr. Susanna Ho, former president of Holy Family Parish Conference, Sr. Rosa Tsui, former member of and who helped established the Holy Redeemer Parish Conference and conference in Macau, and Mrs. Patricia O’Hoy, the wife of our late Hon. English Secretary of the Central Council.

Our Support to the International St Vincent de Paul Family

During the year, members of SSVP HK continued to provide supports to the CGI in various roles. Br. Maurice Yeung was the International Vice-President for Special Projects. Apart from leading a team of coordinators to monitor the implementation of CGI’s projects, he also looked after the “China Desk”. Br. Arthur Chan took up the post of Asia Group 3 Coordinator, responsible for the liaison works for SSVP in HK, Macau, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Mongolia while Br. John Lee was one of the members in the Committee of International Aid and Development (CIAD). Also,

the Society continuously supported the CGI as a member of the Concordat in which twenty member countries provide funding support to the operation of the CGI.

Vincentian families celebrated the 400th Anniversary of Vincentian Charism in 2017. The highlight and the finale was the Vincentian Family Symposium held from 11 to 15 October 2017 in Rome. The theme of the symposium was “Welcome the Stranger” and there was a number of activities including prayer service, conference, papal audience, prayer vigil and celebration of Eucharist. A SSVP HK delegation comprised 5 members including Sr. Mary Tsoi, Sr. Agnes Zhang, Br. Canute Chan, Br. Maurice Yeung and I attended the Symposium.

The Community Chest and Hong Kong Council of Social Service

The Society is the founding member of The Community Chest and is also a member of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

Obituary

Sister Ng Cheng Wai-fun, Maria, member of the Resurrection Parish Conference passed away in 2018. May her soul rest in peace and may perpetual light shine upon her.

Looking Forward

In the next term, in addition to our current services, I wish to extend the scope of our service to care for the sick elderly who are living alone. The ageing population of Hong Kong is on the rise. However, an elder needs to wait for at least four years before a chance for admission to elderly homes. After being discharged from hospitals, the sick elders have to return to their homes which are lack of facilities. I wish we could walk with them during such difficult times and give them support and care.

The 9th Pan Asian Conference (PANASCO 9) is going to be held in Hong Kong from 11 to 14 November 2019. It is expected that some 400 Vincentians from over 30 countries in the Asia and Oceania regions will participate. Since 1968, members of the Vincentian family from these two regions have been gathering together every four years to share their experience and exchange views for the enhancement of our charitable works and to make preparation for the future needs of the community. During the conference, we will invite priests of the Congregation of the Mission to guide us in our spiritual development and to deepen our understanding of the spirituality of our patron Saint, St. Vincent de Paul. I would like to invite every member to mark your diaries for taking part in this meaningful event of the Vincentian family.

The Society is now present in 153 countries with over 800,000 members assisting over 30 million poor people in the world in various ways. In Hong Kong,

conference members carry out visitations and charitable services every day to look after the needs of the poor and weak; to walk along with them; so that they could feel the love and kindness of God. We are not only bringing God's love to them, but at the same time we are serving Jesus Christ who is always with the poor.

May the peace and joy of Christ be with every one of you always!

Sr. Garley Wong
President