



the Record

Winter 2010



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

“...we recognise the Real Presence of Christ in our marginalised sisters and brothers who are not only disadvantaged but also demonised and despised.”

JOHN FALZON | PAGE 5

MAN ON DONKEY

Beaten, still breathing, as awkward as a dog,
He swags across the donkey, unaware
Of who's beside them, footsore in the slog
Uphill for shelter and a kind of care.

Under the bloody bandages, some oil
Soothes where wine has washed away the dirt
To leave him clean and mortal. Alien soil,
Confirming fear, is mingling hope with hurt.

Downslope, the priest is hustling on his way,
Clean as a whistle, and the levite too,
Who thought that pausing meant the devil to pay,
And all the hours awarded them too few.

By the plodding beast, wordless and out of time,
The stranger braces once more for the climb.

PETER STEELE SJ

**COMMUNION TRIPTYCH
(FOR FIONA)**

- 1: first the wind through the double doors
a valve pushed open a pulse in the air
down the red carpet's arterial design
the smell of perfume and crease of faces
an old woman's smile extinguishes all that preceded it
but kindness
- 2: then the voices climbing to reach a single note
late afternoon descends through the open windows
while ceiling fans sweep and rearrange His words
outside they fall swollen to the ground
you know the way the light is in here?
heavy and green
- 3: I sit here and think, I've missed You
You, and the company You keep
a place at your table
saved for me

AMANDA SURREY is a Melbourne-based poet, published in *The Overland* and *The Age*. She has recently joined the Parkville Conference.

Editor's Note: The poem, "The Window", published in *The Record*, Autumn 2010, was written by Sandra Wigney.

PRODIGAL

Sick of his father and his brother's claim,
He lit out for the country, walking tall
As though impossible to halt or tame;
Others, he knew, were riding for a fall.

Out there he sluiced the money every way,
Good as his word, but only for awhile;
Pigs at pods became his only stay,
Expert in how to slobber and defile.

Back home his father, now a yearner, saw
The white nights through and fed the calf a treat.
Paced at the gate until his feet were raw,
Kept sandals, robe and ring beside his seat.

Hoping the boy returned, by some wild chance
The brooding heir would join them in the dance.

PETER STEELE SJ



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

The Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

This logo represents the hand of Christ that blesses the cup, the hand of love that offers the cup, and the hand of suffering that receives the cup.

The Record is published four times a year by the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

National Council of Australia
PO Box 243, Deakin West, ACT, 2600
Contact: Donna Scheerlinck
Phone: 02 6202 1200
Email: admin@svdpnatcl.org.au
Web: vinnies.org.au

Editors: Rebecca Comini and Arlene Eastman

The Record is overseen by an editorial committee comprising Syd Tutton (Chairperson), Rebecca Comini, Danusia Kaska, Raymond James, Tony Thornton and Dr John Falzon.

Advertising: Tony Thornton
Phone: 02 6202 1200
Email: tonyt@svdpnatcl.org.au

Design: Catholic Communications Melbourne
PO Box 146, East Melbourne, Victoria, 8002
Phone: 03 9926 5677
Web: www.catholiccommunications.com.au
Printing: Doran Printing
46 Industrial Drive, Braeside, Victoria, 3195
Phone: 03 9587 4333 Fax: 03 9587 3177
Email: sales@doran.com.au
Web: www.doran.com.au

Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the publishers.

IN THIS ISSUE...

- 2** POETRY
Inspirational poems
- 3** FRONTLINES
From the National President
- 4** PROFILE
QLD State President Brian Moore
- 5** THE EXCLUDED AND UNKNOWN
Our struggle for social justice in the 21st century
- 10** REFUGEE BACKFLIP
Missing what matters, by Andrew Hamilton
- 11** SEEKING AN EQUITABLE PLACE
Compassion needed for the first and last peoples
- 14** IMMERSION
A Young Vincentian's journey to the Nganmariyanga community
- 16** BOOST TO GOULBURN CRISIS ACCOMMODATION
Syd Tutton and Bishop Pat Power on the reopening of Kennedy House
- 18** NEWS IN BRIEF
- 19** DJOONDA DJINDA
Models stand tall and proud
- 20** WELFARE QUARANTINING - TOOL OR WEAPON
Compulsory income management plan extended
- 22** SMART METER PRICING ON HOLD - FOR NOW
An update on the smart meter rollout in VIC, NSW and QLD
- 22** VINNIES SOUNDS A WARNING ON THE FEDERAL BUDGET
The Society's official response to the 2010 budget
- 23** REACH OUT FROM INDIA
Society delegation from India visits Australia
- 23** 'ONE SOCIETY' IN FOUR LOCATIONS FOR NSW CONGRESS
Barbara Ryan on the revival of the NSW Congress
- 24** FROM THE ARCHIVES
The long way to Hobart
- 25** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
- 26** REFLECTION
Our spiritual life for charity by Monsignor David Cappo AO



NOT A MIDAS TOUCH

THE SOCIETY CONDUCTS TWO NATIONAL APPEALS EACH YEAR. This year we also held a National CEO's Sleepout; we have racedays and many other fund raising events. These occasions provide the finance to give material assistance to those in need – a vital element of our Mission.

However, we must never let money predominate in our Mission. We employ professionals to assist us in raising funds, and they rightly focus on this activity. For the leaders, the policy makers and the Conference members, however, this must never be our overwhelming focus. This is sometimes a challenge requiring the wisdom of Solomon to negotiate the right balance.

In our Mission, we are going against the tide of our contemporary individualistic society that very often looks upon people as economic units (for example, as customers, clients etc.). We see the people we assist as having a God-given dignity that surmounts economic and financial terminology – they are persons; they are our sisters and brothers.

When we ask people to participate in giving for our works of assistance, we must always highlight the social justice issue of inequality that makes our appeal necessary.

As Shakespeare says in the play, Henry IV: "How quickly nature falls into revolt, when money becomes her object."

♦ ♦ ♦

As a lay Catholic organisation, our Christianity is all about the implausible, the unlikely and the improbable. We are asked to move beyond belief towards action: to fight for causes that seem impossible, such as closing the gap between rich and poor; to love our neighbours – whatever country they are from, whatever religion they follow and whatever language they speak.

♦ ♦ ♦

I am pleased to advise that Michael Thio from Singapore was elected in late May as the XV President General of our Society. He succeeds José Ramón Torremocha of Spain and is the first member from outside Europe to be elected to this leadership position. ♦

SYD TUTTON
National President
St Vincent de Paul Society, Australia

MEMORIES OF 44 YEARS WITH THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

4

A VINCENTIAN SINCE THE 1960S, Queensland State President Brian Moore tells about the profound role of the Society in his life.

In talking about St Vincent de Paul, I'll have to go right back to when I was five in Brisbane during the Second World War. It was a very hard time for my parents, trying to provide a roof over a family of seven children and put enough food on our plates.

The local St Vincent de Paul used to help the family out with some of life's necessities; they would also supply Mum with material for our school uniforms and to make school uniforms for other needy families. We weren't Catholics at that time, but because St Vincent de Paul and the nuns were so good to Mum and the family, she had us all baptised Catholics – except Pop until about six months before his death at the age of 82 years.

At 18, I started with the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade (QATB) in Brisbane and married Beverley in 1955. We married young and have never regretted it.

After 11 years with the QATB in Brisbane, I was promoted to Superintendent of the Dirranbandi Centre in SW Queensland. My career in the Ambulance Service lasted 38 years, including 26 years as a Superintendent.

The Parish Priest, Father John Bennett, came round one night soon after our arrival at Dirranbandi and said, "Brian, you should join the local St Vincent de Paul Conference." So that's when my involvement with Vinnies began – over 40 years ago. Beverley is also an active Conference Member. She's been a wonderful friend and very supportive of my work in both the QATB and Vinnies. In Vinnies and QATB I saw suffering

from two different aspects altogether and I feel blessed to have been able to help those in need. I saw people suffering from severe trauma, abuse and life-threatening medical and surgical conditions, as well as people suffering from poverty. I came to the conclusion that poverty isn't a blissful, carefree life; it's a painful state of insufficient resources. Those years of caring have taught me to be more compassionate and mindful of others' needs and have increased my spirituality.

As a Vincentian, you get some very sad requests for assistance but you also get some humorous ones. One fellow wrote us a letter, saying he had a problem, asking us to visit him some 30 kilometres away. He didn't want to talk about it in the letter but he said "sitting here and talking to you, I could explain it better." When we pulled up at his place, dogs were barking, and I heard him yell out, "What in the hell do these so and so's want?" He was swearing too. I yelled out, "We're from St Vincent de Paul; you wrote us a letter."

He invited us in and insisted we had a cup of tea. He said, "I'm a very lonely man and St Vincent de Paul has a very good name and you say you can always help people no matter what their circumstances. Now I'm badly in need of a companion, I need a nice woman to love me and look after me." He said, "Look how clean I am around here, with a good woman here with me I wouldn't be lonely any more – I can cook and if she can cook too and we'd have a really wonderful life together."

I told him that while we weren't an agency for finding partners, we are always looking for volunteers at the Beaudesert sorting centre.

"There are a number of unattached ladies who visit the centre," I told him, "and you'd



Brian Moore

be meeting them all and who knows, with your charisma you might find someone nice that you like and at the same time you'd be helping Vinnies!"

"Yes, I'll be in that," he said, but, you know, he never turned up!

We've had some wonderful successes. We've seen people get up on their feet for the first time, which is very rewarding. We've done budgeting with them and it's been wonderful to see them getting back to helping themselves again. When I was Superintendent at Beaudesert, a woman came in, saying "I'd like to see Brian Moore; he belongs to St Vincent de Paul." Her face was bruised and she had her arm in plaster and two little children with her.

We arranged for her to go to a safe house, for counselling and for specialist people to assist and look after her. They relocated her into a house on the southern outskirts of Brisbane. She had left her partner and could no longer live in a domestic violence situation, and she was pregnant. Finally, with Vinnies' assistance, she'd got on her feet and she sent me a beautiful letter, saying she couldn't thank St Vincent de Paul enough.

As Vincentians, we don't look for any thanks for the work we do, but the joy that we feel when we have assisted someone or a family to get up on their feet and to lead a dignified life is really wonderful. ♦



TED KENNEDY PRIEST OF REDFERN

The story of 'this untidy, grimy prophet, a Jesus in our midst' (Judge Christopher Geraghty), renowned for his support for the poor and particularly the Aborigines of Redfern. An army of co-helpers assisted in the cause, among them the wonderful Mum Shirl. 'A beautifully written and moving account of the life of a thoroughly good man' (The Irish Echo). 'A brief but powerful biography' (SMH).

TED KENNEDY PRIEST OF REDFERN by Edmund Campion, rrp \$24.95 (incl GST)

Available from your religious bookstore or direct from the publisher.

David Lovell Publishing PO Box 44 East Kew 3102 tel/fax 03 9859 0000



THE EXCLUDED AND UNKNOWN

Our Struggle for Social Justice in the 21st Century

DR JOHN FALZON presented this address for the General Assembly of the St Vincent de Paul Society held in Salamanca, Spain, from 28 May to 6 June 2010.

SOME DESCRIBE THE ST VINCENT de Paul Society as an organisation or an institution. These descriptions can never do justice to who we are. I would like to put it to you today that we are not a static organisation. We are a *movement*.

How else could you describe this great mass of people across the globe who participate actively in the ministry of justice and compassion?

We are not *only* a movement, however. We are a *progressive, social* movement. We are committed to social change to create a more just and compassionate human society. We are, however, not just a progressive social movement. We are a

spiritual movement. We are profoundly moved by the imperatives of the Gospel. We are deeply moved by our greatest treasure.

And what is our greatest treasure? It is this: that we recognise the Real Presence of Christ in our marginalised sisters and brothers who are not only disadvantaged but also demonised and despised.

Our vision is one that is completely at odds with the values of the world. Those who are despised and called wretched and damned are, for us, those that will be blessed. In the provocative words of Christ:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God..."

"But woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation." (Luke 6:20,24)

We are often angered by the way in which our brothers and sisters are pushed to the edges of society. I am especially angered when people in power blame the poor for their poverty. We have recently had a situation in Australia where the leader of a major political party said that there was

little that could be done by governments to address homelessness because people choose to be homeless and you can't stop them from making bad choices. The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, of course, was duty-bound to publicly refute this falsehood in the name of all that we hold sacred.

We refute these lies because we refuse to accept that poverty is something that we should accept. We believe that governments have an obligation to use every means at their disposal not only to provide all the essential social services to people but also to take the necessary steps to prevent exclusion and poverty in the first place.

While we are committed to providing charitable assistance and while no work of charity is foreign to the Society, we must not perpetuate the situation where people have no alternative but to rely on charity. We must, following the injunctions of our founder, Frederic, study the actual causes of poverty and oppression in order to prevent them, rather than just attending to their consequences after the fact. Frederic

“...we recognise
the Real Presence
of Christ in our
marginalised
sisters and brothers
who are not only
disadvantaged but
also demonised
and despised.”

put this to us very powerfully when he wrote that:

“Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked.

It is justice’s role to prevent the attack.”

We are, at heart, a people of hope. We reject what the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, said when she defended the negative impacts of unbridled globalised markets, saying *“There Is No Alternative”*, a principle that has been shortened into the acronym “TINA”.

We believe passionately that there is an alternative. God has intervened in human history through the Incarnation. God has pitched a tent amongst us, to quote the Gospel of John.

This incredible reality, presented to us in the Christ-child born on the edges of Bethlehem, is a whisper from the edge that another kind of world is possible.

And this is why we are a people of hope. This is why we believe that another kind of society is not only possible, but absolutely necessary if we are to ensure that our sisters and brothers are no longer locked out of the prosperity that is enjoyed by the world’s minority.

Augustine of Hippo once wrote that:

“Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage: anger at the



way things are and courage to make sure that they do not remain the way they are.”

We are right to feel angry at the oppression of the poor. In fact, we are not alone in thundering against oppressive structures. Listen to the mighty Prophet Isaiah:

“Woe betide those who enact unjust laws and draft oppressive legislation, depriving the poor of justice, robbing the weakest of my people of their rights, plundering the widow and despoiling the fatherless.” (Is 10:1-3)

We are also right to seize on whatever courage we can muster. To have courage is, literally, “to take heart”.

But we are called to resist the temptation of staying with our anger. If we are to really take heart, and if we are really to make hope a reality, then we must commit ourselves to carrying at least a few grains of sand to the building site of new society, the building site of love. We recall the beautiful words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam in this respect: *“All my life I have followed the poetry of love in preference to the poetry of anger.”*

I believe that the poetry of love that Frederic embraced, that Frederic spoke, that Frederic followed, is simply the poetry of compassion, the social poetry of social justice. Why a social poetry? Why a social justice? Because we are called to immerse our lives in the heart of the social. This is where the poor and marginalised are made. This is where the poor and marginalised are struggling for a new society. This is where,

in the words of St Vincent de Paul, *“we seek, and find, our God.”*

As a forward-looking, progressive social movement, we cannot afford to draw our poetry from the past. No; we must look to the future. We must draw our poetry from the future. This is where we will more accurately hear the music of what is happening now. It serves no purpose to hanker after a past that is gone. The solutions to poverty and social and economic inequality lie in a future that is radically different not only to the present but to the past.

Because we choose to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who have been pushed to the edge, we come face to face with degradation and yet we are driven by a seemingly hopeless hope.

As Paul of Tarsus said of Abraham, a man remembered by three world religions for both his experience of homelessness and his audacity as a builder of a new society: *“Against all hope, he believed in hope.” (Romans 4:18)*

Remember those beautiful words in the Magnificat, uttered by a young girl who had just found out she was pregnant?

*“He has pulled down the mighty from their thrones
And raised up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
But the rich he has sent away empty.” (Luke 1:52-53)*

This is the hope we are called to embrace.

But we must be realistic. As Paulo Freire, the great educational theorist and developer of mass literacy campaigns with the poor of Brazil, points out, we must engage in a prophetic denunciation of the bad news in order to engage in a prophetic announcement of the good news.

The good news is that another kind of society is possible.

Freire also wrote:

“The oppressor cannot find in their power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.”

I believe with all my heart that it is the oppressed of the world who have the most

to teach us. When we assist our brothers and sisters; when we stand in solidarity with them, they entrust to us their collective pain, their dreams, their sacred stories, their collective yearnings that another kind of world is possible.

The Church has, I am sad to say, been guilty of sometimes assuring them that the only other world that is possible is the one that comes after death, thereby discouraging any kind of struggle for social justice.

When some years ago, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia was accused of being communist because we dared to ask questions about the causes of poverty and inequality, we were able to quote those beautiful words of Archbishop Helder Camara, a man who was educated in the realities of exclusion by the marginalised in the North-East of Brazil: *“When I give bread to the poor, people call me a saint. But when I ask why they have no bread, people call me a communist.”*

What were we doing? What is it we still strive to do? We are trying to follow the imperative of the Scriptures:

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
protect the rights of those who are helpless.
Speak out and pronounce a sentence of justice,
defend the cause of the wretched and the poor.”* (Proverbs 31:8-9)

This, my friends, is what I believe we are called to. We are called to be signs of an alternative hope, a hope that another kind of society is possible. We cannot help but listen to the whispers from the edges of society, the whispers of hope that give birth to both our anger and our courage.

We are called to dream the possible in the face of the nightmares that plague the lives of our sisters and brothers across the globe. But our dreams are of little value if we approach this enormous mission merely as individuals. This is why we are blessed indeed to be part of a living movement in the St Vincent de Paul Society.

As the Indigenous Brazilian proverb reminds us:

*“When we dream alone it is only a dream.
But when we dream together it is the beginning of reality.”*

We do not need to look far to find the people who are left out or pushed out. We do not need to go far to discover the fruits of the structures of dispossession and exploitation. The forgotten ones, the excluded ones, are here. They are right here, where it hurts.

The God we seek in them; the God we find in them; this God is unequivocally a God who does not stand on the sidelines as a neutral observer. This God, the God of the Scriptures, is a God who takes sides, a God who is unequivocally on the side of the poor.

Those who hold the reins of political and economic power in the prosperous industrialised world seek consolation in setting Christ’s poor apart, literally pushing them to the margins on the basis of false moralizing discourses that blame them and paint them as lazy and dysfunctional. The truth is that they are actually set apart by the inequality of resources allocated to them by our society.

An extraordinary story emerged last year from Japan about a man who was experiencing long-term homelessness and who was regularly sending the most exquisite poems, written in strict accordance with traditional rules of composition, to a popular newspaper. His poetry is indeed as beautiful as it is incisive in its social analysis:

*“Used to living without keys,
I see through the New Year.
Of what else must I rid myself?”*

The newspaper to which he had been sending his poetry asked him, through their pages, to make himself known, if only so that they could pay him. He wrote back to them: *“I am touched by your kindness, but presently lack the courage to make contact.”*

I wish to reflect with you about this story, especially through the prism of this man’s poem and letter.

Of course, there is absolutely nothing extraordinary about a person experiencing homelessness producing great poetry. Quite the contrary!

I recall, a couple of years ago, being interviewed by an Australian television program on the issue of homelessness because there was a sense of shock and

surprise about a story reported the day before in the press about a person experiencing homelessness providing excellent medical assistance to someone and then disappearing as the ambulance turned up. Such surprise can only be explained by the strongly ingrained presupposition that anyone experiencing homelessness must be completely lacking in any kinds of skills; that their entire being, history and function is captured by the term “homeless”. Quite the contrary!

I have chosen to frame this reflection under the title, “the excluded and unknown” for two reasons:

Firstly, because I wish to emphasise that social, economic and political exclusion is a systematic action that is done to people. It is not something that people simply happen into by means of bad luck, bad choices or bad karma. It is, to be sure, manifested in individual lives. It is, in every case, a unique intersection between personal narrative and the axes of history and structure.

Secondly, because while there may be a dominant discourse on the existence and persistence of exclusion, it is a discourse that fundamentally un-knows the people, especially in terms of their collision with unjust structures and de-humanising histories. It is this un-knowing that leads to the much-vaunted belief that the term

“Those who hold the reins of political and economic power in the prosperous industrialised world seek consolation in setting Christ’s poor apart, literally pushing them to the margins...”



“When I give bread to the poor, people call me a saint. But when I ask why they have no bread, people call me a communist.”

– ARCHBISHOP
HELDER CAMARA

“homeless” captures the entirety of a person’s story and that, therefore, they are denied the multi-dimensionality that apparently comes as a class privilege to others in society.

Let us return to the beautiful words of our unknown Japanese poet:

*“Used to living without keys,
I see through the New Year.
Of what else must I rid myself?”*

In these three dense lines, he provides us with a miraculous window into his exclusion. He teaches us that dispossession is literally imposed on him as a material, and therefore, spiritual reality. It is the chief social relation that he is subjected to. Contrary to the dominant discourse in which the person experiencing homelessness is at the same time blamed for their marginalisation and then denied any agency in determining their lives, he is extremely aware of himself as a living ensemble of social relations in a specific historical context.

There is, of course, no solution to any social problem except one that follows from the very conditions of the problem. Approaches to social exclusion that are derived from a magisterial view of a purported moral underclass are destined to deliver the possibility of compliance but never the reality of social justice.

In the achingly beautiful novel, *A Sun for the Dying*, by Jean-Claude Izzo, a late 20th century French writer remembered primarily as an exponent of Mediterranean Noir, we find a rich and complex narrative of the social relations of structural exclusion and demonisation in Marseilles. Before sharing a brief passage from this profoundly human book, I have to recall with you one scene in which the main character describes his feelings of rage about a St Vincent de Paul soup kitchen in which people are aware that they will receive favourable treatment at mealtime if they first subject themselves to a gruelling hour of being preached at by the priest.

This imposition of religiosity is really no different to the other forms of moral imposition by the market and by the state acting on behalf of ruling interests. The mistake made by all of these apparatuses, however, is that they imagine that any

form of compliance means that the battle has been won; that the real story has been erased, that the heart, the mind and the body have been conformed to the will of the powerful. The soup kitchen scene is a potent example of this myth, but you do not need to go into the soup kitchen to know this power relation. Neither do you need to experience homelessness. It is institutionalised and morally embedded. When any of us experience it, we either seek to flee its significance or we engage with it, both personally and as a collective social reality that cries out to be subjected to a ruthless critique.

In the heart of these contradictions, however, lies the most powerful potential for love, fought for, like all things worth fighting for, under the guiding stars of struggle and hope.

Izzo puts it this way in describing his narrator’s feelings for another person on the margins of society:

“He was thinking of another kind of fraternity. The kind that unites somewhere between rage and despair, those who have been rejected. Excluded. That, anyway, was the kind of closeness I experienced with him. Like father and son.”

As I read this book for the first time early last year, I remember feeling that it was bursting at the seams with sadness and recognition.

Sadness is important as a way of engagement with social inequality and injustice, especially when this sadness translates not into condescending pity or powerlessness but rather firms up into shame. The people who are discarded by society are the ones who are made to feel ashamed. But I put it to you that the shame is not theirs. It is ours. It is ours if we persist in failing to recognise our sisters and brothers and failing to correctly analyse the structural and historical causes of their marginalisation and exclusion.

Italian theorist Domenico Losurdo has brilliantly observed that *“Democracy cannot be defined by abstracting the fate of the excluded.”* It was Frantz Fanon who reminded us nearly 50 years ago: *“What counts today, the question which is looming on the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity must*



reply to this question, or be shaken to pieces by it."

We have been shaken to pieces by this question. If wealth is correctly understood here as access to appropriate housing, health, education, childcare, transport, employment, social security and wholeness, I would simply add that, in order to achieve this, there must be a massive redistribution of hope, along with the redistribution of wealth.

I will never forget the first time I read the poem by Tomas Borge, a former Minister of Justice in the Nicaraguan Government. His wife had been raped and murdered before his eyes by the military regime he had fought against. In *Christianity and Revolution*, he tells us:

"After having been brutally tortured as a prisoner, after having a hood placed over my head for nine months, after having been handcuffed for seven months, I remember that when we captured these torturers I told them: 'The hour of my revenge has come: we will not do you even the slightest harm. You did not believe us beforehand; now you will believe us.' That is our philosophy, our way of being."

He then produced what I think are some of the most memorable lines of poetry in human history. A poem called *Mi Venganza Personal (My personal Revenge)*, addressed to his torturers. He wrote:

"I will be revenged upon your children when they've the right to schooling and to flowers....

On that day I'll greet you with 'Good morning!' and the streets will have no beggars left to haunt us...

I will be revenged upon you, brother, when

I give you these hands, which once you tore and tortured, without the strength to rob them of their tenderness"

A redistribution of hope is not happening quickly enough as we begin the 21st century. We are, however, witnessing the emergence of a new reality in which people are truly beginning to be united in their experience of exclusion, along with those who stand in solidarity with them.

You are all, no doubt, familiar with the passage in the Gospel of Matthew that depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd: *"...when he saw the multitudes, he was moved to compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered like sheep without a shepherd."*

The phrase in ancient Greek for "being moved to compassion" is actually closer to the image of "tugging at the gut". This should resonate strongly for us. Are we not similarly moved, indeed are our stomachs not churned at times because we feel so strongly the injustice and indignity suffered by our sisters and brothers as a result of oppressive structures? Do we not tremble with indignation at the hurt and injustice suffered by others?

Let us return to the passage from Matthew. The people are described as being distressed and scattered. We know from our first-hand experience of the human face of poverty that this sense of alienation, this crushing of the spirit, is central to marginalisation. People feel, especially in times of global prosperity, that they are devalued, left on the scrap-heap, and, worst of all, atomised, on their own.

The devaluation of the people has incomparably greater significance than

the devaluation of a currency. Yet more attention is paid to the latter than the former.

People are pulled apart by social and economic structures that de-humanise, that compartmentalise, that destroy, that humiliate, that blame. People are made to feel that lives are worth little, that their position at the bottom of the heap completely excludes and effectively disempowers them.

Throughout the early Hebrew narratives of the developing relationship between the people and their God, we read the repeated reminder of identity: *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."* (Deut 5:6, Exod 20:2)

The God of these former slaves was identified not in terms of a static identity but in terms of a relationship based on *doing*. The action that was highlighted as an identifier of this relationship was the act of *liberation*. Intrinsic to this act of liberation was both an urgent love and a passion for justice.

This is so beautifully expressed in that precursor of the Magnificat, The Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:8): *"He raises the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap."*

To paraphrase the Gospel injunction, we are bound to tremble with indignation at every injustice committed against our brothers and sisters, especially those who are regarded as being the least important in society.

This tradition of compassion and liberation gave birth to the St Vincent de Paul Society in 19th century Paris. It is more than a school of thought; it is a way of living whereby one's life becomes a response to the question so poignantly posed by the Nobel Prize-winning poet and advocate Pablo Neruda: *"Who loved the lost? Who protected the last?"*

I would like to end on a note of hope. I will leave you, therefore, with Neruda's prophetic words on our shared dream of a just and compassionate society:

"We will win.

Although you don't believe it, we will win." ♦

Dr John Falzon is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Council of Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society.

REFUGEE BACKFLIP

MISSING WHAT MATTERS

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S decision to suspend the processing of future asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka raises many questions.

As always when there are many possible points of discussion, it is important to ask what matters. In this case, what matters is that asylum seekers find respect for their human dignity in ways consistent with Australia's proper responsibilities and interests.

This decision does not respect the dignity of asylum seekers. One of the reasons given for the delay in processing is that it will deter others from coming by boat to seek asylum in Australia. The tired and brutal logic of deterrence involves inflicting avoidable suffering on an innocent group of people in order to send a message to others. It treats human beings as things, and is inherently lacking in respect.

Not only the reason for the decision, but also the suffering entailed by delayed processing, diminishes the humanity of asylum seekers. The delay will extend the time they spend in detention. My experience, over many years as chaplain in a small detention centre, is that most asylum seekers (who come by air) arrive alert and with bright eyes. After three months, their eyes become opaque and they are often frustrated and angry. After six months, they become listless and show signs of depression.

Those working with refugees commonly say that the effects of detention do not end when they gain residence, but still impair their lives many years afterwards.

As Australian of the Year Dr Pat McGorry said, detention centres are factories for producing mental illnesses. And that, despite the best efforts of staff in the centres.

The human cost of delay will be ravaged lives and greater callousness directed

towards them. This was nicely symbolised in the simultaneous decision to send federal police to Christmas Island to deal with the aftermath of the decision.

The decision also raises larger questions whether the processes for determining asylum seekers' claim to protection on Christmas Island guarantee respect for their human dignity. Respect centrally involves fairness. At present, Australian policies towards people who arrive by boat to claim asylum are quite unsatisfactory, although, in contrast with the previous government, they are administered in a generally fair way. But the decisions made by Government officers and the review of negative decisions are not subject to statutory review. The justice of the decisions depends on government and ministerial good will, not on law.

Now that the Government has bent to the populist winds fanned by an opportunistic Opposition, there are grounds for fearing that the claims of asylum seekers will be judged in a way that unduly reflects the interests of the Australian Government. The Australian Government will have an interest in minimising the number of asylum seekers who are found to be refugees. It will have an interest in recognising Sri Lanka and Afghanistan as countries in which citizens, including minorities, can live safely, and to which asylum seekers can be deported.

This interest will be shared by many other nations, particularly those that look to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is now reviewing their guidelines on refugees from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, and will certainly come under strong pressure to issue a bland and optimistic report, which officials will then be able to use in rejecting claims for asylum. If decisions were to be based on unrealistic assessments, the truth of the asylum seekers' lives, and so their dignity, would prove to be expendable.

If the processes of decision-making lack integrity, the repatriation of asylum seekers whose claim for asylum is rejected will also put in jeopardy their human dignity, and indeed their lives. Recently, some refused asylum seekers have been deported to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. If we cannot trust the processes by which they have been refused protection, and by which countries have been adjudged to be safe, we shall deport them unsure whether we have respected their rights to life and security.

These are immediate concerns raised by the recent decision. It also prompts some saddening reflections on asylum seeker policy. The present policy of processing people who arrive by boat outside Australia's deemed immigration zone is designed to disrespect their dignity. Even when softened by humane administration, it is vulnerable to manipulation in times of controversy, with resultant hurt to the lives of asylum seekers.

But to move to a principled and comprehensive policy, particularly when such a policy needs to be based on negotiation with other nations to protect the persecuted at each point of their journey, requires great political courage and leadership. That is unlikely when an election is close, when the majority of Australians want people who arrive by boat to be treated harshly, and the opposition party is a mouthpiece for the most brutal elements of this majority.

We may wonder whether we shall ever again see government leaders with the courage to defend the humanity of people who belong to unpopular minorities. ♦

ANDREW HAMILTON is the consulting editor for *Eureka Street* and has had a long involvement with the St Vincent de Paul Society. This article was published in *Eureka Street* on 12 April 2010.



SEEKING AN EQUITABLE PLACE

This is an edited version of a *Social Justice in the City* lecture, given in Melbourne on 28 April 2010.

I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people of the great Kulin nation. I pay respect to their elders past and present and recognise that this may look like the St Francis Centre in the middle of a modern metropolis but it always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

A few weeks back, I was fortunate to join Bishop Hilton Deakin from this very city, Sean Cleary from the Edmund Rice Centre, and Paul Lane from Broome, in San Salvador for the 30th anniversary commemorations of the assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero. It was a week full of ritual, outdoor liturgies (featuring the congregation chanting throughout, “*We want Bishops on the side of the poor*”), rallies and marches, meetings, lectures and reflections on the life of the man dubbed the “patron saint of human rights”.

Coming from Australia, the quite stunning thing was that at all of these events over the week, the majority of those participating were young. The churches were full of young people aged between

16 and 30, as were the streets. The overall impression was that this was a place where the Church was not remote from the people but fully incarnate with their hopes, aspirations, ordinariness and needs. It was relevant to their lives. It was also relevant in the life of the nation. We felt there were powerful lessons for us in all of this. Simply, a Church that is not on about justice has left its young behind.

“Like Romero, prophets become martyrs when they give their life for the truth. They seek to create a world without creating winners and losers, and a world built on the necessity of justice.”

One of the main events of the week was a seminar featuring renowned theologians exploring the Romero legacy and spirituality. Among those reflecting were Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, Bishop Sam Ruiz from Chiapas and Jose Comblin from Brazil. In a powerful discussion, they reflected on why the world finds it so difficult to see those who promote peace. It was felt that this was because those who seek to promote peace and justice “reveal the golden thread that is the revelation of God from below”; and that in so doing

“we see the glory of God – but that this is not an easy glory.”

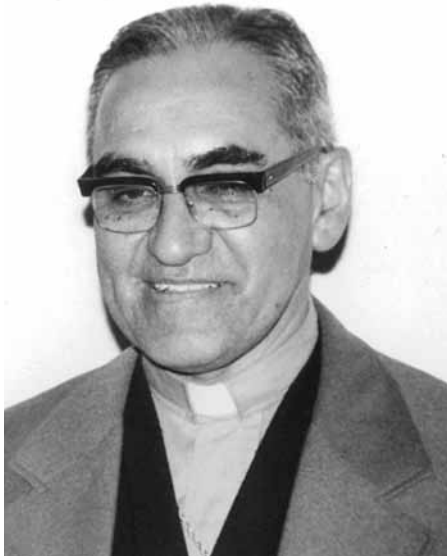
Like Romero, prophets become martyrs when they give their life for the truth. They seek to create a world without creating winners and losers, and a world built on the necessity of justice. Jose Comblin, in explaining this, said that faith and politics have often been caught in an internal conflict historically – a conflict between what he termed the *religious pole* and the *Gospel pole*.

The religious pole, he explained, is fundamentally conservative, founded on the belief that “this is how God so made the world”. Therefore, this pole requires doctrines and priestly castes to justify and maintain the position. It is based in the ecclesial world. The majority of Christians, he felt particularly in the West, have made this move to the right. It is the rules, the dogma, and the certainties, characterised by looking inwards. A place where charity has a place at the edges, but rarely justice.

The Gospel pole on the other hand is not conservative but it is based in the real world. This is because the Gospel speaks of the real world, of historical conditions and social conditions. Symbolic references are important, as they were to Óscar Romero, but they assist in the connection to what is really going on in the world.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Bishop Óscar Romero,
assassinated in March 1980.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

It was this pole that became home for Romero, as it always was for Jesus. He further suggested that today in the life of the Church “we are in a minority.”

But he added that we are in a minority that does not want to give up despite the incomprehension of the great majority, because we are here to proclaim the prophetic mission of the Apostles. This means that we must be involved in the real world, with the problems of the real world and we must always stay close to the people. And so the churches in San Salvador were full of young people.

An example was offered to us of Brazil, where the peasants were involved with the landless revolution, against a powerful majority politically. Many holding to the religious pole said to support the peasants was political, not Gospel, but Jose Comblin argued that the call of the Gospel is to remain faithful, sustaining hope

against all hope (St Paul), and that a failure to engage in the real lives of real people is to isolate the Church from the very people it seeks to serve. It becomes an exercise in tightening and straightening rather than enlarging life, spirituality and hope.

So, in coming back to Australia, we see we have entered election season as asylum seekers and refugees are a political football again, the rights of Indigenous peoples have not moved since the apology and the human face of climate change in Kiribati and Tuvalu is in danger of being completely ignored – or at least put on hold for three years.

In contrast to our recent experience in Latin America from the leaders of the Australian churches there is precious little said publicly on any of these issues. This Gospel pole that always leads us back to the people is clearly not in favour in this country.

During the final presentations in Salvador, a Panamanian priest explained that in his work and ministry the notion of solidarity was a central component. Now over many years, the word ‘solidarity’ has been thrown around social justice and human rights circles like confetti at a polygamist’s wedding! However, we don’t often unpack it, but they do in Panama where solidarity was seen as “an expression of the tenderness of the people”.

This rang bells for me, as pointing to the very thing that has been missing in our public debate in Australia concerning the first peoples and the last peoples to arrive here – the Indigenous and those seeking asylum. Without being over simplistic, there has been an absence of tenderness

and love, compassion again seen as weakness – on both sides of the debate and in the middle of it. One thing Romero did always was to be respectful of those acting unjustly, believing that their actions provided evidence of their own oppression and alienation.

Whether Óscar Romero gets canonised or not is not an issue for the people of El Salvador – he is already canonised in their hearts and in their lives. A church with a place for its youth, which is relevant to the world and makes a difference, is his lasting legacy. A church that stands up for the poorest and most marginalised immediately becomes relevant. To not engage actively in this advocacy is to turn inwards to a place where religion is more important than faith, and where young people struggle to find relevance.

A compassionate history is something this country needs to be able to see, tell and own if we are ever to come to full maturity as a nation. As my friend and colleague in San Salvador, Paul Lane, says, “History did happen here”. And it happened despite the best efforts of the Keith Windschuttles, Ron Bruntons, Andrew Bolts and Alan Joneses of this world to rewrite history in their own tawdry and triumphalist visions: visions that conveniently ignore the simple truth of the matter.

The Prime Minister’s 2008 apology in Parliament to the Stolen Generations was a good start at putting right the wrongs of history, but it was only a start. We have seen little progress since then. So little has happened. The Northern Territory Intervention has continued, and, as of today, still involves the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA).

So we have a situation today where laws are made to discriminate against one group of people on the grounds of their race. Imagine the good burghers of Melbourne putting up with that. Imagine someone living in Kew being told they would have to have their income managed by the State because someone else with the same coloured skin in Mildura has a serious drinking problem and is guilty of domestic violence. And in order for that to happen, the Government will make it legal to discriminate against you on the grounds of race. No-one

Where are our moral leaders with the courage to advocate with passion for necessary changes, rather than continue to start from a fear of offending the powerful, or the static desire to maintain the status quo?



“Imagine someone living in Kew being told they would have to have their income managed by the State because someone else with the same coloured skin in Mildura has a serious drinking problem and is guilty of domestic violence.”



would wear it. Welcome to the Northern Territory in 2010.

Aboriginal people are not a problem to be managed. We need to take seriously our responsibilities and acknowledge that history happened here! We need to acknowledge that since 1788 this country's history has been a history of taking away – the taking away of land, of culture, of heritage and as the apology acknowledged – the taking away of children.

We need to recognise that Australia is a particularly clear example of the continuity of ownership and possession of the land by Indigenous people. While European nations returned African land to Indigenous ownership, that has not happened in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and most of Canada. The British left India and the Dutch left Indonesia. The practical answer to the differences is that Indigenous Indians, Africans, and Indonesians were in the majority. In Australia and those other jurisdictions, they are not.

That means, in fact, that those who stole the country, and the genocide that followed, were rewarded. We Europeans coveted space for a penal colony, new opportunities and great wealth. We came, we coveted, we stole and we murdered.

It is worth noting that those jurisdictions we compare ourselves to – the US, Canada and New Zealand – have all signed treaties with their Indigenous peoples in the 19th century. This of

course does not mean there are not ongoing problems, but they have at least recognised the legal place of Indigenous peoples in their nations. Australia suspending the Racial Discrimination Act remains the odd one out.

We need to get fair dinkum. It is not enough to say that present generations are not responsible for the actions of previous generations, since present generations benefit from that original dispossession and its ongoing repercussions. The policy of assimilation was something many Australians complied with. Even if there were good intentions, this policy was so destructive of the social structures of Indigenous communities and resulted in immense personal suffering.

In all parts of our society if I have hurt someone, it is not enough to be sorry, not even enough to repent. I must recompense the person, or else my repentance is shown to be a sham. For those of us descended from those who arrived in 1788, we would recognise that compensation for past injustices should actually be based on our duty, not just on the needs of Indigenous people.

We should also recognise that no compensation could ever be satisfactory because, as Peter Adam said in a powerful speech in Melbourne last year, what was done was so terrible, so immense, so universal and so pervasive, so destructive, and so irreparable.

The Federal Government has refused to

address the issue of compensation. But recompense we must.

Indeed, as we have seen concerning boat people lately, there is a crisis of moral leadership in the country. Where are our moral leaders with the courage to advocate with passion for necessary changes, rather than continue to start from a fear of offending the powerful, or the static desire to maintain the status quo?

So let's step back from this for a bit and do what Robin Williams did with the students in *Dead Poets Society*, when he got them one by one to come and stand at the front of the room and stand on a chair, that is, to look at the same thing from a different perspective. So let's start by looking at the language in the national debate. If we were to go back 25 years and we were to listen to the debate in parliament and in the media, it was clear that we lived together in a *society*. The debate today says we live together in an *economy*.

People who live together in a society are *citizens*; those who live together in an economy are *customers* or *consumers*. Thus the debate has shifted and hey presto, every human relationship is reduced to an economic relationship.

But we seek a world where those who come first and last in this country might be able to enjoy an equitable place in the life of the nation. ♦

PHIL GLENENNING is the Director of the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney.

1. Playing games.
2. The Easter Vigil.
3. Josephine and Ashleigh.
4. Kite making.
5. Young Vinnies and locals.

IMMERSION

Young Vincentian
ASHLEIGH GREEN'S candid
 view of a surprising
 journey to the heartland.

I LOOK BACK TO MY JOURNAL entry on 27 March 2010. Sitting at the departure gate at Sydney airport, 30 minutes prior to departure to Darwin, I wrote: *"I know nothing of the world I am about to immerse myself in. But nothingness is not a bad thing. There is so much I have to learn."*

For nine days, a small group of young St Vincent de Paul Society members from New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory visited Nganmariyanga, a small Aboriginal community south-west of Darwin. The team was lead by the Darwin Diocese Youth Ministry Coordinator Benita De Vincentiis and Fr Daniel Benedetti was the team's spiritual advisor. The program had a dual purpose of providing a holiday program for the children of Nganmariyanga and immersing ourselves in a culture very different to anything we had experienced before. As a team, we were not there to judge. Nor were we there to have all our questions answered. We were there to open our eyes. In the end, we left with more questions than we had started with.

The program began with two days of group bonding and cross-cultural awareness training in Darwin. I remember sitting in the cross-cultural training session with Dominic McCormack and learning about the culture of the Indigenous communities in the region. It all seemed so foreign, so distant. While I accepted the fact that there were people 'out there' living very differently



"Community wasn't just a concept; it was the lifeblood of existence. Children were proud to talk about their families. Babies were not merely the responsibility of the mother but of the entire family. Individual living was a foreign concept."

to me, it wasn't until our plane landed in Nganmariyanga the next day that I realised that this wasn't just another dry and distant theory. This was life!

My first impression of Nganmariyanga was the amazing sense of family and community. Community wasn't just a concept; it was the lifeblood of existence. Children were proud to talk about their families. Babies were not merely the responsibility of the mother but of the entire family. Individual living was a foreign concept.

I remember a particular conversation on Holy Thursday with one of the local girls. Only on the rare occasion did she refer to herself in first person; everything was "we," "us," "together," "my family". It both amazed and inspired me to examine my own existence. In Western culture we can get so caught up in an individualised mode of existence that 'community' as



2



3



4

such is more theory than reality.

An experience I will always remember was our evening in Wadeye, a nearby community, larger than Nganmariyanga, with a population of approximately 2500. We sat in a circle with some elders, singing songs in both Murrinh-patha (the Indigenous language of the region) and English. They sang about the land and I watched Theodora, the most senior woman, connect with the music on a level that transcended the song itself. It was as if her entire being was engaged with the music, connecting her to the land that she sang so passionately about.

Theodora then took us inside the church and told us the story of one of the paintings there and how this story was passed down to her by her elders. Now, as a 70-year-old woman herself, Theodora is told the same story every week by a 99-year-old woman in the community. She said, “we must remember...”. It made me appreciate the beautiful act of listening and how I often find myself listening only to what is absolutely necessary. Here, Theodora listens to the same story every week, simply for the sake of listening. Listening is an art, a practice, a ritual. The receiving of new information is only the smallest aspect.

We, as a group, were so blessed to spend Easter in such a life-giving, faith-renewing environment. The Easter services under the stars stripped me naked of the consumer-driven Easter traditions I am used to. Easter Sunday was spent fishing with some local boys at a nearby creek and swimming in the refreshing waters. The local boys caught a number of fish, made a small fire on the rocks and cooked them up, serving them on a bundle of green leaves.

Everything we saw, ate and felt that Easter Sunday morning was from the land – the fish that fed us, the water that refreshed us and the landscape that was

so beautiful and varied, all came from the land. The opportunity to strip down Easter to its raw and fundamental core was both inspiring and invigorating.

By organising activities for the children, we were able to connect with them in an informal, conversational manner. I treasure many of the conversations I had with the children, particularly that with a group of young girls about their hopes and dreams for the future. I was forced to ask myself to what extent do I allow stereotypes to sway my thinking?

These kids did have dreams; they wanted to be teachers and office workers. I almost felt ashamed that I’d let myself fall victim to the plight of mass media. Aboriginal culture is a diverse, complex entity and to allow the media to dictate our perceptions is irresponsible on our behalf.

I entered Nganmariyanga fully aware that our role, as “foreigners”, was not to bring forth change. We were not there to

have our say in how things “should” be done. We were there to listen, to share and to build connections. I was wary at times whether that would be achieved because cross-cultural communication is not easy. But, on the day we left Nganmariyanga, it was clear that of all the things we accomplished over the previous nine days, the greatest of all were the connections we had built. After my final hand-clapping game with one of the girls, she asked if we could do it “just one more time.” “Come on,” she said, “just one more time...”.

As I travelled in the back of the troopie away from the township and towards the Nganmariyanga airstrip, I secretly wanted that “again” to come just one more time. The connections created over the nine days were very special. We were exposed to a way of life unlike anything we had experienced before and each one of us left Nganmariyanga renewed, invigorated and alive. ♦



5

BOOST TO GOULBURN CRISIS ACCOMMODATION

UP TO 40 HOMELESS, SINGLE MEN IN the Goulburn area will now have a safe place to stay after the official opening of the St Vincent de Paul Society's Kennedy House in its new location on 14 May 2010.

The men's shelter has been operating for the past 30 years but, with only eight beds, it was turning away an average of 50 men a month.

"With the new facility being able to accommodate up to 40 single men in the local area each night, as well as outreach support for many more, Kennedy House has the potential to make a real impact on the unique issues that exist within the Goulburn community and surrounding region," St Vincent de Paul Society

Canberra-Goulburn President Evan Brett said.

Kennedy House assists single men over the age of 18 through their crisis into stability, and then provides opportunities for ongoing and appropriate accommodation, employment, support and community.

"We have had a real battle on our hands to get where we are today," Mr Brett said.

"But this opening is all about remembering that there are some things worth fighting for."

Speaking at the official opening of the new facility by National President Syd Tutton, Bishop Pat Power commended all involved in the project.

"Kennedy House is an outstanding example of responding to the real needs of real people," he said.

"No longer is homelessness spoken of as something abstract, but the people searching for somewhere to sleep or to eat are met with the welcoming love of Jesus."

Bishop Power said the new centre would help meet the great number of calls for support in the Goulburn area. "So often there can be frustration that the resources available are simply too limited to meet the very real needs," he said.

"Hopefully, the newly extended Kennedy House can go a long way to accommodating the short and longer term needs of those seeking assistance." ♦

CHRIST ON THE MARGINS: KENNEDY HOUSE

This is an edited version of the speech delivered by SYD TUTTON at the opening of Kennedy House, Goulburn on 14 May 2010.

WHEN PEOPLE THINK OF Christianity, the first image that often comes to mind is the church building. They might think of a humble parish church or they might be reminded of the pomp and glory of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

I would like to put it you that the Christianity that has its basis in the simple Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth is in many ways better exemplified by the building that we are opening here today.

Kennedy House, and the St Vincent de Paul Society for that matter, represents the simple, very human, and therefore very sacred, presence of Jesus on the margins of society.

The people that Kennedy House exists for are, for us, the presence of Christ.

I don't say these things to be sanctimonious. I say them because they need to be said at a time when, on the one hand many people in the world see the church as having become distant from the Gospel, and on the other hand we have a world that is fixated on the accumulation of unnecessary wealth, even when it comes at the price of accumulated misery and poverty for so many.

Goulburn Men's Hostel was originally opened on 18 May 1980. In 2001, it was renamed Kennedy House in honour of Bryan Kennedy, the Manager here from 1985 to 2000.

Kennedy House is the only single men's homeless service in the South Eastern NSW Region. So great is the demand for homelessness services in this region that, before moving to these premises, we were stretched beyond our capacity. Kennedy House has always provided not just crisis accommodation, but also works closely with NSW Housing to provide longer term options and support through a number of bedsits in the community. Kennedy House also has a proven

record of supporting men to re-enter the workforce and escape from their cycle of poverty and homelessness.

In the new property, Kennedy House will be able to support up to 40 men every night, offering intensive case management, as well as important supports such as living skills and tenancy sustainability skills.

A prosperous nation like ours should not be experiencing such scandalous levels of homelessness. Conservative estimates are that there are over 105,000 people homeless every night in Australia. Even worse, with such levels of homelessness, no-one should ever have to be turned away from a homelessness service. The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has long been calling on the Federal Government to take seriously its responsibility to ensure that no-one is denied the right to appropriate housing.

In the meantime, we need to be here at the coalface of marginalisation, not as paternalistic dispensers of charity, but as real sisters and brothers to the people who have been pushed to the edges of society. ♦

SYD TUTTON is National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Australia.



KENNEDY HOUSE

The face of Jesus and the love of God

Above-left: Kennedy House staff members.
Above: Bishop Pat Power blesses the new building.

BISHOP PAT POWER gave this homily at the official opening of Kennedy House on 14 May 2010.

GOULBURN'S STORY REFLECTS MUCH of what has happened in Australia's past and what is happening throughout our nation in 2010.

It is a story of diminution, transformation, new growth and hopes for the future.

Many of the institutions which have characterised Goulburn's history are quite different today, in comparison to what they were 50 years ago.

Prestigious colleges, a great railway hub, Kenmore Hospital, the orphanages, a centre for a thriving wool industry, are just some of the landmarks in this city's rich history. The influence of the churches is quite different today to what it was in 1960 and in the years leading up to it.

And yet there are things that remain constant: the jail, the social issues which are part of the city's life, the civic pride

which has always been a feature of Goulburn's existence.

With any group of people there will always be challenges that embrace the struggle of good over evil, of courage in adversity, of the basic goodness of human nature striving to uphold the dignity not just of select people but of every human being; the promotion of an environment where everyone is regarded as our sister or our brother.

The St Vincent de Paul Society has played an important, if low-key, role in Goulburn's history. The people who were so close to the heart of Jesus when he walked this earth 2000 years ago are represented by those whom the St Vincent de Paul Society has sought to reach in the 20th and the 21st centuries.

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and in prison and you came to visit me."

Without any show or fanfare, these are the principles that have guided the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society here in Goulburn, across Australia and around the world. Like Jesus, the members have

not been afraid to go where others might have been reluctant, to embrace their brothers and sisters whom others had shunned. They have been willing to stand by their fellow human beings, even when such stances have been unpopular or counter-cultural.

How beautifully they have lived up to the exhortation of St Paul. Their love has been genuine and has been lived out in such a way that everyone has been treated with the deepest respect. In their spirit of hospitality, they have rejoiced with those who rejoiced and wept with those who were weeping.

Kennedy House is an outstanding example of responding to the real needs of real people. No longer is homelessness spoken of as something abstract, but the people searching for somewhere to sleep or to eat are met with the welcoming love of Jesus.

I spent two happy years as a young priest in Goulburn in 1971-72. One of the constant features of my life in those days was responding to the requests of the "gentlemen of the track", and sometimes women, who came knocking at the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17
presbytery door, seeking assistance.

Largely, it was the St Vincent de Paul people who eventually came to their assistance. But I should say that I tried to do my bit rather than simply foisting them off onto the St Vincent de Paul Conference, which was always over-stretched. I would offer to make them tea and sandwiches and, if they were in need of a bed, take them down to the Mulwaree Private Hotel whose good Catholic owners gave them a night's accommodation for just two dollars. I usually escorted my friend on the five or ten minute walk. It was an opportunity to hear something of how life had been treating them. Sometimes the tale was a fanciful one, but more often they were sad stories of broken lives and misfortune. There was always the frustration of not being able to offer very much long-term assistance or hope.

Nearly 40 years on, times have changed and some of the needs have changed. However, human nature being what it is, there are still great gaps between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in Australian society. These can be acutely seen in many of the people seeking the services of Kennedy House.

So often there can be frustration that the resources available are simply too limited to meet the very real needs. Hopefully, the newly extended Kennedy House can go a long way to accommodating the short- and longer term needs of those seeking assistance. At Kennedy House they will be treated with dignity and in a non-judgemental manner. There will be no talk of the deserving and the undeserving poor. Kennedy House promises to "create a bright home for bright futures." I commend all of you who, through your generous dedication, are making this possible.

We are coming to the end of the Easter season in which we celebrate the new life which Jesus' resurrection makes possible for us all. It is the basis of the hope that every follower of Jesus carries in his/her life.

I am proud to be associated with, and to bless, this great enterprise which shows the face of Jesus and the love of God to everyone associated with it. "*Happy are we who are called to His supper.*" ♦

BISHOP PAT POWER is the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

CEO SLEEPOUT SUCCESS

FOLLOWING ITS HUGE SUCCESS IN Sydney last year, the Vinnies CEO Sleepout went national on 17 June, when hundreds of CEOs and business leaders slept out across Australia.

The event, which had been launched by the Federal Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek, as part of Vinnies Winter Appeal, raised awareness about homelessness, and funds for Vinnies homeless services across Australia.

Ms Plibersek described the CEO Sleepout as a fantastic example of private enterprise and the non-government sector uniting for the benefit of the whole community.

"Homelessness is everyone's responsibility – governments, businesses, the service sector and the wider community all have a role in reducing homelessness," she said.

"This terrific initiative by the St Vincent de Paul Society engages business leaders in understanding and helping to address the complex issues surrounding homelessness."

This year the event was held in Sydney (Luna Park), Canberra (National Museum of Australia), Melbourne (Etihad Stadium), Adelaide (Adelaide Zoo), Perth (WACA), Darwin (The Gardens Oval) and Brisbane (Suncorp Piazza, Southbank) with a target of more than \$1 million. Tasmanian CEOs slept out at the Melbourne event. Final figures can be seen at ceosleepout.org.au. ♦

NEW NSW STATE OFFICE OPENING

The Society's new State Office building in Sydney will be officially opened on 8 July with a blessing of the building undertaken by Cardinal George Pell. An open day will also be held with displays and tours of the many varied and different activities undertaken in State Office.

The new building represents a continuation of a very long Catholic history of the Lewisham site. As far back as the 1830s the area was the site of a Catholic cemetery and more recently, the Little Company of Mary Hospital in which the Society's State Office was previously housed. The building was designed to reflect an open and inclusive workspace and will provide a location from where much of the Society's good works and activities can be advanced for many years to come. ♦

GOOD NEWS FROM THE SOUTH

In April 2009 the former Hobart and Glenorchy Regional Councils amalgamated to form the new Southern Regional Council. The Council ranges from Dover in the deep south, Swansea on the east coast and beyond Oatlands in the midlands. Shortly after the merger, the Council undertook a detailed membership survey. With more than a thousand members and volunteers, it tells a very positive story of the hope and vitality of the Society.

The survey of Southern Regional Council's membership and works revealed:

- 13 adult conferences with 120 members
- 10 youth conferences with 300 members, running Buddy Camps for underprivileged kids and a homework club for humanitarian entrants
- 18 centres supported by 300 volunteers and raising significant revenues subsidising our youth projects and other works
- 3 large incorporated Special Works – Bethlehem House, Tastex and St Vincent Industries – with almost 40 staff and as many volunteers
- Loui's Van street van with three routes and 250 volunteers
- Dining with Friends monthly Brighton community dinner prepared by 20 volunteers
- A program supporting refugee families on arrival and with accommodation
- A men's shed with 40 attendees
- 50 full-time and part-time staff.

Perhaps the secret of the region's success is its youth coordination program, which for more than 25 years has provided a youth worker supporting school conferences, young adult projects and a range of programs.

While youth conferences have transitory membership, their presence and creativity have given life to the whole Society and ensured a natural spread of membership of all ages in all sorts of initiatives. Younger members have provided the inspiration and impetus for our hugely successful Loui's Van street van and many other innovative works.

The Southern Regional Council's Refounding Forum, held late last year, will be detailed in the next issue of *The Record*. ♦

DJOONDA DJINDA STAND TALL AND PROUD

THE MEANING OF DJOONDA DJINDA – Stand Tall and Proud – eloquently reflects the main objective of the Djoonda Djinda Modelling School: to give Aboriginal girls self confidence, to hold their heads up high, and stand tall with great pride.

Delwyn Little, the modelling school's proprietor, started this initiative after becoming distressed from seeing young Aboriginal girls drifting as aimlessly as she had done in her own youth. It was only when Delwyn became involved in the Black Pearl Modelling Agency that she was taught to have confidence and started to build her self esteem.

Now a mother of seven children and grandmother of five grandchildren, Delwyn decided to give the gift of confidence through modelling to young Aboriginal girls, just as she had experienced. Delwyn says "when I started doing a modelling course with the Black Pearl Modelling Agency, it was an experience of a lifetime. I first worked on my self esteem, grooming and deportment, photography and the basic skills of the catwalk. Then we got our first show, in the 1998 Christmas Pageant, we got to do our steps in these beautiful white gowns, cameras flashing and people applauding, I thought it was a dream come true."

With the help of The St Vincent de Paul Society WA and Relationships Australia, Delwyn was able to get her idea off the ground and immediately had great interest from the community. Delwyn's models conducted two fashion shows to celebrate NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Week in 2009 and, during Harmony Week in March 2010, a story about her good work was featured in *The West Australian* newspaper, from which more community interest arose.

Delwyn is currently supervising two

weekly traditional dance and modelling classes, teaching 21 young girls aged between 6 and 19 years vital life skills including grooming and deportment, self esteem, make-up application and hairdressing techniques. Delwyn's work seems to have just begun, with many more projects planned for the near future.

NAIDOC Week is once again being celebrated nationally in July and, in Perth, the school may be selected to open the



"When we got our first show, in the 1998 Christmas Pageant, we got to do our steps in these beautiful white gowns, cameras flashing and people applauding, I thought it was a dream come true."

– DEANA PULLELLA

week-long festival with a fashion parade in Perth City's Forrest Place, as well as further fashion parades and workshops during NAIDOC Week at two of Perth's northern suburb shires in Wanneroo and Joondalup. With projects like these in the pipeline, it's fair to say that Delwyn has come a long way since she first made contact with the St Vincent de Paul Society in 2004.

Delwyn had been struggling to care for her family after a tragic life experience that left her with feelings of depression and the inability to function normally. Through her troubled times, she was able to call on members of the St Vincent de Paul Society for welfare assistance with clothing and food; however, after visiting Delwyn, the members soon realised her needs went far beyond material goods and she was, in fact, dealing with a much more serious issue in her life.

Delwyn happily accepted an invitation to become a part of the *Family Friends Program*, a Conference-based Special Work, endorsed by the St Vincent de Paul Society in WA, which provides support to single parent families. The program is the first of its kind and single parents gain what are essentially "family friends", with the full intention of receiving life-long friendship and support. Single mothers or fathers benefit from regular phone calls and visits, presents on children's birthdays, their "family friend's" phone number (with an invitation to call directly), advocacy on their behalf and, at all times, a supportive, caring and compassionate person to talk to in times of need. During her hardest times, Delwyn says that having a friend to confide in, someone she could talk to when she needed a friendly ear and a sense that she had developed a good foundation to rely on, was essential in getting her back on track.

Six years on and the future is brighter for Delwyn, who is also making brighter futures possible for many young girls with the Djoonda Djinda Modelling School. The school has just received funding from the St Vincent de Paul Society State Council of WA, in support of its good work with the young Indigenous community and to encourage its expansion and growth throughout WA. ♦

DEANA PULLELLA is Communications Coordinator for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Western Australia.

'WELFARE QUARANTINING' TOOL OR WEAPON?

NATIONAL COUNCIL IS SUPPORTIVE of income management as a voluntary tool in the context of appropriate supports. When targeted sensibly, it can be an excellent means for people to deal with current situations, as well as to move towards positions of self-determination.

Sadly, the Federal Government, supported by the Opposition, is planning something completely different, despite the best advice and evidence offered not only by the Society but by virtually all NGOs working with people experiencing marginalisation in Australia.

As you are probably aware, compulsory income management (or 'welfare quarantining', as it is sometimes called) was imposed on Aboriginal people living in prescribed communities in the Northern Territory. This measure was welcomed by some people, and we are supportive of it being continued on a voluntary basis where people find it helpful. It was, however, also imposed on many people who had absolutely no need of this tool, people whose lives were not in disarray and who were managing their meagre finances responsibly. The only criterion for the imposition of compulsory income management or "IM" was that they were Aboriginal.

This imposition, by any measure, is racist. It is explicitly imposed on the basis of race. The UN Special Rapporteur indicated that this was so, especially since the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) had to be suspended in order for this policy to be implemented.

The Federal Government continues to portray the proposed roll-out of compulsory income management

as somehow being integral to its commitment to a social inclusion agenda.

To this end, we witnessed the sad spectacle of data being wheeled out towards the end of last year, purportedly showing how compulsory income management in its current racist application, as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), is somehow responsible for wonderful improvements in the quality of life of families affected.

"At \$4,400 a year per person, the administrative cost of compulsory income management would have been better spent on actually increasing the incomes of these people who are doing it tough."

This "evidence base" was gathered from only 76 "income management clients" out of a possible 15,125. These people were interviewed in four affected locations out of a possible 73 prescribed communities and town camps.

As the authors of the report point out: *"The research studies used in the income management evaluations would all sit towards the bottom of the evidence hierarchy. A major problem for the evaluation was the lack of a comparison group, or baseline data, to measure what would have happened in the absence of income management."*

This is a cynical manoeuvre by the Government. In an effort to get around the Racial Discrimination Act, it has

decided to go down the American path of close supervision of people who are doing it tough. The discrimination will not cease. It will merely be broadened. This is insulting to the people we stand in solidarity with.

This paltry effort to conceal racial discrimination merely leads the government into the equally dangerous waters of class discrimination, as well as gender discrimination, particularly in its impact on sole parents. The former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alistair Nicholson, says compulsory income management is like Big Brother and interferes with people's rights and liberties. *"The Government is so desperate to retain what I would see as some of the objectionable aspects of the intervention that it's prepared to go to these lengths to do so,"* he said.

During a Senate Inquiry into the proposed expansion of compulsory income management, courageous evidence was provided by such people as Elaine Peckham, an Aboriginal woman from Alice Springs, who told the inquiry: "We would like to see our basic rights given back – not the BasicsCard."

We hoped, as per the recommendation of the NTER Taskforce, that income management would be made voluntary and the RDA reinstated. This was not to be.

The Federal Government decided instead to bypass its problem with the RDA by planning to impose Compulsory IM on all people in receipt of Youth Allowance, Newstart and Parenting Payment Single after certain periods.

The imposition on the basis of race has now therefore been superseded by the imposition



on the basis of class. I understand that this term might make some feel uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable! Especially for those who will come under its powers!

Unfortunately, this is the most accurate description we can ascribe to the Government's frame of reference in this proposed roll-out. Once again, it will not target families or individuals because of any demonstrated difficulties they might be having with the management of their social security benefits. It will simply be imposed *because* they are on a given benefit.

This is unreasonable as well as unjust.

I am proud to say that National Council is unwavering in its courage to speak out against this injustice. You can appreciate the vigour with which this policy must be criticised. This policy consists of turning a useful tool into a harmful weapon. It is never too late to turn this around. But it might take some time.

If it goes ahead as planned, we will witness right across Australia the designation of certain areas of disadvantage where all people on the above-mentioned benefits will have compulsory income management imposed.

The feeling of disempowerment and exclusion that this will create is something that will no doubt be highly apparent to our members. It is also quite likely that we will see numbers of affected people seeking to move out of designated areas so as to avoid the compulsory imposition. This is not respectful of people's dignity, nor is it responsive to their needs.

We are obliged to speak out against this. It is shameful that the Government has decided on a path that is so extreme.

Gerard Thomas from the NSW Welfare Rights Centre recently gave an excellent presentation to National Council on this issue. NC members expressed their absolute dismay at the Government's proposed roll-out of compulsory IM. As Gerard pointed out, this will shape up to be one of the most extreme changes to Australia's social security system that any of us have seen.

It is inconceivable to us that a Government that has committed itself to a social inclusion agenda can act in such a disrespectful manner to people who are unemployed or who are struggling on a low income to raise a young family.

At \$4,400 a year per person, the administrative cost of compulsory income management would have been better spent on actually increasing the incomes of these people who are doing it tough.

This policy worsens the social and financial divide in Australia. You can't build a strong economy on the back of a fractured society. ♦

DR JOHN FALZON is the Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

FORCING PEOPLE TO DO THE RIGHT THING

WELFARE RECIPIENTS SHOULD spend their payments on food and clothing, and not on drugs and alcohol.

Indeed, few welfare recipients with drug and alcohol addictions would themselves argue against this. The question is how the government should go about persuading them to make the most appropriate use of their payments.

It can focus its efforts on either force or reason. Forced income management is the easy option. It is effective in ensuring the payments are used for the daily necessities of life.

A Senate report released earlier this month endorsed plans to expand income management from Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to selected welfare recipients across the country.

But the cost to human dignity makes income management counter-productive.

Any disadvantaged person robbed of their dignity will find it almost impossible to flourish as a member of society.

Compulsory income management is supported by government bureaucrats, who have no contact with the recipients themselves. They can see that it makes economic sense, at least in the short term.

Such draconian measures are strongly opposed by charities and welfare groups, which have regular face-to-face dealings with the recipients and can see most clearly what allows welfare recipients to overcome their difficulties.

St Vincent de Paul National Council CEO John Falzon said: *"This Inquiry heard evidence from all over Australia. The evidence overwhelmingly showed that income management can be a useful tool when it is voluntary and backed up with supports and services. It also showed that compulsory income management is*

By MICHAEL MULLINS

degrading and stigmatising."

St Vincent de Paul and similar organisations reject the view that people who are doing it tough need to be set apart and treated as though they are dysfunctional. People who are treated as dysfunctional for a sustained period of time invariably become dysfunctional.

It is much better if the government can show them how to beat drug and alcohol addiction and not remove their ability to take responsible decisions towards this end.

Compulsory income management assumes that some welfare recipients are unable to make rational decisions that take into account the long-term consequences of their actions. The same might be said for some governments.

Michael Mullins is editor of *Eureka Street*. This article was published in *Eureka Street* (www.eurekastreet.com.au) on 22 March 2010.

SMART METER PRICING on hold – for now

THE SOCIETY'S REPORT, *NEW METERS, New Protections*, was launched by National Council Chief Executive Officer Dr John Falzon at Parliament House in Canberra in February this year. The report raised numerous issues in relation to commitment by state governments across Australia to roll out 'smart' meters for domestic energy usage, the impact these meters can have on household energy bills and the need for strong customer protections.

This was the final report in a series of research papers on the matter produced by the Society after receiving a grant from the Consumer Advocacy Panel to undertake the work. The report received substantial media coverage across Australia, and particularly in Victoria.

A key objective for rolling out smart meters is to provide households with price signals through 'time-of-use' pricing, i.e. to make electricity more expensive when demand is high and, conversely, less expensive when demand is low.

The report stated that time-of-use pricing will penalise many households that can ill afford price increases. In particular, we expressed grave concern for households with people at home during the day on weekdays. People in full-time employment during standard business hours can naturally avoid consuming electricity during a significant proportion of the time when peak rates apply. Pensioners, people with disabilities, the unemployed and parents caring for young children, however, all represent households more likely to be severely financially disadvantaged by time-of-use tariffs.

As time-of-use pricing creates winners and losers, we argued that governments deciding to introduce such pricing structures must be clear about the impact it will have on households. Furthermore, they must develop and introduce policies and regulation to mitigate these impacts

before the new energy tariffs take effect.

Since the launch of the report, significant policy and regulatory changes have occurred in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

In Victoria, where the rollout of smart meters to all households had begun in 2009, the State Government announced a moratorium on time-of-use pricing in March 2010. It also established a customer consultation working group, inviting consumer and welfare groups, including the St Vincent de Paul Society, to regularly meet with the Minister for Energy to discuss customer impact issues arising from the smart meter program. The State Government has also proposed to undertake a customer impact study to inform policy developments in 2011, when the current moratorium on time-of-use pricing is set to be lifted. A review into the adequacy of the regulatory instruments and customer protections is also underway.

In NSW, where Energy Australia already had approximately 200,000 customers on time-of-use pricing, the company announced in April that all customers

wishing to be transferred from such electricity tariffs to a flat rate would now be granted the opportunity to do so.

In Queensland, the State Government and the energy companies, Ergon Energy and Energex, have decided to abandon their smart meter and time-of-use pricing trials that were originally scheduled to take place as part of the national, smart meter program.

The Society welcomes these announcements but remains concerned about potential future developments in the area of time-of-use pricing that disproportionately hurt low-income and vulnerable households. We will therefore continue to monitor developments and advocate for equitable tariff structures, customer protections and appropriate concessions to ensure that all households have access to affordable essential services. ♦

The Society's reports on smart meters and consumer protections are posted on the National Council website, www.vinnies.org.au.

MAY MAUSETH JOHNSTON is St Vincent de Paul Society researcher, and author of the *New Meters, New Protections* report.

VINNIES SOUNDS A WARNING ON THE FEDERAL BUDGET

NATIONAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT Syd Tutton outlines the St Vincent de Paul Society's official response to the 2010 Federal Budget:

You don't build a strong economy on the back of a fractured society. This Budget fails to heal the fracture. With more than 600,000 Australians now unemployed, we remain stuck with a Newstart Allowance that is less than half the minimum wage.

With no real adjustment to unemployment benefits since 1994, these Australians are forced to live below the OECD poverty line. An income below the poverty-line is not a stick to drive people

into a job. It is a brake on participation.

A fractured society will cost this economy dearly. The social costs, the health costs, the economic costs, are already apparent.

We called for an increase of \$45 a week for single base unemployment benefits.

We called for genuine inclusion of people doing it tough as sole parents and as battlers on the margins of the labour market.

But the people we represent continue to be forgotten and pushed out.

We will all pay the price of their abandonment. ♦

REACH OUT FROM INDIA

AUSTRALIA RECENTLY HOSTED THE Society's National President of India, Varre M.J. Balaswamy, and National Project Officer, Krupanandam Prakasham, who were visiting to promote the upcoming 7th Pan Asian Congress (PANASCO 7) and to foster the relationship that exists between our two countries.

During the visit, Mr Balaswamy provided the following profile of the Society in India, which is the third-largest National Council after Brazil and the United States of America. Australia is the fourth-largest.

The Society in India carries out its work through 56,946 members, 79,459 auxiliary members in 6,359 parish conferences. The organisational structure is divided into six regions. These are:

ANDHRA PRADESH REGION – 8 Central Councils, 555 Conferences, 5,163 members.

KERALA REGION – 28 Central Councils, 3,660 Conferences, 29,908 members.

NORTH EASTERN REGION – 5 Central Councils, 208 Conferences, 1,560 members.

NORTHERN INDIA REGION – 6 Central Councils, 170 Conferences, 1,519 members.

TAMIL NADU REGION – 19 Central Councils, 1,266 Conferences, 12,277 members.

WESTERN REGION – 8 Central Councils, 500 Conferences, 6,519 members.

Australia twins 1,418 Conferences in India, England and Wales 1,511, Scotland 318, Netherlands 33 and other countries 47 Conferences. In 2008-09, Australia also sponsored 1,679 *Assist a Student* scholarships.

Members of the Society in India provide food for the needy and are a major distributor of milk powder throughout India; they visit the sick in hospitals and their homes; and have many projects including homes for the aged, orphanages,

leprosy hospitals, aids hospice, home for the disabled, eye hospitals, home for street children, training centres, and TB rehabilitation centre.

From 13-17 September 2010, India will host PANASCO 7 under the theme, "*Justice and Peace Will Embrace*". The Congress will be held in Goa and the President General, Jose Ramon Diaz-Terramocha, will give the inaugural address. He will be supported at the opening by the Archbishop of Bombay, Cardinal Ozwald Gracias and the Chief Minister of Goa, Digambar Kamat.

Over the week, there will be keynote addresses and workshops on twinings, social responsibility, the new poor, spirituality, youth and training, and HIV-AIDS.

The week will finish with Mass celebrated by Filipe Neri Ferrao, Archbishop of Goa and Daman and Patriarch of the East Indies, at Bon Jesus Cathedral, which houses the body of St Francis Xavier. ♦

'ONE SOCIETY' IN FOUR LOCATIONS FOR NSW CONGRESS

By BARBARA RYAN

CONGRESSES ARE NOT NEW TO the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW; however, it has been a long time between drinks!

In 2009, a proposal was put forward to NSW State Council to hold a Congress for all members of the Society, both young and the young at heart. The initiative was endorsed and a planning team was formed. There were so many questions, including when and where a Congress could be held to encourage the greatest number of members to attend.

A survey was sent to every NSW Conference, asking what people understood a Congress to be, what they would like at such a gathering and where they would like it to be held. There was a great response, with strong support to participate in a series of regional gatherings, rather than a single centralised one. And so it was to be.

The theme of the Congress, to be held in Wagga Wagga, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo and Sydney between July and September, is *One Society: Renewed in Faith, Serving with Love, Building for the Future*. With this in mind, the aim of the NSW Congress is to:

- invigorate members in our Mission;
- reflect on our spirituality and rich history;
- extend our knowledge and skills through stimulating speakers and workshops;
- connect with, and learn from, one another;
- celebrate our unity AND our diversity; and
- share common hopes and concerns.

Speakers include Jenni Hickson, Chantelle Ogilvie, Fr Frank Brennan SJ, Fr Barry Dwyer and Professor Ian Webster. All speakers have been associated with the Society over many years and each bring to the Congress their own thoughts and

vision for the Society, both now and into the future.

There will also be workshops and group discussions on the key issues that affect membership and the works of the Society today.

No matter which Congress people attend, they will all be wonderful events where Vincentians from all walks of life come together and celebrate exactly what it is that makes them Vincentian – to serve with love – and work together to build for the future.

The Congress is being held at Wagga Wagga from 9-11 July, Coffs Harbour from 30 July-1 August, Dubbo from 20-22 August and in Sydney from 24-26 September, 2010. ♦

For more information, visit the NSW Home Page at www.vinnies.org.au and click on the Congress icon. The program and registration forms are available online.

Barbara Ryan is the State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW.

THE LONG WAY TO HOBART

A scrapbook of memories provides a glimpse into our past

WHEN EUGENE WEBER OF Dulwich Hill set out from Sydney for Hobart in 1927, he did so in a spirit of adventure.

Today we think nothing of travelling interstate or overseas, but in 1927 a long trip was neither common nor easily affordable. To travel any distance around Australia could involve train and ship and weeks or months away from home.

Eugene, aged 33, married with young children, and a member of St Paul of the Cross conference, was setting out for the third Triennial Congress of the Society in Australasia.

To mark his adventure, he compiled a scrapbook of the trip containing photos, postcards and other memorabilia such as tram tickets. The scrapbook has turned up in the Society's National Council archives 83 years later; how it got here is unknown. Eugene entitled it:

My trip to the Society of St Vincent de Paul Third Australasian Congress, Hobart 27 Feb - 5 March 1927 ILLUSTRATED via Ivanhoe, Broken Hill & Adelaide.

That's a long way around to Hobart.

Triennial Congresses were big events in the life of the Society: both religious and social. They seem to have been an Australian innovation that aimed, in contemporary words, to bring together our widely scattered brothers and make them feel they were not isolated units but members of a great, world-wide organisation.

The tyranny of distance in Australia was a significant problem not faced by the Society in other countries. Our early members were separated by vast distances in an age without mass communications. A brother in northern Queensland or country South Australia might know nothing of the Society's work elsewhere in Australia. A Triennial Congress, bringing together members from city and bush, could overcome this remoteness.

There were ten Triennial Congresses

between 1921 and 1954, bringing together hundreds of members from all over Australia. The first two were held in Sydney (1921) and Melbourne (1924). It is interesting that the first Congress outside these two great cities, which were home to three-quarters of the Society's 3647 members in 1927, was held in Tasmania, where there were only 79 members. Brisbane and Adelaide (but not Perth) hosted Triennial Congresses at a later time.

There were ten Triennial Congresses between 1921 and 1954, bringing together hundreds of members from all over Australia.

In making his Congress journey, Eugene sailed from Melbourne to Launceston on the *Nairana*, a Bass Strait ferry with quite a history: she had seen service as a Royal Navy sea plane carrier in the First World War. Eugene would likely have seen the brass plaque mounted in *Nairana's* salon, commemorating her part in the capture of the north Russian port of Archangel (Arkhangelsk) during the Russian Civil War in 1918, when her guns engaged the Bolsheviks and her seaplanes bombed the fort.

There was drama, too, attached to the other ship that brought delegates safely to the Congress. Two hundred and fifty Society members came from the mainland, and most of the NSW and Queensland delegates arrived on the SS *Riverina*, which belonged to the same line as *Nairana* and took three days to sail from Sydney to Hobart. Two months later, bound for Sydney out of Hobart, *Riverina* was shipwrecked between Mallacoota Inlet and Gabo Island, fortunately without loss of life.

What did they do at the Hobart Congress? They went to Mass and Benediction, made new friends and talked – about the spiritual life, Ozanam, Catholic literature,

the mission to seamen, the expansion of the Society in country districts, and “safeguarding Catholic youth”. Tasmanian Premier Joe Lyons (later to become Australian Prime Minister), attended two sessions.

Out of session, the delegates visited St Virgil's College and St Joseph's Orphanage and took a day trip by steamer up the Derwent to the convent at New Norfolk, stopping on the way at Claremont to visit the Cadbury factory.

A hastily organised garden party at Government House was presided over by the Governor, Sir James O'Grady, a former British Labour politician and one-time president of the British Trades Union Congress.

Eugene Weber was a Sydney man. His home territory comprised a handful of neighbouring suburbs, a world only a few kilometres wide. He lived in Dulwich Hill; his parents were married in nearby Newtown, where he himself was born; his wife, May Rowlands, came from the next suburb, Marrickville; and when he died, nearly 50 years after the Congress, he was living in a house just around the corner from the home from which he had set out for Hobart in 1927.

What must Eugene have made of the places he visited and recorded in his scrapbook – not only the cities, Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide, but also the huge expanse of country, the selector's homestead that he photographed between Ivanhoe and Menindee in far west NSW, the lunch at Lake Victoria Station, the punt across the Darling at Menindee, the decorated trams in Broken Hill...

The aim of the Congress was to bring Society members together – in a way, to make their world smaller – but it must also have enlarged the horizons of all who attended, opening their eyes to a big Society and a big country.

MICHAEL MORAN is the Archivist of the National Council of St Vincent de Paul.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Why not Mrs Le Gras?

I WAS QUITE PUZZLED AFTER reading the article, *Remembering Louise de Marillac* (*The Record*, Autumn 2010).

Why is she called by her maiden name when:

1. she was married, and
2. "known to most people as Mademoiselle Le Gras", and
3. always called Mademoiselle Le Gras by St Vincent de Paul – as the article mentions?

Was she a trail-blazing feminist keeping her maiden name, as women often do today? Or was it thought that an upper-class (supposedly) name would add lustre to her good works? As a notorious politician said: "Please explain!"

Jacques Urruty,
Brighton, VIC

Author's note: On the face of it, the change from Mademoiselle Le Gras to Louise de Marillac seems to have little to do with either trail-blazing feminism or the upper-class lustre of the Marillacs. Louise's tomb is inscribed "Louise de Marillac", but I do not know when this was done. Perhaps Mademoiselle Le Gras was an appropriate name for her in life, protecting her status and reputation, and ensuring a proper basis for her collaboration with St Vincent de Paul. Perhaps in death she became known as Louise de Marillac again.

From what I have read, Louise (or Mademoiselle Le Gras) remained in some obscurity in the century or so after her death for two reasons: first, she lived somewhat in the shadow of St Vincent de Paul; and, secondly, her illegitimate birth was something of a mark against her.

When biographies appeared in the 19th century, she was referred to as Louise de Marillac. This seems to be well before any explicit feminism as we know it today. Furthermore, I suspect that the Marillac name had little lustre after the French Revolution.

In her canonisation process, she was named as Louise de Marillac. On the other hand, her near contemporary, St Jane de Chantal, remained known by her married name. Your question may need some further research.

– John Honner

Dubious heroes

RATHER THAN JUST ACCEPT THE politically correct, left-wing media's sanctification of some dubious heroes, those who write for *The Record* should surely be obliged by its editor to thoroughly investigate the lives and history of such people. Those who write letters castigating

anyone who has the temerity to complain about such sanctification would do well to research a little more deeply too.

Have they ever given any thought to Nelson Mandela's ANC's "necklacing" of opponents, I wonder? Why would the sayings of Barack Obama (the most pro-abortion American president ever) be thought worthy of inclusion in our spiritual readings? Does anyone really believe in the United Nations Organisation anymore?

Could I suggest to Dr John Falzon that he research the life of Martin Luther King Jr before he bombards us with quotes from that source? The "Unsleeping Eye" by Robert Stove might be a starting point.

For my part, I say thank you to Bishop Luc Matthys, Joe Lopez and V.K. Ignatius for "standing up to be counted".

Frances Costa
President, St Patrick's Conference,
Macksville, NSW.

Editor's note: In the United States, South Africa and Europe, an unprecedented racial equality was beginning, slowly and painfully, to overturn centuries of enslavement and oppression. Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King were heroes to students all over the world.

Duty to respond

I WISH TO COMMENT ON THE abridged article entitled "The first and the last" (Phil Glendenning, *The Record*, Autumn 2010). The myths surrounding refugees were a real eye opener to me! Being a migrant myself, I understand how misinformation can easily be taken as the truth. The grim picture portrayed is no doubt true, but the question is how to change attitudes when people only pay lip service to the practice of Christianity. Though nominally Christian, Australia is now a secular country.

Recently we hosted one of the largest gatherings of atheists in the world and Richard Dawkins was proud of it! To change the thinking of the government, Christians must change the thinking of voters. The renowned Bishop Fulton Sheen said that Christians want to follow Christ without the Cross, while unbelievers accept the Cross without Christ! This is happening in Australia

today. Christian apathy is when those in authority do nothing, or talk and write a lot and still achieve nothing. As the late Charles Perkins said when alluding to Aboriginal leaders, "no one wants to get their hands dirty."

So, how do we influence the majority of Australians who want the current policy on refugees by boat to be harsher than it is? How do we convince an affluent secular society that, even though our jails are two-thirds full of descendants of a once-proud people, it is not all their fault? How do we debunk the myths about hapless boat people? I was saddened recently when someone suggested, "why don't we just blow them out of the water?". I was lost for words. Though said as a joke, this remark reflects a lack of compassion by some Australians towards newcomers, and also smacks of racism.

Such are the challenges facing not just the Vincentians, but every fair-minded Australian. Phil Glendenning's lecture has explained this quite eloquently. As Christians, we have a duty to respond. We will be judged accordingly.

Les Fern
Nightcliffe, NT

A facet of disadvantage

NOBODY WOULD DOUBT DR FALZON'S sincerity nor good work. However, he would accept that the St Vincent de Paul Society is made up of members with different viewpoints.

To illustrate that the St Vincent de Paul Society is not a monolith: other SVDP Society members would question Dr Falzon's assessment (*Catholic Weekly* 11/4) of Compulsory Income Management. Some perpetrators might feel "degraded and disrespected" but some victims might feel relieved. Other SVDP Society members would disagree with Dr Falzon's "Unfashionable as it might sound, the heart of disadvantage is economic inequality".

Economic inequality may be a facet of disadvantage, but certainly not "the heart", not the *sine qua non*. Other SVDP members might not see his blanket statement, "Compulsory Income

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25)

Management imposed on the basis of race or class is yet another expression of inequality that lies at the core of Australian society”, as either typical or indicative of Australians’ motives nor viewpoints. Australians are egalitarian and generous, but condone neither ill treatment nor waste.

Joe Lopez, Warrimoo

In *Aotearoa Odyssey* (*The Record*, Autumn 2010), the comment is made that “the rationale for the NZ [Charities Act 2005] is that it gives unlimited tax benefits to donors, which is the supposed quid pro quo of having to provide complete transparency for donors and prospective donors who can view all details of a charity online.”

The rationale for the Charities Act 2005 is to monitor and regulate the behaviour of charitable trusts, which, as a consequence of case law dating back to 1891 in England, are exempt from income tax. Consequently charitable trusts are indirectly subsidised by the taxpayer. The Charities Act 2005 provides, for the first time in New Zealand legislative history, the requirement for charitable trusts to publicly disclose their financial and other activities in return for the privilege of being exempt from income tax. A charity which is registered with the Charities Commission is a tax charity. Registration is voluntary and charities which choose not to register are liable for income tax. A tax charity also has donee status, which is the basis for the tax credits available to those who contribute to such charities. The very generous tax benefits to donors to the extent now available are a more recent development, subsequent to the introduction of the Charities Act 2005.

Dr Michael Gousmett,
Manager, Central Council of Canterbury
National Development Manager, National
Council of New Zealand, Society of St Vincent
de Paul.

The Record welcomes letters but we reserve the right to edit them for legal reasons, space or clarity. Articles will be published only if full name and address and telephone numbers are provided, although the address will be withheld from publication if so requested.

Post to: *The Record*, PO Box 243, Deakin West
ACT 2600 or email to admin@svdpnactl.org.au.
Everyone whose letter is published will receive a free book courtesy of David Lovell Publishing.

OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR CHARITY

THROUGH OUR BAPTISM AND the giving of the Spirit, we receive our discipleship with the Lord. We become a part of his mission of salvation for all humankind. We become acutely aware that those people who are on the edges of our society have the same dignity before the Lord as we do. They are our brothers and sisters. Once we accept this, we realise that we have an obligation, as disciples, to help the vulnerable and the oppressed to live out their innate dignity in the community; to bring people in from the edges. To leave them there is to walk away from our responsibility as a disciple of Jesus.

We learn from the action of the Good Samaritan. We do not look the other way. We respond to immediate need for food and clothing and shelter. We give charity. But we know that this is not enough.

While these essentials of life are so important, we have a fuller appreciation of the equal human dignity of every person, made in the image of God, when we work to provide vulnerable people with the means and the opportunities to participate more fully in the community... to provide a person with a disability with education, and skill development so that they can get employment... to ensure that housing is more affordable for low income families... to work with jobless families so that their barriers to employment are lessened and that access to mental health services and other support services is available.

But charity must never be allowed to stand alone. It must always move toward social justice in the cause to assist all people to realise their equal human dignity before God and with all people in the community.

If we look to the poor and the oppressed to be thankful and grateful to us for our charity, we are in grave danger of abusing the vulnerable and feeding our pride.

We must never classify people as the deserving or undeserving poor. It is the right of all the vulnerable, before

God, to be helped back into the heart of community life as best we can.

Our charity must be given because it is the right of all to have the essentials of life.

But charity alone is not enough. It can even be dangerous for us, because the act of charity can seduce us into living the illusion that we have ‘done our bit’, that we have done enough. This would be a shocking injustice, and it would blunt our own spiritual journey.

Charity and social justice are two sides of the same coin. Charity helps meet essential needs for the moment. Social justice works to provide individuals and families with access to opportunity: education, skill development, employment, support services, community networks, adequate housing and transport... to break down barriers and structures which prevent the vulnerable from fulfilling their human dignity in the image of God.

We believe in the Triune God; a God of a community of persons. It is in this image that we are made. In our very core is the need to find our meaning and fulfilment in community. Our reflection on this great aspect of our faith gives added urgency to realising the dignity of the vulnerable by helping to free them to participate more actively and with great dignity in the community in which we all live.

In the Book of Exodus, we read that Moses said to Pharaoh, “*Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.*” The Word of the Lord demanded freedom from the structures that oppressed His people. We are part of this mission. We are disciples of the Lord working for charity and justice for all, but with special emphasis for those who are oppressed. We are in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need, as we serve the Lord of Salvation for ALL. ♦

MONSIGNOR DAVID CAPPO AO is the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Adelaide. He is also the Commissioner for Social Inclusion in South Australia and Vice Chair of the Australian Social Inclusion Board.

