

The St Vincent de Paul 2022 Christmas Hamper Campaign.



Lord Jesus, deepen our Vincentian spirit of friendship and make us responsive to the Christian calling to seek and find the forgotten, the suffering, or the deprived, so that we may bring them your love.....

....A section of the Vincentian prayer, a conviction very palpable as the 67 volunteers, (many of whom are Br. Knights), came together on December 17th for the St Vincent de Paul 2022 Christmas Hamper Campaign.

The area served by St John the Divine Conference is not large, maybe 10 sq kilometers bordered by Southdale, Wonderland, Springbank, and Wharncliffe, yet the need is well beyond what most would expect in such a lovely, middle-class area. When you drive to Mass on the weekend, it's a fact that you will drive by no less than 50 homes of families living below the poverty line. These are our neighbors in need and thankfully we were in a position to provide quite a bounty this year.

Good News! How can there be good news when speaking about those in need? The good news is how our church community, along with several area schools and businesses came through with such generosity. The donations of food, toys, gift cards, and financial contributions were beyond the expectations of the SSVdP team.

In the days leading up to the 17th, the team of volunteers put in many hours to prepare the hall for the market-style grocery store and the meeting room that resembled Toy R Us when the work was completed.

For more than 30 years of St Vincent de Paul at St John the Divine, members would prepare a very generous supply of non-perishable food items and an assortment of extras as Christmas Hampers. The members would deliver, or the families would come to the church to pick up these Christmas Hampers.

In 2018, the SSVdP President at the time, Mike Chretien, had the idea of changing the Christmas Hamper Program to a shopping spree where the church welcomed the families and, with the help of a personal shopper, the family member would make the trip through the market, picking out the items they needed.

This was a huge success, but it could not continue during the years of COVID.

This year, the members unanimously agreed to return to the market style despite needing many volunteers to make it a success. This included hosts of the 35 market stations, many personal shoppers, receptionists, registration coordinators, and several runners who did everything and anything needed.



A team of drivers was also required as many of the families arrived on foot and were simply overwhelmed by the sheer volume of food and other items they received.

What other items? Many other items included fresh carrots, potatoes, apples, and bread. There were toiletries, hats, mitts, pj's, and a wide selection of other personal items.

After completing their shopping, they were pleased to receive gift cards from the local grocery stores, Giant Tiger, Tim Horton's, Shoppers Drug Mart, MacDonald's, Dollarama, and Walmart, all of whom donated to the Christmas Hamper.

But the icing on the cake for families with children was the Toy Store. The picture below gives you a view of what awaited the parents when invited into the Toy Store.



There, they were greeted by a team member that helped them select a toy for each child.

The parents also picked out some books, crafts, and puzzles.

Thanks to the VERY generous donations from parishioners, schools, and some caring London businesses, there were hundreds of quality toys worth thousands of dollars for parents to choose from.

To keep the toys secret from the kids that came with the parents, the children were ushered off to the Kids' Corner where they were entertained by volunteers with games, crafts, and coloring.



It was a beautiful morning, with so many smiles, laughter, hugs, and tears.

Most of these families live below the poverty line and truly struggle to make ends meet. December 17th didn't change their circumstances, but it did bring them some joy, a bounty of food and gifts that made their Christmas a little better than it would have been if not for what happened on the 17th.

The numbers:

SSVdP provided Christmas Hampers to 127 families with 421 family members. Parents

were able to select toys, books, craft supplies, and games for 172 children. These families also received a share of the \$9,945 in gift cards, an average of almost \$25.00 per person

From January through December 2022, St Vincent de Paul at St John the Divine assisted 396 families (1328 people) with food hampers. This was an increase of almost 40% over 2021 and the most in the history of the St John the Divine Conference.

Members have already requested assistance this year and indications are that the need is only increasing.

A concern is that donations to St Vincent de Paul are down, way down which results in a reduction of what we can provide to families in need.

We pray that there will be sufficient donations to enable us to provide hampers with a good and healthy selection.

Thanks to all that participated in the Christmas Hamper Campaign through donations and assisting at the church during Hamper Week.