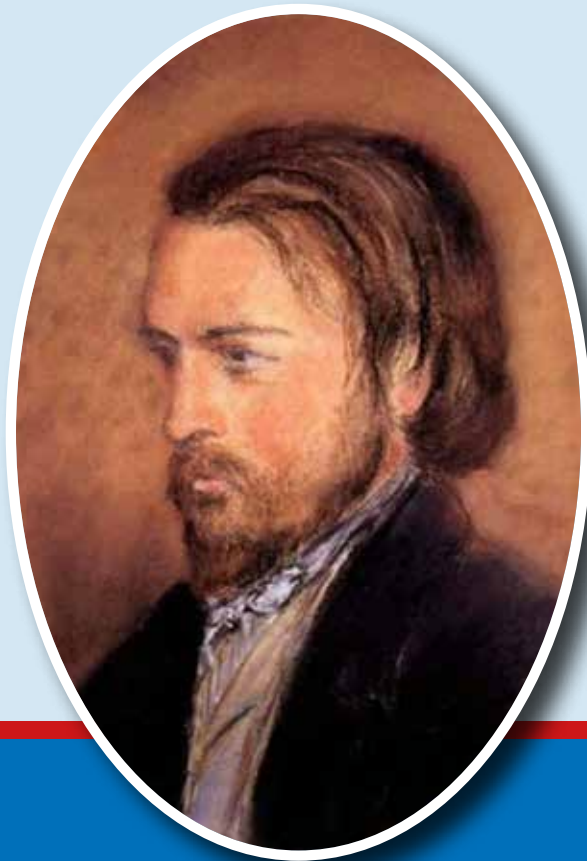




Short History of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Scotland – 1845-2020

by

James McKendrick





Foreword

At one point in his life as an Apostle, St Paul went with his colleague Barnabas to Jerusalem to visit the leading Christian figures there: Peter, James and John. He wanted to receive their endorsement, and he did. They had only one thing to add: “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). This, Paul said, was “the very thing I was eager to do.”

That command, “remember the poor”, lives on and so does St Paul’s eagerness to fulfill it. This book tells the story of the continuing “eagerness” of the Society of St Vincent de Paul to engage in constant, unobtrusive, grass-roots, practical, “remembering” of the poor – who have not been magicked out of existence by social advances, but are always with us. James McKendrick’s succinct and attractive account tells of the Society’s origins in Paris in the 1830s, its establishment and progress and present activity in Scotland. If you are in Aberdeen, you can see the extent and human warmth of its work every Tuesday evening outside St Mary’s, Cathedral. That is just one of so many initiatives throughout Scotland.

I am glad this book has been written. I hope it will spread, and be read. I hope it will inspire a new generation to come forward and serve Christ present in those in need, remembering the poor.

Hugh Gilbert OSB

Bishop of Aberdeen

President of Scottish Bishops’ Conference

Introduction

It is indeed a privilege for me to take this opportunity to present this publication of the historical journey of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Scotland) It is very important to mark the development and acknowledge the services provided through the passage of time, and to pay our respects to all those members and others who have contributed to the many acts of charity delivered in Scotland since 1845 and shared our Vincentian Virtues and Spirituality.

This publication is part of the 175th Anniversary Celebrations and would not have been produced if had not been for all those involved in various key aspects required in this production. I am most grateful to them for their enthusiasm and talents.

Well Done

Men and women who live up to their responsibilities are rewarded. By developing their God – given talents, they render you honor and glory, Lord. Medals and trophies are handed out in ceremony. This provides incentive and motivation.

But Your words, Lord are even more to be cherished. In His parable, Jesus tells of servants who lived up to their master's expectations. "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Mt 25:21). There is no substitute for loving service. I love you Lord.

Words of Comfort for Every Day

Danny Collins
National President

The Beginning

The Birth of the Charism

Vincent de Paul was installed as parish priest in the poor, rural parish of Chatillon in 1617. While vesting for Mass, he was told about a family who were all sick and lived in an isolated house nearby. “It moved me to the depths of my heart. I did not fail to speak feelingly about them during the sermon, and God, touching the hearts of those who were listening, caused them all to be moved to compassion for the poor afflicted people.” His compassion led to immediate action, because many people, particularly women, went to the assistance of the family that same day.



St Vincent

Taking action

Vincent understood that the love of God compelled him to love the poor deeply and serve them for the rest of his life. Realising from the outset the enormity of the task of serving the poor, Vincent called a meeting of these charitable women to determine the best way to help the poor and the sick of the parish. They agreed to form “The Confraternity of Charity”.

Principal Founder

Fast forward some 200 years to Paris. Frederic Ozanam is a young Law student at a time when scepticism and secularism prevailed in the city. He wrote to a friend: “Paris distresses me for there is no life, no faith, no love...”



Young Frederic Ozanam

its coldness chills me and its corruption is killing me”. However, he soon met Andre-Marie Ampere, a famous scientist, who took Frederic into his family. He soon overcame his dislike of Paris, regained his confidence and began to hope in a better future. “Learning and Catholicism, these are my consolations!” Before he left the Ampere household, he would add a third: charity and love of the poor. His faith was greatly strengthened and deepened: one day, Frederic spontaneously visited the local church and was surprised to see Ampere, kneeling amongst the women, fervently reciting the rosary. Later, he was to write “the rosary of Ampere did more for me than all the books and sermons put together.”

Conference of History

In 1832, Frederic and five friends started the Conference of History. At one meeting they overheard this remark: “In former times Christianity worked wonders. But what is it doing for humanity today? And you who pride yourselves on your Catholicity, what are you doing to prove the worth of your faith?” Frederic and his student companions felt compelled to respond.

Conference of Charity

They agreed on the need for a society whose members would be practising Catholics devoted to doing good. Frederic summed up their mood: “One thing is wanting that our apostolate may be blessed by God: works of charity. The blessing of the poor is the blessing of God. Therefore we must do what our Lord Jesus Christ did when preaching the Gospel. Let us go to the poor.”

Quote

“I can see the flame burning in Ozanam’s eyes; I can hear his voice trembling a little with emotion as he explains his project of a charitable Catholic association. He spoke in terms so warm and moving.”

Paul Lamache

First Meeting

The first meeting of the Conference of Charity was held at 8pm on 23 April, 1833. The seven men present at this historic event were: Emmanuel Bailly; Frederic Ozanam; Felix Clave; Jules Devaux; Francois Lallier; Paul Lamanche and Auguste Le Taillandier. The Conference was called the Conference of Charity, in order to emphasise the distinction, both in thought and action, that the founders sought to make between it and the ill-fated Conference of History.

Little is known about the actual discussions of the first meeting. However, the format of the meeting has come down unchanged through almost two hundred years, and today is observed in every Conference throughout the world. The Conference met weekly on Tuesday evening; An Opening Prayer, the Veni Sancte Spiritus was recited; A Spiritual Reading from The Imitation of Christ was read; Cases were discussed and allocated, at first to Ozanam and Taillandier; but soon under the guidance of Sister Rosalie, each member was assigned a family to look after; A Secret Collection was taken up; Closing Prayers were recited.

Visitation

The resources of the Conference were very limited, as Frederic himself relates: "... .. the collections which we make amongst ourselves every Tuesday, the alms of some charitable people anxious to second our goodwill and the cast-off clothes of our wardrobe" Ozanam and his flatmate Le Taillandier made the first visit, carrying some firewood to an elderly neighbour. Subsequent works involved the distribution of food, clothing, bread tokens and meat tokens. Many of these items were received as gifts from people eager to help in the work. The collections the brothers made amongst themselves every Tuesday in Devaux' hat were the origin of the Secret collection. Initially great assistance was provided to the Conference by Sister Rosalie, who as well as giving the Brothers lists of families to visit, Sister Rosalie also provided bread and money to augment their meagre resources.



Blessed Rosalie Rendu

Sister Rosalie

Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, worked with the poor in Paris. She was put in contact with Ozanam and fellow conference founder Auguste Le Taillandier. She was a brilliant mentor. She selected poor families for Frederic and Auguste to visit, providing them with firewood and vouchers for food and clothing. From Sr. Rosalie and the other Daughters of Charity, the young men learned Vincentian values and the spirit and ethos of service of those in need.

She taught them patience, the importance of listening, kindness and that “love is your first gift to the poor.” For her lifelong charitable service, she was honoured with the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

The Vincentian Charism was now truly re-awakened

Patronage of St Vincent de Paul

Leon Le Provost joined the Conference in the autumn of 1833. At a weekly meeting on 4 February 1834, he suggested that St Vincent de Paul could be the patron of the Conference of Charity. Frederic agreed: “Let us remember that we are choosing a patron for his example...We should regard him as the kind of saint we can try to follow, to imitate.” He then added: “Why not actually call ourselves the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul?” Thus the Conference of Charity became the Conference of St Vincent de Paul. Ozanam also proposed that the Conference should place itself under the protection of Our Blessed Lady and honour her in a special way on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The Hail Mary was added to the prayers.

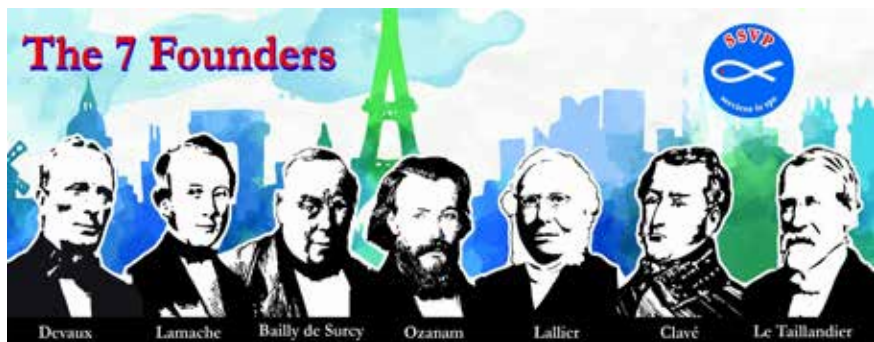
Miraculous Growth

The little society grew rapidly. By 1853, two months before his death, Frederic was able to report to a new conference in Leghorn “We now number in Paris alone 2,000 Brothers who visit 5,000 families (that is to say about 20,000 people) or one-fourth of the poor whom this immense city holds. 500 Conferences in France alone.” In 1860, there were 2,500 conferences worldwide with around 50,000 members

Quote

“Let us love this little society which has made us known to one another, which has placed us on the path to a more charitable and more Christian life. Oh how glad we shall be that we did not leave empty the years of our youth.”

Frederic Ozanam



The 7 Founders

God's Providence

By Providence, St Vincent de Paul had moved to a parish where he became acutely aware of the plight of the poor and was moved by compassion to serve them. It was by Divine Providence that The Charism – service to the person of Jesus Christ in the poor – was nurtured by the members of the Confraternities of Charity (Vincent founded more than 80 in all) and by the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, founded in 1625 and by the Daughters of Charity, founded in 1633; and latterly, by the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, founded some two hundred years later, in 1833.

Originally, there was an ongoing dispute regarding who actually founded the Society. Modestly, Ozanam always maintained that one or other of the members of the first Conference was the actual founder. Indeed, he went so far as to write to all the Conferences, in a letter intimating the resignation of M. Bailly as President General; “...none of us will forget that it was M. Bailly who, in 1833, ... conceived the idea of assembling for charitable purposes, under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul a few young men...” Bailly refuted this at the time, and consistently maintained that Ozanam was the founder. After the death of Bailly, the dispute carried on for a further 27 years. It was finally settled when, in 1883, Lallier was asked to write a pamphlet on “les origines” – the origins of the Society. He submitted his draft to all the surviving founders and obtained their agreement and approval of its contents; including his assertion that Ozanam was the main founder.

Quote

“I had the honour to be one of the seven first members who formed the nucleus of the Conference. It was Professor Ozanam who procured that great happiness for me. The honour of that foundation is his forever.”

Jules Devaux

The present Council General, while recognising Ozanam as the principal founder, has also acknowledged the significant contribution of the other members of the first Conference. Frederic Ozanam is relatively well known, unlike the other six men.

Emmanuel Bailly (1794-1861)

Bailly was a journalist, editor and publisher. As publisher of the *Tribune Catholique*, involved with the *Société des Bonnes Etudes*, a Jesuit affiliation, he was a well known and respected member of catholic Parisian society. and had established a family boarding house where Ozanam stayed for a period. He was very close to young people and helped them combine their studies with their religious formation. Ozanam and his friends came naturally to him for advice regarding their plan to serve the poor. He provided a meeting place for the new Conference and generally guided their actions. Having a great devotion to St. Vincent de Paul, he linked the new Charity Conference to the wider Vincentian spiritual family. He readily agreed to become the first President General of the nascent Society, a position he occupied until he had to step down in 1844 due to illness, remaining, however, a member of the Council almost until the end of his life.

Jules Devaux (1811-1880)

Devaux was born in the Normandy region of France and moved to Paris in 1830 to complete his medical studies. He met Ozanam and his friends when he took part in the Conference of History He was present at the early meetings of the Society's foundation and one of those in the group who approached Bailly for advice. He was the first Conference treasurer and first Treasurer General of the Society. He settled in Normandy after completing his medical studies in 1839. Later in life, he abandoned the medical practice and travelled to Germany where he attempted to establish the first Conference but this attempt had to be postponed. Devaux, a discreet and self-effacing member of the Society, passed away in Paris in 1880.

Paul Lamanche (1810-1892)

Lamanche was born in the Normandy region of France. He settled in Paris to study law where he met Ozanam in 1832 and joined him in the Conference of History. He wrote many articles for different publications, participated in the great debates of his time and became involved in the beginnings of the Society. He was the first Catholic writer to declare himself against slavery and was an eminent law professor at several universities in France He was a passionate defender of justice and the founding president of the SSVP Conference in Strasbourg. He was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour. Lamanche died in Grenoble in 1892, the last of the founders to pass away.

Auguste Le Taillandier (1811-1886)

Le Taillandier was born in Rouen, France in a family of tradespersons. His family moved to Paris where he pursued legal studies. He joined Ozanam in Conference of History as a virtual silent witness because he did not participate in the discussions. In 1833 he told Ozanam that it would be better for them to join some charitable work rather than to involve themselves in futile debates. He was active in the founding of the Society and the work of the first conference, in addition to other charitable work such as giving religious instruction to apprentices and visiting inmates. He returned to Rouen, married, and founded a Conference there. He was decorated as a Knight of the Legion of Honour and received several honorary titles and awards for his contribution to his community.

François Lallier (1814-1886)

Lallier made Ozanam's acquaintance at the Law Faculty of the Sorbonne and became one of his closest friends for the rest of his life. He was the godfather to Ozanam's daughter Marie. He participated in the debates of the Conference of History and was actively involved in all the steps leading to the founding of the Society. In 1835, he was entrusted by Bailly to write the first Rule of the Society. In 1837 he was appointed Secretary General of the Society and signed circulars, which form an important part of the Vincentian tradition.

Returning to Sens in 1839, he established a Conference. In his professional life, he was first a lawyer, then later an eminent Judge in Sens. He had a keen interest in archeology and served as the president the local archeological society. Pope Pius IX honoured him with the title of Knight of St. Gregory the Great for his charitable and civic work; he also received the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

Félix Clavé (1811-1853)

Clavé is the least known of the Society's founders. A native of Toulouse, France, he moved to Paris in 1831 where he pursued his studies and associated with Ozanam and friends. He participated actively in the founding of the Society. He founded a Conference in the district of Paris where he lived. He then moved to Algeria where he attempted to establish a Conference but without success. In 1839, he went to Mexico to live with relatives. Eventually, Clavé married. In his professional life he published several works, including some books of poetry. He died tragically two months after Ozanam's death.

The Council General has also recognised the significant contribution made by the Venerable Jean-Leon Le Provost to the early development of the Society.



*Venerable Jean-Leon
Le Provost*

Leon Le Provost (1803-1874)

Le Provost was one of the first to join the founders. At the age of 31, he was the oldest (excluding Bailly) and brought to the youthful enthusiasm of the others the wisdom and experience of a mature age. He was also a friend of Sister Rosalie. It was Le Provost who suggested the Conference should be placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul. When the first conference became too big and unmanageable, it was divided into two and then three. Le provost was for many years the president of St. Surplice, the second Paris Conference. He was also the first Depute President General of the Society. In 1845, he established, with two other SSVP members, the Religious of St. Vincent de Paul, a Congregation of priests and brothers devoted entirely to the fulltime service of the

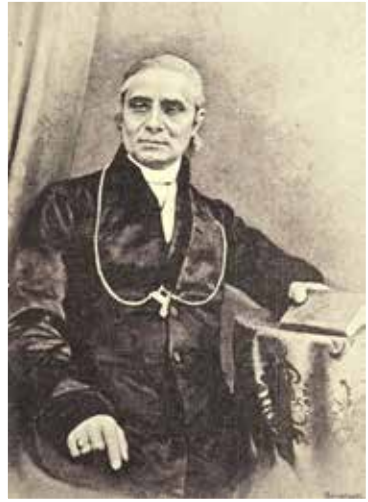
poor.

Council General

The Council General resulted from splitting the “ Council of Direction” into two administrative bodies: on the one hand, the ‘Paris’ Council’, that runs the Conferences in Paris (16 Conferences at that time); and, on the other hand, the ‘Council General’, responsible for SSVP’s growth beyond Paris (with 22 Conferences at that time). It is worth noting that the ‘Council of Direction’ dates back to 1836, when the first Rule was drawn up, and it was intended to manage the rapid growth of the young Society. However, tension quickly arose between the city Conferences and those in the rest of France, regarding perceived preferential treatment of Paris. Consequently, during a meeting held on 21th July 1839, SSVP leaders agreed on splitting the ‘Council’ and the subsequent setting-up of the ‘Council General. The first official meeting of the Council General was held on 27th December 1840 with Bailly as President General and Lallier as Secretary General. The 1839 Rule of the Society, approved at this meeting continued in force, virtually unchanged until 1967.

Bishop James Gillis

Born in Montreal, Canada, 7 April, 1802, he was the only son of a Scottish father and an English mother. His father, a native of Fochabers, Banffshire, had immigrated to Canada and married there. Gillis was educated at the Sulpician College in Montreal, where he acquired a perfect knowledge of French, which stood him in good stead all his life. In 1816, he came to Scotland along with his family, and the following year began his training for the priesthood, First in Scotland; then studying in Paris and at Issy. He was ordained as a priest on 9 June, 1827, and was based at Edinburgh, where his preaching soon attracted large crowds. He visited France in 1829 to collect money for St Mary's church, and in 1831 to raise funds for the foundation of an Ursulines of Jesus Convent, St Margaret's. This was the first religious house established in Scotland since the sixteenth century, and was opened in Edinburgh, in 1835.



Bishop James Gillis

In July 1838, he was consecrated at Edinburgh as Bishop of Limyra and Coadjutor of the Eastern District. He soon assumed direct responsibility for the congregation in Edinburgh. A visit to Paris in 1842, where he was very well received, resulted in the acquisition of what remained of the library of the Scots College. In 1852, Bishop Gillis succeeded Bishop Carruthers as Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District. During his thirty seven years of ministry he did much for the advancement of Catholicism. Bishop Gillis was buried in St. Margaret's Convent, his own foundation, on 26 February 1864. The nuns of St. Margaret's were granted possession of his library.

Visionary Projects

It had always been a dream of the young Fr. Gillis to establish a convent in Edinburgh. So a mere four years after his ordination, his lobbying of Bishop Patterson bore fruit and he was sent to France to raise the funds for his convent. In June 1834, he purchased a suitable mansion house (Whitehouse) with 2 acres of grounds for £3000, By June 1835, the nuns were well established in residence and St Margaret's Chapel, which had been built next to the convent, was completed.

Gillis also had ambitious plans for a Cathedral, designed by the renowned architect, Pugin. Sadly, the project was abandoned due to lack of finance. However, in 1841, Bishop Gillis enlarged the sanctuary of St. Mary's and installed a new pulpit. More successful was his attempt to restore the Society of Jesus to Edinburgh. The Jesuits arrived in 1859 and opened a fine church in Lauriston, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is still used today.

Holy Guild of St. Joseph

This initiative was to lead to the creation of a St. Vincent de Paul presence in Scotland which is still thriving and serving the poor to this day.

In 1841, Gillis founded a Catholic friendly society, under the name of The Holy Guild of St. Joseph. The object was to improve the lives of working class Catholics of Edinburgh

Friendly Society

An important part of the work was to provide assistance to its members in times of old age or sickness and help with meeting burial costs through three separate schemes. The sickness fund provided a weekly payment to men, aged between 18 and 50 who were unable to work through injury or sickness. The other two funds were open to both men and women. The annuity fund paid a pension to members from the age of 66 until their death. Anyone eligible for membership of the annuity fund could also participate in the life assurance fund, which provided assistance with funeral costs. Members were required to make appropriate annual payment .to participate in any of the funds.

Improving the Lot of Members

As well as operating as a Friendly Society through its three funds, the Guild also sought to promote "practical arts" and "hallow the sanctuary of the home". Ordinary members of the Guild were required to "especially bind themselves to the performance of certain religious duties, with a view to their daily improvement in virtue." Books were published on educational or edifying subjects of interest. Early in 1845, weekly readings were organised for

the benefit of younger members of the Guild. The Warden and other members took turns in delivering the readings. For example, Lectures on the Religious Antiquities of Edinburgh, read by James Augustine Stothert who, later in the year, was to become President of the first Scottish Conference.

Important Role of Women

The Guild stressed the important role of women as wives and mothers in ensuring that their families were well fed and lived in a clean, healthy and happy home environment. Prizes were awarded at the Annual Festival meetings of the Guild for the tidiest homes. In 1842, bishop Gillis was able to inform the assembled membership that the first prize for the tidiest house had been won by “ the poor blind woman who played upon a hand-organ in front of the Physicians’ Hall. The Guild thrived in the first decade of its activity. By 1845 it had over 300 members. However in 1851, although there were 247 members, 150 male and 97 female, almost 200 of these belonged only to the life assurance fund. Clearly, burial costs were the most pressing concern of the day. It seems that, with Bishop Gillis becoming more involved in other projects and increasingly travelling abroad, the SVDP gradually absorbed the Holy Guild.

Quote

“deprived of the guiding hand that had fostered its existence (Gillis) it was dissolved and replaced by other confraternities annexed to the different parish churches”

History of St. Margaret’s Convent

Early Days in Edinburgh

In 1841 ,on one of his regular visits to Paris, Bishop Gillis had heard all about the Society, and may even have spoken to Bailly and Lallier. He had observed young men engaged in works of charity which were the means of saving many poor people from poverty and encouraging them in the practice of their religion. At the first Annual Festival of the Holy Guild of St. Joseph in 1843, Gillis presented a brief outline of the Brotherhood of St. Vincent de Paul, its remarkable growth and many good works. His admiration and enthusiasm for the Society must have impressed some of the Guild members, because it was from this group that the first Conference of the SSVP was founded. Eleven Guild members met on 25th May 1845 in the rooms of the Guild of St Joseph at 7 Hunter Square, Edinburgh. It is only fitting that their names are recorded for posterity.

*First president, James Augustine Stothert, advocate;
vice-president, James Fraser Gordon, writer to Signet;
secretary, John Chisholm;
treasurer, John Gordon Smith;*

Members

*Eneas R. MacDonnel, James Forrester (schoolmaster),
James Donlevy (schoolmaster),
George Dalrymple,
Donald MacLachlan (leather merchant),
James Maciver (clothier)
Samuel Philips (student)*

The Conference was named St. Patrick's, although it comprised the parishes of St. Mary's and St. Patrick's, and was aggregated on 11th April 1851.

First Scottish Conference

At this time, Edinburgh was divided into two parishes with two churches; St. Mary's in Broughton Street and (slightly later) St. Patrick's in Lothian Street.

The 1840s in Scotland were the years of Irish immigrants and “hungry forties”, with a crying need for those in better circumstances to help the poor, unjustly treated and often sick people trying to eke out a living in Scotland. Each member had to promise to receive the sacraments regularly and to recite every night the Litany of St Loretto, one Our Father, one Hail Mary and the Prayer of St Vincent de Paul.

Edinburgh and Leith were divided into districts, each of them under the care of two or more members who would visit, at least once a week, every case on their list. They would receive all new applications for relief and consider these at the weekly Conference meeting. By 1846, there were eighteen members and over fifty Honorary Members and Benefactors who contributed donations of money, clothes, bedding, books, provisions and coal for the use of the poor. Interestingly, the address of the Conference is listed in the Catholic Directory of 1846 as Halls of the Holy Gild of St. Joseph, 7 Hunter Square, Edinburgh.

Giving Charity

Their main task was to visit the homes of the poor and sick, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, pray at their deathbeds and follow their remains to the cemetery. It was this more than anything else which impressed the non-Catholics in the city. They also found time to instruct children and adults in the faith. Much of their income came from the pockets of the brothers themselves through their weekly Secret Collection and from Benefactors, Catholic and non-Catholics alike. Two non-Catholics gifted the handsome sum of sixty pounds to the Conference “on condition that the brothers and the poor pray for their intentions.” In the parishes of St Mary’s and St Patrick’s, half the collection taken up at the doors of the churches was given to the Conference. Soon, there were eighteen members and one aspirant preparing for a month to be taken into the Conference. Their ideals included a night shelter, the supervision of apprentices and an orphanage. In Edinburgh, an apprentices association was founded by the SSVP in 1854, and in 1858 an orphanage in South Bank, Canongate. A home for working boys was opened in Lauriston in 1889.

Growth of the SSVP in Scotland

The SSVP in Scotland is organised geographically in line with the Catholic Dioceses. The history is presented here in the same way.

In the 1840's (when the Society was first established in Scotland) the country was divided into 3 ecclesiastical areas, each presided over by a Bishop as Vicar Apostolic. The Eastern District, centred on Edinburgh; the Western District, centred on Glasgow and the Northern District. The Restoration of the Hierarchy on the 4 March 1878 saw Scotland divided into The Province of St Andrews and Edinburgh, with a Metropolitan See and four Suffragan Sees of Aberdeen, Argyll and the Isles, Dunkeld and Galloway, and the Archdiocese of Glasgow directly subject to the Holy See. On the 25 May 1947, the Archdiocese of Glasgow was erected into a Province, with a Metropolitan See and two Suffragan Sees of Motherwell and Paisley.

St. Andrews and Edinburgh

Steady Growth

From 1845, St Patrick's conference remained intact and continued to serve the poor and needy in Edinburgh and Leith. However, as was the case in Paris, within five years the work was becoming too much to cope with, especially financially. The first Conference was divided into two Conferences, named after the parishes, St. Mary's , Broughton Street and St. Patrick's, which met in the new clergy house of St Patrick, Brown Square, and in 1855 a third Conference was established in Leith. A Council of Direction was set up to monitor the work of both city Conferences (but not Leith). In 1859, a new Conference was founded in the old St Cuthbert's, later moved to Sacred Heart in Lauriston.

The Council of Direction suffered the same malaise as its namesake in Paris and was replaced in 1867 by Edinburgh (Eastern District) Superior Council, under the presidency of Bro. Smith-Sligo.

Golden Jubilee Celebration

Over the 18th and 19th August 1895, the Golden Jubilee of the first conference was celebrated in Edinburgh Diocese. On Sunday, 18th August, special Celebration Masses were held in all the churches throughout Edinburgh, Portobello and Musselburgh. That same evening, a grand celebration took place in the St. Mary Street Hall, at which the Archbishop of St. Andrew's and Edinburgh presided. The next day, after a Mass celebrated in Edinburgh by Archbishop McDonald at 8.30am, a well attended pilgrimage to Dunfermline took place, leaving Waverly Station at 10.15am.

20th Century

By 1900, there were 13 Conferences in the Archdiocese – 6 in Edinburgh, plus Musselburgh, Broxburn, Dunfermline, Stirling, Falkirk, Denny and Kilsyth..

The Society spread gradually reaching 27 Conferences by the end of the Second World War. As new parishes were established a further 38 Conferences were established by 1989. Since 1990, there have been a further 6 new Conferences started.

Widening horizons

In the last 50 years, Special Projects have been set up to tackle problems which persist despite the Welfare State. The recycling of furniture was pioneered as early as 1962 and still continues through project in Fife plus partnerships with other agencies in Edinburgh and Stirlingshire. Since the late 1980s, a soup kitchen has operated in Edinburgh in cooperation with the Jericho Benedictines. For the last 40 years, thanks to the joint efforts of members throughout the Archdiocese, we have offered families caravan holidays in East Lothian and Fife. Conferences now recognise that loneliness, loss of mobility and isolation from family members affect people regardless of their financial circumstances. Social events like Christmas parties and outings for older people in our communities supplement our visiting. We care for people's spiritual needs by transporting people to our special Masses.

Glasgow

In 1848, the first Glasgow conference was established in Glasgow. It was based in St Andrew's Church, Clyde Street. Its President was John Bums Bryson, a solicitor who had been responsible for the foundation of the Scottish Temperance Association in 1839. He had joined the Society in Edinburgh, before returning to the west. The treasurer was Hugh Margey of Great Clyde Street; the vice-president was David Rodgers of Anderston

and the secretary, John Trainer of Clyde Terrace. In the first decade, fourteen additional conferences were established, with 131 active members and a further thirteen in the second 10 years. By 1872, there were thirty conferences, ranging from Glasgow to Girvan and Rothesay to Airdrie.

Charitable works

The needs of the growing city, packed with Irish immigrants and full of poverty and need and disease was immense. In addition to visiting needy homes, members assisted boys to find employment and helped in basic education, secular and religious, in night schools. Destitute and orphaned Catholic children of the Poor Houses were found good homes where they received a “Catholic upbringing in the Faith.” In 1887, a Day Refuge was opened for the large number of poor children engaged in selling newspapers and the members helped these poor waifs, who eked out an existence with pennies from papers, to find better jobs and roofs over their heads. Later, in 1892 a Night Shelter was added.

Penny Dinner Scheme

In the late 19th century Catholic schools were outwith the state education system, receiving no funding or support from the government: families had to pay. Prices ranged from one to four pennies per week, and such was the hardship faced by this community that even one penny a week was difficult to spare. Those who could not afford to pay the school fees often had the costs met by the local St Vincent De Paul Parish Conference. The penny dinner scheme, the brainchild of Brother Walfrid, a Marist headmaster of a local school, was set up in 1883 to feed school children at St Mary’s for a contribution of one penny, and those who could not afford to pay were still fed, thanks to contributions from the parish SSVP conference and other donors. The scheme was extended to cover the school costs of needy children throughout the East End of Glasgow and also provide a hot meal every day. By the mid-1850s, the scheme providing over 1000 meals a week and further funds were needed.

Celtic F.C.

At the same time, football was rapidly growing in popularity across Scotland, with games drawing regular crowds who all paid an entrance fee. A Marist Brother, Walfrid, saw this as an opportunity to raise funds for free education, the penny dinner scheme and other charitable causes throughout the East End of Glasgow, all with the aim of alleviating the terrible poverty of the area, and helping Irish Catholic immigrants to help themselves. In 1886, Brother

Walfrid invited Hibernian FC, the most popular Catholic team at the time, to play a charity match in Glasgow. A series of charity matches followed, and Brother Walfrid saw the potential for Glasgow to have a full time Catholic team. On 6 November 1887 in St Mary's Church, Carlton, Celtic FC was founded:

“The main objective of the club is to supply the East End conferences of the St. Vincent De Paul Society with funds for the maintenance of the “Dinner Tables” of our needy children in the Missions of St Mary's, Sacred Heart, and St. Michael's. Many cases of sheer poverty are left unaided through lack of means. It is therefore with this principle object that we have set afloat the Celtic.”

Brochure announcing formation of Celtic FC early 1888.

A Children's Refuge

Archbishop Eyre wanted to found a children's refuge, and, in 1887, this work was undertaken by the Daughters of Charity in Whitevale Street, with funds from the Society. Twenty percent of the Society's monies was directed to this home, until eight years later it was cut to ten percent, the other ten going to the working boys' homes. The Catholic Enquiry Office and the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society in their turn were to be helped by the Society in years when their needs were great. A circular letter from Archbishop Eyre in 1898 states, “Nothing would give us greater pleasure than the knowledge that each of our missions had a conference of St Vincent de Paul”.

Throughout the rest of the 19th century the work in Glasgow expanded – as well as the visitation of the poor in their homes other works were quickly to spring up according to the needs of Glasgow and the West of Scotland. It was not only the practical needs of the poor that the Society worked to alleviate – the Society also became well known for the way that we served those who passed away. The burying of the dead if they could not afford a funeral and the reciting of the Rosary were just some of the ways that dignity was shown to the deceased. Some Conferences to the present day are still involved in the funerals of their parishioners.

Celebrations

On 11th September in 1898, the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of the first Glasgow conference was held and was celebrated by Archbishop Eyre with Mass in the Cathedral, a Conference in St Alphonsus' Hall, Charlotte Street, and a rally in the St Andrew's Halls, Kent Road. To allow members to



attend the 1933 Centenary Celebrations in Paris, a six day excursion was arranged by the Glasgow Superior Council and coordinated from the Council offices at 92 Dunlop Street. Travel by train and boat; all meals and hotel accommodation; gratuities to hotel staff; and all for the Inclusive Fare of £15 -7s- 6d.

20th Century

A Boys Guild was started in 1913 to take care of boys who had left school until they were 18 years of age. It provided sports, such as football and swimming, as well as various other activities; a summer camp, annual church parade, various educational ventures.

In 1948 the Archdiocese of Glasgow was split into 3 parts; Glasgow, Motherwell and Paisley. After this separation, in Glasgow with the building of new estates and the removal of the previous tenements there was an increase in the number of parishes which in turn increased the number of Conferences throughout the early post-war period. The works of the Society developed throughout this period and there was a change away from homes for boys, etc., which had been established in the 19th century, to new works such as the Ozanam Centre, established in 1975 to provide clothing for homeless men, as well as spiritual support.

Later Developments

By the start of the 21st century there were a number of changes taking place within the Archdiocese. The Furniture project ceased after it was decided that this project had run its course. The shop which had been opened at the same time as the Furniture Project continued. The Ozanam centre, which has moved now on a number of occasions to new premises, has changed from its initial work of providing clothing to homeless men to doing the same for women also and operating a Sunday lunch club. A caravan project was also started to provide free holidays in Saltcoats. The newest project is the Rendu Group which has been developed to learn sign language mainly to assist the Catholic deaf community at Mass – particularly the weekly Archdiocesan Mass for the Deaf. As like all our other projects, the Rendu Group has developed and the members have received accredited training for British Sign Language. Also at the start of the 21st century an Ozanam Talk and Week have been instituted to promote both the life and cause of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the works of the Society.

Motherwell

The first Conference was established at St. Margaret's, Airdrie on 30/07/1854 and a further 8 Conferences were formed by 1890. There were no further Conferences formed between 1890 and 1899. There were 18 Conferences formed between 1900 and 1935, and another 10 Conferences formed between 1940 and 1949. A further 17 Conferences were formed between 1950 and 1959, and between 1960 and 1976 a further 17 Conferences were formed. The last Conference to be formed was St. John Ogilvie in Blantyre in 1980.

A large Legacy was left to Motherwell SSVP in 1992, for the Poor of the Diocese, by Fr. Lawrence Kenny, who was the Parish Priest of St. Edward's, Airdrie and he left the magnificent sum of £97,000. This Legacy helped the Society to purchase 3 caravans at Port Seton, outside Edinburgh, and to purchase vans for the Furniture Project, which has been going over 25 years. We trust that we used the legacy wisely and have done as requested and helped the poor of the Motherwell Diocese.

Jim Lynch started the Ozanam Clubs, with the first club opening in Viewpark in May 1989 and this was followed by Hamilton in 1991 and Carfin in 1992. The Ozanam clubs in Viewpark and Carfin continue to do great work with adults and children with special needs, in addition to providing a welcome respite for their family/carers when the Clubs are in session.

Paisley

In October 1948 Bishop Black established a Paisley Diocesan Central Council of St. Vincent de Paul. Prior to this date Renfrewshire, as existed at that time, formed part of the Archdiocese of Glasgow. The present Diocese of Paisley encompasses the areas of Inverclyde, Renfrew and East Renfrewshire District Councils. The first Conferences were formed during 1853, being St. Mirin's, Paisley and St. Mary's, Greenock both of which have served continuously to this day. Further Conferences were formed throughout Barrhead, Greenock, Port Glasgow, Paisley, Renfrew, Johnstone and Neilston and by 1900 there were 10 Conferences existing.

The Society continued to grow during the first half of the 1900s and by 1948 the total number had reached 19, stretching from Gourock in the west through Greenock and as far as Clarkston. Conferences also sprang up in the villages of Bishopton, Houston, Howwood and Linwood. At present there are 37 active Conferences. The latter part of the 1900s saw massive growth in housing developments with new parishes being set up and new Conferences being formed. All the major towns saw new Conferences formed and Newton Mearns welcomed St. Cadoc's to help in that area.

Special Works Conferences

Paisley Diocese has four Special Works Conferences: Holy Spirit, Inverclyde, who support Jericho in their drug rehabilitation work; St. Vincent Hospice, Johnstone, who provide support for those who care for the terminally ill; Our Lady of the Wayside, Paisley, who run the Paisley Ozanam Centre to feed the homeless and distribute clothing and Rosalie Rendu, Paisley, who run the Paisley Ozanam Club for those with special needs.

Celebration

St. John the Baptist Conference, Port Glasgow held a 150th anniversary Mass of thanksgiving on Sunday 18 March 2007. The principal concelebrant was the Right Reverend Philip Tartaglia, Bishop of Paisley and a large number of former priests of the parish were present. St. John's is also unique in having a ladies auxiliary group, formed in 1891. The group promote social functions and raise funds for the Conference.

Aberdeen

The SSVP started in Aberdeen with the setting up of St Mary's Cathedral Conference on 7th August 1914, followed a few days later by St Peter's Church Conference. The first meeting place of the St Mary's Conference was a small room in the Cathedral, later converted into the ladies' toilets. We were then moved into the very small works sacristy for a number of years. Finally, at the suggestion of Fr. Chalmers, we gratefully moved into the large basement of the Chapel House.

The Society moved fairly slowly through this Diocese and on the 23rd June 1935 St Mary's in Inverness at long last opened their Conference, followed by St Joseph's in Aberdeen on 6th March 1938. In 1955 a Conference was raised in the Sacred Heart Church, Torry and named after Blessed John Ogilvie. On 23rd November 1980 a Conference was opened in St Ninian's Church, Inverness, followed by the opening of St Sylvester's Conference in Elgin on 17th June 1982. Ten years later another two Conferences were raised, St Joachim's in Wick on 4th March 1990 and one day later St Anne's Conference in Thurso. In September 1999 St Mary's Conference in Nairn was opened. Until very recently, St. Mary's Nairn managed the National Caravan which was located at a beautiful site in Lochloy Park. The caravan annually hosted holidays for families in need, with around 80 guests attending. For some time now, students from Aberdeen University have been assisting St. Mary's Cathedral Conference with the distribution of clothes, hot food and food parcels.

Argyll and the Isles

The first Conference to open in Argyll and the Isles was St Mary's, Rothesay on 20th November 1864, which is sadly now closed. It wasn't until 55 years later that St Kieran's, Campbeltown opened on 6th July 1919. Another 66 years later and St John and St Mary's, Caol opened. The last Conference to open was St Columba's Cathedral, Oban on 1st December 1993.

Dunkeld

Perth and Dundee

The first Conference in the diocese was formed in Perth, at St John the Baptist Church, on 6th January 1861 to serve the poor within the city of Perth. The work of the Society quickly spread within the Diocese and 19th April 1863 saw the founding of the next Conference at St Andrew's Cathedral, Dundee. Sadly, this Conference ceased to exist early in the 21st century due to the age and illness of existing members and failure to recruit new members. Four years went by before the next Conference was established at St Mary Our Lady of Victories Church, Dundee on 15th July 1867. Following a gap of over twenty years a new Conference was formed at the Immaculate Conception Church, Dundee on 18th January 1889. Two years later the fourth Conference to be formed within the City of Dundee was founded on 4th July 1891 at St Patrick's Church. Sadly, this Conference too has folded in recent years through lack of members. Further conferences were Sts Peter and Paul's Church, Dundee on 1st 1932 and St Francis Conference, Dundee was formed on 10th September 1933.

Elsewhere in the Diocese

The first Conference to be formed outwith Perth and Dundee Cities was at St Mungo's Church, Alloa. This was founded on 1st January 1896. There then followed a gap of over ten years before the next Conference was set up at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, Broughty Ferry, on 14th November 1909. A Conference was formed at St Serf's Church, High Valleyfield on 1st May 1932. The only Conference to be established during the 1940s was at St John Mary Vianney Church, Alva on 1st January 1946. The start of the 1950s saw the formation of a Conference at Holy Family Church, Dunblane on 2nd July 1950. The post war years saw a rapid increase in the number of Conferences formed throughout the diocese. With the splitting of many of the older parishes and the building of Catholic Churches within the housing estates created by the building of social housing in the 1950s to the 1980s, a total of fifteen new Conferences were formed between 1951 and 1987.

Recent Events

The start of the 21st century saw the formation of the first Youth Conference

at Dundee University. This Conference was formed in 2004 and was granted aggregation in December 2006. The members of this Conference are available mainly during term time but those who reside locally continue their involvement within the Conference throughout the year. As Dundee University stands adjacent to St Andrew's Cathedral, the Conference members respond to the needs of the poor within that parish following the closure of the Cathedral Conference. Members also help to run a soup kitchen for homeless people two evenings per week and visit residents in care homes in their area.

Over the years members of the Society within the Dunkeld Diocese have continued their charitable and spiritual work through the visitation of the sick in their homes and during visits to hospitals and nursing homes. In addition, visits to the housebound have helped to maintain contact with parishioners who live alone or are unable to attend church services or parish social events. Many of our Conferences organise parties, day outings, lunch clubs and other social events for our elderly parishioners. Other activities have included furniture projects run by the Dundee, Perth and Clackmannan Group Councils. provision of good quality accommodation to homeless people in Perth. The Ozanam Club in Dundee providing an opportunity for children and young adults with disabilities to meet weekly where games, social interaction and outings are encouraged under the supervision of volunteers, and caravan holidays provided by the Dundee Group in two caravans sited at Arbroath.

Galloway

The first Conference to open in Galloway was St Andrew's, Dumfries on 2nd February 1862. Early records of the Conference show in 1878, the sum of £34-4s-6d given in assistance to poor families due to lack of employment and the harsh winter; in 1893, records show regular expenditure on the provision of clogs for children. The next Conference to open was St Margaret's, Ayr on 1st November 1868, closely followed by St Joseph's, Kilmarnock on 1st April 1869. Between 1872 and 1899 a further four Conferences opened in Girvan, Kilbirnie, Cumnock and Stranraer. During the 20th century a further 28 Conferences opened, with a spate of those opening in the late 50s, early 60s. The last Conference to open was St Anne's, Mossblown on 5th March 1990. Though one of the smaller Dioceses, Galloway Diocesan Council has provided four National Presidents of the Society in Scotland (covering 19 of the 24 years from 1996 to 2020); a Treasurer General and also members of the General Assembly and International Executive Committee of the Council General International.

International Growth

Internationally, the rapid growth of the Society has been compared by Pope Francis to “a mustard seed.” From seven founder members in 1833, there are now over 800,000 in 154 countries.

Year	Conferences	Members
1860	2,500	50,000
1913	8,000	133,000
1933	12,000	200,000
1983	38,000	750,000
2020	47,000	800,000+

The dream of Ozanam has been fulfilled

“ I would like to embrace the world in a network of charity.”

The rapid international growth of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul from its beginnings in Paris in the 19th century certainly owes much to the youthful enthusiasm of its early members who carried the Vincentian inspiration and charism across the oceans. Two Scottish examples are Charles O’Neill and Alexander Wilmot.

Charles O’Neill

Charles Gordon O’Neill (1828-1900), engineer and Society member, was born in Glasgow. He trained as an engineer and graduated as a member of the Institution



Charles O'Neill

of Civil Engineers For some time he was chief assistant in the Public Works Office, Glasgow. On graduation he joined the Society of St Vincent de Paul, He was Conference Secretary at Dumbarton in 1851 and by 1863 was the second President of the Superior Council of Glasgow and a member of the Council General in Paris.

He resigned in August 1863 and emigrated to New Zealand where he became. In time, provincial engineer at Wellington He planned and supervised the construction of Wellington's tramway system, and also the water-supply systems for Auckland. In Wellington he was active in the Society of St Vincent de Paul and in 1876 founded its first conference to be aggregated in New Zealand.

He is credited with establishing the Society in New Zealand. In 1881 O'Neill moved to Sydney and, with aid from the Marist Fathers, founded on 24 July the first Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Australia to be firmly established, at St Patrick's, Church Hill.. Recognised as head of the Society in Sydney, he became first President of the Particular Council of Sydney on 28 January 1884, and is widely regarded as the founder of the Society in Australia.

The life of Charles Gordon O'Neill was celebrated in November 2016 at the official opening of Charles O'Neill Memorial Walk at Rookwood Cemetery.

Charles O'Neill Walk is positioned close to Charles' final resting place and provides a quiet contemplative place to pray and learn more about an extraordinary man who did so much for the people of Sydney in the late 19th century. The celebrations finished in December with the Society's Annual Celebration Mass at St Patrick's Church, the home of the first St Vincent de Paul Society Conference.

The Church features a stained glass window that was a gift from Charles O'Neill in recognition of the work of Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Outgoing President, Ray Reynolds, said "Charles O'Neill was a brilliant young visionary who was torn between professional ambition and a desire to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ to serve the poor. Charles sought a more authentic Christian model of charity that was unobtrusive, non-judgemental and respected the dignity of the poor. It is this vision we have proudly carried forward to this day"



Gravestone of Alexander Wilmot

Alexander Wilmot

The first St Vincent de Paul conference in South Africa was established in 1856 at St Mary's in Cape Town by Alexander Wilmot aged just 20. Born in Edinburgh in 1836, he had moved to Glasgow to study at the university.

The South African branch of the Society was founded by this young Scotsman aged just 20 (like Frédéric Ozanam when he founded the SSVP in Paris in

1833). Wilmot was a committed Vincentian, thoroughly familiar with the work of Frédéric Ozanam. Wishing to continue his work with the SSVP, which had begun in the country of his birth, he obtained permission from Msgr. Griffith (First Bishop of Cape Town) to form a Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul at St. Mary's Cathedral on 17 November 1856.

From there, the Society's growth followed the path Wilmot himself took in professional terms working for the British government, a second conference was formed at Port Elizabeth, then a third at Grahamstown in 1859. 164 years later, the SSVP in South Africa now has 247 Conferences with over 2500 members and volunteers.

National Council of Scotland

By 1867, both Edinburgh (Eastern district) and Glasgow (Western District) had Superior Councils. For long enough, indeed right up to 1968, several papers were given, advocating one Superior Council for Scotland. At a Delegates Meeting 1887, a paper was read proposing the amalgamation of the two Superior Councils, but the clergy present objected, and the idea was dropped. Again, in Edinburgh in September 1898, a similar paper was read by Brothers eager to show the advisability of erecting a Superior Council for Scotland. A committee was even formed, but with no positive outcome.

It was slow to come, but come it did; in June of 1970, the National Council was established. This centralisation allowed a more efficient response to the splitting of the Archdiocese of Glasgow into Glasgow, Motherwell and Paisley Dioceses, and the enlargement of the Diocese of Galloway.

There was now one National Council, and each Diocese had a Diocesan Council. Superior Councils and Particular Councils were a thing of the past: Group Councils continued in larger areas, but all fall under the National and Diocesan Councils; a structure which aligns itself perfectly to the Church's own basic structures. Over the years, members of the National Council have contributed to the international governance of the Society as Treasurer General, members of the General Assembly and members of the International Executive Committee.

Presidents of Council of Scotland

John McLaughlin	June 1970 to December 1971
Dr A Brannan	December 1971 to March 1977
Buchan Chalmers	March 1977 to March 1982
Francis Cooney	March 1982 to March 1987
Jim Robb	March 1987 to April 1991
Hugh Scott	April 1991 to June 1996
John Murphy	August 1996 to April 1999
Ian McTurk	April 1999 to April 2005
Jim Delahunt	April 2005 to June 2008
Michael Balfour	August 2008 to February 2014
Jim McKendrick	February 2014 to February 2019
Danny Collins	February 2019-

150th Anniversary National Celebrations

On 27th May 1995, the National Council together with the Society in Scotland attended a 150th Anniversary Celebration Mass in St. Patrick's Cowgate, Edinburgh. The Principal Celebrant was Keith Patrick O'Brien, Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh. St. Patrick's has a long and significant history, involving many aspects of Catholic life. Built in 1774 as an Episcopal church, it became, in 1818, a Presbyterian church. It was purchased by Bishop James Gillis in 1856 for £4000 and became the parish church in the Old Town. As the first Scottish Conference was named St. Patrick's (although working in the parishes of St. Patrick's and St. Mary's), St. Patrick's is often seen as the home of the first conference. The National Shrine of the Venerable Margaret Sinclair is housed here.



Margaret was born, baptised and went to school in the parish. Since 2003, her remains have rested in St. Patrick's. Hibernian F.C. was founded in the parish; a plaque on the wall of the church, acknowledging this fact, was presented by Hibs Supporters Club.

After Mass, the Archbishop kindly provided a small reception for those involved in the organisation of the National Celebration.



Archbishop O'Brien and guests

St. Vincent's Centre Langbank

Holiday home for needy children

Langbank has a special place in the national history of the Society . Opened in 1921 it was meant to give holidays to needy children from the West of Scotland and was run by the Daughters of Charity. Between 1921 and its closure as a home in 1961, Langbank gave fortnightly holidays to 75,000 children, many of whom had never seen a white sheet or a green tree before.

The work in the 1920s and 1930s grew so speedily that, the sum of £35,000 was spent enlarging the Home – first with a play hall on top of the greenhouse foundation topped with a dormitory; then with a new wing in 1926 with dormitories and a refectory and kitchen; and finally in 1931 with the addition of a beautiful and homely little stone-built church at a cost of a mere £11,000. Langbank Home had to close for the six years of the Second World War, during which the chapel and play park suffered extensive damage. The work resumed after the war but, by 1961, the local authorities had eventually assumed responsibility for much of the holiday home work.

St. Vincent's College

At this time the Society handed Langbank over to the Bishops of Scotland who were seeking an extension to Blairs College, the National Junior Seminary in Aberdeen, which had, for a number of years, struggled to cope with the fast-increasing number of applicants. In March 1961, Fr. Charles Renfrew, Procurator of Blairs College, was appointed Rector of St. Vincent's College. He took up residence on 16 March to commence the necessary works



Fr. Charles Renfrew

of adaptation and renovation. The first students arrived on 31st August, 68 boys from all over Scotland. The Daughters of Charity remained in the College to tend to the material needs of the students. During the sixteen years of the College's existence, the link was never severed between Langbank and the Society, whose annual gatherings there are remembered with affection by hundreds of brothers and sisters. Also, Fr. (now Bishop) Charles Renfrew, was from 1974 until his death in 1992, an inspirational and much loved National Spiritual Director of the Society in Scotland.

St. Vincent's Centre

In 1977 the function of St Vincent's changed again. Economic factors prevented its continuation as a College and it was leased back to the Society as a centre for the alleviation of poverty in every sense. No work of charity was foreign to St Vincent's with the elderly, alcoholics, handicapped children, one-parent families, school retreats and the poor in general being guests. The centre was used extensively by the Society and other groups for retreats, meetings and Conferences. In 1992, the Vincentian Volunteers were formed at the centre by the Daughters of Charity. Since then over 200 young men and women have dedicated a year of their lives to the service of the poor and needy throughout UK.

Special Works Conference

From 1977, the Special Works Conference diligently worked to keep the Centre running, their main fund-raising event being the annual Summer Fete, which was the highlight of the Vincentian calendar, despite the rain. Because of the changing demands on the services provided at St Vincent's Centre and the deteriorating fabric of the buildings, it was with great reluctance that the National Council decided in 1994 that the Langbank site should be closed. In June 1994, a final Mass of Thanksgiving was held to mark the closure of the Centre.

Women in the Society

Women were practically absent from the University and did not take part in the creation of the Society. However, despite the existence of the Ladies of Charity, founded for young women by Saint-Vincent himself and Louise de Marillac, women wished to join the Society and follow the rules set by the founders. The first female Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded in Bologna (Italy), January 10, 1856, by Celestina Scarabelli. In 1855, in the city of Bologna, there was a serious outbreak of cholera, and to help families affected by the disease and those in hospitals. However, at that time, due to a rule of the Society, men could not visit single women, especially if they were young. The regional president, Antonio Costa, shared this problem with Celestina Scarabelli, who was well read and noted for her charitable work. She offered to recruit women to visit and assist the sick women. The commitment of these women was much appreciated and Antonio offered to create a women's Conference, following the example of the conferences of men.

Global development

Until 1963, women were organised separately throughout the world as the 'Women's Society of St Vincent de Paul', with headquarters in Bologna, Italy. It was founded in 1856 to render charitable aid to the afflicted in matters which men could not handle, such as the care of widows, orphan girls and mothers with small families. It took more than 100 years until both branches, male and female, were merged on October 20, 1967; thus creating the Council General International (CGI).

Scotland

This merger also led to a change in the Rule. From 1968, women could join the Society on the same basis as men. The resultant influx of female members removed the all-male ethos of the Society and revitalised it. Over the last fifty years, women have become an integral and invaluable part of the Society; enlivening and sustaining it with an unique perspective and unbridled enthusiasm. The Society has succeeded in the last forty years, to a large extent, by attracting more women. Indeed, in 2019, women accounted for just over 50% of the Scottish membership and have filled offices at Conference, Diocesan Council and National Council level.

Twinning

Worldwide solidarity

For 45 years the SSVP Twinning Scheme has enabled the Society in developing countries to thrive and grow, strengthened by the spiritual, financial and moral support the members have received. What is a very small sum of money for a Conference in Scotland can make a vast difference in a poor country. Whilst the major part of Twinning in terms of Conference to Conference Twinning is currently with India and South Africa, the link with Hungary is also growing. The Society in each country shares the same Spirit that guides us in our work for the poor and each country benefits from the encouragement that Twinning offers.

Prayer is the key aspect of any successful Twinning. The promise to pray for the Twin is really what sets Twinning apart from a secular exercise.

Correspondence letters are exchanged regularly, and if Conferences have access to the internet, they also communicate in this way. Language and literacy can sometimes make communication more difficult, **but patience is always exercised.**

Financial Support shows the tangible evidence of our sharing. This helps our overseas Brothers and Sisters to increase their efforts to overcome the poverty in their own parishes and communities. In 2019, Scotland gave £34,620 to support 279 Indian conferences and £12,600 to support 105 conferences in South Africa. In addition, £17,810 was provided to finance 20 Indian Projects. Also, we responded to International Appeals to help with disaster relief in Indonesia (£44,438) and Kerala, India (£46,316). Since its establishment in 2017, Scotland has contributed £54,465 to the CGI Solidarity Fund.

Quote

“Christianity is not about ideas but about deeds inspired by love”

Frederic Ozanam

Youth

The Society has always taken Youth very seriously. Not just because young people are our future, have ability for empathy and are filled with strength and determination; but also, because at our heart, we are an organization started by a young person. Blessed Frederic Ozanam was only 19 years old when he was stirred to action by the desire to help those in poverty in Paris of 1833. His youthful spirit and that of his companions enabled them to go to the poor of Paris. They overcame every barrier in their way which led to the creation of one of the most widespread charities the world has known.

This spirit of youth is to be cherished and nurtured at every stage. The appointment of a permanent Youth Coordinator showed the value placed by the Society on the need to engage with our young people across Scotland. The remit of the Youth Coordinator is to engage and liaise with schools and colleges across the country to be a direct link to the heart of SSVP Scotland. They provide initial information packs, maintain social media and make visits to groups who are starting out or maybe have special events and would like a visit or participation from National Office. They are there for practical needs too such as sending out badges, maintaining records and being a there at the end of the phone for any questions or queries from teachers.

Mini Vinnies

We begin involving our youth in the work of charity in Primary school. Our Mini Vinnies begin from Primary 4 (age 8) At this point they learn about St Vincent and Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the way they treated others. They look at ways of reaching out both within school and out in their local community. The ideas they have for ways to provide company for the lonely and fundraise for the poor constantly amaze their teachers and their commitment to the Vincentian values is to be admired. They enjoy the camaraderie of belonging to Mini Vinnies and get to know children from other classes and indeed other schools when they have joint projects. Our Mini Vinnie days have become a real highlight in SSVP Youth calendar. We bring together groups of pupils, teachers and Conference members for a day of sharing ideas, celebrating success and learning together around a chosen

theme. It is a chance to feel that the work of each group is connected to others and in turn is part of the worldwide Vincentian family. Many pupils have grandparents who have been members of SSVP and this can be a reason why they want to become a Mini Vinnie. In this way we are ensuring the legacy of the Society is passed down through the generations so that those in need will always have somewhere to turn.

Secondary School

Our Secondary pupils continue their journey as key members of our Vincentian family. Being older in years means they can participate more fully in terms of helping at Foodbanks, Homeless dinners, and working with Furniture projects. They are often able to combine SSVP work with their Catholic National Curriculum learning on social issues and Justice and Peace. A new initiative is to have the older pupils working with new first years as they move from Mini Vinnies to the Secondary programme. This ensures continuation of the feeling of belonging to our Society.

1833 Groups

Beyond school life we have our 1833 groups for students who have left the school system and want to have their own group which fits in with their commitments. These groups are often based at universities but in some cases can be attached to a parish. Here our young adult members are able to carry out many acts of charity in the community and often volunteer to work within schools with our Mini Vinnie and Secondary groups. This can provide valuable work experience for them as they prepare to start out in their careers. Our hope is that the experiences they have gained will see them return as full members and so carry on the essential work of our Society.

Our work with external organisations broadens the experiences of our young people. Justice and Peace Scotland are one such organization who work alongside SSVP within Scottish schools and often attend our Mini Vinnie and Youth days to help the young people learn about social justice across the world.

Going Forward

Going forward our mission for SSVP Youth is to form as many new Mini Vinnie and Secondary Youth groups across Scotland as possible. We currently have 66 but there is much room to grow and much work still to be done. Our hope is that one day, we have an SSVP Youth group in every Catholic school in Scotland. Only with the support of our wonderful teachers and Conference members can we achieve this goal. With the intercession of our Patron St Vincent and Blessed Frederic Ozanam may God guide us to this outcome.



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