

# Annunciation's 'Vibrant Vinnies' become official Conference

By: The Catholic Sun

Frederic Ozanam, founder of the Society St. Vincent de Paul, was a 20-year-old law student when he and his peers formed the first "Conference of Charity."

Some 800,000 Catholics of all ages now carry out charitable work in the name of St. Vincent de Paul in 150 countries. That includes 30-some fifth-through eighth-graders at Annunciation Catholic School in Cave Creek who recently became an official St. Vincent de Paul Conference.

They join some 4,440 Conferences at the parish, university and special work levels committed to helping the poor with food, bills and other services worldwide. Annunciation's "Vibrant Vinnies," as the students call themselves, are one of the few SVdP elementary Conferences in the U.S. Most youth Conferences are high school or college conference.

They have a complete slate of officers and hold monthly meetings. They hold at least one, if not two service projects a month and do home visits during the summer with an inner city Conference. Last September, they raised over a \$1,000 for their Chris Becker Dining Room Christmas party by participating in the National Friends of the Poor® Walk sponsored by District 11. Annunciation's Vibrant Vinnies worked behind the scenes and as participants. This year's walk is Sept. 30.

"Each month, I stand in awe of their commitment to helping others, their increasing awareness of the social issues that lead to poverty, their understanding of the Society's history and its mission, and their determination to use their youth as a unique springboard to service," said Shirley Smalley, the Conference's adult leader.

Their Conference motto is, "You are never too young to make a difference."

The Vibrant Vinnies saw that during a game night at Ozanam Manor, a transitional shelter for older adults and any adult with a disability. More adults than usual came down and participated. By the end of the evening, Smalley counted 22 youth and residents gathered around one table playing Apples to Apples.

"No one wanted the game to end," she said. "The residents were comfortable and relaxed around the kids. No one was afraid of not measuring up. In the faces of these young Vincentians, the residents remembered their own child, grandchildren, nieces and nephews and the room was filled with joy and laughter."

The rest of the school year will see Annunciation's Vibrant Vinnies supporting St. Vincent de Paul food pantries, doing food delivery home visits, supporting its family dining room, co-sponsoring a Christmas party for children of the working poor, hosting food drives and serving in the community garden or family volunteer days, both at the main campus.



Members of Annunciation's Vibrant Vinnies hand out hygiene bags at St. Vincent de Paul.