

## A Year of Suffering. A Year of Love.

Dear Friend of St. Vincent de Paul,

Sometimes my friends or family will ask me how it's going at work and I'll exclaim, "We're in the misery business, and business is great!" I know that sounds like a terrible thing to say, but in truth, therein is a great and beautiful paradox: The depth of our love is made possible by our experience and accompaniment of suffering.

You see this from your own experiences of childhood, friendship, marriage, or parenthood. Each of these has particular sufferings that sometimes make terrible messes in our lives, but the dirtiest soil is fertile ground for seeds of faith, hope, and love.

This special edition of *The Vincentian* is a diary of sorts, chronicling my experience of this past year of community disasters: Memorial Day tornadoes, the Oregon District shooting, and now the coronavirus pandemic. They have directly afflicted many of us at once, and that of course is on top of the "usual" individual sufferings that have affected or taken many lives. I want to share with you a glimpse of the many fruits of faith, hope, and love appearing amid the thorns and tangled vines of these stories.

You will read about John, his young son Johnny, and how the many lies of drug addiction got mixed up with the tornadoes; the Oregon District shooting endured by a staff member whose father was shot and died in his arms; and the coronavirus pandemic stoking fear on the front lines of homelessness.

At St. Vincent de Paul Society we are called to deep love through service and accompaniment of individuals in need, honoring and worshipping God through authentic relationships we cultivate with our neighbors and guests. Whether you are a volunteer, a staff member, or a financial supporter, or even if you simply spread the good news of our ministries, you are part of the fabric of love we continuously weave to affirm honor and respect for every human life in the Miami Valley.

Please pray for me, for our staff, for our volunteers, and for every individual we serve. Thank you for all you do in love. God bless you and your loved ones.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Michael E. Vanderburgh,  
Executive Director



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## Triple Tornado: Drugs, Homelessness, and Single Fatherhood



Tornado damage to an employee's home

About two weeks after the Memorial Day tornadoes I met John and his six-year-old son Johnny in the parking lot as I was headed into the office one evening. I asked them how they were doing, and John was understandably concerned that the shelter wasn't a good place for Johnny.

John said that he and Johnny had been living with his wife in Northridge until her drug addiction had drained all their savings and they became estranged; John and Johnny left for emergency shelter just before the EF-4 tornado struck their house. John didn't know where his wife was, and they had no home to return to.

As a father, my heart ached for John, and just a few days before I had made arrangements for temporary housing for tornado survivors. Within 48 hours John and Johnny moved into a temporary apartment, and my daughter Clare and I assisted them by purchasing kitchen necessities and food.

About 10 days later I received a call from the landlord that Johnny had called 911 because his dad collapsed in the hallway outside their apartment due to a drug overdose. It turns out that John had lied about their address and living circumstances in order to get a home for Johnny. I subsequently met John's mother, who said she sent them to shelter out of desperation because of John's drug addiction. She said that St. Vincent could care for them better than she could.

I've been turning these events over and over in my head since last summer. It makes me reflect on all the lies I have told myself and others in my lifetime and the possible consequences that may have escaped me.

I learned that Johnny was born drug addicted. His mother died from a drug overdose when he was just a few weeks old. And here he was at six years old, saving his dad's life with a call to 911. John just recently completed drug rehab, and Johnny is with his cousins. Please pray for them.

## Witness to Suffering: Dion Green

Just two weeks after the EF-4 tornado ripped up his Northridge home, Dion began work at our Gettysburg shelter for men. "I had to be around others in greater need," he later told me. He couldn't have imagined the personal suffering coming to him in the early hours of August 4, 2019. Derrick Fudge, Dion's father, was shot in front of him and died in his arms.

A few months later Dion told me, "I thought God was breaking me down. When I finally came back to work, I knew I needed to be with others at the lowest points of their life. We were there for each other."



Dion Green

Dion moved on from St. Vincent in February and is currently working on a book and a TedTalk. His witness to suffering is an inspiration to our mission. Thank you, Dion!

## Fight or Flight: Where Can We Go?

In late January I received the first indication from Ohio Emergency Management Agency that we might need to plan for COVID-19, but it was still a vague threat that didn't seem much more than a flu without a vaccine.

On March 5, a meeting that I was planning to attend in Washington, DC the following week was cancelled, and at the time that seemed like an overreaction. Finally, on Thursday, March 12, the reality of the COVID-19 crisis sank in, when Governor Mike DeWine announced school closures. The importance of social distancing and strict new sanitizing standards became center stage, but how on earth could that work in homeless shelters?

We were advised to isolate ourselves at home as much as possible, but what if your only home is with hundreds of other people in a dormitory? We needed a plan to get our highest-risk homeless guests out of shelter, not only to protect them but to provide sufficient social distancing. Many chronically ill and frail people live in our shelters.

Surely with the tens of thousands of serious infections expected to deluge our hospitals, area hotels wouldn't be an option. As time went on, however, the Ohio emergency management plan for hospitals focused on convention centers. I talked it over with Mike Parks at The Dayton Foundation, and he referred me to Jackie Powell at the Dayton Convention and Visitors Bureau. Jackie sprang into action, and after I visited several referrals, I met Patty Nagelkirk and Jerry Dehner, married business partners who had just opened the Moraine Red Roof Inn a few weeks earlier.

Patty is a social worker and Jerry is a business consultant, which turned out to be a great combination for the three of us feeling our way forward in this "new normal" of caring for homeless guests in a hotel. How beautiful it has been over these past two months to see the hotel staff and our shelter staff come together in hospitality, forming new and authentic relationships with each homeless man, woman, and child living in the hotel. The guests have included very physically frail older men and women, guests affected greatly by chronic mental illness, a very pregnant young lady who recently gave birth (in a hospital!) to a healthy baby, young and adult children with challenging autism, and a man terminally ill with cancer. It's been an honor to share our responsibility of care with Patty, Jerry, and their staff, all of whom have gone to extraordinary lengths of hospitality for our guests.



**Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA) generously helped us transport our guests and their belongings from both shelters to the hotel.**



**Patty Nagelkirk**

We will likely maintain 30-60 rooms through August. We are working with an architect to reconfigure our shelters so that we might permanently maintain social distancing for our guests and staff. My hope is that we will be able to finish this redesign project by September so that we are prepared for our likely seasonal increase in the number of guests, and so we can safely shelter without hotel rooms. Your continuing financial support makes that possible. Thank you!



St. Vincent de Paul  
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DRIVE DAYTON FORWARD

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### WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR GIFT OF GOODS?

We regularly use the household items you donate to help the people we serve in a number of ways. From clothes and toiletries for our shelter guests to furniture and appliances for families moving into their new homes, nothing you give to our mission is wasted and everything you give is appreciated.

### DONATION DROP-OFF

Donation of goods can be made any time to our 24/7 donations dock at 120 W. Apple Street. If you or your organization would like to host a collection drive, please visit [stvincentdayton.org/drives](http://stvincentdayton.org/drives)

### FURNITURE PICK UP

Please call 937.425.0592.

## Urgent Needs

**Our neighbors need a place to sit, eat, and sleep. We are in great need of furniture donations to satisfy these needs. Donations of beds, cribs, mattresses, sofas, living room chairs, end tables, and dining tables and chairs are much appreciated. For furniture pickup, please call 937.425.0592.**

### PERSONAL ITEMS NEEDED:

- Deodorant
- Soap – liquid or bar
- Sheets and sheet sets – all sizes, new or gently used
- Blankets – all sizes, new or gently used
- Bath towels and wash cloths – new or gently used

*For the most up-to-date information on the items needed to serve our guests and neighbors, visit [stvincentdayton.org](http://stvincentdayton.org) and “Donate Goods”.*

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### PRIVACY STATEMENT

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