

## ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY SVP Awareness Month

The Feast of St Vincent de Paul falls on 27<sup>th</sup> September and each year, September is SVP Awareness Month of the St Vincent de Paul Society, when the Society raises awareness amongst parishes nationally about the aims and work of the Society.

The St Vincent de Paul Society, or SVP as it is known, was founded some 200 years ago in France and is now an international charity outreach. The local Dereham Conference of the SVP was started 35 years ago and has constantly done much good work, quietly in the background, visiting parishioners who are housebound or in care homes, plus meeting requests for befriending or practical help.

In past years, many other social groups flourished within the Parish – such as the Union of Catholic Mothers, a walking group, Co-workers of Mother Teresa (knitting group), prayer groups (held in people's homes), and a brilliant Justice & Peace group which twinned with a church school in Kulende, Nigeria and supported it with fundraising until the school was well-established and successful. There were also other groups and individuals who all supported the parish. All these groups and other groups and individuals reflect the work carried out by the SVP but sadly due to falling memberships, many of them are no longer active within the parish.

The Dereham Branch of the SVP has similarly been impacted over the years by ageing members and membership numbers have seriously fluctuated. Despite this, the Branch has continued to keep functioning and meeting an increasing need for outreach help in and around the parish. Currently, the youngest member of the Branch is 67 and the average age of members is over 70. So there is a desperate need for new younger people of all ages and nationalities to volunteer to help the SVP to continue to meet the needs of those it serves.

The membership process is subject to national safeguarding procedures, which does take some time before volunteers can begin. Once fully enrolled, volunteers work in pairs to visit parishioners or befriending those in need. The commitment is for one hour a week, plus attendance at a monthly

group meeting (again lasting no more than one hour).

There are many ways that help can be given – visiting the elderly or housebound. For example, there are some elderly people who would love for a young mother to come and visit them, with their young child or children. Some parishes have 'mini-Vinnies' who operate in Primary Schools. There are youth SVP opportunities for 11-18-year-olds. And then you have SVP groups like ours, that are for anyone. Members of different nationalities can also be so helpful when helping others in need where English is not their first language. In recent years, there has been a need for Ukrainian, Urdu and Polish speakers amongst others. So you can see how anyone can volunteer in so many different ways helping those in need of any age and nationality.

We ask you all to please think charitably about what you might be able to do that could make a difference to those around you, to put into action the Word of God. The SVP is a very powerful way of doing so.

*(Paraphrased from an appeal given by  
Deacon Martin Sanderson  
SVP Dereham Conference,  
Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024)*