

SPECIAL POINTS
OF INTEREST:

- Donations Benefit Reservation Families
- Vinnie's Hope
- Celebrating Experienced Workers: Roger Johnson

SVDP Donations Benefit Reservation Families

Margaret Kuznia is a long-time volunteer at the Minneapolis St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store on Lake Street. Due to her outreach, the store is able to supply goods on a quarterly basis to the White Earth Indian Reservation in northwest Minnesota, about 225 miles from the Twin Cities. The reservation is the home base of the White Earth Band of

Ojibwe, and about half the population on the reservation is non-Indian. The community struggles with high rates of unemployment and poverty. Margaret wrote this report on how she came to be involved:

In 1963, six little children, all from the same family, were separated from their parents and needed a home. My sister, Juliana, had no children of her own and decided to take them into her home. Social services gave special permission so Juliana could take all six children and not break up the family. The children were from the White Earth Indian Reservation.

Years later, in 2011, Ray Machete, a member of the Knights of Columbus in Lino Lakes, MN, was looking for assistance with collecting household items for people who lived on the nearby reservation. Because of my family connection, I said I would help gather some

of the necessary items. Since I volunteer at the SVdP thrift store, I asked the manager, Wayne Bugg, if we could be part of this mission. Wayne gave permission to prepare shipments to be sent every three months.

The Knights of Columbus collects from many organizations that help fulfill multiple needs at the reservation. The SVdP store donates bedding and kitchen wares. White Earth also asked for computer systems, and over the years we have supplied them with several dozen. They are warmly received. The White Earth office uses many of the computer systems, and others are provided to individuals.

In August 2018, we sent seven large boxes to the reservation. Thirty-two families received the supplies with gratitude. The next delivery will be scheduled very soon.



Margaret Kuznia packing items for White Earth

Who's Hungry?

Hunger. The experience of hunger hurts, both physically and emotionally. If we don't experience hunger, we may not realize how many people around us do. Hunger is not just lack of food, it is lack of access to healthy, nourishing food that everyone—and especially children—needs to thrive.

Hunger is often invisible, and it carries a social stigma. If we're not able to feed ourselves or our families, we may feel ashamed as well as hungry. One hungry Minnesotan reported living on one daily meal of ramen noodles and an egg, but was ashamed to ask for help.

Food Insecurity on the Rise in Minnesota

Hunger is on the rise in the Twin Cities. According to the University of Minnesota, 39 percent of Twin Cities households with children regularly experience food insecurity—that is, they lack consistent access to healthy, affordable food. Access is limited not only by lack of money for food, but by lack of nearby grocery stores and transportation.

"It's everyday people who don't have enough resources," said Colleen Moriarty, director of the non-

profit organization Hunger Solutions. "If you have one car repair or health emergency, that sets a family back. It takes a long time to recover from that."

Researchers found that parents in food-insecure households are more likely to serve cheap and easy-to-get unhealthy foods, such as sugary drinks and fast foods, and are much less likely to serve fresh fruits and vegetables. Parents are also more likely to skip meals themselves, so their children can eat.

Increased Food Shelf Visits

The situation is not improving. As the cost of rent, utilities, transportation, medical costs, and other needs continue to rise, those living with low or fixed incomes, disabilities, or other barriers face extra challenges. Many of these individuals and families are, more than ever, turning to local food shelves.

In 2017 the Minnesota Department of Human Services recorded an 11 percent jump in food shelf visits, for the year's record-breaking 3.4 million visits. It was the seventh year in a row that visits to the state's 400 food shelves increased.

It's not just young parents and their children who turn to food shelves.

Minnesotans 65 years and older are the fastest growing segment of food shelf visitors, with an almost 40 percent increase in 2017. Hit by ever-rising costs in rent and health care, large numbers of seniors are finding they can't make ends meet without food shelves.

Food for the Hungry: VINNIE'S HOPE

Food shelves get food to people, but who gets food to food shelves? Supplying food shelves is a major task in itself.

In January 2015, to help meet that need, St. Vincent de Paul—Twin Cities began operating a food bank, Vinnie's Hope. Food banks collect food in bulk and deliver or make it available to food shelves, free of charge.

Vinnie's Hope's refrigerated truck picks up food from major suppliers, who donate excess or discontinued food that is still safe for humans to eat.

Since Vinnie's Hope began, they have distributed more than 8 million pounds of food, including fresh produce, meats, bakery, and dairy. They provide food and other essential items like toilet paper to at least 26 local food shelves every week.

Who's Hungry Cont.

Food banks cost money to run on a daily basis. Vinnie's Hope costs about \$1,650 per week to operate. As it expands to meet growing needs, the program is in constant need of donations to help with transportation, storage, and related costs.

To learn more about Vinnie's Hope, check out the SVDP-Twin Cities website, at www.svdpmpls.org/vinnies-hope. For further information, or if you are looking to donate to or partner with Vinnie's Hope, please contact Executive Director Ed Koerner at eekoerner@svdpmpls.org.

Celebrating Experienced Workers: Roger Johnson



Roger Johnson pricing linens

When shopping at the St. Vincent de Paul—Minneapolis Thrift Store, you may notice SVdP draws on the talent pool of older workers. Seniors work in the warehouse, unloading donations at the dock, and sorting and pricing the goods. Experienced merchandise assistants stock the shelves and racks and help you find what you need on the floor.

If you are shopping for textiles, Roger Johnson is your man. "I'm linens," Johnson said. "I fold, price, and put out blankets, sheets, pillows, and small rugs. But I've worked on the donations dock too. You have to be versatile here—everybody does everything."

Johnson first came to SVdP through the federally funded Senior Community Service

Employment Program (SCSEP). Based at the East Side Neighborhood Services in northeast Minneapolis, SCSEP places low-income Hennepin County residents age 55 or older in temporary, part-time jobs at local nonprofits. The program pays the workers' part-time wages for four years. The store has slots for eleven SCSEP workers, which are currently filled.

"Before I came to St Vincent's," Johnson said, "I had been looking for a job for more than a year. As an older man and a former convict, I was unhireable. If I hadn't been hired here, there's no telling what would have happened. I was desperate for a job. And St Vincent was like a life preserver for me. It gave me a chance to get a hold on my life."

Store manager Wayne Bugg said, "That's what we do

here. We take things that other people have deemed unworthy, no longer usable, and give them a second chance. And it's similar with people—a lot of the workers here, including myself, have backgrounds that did not lead us to be the most hireable. But St. Vincent's gave me a chance."

"I enjoy working here," Johnson said. "It's open-minded and friendly, and most of the workers are over fifty. At that age you should be an adult so the supervisors don't have to stand over and push you."

Like a lot of older workers, Johnson doesn't want to stop working. "I'm not going to sit home and do nothing," he said. "I plan on being here at least till I'm seventy."

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OUR GOALS

- Promote greater spiritual growth at every level of the Society
- Enhance the image of the Society to become a more visible sign of Christ
- Encourage greater unity at every level of the Society
- Develop greater solidarity with and care for people who are poor
- Build strengthened relationships with the Church, Vincentian Family, and other organizations which serve people in need

To contribute story ideas, or pictures, please email Wayne Bugg at wbugg@svdpmpls.org

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