

*“Compassion and Hope  
for Children of  
the World”*

DELIVERED BY

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RESPONDENT

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*Ozanam Lecture  
2005*

HELD AT  
ST FRANCIS' CHURCH  
LONSDALE STREET  
MELBOURNE

THURSDAY 26 MAY 2005

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

*Blessed Frederic Ozanam*

1813-1853



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*



## St Vincent de Paul Society

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 600,000 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.

# A message from the State President

Dear Friends,

I am honoured to be able to share with the wider community this summary from the eighth annual Ozanam Lecture which celebrates the spirit of our founder Frederic Ozanam and the charisma of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

This year the lecture was delivered by Moira Kelly AO, Executive Director of the Children First Foundation, and the respondent was Fr Peter Norden SJ, Policy Director for Jesuit Social Services.

Over 500 people attended St Francis' Church to hear the lecture which is not designed as an academic exercise but as a device to raise community consciousness on a contemporary social justice issue.

I invite people of all beliefs and political views to read and contemplate this lecture and provide critical discussion that perhaps will contribute to this important social issue.

God bless you all.

Syd Tutton  
State President – Victoria  
St Vincent de Paul Society



# Compassion and Hope for Children of the World

Moira Kelly, AO Executive Director, Children First Foundation

Moira Kelly is the Executive Director of the Children First Foundation and has devoted her life to working with children in third world countries, who are struggling with life threatening physical conditions that are completely operable in the Western world.

During her early life Moira grew up surrounded by a spirit of service. Her grandparents were involved with the St Vincent de Paul Society and she was inspired to help people in need which included working on a Melbourne soup van.

Moira was just eight-years-old when she watched a documentary at school about the life and work of Mother Teresa. Arriving home, she vowed to her mother that one day she would work with the Calcutta-based Saint.

At the age of 22 Moira fulfilled her vow, working with the late Mother Teresa in India and Africa. She spent two years in Calcutta, returning only when her visa expired. This was also when the seeds of her own personal philosophy were sown. "Wherever there is the greatest evil, the greatest good can be achieved." Coupled with her own inner determination, the lessons Moira learned

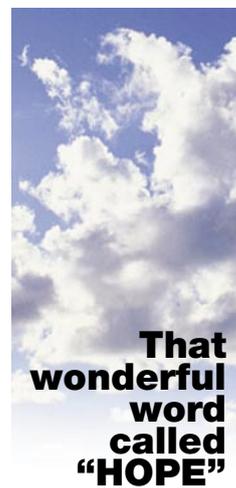
from the diminutive Sister set the foundation for a lifetime of charity work.

Moira has worked with crack addicted babies in the Bronx, with children in remote aboriginal communities, with Romania's heart-breaking AIDS orphans, and in Bosnia and Kosovo during the crisis. While working in a Bosnian refugee camp, a mother with a seriously ill child who could not be assisted with basic medicines available, asked the question: "Wouldn't the doctors and people in your country, Australia, help my child if someone told them what was happening in this country?"

And there began Moira's own unique mission. She began finding children in third world or war torn countries or in humanitarian crises, who were struggling with life-threatening physical conditions that would be completely operable in the Western world.

She offered them hope and the chance to access medical attention that they would otherwise be deprived of.

Moira Kelly doesn't know the meaning of the word 'No' and as a result of that initial question the



**That  
wonderful  
word  
called  
"HOPE"**

If you find yourself in a hopeless situation, even in your darkest moment, make a change, look for somewhere you can make a difference and restore your own hope!



**“Everything happens for a reason”**

If you're open to the signposts and you listen to your heart then you'll know that you are meant to go there.

Children First Foundation was established in July 1999 to support Moira's humanitarian work. She has developed a wide network of hospitals and doctors in Australia, New York, London, Boston, Toronto and Ireland. She has travelled to countries like Albania and Somalia, collecting sick children, and flown them to those western countries where they could undergo life-saving medical treatment. For some it has meant heart surgery, while others have been given prosthetic legs, or reconstructive plastic surgery to address terrible facial deformities.

After surgery, the children's recuperation is at the "Children First Foundation Rotary Farm" before returning to their own countries.

Located in Kilmore the Children First Foundation Rotary Farm was achieved through the donation of a 40 acre property and Rotarians building a 100 square farmhouse able to cater for the needs of the children it assists. Moira has made her home in Kilmore and manages all medical operations, consultations, etc.

Since 2000, Moira has been responsible for assisting over 200 children receive urgent medical attention.

### **Moira's good works**

**At 20** Served as housemother to Aboriginal children on a Western Australian mission

**At 22** Worked alongside Mother Teresa in Calcutta

**At 24** Volunteer AIDS worker in Victoria

**At 25** Worked for the Daughters of Charity Marillac House for intellectually disabled girls and opened a special unit for boys with behavioural problems at Sutherland Homes

**At 26** Worked in Botswana with the Kalahari bushmen on a self-help project

**At 27** Worked in soup kitchens in camps at Johannesburg

Nursed AIDS babies in The Bronx (USA) and fed homeless men and women

**At 28** Raised funds and took five children from a Bronx homeless shelter to England and Ireland for a holiday

Co-ordinated the Romanian Children's Appeal in Bucharest, Romania and responsible for 80 abandoned children infected with HIV at The Victor Babes Hospital in Bucharest

**At 29** Organised a holiday for six homeless children from The Bronx and Harlem to Australia

**At 30** Set up a soup kitchen and a children's crisis centre in a Bosnian refugee camp

**At 32** Brought two Bosnian children to Melbourne and groups of children to USA and Ireland for medical treatment

Organised fresh fruit and vegetables to be supplied to refugee camps for two years

**At 33** Brought five Bosnian children and an orphan from Pakistan to Australia for surgery

Conducted food relief operations and set up a dental clinic in Bosnian camps

**At 34** Brought five Bosnian children to Australia for medical treatment

Organised four Bosnian surgeons to travel to Australia for training

Arranged medical treatment for a badly injured doctor from Albania

Children from Bosnia and Albania were sent to the USA and Ireland for medical treatment

**At 35** Brought seven Albanian children to Australia for surgery, five for major surgery and two for secondary education

Donation of 40 acre property near Kilmore to establish home for rehabilitation of children undergoing surgery

Children First Foundation was established

**At 36** Arranged for seriously ill 15-month-old Albanian boy and his mother to travel to Australia for emergency heart surgery



Moira Kelly addresses the audience at St Francis' Church, Melbourne

## Moira's achievements

- 1989** Awarded Queen's Trust Achiever Award and Victorian Young Achiever Award for Community Service
- 1994** Awarded inaugural Sir Edward Dunlop Award for Humanitarian Service
- 1995** Met with Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace in honour of her efforts with children in Bosnia
- 1999** Received a standing ovation after her keynote address to the 19,000 delegates of the World Conference of Rotary International  
  
Film Australia produces a documentary on Moira's work. The documentary was entered at the Melbourne Film Festival and sold to the ABC, BBC and CNN and televised nation-wide on 14 February 2002  
  
Donation of 40 acre property in Kilmore  
  
Children First Foundation was established to maintain the Children First Rotary Farm
- 2001** Over 80 children from Iraq, Somalia and Albania were sent to the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia for major surgical procedures  
  
Awarded the White Flame Award by Save the Children to recognise her outstanding service to disadvantaged children  
  
Awarded Prime Minister's Award for outstanding community service

One of only 10 people recognised internationally for their contribution to the world which was presented by the Junior Chamber International in Spain

Made an Officer (AO) in the General Division of the Order of Australia in recognition of her "outstanding service to the Australian community through the provision of social support and service for disadvantaged people, and to the international community through the provision of humanitarian relief and assistance and the organisation of medical treatment for those affected by war or insurrection".





**Fr Peter Norden, SJ**  
A Short Biography

Peter Norden is the Policy Director of Jesuit Social Services and the parish priest of the inner city parishes of Saint Ignatius in Richmond and St James in North Richmond.

His current work focuses on strategic interventions on behalf of disadvantaged groups and communities in Australian society. Using research and consultation with government and political representatives, the policy and research arm of Jesuit Social Services, the Ignatius Centre, hopes to influence change in public policy and legislation affecting the most disadvantaged.

Recent research and public policy work has focused on the unequal distribution of wealth in Australian society and a national study looking at how Catholic secondary schools can better respond to incidents of illicit drug use among students.

He has extensive experience working in the criminal justice system here in Victoria and is currently the Convenor of the Victorian Criminal Justice Coalition and an Adjunct Professor in the School of Social Science and Planning at RMIT University.

# Response to Moira Kelly's Ozanam Lecture

Fr Peter Norden, SJ Policy Director, Jesuit Social Services

I first met Moira Kelly in New York City in June 1988. She was 23 years of age and working as an assistant in a homeless persons shelter in downtown Manhattan. Fr Kevin Mogg, the Director of Catholic Social Services, suggested I look her up, while I was undertaking a study tour of the American criminal justice system. Fr Mogg said, "See if you can meet this young Australian girl ... she's got a bit of dash and has a lot to give others".

Prophetic words! By that time she had already been working with Aboriginal children in Western Australia and with some of the early cases of persons infected with HIV here in Victoria in the mid-1980's.

You have heard a little of the range of different locations where she has travelled in the years that have passed since that time: always searching out some of the most difficult and demanding situations of human need that could be imagined.

I must admit that I felt for a while that she was a bit of a rolling stone. I said as much to her at one stage in those early years. That's why I was pleased to learn, back in 1999, of her decision to establish the Children First Foundation and of the initial support that was provided to that foundation by Rotary. Many other organisations have now contributed to make the farm centre at Kilmore an ongoing concern.

Listening to Moira Kelly speak tonight of her experiences and her work over the last 20 years, you have to ask the question: 'Why'? Why is it that a young woman like her would embark on a journey of this nature?

St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, once said that "love shows itself more in actions than in words".

Moira Kelly certainly puts a few words together, often in rapid succession, a sign of her great enthusiasm and commitment to the cause.

But the great thing about the way Moira goes about things is that she just gets in there and does it, and doesn't sit back and wonder why other people are not doing the right thing. Others see her and follow.

One of the consequences of the work of the Children First Foundation is that people around the world begin to wonder why it is that it is possible to undertake some complex surgical operations in some parts of the world, but not in others.

It makes us ask some questions about access to basic health and medical services and the incredible discrepancy that exists between wealthy countries like Australia and even close neighbours like Papua New Guinea, East Timor and the Pacific Islands.

I guess you can understand that the different economies in such different countries lead to different levels of service being available within government run health centres and public hospitals.

But why should such differences exist in the Catholic health care system, between for example the most northern part of Australia and Papua New Guinea?



Does the fact that many of us happen to have been born in Australia, or to have become permanent residents or citizens of Australia, mean that we simply accept such differing levels of health care, even those provided by the Catholic Church and many of its religious orders, with those available in our neighbouring countries?

I for one do not accept those differences. And hearing of the work of the Children First Foundation, we are stirred to actively challenge those differences.

It is wonderful that such complex surgical operations can be performed in Australia for children living in social or political circumstances where such surgery is not available.

But it simply is not right that such differences continue to exist. Our awareness is clearly raised of the unjust nature of such differences continuing.

Moira's work is focused on assisting children, the victims of natural disasters, past conflicts, the cycle of hatred, of war. These children could be seen as simply the collateral damage of such human conflicts

But their medical needs confront us with the dire consequences of such human conflicts and political battles. We can see the consequences before our very eyes. And we can also see what can result when people act with courtesy, with generosity, with love and respect for each individual.

Frederic Ozanam had that insight as a young man at about the same age as Moira Kelly was when she began her journey of service across different countries of our world.

He saw the shortcomings of the world in which he lived and the consequences on the lives of ordinary human beings. He set out to find a practical response that would enhance the value and the dignity of those whose lives were threatened.

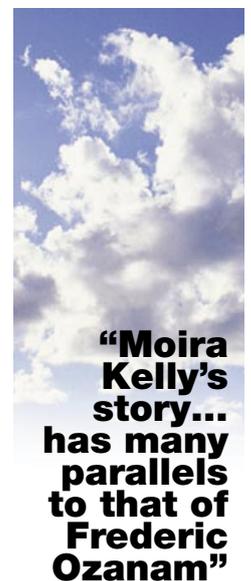
But Frederic Ozanam also went further. He and his young companions at the University of Paris were shocked at the poverty and deprivation that confronted them and they sought solutions. They developed a vision of a different way of living, where personal greed and accumulation of resources were not part of the solution.

Moira Kelly's story this evening has many parallels to that of Frederic Ozanam. She is not called 'blessed' but instead she points to the lives of these little ones whom the Lord called 'blessed'.

"Unless you become like these little ones, you will never enter the Kingdom of God" he said.

Having listened to her story this evening, we know that we ourselves have been blessed, but not because we have earned it or deserved it.

We know a little bit more that what we have received in life is a gift and like Moira we are invited to share those gifts with others.



# ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



(l to r): Society State President – Victoria, Syd Tutton; Fr Peter Norden, Moira Kelly, Society National President, John Meahan, Society State Vice President – Victoria, Teresa Wilson.

## Ozanam Lecture

The annual Ozanam Lecture celebrates the spirit of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the charisma 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 past eight 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.

### Ozanam Lecturers

- 1997** Sir James Gobbo  
Governor of Victoria  
Respondent: Bette 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** Bette 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, SJ, Policy Director, Jesuit Social Services

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