

SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE CENTENNARY HALL

PORT OF SPAIN

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER, 22ND, 2002.

8:30 – 1:30 P.M.

ADDRESS BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT

BRO. ANTHONY WONG DOO

Your Grace, Most Rec. Archbishop Edward Gilbert, Sisters and Brothers of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul – Good Morning and a very warm welcome to you all.

Our experience over the past year was overshadowed by the death of our dear Bro. Steve Solomon on October 13th, 2001. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Trinidad and Tobago had loss not only a National Executive Secretary who had served faithfully and diligently for thirty-two years, the society had loss its Father. A father who against all the prevailing odds, obstacles and constraints, shaped and nurtured the Society in Trinidad and Tobago to what it is today. A formidable task which I am certain could only have been accomplished because Bro. Steve embraced the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. I hold dear memories of him as a person who treasured the intercession of the Blessed Mother in all his ventures and assuredly the society enjoys the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

As a 'Servant of the Poor' Bro. Steve Solomon's contribution was colossal and his name will always be synonymous with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Trinidad and Tobago and indeed in the wider Caribbean as a whole. May he Rest in Peace.

As a society we underwent a period of mourning but we were not paralyzed. His death challenged us to revisit the structure of the administration.

This was done by Ernst & Young and their recommendations were submitted to the Society at the end of April, 2002 and were reviewed, discussed and ratified by the National Council in June, 2002.

Two of the major recommendations were the reversal of the position of National Executive Secretary to Honorary Secretary and the greater involvement of the Particular Councils in the running of the Institutions. This is nothing new, in a dynamic world, the Society has come full circle.

I am happy to report that in recent conversation and at my suggestion, Bro. Clive Belgrave has accepted the position of National Honorary Secretary.

Sisters and Brothers, you all will agree that Bro. Clive with his wealth of knowledge of the workings of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, is eminently qualified.

Sr. Leah Gordon will now serve as the Senior National Vice President of the Society.

I would also like to advise that the National Executive has agreed that Sr. Leah, Bro. Clive and myself will oversee the implementation of the recommendations of Ernst & Young.

Sisters and Brothers, we as a Society have to continually review our performance and be self-critical. At our last Annual General Meeting, His Grace – Most Rev. Edward Gilbert counselled us to never entertain the luxuries of complacency and presumption, for we live in a world that is dynamic and fraught with new challenges that affect and contribute to Poverty, Hopelessness and Brokenness.

His Grace also advised that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's role in Human Development and Social Justice must be in concert with our identity of being Catholic where we are receptive to the Holy Spirit and responsive to the Lord. Vocational Clarity must be a pre-requisite of our formation which is continual. Each member of the Society must pursue his Sacred Mission instead of just seeing one's self as doing a good job.

Over the first year of my installation as National President, I have attempted to meet and to dialogue with the majority of Conferences throughout Trinidad and Tobago via strategic Particular Council meetings and festival gatherings, with reasonable success. At every meeting, the perennial and global concern about the continuing rise of the average age of the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul came up. I have recently received a circular letter to all the Conferences of the world, via their National Presidents, from the International President General, Jose Ramon Diaz Torremocha. This communiqué deals extensively with this burning question and I will ensure that each Conference gets a copy for study and reflection. I am confident that with prayerful reflection, the contents of this letter will be instructive. Later on as a Society, we will formulate a national thrust in this regard because I believe it is quintessential for continuity.

Let me close by expressing my profound gratitude to all members who have remained faithful during the last trying year. I applaud the many who have sacrificially contributed to the work and vision of the Society, and believe me there are many. I am restraining myself from calling names for it is not in the best tradition so to do.

Our Radio and T.V. programmes, our Public Relations, Prison and Fund Raising Committees held their ground.

Bro. Clive exemplifies the Vincentian Spirit to serve in any position. Sr. Yvette Woodruffe and her support staff at the Secretariat went not only the extra miles.

His Grace is correct. This is not a job – it is a Vocation. So for those who say they are tired and want to retire, let me advise this is no Public Service or business organization. Remember the Good Book says the Poor will be with you forever and your calling is tied to the Poor. So take the tip. And as you continue to work remember: “Without Charity, any work done is Worthless.”