

**Oral Report Provincial President
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Madonna of the Streets

The artist who created this image, called his painting *Little Madonna*. He chose a peasant girl who was caring for her baby brother to pose for this picture. He never intended the painting to be one of the Virgin Mary. The *Little Madonna* eventually gained world fame and came to be known as Madonna of the Streets. This new name reflects the spirit and flavor of the art work. The focal point is the girl's face with its pleading and expressive countenance. The whole backdrop suggests hardship, toil and poverty. There is a contrast between Mother and child: while the child is safely cuddled and asleep in the arms of his mother, Our Lady appears to be standing on somebody's doorstep begging for shelter and food.

The image of the Madonna of the Streets, touched my heart the first time I laid eyes on it. It struck me that the Holy Family was very poor and homeless. As a young mother with many mouths to feed I prayed to Mary constantly to help me be a good mother and to help me provide for my large family. One day I didn't have socks for everyone. I cried. And I prayed. Before the day was out, a neighbour was knocking on my door saying, "I am embarrassed, but I have a bag of socks for you. I don't know why I only bagged up socks but, would you like them?" Again, I cried...my children would have warm feet. Mary, the Madonna of the Streets had answered my prayer.

I work in an intercity hospital, where many street people come for help. Some looking for dry socks, mittens, a sandwich, or a warm place to stay until the shelter opens again in the evening. I was drawn to these individuals, wanting to help on a larger scale, not knowing where to begin.

During one of our government visits a couple years ago, we met with the Senior Policy Advisor for the Minister of Housing. He told us that the Ontario Government was going to be developing a Strategy for Homelessness and could we find a way to partner with them. I knew then that I was being called to help. This is where the seed for our provincial theme began to blossom.

I am overwhelmed, overjoyed and amazed by all the ingenious ways you have addressed Homelessness. The collection of thousands of pounds of food, sleeping bags for youth shelters, blessing bags, coffee cards, gift

cards, helping at soup kitchens, taking the time to smile at and introduce yourselves to people on the streets, developing prayer services, having guest speakers, are only a few of the unique ways you have made a difference in someone's life.

I am incredibly impressed, and thankful beyond words that you are so willing to give so much of yourselves to those who have so little. I am also certain that the Madonna of the Streets is smiling at all you have accomplished for her needy children.

This concludes my report