

First woman elected to head US Society of St. Vincent de Paul

ST. LOUIS - Sheila Gilbert, a national officer for the U.S. Society of St. Vincent de Paul for the past six years, became the first woman to head the organization Sept. 3.

Gilbert said she was humbled and grateful for this new responsibility.

“Having been involved in the organization for some 30 years, I am privileged to serve in the company of exceptionally talented and compassionate men and women who have dedicated their lives to serving those who are most in need,” she said.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society, with U.S. headquarters in St. Louis, is a Catholic lay organization committed to helping the poor around the world.

Gilbert said she not only hopes to help members of the society, known as Vincentians, grow personally and spiritually, but she also wants to help the organization more effectively bring people out of poverty.

She is a strong advocate of systemic change and says the organization needs to collaborate with other groups on effective ways to reduce or eliminate poverty and it should also advocate for long-term change at the local, state and national levels.

“These goals are attainable,” said Gilbert. “We just need to find the will to carry them out.”

Gilbert has a bachelor’s degree in sociology and master’s degree in public and environmental affairs, both from Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind. She also has a certificate in public management from Indiana University and a master’s

degree in pastoral theology from St. Mary of the Woods College in Indiana.

St. Vincent de Paul's programs include home visits, housing assistance, disaster relief, job training and placement, food pantries, dining halls, clothing, transportation and utility costs, care for the elderly and medicine. Each year, the organization provides more than \$595 million in tangible and in-kind services, serving more than 14 million people in need.