

A Place to Belong

How encounters in shelter deepened Sophia's faith and taught her about community.



Sophia sees Christ in the guests she serves.

When Sophia graduated from the University of Dayton in 2023, she decided to do a year of service before heading off to medical school. Growing up Catholic, her faith inspired her desire and need to serve, as did the influences of her grandma, her mom, and Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, who served the poor in Sophia's hometown of Indianapolis.

She was drawn to working with the poor and especially children. When she toured St. Vincent de Paul, she says, "There was a young girl about four or five years old sitting down, swinging her legs, and just staring at the wall. I immediately knew this is where I was being called. I remember thinking, I want to be the one to read to her, I want to bring joy to her."

For the past year, Sophia has done just that for countless guests at the Women and Families Shelter. As part of the Health and Safety Advocacy team, she focuses on providing holistic care to the families staying in shelter. While guests work with case managers to find housing, Health and Safety Advocates accompany guests to help address their health needs and overall mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing.

"Our goal is ultimately to connect with our guests and to help connect them with services in the community," Sophia explains. She helps provide healthy activities for children like reading, coloring, and playing games on the playground. She also helps guests navigate the healthcare system to find appropriate care, connects them with life skills classes, and assists them with whatever else they might need – even clipping a guest's toenails when they could not reach them.

"It is all a reminder to be present," Sophia says. "It can be chaotic in shelter. There is always something to do, but when a guest comes to me, they are the priority. I drop what I am doing and focus on them to give them the care they need. I strive to see Jesus in each person. If I am not treating them with love, I'm not loving Christ as I should."

"I am also inspired by the faith of our guests," she says. "My faith has grown so much since I've been here. It's been a humbling experience. I had a bunch of preconceived notions about drug addiction and homelessness before coming here. Serving at St. Vincent de Paul has thrown all my old ideas out the window. To be able to sit down and be with our guests, those barriers were torn down. I see my family and friends in them. It is really all about community. At the basic level, we all just want to belong."



From the Executive Director



Through our ministries of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, our very humanity is celebrated every time we reach out to a hurting neighbor, a stranger with nowhere else to turn, or a child without clothing, food, or safe shelter. Together we show God's love through our care and accompaniment of over 100,000 people in the Miami Valley each year.

Dear Friend of St. Vincent de Paul,

This year I've been talking to civic groups about what I believe to be the solution to homelessness: Love One Another!

It's a simple expression, but among life's most difficult activities. It's not a government housing program, it's not a financially lucrative venture, it's not at all efficient, and it seldom gets the attention it should. After all, it is the centerpiece of Christian activity: knowing, loving, and serving God is our very purpose in life (Mt 22:37), and God challenges us to know, to love, and to serve each other (Mt 22:39), since we are all one body in Jesus Christ.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is built upon a radical faith in Love itself – God who dwells among us, who teaches us to tenderly accompany each other through every pain and suffering. We were made for Love, and our neighbors in need help us grow our faith in Love.

Thanks for your prayers, financial support, material support, volunteering, and for sharing the good news of St. Vincent de Paul Society with your family and friends!

Yours in Christ,

Michael

Michael E. Vanderburgh,
Executive Director

Gratitude Report: You Are Wonderful!

Thanks to Sugar Creek Presbyterian Church for their gift and spirit of service!

Last year, our friends at Sugar Creek Presbyterian generously gifted a new playground for children staying at St. Vincent's shelter. This gift came at the perfect time when the shelter served a record-high average of more than 100 children each night.

Even greater than the material gift itself, however, is the spirit with which it was given. The story begins when church services were halted at the start of Covid. The people at Sugar Creek looked for ways to be the church in the community. They found Christ in the men, women, and children staying at St. Vincent's shelters.

Their service evolved from casserole and linen drives, to prayerful in-person meal service, to a playground where church members can now host activities for children and families. Through each of these services, they, like thousands of our volunteers, offer real love and friendship to our neighbors. We are thankful!



The new playground is ready for children to enjoy!

Finding Peace in a Supportive Community

You helped Diamond find the stability and support she needed.

“I was in with the wrong crowd when I was 17,” Diamond says. “I traveled to Dayton from Cleveland with some friends, and I ended up getting arrested.” When she was released from prison, she decided to stay in Dayton for a fresh start.

This was easier said than done. She had grown up in foster care and spent most of her life bouncing around from home to home. Now that she was on her own with nowhere to go, she did what she knew: she bounced around between friends’ couches, the shelter, and the streets for more than a year.

Finally, when she was in a particularly difficult situation, Miami Valley Housing Opportunities connected her with housing. Now she has her own place within St. Vincent’s supportive housing. There, she has been able to stabilize and receive the support she needs.

“I feel proud that I have been able to stay here for five months and have improved,” she says. “I didn’t really have structure growing up. I wouldn’t know how to live if I was on my own. The staff here are so supportive. I never have to search for someone to talk to. The support here has helped me keep going. There are times when I want to give up, but they help.”

Your continued care lets us walk with Diamond and many others in our supportive housing ministries, ensuring they have what they need to keep going.



Diamond is proud of her success.

Sharing Their Resources to Help Their Neighbors

Skip and Jeannette give directly through their IRA to help their neighbors in need.

Those who give financially to St. Vincent de Paul’s mission have a significant impact on feeding, clothing, and sheltering their neighbors. Skip and Jeannette have been faithful donors for several decades, yet they say they wish they could do more.

“The people who work for St. Vincent do what we cannot,” they say. “We all need to share our talents and resources with one another. Many people could be in similar situations. It only takes losing a job and then having a major illness to be in serious financial difficulty.”

The couple started making contributions through United Way, but when they reached retirement, their financial advisor recommended they begin giving directly through their IRA. “It works very smoothly,” they say. “It reduces our taxable income. The money we give to St. Vincent goes further in helping those who need it.”

If you are at least 70 1/2, you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution through your IRA to a qualified nonprofit like St. Vincent de Paul. This means you do not have to pay taxes on the amount, and the money will go directly to feed, clothe, and shelter your neighbors in need! You can learn more on how to donate through your IRA at stvincentdayton.org/ira. Thank you for continuing to show your neighbors love with your financial support!



A gift through your IRA is easy and reduces your taxable income!



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DRIVE DAYTON FORWARD

The Vincentian Newsletter - Spring 2024



WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR GIFT OF GOODS?

We regularly use the household items you donate to help the people we serve. Shelter guests receive donated clothes and toiletries, and families moving into their new homes need furniture and appliances. Would you please make sure your furniture, appliances and household items are in clean and usable condition before donating? Thank you!

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

FURNITURE PICKUP

Please call 937.425.0592.



Please remember St. Vincent de Paul Society in your will.

Please call Michael Vanderburgh at (513) 257-6266 if you need assistance.

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The Dayton District Council of St. Vincent de Paul, growing in spirituality and friendship, provides Christ inspired, person-to-person support in an empowering effort to improve the lives of those in personal, spiritual, or material need.