



Vincentian Solidarity Office

March 2018 Bulletin



Serving the Poor and Protecting Creation in Kharkiv



St. Vincent's church and parish center

St. Vincent De Paul taught his confreres to serve the poor through collaborative, innovative, and sustainable ways. Our missionaries of the Vice-Province of SS. Cyril and Methodius have fully embraced that teaching at one of their key works: their mission at St. Vincent's Parish in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.



For several decades, the mission has been

rebuilding the local Catholic community by evangelizing the populace through religious services, and offering a plethora of social services for the most vulnerable of the city's residents: immigrants (especially from Africa), street children, impoverished single and elderly women, and the homeless. The social services include education, provision of food and shelter, counseling, programs for addictions, and advocating with authorities. Several organizations collaborate on these works with our missionaries, including the Daughters of Charity, the International Association of Charity, and the DePaul Ukraine Foundation. Collectively, these organizations address the region's poverty and lacking social safety net that arose during the transformation of Ukraine's socialist system to a free market economy. Poverty in the region has been aggravated by violence related to the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian tension and conflict.

Financing the pastoral and social services has been difficult. Heating the mission's large church and five-floor pastoral service center has been a special challenge. Heating fuel is expensive and difficult to obtain in the region, which has long, cold winters. Burning this fuel also harms the environment.



Solar heating panels



Heating system components

In response, the mission looked to God's creation for help, while also seeking to protect it. It decided to install a geothermal heating system to draw warmth from the ground, and solar panels to absorb energy from the sun. In this way, it could heat the space and water in its church and pastoral center in a more cost efficient and environmentally friendly way.

The mission sought the help of the VSO to fund the installation of the geothermal and solar panel heating systems, which involved digging wells and underground pipelines, and purchasing sophisticated equipment. The VSO assisted the mission in obtaining grants from the Archdiocese of Cologne, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Papal Foundation, and also applied monies from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund, to finance the project.

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A New Staff Member at the VSO

We are happy to announce that our VSO staff has expanded to meet the growing number of project requests from provinces and missions. We have added another associate director: Joe Lesenko.



Our new associate director

Joe comes to the VSO with extensive experience in project management and business administration. He also has an appreciation for the Vincentian charism, having studied in the minor and college seminaries of our Eastern Province. We quickly put Joe to work!

Child Nutrition in Boganangone

The United Nations ranks the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) at the very bottom of its human development index of 188 countries. Poverty in the nation is tragic. Life expectancy is 52 years; the mean number of years of schooling for adults is four; 76% of residents live on less than \$1.90 USD per day.



Fr. Séraphin Zoga, C.M. and nutrition agents

Our Congregation started its mission in C.A.R. in 2007, where our missionaries quickly became engaged in a war against poverty. Their current battle is one of the most difficult: addressing the high infant and early childhood mortality rate and malnutrition.

Our missionaries have teamed with lay people to bring nutritional services and medicines to residents of their two parishes: one outside of the nation's capital city of Bangui (where the mission started); the second located over 200 kilometers away in Boganangone, where the project is currently focused.

The parish in Boganangone has 32 dispersed villages. The villagers are utterly poor. In some villages, infant mortality is 50%. Our four priests in the parish work with the project team to combine popular missions with mobile nutrition-medical clinics. Lay members of the team include a physician, nurses, and parishioners (mostly women) who are being trained as health-nutrition agents. Through the team's efforts, villagers are assisted with their growth in faith, mothers learn about nutrition and growing vegetables; and children receive vaccinations, medicines, nutritional supplements, and direct care.

The C.A.R. Mission turned to the VSO for funding for this multiyear project. Because of the generosity of many individual donors sending contributions to us, the VSO was able to quickly send the monies needed to cover the costs of medicines, food supplies, transportation, a generator, portable lamps, and the salaries of the lay members of the project team.

Vincentian Solidarity Office
500 East Cheltenham Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144
United States of America

Our goal: To assist the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for its evangelization and service of the poor.

How to contact us:

Fr. Gregory Semeniuk, C.M., Executive Director:

Email: gisemeniuk@gmail.com

Scott Fina, Ph.D., Associate Director:

Email: scottfina@gmail.com

Joseph Lesenko, Associate Director:

Email: josephlesenko@gmail.com

María José Pacheco del Río, Project Manager:

Email: MPacheco@cmphlsvs.org

Telephone: +1 215-713-2432

Our website: www.cmglobal.org/vso