

Spring 2026

- 3 Living the Mission at St. Vincent de Paul Parish
- 4 Donor Spotlight
- 5 Serving Those Who Serve
- 6 Our Lenten Journey
- 7 Western Province Office Relocating

Passing the Light

St. Vincent's Schools in Perryville celebrate 130 years with Catholic Schools Week

St. Vincent de Paul Church in Perryville, Missouri, was packed to capacity for its Feb. 2 Pass the Light Mass, which kicks off Catholic Schools Week at the Parish each year.

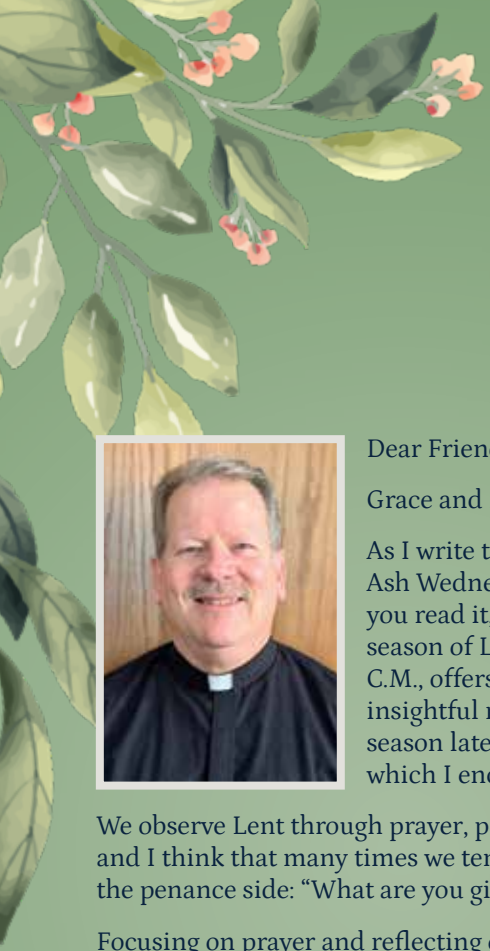
Members of the senior class entered in a processional with members of the kindergarten class—the outgoing and the incoming, each moving into a new phase in their lives, anchored by their mutual connection to St. Vincent's. Pastor Fr. Joe Geders, C.M., called it, “an overload of cuteness.”

This Catholic Schools Week was a special one at the parish, which is celebrating 130 years of Catholic education and has been run by the Vincentians since 1818.

With 582 students from age 3 through grade 12 and 75 staff, the schools have an eye on the future while they celebrate the past, said Zach Stobart, Ed.S., President of Schools. A few years ago, they changed their administrative structure and transitioned their advisory council to a more formal Board of Directors.

(continued, p.2)





Dear Friends,

Grace and Peace in the Lord Jesus!

As I write this, it is two days before Ash Wednesday, and by the time you read it, we will be well into the season of Lent. Fr. Ron Ramson, C.M., offers a thoughtful and insightful reflection on the Lenten season later in this newsletter, which I encourage you to read.

We observe Lent through prayer, penance, and charity, and I think that many times we tend to focus too much on the penance side. "What are you giving up for Lent?"

Focusing on prayer and reflecting on our spiritual lives and our personal lives can extend naturally to penance and charity if our reflections lead us to actions that lift up the people around us.

Charity can take many forms, of course, whether it be almsgiving or offering a kind word or a helping hand. All of these amount to sharing our gifts, as St. Vincent instructs us to. It's something to think about.

I wish you a blessed Easter; 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 a photo gallery
from St. Vincent's Parish

(continued from cover)

"St. Vincent Schools have excelled in academics, athletics, and spiritual formation, demonstrating a well-rounded commitment to developing students' minds, bodies, and souls," said Dr. Stobart, who is in his second year as president and his fourth overall at St. Vincent's.

He said his and Fr. Geders' main focus areas are sustainability and the Catholic identity of the school. Toward the latter goal, Fr. Ranjan Lima, C.M., joined the staff in 2024 as principal of the Junior and Senior High School. A native of India, he came to the school after completing his doctorate in curriculum studies at DePaul University.

Fr. Ranjan said he is impressed by the strong sense of community in the Perryville and that the school has become more intentional about its Catholic and Vincentian identity through structured spiritual activities and faith formation programs, making faith a visible and active part of daily school life.

Dr. Stobart asserts that the students' perception of priests has changed with Fr. Ranjan in the building, which he thinks will also serve to enhance vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

"I have had discussions with graduating seniors, who said they feel they have become more Catholic and more Vincentian," Dr. Stobart said.

Fr. Ranjan said he believes the school has fulfilled the goal of Catholic education very well, which is about forming students in the mind of Christ. This extends to the schools' Parish School of Religion program, according to Coordinator Randy Dickmann. The program's 119 enrollees, who attend public school, celebrate reconciliation, first communion, and confirmation along with the rest of the students at St. Vincent.

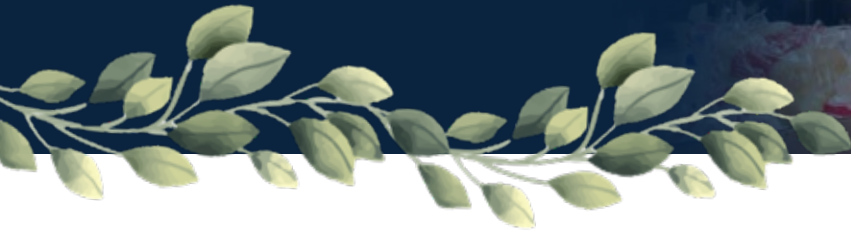
"There is something unique and beautiful about this place," Fr. Ranjan said about the sense of interconnectedness he has found at the school. "Most students' parents and grandparents went here. There is a great interest and excitement among the alumni for the betterment of the school."

And so it goes, on and on, passing the light from generation to generation.



The Way Things Work

St. Vincent's parishioners live the mission for the less fortunate



Fr. Joe Geders, C.M., pastor at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Perryville, Missouri, works with old locomotive steam engines in his spare time.

“As a kid, I loved trains,” he said. “Mostly, I think I’ve always been fascinated by the way things work.”

Ordained in 1984, Fr. Geders said he had always wanted to be a parish priest.

“I started out teaching at the high school seminary, St. Louis Prep,” said Fr. Geders, a native of St. Louis County. “I went from there to treasury work, and after I served as provincial treasurer (from 2003 to ‘06) I got a chance to be a pastor.”

He served in Jackson, Wyoming, for about 4½ years before a five-year assignment as Treasurer General for the CM Curia in Rome. Pastor at St. Vincent’s for about eight years now, he has a deep appreciation and connection for the people of this community and their values.

“People here are independent,” he said. “It’s a farming community. People get to know each other and support each other. Grandparents, parents, kids, grandkids—it’s nice to see those family units.”



He appreciates that parts of the Vincentian mission, serving and evangelizing the poor, are carried out in his parish by the parishioners at the Ladies of Charity Food Pantry and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Though separate from the parish, these organizations work closely with it and each other.



“Reading the history of St. Vincent and St. Louise, I feel like this is what Jesus calls us to do. If you can bring a little joy, ease people’s burdens, it seems the thing to do.”

—Maureen Mattingly

Maureen Mattingly (pictured above on the left), President of the Perryville Ladies of Charity chapter for the last two years, said the food pantry serves 255 families a month. The pantry’s shelves are stocked with donations from local businesses and individuals.

“The parish gives us a lot and partners with us in many ways,” Maureen said. “The school does a fundraiser every year on St. Vincent’s feast day, and we frequently publish information in the bulletin.”

Andy Graf, President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, proudly shows off the society’s thrift store, where Maureen

also volunteers. Store sales fund a variety of assistance, including rent and utilities, medical and dental payments, auto repairs, and much more. The thrift store is in its 25th year and moved into its current facility last summer, built with donations from the community and staffed entirely by 115 volunteers.

“We helped 500 families last year,” Andy said. “We have the same guiding principles as the Vincentians; Fr. Ron Ramson (C.M.) is our spiritual director.”

The Society contributes any additional funds to other charitable organizations, including the Ladies of Charity Food Pantry.



Scan for a video from St. Vincent's Parish



This is a Relationship

Bert and Amy Feliss ponder a lifetime of blessings from the Vincentians

Bert Feliss grew up in St. Basil's Parish in Chicago, and though his path has taken him all over the country, including seminary high school with the Vincentians, he has fostered a strong relationship with his friends from that time and the Vincentian community that would help shape their lives.

Fr. Joseph Haley, C.M., a Vincentian priest he met at St. Basil's, convinced him to try the seminary high school in Lemont, Illinois, where he graduated in 1965.

"While some of my group went on to the seminary in Santa Barbara, I went in a different direction, into science and technology," Bert said.

He earned a bachelor's in chemistry from Notre Dame and a master's and Ph.D. in engineering from Michigan State University before starting his career with IBM. There, he worked in research and development and moved all over the country, as well as a stint in Southampton, England.

Bert met his wife, Amy, in Minneapolis, and they were married there in 1988. Both are retired now, they have settled in Aptos, California, 10 miles from Santa Cruz on the coast of Monterey Bay. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.

"They live in San Jose, so we get to see each other quite often," Bert said.

Bert has remained in touch with several of his classmates, including Fr. J. Patrick Murphy, C.M., who remains in Chicago and is a professor emeritus at DePaul University.

"There are about 10 of us in close communication," Bert said. "We get together for a reunion every few years."

The Vincentian community helped develop a strong moral and academic basis for his life, for which he is grateful. The couple have faithfully supported the works of the Province for many years.

"That community transcends the time and the years," Amy said.

"You want to give back where you received so much, to those people who helped you develop into who you are. We believe that we have benefitted from the prayers of the community. It means a lot, knowing that you are included in their prayers and intentions. This is a relationship."

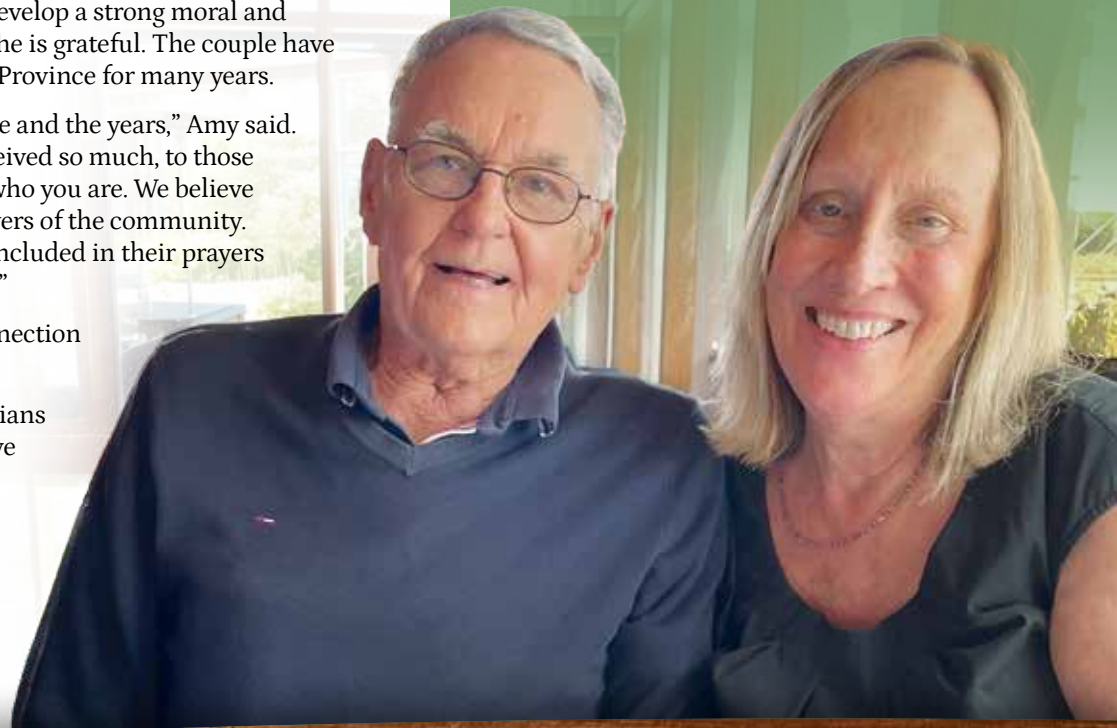
For Bert, the community and the connection is about more than just memories.

"In Ukraine, for example, the Vincentians have worked to protect people and give them food and housing," Bert said. "I think the mission of the Vincentians, knowing there is goodness going on in such a crazy world, is comforting."

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“That community transcends the time and the years. You want to give back where you received so much, to those people who helped you develop into who you are.”

—Amy Feliss



Serving Those Who Serve

Fr. Gielow has advised U.S. Ladies of Charity nearly 40 years

Although St. Vincent de Paul is widely known as the founder of the Congregation of the Mission and co-founder of the Daughters of Charity, some people may be surprised to learn that St. Vincent's first organization of charitable work was not made up of priests, brothers, and sisters, but rather lay women.

The Ladies of Charity still serve the poor throughout the world, and their membership in the U.S. has had a steady presence for decades in its National Spiritual Advisor—Fr. Dick Gielow, C.M.

In 1617, as pastor of a parish at Chatillon-les-Dombes in eastern France, St. Vincent began the first "Confraternity of Charity" (also to be known as the Ladies of Charity), organizing the women of the parish to do activities that combined personalized charitable work with prayer and community. Later, with St. Louise de Marillac, he established these all over France. Today, they are part of the Vincentian Family and are known as the International Association of Charities (AIC). In the U.S., the Ladies of Charity (part of the AIC) number nearly 6,000 women in 57 associations across 20 states and the District of Columbia. They take as their motto, "To serve rather than be served in humility, simplicity and charity."

Helping to promote the Vincentian charism among its members has been Fr. Dick Gielow, C.M., who began his involvement with the Ladies of Charity in 1976 as spiritual advisor of the Kansas City association. In 1988, he was asked to become the National Spiritual Advisor to the Ladies of Charity USA, and he has held that role ever since.

Working with the Board of Directors, Fr. Gielow helps "assist local associations to continue, expand, and improve their charitable and spiritual works according to the directives and in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton through personal service to those in need." (from the statement of objectives, LCUSA)

Fr. Dick's role with the organization has three main parts. First, he attends the National Assembly of the Ladies, which always begins with a day of prayer at which he offers reflections and celebrates the Eucharist. Second, Fr. Dick attends the Board of Directors meeting twice a year, helping them find ways to promote the Vincentian spirit throughout the organization. And third, he travels to various locations throughout the U.S., offering days of prayer and other assistance, as requested.

"When I listen to what these women do for the poor, I am always inspired," Fr. Gielow said. "Their service is always grounded in the spirit of St. Vincent and St. Louise."





Do we take Lent seriously

I have been a Catholic priest for 64 years. In those 64 years, I have taught at seminaries and served in various administrative roles there. I have served in parishes, and at one time I was a missionary in Kenya.

One of the best things I ever did was start young teen clubs in the worst slum high schools in the Nairobi, Kenya. I thoroughly enjoyed these teens. They taught me what poverty really was.

One of the Catholic high schools invited me to speak at their assembly. I accepted. At this particular school, there were 125 Muslim boys. The Muslims sent their sons to the Catholic high school for a solid education and formation. What would I talk about to this mixed group of young adults? I prayed about it, and it came to me: Ramadan and Lent.

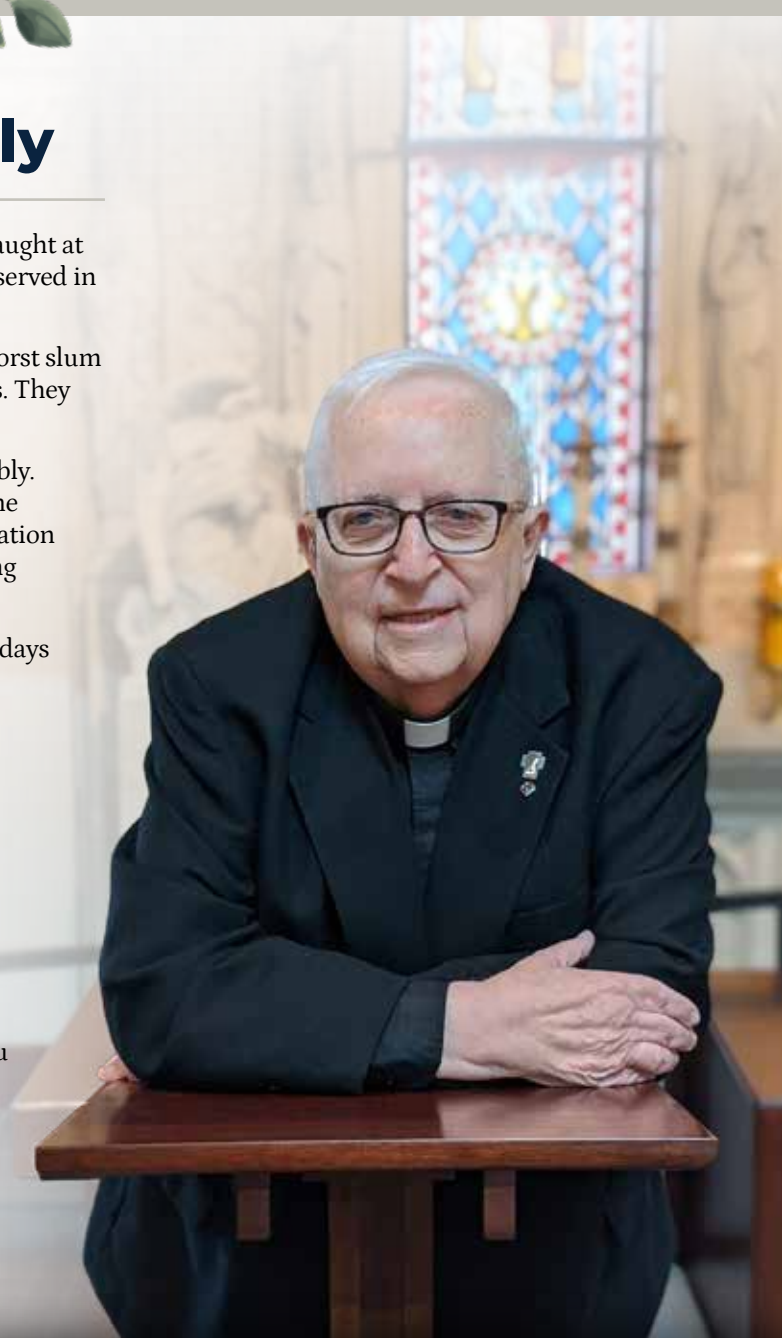
We Christians celebrate 40 days of Lent. The Muslims celebrate 30 days of Ramadan, ten days shorter than we Christians do.

There is a similarity between the two. We Christians, during Lent, promote prayer, penance, and acts of charity. For Muslims, during Ramadan, they also have the same three means of observance.

As I talked to the teens, I was thrilled that they were all listening intently to me. I think the Muslims were very surprised to hear a Catholic priest talking about their holiest time of the year.

Muslims take Ramadan very seriously. How about us? Do we Christians take Lent very seriously? There is still time—we are now more than halfway through Lent. How are you doing with prayer, penance, and acts of charity? Examine your spiritual life. Thank you for reading. God bless you!

Fr. Ron Ramson, C.M., ordained in 1959, is the author of numerous books, including Put Your Hands Into Hers: Mary, Our Life Our Sweetness, and Our Hope. He lives at the Vincentian residence at St. Mary's of the Barrens in Perryville, Missouri.



Western Province Office Moving to Historic St. Louis Building

In June 2026, the Congregation of the Mission Western Province will relocate its office to a newly renovated building at 1405 South 9th Street on the campus of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in St. Louis.

The building will house a combination of lay staff and Vincentians, including Provincial Superior Fr. Joseph Williams, C.M., Treasurer Fr. Kevin Fausz, C.M., and the Development, Finance, Human Resources, and Communications offices, as well as some staff members for The God Minute, a Vincentian online prayer ministry.

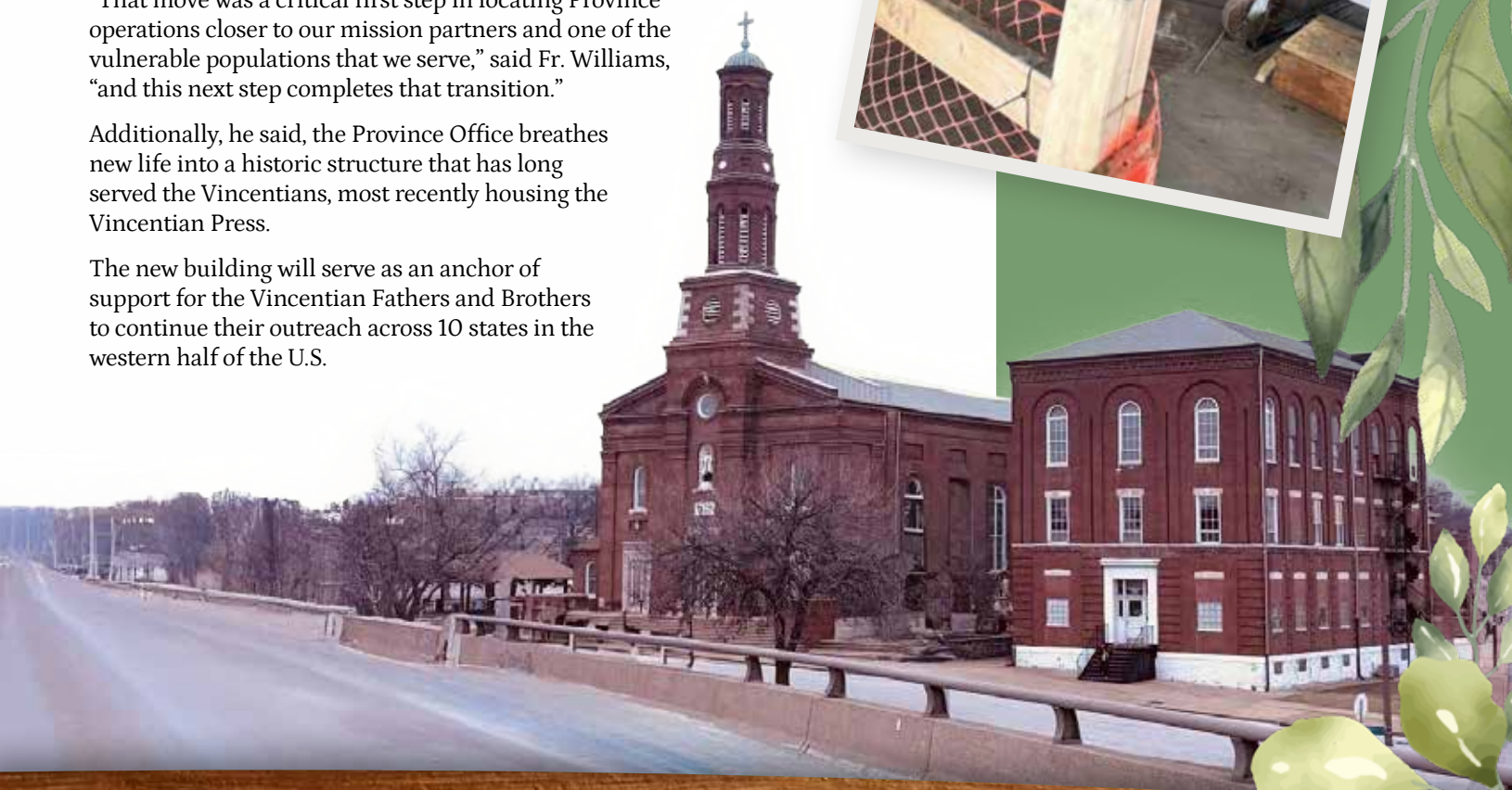
“This new building represents an opportunity to locate the Province Office in a space owned by the Province, directly adjacent to our mission in action at St. Vincent’s Parish, which serves hundreds of needy families in the Soulard area and beyond with food and housing assistance, clothing, and more,” said Fr. Joseph S. Williams, C.M., Provincial Superior.

The Province Office moved to its current location, in the bottom level of the Aquinas Institute of Theology, in July 2021 after 25 years in Earth City.

“That move was a critical first step in locating Province operations closer to our mission partners and one of the vulnerable populations that we serve,” said Fr. Williams, “and this next step completes that transition.”

Additionally, he said, the Province Office breathes new life into a historic structure that has long served the Vincentians, most recently housing the Vincentian Press.

The new building will serve as an anchor of support for the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers to continue their outreach across 10 states in the western half of the U.S.





**CONGREGATION
of the MISSION**

THE VINCENTIANS
WESTERN PROVINCE

3701 Forest Park Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63108



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

2026 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.

Western Province Statement on U.S. Immigration Policies and Enforcement

Even before St. Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission 400 years ago, he arrived at a moment of moral clarity regarding the plight of the poor and forgotten. He devoted his life and built our community, the Vincentians, around an unwavering commitment to those who suffer in our communities, including refugees.

In a similar moment of moral clarity and guided by the principles handed down by our founder, we, the Vincentians of the Western Province, are compelled to speak out on the increasingly aggressive, violent, and alarming actions and tactics by our nation's immigration enforcement personnel in communities throughout the United States.

While we support the broad goals of law enforcement to reduce violent crime and make our communities safer, we cannot condone the indiscriminate and often harsh targeting of immigrants whose only offense is that they entered the U.S. outside of the established legal immigration procedures. We cannot condone unnecessarily violent law enforcement practices, racial profiling, or retaliation against those who are

lawfully protesting the actions of immigration personnel.

We stand with refugees, especially those who have fled violence and abject poverty in their home countries. We stand with those who have joined and contributed to our communities, and we stand with families, as well as with law enforcement personnel who protect the rights and safety of all.

We call on our leaders in government to enact sensible, humane immigration policies that recognize the dignity of every person and that reflect the American values that have stood for generations in this nation of immigrants.

Finally, we pray that our representatives in government step back from this precipice and reflect on the words of our savior: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25: 31-40)

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION WESTERN PROVINCE LEADERSHIP

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

Fr. Kevin Fausz, C.M., Treasurer and Consultor

Fr. Rex Hays, C.M., Consultor

Fr. Jim Osendorf, C.M., Consultor

Fr. Derek Swanson, C.M., Consultor