

# *Companions on the Journey: Sharing Jesus' Love*



Delivered by  
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## *Ozanam Lecture 2008*

Held at  
**Melbourne Town Hall**  
Swanston Street, Melbourne

**Thursday 10 July 2008**

The lecture is held annually  
in honour of the  
St Vincent de Paul Society's founder,

***Blessed Frederic Ozanam***  

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**1813-1853**



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## A message from the State President

Dear Friends

It is with great pleasure that I write this foreword to the printed version of the 2008 Ozanam Lecture.

This year the lecture took place within the context of the Days in the Dioceses program, itself the prelude to World Youth Day.

We were fortunate to obtain the particular talents of Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez from Honduras for the lecture. The lecture itself is a brilliant interplay of the theology and the practice of serving the poor and disadvantaged in our community.

A re-reading of the lecture, from time to time, will serve as a refresher for us, especially when our enthusiasm seems to be on the wane.

Christine Boyle's formal response to the Ozanam Lecture, while following the Cardinal's themes, has its own challenges for us all.

So please read and consider these two thought-provoking talks.

Yours sincerely

Jim Grealish  
State President – Victoria  
St Vincent de Paul Society

## Mission Statement

The St Vincent de Paul 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.



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## Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez, SDB

### A Short Biography

Cardinal Rodriguez is widely viewed as an outstanding leader of the Latin American Church. His campaign for human rights and the poor has won widespread praise.

He is trained in classical piano, and not afraid to play the piano or saxophone, and has studied in El Salvador, Guatemala and the United States.

A long-time teacher and professor, Cardinal Rodriguez has a combination of education, charm, outspokenness and international experience that makes him popular.

On 5 June 2007 he was elected the new Caritas Internationalis President by the Caritas Confederation members at their 18th General Assembly in Vatican City. As its President, he is the global representative of the Caritas Confederation for the next four years.

The Cardinal is also currently a member of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. He has been at the forefront of confronting corruption in society and championing the rights of the poor and suffering in a globalised world.



# Companions on the Journey: Sharing Jesus' love

## Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez President, Caritas Internationalis

Thank you for asking me to speak in honour of Blessed Frederic Ozanam at your annual Ozanam Lecture in Melbourne. This year the lecture is given in the days leading up to the first World Youth Day in Australia.

From all over the world young people are coming together to witness as one, not only to their faith, but also to their life in Jesus Christ, celebrating with the Holy Father the sacrament of His self-sacrificing love for the whole of humanity in the Eucharist.

Frederic Ozanam was a young man when he, together with some of his fellow students, decided in 1833 to start what they called a 'Conference of Charity' or the 'Conference of Love' to assist the poor, the neglected and the downtrodden.

They did that following the example of Saint Vincent de Paul, who two hundred years earlier had started his 'Conference of Charity' in Paris to rescue babies abandoned at Notre Dame Cathedral.

A few years later Ozanam renamed his 'Conference of Charity' the 'St Vincent de Paul Society'. Soon it was shared by others, inter-generationally, by young and old.

I honour and thank Frederic Ozanam, and all of you here present and especially all Vincentians, or 'Vinnies' as you call yourselves over here in Australia, who in your thousands have been loving and serving as Ozanam did.

You might remember that as a young man Frederic once wrote to some of his friends: "If you want a formula", and he was writing about what to do about the troubled and unjust world in which he lived, "I believe in love."

He thought that the fate of the world "will be terrible if charity does not interpose... if Christians do not dominate with all the force of love."

According to him, sharing in the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ is the only redeeming force in our world. And he added: "The order of society is based on two virtues: justice and charity. However, justice presupposes a lot of love already... Justice has its limits whereas charity knows none".

It is in the loving relation with the one overlooked and in need, that the saving and redeeming connection is made from heart to heart.

That is why I would like to propose to speak about love, about Gospel attitudes; the attitudes of Jesus, for dealing with our brothers and sisters who are forsaken and forlorn in our world.

Speaking about 'Sharing Jesus' love' to you, Vincentians, I would like to talk about being companions on His, on Jesus' journey.

And the first thing that comes to mind when I think of proposing a new vision or way of looking at the



'...[the world] will be terrible if charity does not interpose... if Christians do not dominate with all the force of love.'

Frederic Ozanam



**'Encouragement is related to the virtue of hope. It makes us find reasons for living, for loving, for suffering and the energy to bring them to fruition.'**

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez

lack of charity and the injustices in the world is the passage from St John (15:9): "As my father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love."

In the vocation of every Christian, there is often a face that has stimulated us or motivated us to a new way of life. For all Vincentians Frederic Ozanam has been one of those! Then there are those exemplary people who have joined the saints; or those who are still accompanying us on our way.

Someone has invited us, welcomed us, accompanied us. Behind each of us we can see these faces, maternal, paternal, fraternal, which have revealed the beauty of God our Father and the worth of the human person.

This is what I propose: that we become maternal, paternal or fraternal faces for those who are overlooked, forsaken and forlorn, so that, as the Gospel says, they receive and we receive a hundredfold and begin to experience eternal life here on earth.

If we tried right now to count on our fingers the faces of the people who have accompanied us, encouraged us and welcomed us up to this moment of our lives, I can assure you that the hands of all of us here would not be sufficient. How wonderful life has been to us; how wonderful God has been to us. And I think: "Love is repaid with love." And I think: "There is no greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends..."

Let us consider the pain and deception that we Christians often cause when we refuse to welcome someone, or when, after the initial welcome, we are unable to persevere in love. When we help open up worlds and are not consistent enough to accompany people on their remaining journey. When we give the sense, or the certainty, that we are not interested and consequently leave someone behind, or when instead of the gratuity of companionship and fraternity, we turn love into a knot and accompaniment into dependence, imposition or manipulation.

It is worthwhile knowing that we are capable of being brothers or sisters, mothers or fathers to those neglected, poor and forlorn. We know the road is not free of pain, but that is true of anything that is worth the effort; it is also the consequence of love that is freely offered. I propose the following methodology for your Vincentian pastoral work.

### **The First Step is to Welcome**

Welcoming is obviously the starting point. We could read the Gospel interminably in the code of welcoming, paying attention to the heartbeats of so many powerful moments in the life of Jesus, who, even just before he dies, takes time to welcome the 'Good Thief'.

Welcoming does not mean simply giving a hand or opening our arms. Welcoming means, allowing ourselves to be invaded by others, making a place for them in the deepest corners of our hearts, creating an atmosphere of trust, so that the person can reveal his or her mystery, creating a loving connection.

Welcoming is a ministry that leads to the mystery of God, of the person, of things. In the deepest sense, it means understanding the 'being' of our God, who is always at the door, attentive, watchful, and ready to take the initiative to love and reveal his mystery to anyone willing to meet him.

In human beings, welcoming is a feminine trait. It is the love that engenders, because it is the woman who welcomes the seed of a man into her womb and welcomes the new life growing within her. It is not strange, then, that the older St Elizabeth and especially the Virgin Mary, a very young woman, give us a master class in welcoming: not only by what these two holy women offer and give to one another, but by the way they both welcome the will of our God. This will is welcomed with an attentive ear, with open arms, with a willing soul, so that through it the mystery of each person is revealed and we can know something more of the unfathomable mystery of our God. Mary stands as the perfect example when speaking on the place of a young person in God's plan.

### **The Second Step is to Encourage**

Encouraging, on the other hand, is a more masculine trait. It means infusing with breath, as was done at creation, and penetrating the soul, as Jesus did with his gaze, laying bare the heart. It is not a gaze of inquisition. It is simply the gaze of love, which is capable of breaking through the defences of fear that we so often see among the poor and downtrodden, whom we encounter in the streets of large cities in this country, and its almost endless outback and plains.

Encouraging is an act of healing presence that restores joy in living, as Jesus did with the paralysed man or with the woman who suffered a haemorrhage: "Have courage, your faith has saved you."

But it is also an act of revelation that leads us to the source of meaning: "It is good for you that I go... because I will send the Paraclete", the one who encourages, who will lead you to the truth. A reality and truth expressed so well in the motto given to all those coming to World Youth Day: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses".

Encouragement is related to the virtue of hope. It makes us find reasons for living, for loving, for suffering and the energy to bring them to fruition. For this reason, encouragement culminates in the Paschal mystery, particularly in Pentecost. There we go to the source. There the Spirit of the new creation calls to us. The Paschal mystery of our Lord is the most fertile source of life and consolation: "Take courage, for I have overcome the world."

### **The Third Step is Accompaniment**

Accompanying, meanwhile, means abiding in love. It means prolonging in time and space the welcoming and the encouragement. Accompanying is faithfulness in action. For this reason it is, perhaps, the deepest trait that we owe to our impoverished and lonely brothers and sisters; it is a way of giving



Cardinal Rodriguez presenting the 2008 Ozanam Lecture

life. It brings into play all the energy of those who accompany and all their humility, because they know that they are not the ones who give grace, but that they are simply instruments of the Lord.

It is, I repeat, a mature attitude at whatever age, on the part of the person who decides to give himself or herself as father or mother, with everything that this type of love entails, to help nurture other people spiritually, to help them learn to love, to grow in freedom, to mature in life and, in the case of the most overlooked ones, to recover the dignity that they might have lost along the way.

Perhaps the clearest example of accompaniment in the Gospels is Jesus' relationship with his disciples, especially with Peter.

In an act of love, Jesus calls Peter, who in response leaves his nets to follow in the Lord's footsteps. One night, while keeping vigil, Jesus prays and chooses Peter to be his messenger. In a moment of intimacy, Peter acknowledges Jesus as Teacher and Lord, and Jesus reveals to Peter his preferential love.

We can repeat this attitude of Jesus': we can call someone who as a wandering refugee and migrant has already left nets and boat behind in their land and pray with them during a night of vigil and reach the solemn moment when we can recognise them as our brothers and sisters and express our 'preferential love' like Jesus and Peter.

Accompaniment, like welcoming and encouragement, is not only aimed at people. It is also necessary to accompany communities. This is what we learn from Paul with each of the communities he founded, especially those of Corinth or the Philippians, which caused him so much suffering and which, perhaps for this reason, as with our own parents, inspired in his heart such paternal and maternal love.

It is interesting to read the letters to the Corinthians, which are eminently apostolic, to discover the strength of the love of this man, who clearly understood that he had engendered them, proclaiming the Gospel to them (1 Cor. 4:15-17), and who declares his fatherly and motherly love.

Who speaks of Timothy as 'my beloved son' and of Titus with tender love (2 Cor. 7:2-16). This Paul, who is so dominating, so controversial, and so passionate, who reveals the deepest parts of his being, his anguish, his tears and his love, who does not want to impose himself on his children.... Who even says that he is braver correcting them in letters than when he is actually present with them.

It is enough to re-read the beginning of his letter to the Philippians, which is perhaps the most revealing of Paul's extreme sensitivity to the Lord, we need only count how many times he names him in just five chapters, and to the community he loves so much:

- "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you..."
- "It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart..."
- "For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus..."
- "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, to help you determine what is best..." (Phil. 1:3-11)

He addresses the Philippians as "brothers and sisters whom I love and long for, my joy and crown" (Phil. 4:1) ... but, and this is surely because of that same love, he speaks the truth transparently to certain ones and accompanies them, although from afar, with his letters and advice, so that they can move forward on the journey of faith.



**'And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, to help you determine what is best...'**

(Phil. 1:3-11)



**'To accompany is to have faith in the other: in his or her word, dreams, choices and life...'**

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez

## Characteristics of Accompaniment

After this brief glance at Jesus and St Paul, it is appropriate to describe some of the characteristics of accompaniment, always against the backdrop of the paternal and maternal figure of God, because the only people capable of accompanying are those who are willing to take, in their lives, the step of becoming a father or mother.

And here age does not matter, there are very precocious fathers and mothers. It is amazing what young people can do. Think again of that young girl Mary who went to help her old kinswoman in need, and the hymns they sang together! What is important is the maturity of the heart, maturity in love... because all accompaniments imply a deep, even sacrificial, offering.

## Accompany the One Who Abides in Love

To love is beautiful. It is more difficult to remain in love. It is wonderful to love. It is more difficult to remain faithful to the beloved. It is exciting to love. It is more difficult to forgive. And no one can say they have attained love unless they have passed through the crucible of forgiveness.

Accompaniment is this: "As my Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love" (Jn. 15:9).

And abiding in love, 'for better and for worse, in sickness and in health'. Abiding when we agree and when we disagree. When people do what we want and when they do not. When they listen to us and when they do not listen; when we are recognised and when we are abandoned; when someone thanks us and when we are forgotten. Abiding in love... as my Father loves you... this is the definite point of comparison for all accompaniment.

When we go from being children to being parents, we must travel along the road of pain, forgiveness and generosity. It is the step into maturity; it is an Easter in every sense of the word.

## The Road of Pain

The first road that leads to spiritual parenthood is pain, because there is no mercy without tears ... tears that spring from the eyes or the heart. We know that we only suffer for that which we love. Therefore, accompaniment that is not united to the willingness to accept the sacrament of pain, to the cross, may be spiritual comradeship, but it is not an act of engendering or of taking responsibility for the life that we have helped bring to birth.

Rather, when we seek to travel the road of fraternity from end to end, pain becomes a source of prayer, a discipline of the soul that allows us to attain great freedom in love.

## To Welcome is to Walk the Road of Generosity

Part of the grace of love is to love each person individually. And to each one, to every son, to every daughter, we would like to give all, holding nothing back. This is the deepest sense of inheritance.

"If your child asks for bread would you give him a stone? And if he asks for an egg, would you give him a scorpion? ... Give to those who ask you for a loan ... and if someone asks you to walk a mile with him, walk ten.... Otherwise, what credit is that to you?" (Cf. Lk. 11:8-13, 6:27-38).

No one has greater love than those who give their lives for those they love.

And this attitude also implies the discipline of letting go, of not coveting, of not being greedy, not with affection, not with time, not with things. Every time we take one step toward generosity, we are moving from fear toward love.

Unless we accept pain, offer forgiveness and choose generosity, we cannot aspire to accompany. But we need not be afraid: the same one who awakens in us the gift of accompaniment will give us the grace to do so.

## To Accompany is to Believe Deeply in the Other

To abide in love requires a grounding in faith. To accompany is to have faith in the other: in his or her word, dreams, choices and life... Having faith, even though we disagree... Having faith even when we encounter inconsistency, the precariousness of a person's word, difficulty in being consistent. Having faith, even amid sin.

Accompanying is a great act of trust, like the trust the Father showed in us by giving us the fullness of the Spirit of Pentecost just after His beloved Son had been denied and crucified.

It is the trust of the father who gives his ring, with the seal that gives authority to dispose of all his goods, to the son who has squandered his fortune. It is the trust of Jesus, who gives to Peter a place of leadership in the community of believers, so that it is the one who betrayed Him who must confirm His brothers and sisters in the faith.

This attitude is not as illogical as it appears, because it is precisely the experience of total trust amid complete knowledge that leads to a change of life: When they believe in me and still place their hope in me, although they know who I am and precisely because they know who I am, in my greatness and in my very smallness. An act of faith.

But it is also an act of respect for what God is doing in another person, certain that 'whoever has begun the good work will finish it well'. The one who does the good work is the Spirit of God, not the one who accompanies. The one who accompanies is only an instrument.

Meanwhile, the most difficult thing for the person who is being accompanied is to perceive a lack of trust. It

is almost a reason for abandoning this caricature of a brother. More difficult still is to find that this complete openness has been used against him. This is called betrayal. And unfortunately, it sometimes occurs, damaging the trust that has been placed not only in the one who is accompanying, but also in the Church.

It is also difficult to feel that someone believes in me only when their choices coincide with mine. It is hard to feel that the one who opened my eyes, or who helped me open them, does not dare to accompany me along the most twisting paths, where choices are more questionable.

But accompanying is also an act of faith, because it means proposing to the other person or community criteria that are rooted in the Kingdom of God, not just personal criteria. This is what Paul does with Corinth in the case of the person who committed incest or the divisiveness that destroyed the community.

We must be careful not to create dependence. Within the Church, we want to help give birth to people who are mature, not dependent personalities. The father wants to have mature sons and daughters, not to oversee a kindergarten forever. We learn this from St Paul, who first gives milk, then solid food.

### A Situation in Which We Must Hope Against Hope

The love and faith that are present in accompaniment always go hand in hand with hope: the same hope that the Father has in the work of His hands. Despite original sin, despite the scorn His prophets faced, despite the rejection of His beloved Son. As St Paul says: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." And that is the case with the person whose mission is to accompany.

One amazing characteristic of the virtue of hope is that it is not obvious:

- Hope that is seen is not hope.
- Hope is coquettish; it must be sought out.
- Hope is shy; it must be discovered.
- Hope is as fragile and small as the Child of Bethlehem, and must be cared for.
- Hope is as vulnerable and as strong as Easter, and must be celebrated.

The experienced eye of the person who believes in hope knows how to detect its fertile sprouts in the lives of those of us who are called to accompany. And this hidden presence, which seems so small, nearly invisible, helps affirm people's hope in themselves and in other groups.

There is little sense in pointing out defects, what is missing, what was done wrong. Sometimes it must be done. It requires honesty, but not much creativity and even less contemplation. Finding strength in the weakness, that is the grace of the Lord.

This comes from Christian hope. Pointing out a defect and not taking responsibility for it can be irresponsible. We only have the right to point out a limitation, a sin



Cardinal Rodriguez with visiting World Youth Day pilgrims from Honduras

or a defect if we are willing to accompany the person on the road to overcoming it. Anything else is abuse of authority, irresponsibility. It creates guilty consciences, not hopeful spirits. It puts us above the other, not at their feet, where a servant should be.

Hope is always directed toward life, knowing that this involves death. It is directed toward the destination, without ignoring the fatigue of the journey. It does not lose itself in details, but focuses on what is essential. It is directed toward the radical goodness that God has created in the human heart, which will always be unblemished even though sin may try to deface it or even destroy it. Because of this, instead of getting caught up in details, it invites us to look at the array of people and communities, to delight in their progress and point them out to those we accompany.

### Seeing suffering people with the Eyes of God

I am aware of the difficulty. At first glance, it seems easier, or at least more attractive, to build, to manage, preach or celebrate than to accompany.

I am not questioning or minimising the value of preaching or celebration or even your very noble work for justice and charity as Vinnies. I could not.

But never forget, you as followers of Frederic Ozanam, always require a face-to-face encounter, the Cyrene who helped carry the cross, the experienced person who encourages another to withstand the fatigue of the journey, showing that what seems to be a mountain is only a bump in the road.

For this reason, the most basic element of the service of charity for the one who accompanies, is and always will be, to place in the Lord, in his hands, the people and communities being accompanied: it is He who holds them in the palm

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Quote from film  
'Monsieur Vincent'

of his hand. It means seeing with the eyes of God: it is He who watches over them as the apple of his eye. It means loving them with the Father's heart: it is He who always hopes, scanning the horizon, unseen but never failing to keep watch. Ideally, to accompany is to incarnate the fatherly figure of God: to be his sacrament.

### A Proposal

To conclude, I would like to make a triple proposal that implies at least three attitudes for the disciples of Frederic Ozanam:

1. Respect for the other person's freedom;
2. Giving advice with humility; and
3. Discovering the language of love.

Respecting freedom and doing so as God does with us. Not spying, not wanting to tie people down, not even with invisible threads. The only possible bond is that of love, which always liberates.

Giving advice with humility, placing our experience at the service of others. Love never humiliates another person. This is especially true in our case, when we are aware of our limits, our inconsistencies, our late conversions. God seduces, invites, encourages, stimulates, corrects, and warns. Love never imposes.

The one who accompanies is not an oracle, is not the Word of God, is not the definitive opinion, let alone judge and jury. The one who accompanies is a vulnerable person with the soul of a father, with the heart of a mother, who wants to offer the best of his or her love knowing that this, the best, also has its stumbling blocks. We will never be mature enough or gratuitous enough to truly live up to this task.

A degree of reciprocity is normal between parents and children, and we who accompany will learn a great deal from the people whom we accompany: from their authenticity, their inner seeking, the sensitivity of their awareness, their greatness of heart.

The person who accompanies is called to discover the language of love, not only in words, but also in gestures.

This is obvious. If it is of God, it is the only way, and this is God's language.... It is Jesus laying His hands on the children. It is Jesus looking with intense love at the rich young man. It is Jesus standing up for the woman caught in adultery or the one in Simon's house. It is Jesus on the cross, His arms outstretched between heaven and earth, reconciling this wounded humanity. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father.

It is Jesus who speaks words of love: the most longed for, the most novel, the most revealing. He speaks with authority because with His eyes of love, He is able to discover what lies within each person. And that gaze is always within reach for anyone who wants to learn to see with the eyes of the Lord.

Out of this gaze come the timely words, the wise advice, the moments of revelation that help a person realise who he or she really is.

We must not only pay attention to the words of those who seek our company: we must also be attentive to gestures, to looks, to hands, to silence, to know how to understand what words do not know how to say or sometimes cannot say. This same attention is reflected in the body language of the one who accompanies, invites, welcomes and provides encouragement.

### Conclusion

Dear friends, let me conclude my oration in honour of your Blessed Frederic Ozanam. As President of Caritas Internationalis, I, like you, know that we must be vitally concerned for social justice and changing unjust structures that deepen the suffering of poor people trapped in cycles of dependency.

Always be brave and courageous in fighting for justice for the poor here and in the global village!

But justice is only the beginning! Remember the words of Paul VI "Justice is love's absolute minimum". Poor sinners, though we are, let us make the human person the centre of our work. Our aim is always to share the love of Jesus ourselves.

That is why this afternoon I have stressed that above all we must love and accompany people! Only thus can we really serve our sisters and brothers.

Accompanying is an art, in the fullest sense of the term. It is not easy to understand the ways of the human spirit, so complex, so subtle. It is not easy to have the right word, the timely piece of advice, the correction, and the encouraging word. Nor is it easy to know which new step should be recommended in the life of a person or a community. You, young Vinnies, must dream boldly! This is something that cannot be improvised: It is necessary to study, to contemplate, to know oneself better, to know the other person, to connect.

Or to put it in the words that close the film *Monsieur Vincent*, "It is only because of your love, your love alone, that the poor will forgive you for the bread you give them."



## Christine Boyle, BEc/LLB

A Short Biography

Christine Boyle is a Melbourne barrister who graduated from Monash University in Law and Economics. She specialises in commercial law but maintains a keen interest in social justice issues.

Christine, who is an old girl of Loreto Manderville, worked as a solicitor in private practice and as in-house counsel in Melbourne, London and Paris for a global insurance and investment management group.

While working in London, Christine sought volunteer work and became a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society conference at Brompton Oratory. As part of her volunteer work Christine regularly assisted on the soup vans.

On returning home, Christine became a member of the St Francis Conference in Melbourne and heartily encourages everyone, especially young people, to become involved in volunteering and community work.

# Response to Ozanam Lecture

Christine Boyle

Barrister and member of the St Vincent de Paul Society

Thanks and welcome everybody. What a fantastic turn out today.

Welcome especially to all our international guests, I know we have Canadians in the front, the Portuguese, Hondurans. Is there anyone else out there that we have missed?

From all around the world, or wherever you have come from, welcome and thank you for coming and stopping in Melbourne on your way to Sydney. But you are lucky that you have, because you have now seen Australia's most cultured city. But don't tell the people in Sydney that I said that.

It is a great honour for me today to talk not only to you, but also to respond to Cardinal Rodriguez's speech.

Before I embark on my response, I am going to do something very barristerial, I would like to make a disclaimer, and my disclaimer is really offered to those of you who have been to previous Ozanam Lectures and who know that normally when we have a speaker of such note as Cardinal Rodriguez, that it's usually followed by someone of equal local import, an academic or an anthropologist or some sort of expert in social services who enlightens us about the local situation on relevant points.

Well my disclaimer is sadly for you, and for me, that I am none of those things and I have probably had less experience with the Society than many of you here today.

So why am I here you ask? Well I am here because next week is World Youth Day and in the spirit of that, the Society has asked me to give a young person's

perspective. Obviously I'm using the word 'young' liberally, a young person's perspective on Cardinal Rodriguez's speech and on the general question of how we might make our Society young again, and how do we attract and retain young people.

So Cardinal Rodriguez gave us a very heartfelt and inspiring speech I'm sure you will all agree, but I think the real beauty of his speech was, that he gave us something practical to take away. He gave us a three step program, if you like, that we can take in our work with the Society and in dealing with the disadvantaged in general. And those three steps are to simply welcome, encourage and accompany those people, the people who we seek to serve.

He showed us that all of those three steps are vital if we are to end up fulfilling our end goal of loving the people we serve. Now I don't know about you, but I grappled for a long time with this concept, 'loving the people we serve', I can see that in theory it's all well and good, and Jesus-like and noble, but how in practice, do I love someone I don't even know, who obviously is going to have some problems if I am going to try to help them.

Well I am happy to say that I finally realised what that meant on my very first night with the St Vincent de Paul Society on a soup van. The night in question, we were particularly short staffed in my group and I was left to make the sandwiches and the soup for that night's deliveries, and I was plagued by anxiety about my sandwiches. Did I make them the way they wanted? Had I made enough? Was my lumpy soup going to be rejected?

**'...those three steps are to simply welcome, encourage and accompany those people, the people who we seek to serve'.**

Christine Boyle



**‘...that enduring principle that the St Vincent de Paul Society has, of loving the people we serve and, treating them face to face, as the Cardinal mentioned, with respect.’**

Christine Boyle

But what I realised later that night, is that the food that we were serving was the least important thing we were providing, and I learnt that when I went out on the van with my fellow volunteers, when we arrived at our first destination and I was busying myself getting the food ready I saw that my fellow volunteers got off the van straight away and greeted the people that had been waiting for us, and they greeted them very personally, in many cases with their first names. They struck up conversations which they had obviously started some time before. They made jokes, they were warm and affectionate, and for those people that were obviously new, they welcomed them as warmly as if they were friends of old friends.

The whole scene looked more like friends meeting at a pub than anyone giving charity to anyone else, and I was so, so blown away as we say. I was so impressed, I have never in my life seen two groups of people from such vastly different backgrounds treating each other with such respect, and such love. And finally I got it, and I think that enduring principle that the St Vincent de Paul Society has, of loving the people we serve and, treating them face to face, as the Cardinal mentioned, with respect. This is the greatest thing that we can offer and in fact it is one of the greatest selling points for young people as well.

The sad reality is that in this country, and probably around the world, established religions like in our Church, is becoming less popular amongst young people and that was made very clear by a study that was conducted in Australia earlier this year, and found that 31% of 13 to 17 year olds, that's probably most of them still at school, have absolutely no religious beliefs or no spirituality.

And perhaps even worse, four out of five, that's 80% of them, do less than one hour or no community service work per month in their lives, and these are kids who are still at school and probably you would expect subject to some sort of community service programs. These results paint a bleak picture for religion and also for societies like the St Vincent de Paul Society.

But I think that there's a simple problem behind these figures and I think there is probably a simple resolution that we can all assist in achieving. It's true that young people are disaffected with religion, but it's not true that they are not interested in volunteering and helping the community or making poverty history. They, like Frederic Ozanam when he was only 20 years old, are still extremely interested, but I think the problem is not enough of them have been subjected to the three steps that Cardinal Rodriguez offered us from societies like the St Vincent de Paul Society. Not enough of them have been welcomed, or encouraged or accompanied along their journey.

What I think we need to do, is to extend a welcome to young people who are already in the Society or those who might even consider joining it, and when we make that welcome, don't be afraid to talk about the kind of work that you do, and what you see being achieved by that work, and what you yourself get from it.

Cardinal Rodriguez spoke about welcoming, and how in each person's own Christian vocation there has probably been a welcoming point at some stage in their lives. For Frederic Ozanam the welcoming faces would have come from his mother and father, his father was a doctor but he spent about a third of his time treating the poor for no charge.

His mother was also a volunteer at the bedside of the sick and bedridden. Now we do not all have such wonderful parents, although I do, and they are here; but as the Cardinal has said we can all be maternal, paternal or fraternal faces to those who are disadvantaged and I think also to those younger than us who we might encourage or welcome into the Society.

The second step Cardinal Rodriguez talked about is the step of encouraging the subjects of our pastoral work; again I think this is equally applicable to young members of the Society or potential young members.

The Cardinal talked about how encouraging can breakdown the defence of fear amongst the poor and I think amongst the young it can help break down that defence of anti-religious sentiment which is so prevalent today. But it was also prevalent in Frederic Ozanam's time.

How many people do you think could find fault with what Frederic Ozanam, the Cardinal and the Society stand for, loving those who are less fortunate than us, helping and respecting them? I wager very few.

The final step Cardinal Rodriguez talked about is accompaniment. He describes this nurturing other people spiritually helping them to love, given the chance to grow, with freedom and to mature in life and in the case of the most neglected ones to recover the dignity they might have lost along the way.

I think the most important thing he said about accompaniment is to abide in love even when you disagree, and for those of you who have ever lived with teenagers in the house, know that sometimes younger people can take very different views to yours, and sometimes on very important matters to you.

I think what Cardinal Rodriguez was trying to tell us, is that our role is not to criticise these people and not to take issue with our aspect of disagreement, but instead to accompany them along their journey even if they are not prepared to agree with you.

I think equally when you have young people in the Society or young people you might have met in life, you might have been enthusiastic at one stage about the Society or whatever it is that you are doing but then those interests wane because life has stepped in the way from time to time. The important thing is to abide and, in fact, the important thing is probably to use Cardinal Rodriguez's three steps potentially in reverse, you need to be there to accompany them whilst they find the direction they need in life. You need to be willing to encourage them if you have the opportunity, to welcome them back into the Society, when needed or when they are ready. And finally when they are ready, you need to be there with open arms ready to welcome them back and tell them that they are needed and you're glad their back and they are going to do good.

So as today's appointed Youth Advisor, some parting words for attracting and retaining young people in the Society.

What I would say to you is each of you here is, simply by the fact that you work in the Society, or for those of you who don't, who deal with young people in life, each of you is a potential mentor for a young person. Each of you has the potential to make an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of young people. Think of what those volunteers on the soup van on my first time did for me without even knowing it. You do not have to take on board this opportunity, and take on an active role as mentor. But if you don't the figures look a bit distressing about the future of volunteer work in this country. If you do take it on and embrace it I think great things will come. And if you are wondering how to go about it just think of Cardinal Rodriguez and his three simple steps.

Welcome, encourage and accompany.



The St Vincent de Paul Society's Victorian State President, Jim Grealish with Cardinal Rodriguez and Christine Boyle

# Ozanam Lecturers and Respondents

- 1997 Sir James Gobbo**  
Governor of Victoria  
*Respondent: Betti Knott, General Secretary, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.*
- 1999 Archbishop (now Cardinal) George Pell**  
Archbishop of Melbourne  
*Respondent: John Moore, National President, St Vincent de Paul Society*
- 2000 Sir Gerard Brennan**  
Chief Justice, High Court of Australia  
*Respondent: Susan Campbell, General Secretary, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.*
- 2001 Betti Knott**  
Director Operations, Archbishop of Atlanta, United States of America  
*Respondent: Tony McCosker, Director, Ozanam Community*
- 2002 Professor John Molony**  
Professor of History and Author, Australian National University  
*Respondent: Morag Fraser, Editor, Eureka Street*
- 2003 Helen Johnston**  
Director, Combat Poverty Agency, Ireland  
*Respondent: Fr Mark Raper, Provincial, Australian & New Zealand Province of the Jesuits*
- 2004 Fr Frank Brennan SJ**  
Associate Director, UNIYA and Author  
*Respondent: Sr Libby Rogerson, Co-ordinator of Social Justice & Director of Caritas, Diocese of Parramatta*
- 2005 Moira Kelly AO**  
Executive Director, Children First Foundation  
*Respondent: Fr Peter Norden, Policy Director, Jesuit Social Services*
- 2006 Fr Gerald A Arbuckle SM**  
Co-director of the Refounding & Pastoral Development Unit, NSW  
*Respondent: Julie Morgan, Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars*
- 2007 Dr John Honner**  
Director, Edmund Rice Community Services  
*Respondent: Dr John Falzon, Chief Executive Director, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council*
- 2008 Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez SDB**  
President, Caritas Internationalis  
*Respondent: Christine Boyle, Barrister and member of the St Vincent de Paul Society*



The St Vincent de Paul Society's Victorian State President, Jim Grealish, 2008 guest lecturer Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez and respondent Christine Boyle

## Ozanam Lecture

The annual Ozanam Lecture celebrates the spirit of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the good works of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Frederic Ozanam wrote:

*"Yours must be a work of love, of kindness, you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning with an inalienable right to respect.*

*"You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis: You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long term improvement."*

The lecture is open to the public and welcomes all interested individuals. Each year a guest lecturer is invited to address an audience and raise their community consciousness on a contemporary social justice issue.

The selected lecturer is a person actively involved in practical work with the disadvantaged and marginalised (those God loves most). But is also an advocate for social justice through their words or examples. This is to reflect the charisma of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions and our patron, St Vincent de Paul.

The Society has been privileged to have a distinguished list of lecturers and respondents over the years. We are grateful to all for sharing their experiences while also raising the social consciousness of us all to our obligations in continuing to journey along Frederic Ozanam's vision.



**St Vincent de Paul Society**  
*good works*

The St Vincent de Paul Society began in 1833 with a 20 year old French university student named Frederic Ozanam. At that time the people of France were experiencing tremendous political and social upheaval including the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and unjust employment practices.

Ozanam gathered a group of colleagues and began responding in practical ways to the poverty and hardships he saw around him by visiting people in their homes, offering friendship and practical support such as a load of wood. Today this practice of 'home visitation' still remains a core activity of the St Vincent de Paul Society's members and volunteers.

The Society in Australia was founded by Fr Gerald Ward at St Francis' Church, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne on 5 March 1854. There are now over 44,000 members and volunteers assisting over 1.8 million people in need. The Society is one of the largest and most cost-effective welfare organisations in Australia.

In Victoria the St Vincent de Paul Society consists of over 7,000 members and volunteers who assist more than 660,000 people in need each year. The specialist arm of the Society, St Vincent de Paul Aged Care & Community Services, provides professional assistance to people with more complex needs in aged care, accommodation and support services as well as supported employment for people with a disability.

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