

400 Years

Vincentians celebrate their founding across the province

The weekend of Jan. 25, 2025, was for Vincentians around the world the culmination of months of celebration and observance of the 400th anniversary of Congregation of the Mission's founding.

Masses and events in parishes across the Western Province were held with participation by Cardinal Roger Mahony in Los Angeles, Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski in St. Louis with Archbishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M., of Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska, and Bishop Myron J. Cotta of the Diocese of Stockton, CA, in Patterson, among others.

The Vincentians celebrated the 150th anniversary of St. Vincent's Parish in Chicago at the same time, and they held a day of service at Holy Trinity Parish in Dallas. St. Joseph Parish in New Orleans put on a music-filled celebration.

"Today, we pause and look back, and we also stand, clear-eyed, focused on the work ahead," said Fr. Joseph Williams, C.M., Provincial Superior of the Western Province. "Thank you for joining us in St. Vincent's mission."

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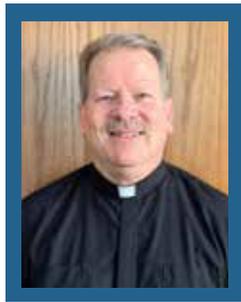
↑ St. Louis



↑ Los Angeles



↑ Patterson



Dear Friends,

On Jan. 25, after months of preparation and build-up, I had the honor to concelebrate a Mass in St. Louis for the 400th anniversary of the Congregation of Mission. We observe our anniversary on the Feast of St. Paul the Apostle, when St. Vincent preached his "first sermon of the Mission" at Folleville, France.

With our friends and partners in mission from across the wide Vincentian family, it was impossible not to feel the magnitude of this occasion, and a little bit of pride, with similar observances taking place throughout our province and the world.

It was wonderful to see our friends and partners, the Daughters of Charity and Ladies of Charity, as well as representatives of several lay organizations who operate in the name of St. Vincent. Many of these groups are run for or by young people. St. Vincent's charism is, after all, a living, vibrant thing whose fire burns as brightly as it did in St. Vincent's time.

I cannot help but be encouraged by this.

We have collected images from some of these celebrations in this issue of *The Vincentian* and on our website. We hope you will take some time to look through them and also read about some of our confreres out west and two of our devoted supporters, whose stories are inspiring, in and of themselves.

God bless you, and please pray for me as I do for you.

Sincerely in St. Vincent,

Rev. Joseph S. Williams, C.M.

Fr. Joseph S. Williams, C.M.
Provincial Superior



Scan for 400th anniversary video, more photos, and much more



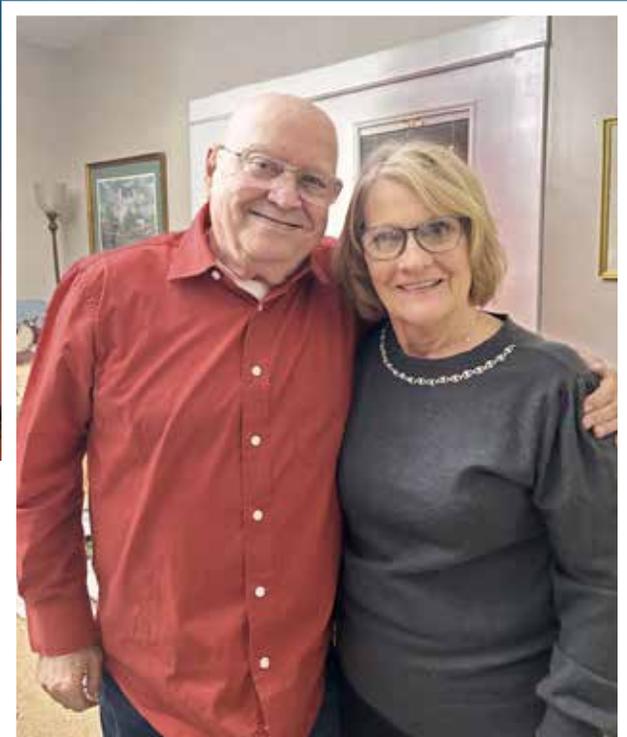
↑ St. Louis



↑ New Orleans



↑ Los Angeles



Donor Spotlight:

Eichhorn Family: Vincentian Parish Priests Became More than Spiritual Shepherds

CYRIL (“BUTCH”) AND CONNIE EICHHORN GREW UP IN NEIGHBORING SMALL TOWNS in southeast Missouri during the 1960s. Connie was raised Catholic. Butch was raised in the Lutheran faith.

In 1972, the couple married, moved to the larger city of Cape Girardeau, and started their family. They joined St. Vincent de Paul Parish and eventually sent their two daughters to the parish grade school. In 1993, Butch joined the Catholic Church.

“As our kids grew up and took part in youth group and a lot of the Vincentian opportunities for service, Butch and I met more and more Vincentian priests,” Connie recalls.

There was a certain genuineness and warmth that stood out to the Eichhorns as they got to know various Vincentian pastors and associates serving the parish.

“Growing up Catholic, you always felt you had to behave a certain way in front of priests,” Connie said. “You were guarded. There was a sense of awe and distance. But with the Vincentians, I felt like I saw the real side of the person – not just the perfect or holy side.”

The Eichhorns have grown especially close to Fr. Joe Williams, C.M., recently elected Provincial of the Western Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

“Fr. Joe is a good, good friend,” Connie said. “He has baptized all five of our grandchildren and presided at our youngest daughter’s wedding. He’s even joined us on our family vacations.”

Now in their 40s, the couple’s daughters remain in touch with Fr. Ron Hoye, C.M., a leader in youth faith development across the U.S. as well as abroad and director of Catholic Teamworks.

The couple felt God had blessed them in many ways throughout their lifetime together, so when the opportunity arose to support one of the Vincentians’ projects in Kenya, they said YES. It was the beginning of making an annual commitment to support the Congregation.

Having centered so much of their family life around the life of the parish, Connie believes the positive Vincentian influence in their girls’ lives is a big reason why both remain practicing Catholics today. “They felt comfortable in their schools, the relationships and the close church community ... There was a real bond that our entire family developed that centered around St. Vincent’s.”

“The Vincentians are a community of missionary giving. Whether a person’s need is material or spiritual, they recognize the need and respond to it in a very personal way. They work from their hearts, getting people engaged and helping them understand the Church and how to build your relationship with God. To me, that’s what sets the Vincentians apart.”

—Connie Eichhorn

Connie and Butch Eichhorn, both retired, live in St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Cape Girardeau, today a diocesan parish. They have two daughters and five grandchildren.

From Madrid to Montebello

Spanish trio of priests finds meaning and mission in the U.S.

Three Spanish Vincentian priests residing in Montebello and Los Angeles, CA, share the same origin story. Fr. Pedro Villarroya, C.M., Fr. Antonio Ruiz, C.M., and Fr. Prudencio Rodriguez, C.M., each came to the U.S. from their home province in Spain to study and prepare to serve in the Philippines.

None of them would go to the Philippines, and each would spend his entire ministry in the U.S.



Fr. Pedro Villarroya, C.M.

Fr. Pedro left his home in Madrid in 1955 for Perryville, MO, with three other seminarians to study theology. The Vincentian province in Madrid had a presence in the Philippines.

“In 1958, I found out half the class was going to the Philippines while the rest of us were going to remain in the states,” Fr. Pedro said.

He was ordained the following year and taught for a few years in seminaries in San Antonio, TX, and Camarillo, CA. In the ensuing years, amid his parochial work in Texas and California, he became involved in community organizing and working against anti-immigrant legislation, and around 1968 the Provincials in Spain and the U.S. agreed he could stay in America.

“After I got out of community organizing, I decided I wanted to work with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,” he said, “which I did for 30 years.”

As coordinator of education and formation for the lay members of the society, he visited every diocese in 10 western states, including Hawaii, coordinating between and organizing with bishops.

“The person who understood the Vincentian calling better than anyone was Frederick Ozanam (founder of the society),” said Fr. Pedro, now 90. “He chose not to teach them, but to love them. That is what Jesus was all about, what Vincent was all about, and what our vocation is all about. That is sacred to me.”

Fr. Antonio Ruiz, C.M.

Fr. Antonio (Tony) Ruiz, got to know the Vincentians through the Daughters of Charity in his native Madrid and came to the U.S. in 1961 to study. Two years before ordination, he also discovered he was not going to the Philippines.

He was ordained in Chicago in 1965 and began working at St. John’s Seminary in Kansas City before transferring to the seminary in Camarillo, CA, and later to parochial work. In 1975, his home province asked him if he wanted to continue in the U.S., which he did.

While serving at the parish in Fort Myers, FL, in the mid-1980s, he was approached by the bishop there to serve as his liaison for charismatic renewal, which came out of Vatican II.

“The Pope and the bishops wanted to bring the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the whole church through prayer and the freedom to do it spontaneously,” he said. “It was a rich learning experience, being with people who prayed with so much faith and enthusiasm.”

Later, as pastor at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in LA, he became the first spiritual director of Vincentian Lay Missioners, now Misioneros Catolicos, which comes together to support members of the community who are struggling and has expanded into multiple dioceses, including in Mexico.

At 83, living in Montebello, he keeps busy helping out at local parishes.

“Many parishes used to have two or three priests and now have only the pastor,” he said. “I help them out in different ways, and I will do it as long as I can.”

Building Relationships

Fr. Roy Persich, C.M., reflects on a life in education

Fr. Roy Persich, C.M., speaks directly and frankly with a sharpness and energy that belie his 90 years. He lives at Amat House at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Los Angeles and serves as an auxiliary priest at St. Mary Magdalen Church in Camarillo.

The New Orleans native grew up in and attended school at St. Joseph Parish, which was and still is run by Vincentians. The youngest of four brothers, he followed them all into the seminary and was ordained in 1960 at St. Mary's of the Barrens in Perryville. He went directly to work at St. Vincent de Paul Seminary in Lemont, IL.

"We were running 17 seminaries in those days," he said. "That was our great contribution."

He later worked with the National Organization of Continuing Education of Ongoing Formation Directors for 25 dioceses, for renewal of priestly identity.

The most meaningful part of his ministry, he said, started when a couple he knew approached him about serving in Marriage Encounter, a Catholic marriage enrichment program. He said the experiences that he had influenced his work in the seminary.

"The intention of the program was to renovate the parishes by renovating family life," Fr. Persich said. "I learned a great deal about married love and love in general. And I formed friendships that continue to this day, 50 years later."

Fr. Persich goes to Camarillo when needed at the parish, which helps him maintain meaningful connections.

"When I go there, I stay with friends," he said. "It's a combination of helping at the parish and visiting with friends, another aspect of relationship-building."



Fr. Prudencio Rodriguez de Yurre, C.M.

A classmate of Fr. Tony Ruiz, C.M., Fr. Prudencio taught at St. Louis Prep Seminary initially and decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Spanish literature so he could teach college. He later taught at DePaul University in Chicago, where he also served in the administration.

He went from DePaul to pastoral ministry and back to teaching, this time at St. Thomas Theological Seminary in Denver, where he taught from 1978 until it closed in 1994.

"I loved it very much," he said. "After the seminary closed, I asked, 'What do I do now?'"

Fr. Prudencio conducted programs and retreats for Spanish-speaking people in Phoenix and then Denver and relocated to Montebello in 2010 to direct the DePaul Evangelization Center, which he did until he "retired" in 2016.

"A little bit before that, I began working as the spiritual director for the Spanish-speaking programs at the Association of the Miraculous Medal," he said.

Now 83 and blessed with good health, he visits parishes and conducts 3- to 4-day missions to promote devotion to the Blessed Mother.

"I think the most important thing we can do is promote that devotion," he said. "The Spanish-speaking people have a strong devotion to Mary. I bring Miraculous Medals with me, and I never seem to have enough. I don't have to say very much. They know what it means, and that is very fulfilling to me."



⬆ Fr. Roy Persich, C.M.

The Laborer

Fr. Hoan Nguyen, C.M., took a long route to the priesthood

Before Fr. Hoan Nguyen, C.M., was born, his mother prayed for a boy and said that, if she were granted one, she would offer him to God. Though it took a long time, at the age of 80 she saw him ordained a priest in California.

Growing up in Vietnam, Fr. Hoan entered the Vincentian seminary in 1969 at 19. When the Vietnamese government fell in 1975, his studies were halted because of the Communist government. While his friends left and got married, Fr. Hoan taught catechism to young people and brought communion to the elderly, all in secret.

“I decided that to keep my vocation, I had to leave for the U.S., which I did in 1989,” he said.

He connected with the Vincentians in California, restarted his formal studies, and was ordained in 1999, the day before his 50th birthday.

He has served as an associate pastor, as a chaplain for various organizations, and in a variety of other roles.



Fr. Hoan Nguyen, C.M.

Now 75, he lives at the DePaul Evangelization Center in Montebello and is chaplain for Annunciation Catholic Church in Arcadia. He has embraced every assignment.

“I am like the day laborers in the parable (Mt 20: 1-16), the workers waiting on the corner until the landowner finally calls them to work,” he said. “When the community asks me to do something, I say ‘yes,’ because I was chosen late and need to respond.”

Forming Faith

Fr. Bernie Quinn, C.M., looks back on a fulfilling life in ministry

Fr. Bernie Quinn, C.M., was born on the west side of Chicago in 1947, one of 10 children, the day his oldest sister left home to join the Daughters of Charity. Two other sisters would follow her into the Daughters, who ran the girls’ high school in his parish.



Fr. Bernie Quinn, C.M., with a cherished picture of his students while serving as Novice Master in Kenya.

“We were included in the Vincentian family,” he said.

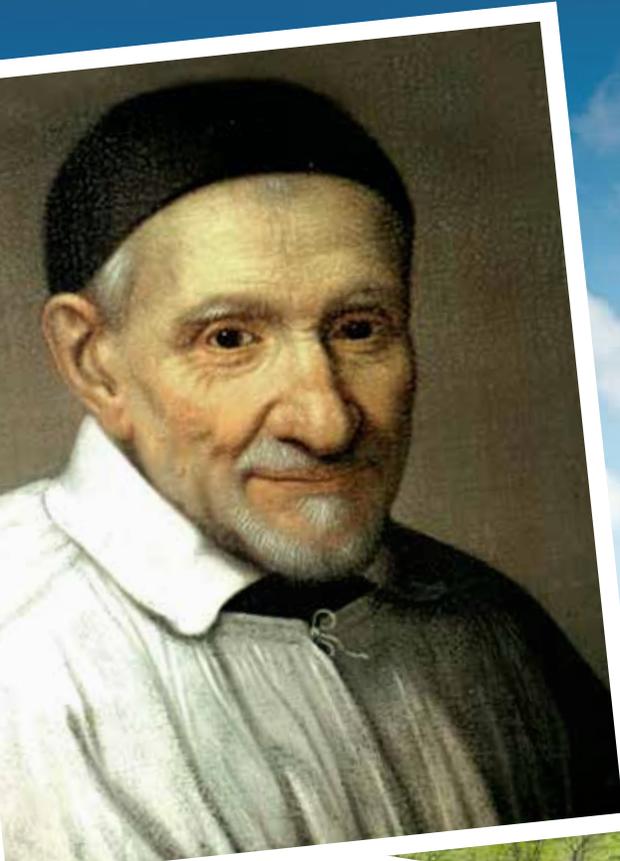
He caught the vocation bug while attending Loyola University and went into the seminary. He was ordained in 1972 in Lemont, IL, and began teaching in the seminary in San Fernando, CA, which he said, “may as well have been China.”

Fr. Bernie served as Parochial Vicar in Burundi for a few years and later was Provincial of the Province of the West from 1996 to 2002.

When the chance came in 2011 to take on the role of Novice Master with the Vincentian mission in Nairobi, he eagerly took it. He speaks fondly of the men he worked with there, including a young Edwin Mugwe, who currently serves as Visitor for the Kenyan Vice-Province. When he returned to the U.S. in 2015, he served as Director of the Daughters of Charity Province of the West for nine years.

“In a sense, the through line for me has been formation, starting with my own and then assisting others,” he said. “It has all come down to being available for whatever the province needed me to do. That is the Vincentian calling.”

St. Vincent de Paul, Our Patron Saint



As we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Misson, we naturally want to reflect on the man who is our patron saint, St. Vincent de Paul. As we do, the question might come to mind, “What exactly is a patron saint?” A valid question! But perhaps a better question would be, “What are we to do with a patron saint?” A great answer was put forward by Blessed Frederic Ozanam when writing about the patron of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which he co-founded.

“A patron ... is a model one must strive to imitate, as [Vincent] himself imitated the model of Jesus Christ. [Vincent’s] is a life to be carried on, a heart in which one’s own heart is enkindled, an intelligence from which light should be sought; he is a model on earth and a protector in heaven.”

—Blessed Frederick Ozanam

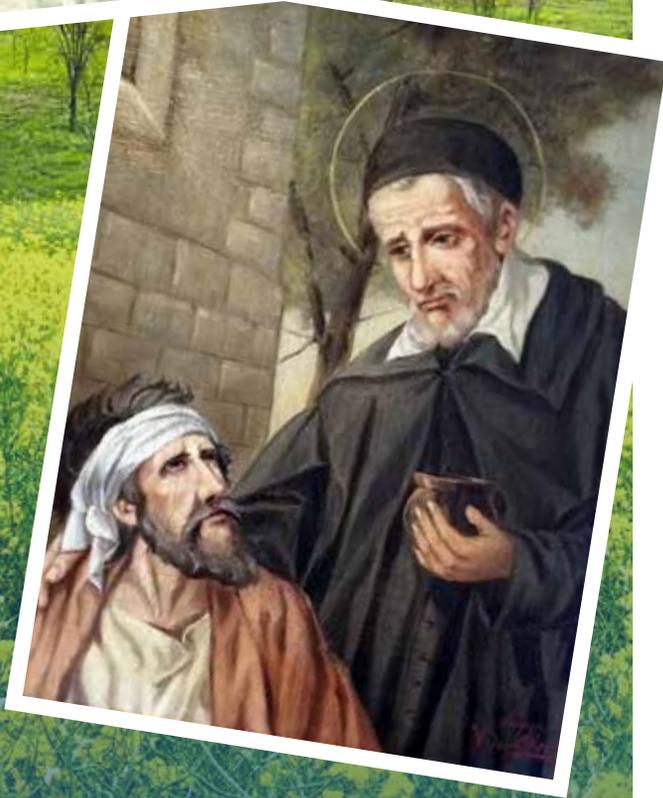
As a model on earth, we imitate St. Vincent. As a protector in heaven, we invoke his assistance. His role as patron saint is about imitation and invocation.

Imitation. As to what aspects of St. Vincent’s character and virtue we should imitate, the possibilities are many. At the top of the list would be his humility and charity, especially when it comes to dealing with each other and those we serve. These virtues were most often mentioned by Vincent’s contemporaries, and they are evident in his biographical accounts. We could surely benefit by reflecting on how well we imitate our patron in these two key virtues.

As far as invoking St. Vincent in our prayers, we have only to look at the many ways he showed himself to be a man of prayer, making it the groundwork of all he did. Although his contemporaries saw him as a man of action, doing so much in the span of one lifetime, he insisted that no good works were possible without a deep commitment to prayer. Or to put it another way, prayer is the soul of ministry and an essential element of our service to the poor. Although during his life he would have blushed and discounted any notion of his being the object of our prayer, we would do well in our daily prayer to frequently invoke the protection and intercession of our patron saint.

For close to 400 years, not only the Vincentian Family but also other believers and non-believers alike have found Vincent de Paul to be a worthy and admirable patron. He is our founder, mentor, and heavenly friend; someone we ought to imitate and invoke as often and as deeply as possible.

-Fr. Ray Van Dorpe, C.M.





CONGREGATION
of the **MISSION**

THE VINCENTIANS
WESTERN PROVINCE

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ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

2025 SPRING NEWSLETTER

Learn more about the Congregation of the Mission Western Province, join us in prayer, and offer your support. Visit us online at vincentian.org and like us on Facebook at facebook.com/CMWesternProvince.

The Strength to Fight On

Province launches 2025 Kenya Appeal

Rosemary Awino gets up to speak wearing a black coat and a red and white head scarf. She smiles and addresses the other members of the congregation after an outdoor Mass at the Vincentians' Lazare House in Nairobi, Kenya, spreading her hands wide and gesturing for emphasis. The congregants, like her, are there to receive food assistance: bags of dried beans, rice, and other staples that will provide for their families for a few weeks.

"You come here feeling very weak...but you come out smiling," she says to applause. "Is it not true?"

Rosemary first came to the Vincentians for assistance in 2019. Having lost her husband and son, she was suffering from ill health and had no one else to turn to. The Vincentians provided medical and food assistance, and though she was later diagnosed with ovarian cancer, the Vincentians' have continued to support her with food and medicine, which has given her the strength to confront her challenges.

The Western Province's Kenya Appeal supports assistance for people like Rosemary and much more, including education and formation programs for the clergy and laity, healthcare programs for the elderly, and clean water and solar projects.

Our goal is to raise \$145,000 for these important initiatives. You can find out more and donate online by visiting www.vincentian.org/your-support/needs-in-kenya/ or scanning the code below.

Please consider joining us to help people like Rosemary and support the Vincentians' important work in East Africa.



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