Putting human dignity, agency and wellbeing first

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Denial

We should not harshly judge these men who fail to see the things they can’t control: the rippling tides that breach the road, the sand encroaching on the fields - these signs inscribed by God in cloud and wind for us to see and act upon.

We should not harshly judge these men who keep God in their pockets. How could they heed a pocketed God who whispers through delicacies of nature, and human vulnerability?

We should not harshly judge these men, when God leaves no one, dead or blinded, out of pocket.

Industrial Relations Maxims

Long live the iron fist of governance! But tender, tender is the human hand.

Like stone the workers’ claims are crushed. But gentle, gentle is the building of trust.

To our offended customers goes recompense. But better, better would be promises kept.

Our profits will soar, and costs we shall cut. But priceless, priceless is mutual respect. A fortified company we shall build. But sapping, sapping is the worm of greed.

Denial and Industrial Relations Maxims
by Andy Hamilton SJ
Turned away

By Anthony Thornton

Last month I saw a report on child homelessness in Australia. Last year in Australia 84,000 children tried to get help from a homeless service, but more than half of them were turned away.

The number is frightening. Even more frightening, however, are the real life stories behind this number; stories like the following one that was reported by the ABC:

When 31-year-old Darlene Teitou became pregnant last year, she was already homeless. After her daughter was born she was given temporary accommodation, but a week later she was told by the New South Wales housing department she had to find another place to live.

She ended up having to sleep in her car, with her one-month-old baby wrapped in her jacket.

“That's when we got sick, she got sick, I got sick because she had all these bugs bites and she was getting the fevers, getting the flu and it was the same as me, so it was really tough,” Ms Teirou said.

Darlene spent the next 10 months sleeping on the streets, in her car or staying with friends and was told she could be on the waiting list for a department home for as long as two years.

“Sometimes you feel like you want to do something stupid, I mean like...commit suicide,” she said.

“It's a lot of things that comes in your mind when you're in that situation, you feel scared. It's like what will happen to you and your daughter?”

It's hard to believe that in a prosperous nation like ours should not be experiencing such scandalous levels of homelessness. Conservative estimates are that there are over 105,000 people experiencing homelessness every night in Australia. Even worse, with such levels of homelessness, no one should ever have to be turned away from a homelessness service. In the meantime we need to be there at the coalface of marginalisation, not as paternalistic dispensers of charity, but as real sisters and brothers to the people that have been pushed to the edges of society.

A prosperous nation like ours should not be experiencing such scandalous levels of homelessness. Conservative estimates are that there are over 105,000 people experiencing homelessness every night in Australia. Even worse, with such levels of homelessness, no one should ever have to be turned away from a homelessness service. In the meantime we need to be there at the coalface of marginalisation, not as paternalistic dispensers of charity, but as real sisters and brothers to the people that have been pushed to the edges of society.

It has been said in many places that a society should be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable members.

For me, I will always remember these words being uttered by our former Governor-General, Sir William Deane, a man who continues to bear prophetic witness to this Gospel value.

Our work with Christ’s Poor should not stop with simply supplying the immediate solution to an immediate need. We are challenged to go much further. We are challenged to enable vulnerable people to take control of their own lives. We do not accept the idea that people are to blame for their own marginalisation. We do, however, believe that people are able to overcome the odds that have been stacked up against them if the right resources are made available and, most importantly, if we are able to change the conditions in society that make things impossible for them.

We also need to keep thinking beyond our shores. We need to think of the people, including many children, who seek asylum in our country after suffering incredible traumas in their own countries. We need to remember that the St Vincent de Paul Society is a global network of love and that we should join in the global effort to prevent the conditions that cause poverty and homelessness on a massive scale across the world, especially as Third World countries continue to carry the burden of allowing First World countries to enjoy unprecedented wealth.

No one should be turned away. In the words of Blessed Frederic:

“It is time to seek the abolition of poverty.”

Anthony Thornton is the President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.
Society welcomes new faces

Staff and volunteers at the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia office in Deakin, Canberra, have welcomed on board two new colleagues – a dedicated research officer and an experienced media officer.

The two newly-created positions report directly to the CEO Dr John Falzon and provisions for their appointment were approved by the National Council.

The Record caught up with Research Officer Bess Harrison and Media Officer Colleen O’Sullivan during their first few weeks on the job, and asked how they came to work for the Society.

Name: Colleen O’Sullivan
Job title: Media Officer
Hometown: Melbourne
Base: Curtin, Canberra

What did you know about Vinnies before you started working for the Society?
That Vinnies is a lay Catholic organisation and one of the biggest charities in Australia, thanks to its many hardworking volunteers and members. As a journalist, I used to contact representatives from the Society to comment on social affairs issues affecting the local community. In addition to the annual Christmas and Winter Appeals promotions, one story that really stood out for me was the successful Feel Good Shopping campaign conducted by the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra-Goulburn, which helped introduce Vinnies to a younger generation.

How did you come to work for the Society?
Strangely enough, I had made up my mind to work for a not-for-profit organisation whose ethos I admired and that was preferably located in Deakin, just weeks before the Vinnies job was advertised. I’m honoured to have the task of publicising the Society’s views on important social and political topics of the day such as homelessness.

What did your previous jobs and/or studies involve?
My background is in newspapers. I worked as a journalist in country NSW for several years and, up until last year, was the editor of both the Cooma and Jindabyne newspapers. I had a six-month stint as a media adviser to the Minister for Regional Australia, Simon Crean, before deciding to join the not-for-profit sector and promote social justice issues. In 2003, I completed a Bachelor of Communication from Monash University, as well as a Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing from Chisholm TAFE.

How do you spend your spare time?
I’ve only recently started jogging again and did my first City to Surf (Sydney CBD to Bondi Beach) in August, which was fun.

What role does faith play in your life?
It is playing an ever-increasing role, much to my surprise and relief.

Name: Bess Harrison
Job title: Research Officer
Hometown: Majors Creek, NSW
Base: Lyneham, Canberra

What did you know about Vinnies before you started working for the Society?
I had briefly volunteered with Vinnies in Wollongong on the Compeer program and in Canberra on night patrol. I had also come across the Clemente program and was very impressed by it. I should mention I’m also an avid op-shopper!

How did you come to work for the Society?
I’ve been involved in community activism and campaigned on a range of social justice and environmental issues. After university, I wanted to work somewhere ethical. I was drawn to the St Vincent de Paul Society because of its uncompromising vision for social change and its acknowledgement of the spiritual aspects of oppression and marginalisation. I applied for four different jobs with the Society and this turned out to be the one for me - it’s my dream job!

What did your previous jobs and/or studies involve?
Most recently, I was employed as a project officer with the YWCA in Canberra, working on a pilot project for year six students called Healthy Transitions. This involved working in classrooms, facilitating a series of personal development workshops and talking about healthy lifestyle choices. I obtained a Bachelor of Arts with Honours from the Australian National University and I’m currently working towards a Masters in Social Research and Policy through Macquarie University. Last year, I tutored Sociology at the Australian National University. I have also cleaned many, many hotel rooms.

How do you spend your spare time?
I play the ukulele, guitar and sing for fun. I bought some brushes (for drums) the other day and have been playing the top of the TV.

What role does faith play in your life?
My faith is by far the most important thing in my life. It is my life, my joy, my fuel, my hope. Jesus gives us a radical vision of who we are and what we are here for. I have been particularly inspired recently by Christian activists like Shane Claiborne.
News in brief

Victoria hosts high-profile Anti-Poverty Week forum

During Anti-Poverty Week in October, the Society in Victoria hosted a forum ‘Poverty and human rights: the state of the nation.’ The key address was delivered by Cassandra Goldie, CEO of the Australian Council of Social Services. The audience, consisting of conference members, representatives of other welfare organisations and Society staff and volunteers, also heard from a lawyer from Public Interest Legal Clearing House and a board member from Social Policy Connections. The response to the forum was very positive, with the organising group agreeing to meet in the new year with a view to planning a full day conference on human rights in Anti-Poverty Week in 2012.

Surprising find on summer holiday in Lyon

VINCENTIAN JOHN WICKS AND his wife Deirdre returned from a recent trip to Europe in September with photographs of a very special church. They were attending Sunday Mass at The Church of Saint-Nizier in Lyon, which is the second biggest city in France, when they noticed a very interesting plaque in a prominent position on the wall of the church. The inscription reads:

In this Church of the Saint-Nizier and during his childhood he often came to pray here.
Frederic Ozanam 1813 to 1853
Founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society received the sacrament of marriage.
The 23 of June 1841

Centenary celebrations in Western Australia

IN 2011, THREE conferences of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Western Australia celebrated 100 years of assisting the most disadvantaged members of the community with compassion, dignity and hope.

The St Vincent de Paul Society acknowledges the efforts, vision and dedication of all members, past and present of the Midland, Subiaco and Bunbury Conferences who aspired to make a difference and continue to aspire to help others change their lives and see a better future.

Congratulations to the Midland, Subiaco and Bunbury Conferences in Western Australia.
What does Compulsory Income Management teach us about ourselves?

BY SALLY COWLING

THE PAST TWENTY FIVE YEARS have seen a pronounced shift in the conduct of welfare policy and the way we speak of those who receive income support. Welfare is now a creature that will foster ‘dependence’ in the absence of the growing raft of requirements, suspensions and sanctions designed to change the dysfunctional behaviour of particular individuals and communities.

It has been a long time since we discussed what a welfare system which fosters human dignity and agency looks like. We seem to be afraid of conceptual foundations that are both meaningful and demanding. At the same time, we have been content to roll with a paternalistic and punitive tide of welfare reform without questioning its efficacy, assumptions or morality. In this piece I’d like to ask these questions of Compulsory Income Management (CIM) to make the case for a new conversation on welfare policy. But first, let’s put the policy in context.

CIM requires that between 50 and 70 per cent of income support and family payments are spent on ‘priority goods and services’. People subject to CIM (or who sign up voluntarily) are issued with a BasicsCard which determines where they can shop and what they can buy. CIM first appeared on Australian shores as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. In 2010, the Labor Government introduced a New Income Management model which did not discriminate on racial grounds. Instead, income support recipients in the Northern Territory, parts of Queensland and Western Australia, who were part of a particular risk category (the long-term unemployed, disengaged young people, the financially vulnerable or people referred by a child protection worker) were subject to CIM. Income management has also been part of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial but is imposed as a last rather than first resort. In July 2012, place-based income management will be introduced in Bankstown, Shepparton, Playford, Rockhampton and Logan (areas characterised by pronounced socio-economic disadvantage) for the child protection, financial vulnerability and voluntary streams.

So why is the roll out of CIM a matter of concern? Let’s start with considering moral questions. In a 1998 article published in the Boston Review, the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum explores what Greek tragedy can teach us about the alliance between sympathy for weakness and respect for human agency. She states:

“It is so strange that we so often speak differently about the poor, suggesting that cutting off basic social support is a way of encouraging agency in poor mothers and children and improving their character, rather than a way of stifling agency, or stunting it before it gets the chance to develop. If we do respect agency and its dignity, we owe it a chance to develop and flourish.”

The needs of families where children are at risk of abuse or neglect; of communities where socio-economic disadvantage is
entrenched and opportunities few; of individuals where addiction has created financial vulnerability or distress, are rightly the concern of government. But genuine concern and policy responses realise change must start by asking how we can best support agency to develop and flourish. What is required of us so that the resources and opportunities needed to address pronounced structural inequalities are available to all? How do we work with individuals, families and communities so they are empowered to make change? What is the nature of very complex problems and what works to address their root cause or causes?

In 2010, FaHCSIA commissioned a paper by Jacqueline Homel and Chris Ryan which explores what studies from psychology, behavioural economics and procedural justice teach us about the way in which people receiving income support respond to government incentives, edicts and sanctions designed to change behaviour. The authors found that the intrinsic motivation to change would only be activated and maintained if conditions satisfy “basic human needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy”. It is imperative that all of us working with those in need create environments where people can understand and work through how and why they want to change, are offered choices and access to necessary services and supports, and feel respected and cared for.

I would argue that as a welfare policy designed to motivate behavioural change, CIM fails all of these tests. On top of that, the evaluations published to date are poorly designed; provide no evidence that change is being realised and some evidence that the ‘dependency’ so troubling to both sides of politics is being entrenched. For example, the evaluation of the income management trial in WA showed a worryingly low take-up rate for financial counselling services. Many people didn’t know about the service but many didn’t see the point of developing money management skills when they had a BasicsCard. The ironies abound.

The decision to expand the march of CIM into five new locations is unfathomable. When resources are so desperately needed for the programs and approaches which do make a difference to families where there are child safety issues or to break the vice of alcohol or substance abuse we cannot afford to dedicate precious funding to failed, but expensive policy options like CIM.

It is time for a new national conversation on welfare policy that speaks with people receiving income support. We must also ask ourselves whether we are committed to understanding the difficulties of others, the supports we would need and want were we in similar circumstances, and whether we still see dignity and agency as the foundation stones of our welfare system. We need to focus much more attention on what works and how we work to build policy settings, systems and programs that promote “relatedness, competence and autonomy”. This is not just a challenge for government, but for all of us. As neighbours, practitioners, community organisations, researchers and peak bodies the time has come to think more imaginatively and respectfully in the welfare policy domain than we have done for a long, long time. A commitment to human dignity, agency and wellbeing demands this.

Sally Cowling is Manager, Research and Program Development with UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families.
The former NSW Minister for Juvenile Justice, Graham West, gave the following speech at the launch of the 2011 to 2012 Social Justice Statement held by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in Sydney on September 14, 2011.

BY GRAHAM WEST

In launching today’s statement, Building bridges, not walls by the Australian Catholic Bishops, I want to begin by acknowledging that we stand on the lands of the Cammeraygal people, the traditional owners of this land.

In doing so, it is with sadness when I reflect on the fact that too many sons of the traditional owners, Dharawal, Gadigal, Bundjalung, Wiradjuri and many other Aboriginal peoples are in jail or detention around Australia.

As a nation, we are discussing recognition of Aboriginal Australians in the constitution. It is a welcome move. But we must also work to reduce the injustices that lead our Aboriginal brothers and sisters to be vastly over represented in our cells and our justice system.

Only when rates are equal on many fronts, health, life expectancy and incarceration can we truly say that we have taken steps to a lasting reconciliation.

This journey is one that must be taken together; one that must be discussed and approached with a genuine commitment.

In providing national leadership on this issue, the federal government as part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda, could provide appropriate funding to state and territory governments that provide meaningful programs that will reduce the over representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system.

This money would only need to be a fraction of the present custodial budgets because community development is more cost effective, even if it is more challenging, as the bishops’ statement points out.

Differing solutions are required to break the cycle of custody and provide real hope to many caught up in the justice system, but the leadership of the COAG process could be part of our path to reconciliation.

Perhaps the Government could go one step further and tie this support into a justice reinvestment framework as my friends Tom Calma and Mick Gooda have suggested. Indeed, Mick has raised the possibility of adopting a Co-operative Research Centre framework to ensure a long term commitment and evaluation and I think this has considerable merit.

This need not be as difficult as it sounds as our American and British friends are already taking steps down this path and we can stand on the shoulders of their research.

But one thing is clear: the longer we wait, the more we will lose the unrealised potential of our young people and their inalienable right to dignity and a worthwhile future.

There are many shocking statistics in the justice area and these are quoted in the report and shocking crimes require the perpetrator to be held responsible. But to achieve safe communities we need to focus on prevention and rehabilitation.

Many young people in custody have at least one parent in custody that night.

Many have been in the care of the state.

Far too many are Aboriginal.

Many have an intellectual disability and many more a border line disability.

Most are poor.

Almost all have very poor literacy and numeracy: the building blocks to knowledge.

We cannot as a society, speak of justice when we allow our jails to be full of the Aboriginal, the poor and the disabled. Surely as an advanced nation we can use this indisputable information to prevent this occurring.

Perhaps we can start with education. The average age of leaving school for those in NSW Juvenile Justice custody is 14, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. This suggests that education has a protective effect.

However it also suggests that our current system does not engage and meet the needs of many young people.

I have seen young people in custody lift their literacy rates quickly with alternative teaching methods including a focus on visual spacial learners, who struggle in the traditional classroom.
We now know that there are many different learning styles and we need to identify those who are struggling and try different methods. Yes this is resource intensive but in NSW the direct cost of a young person in custody is close to $200,000 per year, and this does not include court and police costs, any damage to the community or the opportunity costs to the young person and the community from the loss of this person's potential.

Similarly, if we accept that jail is the last resort, especially for young people, as the international conventions to which Australia is a signatory state, then the bail situation means we are failing.

Nearly 80 per cent of young people on remand in NSW, that is spending the night in a detention cell, will not end up with a custodial sentence. If this was a hospital and people were being misdiagnosed 80% of the time the outrage would be without limits. How can we get it so wrong, so often, with bail?

Of course, the reasons many young people end up on remand are varied, and sadly sometimes it is done with good intentions as the justice system feels compelled to play a welfare role, yet alone any legislative hand lying on top of this.

A magistrate or officer may believe that it is unsafe for a young person to return to their home, or they may believe that they are at risk of abuse due to homelessness.

That is why I believe that my friend Fr Chris Riley is right in calling for the establishment of bail houses that are well supported with services and connected to the community. This will ensure that young people are given the help they need to stay out of trouble and deal with the real, underlying issues rather than start a sad journey though the justice system.

It is important to note that this statement is not only about the importance of prevention; it is also about rehabilitation and the importance of accountability through community restorative justice processes.

We also now know that programs that work with and involve the whole family such as multi-systemic therapy help break the cycle and assist the whole family, and I commend the trial in NSW of the Intensive Support Project which is already showing great results.

For those in custody we must ensure that they are given options for rehabilitation and education, not on an ad-hoc basis but based on a systemic approach. We do not want those in custody to learn violence and helplessness and be disconnected from the community.

I am reminded of a visit that the late John Marsden asked me to attend with him to a client in the old Forensic Hospital of Long Bay when he was campaigning for its upgrade. Leaving aside the facilities, which have been now upgraded, I remember clearly that many of the inmates had profound mental illnesses.

I also remember the fear of some inmates about being released and getting the help they needed.

A prison is not a good place to be, so imagine the life story of those who feel safer and better supported inside.

I remember being struck by the difficulties of a man trying to engage in a relationship with his young son on a visit, yet not having the parenting skills or the support to gain them.

This is highlighted in the bishops’ statement, for it is often the families and especially the children who are the real victims and I’m pleased to be involved with SHINE for kids, which aims to support children and their families through an encounter with the justice system, and I thank Corrective Services in NSW for their support of this endeavour.

I would also like to echo the thanks of the bishops, for the chaplains, in our prisons and juvenile justice centres. They make a real difference to not only the prisoners and detainees, but to the staff too. They offer a source of hope, and their work deserves more recognition.

They are also a great starting point for those wanting to take up one of the greatest challenges in the bishops’ statement and that is to support those in the custodial system to make the transition back into the community following release.

The Church should be the largest human rights organisation in the world when you add all of the works that are done by its many arms, hospitals, visitations, nursing homes, advocacy, education, in fact it would be a challenge to find an area in the declaration that it does not operate in, but sadly in Australia, we as the laity are not as engaged in this area of need as much as we could be.

As a community, committed to the mission that Jesus set for himself in that beautiful passage that he drew from Isaiah:

“*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the lords favour.*”

Then we need to ask our chaplains how we can assist. We need to ask our St Vincent de Paul conferences if they can be involved in visitation with prisoners or those transitioning from custody. Our social justice groups could be inviting our Aboriginal elders to help us frame a Christian response.

This is a complicated and difficult area, but it is a journey that we need to take in order to arrive at a truly safe and inclusive community.

I would like to commend the Australian Catholic Bishops on their leadership, and thank one of our champions for Justice the Most Reverend Bishop Chris Saunders, for inviting me today, and close with an observation not from Jesus or St Paul, both prisoners, but from another prisoner who changed the world: Mahatma Gandhi

“An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”

Graham West is the CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society of New South Wales.
Principles for a coherent refugee policy

BY FRANK BRENNAN SJ

IN 2009, I WAS PRIVILEGED TO CHAIR the National Human Rights Consultation Committee. During that inquiry we commissioned some very detailed research on Australian attitudes. A random telephone poll of 1,200 Australians disclosed that over 70 per cent of us think that the mentally ill, the aged, and persons with disabilities need greater protection from violation of their human rights.

Quizzed about a whole range of minority groups, there was only one group in relation to whom the Australian population was split right down the middle. While 28 per cent thought that asylum seekers needed greater protection, 42 per cent thought we had the balance right, and 30 per cent thought that asylum seekers deserved less protection.

By way of comparison, 32 per cent thought gays and lesbians needed greater protection, 50 per cent thought we had the balance right, and only 18 per cent thought gays and lesbians deserved less protection.

Australia is a long time signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 protocol. It is one of the few countries in the region having ratified the Convention. Indonesia and Malaysia are not parties to the Convention. Since the Vietnam War, there have been periodic waves of boat people heading for Australia seeking asylum. These boat people often pass through Malaysia and/or Indonesia.

Under the Convention, parties undertake three key obligations:

1. Not to impose for illegal entry or unauthorised presence in their country any penalty on refugees coming directly from a territory where they are threatened, provided only that the refugees present themselves without delay and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.

2. Not to expel refugees lawfully in their territory save on grounds of national security or public order.

3. Not to expel or return ('refoule') refugees to the frontiers of any territory where their lives or freedom would be threatened.

Given the wide gap between the first and the third world, it is not surprising that some people fleeing persecution will look further afield for more secure protection together with more hopeful economic and educational opportunities.

Having the status of a refugee has never been accepted as a passport to the migration country of one’s choice. Then again, the international community has never been so callous or short-sighted as to say that during a mass exodus one has access only to the country next door in seeking protection even if you have family, friends or community members living in a more distant country.

The responsible nation state that is pulling its weight will open its borders to the refugees from the adjoining countries and also expect some flow over from major conflicts wherever they might occur. It is no surprise that Afghan and Iraqi refugees have turned up on the doorstep of all first-world countries in recent years. Nor is it surprising that Sri Lankans fleeing the effects of protracted civil war have arrived in countries like Australia.

With the ease of international travel and the services of people smugglers, it has become very difficult to draw the distinction between refugees who are coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom has been threatened and those refugees who, having fled, have already been accorded protection, but have now taken an onward journey seeking a more durable solution or sustainable migration outcome.

First world governments say they cannot tolerate the latter because they would then be jeopardising their own migration programs and weakening their borders.
every time there was a refugee-producing situation in the world no matter how close or how far it occurred from their own shores.

This problem is not solved by drawing careful legal distinctions, because one person’s preferred migration outcome is simply another person’s first port of call where they thought there was a realistic prospect of getting protection for themselves and their families.

The problem cannot be solved by refugee advocates pretending that it does not exist or hoping that it will simply go away. Neither can it be solved by governments pretending that all persons who arrive on their shores without a visa are secondary movers.

When mass movements occur during a conflict, it is necessary for governments to cooperate, ensuring that adequate protection can be given to persons closer to their home country before then closing off the secondary movement route except by means of legal migration.

When countries of first asylum are stretched and unstable, other countries must be prepared to receive those who travel further seeking protection.

In the present debate on refugee policy, many people forget that the Howard Government created a nexus between the number of successful onshore asylum claims and the number of places available for humanitarian offshore cases. Usually we take 12,000 to 13,000 humanitarian applicants each year.

Advocates like myself unsuccessfully argued that even those countries without a net migration program would be required to provide a durable solution for refugees within their jurisdiction, and that therefore there should be no nexus.

We need to admit that there is presently no strong community demand for the nexus once again to be broken. The nexus is judged by the community to be morally acceptable as well as politically expedient. This means that every successful onshore asylum seeker takes a place which otherwise would have been available to an offshore humanitarian applicant. Offshore humanitarian applicants do include very needy, deserving refugees without access to people smugglers.

This means that the Australian system without discrimination gives preference to three groups of onshore asylum seekers over offshore humanitarian applicants. Those three groups are transparently honest visa holders whose country conditions deteriorate after they have arrived in Australia, visa holders who make less than full disclosure about their conditions, and that therefore there should be no nexus.

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asylum claims when applying for a visa to enter Australia, and unvisaed refugees who arrive by boat often having engaged the services of a people smuggler.

Strangely it is only the third group which causes great community angst even though most of that group, unlike the second group who come by plane with visas, are transparently honest about their intentions and their status.

When boats are not turned back, those asylum seekers arriving without visas should be detained only for the purposes of health, security and identity checks. Once those checks are successfully completed with a decision that the known applicant poses no health or security risk and if there be too great a caseload for final determination of claims within that time, these asylum seekers should be humanely accommodated while their claim process is completed.

Community groups should be invited to assist with the provision of such accommodation to those applicants most likely to have a successful refugee claim. Those unlikely to succeed should continue to be accommodated by government or its contractor being assured availability for removal on final determination of an unsuccessful claim.

I continue to concede that their refugee claims need not be subject to full judicial review provided we have in place a process which accords them natural justice and complies with the requirements set down by UNHCR. Given that we are a net migration country, those who establish a refugee claim should be granted a permanent visa, thereby being able to get on with their lives.

Until the treatment of asylum seekers in transit countries such as Indonesia is enhanced, we Australians must expect that some of the world’s neediest refugees will engage people smugglers and come within reach of our authorities. For as long as they do not excessively skew our migration program, we should allow those who are proven to be genuine refugees to settle permanently and promptly so they may get on with their lives and make their contribution to our national life.

Let’s not forget the honest assessment of immigration detention centres by Professor Patrick McGorry, the former Australian of the Year: ‘You could almost describe them as factories for producing mental illness and mental disorder.’

Community partnerships with government could assist with the accommodation and transition needs of those asylum seekers most likely to succeed in their claims. In hindsight, we know that proposals such as turning back the boats, temporary protection visas for those who will be refugees for many years to come, and the Pacific Solution are not only unprincipled; they fail to stem the tide nor to reduce the successful claims.

We always need to ask, ‘Why is it right to treat the honest, unvisaed boat person more harshly than the visaed airplane passenger who fails to declare their intention to apply for asylum?’ If the answer is based only on consequences, then ask, ‘Would not the same harsh treatment of the visaed airplane passenger have the same or even greater effect in deterring arrivals onshore asylum seekers?’ The Qantas 747 does not evoke the same response as the leaky boat, does it?

The Gillard Government’s proposal for a regional processing centre in East Timor was unprincipled and unworkable, as is its proposed Malaysia solution, and as would be a simple restoration of the Pacific Solution by an Abbott government.

The Malaysia solution proposes a serious moral recalibration of the acceptable bottom line, wanting to move us from offshore processing to offshore dumping. At least the bona fide refugee under John Howard’s Pacific solution was assured eventual resettlement in a third country, usually Australia or New Zealand. Under the Malaysia solution the bona fide refugee would be sent to the end of a queue which is 95,000 long.

The Abbott Opposition has now conceded that boats can be towed back only with the full cooperation of the Indonesians, and even then there would be serious questions about safety at sea, invoking our obligations under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1974 Safety of Life at Sea Convention. Philip Ruddock has conceded that the Pacific Solution second time around would not be sufficient to deter hazardous boat journeys from Indonesia.

The long term work still needs to be done in Indonesia which is the main transit country to Australia. Both sides of politics know that the vulnerable will continue to arrive on our shores uninvited. Independent scholars need to maintain the faith of Petro Georgiou who told our Parliament in his valedictory speech:

“I believed that politics was a tough business. There were two dominant parties, they were in conflict, they had power and they had resources. They were strong and evenly matched. They punched and they counterpunched, and sometimes low blows were landed. In my view, however, scapegoating the vulnerable was never part of the political game. I still believe this.”

Let’s not forget that it is only because we are an island nation continent that we can entertain the absurd notion that we can seal our borders from refugee flows. All borders are porous in our globalised world. We need to manage those borders firmly and decently.

That is the challenge. At the very least, we must remain committed to processing and resettling those bona fide refugees who reach our shores regardless of the cooperative regional solutions we put in place to deter their arrival in the first place.

Frank Brennan SJ is a human rights advocate and a lawyer. Text is from a speech ‘Principles for a Coherent Refugee and Migration Policy’, presented to the Society of Independent Scholars, National Library of Australia, 3 November 2011. The speech was first published on Eureka Street/www.eurekastreet.com.au
Stanley Grove officially opened

The Frederic Ozanam Housing Association Inc celebrated the opening of Stanley Grove named after long serving Vincentian Brian Stanley in March 2011.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE Grove was a partnership with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide Charitable Trust, the South Australian Housing Trust and Federal Government through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package funding. Land owned by the Roman Catholic Charitable Trust was sold to enable the construction of 10 two bedroom homes on the site.

All tenants living at Stanley Grove have experienced great challenges in their life and have appreciated the opportunity for safe, secure and affordable housing. Tenants have commented that stable housing has enabled the pursuit of further studies in Business Administration at Thebarton College, while for another enabled him to be reunited with his daughter.

Stanley Grove is a concrete expression of how the Society through the work of the Association is fulfilling its mission of serving those in need and is truly a ‘hand up’ for some of the most marginalised in our community.

Top: South Australian Minister for Families and Communities, Jennifer Rankine, at the opening with Vincentian Brian Stanley, Archbishop Wilson and Senator Ann McEwen representing the Minister for Social Housing Mark Arbib.

Bottom: St Vincent de Paul Society of South Australia CEO, John Haren at the opening.
Taking a walk in other people’s shoes

BY LEANNE PRICHARD

ON FRIDAY 5TH AUGUST, AS PART OF Catholic Education Week, students and staff of the Huntingfield campus of St Aloysius Catholic College in Hobart had the opportunity to step into the shoes of those less fortunate by participating in a number of activities and taking on a series of challenges as part of our Walk In Other People’s Shoes Day.

The day was organised by Vinnies and Mini Vinnies students in Grades 5 to 9 to raise awareness among students and staff about those less fortunate than themselves. Walk in Other People’s Shoes Day began with students arriving at school wearing their favourite shoes, and donating shoes they had grown out of to those in need in our community and overseas.

After attending a moving prayer service based on the theme of the day presented by some Mini Vinnies students and the Grade 9 Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA) group, classes visited the Walk of Fame exhibition. This consisted of a collection of shoes from famous celebrities including Academy Award winning illustrator Shaun Tan, popular children’s author Andy Griffiths, cooks Kylie Kwong and Maggie Beer, Lord Mayor Rob Valentine, Archbishop Adrian Doyle, politician Bob Brown, Tasmanian walker for peace, Sam Clear and footballer Jack Riewoldt. Students enjoyed reading quotes from the celebrities about what walking in other people’s shoes meant to them.

The Grade 6 classes were very privileged to participate in a presentation called Living In-Between given by the Students Against Racism Group from Hobart College. During this interactive workshop, the students heard from young refugees and migrants who shared their stories openly and honestly. “I really enjoyed Friday, especially the refugee talk, it was just amazing,” student Isabel Scanlon said.

Jeremy Picone, a former student of our College, presented 1.4 Billion Reasons, the popular world-wide presentation on poverty based on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, to our Grade 7 and 9 students, and encouraged us all to do all we can to help end extreme poverty and bring about better conditions for all those in need.

Loui’s Van visited on the day to provide noodles for the students and, more importantly, to highlight the plight of the homeless in our own city. As well as these activities, classes were invited to take on a variety of challenges for the day to really experience what it is like to walk in the shoes of others. These challenges included:

**The Technology Challenge:**
Classes were encouraged to walk in the shoes of students in many parts of the world, including our sister school in Tanzania, who have no technology, in fact no electricity at all, which meant not using any forms of technology for the day.

**The Food Challenge:**
More than 50 students took up the option of walking in the shoes of millions of people in our world who have nothing more than rice to eat as their staple diet by sharing a simple rice meal for lunch.

**The Furniture Challenge:**
Many schools in Africa and other developing countries have no buildings or desks - many students sit in fields or on bare ground to learn. A number of classes took on this challenge by not using desks or chairs for the day, to walk in solidarity with these children.

**The Take Action Challenge:**
During the week, classes had the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of others by choosing to do something practical for the homeless in Hobart by preparing ‘Giving Backpacks’,
which will be given to Loui’s Van who will distribute it to the clients they encounter on the streets of Hobart.

We were very privileged to have Dr Trish Hindmarsh, the Director of the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office, and her husband Vin Hindmarsh, the State President of St Vincent de Paul Society, come and be involved in part of the day. They later sent an email expressing their enjoyment of the day, saying the event was “a magnificent example of Catholic Education at its best!”

We would like to thank the many people who were involved in any way in helping make this day such a huge success. We especially thank all our presenters, the celebrities who donated the shoes, Phil Pyke for his promotion of the day in the media, all the students and staff who participated so fully in the day, and our College families for their donation of shoes and money for the Archbishop’s Samaritan Fund.

But the biggest thank you must go the dedicated members of the Vinnies and Mini Vinnies groups who spent many lunchtimes preparing, promoting and organising the whole event, as well as helping out on the day with Loui’s Van, setting up the Walk of Fame and cooking the rice. They are to be congratulated for their enthusiasm and their passion for making a difference - I am very proud of them all. We look forward to having a similar event during Catholic Education Week next year.

Leanne Prichard is the Pastoral Associate St Aloysius Catholic College in Tasmania.
NEARLY TEN YEARS AGO I WROTE an article for The Record that began with the famous lines of Henry Lawson from his poem, Faces in the street:

“They lie, the men who tell us in a loud decisive tone
That want is here a stranger, and that misery’s unknown;
For where the nearest suburb and the city proper meet
My window-sill is level with the faces in the street --
Drifting past, drifting past,
To the beat of weary feet --
While I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.”

I observed at the time that, unless we reversed the trajectory of growing inequality:

“The Australia of the early 21st century will be more akin to the Australia of the early 19th century: a land disjointed rather than diverse, a land where dispossession and exploitation of people is the rule rather than the exception.”

I tried to conclude, however, on a note of hope:

“We are passionate about what we know to be fair. We are practical about what we know to be possible. Let us be decisive about our future as a nation. Australia: working hard to build equality. Wouldn’t that be a description to be proud of in a UN Human Development Report of the future!

Australia:
• building equality through affordable and adequate housing and transport.
• building equality through a social safety net that protects and enables rather than punishing and humiliating
• building equality through its world-class public healthcare system
• building equality through its public investment in free education and childcare
• building equality through its public investment in free education and childcare.

The prophets of doom are wrong. Such an Australia is possible. By daring to work towards it we can share both bread and hope with the owners of those faces in the street.”

I still believe in this objective. Not because it is a nice ideal. I believe in it because it continues to be the message I am given, in no uncertain terms, by Vincentians across Australia. It continues to be expressed to me by the people we assist, the people with whom we stand in solidarity, our brothers and sisters in Christ. It arises from the concrete conditions experienced by people who are struggling on the edges of the labour market, on both sides of the employment/unemployment divide.

It is also true to the social analysis that characterised the St Vincent de Paul Society’s humble beginnings. Frederic Ozanam, as both a student and as an academic, was a deeply engaged social activist. As such, he had a bit to say about workers’ rights. At one stage the St Vincent de Paul Society was actually proscribed as a quasi-communist organisation because it so clearly took the side of the workers living in poverty during the revolutionary upheavals in Paris.

Frederic wrote:

“Exploitation occurs when the master considers his workers ...as an instrument out of which he must extract as much service as possible at the smallest possible price.”

More recently, British Economist, Guy Standing, coined the term, precariat, to describe the reality of low wage workers in our modern, global economy: a reality in which risk continues to be shifted away from capital and on to the backs of working people at the low end of the labour market.

As Frederic Ozanam put it:

“The haughty lords of industry, just like our ancient kings, are carried round on the backs of the people.”

With the rise in casualisation and insecurity in the workplace the members of
the St Vincent de Paul Society have seen a sharp rise in the number of families with one or even two members in paid work who seek assistance from us.

Work insecurity means housing insecurity. Housing insecurity is only a short step away from families sleeping in cars or knocking on the doors of homelessness refuges. Homelessness has devastating consequences for everyone, especially the children who are then more likely to experience homelessness as adults.

As the late Pope John Paul II put it: “The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximisation of profits.”

The needs of the people in the lowest 20 per cent of the income distribution must take priority over the desires of the people in the highest 20 per cent. The rights of workers, especially those whose working lives are fraught with insecurity and devalued by inadequate pay, must take priority over the maximisation of profits.

There was a time in Australia when the received wisdom was that a job is the best route out of poverty. This is no longer true. For many of the people we assist the move from welfare to work is a journey out of the frying pan and into the fire; a journey from inadequate income support to inadequate income. And sometimes back again! There was also once a time when the social security system sought to be exactly that. Now it is, for many, a system of social insecurity that, sadly, prepares people for work insecurity.

The US bishops, in their ground breaking 1986 statement, Economic Justice for All, explained that “[t]he way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice.”

This is not call for a return to the past. The members of my organisation who, every day witness the Australian face of working poverty, are calling for a new way of genuine social security and inclusion for all people. Let us put aside what has, in effect, become a false border between those outside the labour market and those whose work is low paid, insecure and precarious. The time is right for a new social contract that protects people no matter where they currently sit along this precarious frontier; protects them from being cast off and cast out; protects them from being devalued as human beings, as women and men, along with the children who share their precarious fate.

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a spiritual movement committed to social justice and social change. We are not called to preserve poverty or to preserve the structural causes of poverty. In Frederic’s words “It is time to seek the abolition of poverty”.

We will always be there to give people a hand up. But this should not be seen as a matter of charity. It is a matter of justice. ◆
Inside the Canberra tax forum

The Government’s Tax Forum was held at Parliament House in Canberra on the 4th and 5th of October. The St Vincent de Paul Society was invited to take part and was represented by John Wicks and National Research Officer Bess Harrison. Of the substantial number of items discussed, below is a report on some of the key items of interest to the St Vincent de Paul Society.

BY JOHN WICKS

In terms of outcomes the Tax Forum was very disappointing in that whilst the Government recognised the need for tax reform and the validity of the Henry Tax Review it focussed overwhelmingly on tax changes it had already made or were in the pipeline and of which any interested person was already well aware. Other major tax reforms which participants at the Forum considered crucial were ignored.

Hence Government spokespeople focused on the Carbon Tax, the NBN and its impact, the Mineral Resource Rent Tax and the benefits to the low and middle income Australians from new programmes this would finance, changes to the taxation threshold and save variations in welfare payments.

However discussions at the Forum by a wide range of interests were not disappointing and included a range of soundly based arguments for fundamental tax reform. Many of their arguments had been previously put to the Henry Tax Review but were invigorated by later data, concrete examples and stronger advocacy.

Entrenched and accelerating inequality in Australia in many respects promoted by the existing tax system was an issue raised by many participants, with 20 per cent of the population taking each year more and more of the national income and wealth. We at St Vincent de Paul Society submitted to the Forum our 2001 report called ‘Two Australias’ a detailed study of poverty and inequality at the time. We did so to show that over the past 10 years whilst some quite modest improvements had occurred in some areas, inequality, disadvantage and poverty in Australia had intensified.

We specifically proposed at the Forum that the Government should set a specific target to reduce inequality, poverty and disadvantage to 7 per cent of the population (not outlandish when some other developed economies achieve 5 per cent levels, but Australia’s is around three times that). We also argued that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) be given additional annual funding to monitor this target. Of course this raises the question at how do you define poverty and inequality? One broad measure is households living on less than 50 per cent of average weekly earnings, but there are significant variations depending on the costs of living in different areas around Australia, the problems for different age groups, the special problems of Aboriginal and migrant communities, and much more which we believe the ABS should monitor more closely and report more regularly.
Other key topics of interest to the St Vincent de Paul Society were the substantial and continuing annual gains to wealth and very high income earners who could reduce their tax liability to 15 per cent by means not able to be accessed by those on a low income and a large number of middle income households. These included substantial financial and tax benefits derived from:

- Superannuation provision
- Negative gearing
- Capital gains tax provisions
- Trusts
- Golden handshake provisions
- Insufficient marginal tax rates on extremely high incomes.

Detailed arguments and data on all of these were provided by various participants at the Forum.

Although some at the Forum favoured abolition or removal of some of these tax minimisation arrangements and possible gains of as much as $35 billion per annum to government revenue, others sought restrictions on the level of benefits that could be obtained. For example removal of capital gains tax exemptions for homes sold for millions or limitations of multimillion dollar negative gearing arrangement that did not result in any beneficial rental housing for low and middle income households.

The current complexity of the Australian tax system was recognised by many if not most at the Forum. In this regard a very interesting issue that arose was that in several countries overseas a majority of citizens did not have to submit any annual tax returns. This arose because those countries governments provided net amounts or levels of concessions for the myriad of tax concessions that people in Australia request through complicated and expensive documentation collection and filing and the need to use specialised tax consultants. It was said that eight million out of 12 million Australian tax payers could be relieved from submitting annual tax forms. Is this an interesting concept that should be pursued?

John Wicks is a Vincentian and economics adviser to the St Vincent de Paul Society.
Open statement on asylum seekers

This open statement on asylum seekers signed by prominent Australians was first published on the 9th of October, 2011. Among the 19 individual signatories and nine institutional signatories are former Australian of the Year Professor Patrick McGorry AO, the National Council of Churches in Australia and the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. It has also been endorsed by the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

IN RECENT HISTORY, BUT especially since the Tampa incident in 2001, political leaders from the major parties have been unable or unwilling to compromise and craft a reasonable and realistic migration policy that takes into account regularly occurring flows of refugees from conflict areas. Politicians in Canberra have instead chosen to play to baser instincts rather than Australians’ better nature, marginalising vulnerable asylum seekers by catering to those on the extreme margins of politics.

The recent High Court decision, requiring current and future Australian Governments to meet basic human rights obligations in its treatment of asylum seekers, is more than simply a political obstacle to be overcome. It provides a unique opportunity to do what should always have been done - that is, process asylum seekers on-shore irrespective of whether they come by boat or by plane. This would serve to re-implement tested practical and effective solutions regarding the treatment and processing of refugees - an endeavour that would truly be in the “national interest”.

With both parties wrangling to score political points, the issue can be seen as intractable. However recent history offers clear guidance as to the compassion and creativity of the Australian people - and our political system - when our nation was forced to choose between treating refugees humanely or contributing to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions.

As the Vietnam War came to a chaotic end, Australia faced the prospect of a huge influx of refugees from the conflict. Fears for the wellbeing of asylum seekers, as well as concerns about whether Australia could successfully deal with such an influx, were well founded. A balance was struck however, and a humane and effective bipartisan solution was put in place. Both Government and Opposition rose above party affiliation to act in the face of initially negative opinion polls.

Australia’s elected leaders created a system that worked with regional partners, ensured basic human rights protections and created an efficient and effective system which, over 20 years, dealt with the needs of more than 2.5 million Indochinese refugees. The system initiated by the Fraser Government ultimately resulted in some 250,000 Vietnamese refugees and immigrants being taken in. Many of these people were fleeing a war in which Australia was a combatant. We had a moral responsibility to assist them, and we did.

The numbers were far greater than the small number arriving by boat today. The current debate all but ignores the fact that three times more asylum seekers arrive by plane than boat and are successfully processed onshore often while living within (and contributing to) their new communities. Onshore processing, assisted by regional cooperation, was the right thing to do then, and remains so today.

A Vietnamese refugee on one of the first boats to arrive in Darwin Harbour went on to become Lieutenant Governor of South Australia. Thousands of others have become magnificent Australian citizens over the past three decades.

By not simply subscribing to the idea but also implementing policies that reflect a “fair go,” Governments truly act in the “national interest” – being responsible global citizens, while making the Australian experience richer through refugees’ contributions to local communities and our country in countless ways.

The Prime Minister and Opposition Leader have a similar opportunity to do...
the right thing now, to exhibit the kind of moral leadership that's too often bypassed in the political process, yet which is precisely what the Australian people and those seeking to become Australians expect and deserve. Rather than seeking creative ways to remove the assumptions of natural law and review by the courts, and watering down human rights protections, our leaders can and should focus on real solutions.

First and foremost, institute a system for effective and efficient on-shore processing. Those arriving by boat and seeking asylum do nothing illegal under Australian law. It is the off-shore processing regime proposed by the Government that has been found to be illegal by the High Court.

Honour the commitment to accepting an additional 4,000 refugees - the only salvageable element of the Malaysian agreement - while permanently expanding the current intake of UNHCR-designated refugees up to 25,000 - a reasonable and manageable number that will go a long way in removing the incentive for individuals to take the desperate and dangerous ocean journey to Australia.

End the linking of on-shore asylum seekers with the off-shore refugee and humanitarian intake. This linkage was a relatively recent creation of the Howard Government and needs to be removed. Both those who seek resettlement off-shore and those seeking asylum on-shore should never have to compete. We should unravel the two categories immediately, returning to a policy whereby those who come from off-shore as refugees do not lessen Australia's commitment or capacity to accept individuals escaping humanitarian crises who arrive in this country seeking asylum.

Put considerably more effort into developing cooperation with regional partners to ensure greater protections for asylum seekers, while status determinations take place.

Seize the opportunity to exhibit leadership, not just at home, but also on the world stage, where implementing the aforementioned measures would serve as an incentive and example for members of the UNHCR Working Group on Resettlement, which Australia currently chairs.

This would be in sharp contrast to recent actions which have brought widespread global consternation and condemnation. Make no mistake - the world is watching. The current debate is doing tremendous damage to our international reputation. By exhibiting courage and compassion, Australia has a chance to not only salvage our reputation but set an example for our friends and allies around the world.

In short, we need an orderly migration and integration system for refugees, while realising the reality and gravity of international obligations and domestic law. It was done before when the numbers were much, much larger. It can be done again.

Political leaders who truly want to be on the right side of history must also exhibit true leadership. We urge the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader to put aside their political differences and work towards tried, tested and effective solutions. It’s the right thing to do for refugees and asylum seekers, and it is in the true national interest of all Australians.
The golden casket of charity

BY MICHAEL MORAN

WHEN IS A GONG A GOOD THING? IN the early years of the Society, anonymity was a virtue. The idea of being honoured publicly for one’s good deeds was foreign. Members went about their work with little public recognition. In the spirit of Matthew 6:3, our annual reports steered away from praising individuals by name.

But as the Society grew, it became too big to avoid recognition, and it needed at least some publicity if it were to attract new members. And Papal Honours were a bit different. They honoured the faith as much as the individual. In an Irish-dominated Australian Church they may have been seen as our honours as distinct from those of the establishment.

For the St Vincent de Paul Society, 1920 was a bumper year for Papal Honours. At least six members were honoured in Sydney alone, including our National President John Mullen and Vice President Bill Coogan. Other Vincentian recipients included boot manufacturer, politician and founder of the Knights of the Southern Cross, Paddy Minahan; architect Jack Hennessy; and lawyer and politician John Lane Mullins.

Prominent citizens all, but a lesser-known recipient, Denis Haugh (1872-1933), honoured with the Cross of Leo, is one of the most interesting and remarkable people in the Society’s history.

Denis Haugh grew up in Toowoomba, where his parents had migrated to from Ireland, and came to Sydney as a young man in the 1890s. He joined the Conference at St Francis, Haymarket, an inner-city parish, later serving as Conference President for many years.

For Haugh’s Conference the city at the turn of the century was a hard world, remembered later as a place of “dens and hovels” where “the people lived in garrets, cellars and sheds. One old woman, whom they used to visit, refused to leave her cellar when she became ill, and there she died. She had to keep her food in an oven to prevent the rats getting it”.

Haugh became a tea-merchant and active citizen. He married late and had four children. A public-spirited man, he served at various times as a Justice of the Peace, a returning officer at State elections, and Secretary to the Belmore Oddfellows Club (a mutual benefit society). He was Honorary Secretary of St Margaret’s Hospital in Bourke Street, Surry Hills, the famous maternity hospital originally founded “to provide shelter and care for unmarried girls of the comparatively respectable class”, and something of a man about town, friend to Sydney identities like Minahan and the controversial lawyer and politician, Dick Meagher.

He also served the Society in various positions, including NSW State President. But his real passion, his vocation, was for the welfare of children and single mothers.

The fate of children and the plight of single mothers in Haugh’s time are hard to understand today. Babies were often abandoned (“foundlings”) and even sold. The language of the day is revealing. Children might be “strays”. Single mothers were “the unfortunate castaways of society”.

Haugh served formally on Society committees overseeing the welfare of children, and as the Catholic Church’s official representative to the Child Welfare Department. But he did more than sit on committees. He attended the Children’s Court every day and went out searching city areas for abandoned children. He took them into his own family home if no homes could be found.

He is remembered today as the founder of St Anthony’s Home, Croydon. St Anthony’s, variously known as a “Home for foundlings” or a “Home for Infants and Girl Mothers”, was one of the Society’s main Special Works for 30 years (1922-1952) when it was handed over to the Josephites.

St Anthony’s preserved another kind of anonymity. No-one would know the “girl-mother’s” name. She might keep the baby or give it up for adoption. If she chose the latter, she could return “to the country town, to the city and the suburban home, and no one, save the President and the Matron of the Home, were the wiser”. After Haugh’s death, an obituarist noted that, thanks to him, “there are today hundreds of young women who have passed through the Valley of Death and emerged consoled and restored to their homes”.

In 1933, when Denis Haugh died, the home was sheltering 27 mothers and 110 babies.

There, the Society’s annual report noted, “the unfortunate girl-mother, the unwanted and unwelcome babe, are cared for by a trained staff of nurses, their secret being locked away in the golden casket of charity”.

Haugh never sought honours or publicity. He died of cancer at the Sacred Heart Hospice in Darlinghurst in 1933. He had moved out of the inner city after marriage but in death he was taken back to his old parish in the city. There were more than 20 priests in the sanctuary, more than 100 brothers of the Society in the church, and 16 children from St Anthony’s in attendance. In death this “beacon light of hope for countless girl-mothers” could no longer avoid praise.

Michael Moran is the National Council Archivist.
Is The Rule prejudiced?

Strangely, our National President (The Record, Spring 2011) accuses those who have “real scruples about who might qualify as a Vincentian” of being prejudiced. These ‘prejudiced’ ones, Tony writes, would prefer, among other things not listed that Vincentians should be practising Catholics who lead good personal lives.

Unfortunately, Tony wasn’t a little more precise. People from all works of life, Protestants, Catholics, who are practising or otherwise, and non-Christians are all welcome into the Society, as long as they “sincerely respect and accept the Society’s identity and its principles insofar as differences of faith allow” (Rule 6.4)

However, I for one do think it important that those who are elected or appointed to positions of responsibility in the Society are people who do practice the Catholic faith and lead good personal lives.

After all, we do belong to a Society which is profoundly Catholic in its ethos and as Rule 6.5 states: “The Catholic beliefs and ethos of the St Vincent de Paul Society must be preserved…[that] presidents, vice presidents and spiritual advisers must be Catholic”.

Rule 2.2 goes a lot further and makes it abundantly clear that “Vincentians are called to journey together towards holiness [that this] journey will be all the more fruitful if the members’ personal lives are characterised by prayer, meditation on the scriptures…devotion to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary…and to the teachings of the Church”.

So the question then emerges, is The Rule prejudiced? Of course it isn’t! If we are to retain our Catholic identity, our Catholic ethos and Ozanam’s vision we must not only respect and uphold our Catholicity. In the words of our core values statement, the Society must seek “to deepen the faith of all its members through its good works, integrating the social and ethical teachings of the Catholic Church”.

Livia Carusi
Mission Integration Officer
St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

Views on Vincentian life ‘refreshing’

I wish to comment on who a Vincentian is, as explained by the National President, Anthony Thornton, in the latest edition of The Record.

How refreshing when someone new can see things from a different perspective and hit the nail on the head! Whoever or whatever a Vincentian is, that person is first and foremost a Christian, while being Catholic is very helpful. To show mercy is not easy, yet it is mercy by which we will be judged, as stated by Jesus in the Our Father and also mentioned in the Beatitudes.

Whether one is a Vincentian or not, the National President’s message is timely for all who help the poor in one way or another without prejudice. The parable of the Good Samaritan is indeed food for thought. What a better world this would be if we could show a little compassion towards others every day.

Les Fern
Nightcliff, NT

Clarification on income management criteria

The article ‘Women speak out on income management’ (The Record, Spring 2011) stated that parents are referred for income management if their child has five or more days of unexplained absence in a term. This is not the case. School attendance is a prerequisite for exemption from income management not referral to income management.

In October the federal government announced the expansion of School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) which does link school attendance to welfare payments.

Robert Leach
State Council Vice President
St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland
THREE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS identify who we are and why we exist. The first has to do with our spirituality which bears witness to a faith in Jesus and the Church. This faith inspires us to work for the good in humanity. By doing so, Vincentians make a commitment to their own faith development and encourage others to do so as well. Second, a Vincentian is a person who joins with other Catholics and people of goodwill to live out the love of God in others. We are not groups or mere teams of people. We are faith communities. We seek to develop this community of faith and witness not only among ourselves but among those we serve. Third, Vincentians establish person to person contact with people who suffer disadvantage. The focus is on quality not quantity. We live by charity and justice, by assisting and advocating with and on behalf of others.

On its own, a focus on spirituality does not capture being a Vincentian. Most church or parish groups offer a spirituality of some kind or other. It is the particular focus, however, of our spirituality that makes us different: we see Christ in the face of a person who is poor. On its own, a faith community of Vincentians does not explain why we exist. We do this already in our parish or church group. Likewise, on its own, a focus on service does not fully define who we are. Many other parish/church groups provide service to others. There are also many non-profit, volunteer service groups in the community. When we talk about our Vincentian identity, we speak of a blend of spirituality, faith community and service. They are not just three independent qualities or different reasons for our existence. Being a Vincentian calls for an integration of the whole three. In short, this is who we are. This is why we exist.

Most Vincentians, however, don’t live in this narrowly defined world. On any given day of the week, members rub shoulders with others who don’t fit into church or even religious categories. They collaborate with other ‘volunteers’, they network outside the Society with people of goodwill, they are supported by staff at St Vincent de Paul Society offices, they advocate with representatives in government and they seek new ways to respond to situations of need, wherever they might be. In doing so, a tension emerges from two apparent and conflicting imperatives. On the one hand, the mission of the St Vincent de Paul Society is to transmit something from its Catholic tradition that is distinctive and without compromise. It suggests the notion of boundaries and borders that have to be protected. Prospective and current members need to know clearly what the Society stands for - and what is doesn’t. On the other hand, we have another polarity: the imperative of the Society to be inclusive. The St Vincent de Paul Society is open to all people, regardless of their faith background. This second imperative emphasises pastoral care and responsibility, flexibility in the face of cultural and historical change, and also vulnerability. At the Second Vatican Council, it was stated in the ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world,’ that the Kingdom of God is not only “a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace,” but also of “justice, love and peace.” Such an aspect of Catholicism acknowledges its own shortcomings and sinfulness, its pilgrim status of being on the way, and of being attentive to the Holy Spirit beyond its borders.

These two imperatives do not sit easily together. The degree of harmony with which they are held together will determine whether they are seen as
complementary or in contradiction to one another. Most Vincentians strive genuinely to balance these two polarities. The very impact of working at the coalface means they cannot pray in one world and live in another. In their various ways, they seek to emphasise, and live by values that bring all people involved in the Society together. These values, as stated in our ethos document, are compassionate service, charity, respect for human dignity, witnessing under a framework of gospel values and church social teaching, advocacy and justice.

What brings all this together is an overarching narrative, one that has sufficient credibility and symbolic power to sustain Vincentians in the best sense of the word. We have such a story in the lives of Jesus, St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Their story has the power to elucidate the present, and return us not only to our origins but also points us to the future. It’s a story that clarifies our ideals and suggests a rule for conduct; it gives a sense of coherence and purpose. Such narrative allows us to make priorities, sustain our efforts in the face of difficulties and encourages us to work with others who share its vision of embodied ideals. Even when the story is based on the past lives of our founders, its significance is its promise for the future. This kind of story is meant to provide us with a vision towards which we can strive.

We might describe a member then as a bearer of the ethos. We might go further and suggest that there is the need to ensure that the Society retains a critical mass of Catholic leadership to carry its mandate into the future. This does not demean the contribution of volunteers who are not from a Catholic or religious background. Nor may it even preclude them from assuming some representation at leadership level, providing they are bearers of the ethos, and working alongside leaders who are specifically Catholic in orientation and understanding.

It is a given that critical reflection and spiritual renewal are always necessary so that there are sufficient numbers in the Society capable of carrying the ethos. Those ethos bearers are not only the custodians of our Vincentian spiritual heritage; they ensure that the heritage can continue as a constantly renewed and dynamically unfolding work in church and society.

Vin Hindmarsh is the State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania.

TO COINCIDE WITH THE LAUNCH the Cardinal also held a press conference at the Vatican where the topic of the Occupy Wall Street Movement was raised. The Occupy Movement, which began in Wall Street in mid-September then spread to cities across the world, has generated widespread debate about the distribution of wealth.

According to the Catholic News Service the Cardinal told reporters “Do people at a certain time have a right to say: ‘Do business differently, look at the way you are doing business because this is not leading to our welfare, to our good? Can people demand this of the people of Wall Street? I think people can and should be able to.”

“The Vatican is not behind any of these movements, but the basic inspirations can be the same,” Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson said.

The Occupy Movement is not mentioned in the Council’s report, which calls for a global financial authority to be established. The following are edited excerpts from the report:

1. Economic development and inequalities

The grave economic and financial crisis gripping the world today springs from multiple causes. Opinions on the number and significance of these causes vary widely. Some commentators focus above all on certain errors that they consider to be inherent in the economic and financial policies. Others stress the structural weaknesses of political, economic and financial institutions. Still others say that the causes are ethical breakdowns occurring at all levels of a world economy that is increasingly dominated by utilitarianism and materialism. At every stage of the crisis, one might discover particular technical errors intertwined with certain ethical orientations.

In material goods markets, natural factors and productive capacity as well as labour in all of its many forms set quantitative limits by determining relationships of costs and prices which, under certain conditions, permit an efficient allocation of available resources.

In monetary and financial markets, however, the dynamics are quite different. In recent decades, it was the banks that extended credit, which generated money, which in turn sought a further expansion of credit. In this way, the economic system was driven towards an inflationary spiral that inevitably encountered a limit in the risk that credit institutions could accept. They faced the ultimate danger of bankruptcy, with negative consequences for the entire economic and financial system.

2. The role of technology and the ethical challenge

The great economic and social developments of the past century, with their bright spots and serious shadows, can also be attributed in large part to the continued development of technology and more recently to advances in information technologies, and especially to their applications in the economy and most significantly in finance.

However, if we are to think clearly about the current new social question, we must avoid the error – itself a product of neo-liberal thinking – of regarding all the problems that need tackling as exclusively technical in nature. In such a guise, the problems evade the discernment and ethical evaluation that are urgently required. In this context Benedict XVI’s encyclical (in 2009) warns about the dangers of the technocracy ideology: that is, of making technology absolute, which “tends to prevent people from recognising anything that cannot be explained in terms of matter alone”. It also minimises the value of the choices made by the concrete human
individual who works in the economic-financial system by reducing them to mere technical variables. Being closed to a “beyond” in the sense of something more than technology, not only makes it impossible to find adequate solutions to the problems, but it impoverishes the principal victims of the crisis more and more from the material standpoint.

3. **An authority over globalisation**

This is a complex and delicate process. A supranational Authority in this arena should have a realistic structure and be set up gradually. It should be favourable to the existence of efficient and effective monetary and financial systems; that is, free and stable markets overseen by a suitable legal framework, well-functioning in support of sustainable development and social progress at all, and inspired by the values of charity and truth.

The establishment of a world political Authority should be preceded by a preliminary phase of consultation from which a legitimated institution will emerge that is in a position to be an effective guide and, at the same time, can allow each country to express and pursue its own particular good. The exercise of this Authority at the service of the good of each and every one will necessarily be super partes: that is, above any partial vision or particular good, with a view to achieving the common good. Its decisions should not be the result of the more developed countries’ superior power over weaker countries. Instead, they should be made in the interest of all, not only to the advantage of some groups, whether they are formed by private lobbies or national governments.

What is valid on the national level is also valid on the global level. A person is not made to serve authority unconditionally. Rather, it is the task of authority to be at the service of the person, consistent with the pre-eminent value of human dignity. Likewise, governments should not serve the world Authority unconditionally. Instead, it is the world Authority that should put itself at the service of the various member countries, according to the principle of subsidiarity.

4. **Towards reforming the international financial and monetary systems in a way that responds to the needs of all peoples**

In this process, the primacy of the spiritual and of ethics needs to be restored and, with them, the primacy of politics – which is responsible for the common good – over the economy and finance. Economics and finance need to be brought back within the boundaries of their real vocation and function, including their social function, in consideration of their obvious responsibilities to society – for example, that of nourishing markets and financial institutions which are really at the service of the person and are capable of responding to the needs of the common good and universal brotherhood.

Clearly, this vocation, this function has nothing to do with the shallow and crass economism for which money and marketplace success are the only measure of social value.

The full report can be found at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

An English translation of the report is available at [http://ncronline.org](http://ncronline.org)
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