



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

YOUTH

CONFERENCE STARTER KIT

for High School Students + Young Adults

WWW.VINNIES.ORG.AU





Our Mission

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

Our Vision

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering 'a hand up' to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

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ABOUT YOUTH CONFERENCES

In Vinnies 'Conference' is the word used to describe a group of people who get together to help those in need within their school, parish, or local community.

What is a High School Conference?

A High School Conference is a Vinnies Conference in a High School with students as its members. Often a teacher is appointed to help out, but the vision, direction and decisions are made by the Conference members.

What is a Young Adult Conference?

A Young Adult Conference is a Vinnies Conference with Young Adults (usually aged from 18 – 35) as its members. Young Adult Conferences can be based in Parishes, Universities, TAFEs, suburbs or regions.

What is a Youth Conference?

High School Conferences and Young Adult Conferences are often referred to in Vinnies as Youth Conferences. For the remainder of this document the term Youth Conference will refer to both High School and Young Adult Conferences.

The actions of a Youth Conference generally involve three components:

'See' – Education and Awareness. 'Seeing' is an opportunity for members of Youth Conferences to become aware of the plight of those who are less fortunate than themselves. It is an opportunity for members to develop empathy for those in need.

"Be good, keep your feet dry, your eyes open, your heart at peace and your soul in the joy of Christ." – Thomas Merton

'Think' – Formation and Reflection. 'Thinking' is coming together as a Youth Conference and as a group to mull over social justice through spiritual reflections, discussions, prayer and debate.

"Small is the number of people who see with their eyes and think with their minds." – Albert Einstein

'Do' – Community Service and Fundraising. 'Doing' means supporting the Society in its 'good works' in Australia and overseas. 'Doing' is an opportunity for teenagers and young adults to do something about the issues they have seen, thought about, and discussed.

"Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do." – Pope John XXIII

**Joseph Cardijn was the founder of Young Christian Workers. He developed the "See Judge Act" method during his work with the YCW movement. The 'See Think Do' method outlined above has been derived from the "See Judge Act" method and we would like to acknowledge that the idea was based on Cardijn's method.*



THE BEGINNING OF A VINNIES JOURNEY - YOUTH CONFERENCES

Below are the stories of three Young Adult volunteers who began volunteering in a High School Conference and are still involved with Vinnies. Read about how they got involved and what they are doing now. These stories show how much you can do through Vinnies.



“My name is Kate and I’ve been a volunteer for Vinnies for the past 6 years. I began my involvement when I was aged 16 and joined a Vinnies Conference at my school. We met monthly to learn about social justice issues, participate in Vinnies activities and to organize fundraising for Vinnies. It was here that I became aware of the many and various Special Works of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Not long after, I became a Kids Camp leader and volunteered my time every school holidays. Kids Camps provide the opportunity for children

who are experiencing disadvantage and who are disengaged to experience a holiday and be a kid. To this day, I haven’t looked back. What I experienced as a Kids Camp leader gave me a rare glimpse into the lives of these children and I was filled with a passion to do more.

Since then I have had the opportunity to volunteer regularly on Buddies Days and Night Patrol and in 2005 I was privileged to be invited to represent the St Vincent de Paul Society at World Youth Day in Cologne. I feel honoured to be part of such a compassionate organisation which recognises the value and dignity of all people and strives to achieve social justice. I have learned many valuable life lessons through my work with Vinnies which have helped shaped the person I am today.”



“Hi, my name’s Liam, I’ve been volunteering with Vinnies since 2006. I came to Vinnies because I had a general frustration with the injustices I was seeing all around me and saw Vinnies as a good outlet for that energy.

I started volunteering on Kids Camps, which I instantly loved, meeting a lot of hilarious and energetic kids. Since then I’ve been involved in Night Patrol, Buddies Days, Teen Camps, and various retreats and formation days. I’ve also been lucky enough to visit different Vinnies projects in South Africa. The more I’m involved in Vinnies, the more I’ve had the chance to meet and form friendships with some amazing people - other volunteers as well as the people we assist.”



“Hi my name is Bec, I got involved in Vinnies in high school, when I was in year 11 in Canberra. We had coloured clothes fundraising days and coordinated a drive to collect toiletries and make up little toiletry packs for a local women and children’s refuge. I have to be honest though and admit that my real commitment to Vinnies probably started when some uni students came in to tell us about the Kids Camps that Vinnies runs and offer us the chance to do the training and get involved in the school holidays.

Eleven years later, I am the State Youth Coordinator for Vinnies Youth in NSW. After a few years volunteering on the Kids Camps I was asked to represent Vinnies Youth programs and teams on the NSW State Council and Board of Trustees. I left that role to take up my first employed role with Vinnies, as their National World Youth Day Coordinator from 2006 – 2008. After WYD I spent 6 months working for the Vinnies National Council of South Africa, setting up their first youth teams and programs

and then returned to Australia for this new role. I can’t believe it all started from getting involved in my high school Vinnies Conference! What a journey.

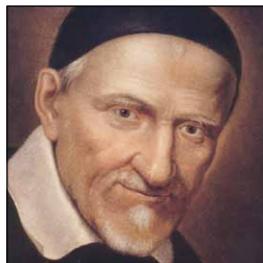
My favourite Vinnies memory: there are so many to choose from! It would either be watching little kids grow up from their first camp when they are 5 to their last camp at 12 or 13, or going to World Youth Day in Germany in 2005 with a group of 30 awesome Vinnies Youth Members, or welcoming over 300 Vinnies Youth Members from 26 countries come to our Vinnies events at World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008, or our first Vinnies Youth weekend in South Africa or the Vinnies Orphanage I visited when I was travelling in South America a few years ago... If I really have to pick one, it would be the friendships I’ve formed with inspiring people from around Australia and the world, who are doing so much to make the world a better place.”

ABOUT THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic community of people who work towards the alleviation of poverty and suffering throughout the world. The work of the St Vincent de Paul Society is conducted by its members and volunteers in a spirit of justice and charity.

Frederic Ozanam, the Society's founder, once said, *"Yours must be a work of love and unlimited kindness; you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor man 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 often the injustices which brought about such poverty with the aim of long term improvement"*.





The Saint behind the Society: St Vincent de Paul

Date of birth: 24th April 1581
Place of birth: Pouy, France
Occupation: Priest and servant of the poor
Died: 27th September 1660
Canonised a Saint: 16th June 1737
Feast day: 27th September

Vincent was a very intelligent young man, who spent four years with the Franciscan friars obtaining an education. He tutored students of wealthy families and was ordained at the age of 20. Vincent has admitted that at the beginning of his priesthood he was more attracted to the power, stability, status and security of the role rather than its potential to serve the poor.

At the age of 24, Vincent was taken captive by Turkish pirates and sold into slavery. During this time, Vincent witnessed the terrible conditions in which slaves were forced to live, although his own master was a doctor who treated him

well and taught him about medicine. When his master died, Vincent escaped and returned to France.

In France, Vincent became a parish priest. He committed himself to serving the poorest of the poor, pledging his life to people who were sick, insane, orphaned, elderly, starving or abandoned, and to beggars, prisoners and slaves. There was no form of poverty or suffering – physical, emotional or spiritual – which Vincent did not try to alleviate. He was appointed Royal Chaplain General and set about improving conditions for prisoners, slaves and people in hospital.

Vincent started an order of priests called the Congregation of the Mission – more commonly known as Vincentians – whose mission it was to share Jesus' good news to the villages through preaching and service. Along with Louise de Marillac, he also started the Daughters of Charity, who cared for people who were poor and sick.

St Vincent de Paul is the Patron Saint of: charities, charitable societies and workers, hospitals and hospital workers, lepers, prisoners and volunteers. The town in which Vincent was born is now known as Saint-Vincent-de-Paul.

Vincent believed that in serving the poor, he was serving Christ:

“Go to the poor: you will find God”



The woman behind the Saint: St Louise de Marillac

Date of birth: 12th August 1591
Place of birth: Auvergne, France
Occupation: Wife and Mother
Died: 15th March 1660
Canonised a Saint: 11th March 1934
Feast day: 15th March

Louise did not know her mother and was raised by her father. From the time she was a small child, she was taken to the Dominican sisters, who gave her a good education. Later, she went on to further education at a residence for young girls in Paris. Her education was much better than that of most students her age, and Louise became one of the most educated women of her time.

Louise had a desire to join a religious order, but she was not allowed to join. She married Antoine le Gras, secretary to the Queen Mother, in 1611. According to Louise, Antoine was a

good man. Throughout their marriage, Louise travelled a lot and socialised with the royalty and aristocracy of France. Louise and Antoine had a son, Michael, and lived together happily for many years. Antoine, however, became sick, and he died in 1625.

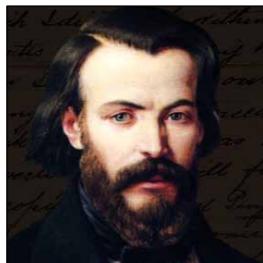
After her husband died, Louise met and became friends with Vincent de Paul. Despite the fact that she had come from a background of wealth, and knew many rich people, she was just as comfortable around poor people. Louise dedicated her time to helping abandoned students on the streets. She also visited sick men in the prison hospital and established a house near the hospital where, each day, many women would cook food that visitors would then take to the prisoners.

Throughout France, women set up centres to serve the poor. Louise pushed for every village to have its own clinic, school nurse and teacher. With Vincent, Louise started the Daughters of Charity in 1642. The Daughters of Charity were

a revolutionary order of the poor. They helped abandoned students, people who were poor and sick, wounded soldiers, slaves, people who were mentally ill and the elderly. Today, there are over 20,000 Daughters of Charity, who continue to help people in need.

Louise is the Patron Saint of sick people, widows and orphans, and in 1960, Pope John XXIII proclaimed her the Patroness of Social Workers.

“Love the poor. Honour them, my students, as you would honour Christ himself”



The man behind the Society: Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Date of birth: 23rd April 1813

Place of birth: Milan, France

Occupation: Lawyer and Professor

Died: 8th September 1853

Beatified: 22nd August 1997

Feast day: 9th September

Frederic's family was an upper middle class Catholic family – his father was a doctor and his mother was an heiress. He was the fifth born of 14 children, but he was one of only four to survive early childhood, with 10 of his siblings dying from disease at a young age.

Frederic was a very intelligent young man and decided to study Law at Sorbonne University. People at Sorbonne were very anti-Christian, and there were not many other Catholic students. Many Students – and even teachers – at the university attacked the religious beliefs

of Frederic and his fellow Christians, claiming that the Church had become irrelevant and was not doing anything to help the many poor and suffering people of France. Frederic, who was seen as a natural leader of his fellow Catholic students, decided to take action, and he started a Conference of Charity with a few other students.

Guided by a middle-aged journalist named Emmanuel Bailly, the Conference Members were driven by a deep desire to build their faith, and they decided to go out and become servants of the poor, just as Jesus Christ had done. The group followed the example of St Vincent – the French Saint who had done so much work to help the poor 200 years earlier – and named their Conference 'the Society of St Vincent de Paul'. The group was also inspired by a young Daughter of Charity, Rosalie Rendu and the young men worked closely with her to help the poor people of Paris.

As well as becoming a lawyer, Frederic was also a teacher and a scholar. He wrote many essays and journal articles on a whole range of subjects, and was appointed Lecturer in Foreign Literature at the University of Lyon. Much of Frederic's work was based on his passion for social justice, and he argued for better social conditions, higher moral standards and the restoration of the Catholic faith in France.

On 23rd June 1841, Frederic married a woman named Amelie Soulacroix, who in 1845 gave birth to their daughter Marie. Frederic was a sick man his whole life, and was forced to resign from his job in 1852. He died in September 1853, at the age of 40.

"Let us do whatever good lies in our hands"



**An example of compassion:
Blessed Rosalie Rendu**

Date of birth: 9th September 1786
Place of birth: Confort, France
Occupation: Daughter of Charity
Died: 7th February 1856
Beatified: 9th November 2003
Feast Day: 9th November

Jeanne Marie Rendu (later called Sister Rosalie Rendu) was the oldest of four girls in her family. Her parents were simple living but well respected people who lived in the mountains. When Jeanne was only three years old, the French Revolution broke out in France. At this time, many faithful priests were forced to flee persecution, and the Rendu family home became a refuge for many of these priests.

Following the death of her father and baby sister, Jeanne helped her mother to look after the family. Jeanne’s mother sent her to

a boarding school so she could get a good education. During her two years there, Jeanne would walk around the town, and one day she discovered a hospital where the Daughters of Charity cared for the sick. Her mother gave her permission to spend some time at the hospital, and Jeanne soon felt called by God to become a Daughter of Charity.

When she was nearly 17 years old, Jeanne entered the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity and received the name Rosalie. She took vows to serve God and the poor, and spent over 50 years living out those vows. She opened a free clinic; a pharmacy; a school; an orphanage; a childcare centre; a home for the elderly and a youth club for young workers. She became known as the “good mother of all”, and helped Frederic Ozanam and his friends to do ‘good works’, which is how the St Vincent de Paul Society started.

As well as assisting the poor in the streets and

in their homes, Sister Rosalie showed great courage and leadership during the bloody uprisings that took place in France in 1830 and 1848. During the battles, Sister Rosalie would climb up on the barricades – risking her life – to help wounded soldiers, regardless of which side they were fighting on.

Although her health was always fragile, Sister Rosalie never rested; she preferred to keep serving the poor, and managed to overcome fatigue and illness. Eventually, however, her huge workload, combined with her age and increased frailty, broke her resistance, and she became progressively blind during the last two years of her life. She died on 7th February 1856.

“Never have I prayed so well as in the streets”

VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Vincentian Spirituality is rooted in the life and example of St Vincent de Paul who gave up his privileged life to live with and serve those less fortunate. Vincentians believe that Jesus Christ is not only God, but also truly human and is present in all of us. The following passage explains how – when we love and serve our neighbours – we are in fact loving and serving God.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘I tell

you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”
Matthew 25: 35 - 40

When the voice of the poor calls, Vincentians willingly leave their prayers, or other religious practices, knowing that they are leaving God for God. They seek to honour, love and serve God by honouring, loving and serving the poor, the abandoned, the victims of exclusion and adversity.

Vincentians show their love for God through their ‘good works’ and seek to do this with gentleness and humility, striving to be selfless and genuine, yet passionate about the needs of the poor. As St Vincent de Paul said:

“Let us love God... but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow.”

In the context of Youth Conferences, spirituality can be viewed as similar to a thread which runs through the centre of the Conference. It is at the

core of what Vinnies is all about and it is more than the opening and closing prayers. It is not essential to be Catholic to be a St Vincent de Paul Conference Member. We just ask that all Members respect the ethos of the Society.

At the beginning of each meeting Conferences start with prayers and/or a spiritual reflection. This helps to remind us why we are doing Vinnies good work and gets us in the right head space. The reflection can take the form of a song, a poem, an article, a quote or a photograph, which has spoken to the person that is leading the reflection. The group can then discuss the meaning it has for each Member. You can pray for the people that you serve through your ‘good works’, for example, the health of the residents of the nursing home that your Conference visits or for the people living in the refuge who you donate toiletries to. You may also decide as a group to pray for a certain group of marginalised people, like refugees or people with disabilities. Praying for people enables us to leave them in the hands of God when we are not with them.

The Beginnings of the Society

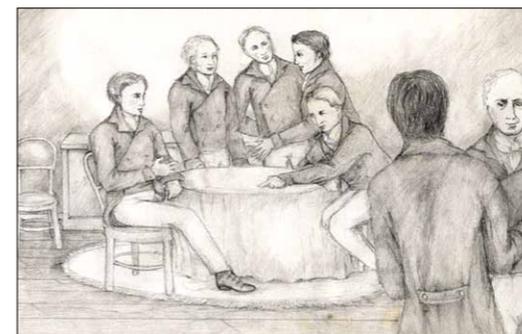
Frederic Ozanam was a devoted Catholic, but he was in the minority at Sorbonne University, where he studied law. Because of the strong anti-Christian sentiment within the University, many Catholic students would not openly admit to their faith. A professor named Jouffrey argued that Christianity was irrational, and that it was the enemy of scientific inquiry and human liberty. Frederic wrote two letters to the professor to disprove the professor's arguments. He wrote a third letter, which was signed by nine other students. Jouffrey was forced to read the letter in public and promise to never again attack the religious beliefs of students.

Following this incident, Frederic was seen as a natural leader of the Catholic students at the University. He was driven by a deep desire to find a way to help build the faith of his peers. One day, Frederic was challenged by a group of Socialist students who went by the name of

Saint Simonians. The students argued that:

“Christianity is now outworn and defunct. It may have been useful in the past, but what use is it today? Show us your works, and then we might believe!”

These claims troubled Frederic greatly, and drove him to start a ‘Conference of Charity’ with a few friends. The group consisted of:



Frederic Ozanam, 20
Francoise Lallier, 20
Paul Lemanche, 23
Felix Clave, 22

Auguste Le Tallandier, 22
Jules Devaux, 22
Joseph Emmanuel Bailly, 42

Under the guidance of Emmanuel Bailly, who was the founder of an influential Catholic newspaper, the students met weekly, starting in May 1833, and committed themselves to helping the poor people of Paris. Inspired and assisted by Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, the students visited poor people in their homes, bringing food and other necessities. Frederic had a strong belief that this method of serving the poor was much better than what he called “ostentatious philanthropy” (the bold, flashy giving of money without paying much attention to the people who were actually in need of the help).

The Conference adopted the name “The Society of St Vincent de Paul” because they were inspired by Saint Vincent, who had devoted himself to helping the poor people of



France about 200 years earlier. Sister Rosalie taught Frederic and his friends to see the face of God in the poor people who they visited. In this way, the Conference members recognised the importance of providing company and friendship as well as material assistance to people in need – those they visited were not just physically poor, but emotionally and spiritually poor as well.

Frederic came to realise that, in serving the poor, charity was not enough, and he began calling for social reform and justice for the working classes. The Society of St Vincent de Paul began to focus not just on helping people through their immediate poverty, but also on the changing laws and structures that continued to create poverty and disadvantage. Frederic said:

“Charity is the oil being poured on the wounded traveller. But it is the role of justice to prevent the attack.”

As the student members of the Conference completed their studies, they started up Conferences in other provinces of France. Within two years of the first Conference meeting, there were over 100 members of the Society. Soon, the Society spread beyond the borders of France, and there was a Conference in Rome, Italy, by 1842. Vinnies was then started up in other countries in the following years:

1843 – Belgium, Scotland, Ireland

1844 – England

1846 – Holland, Germany, Greece, Turkey, the USA and Mexico

1847 – Canada, Switzerland

1850 – Austria, Spain

1854 – Australia

By the time of Frederic’s death in 1853, the Society was thriving in France and had spread throughout the world, fulfilling Frederic’s desire to “embrace the whole world in a network

of charity”. Today, Vinnies is present in 143 countries, with 49,500 Conferences and over 1,000,000 members and volunteers.



The international logo

- The fish is the symbol of Christianity.
- The eye is the eye of God, watching over us and those we assist.
- The circle of the logo represents the unity of our international organisation.
- The words ‘serviens in spe’ usually accompany the logo. It means, ‘To serve in hope.’

The Society in Australia

The Society then spread throughout Australia.

1854 – Victoria

1865 – Western Australia

1881 – New South Wales

1886 – South Australia

1894 – Queensland

1899 – Tasmania

1949 – Northern Territory

Mission Statement

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

Vision Statement

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering

a “hand up” to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

The St Vincent de Paul Society Logo



St Vincent de Paul Society

good works

The logo for Vinnies in Australia was created by a sculpture artist named Tom Bass. It symbolises the presence of Jesus Christ in the work of the Society:

**The hand of Christ
blesses the cup**

**The hand of love
offers the cup**

**The hand of suffering
receives the cup**



The cup can be interpreted as a gift, which means that everything given by Vinnies to those in need is a gift. This includes the gift of time, of friendship, of material goods, of a cup of coffee, or of a bed for the night. God’s blessing on the work of the Society is central to the mission of Vinnies and it enables the good works to continue.

‘good works’

Vinnies adopted the slogan ‘good works’ in 2004. Vinnies believes this slogan best represents the work that Vinnies’ members, volunteers and employees undertake, and it also expresses the ‘goodness’ of our work with those in our community who are poor, sick, lonely, homeless, elderly and marginalised. The slogan echoes the challenge put to Frederic at Sorbonne University to “show us your works, and then we might believe.”

Services Offered by Vinnies around Australia

The St Vincent de Paul Society is organised into Conferences (groups of members focused in a particular area, usually linked to a particular parish) and Special Works, which are programs with a specific focus, addressing a particular need within our community. Through these Conferences and Special Works, Vinnies volunteers and staff help marginalised people in a number of ways. Some of these are detailed below.

Home Visitation

The first work of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1833 was that of Home Visitation. This act of visiting people in their homes is still active today and is one of the main works of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. People call the emergency assistance number at Vinnies seeking help. They give their name and address, and members of the Vinnies

Conference in that area then visit the person in their home and talk to them about what they need. The volunteers can then provide material support by giving a voucher for food, clothing or furniture. The volunteers also offer personal, emotional support to those they assist.

Homeless Services

Services owned and operated by the Society provide shelter, support and education to men, women and young people who are homeless. Some refuges are women and student specific and deal with people made homeless as a result of domestic violence. Other refuges are youth specific and provide assistance to young people recovering from alcohol or drug dependencies. The St Vincent de Paul Society is the largest provider of homeless services in NSW.

Family and Welfare Centres

Family and Welfare Centres provide counselling and welfare support services to people in need. Welfare support includes things like nappies,

chemist vouchers, food vouchers and parcels. Counselling and support are provided to people who have suffered because of addiction, loss, substance abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, relationship difficulties, sexual and physical abuse and grief.

Respite Centres

Respite centres offer care and a place to spend some time for people in need such as students and adults with disabilities, people with mental illnesses or the elderly. Clients enjoy social and leisure activities appropriate to their needs, including barbecues, social outings and sporting activities.

Night Patrol (Vinnies Van)

Night Patrol vans, staffed by volunteers, travel the streets of towns and cities to serve food, hot drinks and offer friendship and conversation to people experiencing homelessness. Many thousands of sandwiches, biscuits, cups of tea and coffee are served by Night Patrol volunteers each year.





Migrant and Refugee Services

Migrant and Refugee Services work specifically with individuals and families who have recently arrived in Australia. Staff and volunteers give material support, such as blankets, but most importantly personal and social support. They help people find accommodation, access health and education services, and assist in making people feel comfortable and welcome in their new home. Other programs include homework help classes that assist refugee students in their transition into schooling and parents groups.

Overseas Partnership and Development

The Overseas Partnership and Development Committee (OPDC) coordinates the Society's efforts to assist disadvantaged people in other countries. One of the ways Vinnies in Australia helps people overseas is by 'twinning' with developing countries. For example, a Vinnies Conference in Australia may be twinned with a Vinnies Conference in India. Their 'twinned' Australian Conference supports and encourages the Indian Conference by praying

for them, writing to them and offering financial support to assist them in their works. In NSW, the St Vincent de Paul Society is twinned with Conferences in India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Fiji

Youth Programs

Vinnies runs a number of programs and activities aimed at supporting young people who are marginalised or 'at risk'. This includes young people who are experiencing disadvantage or abusive family situations, young people who lack a safe, stable or loving home life and young people who have made some negative life choices or are at risk of doing so. Youth Programs, including camps and holiday activities, aim to assist these young people by providing fun and friendship as well as promoting life skills such as teamwork, confidence and positive thinking.

Vinnies Centres

There are many Vinnies Centres across Australia, and they are one of the most visible and well-known aspects of the Society's work. Vinnies Centres are retail outlets where clothing and household goods donated to the Society are sold at low prices. Goods are donated by Members of the public through donation bins or through school and church collection boxes. Vinnies Centres generate income for the Society – money raised through the sale of goods can be used by Vinnies to help those in need within our community.

HOW TO FORM A YOUTH CONFERENCE

The first step is to introduce the idea of Youth Conferences to other young people and find out if any of them are interested in forming a group. You could spend some time learning a bit about the Society and how volunteers of all ages can help, or request a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society Youth Team, or the Youth Coordinator in your Diocese to come and answer any questions you or your interested friends may have about the Society.

How you advertise the first meeting will depend on where the Conference is going to be based. If it is going to be in a Parish:

- Put a notice in the Parish bulletin
- Put up a poster in the Church foyer
- Ask your Parish Priest if you can speak at the end of Mass
- Personally invite any other Youth who may be interested in the Conference to come along.

If it is going to be at a University or similar:

- Talk to the groups and movements organiser at your University
- Put up posters around campus
- Ask to talk at the end of your lectures
- Personally invite any other Youth who may be interested in the Conference to come along.

If it is going to be at a school:

- Talk to the Principal or Social Justice Coordinator
- Put up posters around the School
- Speak at a School assembly
- Personally invite fellow students.

It is often a good idea to invite someone from the St Vincent de Paul Society Youth Team or from a local St Vincent de Paul Society Parish Conference to come and speak at your first meeting. They can offer significant experience in running Conferences and can provide valuable advice on what works, what doesn't work and how best to manage the Conference.

The First Meeting

- Open the meeting with a prayer or reflection;
- Allow the representative from Vinnies to briefly address the group;
- Decide as a group when, where and how often you will hold meetings;
- Discuss what activities and projects the group could undertake or look into;
- Discuss what roles will exist in the group and what would be required of people in those roles;
- Close the meeting with a prayer and details of the next meeting.

Roles

There are a number of leadership roles within a Vinnies Conference. These include President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Spiritual Advisor and any role that your conference has a need for. (This could include Public Relations Advisor, Social Coordinator, Facebook Page Administrator, Fundraising Coordinator etc.) The following outlines are suggestions only. If



your Conference assigns tasks in another way that is fine.

The **President** looks after the internal wellbeing of the group. The role of the President is a crucial one in that a well functioning conference is usually the result of a proactive President. The President is a person who can:

- Gather support from the Conference members
- Allocate tasks to Conference members
- Promote sharing and fellowship within the Conference
- Be compassionate to Conference members and the needy alike
- Facilitate communication within the Conference
- Chair the Conference meetings and keep them on track
- Encourage participation for everyone in the Conference
- Resolve conflicts in the group
- Keep in touch with the local Youth Coordinator and Youth Representative

The President attends and reports to the local

Regional Council meeting which occur regularly throughout the year. Note: often a High School Conference President won't attend the Regional Council meeting but will send a written report.

The **Vice President** is supportive of the President and takes on the role of President if they are ever absent from the conference meeting. The Vice President is someone who can:

- Be active and encourage outreach
- Coordinate the group's mission action
- Organise Good Works for the group ensuring that the members have support in their work
- Ensure the Good Works of the group are followed up and actions are carried out
- Show empathy and compassion to those in need
- Organise special events and invites new members
- Help encourage the group to be a witnessing community
- Organise the training of members

The **Secretary** keeps the records of the Conference and communicates on behalf of the conference with the wider community. The Secretary is a person who can:

- Keep minutes as a record of the Conference's activities.
- Record contact details of all conference members and other important contacts
- Responds to all correspondence received by the conference
- Maintains relationships with those who occasionally help the group.
- Stays aware of the dates of wider Society activities
- Gets to know Secretaries from other Conferences in the local area
- Makes contact with the Diocesan Youth Representative and/or Youth Coordinator
- Keeps information on the Society, its founders, history and spirit.

The **Treasurer** keeps a record of all the spending and fundraising of the Conference and



any donations that are made. The Treasurer is someone who can:

- Oversee the Conference's account activity and expenditure
- Report regularly to the Conference about the balance
- Promptly deposits money into the bank and keeps record of it
- Research fundraising options and suggest these to the group
- Coordinate the doorknock, Winter and Christmas Appeals within the Conference
- Budget wisely and predict how much various activities will cost
- Manage payment of expenses
- Manage petty cash and keep record of it.

The **Spiritual Advisor** is someone who has experience in leading groups in Spiritual reflections. In a High School Conference this person is usually the teacher or another adult, while in Young Adult Conferences this person is

a Conference member. The Spiritual Advisor is someone who can:

- Lead the Conference in spiritual reflections
- Encourage and support members in their personal growth and faith development
- Recognise the link between the work of Vinnies and Christian faith
- Teach others about Vincentian Spirituality and is willing to learn more about it themself.
- Arrange events such as retreats, forums and workshops
- Link in with other Spiritual Advisors and share resources
- Seek out suitable resource material
- Mentor members of the Conference in leading spiritual reflections.

Structure of Vinnies

Vinnies is both a local, grass roots organisation and a large international organisation. The following list explains how a local Conference is

connected to the International Council General and vice versa.

Every Vinnies Conference President represents

- their Conference on the Regional Council. The President of the Regional Council then represents their Region on the Diocesan Council (also known in some areas as Central Council).
- The President of the Diocesan (Central) Council represents their Diocese on State Council. The President of State Council represents their State on National Council.
- The President of National Council represents their Country on the International Council General located in Paris, France.

Vinnies has a strong emphasis on youth representation on Councils. This means that the President of your Conference will represent your Conference on your Regional Council, and ideally there will be also be a youth member on the Council as the Youth Representative. The following is an extract from the Rule:



*“The Members of a Council are the President, the Presidents of Conferences and Councils, the Youth Representative and office bearers.”
(The Rule, Article 9)*

Commissioning Ceremony

A good way to launch your Conference is with a commissioning ceremony. This could be at the end of a Parish Mass, if the Conference is based in a Parish, at the School’s Opening Mass, if you are at a school, or if you are based in at a University it could be during Orientation Week. Alternatively the Regional Presidents meeting could also be a good place to be commissioned. The location can be decided by whatever makes most sense for your Conference. At a commissioning ceremony, the members in the Youth Conference are recognised for being part of the group and for wanting to help people.

Usually, members are presented with a certificate and a badge. At the ceremony, the

members can recite a pledge which they have written about what being in the Conference means to them and what they are pledging to do.

At the ceremony, someone from Vinnies can speak about the Vinnies symbol and the aims of the Society, and congratulate the members for getting involved. You can then have a commissioning ceremony at the start of each year, to welcome members who have joined the group and to launch the group’s activities for another year.

The Role of the Bailly

This is a role you may want to consider including in the support of your Conference. In Frederic’s Ozanam’s Conference they had an older person who supported their works – his name was Emmanuel Bailly. In the tradition of Frederic’s Conference we call this person the Bailly. In a Youth Conference any older person can take on this role, they just need to

be willing to help support the Conference (it helps if the person has experience in Vinnies). What is important is that the person is willing to commit some of their time to attending the Conference’s meetings, assist in organising the service activities, events or fundraisers that the Conference may organise. The Bailly provides support for all aspects of the Conference work and acts as a mentor to the Conference members.

In Youth Conferences, the members can really have a say and make decisions about how you can help people in your community. The local Youth Coordinator and or Youth Representative should support the Members in their individual and collective growth and formation in the process.



Meetings

When your Youth Conference is established, your meetings can follow a similar format to the first meeting, although you don't need to invite a Vinnies coordinator to every meeting. You may, however, invite guest speakers to address the group from time to time, perhaps once a quarter – a guest speaker might talk about a particular social justice issue, which could influence the group's activities for the following months and inspire the young people to continue in their efforts to shape a more just society.

Learning about Vinnies

It is important for a Youth Conference to learn about the history and works of the St Vincent de Paul Society, both locally and at an international level. The students may want to read about the founders of the Society, or a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society Youth Team can give a presentation about how the Society began. A local St Vincent de Paul Society Conference

member could talk to the group about when and where the Conference meets, what the needs are in their region and the ways in which the Conference helps local people. The group could also visit some different places to learn about how Vinnies works in their Diocese, such as the warehouse where all the donated clothes are sorted and distributed or a local Vinnies Family Centre.

Having Fun

As well as helping young people to develop leadership skills, learn about issues in their community and discover their ability to make a difference in the world, Youth Conferences can be a great way to make new friends and have some fun.

As well as providing time in meetings for the members to talk and get to know each other better, it is good to have some social activities within your Youth Conference. A shared lunch or morning tea at the start or end of each season

is a good way to celebrate the 'good works' the group has done and to give the students a good opportunity to get to know each other better. This will help them to work more closely as a team. This fun, social element of Youth Conferences makes it more enjoyable and interesting for the members who are involved.

Aggregation

Aggregation is the form process to have a Conference registered and recognised with the International Council General in Paris.

If your new Conference is going strong after 6-12 months, consider applying for aggregation through your Diocesan Council.

SEE AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Youth Conference provides an environment for young people to be exposed in a structured way to issues of social justice, such as poverty. Through identifying and naming the injustices that are present in the world, Vinnies members will be raising awareness amongst themselves about the issue concerned— initial identification is one important step to fighting injustice.

Some simple steps to ‘seeing’:

LOOK – what can you see around you that isn’t just or fair? Be purposeful about looking for injustices.

OPEN EYES - By having your eyes more fully open you will definitely see more. Think about a route you regularly walk or drive by – are your eyes closed to the injustices you pass by every

day? Next time you pass consciously do it with your eyes OPEN!

Think about the places where you spend a lot of time or groups that you regularly interact with. Does everyone have equal access to opportunities? Can all participate in the activities? Is the diversity of a group embraced or is the group only for specific participants? When you scratch beneath the surface, are there injustices hidden even in the places where you spend a lot of time?

IDENTIFY – What does what you can see mean? What injustice is occurring?

LISTEN – What are people telling you that you haven’t quite heard? Try to really listen, open your ears and your heart to stories people are telling you about their lives. Be prepared to hear bad news some of the time and to be a source of comfort and support in these instances.



THINK FORMATION AND REFLECTION

Think – Formation. Thinking is coming together as a Youth Conference and as a group participating in spiritual reflections, discussions, expression, prayer and debates. ‘Thinking’ is an opportunity for young people to develop a real understanding of some of the world’s injustices – their causes, effects and how they might be alleviated. ‘Thinking’ is an opportunity for Vinnies Conference members to reflect on their beliefs, to share their thoughts, engage in thoughtful discussion and to consider how they form their relationships with their peers, those in need and Christ.

One of the most effective ways to learn about poverty and social justice can be through images and stories that show the direct link between social injustices and individual stories of suffering. Through news or magazine articles, documentaries or case studies the conference

members can, learn about different justice issues through understanding the personal impact of the issues.

Issues that Youth Conferences might like to discuss include:

- Social Exclusion
- Poverty
- Child Poverty
- Homelessness
- Refugee issues
- Mentally Health
- Elderly
- Closing the Gap on Indigenous Health
- Inequality

Why is it Important to Learn about Poverty and Social Exclusion?

It is important for young people to learn about issues of justice so that they are aware of the inequalities in the world. By equipping themselves with an awareness of other people’s

suffering and the reasons why they suffer they will develop into more compassionate, giving people. Furthermore they will also have a greater understanding of the blessings in their lives.

What is Poverty and Social Exclusion?

Nelson Mandela once said of poverty:

Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.

And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.

While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.

Poverty is a basic cause of social disadvantage in Australia. Poverty is defined by the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council as follows:



Poverty has two elements:

- Financial and/or economic disadvantage for an individual or household; and
- Inequality of opportunity where the expectation of the poor and disadvantaged are well below community norms and expectations.

While financial disadvantage is an important part of the problems for the poor and disadvantaged, equally important is the inequality of opportunity.

Poverty is often explained in one of two ways. Poverty is either referred to as 'Absolute Poverty' or 'Relative Poverty'. Absolute poverty occurs when people do not have the basic necessities of life, that is, food, shelter and clothing. Some Indigenous communities in Australia are often described as living in absolute poverty. Relative Poverty, on the other hand, occurs where there is inequality in a community and is often measured using

a 'poverty line'. Relative Poverty is a concept most frequently used in developed countries like Australia to define poverty.

Social exclusion occurs when members of the community cannot participate in key activities for whatever reason. This may mean they have restricted access to the economic resources and/or services they require or they are effectively disengaged from many of the activities many community members would take for granted. Examples might include an inability to see a dentist or medical practitioner or an inability to take the kids on a holiday.

Social exclusion is a newer concept which is broadening our understanding of the disadvantaged in Australia.

DO COMMUNITY SERVICE

This is an opportunity for to put all their seeing and thinking into action. It is important for members of Youth Conferences to understand that they can make a difference in this world. To this end, doing means undertaking an achievable project that will make a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged, isolated or marginalised.

It is important to understand that simply by setting up a Youth Conference, the members are doing something tangible:

- They pray as part of each meeting,
- They learn and
- They develop into more socially aware and responsible adults

Sometimes it is easier to feel like we have “done something” when the good works and its effects are tangible. Measurable good works include:

- Service Activities
- Home Visitation
- Kids Camps
- Buddies Day
- SPARK
- Night Patrol / Vinnies Van
- Music Performances at Nursing Homes
- Build a relationship with a local school for hearing or vision impaired children. Visit regularly and assist with their education
- Run a picnic day for the children from the above school or the Nursing Home residents or both!
Do gardening for local Senior Citizens
- Organise Free Breakfasts at the local primary school for children who go without Breakfast
- Host a morning tea for residents of the Nursing Home at your school

Raising Money

There is no obligation on a Youth Conferences to raise money or an expectation that a group will send money to the St Vincent de Paul Society – the circumstances are different for

each Youth Conference, with some groups being able to do lots of fundraising but little community service, and others able to do lots of service activities but little in the way of fundraising.

Sometimes service activities or programs require funds to be raised for the service or program to occur. For example Buddies Days often require fundraising to cover the costs of the day. By fundraising for a specific service activity or program the Vinnies Youth Conference has a greater sense of ownership over the activity.

- Fundraising Activities
- Trivia Night
- Dinner Dance
- Cake stalls at the parish
- Selling chocolates at work/uni/parish
- Parish collection
- Fashion parade using Vinnies clothes



These are all good ways of raising money within the community. The best fundraisers, however, are ones which are new and creative, because they generate more interest and can therefore yield greater results.

Where Does the Money Go?

It is up to the Youth Conferences to decide what they want to raise money for. There may be a particular need within their community which they want to address through fundraising, or a guest speaker may have talked to them about a particular Vinnies program which they would like to support. The money could be used by the Vinnies Youth Conference to set up a project or program within the school, or given to the St Vincent de Paul Society to assist in good works across Australian and overseas. The money could go to the local Vinnies conference, or to a Special Work of your choice.

With any fundraiser, it is important to let people know where the funds will be going (for

example, to supporting kids in need, to provide material support to struggling families in the local area, or to feeding homeless people). People are more likely to support the fundraiser if they know exactly who they will be helping by making a donation. This also helps you to raise awareness at the same time as raising funds. Raising awareness of social justice issues is a very important part of the work the St Vincent de Paul Society, and Youth Conferences can play a key role in this.

It is also important to note, that if you are fundraising under the name and banner of Vinnies, we don't then give our money to other charities. Try to use any money fundraised under the Vinnies name for either projects that your Vinnies group is doing or make a contribution to a local Vinnies appeal or program.

Supporting People in the Local Community

You could also raise money for struggling families within the community. Money raised could be put into a fund – to be managed by the Conference President or perhaps the Regional President. Even though the Youth Conferences would not know who exactly is being helped through such a program (confidentiality is obviously important), they would know that they are giving vital support to a family within their immediate community.

Raising Awareness / Advocacy

Raising awareness of social justice issues is a very important part of the work the St Vincent de Paul Society and Vinnies Youth Conferences can play a key role in this.

There are heaps of ways your Youth Conference can stand up and speak out in your local community. The best way to start is with education. Teach people about the injustices



in our communities, once people know and care about an issue they're more likely to stand up and speak out against it. Here are some examples of ways you can raise awareness about issues in your community, but by no means is this a full list – the best way to do it is to be innovative, come up with ways to communicate your message that best suits your community.

- Hold a social justice forum, let the whole community know about the injustice and educate them on all the things that are happening and why they are unjust. (You can do this in a variety of ways – speeches, drama plays and other performance pieces, art instalments etc.)
- Make community announcements on local radio stations
- Organise a week dedicated to the cause with something happening each day. (E.g.: Have a 'Refugee Week'. With an assembly on the Monday, a fundraiser on the Tuesday, an art show on the Wednesday etc.)

- Remember you can also link in with existing special dates such as International Women's Day, AIDS Day etc etc
- Get involved in raising awareness of Social Justice issues through your parish/uni. It could be talking at Masses, organising forums, debates or speakers at uni

There are so many ways you can educate people on injustice. Be creative! Some of these ideas can easily be tailored to suit your community.

CONTACT US

You can contact your local Vinnies Youth Team to get more information about Vinnies, organise a guest speaker, get in touch with other Youth Conferences or Vinnies Conferences, or to have someone come out to your Conference to present certificates to your Youth Conferences or help organise activities. They could also help you to advertise your activities and let everyone else know about your group's 'good works' by putting an article or photo in Vinnies newsletters and magazines. You can also ask about merchandise and materials such as prayer cards; badges; wristbands; certificates; balloons; tattoos; brochures; posters etc to assist you in forming a Youth Conference or running a particular project.

For more information about Youth Conferences or for any enquiries, please contact the Vinnies Youth Team in your Diocese.

You can find contact details at: www.vinnies.org.au or email youth@vinnies.org.au

Armidale	(02) 9568 0255	youth@vinnies.org.au
Bathurst	(02) 9568 0292	youth@vinnies.org.au
Broken Bay	(02) 9495 8306	youth@vinnies.org.au
Lismore	(02) 6621 5835	svdp@vinnieslismore.org
Maitland/Newcastle	(02) 4967 6277	maitland.newcastle@vinnies.org.au
Parramatta	(02) 9689 1900	parrayouth@vinnies.org.au
Sydney	(02) 9350 9651	youth@sydneyvinnies.org
Wagga Wagga	(02) 6971 7175	waggayouth@vinnies.org.au
Wilcannia/Forbes	(02) 9568 0292	youth@vinnies.org.au
Wollongong	(02) 4627 9013	youth@svdpwgong.org.au



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

YOUTH

CONFERENCE STARTER KIT

for High School Students + Young Adults

Every day the St Vincent de Paul Society helps many thousands of people through home visitation, migrant and refugee assistance, hospital visitation, prison visitation, retail centres, sheltered workcentres, homeless hostels for training, education and support homeless men, women and children, overseas relief, disaster recovery, budget counselling, mental health services and youth programs.

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