



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
SOCIETY OF MARIN

InsideView

2020 NEWS

**KEEPING OUR
PROMISE TO ASSIST
VULNERABLE
NEIGHBORS**

You don't have to go it alone

JAYLA WAS IN over her head and panicking. "I was floored when I got the call" recalls Jayla. Her mother had breast cancer, and she needed her only child Jayla to support her through treatment and minimize her exposure to COVID-19.

Jayla, an RN and Army veteran, dropped everything to move back into the family home in Marin. Once here, she hit the ground running by taking over household responsibilities.

The one thing Jayla's discipline and training couldn't prepare her for was the much higher cost of living. Somehow, Jayla needed to stretch her mom's fixed income to cover mortgage payments, while her staggering medical bills piled up. Copays for tests, medication and treatment took a huge chunk out of the carefully planned household budget, leaving little, if any, money left for groceries and personal needs.

Jayla didn't know where to turn. That is when Marie,

a St. Vincent de Paul Society volunteer from Jayla's family's parish church, heard of her fellow parishioner's illness and reached out. Help was on the way!

Vincentian volunteers practicing social distancing appeared at the front steps with bags of groceries in their arms, as well as hand sanitizer, masks and grocery store gift cards. Jayla continues to speak with Marie each month, to check in and get help if things get too tight. Jayla said, "St. Vincent's let me know that mom and I are not alone in this. Now I can focus on my mom—and she can focus on getting better!"

Did you know? Through our HOT collaborative program, **50%** of Marin's homeless veterans have received housing. Our goal: to end veteran homelessness by 2021 with fewer than **50 veterans** left to be housed.

WHAT I KNOW



As you might imagine, this year has been vastly different than my previous 15 years at the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin. My experience on the frontlines reminds me of a quote from John Allen Paulos: *“Uncertainty is the only certainty there is and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security.”*

We are *not* trying to conquer the unknown. Instead, we are focusing on what we *do* know and what we *can do*. We are quickly learning to “lean into” this heightened insecurity, helping those who are suffering through this unimaginable crisis. While there is still a lot we do not know, this is

what I *do know* with certainty:

I *know* our team turned its normal procedures “on their heads” within 12 hours by keeping our Free Dining Room open every day within safety restrictions, assisting our homeless clients to find safety, and responding to three times the requests we usually receive for emergency rental assistance due to job losses.

I *know* our team works well together, buoyed by the trust in our countywide Housing Outreach Team (HOT) collaborative. We accomplished what seemed impossible. Despite some sleepless nights, in just a few days via Zoom we were able to create several pop-up emergency shelters in motels for high-risk people experiencing homelessness.

I *know* our volunteers are our extended family. Despite suspending or changing their roles to protect their health, our volunteers are staying in touch, offering assistance, support and prayers from home so many times that it feels like a warm quilt enveloping us during a terrible time.

I *know* our contributors have never been more generous, making all this work possible. The outpouring of donations keeps us going, both literally and figuratively, preventing thousands of people from becoming homeless during the pandemic.

These are the facts that bring comfort to me and I hope to you, as well. As we continue to “live with insecurity,” I am certain that our family is strong, compassionate, and determined to help our fellow human beings during these incredibly challenging times.

With your continued support we know we will do more, help more and save more lives in the coming days.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Paquette". The script is fluid and cursive.

Christine Paquette, Executive Director

No longer alone, help arrived in the nick of time

S **EVEN DECADES**... "and counting!" is how long retired builder Chester has called Marin his home. He is a lively character who recounts having a hand in many of Marin's great landmarks. He is proud of his home. Being an independent spirit helped him cope when his wife and children passed away, but now that Chester is in his late seventies, he has learned he can't do it alone.

When two SVdP volunteers from his parish checked in on Chester to deliver groceries, they became seriously concerned. Every room of the home was packed with stuff, and a leaky roof was wreaking havoc. With boxes piled high on every surface, and given the neglected state of his home—they worried about his safety.

Chester confessed that he had hopes of making the repairs on his own, but hip surgery had set him back and then a series of health issues made it impossible for him to do any work. Chester could not pay to have someone repair years of water damage and have enough left over for his prescription medication and food. His past due utility bills were just piling up.

Right on the spot, our volunteers helped Chester call the St. Vincent's Help Line, knowing that he needed help fast! Within 24 hours of placing the call, Chester was speaking with Hayley Liddle, our homeless diversion specialist.

Hayley met with Chester to identify his immediate needs, then brainstormed a plan and created a budget. "It was important to find a way he could stay

safely in the home that meant so much to him," said Hayley.

Over the years Chester held on to all of his loved ones' belongings, which not only filled his home but three storage units as well—costing \$200 a month.

"We had a lot of good times here. It makes it hard for me to throw anything out!" Chester lamented.

SVdP staff got right to work helping Chester sort through his belongings at his home and storage units, successfully reducing 50+ years of accumulated items into one well-organized space where his most

"If I could still get down, I would retile my own bathroom"

precious mementos could be kept. Next, Hayley worked with Chester to get quotes for repairs to make his home safe and helped him reach out to his one remaining relative, his 82-year-old brother Thomas.

"Tommy and I decided to become roomies," Chester said with a grin and a chuckle. Although he can laugh about it now, Chester says help arrived in the nick of time. Now, by combining their limited incomes and living space these two gentlemen are looking forward to peaceful retirement together in a safe and comfortable home.



Making Sense of the New Normal

Howard Schwartz
& Meredith Parnell
in conversation



Howard Schwartz, PhD

grew up in Baltimore and graduated from Duke with a degree in psychology and a graduate degree from Brown. He served as Professor of Religion at Stanford and Temple Universities, then pursued a career in high

tech here in the Bay Area before joining the staff of SVdP in 2015 as Director of Strategic Initiatives. Howard is an ordained Rabbi and lives with his wife in San Rafael. They have three adult children.



Meredith Parnell, JD

grew up in Tiburon and Honolulu. After graduating from Mills College, she received her law degree from George Washington University. A self-described “recovering attorney,” she joined the staff of SVdP in

2019 as Volunteer Coordinator. Previously, she worked for more than a decade assisting with programs and as the Director of Marketing & Communications at Congregation Rodef Sholom. She lives with her husband in San Anselmo. They have two adult children.

The 2020 pandemic has shaken all of us. How has your job at Vinnies changed to respond to so many more people crying out for help?



HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH SVDP OF MARIN?

Howard: Before I began my job here as Director of Strategic Initiatives in 2015, I volunteered at the Society’s Help Desk. I learned firsthand how nearly impossible it was to find low-income housing for a woman in her eighties that I had befriended who was at risk of becoming homeless. Christine hired me to bring together all the well-intentioned, yet uncoordinated efforts of local government and community groups working to end homelessness.

Meredith: I first became familiar with St. Vincent’s as a volunteer advocate with Marin Organizing Committee (MOC), a coalition of more than 20 faith-based, nonprofit and civic groups that work together to advance policies for the common good. SVdP was a founding member of MOC. I joined the staff here about six months ago as Volunteer Coordinator, feeling passionate about developing long-term strategies to maximize the impact of the Society’s hundreds of volunteers.



WHAT WERE YOU FOCUSED ON BEFORE THE PANDEMIC CHANGED EVERYTHING?

Howard: I was feeling really good that we were able to break out of our separate “silos” with the initiation of the Housing Outreach Team (HOT), successfully housing more than 200 *chronically* homeless people in just a few years, achieving a 28% drop in *chronic* homelessness in Marin. We did so by meeting regularly and breaking down barriers together, sharing our commitment to finding housing solutions through a “one-person-at-a-time” strategy that has proven to be effective. We were housing the most vulnerable and making sure they got support to stay housed.

Meredith: I was working on finding more ways to expand our volunteer activities to engage so many

people from area high schools, colleges and the community who are eager to help, but couldn't get their foot in the door here because most of our Free Dining Room shifts are filled by volunteers who stay in their jobs for many years. I was also surveying the needs of active volunteers in our parish-based SVdP Conference groups, who respond to our Crisis Line calls with compassion, advice and funds they have raised to help families buy groceries, pay medical bills or provide emergency rental assistance to prevent families from becoming homeless.



SUDDENLY EVERYTHING CHANGED. HOW DID YOU SAFELY RESPOND TO MORE CRIES FOR HELP?

Howard: Thankfully, we had been collaborating for the last four years and trusted each other's commitment. But the pandemic hit us like a tsunami, ushering in a new kind of chaos that we knew we must overcome, as we began working non-stop from home.

Responding to crises was not unusual for me or for my colleagues.

We quickly needed to initiate NEW pop-up temporary housing and food programs all at once; train newly assigned County emergency workers to manage the care and housing

of fearful, homeless people, who often suffer from trauma and serious health challenges; immediately establish ways to collect data, prevent duplication, and meet the requirements of our funders, including Marin Community Foundation, the County of Marin and FEMA—and we needed to do it all 20 times faster than we'd ever done it before.

Meredith: Well, suddenly all our volunteers and Dining Room kitchen staff were sidelined for their own protection. We had to *think fast*. Generally, I'm a steady hand. I was asked by our Executive Director Christine to figure out the best ways to continue getting meals to people every day without relying on our kitchen staff or regular volunteers who generally tend to be older and at-risk.

Initially, we passed out boxed lunches received from the County Jail's food suppliers. After considering several options, Karen Petterson, an amazing volunteer, helped me create a *SignUpGenius* schedule online to activate volunteers from home. More than

18,000 meals were donated over two months.

Next, I was tasked with helping Howard establish our internal system for accepting applications, reviewing,

Our "to go" food brigade is operating with 85+ volunteers.

approving, and distributing emergency rental assistance. Susan Brennan, another outstanding volunteer, helped me work with our Case Management Team

and Director of Client Services Connie Borges to streamline our procedures and field hundreds of requests for help, three times the number we typically receive. Together, we found a way.

I admit, I woke up thinking about spreadsheets and went to bed still thinking about spreadsheets and worrying about our community's waiting list that has now grown to 2,500 applications. However, right now I am so pleased that we are on track to distribute more than \$300,000 in emergency rental assistance during April, May, and June—helping many desperate people stay safely housed.



WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO KEEP GOING? FAVORITE WAYS TO RELAX?

Howard: Getting the results we believe in has kept me going. My favorite way of taking a break is hiking the beautiful hills of Marin, or when I am pressed for time, working out on my Peloton at home. I also enjoy uncovering my family history that I've traced all the way back to a small village in Russia.

Meredith: I'm inspired by stories like this one: a landlord in Mill Valley contacted me after she received an emergency rental assistance check from SVdP. She told me she had no idea her tenant was unable to work or pay her rent due to safety restrictions. She then released her tenant from the rent owed, returned the

This generosity restored my faith in humanity.

check to SVdP so someone else could receive support, and made an additional contribution to support this critical work.

I like to relax by finding a spot on a mountaintop or a beach and looking out at the ocean. It always helps me gain perspective and feel less overwhelmed. And, I adore watching basketball, especially the Warriors!

Volunteers find new ways to help hungry people

MOST PEOPLE who come to our emergency Food Pantry are families with very low-incomes living in our community,” explained longtime volunteer, Barbara Beaulieu. Barbara is one of about 25 dedicated volunteers who organize the Food

non-perishable groceries, with essentials like cereal, dried pasta, jars of sauce, rice and beans, and higher-protein items like canned tuna and peanut butter.

Suddenly, when the pandemic hit, this Conference group needed to adapt their food pantry collection and distribution processes when social distancing

began. “Our pastor said we needed to minimize our risk of exposure to COVID-19, especially for our volunteers. When he decided that younger pantry volunteers, under the age of 65 were needed, we turned to Vincentian volunteer Luann Desautel. She stepped in without hesitation,” explained Barbara. She says Luann has been doing the work of several people, single-handedly passing out food every weekday since the pandemic began!

Not only has the volume of people coming to the Food Pantry changed, the demographics have also shifted. Luann explained, “There are more men than women in line now for food, a distinct shift from before the pandemic, mostly because of job layoffs. And, families that used the pantry in the past, but became self-sufficient for years, have now returned for help with food.”

When the SVdP Conference of volunteers began running critically short of food donations, they sent out an urgent request

via social media and email. Parishioners and donors throughout Marin responded enthusiastically filling the pantry, and then some. “Even a few people we had never met before saw the long lines of people waiting for food, stopped their cars, found out why people were in line, and later came back to drop off a check or donate food!” smiled Luann. This outpouring of support from strangers is keeping these Vincentian volunteers inspired.

“This is a real boost to us, in more ways than one!” says Frank Lindh, who helps coordinate this labor of love, also known as their emergency Food Pantry.



Pantry at St. Raphael's Catholic Church, at the Mission of San Rafael Arcangel, located on Fifth Avenue in San Rafael.

Vincentian volunteers make sure everyone who comes to their Food Pantry for help is treated with dignity and kindness. Her SVdP Conference group's finely tuned food donation and distribution process worked very well for approximately 130 families they helped each month.

Now, because of the COVID-19 health crisis, requests have climbed to nearly 300 families per month, and the need for food continues to grow. People from all over San Rafael line up each week to receive bags of

August saves the day at the Free Dining Room

THE PANDEMIC has not stopped our Free Dining Room at 820 B Street in San Rafael from providing meals for our hungry neighbors, as we have every day for the past 39 years.

When new special measures requiring masks were announced, our staff acted quickly to provide hundreds of masks for our vulnerable guests, most of whom have health challenges and/or lack access to safe storage or laundry facilities for their belongings.

Fifteen-year-old Mill Valley resident August Buessing had already logged over 100 service hours for his Boy Scout Troop #1, by helping struggling families get the food they needed during tough times.

He approached SVdP with his idea: using his mom's extra fabric and his extra time at home during the pandemic to make face masks for people coming to Vinnie's Free Dining Room. August was thrilled

Enterprising teen inspires mask making campaign

to learn how fast you could sew masks on a machine and whipped out fifty during his first week.

"My jaw dropped when I saw the beautiful donated masks that August made. His timing was perfect!" said Volunteer Coordinator Meredith Parnell. Photos of August's masks were posted on VinniesMarin page on Facebook, inspiring many others to dust off their Singers and donate. Want to help? Please contact volunteer@vinnies.org to coordinate your mask donation.



You are invited to join our Legacy Giving Circle

Many of our supporters join our Legacy Giving Circle by choosing St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin to receive a percentage or specific dollar amount in their will or trust. Bequests of any size are encouraged and appreciated. Your legacy gift will provide housing, emergency food and crisis intervention services for vulnerable children, older adults, veterans and families into the future.

FEDERAL TAX ID #94-1207701

For questions, please contact Katrina Redahan kredahan@vinnies.org or 415.454.3303 x 21.

SAVE THE DATE
2020
PENNIES FROM HEAVEN
@HOME

Join us this year @home for the Annual Pennies Fundraiser
(Note: for safety, no "live" event this year)

To give on or before
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020
Supporting our work on the frontlines to feed, house and care for our most vulnerable neighbors

Visit www.vinnies.org/pennies



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SOCIETY OF MARIN

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it's important to
stay connected.**

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sign up for email updates at vinnies.org**



A special heartfelt message from SVdP staff:

Your support makes it possible for us to fulfill our promise to help
our neighbors in crisis, and we are extremely grateful!