

Partnering with the St. Vincent de Paul Society

Valerie Kelly, Justice and Peace Commission

These are certainly hard times for many people. At the January meeting of the Justice and Peace Commission, we discussed the challenge of meeting the needs of the increasing number of disadvantaged individuals and families in our community. We focused particularly on the efforts of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Kingston, whose volunteers work hard every day at the Stephen Street facility to provide assistance to people in need. They offer a hot meal at lunchtime, five days a week, all year long. Their WearHouse offers free household items and clothing, and the Emergency Food Pantry distributes food to those who are having difficulty making ends meet.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society was incorporated in Kingston in the early 1870s. The story of its current location at 85 Stephen Street began in 1965, when the Society worked with St. Mary's Cathedral to find a permanent place to provide care for the poor and disadvantaged. By 1966, other local parishes had joined in the efforts of the Society to help those in need. In 1967-68, under the leadership of Archbishop Wilhelm, the property at 85 Stephen Street was purchased. After more than 50 years, the Society has outgrown the small Stephen Street facility. As Judy Fyfe, Executive Director of the Society, explains, "There isn't enough space for us to continue to serve. Our meal program is overcrowded; we've got two seatings now just to meet demand. It's tricky because it's a building that holds 45 chairs, and, for Thanksgiving alone, we did 148 meals, so it's tough. And with the demographic we serve, it's challenging to be in such a loud and crowded space." Plans are underway for the Society to build a new facility at the corner of Bagot and Charles Street in downtown Kingston. A private donation has already secured the property, and a capital campaign is underway to raise funds for the construction of a new building.

A Community Engagement Committee has been established to promote public engagement and partnerships within the community; to raise public awareness about the good work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society; and to coordinate long-term, sustainable funding to enable the expansion of programs and services. The Justice and Peace Commission has pledged its support for the Committee's endeavours and would like to encourage our faith communities to do the same. During a recent Zoom meeting with Judy Fyfe, she commented that, "It's impossible to map the connections throughout the community of support! Our organization has broad and deep roots in Kingston."

If you would like to join us in supporting this important ministry, you can make a donation through Canada Helps at: <https://loom.ly/ftLsaal> or by contacting the St. Vincent de Paul Society directly at 613-766-8432. Your prayers would also be very much appreciated in this time of transition.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Justice and Peace Commission, please contact Rev. Canon Valerie Kelly at vkelly@ontario.anglican.ca.

On behalf of the Commission members, I extend best wishes for Easter blessings to you and your loved ones.