



Famvin Homeless Alliance  
Vincentian Family Global Initiative on Homelessness  
Our vision is that everyone has a place to call home  
and a stake in their community

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Famvin Homeless Alliance. This is an exciting moment for our new alliance. We have spent the past year laying the groundwork for this initiative within the global Vincentian movement: a movement inspired by a mission to serve our homeless neighbours – be they living in the world's many slums; fleeing war or natural disaster as refugees or internally displaced people; or trying to survive in inadequate shelter or living on our streets.

Now it has reached the time for us to take this work to you, the Vincentian Family, and ask: will you **join us**? Will you help us make a real difference to our homeless brothers and sisters wherever we live?

I am always struck by St Vincent's restlessness. He once said we must 'seek out those who are poorest'. For me, Saint Vincent is saying we must be bold: we must push ourselves to do more for the marginalised of our world. We should not wait for them to come to us. We should not witness suffering or poverty and just stand by.

I know first hand that the Vincentian Family is already answering this call. Across the globe, our Family does marvellous work for the homeless. The Famvin Homeless

Alliance is not here to replace that. On the contrary, we are here to build on that, with the restlessness that St Vincent instructed us to show.

A restlessness Jesus too displayed, of course. In John 15, He famously tells the disciples to 'love one another, as I have loved you'. This is a real challenge, one St Vincent understood. This passage is saying, I think, that we must be ambitious in our love, that we must aspire to Jesus' standard of love and care for all people. Those of us working in the service of the poor must be ambitious to work for and with them.

The Famvin Homeless Alliance is there to support those with this ambition to love the homeless, whether you have been working in this field for decades or are completely new to it. Our **13 Houses Campaign** invites Vincentians to build houses and develop projects for those without shelter or stability. It is in its pilot phase at the moment but using the learning from this we will take the Campaign to the whole Family in November. We want to house 10,000 people across the globe. Yes, this is ambitious. But, as Vincentians, we have to be!

Our **Conference in November** is bringing together experts from all over the world to reflect on how to best serve our homeless neighbours. If you want to network with other members of the Vincentian Family involved in homelessness or increase your knowledge and skills to help the homeless, do apply to attend in Rome through our website. I'd love to see you there. Also on our website, and social media platforms, we will be sharing stories, training resources and spiritual materials. We want you to help us develop this base of knowledge – have you got a story to share that others might learn from?

This theme of contribution and collaboration is what the Famvin Homeless Alliance is built on. Already, we have participants from across the world, but we want more. To be ambitious means to collaborate – finding people who will join you in your mission is vital. I have learnt this as the Chief Executive of **Depaul International**, a Vincentian homelessness charity working in seven countries helping 21,000 people each year. Only through the combined hard work and talent of hundreds of people (both professional staff and volunteers), are we able to serve our homeless neighbours.

So I want to thank you for your interest in the Famvin Homeless Alliance, and sincerely hope you join us in moving forward together. My prayers for your work and service.

Yours in St Vincent,

**Mark McGreevy**

Famvin Homeless Alliance



## WELCOMING THE STRANGER – SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL AND THE HOMELESS

### Father Robert Maloney, C.M.

Homelessness was a major focus of St Vincent's charitable work. Father Robert Maloney, in his article "*Welcoming the Stranger: Saint Vincent de Paul and the Homeless*" explores how his example, four hundred years later, has inspired the creation of a Vincentian Family 'megaproject' for homeless people: the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA).

Homelessness, says Father Maloney, "ranked high on Vincent's agenda" and his initiatives were foundational in establishing the principles of structured and well-administered charity we see today.

He, in fact, dedicated time and effort to accommodate foundling children. Using the money donated by the Queen of Austria, he built 13 small houses which he rented to the Ladies of Charity where children were accommodated. The regular rent money became the stable endowment to support the missions in Sedan.

He also worked hard to find lodging and assistance for thousands of men, women and children displaced by the conflict in Lorraine. He organized campaigns to raise funds and to obtain contributions for their relief. He led efforts to shelter, clothe and feed people living on the streets of Paris.

Vincent also organized educational programs for to equip teachers for catechizing those living in desperate circumstances. For him, education and job training were extremely important in transforming the lives of the homeless and the poor. Central too were the values which underpinned his work: Saint Vincent demanded diligence and accountability from those who served the poor under his watch.

Fr Maloney argues an emphasis on collaboration and systemic change are essential to an effective and fruitful project and articulates how this can be achieved, especially through listening to and actively involving our homeless brothers and sisters.



## FHA AT THE 8TH MEETING OF THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY IN LATIN AMERICA (FAVILA) IN COCHABAMBA

On March 13-18, Yasmine Cajuste, our Project Development Manager, participated in the 8th meeting of the Vincentian Family in Latin America (FAVILA) in Cochabamba, Bolivia. This gathering of 93 Vincentians from 18 countries and 10 branches of the Vincentian Family was the first opportunity to present the Famvin Homeless Alliance in the region. The Final Documents of meeting highlighted the need for concrete actions within the region in the spirit of collaboration and the methodology of systemic change.



## FHA VISITS FATHER PEDRO OPEKA C.M. AT AKAMASOA - MADAGASCAR

From the May 1-7, Mark McGreevy and I, Anja Bohnsack, went to visit Madagascar to meet and learn from Fr. Pedro Opeka. Over the past three decades Fr. Pedro has created Akamasoa – a project supporting people living in slums by providing them with the tools, opportunities and community needed to change the lives of their families for generations to come. During this time, Akamasoa has helped over 500.000 people and is continuing to increase its reach by developing new communities across Madagascar.

Throughout our visit, we found Fr. Pedro to be a true inspiration, a visionary leader whose approach is eye-opening. Whilst we often think about how to develop a project, how to make it sustainable, how to make a real difference to the people we are here to serve – we sometimes lose focus of the most vital aspect: to actually do it. Almost three decades ago, Fr. Pedro saw a need and started his work, started his path with steadfast determination. He told us stories about the humble beginnings of his project, of small groups of a few dozen people coming to his mass. He told us about the time it took him to convince families to even just consider moving away from the garbage dumps they lived on. And about the raging violence and crime, the lack of community, trust or opportunities. All of these stories we knew to be true, but they were difficult to imagine when seeing thousands of people singing and dancing whilst listening to his words – he had found a way to help them create a better life for themselves and their children, a future that had once been difficult to envisage. For us, these few days not only taught us more about how to develop projects with people living in slums that are truly connected to the community, but also about how to bring the words of St. Vincent to life through the work we do with our poorest brothers and sisters. If you would like to find out more about Akamasoa, please visit [www.madagascar-foundation.org](http://www.madagascar-foundation.org)

We are also extremely pleased to announce that Fr. Pedro has agreed for Madagascar to become one of the pilot countries for the **13 Houses Campaign** of the Famvin Homeless Alliance. More news will follow!



We invite you to **join us by signing up to our mailing list** on our website or by following the “Famvin Homeless Alliance” social media platforms on **Facebook** and/or **Twitter**.

By joining the FHA, you will be receiving access to formation materials, the **IGH hub**, training opportunities, and conferences. Furthermore, the FHA helps Vincentians to connect through its website and social media platforms – allowing you to find out about projects across the world, ask for expertise, exchange ideas and ultimately, develop projects that will work towards ending homelessness.



The **International Conference** of the Famvin Homeless Alliance will take place in Rome (Italy) over three days on 26-28 November 2018. It will bring together Vincentian experts in homelessness to educate and train other Vincentians working to help homeless people.

By attending the conference, one would hear from and meet global experts working in homelessness, learn about the work of the Famvin Homeless Alliance and how to get involved, explore homelessness within the context of our shared Vincentian heritage and spirituality, learn how to improve the service to homeless people by participating in group workshops led by experts and, learn about how to support the 13 Houses campaign – the Famvin Homeless Alliance’s initiative to build new homeless projects across the world.



The **13 Houses Campaign** is a movement born out of the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) and shares its aim to reduce and, where possible, end all forms of homelessness in the countries in which the Vincentian Family works.

The 13 Houses Campaign is a call to action, asking all members of the Vincentian Family to work together to build their very own version of the 13 Houses in all 151 countries where the Vincentian Family works – bringing a home to 10,000 people or more!

The “13 Houses” is an allegory for providing the very things they initially stood for: safety, community, warmth, hope and a future. There is no prescription as to how your 13 Houses have to look like – as long as they address an urgent need and have a systemic and long-term view.

 [www.vfhomelessalliance.org](http://www.vfhomelessalliance.org)



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