“Strangers are just family you have yet to come to know”— a proverb that sums up the three-day Footsteps of Frederic retreat that took place at the beautiful Casa Pallotti Camp in Millgrove, Victoria.

Footsteps of Frederic is an inaugural St Vincent de Paul Society program designed to give young people who are passionate about social justice an opportunity to grow as leaders through the Vincentian experience.

On 16 January 2018, 16 young people came together from all over southern Victoria to participate in a leadership retreat. Nervous murmurings quickly turned to friendly chatter and laughter as the group bonded over food, games and other group activities.

St Vincent de Paul Society’s Youth & Education Development Team, Cheyne Pettit, Felicity Walter, Sarah Taylor and Jacob Miller, were joined over the course of the retreat by other youth leaders. Each leader shared stories of their time with Vinnies and explained the numerous opportunities that young people have for service and leadership over the coming year.

“We experienced a real human connection through games and activities over the three days. Each game and activity taught us more about ourselves and we were able to draw parallels to real life,” said participant Lucy Lee.

Reflecting on what the retreat meant to her, fellow participant Sarah Castricum said: “My defining memory of camp is feeling safe. In that environment you can talk about anything and everything, and feel comfortable to be yourself, surrounded by like-minded people who are trying to achieve the same goals as you are in 2018.”

Several people spoke of the incredible bond that had been forged between the participants in such a short time. Many spoke of being committed to sharing that same warmth and love with people they will meet as they follow in the ‘footsteps of Frederic’. This was no throwaway line. The Society was born out of the youthful energy of its founder—Frederic Ozanam—the then 20-year-old university student, who was inspired by St Vincent de Paul’s legacy of favouring a practical, direct approach in dealing with poverty and injustice.

A reinvigoration of Frederic’s vision, the retreat has a clear aim to engage a new, youthful generation.

During the last night of the retreat, participants were asked to encapsulate in one word their time together. The one word that came up time and again? Family.

Isobelle Morgan
Footsteps of Frederic participant
Dear Friends,

I can’t believe that my four-year term as the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria’s State President has finally come to a close. What a journey and privilege. I have seen many programs and initiatives grow and develop, and I have also seen the challenges of future-proofing the Society.

I am proud of how the Society has responded to need within the community over the past four years, especially the initiation of new programs, such as Matthew’s Offering, a wonderful co-initiative between the Society and St Vincent’s Hospital that assists rural patient families with practical needs, such as accommodation and vouchers, as well as face-to-face support.

Our collaboration with CatholicCare, in which we provide practical and pastoral assistance for refugee families in and around Dandenong, continues to change lives.

The reformation of Middle Park and St Francis conferences has ensured a more streamlined approach to providing assistance in and around Melbourne’s CBD and the inner suburbs. We continue our work in prison ministry supporting people as they prepare to re-enter the community, too.

In the last financial year, we have been quick to respond to the rising costs of education by supporting families so their children can fulfill their right to an education. We are also extending our bursary and scholarship funds, and more and more conferences are getting on board.

The Vinnies Soup Van Program continues to provide valuable face-to-face support—and a delicious meal—on the streets of Melbourne and beyond. The Vinnies CEO Sleepouts continue to be part of the solution in raising much-needed funds.

Through support and companionship the Compeer program continues to improve the lives of people living with disability in parts of Melbourne and Bendigo. Our Vinnies Shops go from strength to strength, too—with 11 new shops opening in the past four years, bringing Victoria’s total number to 108.

Of course, I could not have done this job without the enormous support I received from the entire State Council, the Society’s CEO Sue Cattermole, my Executive Assistant, Tracey Thomas, our employees, and our marvellous members and volunteers. My most sincere personal thanks to my wonderful wife Helen, too.

I’m indebted to Monsignor Tony Ireland and Fr Tony Kerin for their ongoing spiritual guidance. Throughout my time as State President they have reminded me to keep asking the tough questions: Are we where we need to be? Are we responding adequately to diverse needs? Are our people appropriately skilled and trained?

While it’s with sadness that I say goodbye, I also leave with great optimism for the future. I believe that the Society will continue to respond compassionately and creatively to need, and is well placed to bravely face any challenges ahead to ensure that its spirit and vision remain vibrant.

Michael Liddy
State President

PRICELESS FIND RETURNS HOME

It might be an unassuming little book, but it comes with a wealth of history and a touch of mystery. Simply titled Manual of The Society of St Vincent de Paul, the leather-bound book found its way to St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria’s central office—Gerald Ward House—thanks to the generosity of Marise Henderson, a member of the East Bentleigh Conference.

There’s a very good reason its arrival was met with big expectations and even bigger smiles. Dated 1851—three years before the Society’s inception in Australia—and translated from French into English, this version of the Society’s reference book is one of the earliest, published in London 18 years following the establishment of the first conference or branch of St Vincent of Paul in Paris.

This version, which came with the hallowed seal of approval from an ‘L. Buquet, the Vicar General of the Arch-Dioceeses of Paris’, also boasts a ‘tableau of conferences’ of the time. The ‘tableau’ lists the Society’s conferences of the time in Europe (mainly in France), Algeria, Canada and Mexico.

Touchingly, written in a fluid cursive script on the edition notice page is the name ‘Charles Fleming, Derry’, Marise’s grandfather.

“Mum had a lot of old books that were my grandfather’s when he was a boy,” Marise said. “He was an avid reader and this was among his books. He grew up in Ireland and died in 1950, I think he was 78 when he died. He was an interesting man, and had his own business, as a merchant tailor. My grandfather was a very principled man and a committed Vincentian.”

“This is a very important find,” said State President Michael Liddy. “I would suspect not every member at the time would have had such a book because, of course, not everyone had the luxury of education. It evolved in Australia into what’s called simply The Manual. Nowadays we have The Rule, which codifies things, but back then The Manual was more explanatory.”

Marise and her husband Robert have generously donated the historical document to the Society.

“The interest from National Council has been incredible,” said Michael. “It’s a priceless find and we’re extremely grateful to Marise and Robert for bequeathing us this valuable legacy.”

After conservation, this historical book will be displayed in a new cabinet in the reception area of Gerald Ward House, Box Hill.

THANK YOU MICHAEL
RISING SCHOOL COSTS DON’T ADD UP

In February this year, the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria launched a new campaign aimed at addressing the rising costs of education.

The Back to School campaign was in direct response to The Society’s recent report Back to School – The Real Costs which showed an unprecedented need for school-related expenses across Victoria.

During the period of December 2016 – June 2017, conferences and regions across Victoria provided almost $300,000 worth of education-related expenses.

The report also showed that many families that had met their education expenses were unable to cover the costs of daily needs, such as utilities, phone bills, transport and medical expenses.

If you would like to learn more or support the appeal please go to: https://www.vinnies.org.au/backtoschoolappeal
PRAYERS ARE REQUESTED FOR...

Deceased members, volunteers, family and friends

- Annette Atkinson, former member, Syndal Conference
- Maria Bakker, member, Dandenong North Women’s Conference
- Vince Connellan, member & volunteer, Echuca Conference & Vinnies Echuca
- Joyce Cotchin, former member, Sunbury Conference
- Matthew Coughlan, member, Pascoe Vale Conference
- Val Dunn, member, Glen Iris Conference & former State Vice-President
- Rose Galea, former member, Brunswick West Conference
- Dunstan Girton, volunteer, Berwick Soup Van
- Sr Joy Hanrahan, former membr, Moe Conference
- Arthur (Frank) Hillas, member, Ascot Vale Conference
- Stephen Hutchins, former member, Airport West Conference
- Paul Kirsch, member, Port Melbourne Conference
- Connie Mabilia, member, Wonthaggi Conference
- Bill Madden, former member, Belmont Conference
- Cyril Mahon, former member, Rosebud Conference
- Stan Naylor, former member, Audit Risk & Compliance Committee
- Joan Plostins, former volunteer, Box Hill Call Centre
- Kath Richter, member, Brunswick Conference
- Kathy Rohan, former member, Keysborough & Dandenong Conferences, and former Dandenong Regional President
- John Wilson, former president and member, Williamstown Conference, and former president, Altona Regional Council

Please email any requests for prayers to our Support Services team at support.services@svdp-vic.org.au

HANGING UP THE APRON

With more than 43 years of service between them, soup van ‘Vannies’ Walter Valles and Ken Solomon* have recently hung up their aprons for the last time. Both men spent their final years with the vans in the kitchen making the soup.

They say Melbourne of the mid to late 1990s was a very different place to Melbourne of today.

“There were 40 or 50 people, mainly single men, who were referred from the parish or council social workers who let us know that they’d appreciate a visit,” said Ken.

For Walter who had grown up in India, what he saw on the streets was both “shocking and familiar”.

“In India I’d seen all manner of begging and poverty, so to see this in a place like Melbourne was quite extraordinary.”

Both men are driven by social justice (Ken was a staunch union man) and were drawn to the van’s unofficial mantra of “Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement”.

While some faces have faded since from memory, there have been, of course, a number of people whose lives intersected—even if only briefly—with theirs.

“There was one guy who used to come Monday nights and he was well dressed and well spoken,” Ken recalls. “I guessed that he was a professional man who had made a mistake, maybe spent some time in prison. He’d lost his family and was living alone and looked forward to our meetings. He really left a mark on me.”

“I still can’t forget one young women,” says Walter. “Elizabeth. That was her name. She was a frail young thing I met—just once. She seemed so vulnerable.”

It’s not always clear when it’s best to stop doing what you love, but for both men being on the vans was never about them—it was about challenging the causes of human injustice.

As a secondary school teacher and counsellor, Walter had introduced streams of students to the vans. “It was a great education for them,” he says. “It was life, and not how they knew it.”

Ken is buoyed by the fact that Kevin Campbell, a friend whom he inducted some years before, took over as the Monday night supervisor. “The best thing I did,” says Ken, “was recruit Kevin.”

Their advice to anyone considering volunteering on the vans? “Think of each person you serve as your lost brother or sister,” says Walter. “It’ll help you love them just that little bit more.”

*Walter, Tuesday night Fitzroy Soup Van, 20 years. Ken, Monday night Footscray Soup Van, 23 years.

TRARALGON CONFERENCE

177 YEARS OF SERVICE

Here stands an accumulated 177 years of service to the Society of St Vincent de Paul Victoria—Charlie Medhurst, Kevin Jones, Brian Doyle, the latter whose retirement from St Michael’s Conference, Traralgon, was marked by a morning tea late last year. Brian was thanked for his 20 years in service to the conference.

EMAIL MEDIA@SVDP-VIC.ORG.AU TO SHARE YOUR STORY IDEAS
On 26 January, Australia Day, the doors of Government House were opened to the public. This much anticipated annual event saw thousands of people lining up to wander through rooms not normally open, such as the magnificent ballroom, and enjoy a picnic on the lawns.

Once again the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria was present at the invitation of its patron, The Honourable Linda Dessau AC, Governor of Victoria. The annual event is an occasion to promote our great work and raise some much needed funds. The Governor also mingled with the crowd and happily posed for photos with some of our wonderful volunteers. Pictured right are soup van volunteers Shannon Joyce and Br Doug Walsh with the Governor and His Honour Judge Anthony Howard.

A big thank you to all the volunteers who generously gave their time to help spread the word about the Society’s services (in particular the soup vans) and gave out bottles of cold water (kindly donated by IGA) in exchange for a gold coin donation.

On Saturday 24 February the election of the new State President for the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria was held.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the election process.

The successful nominee was Kevin McMahon, who has been a member of the Society for over 11 years, including time serving as a member of State Council from 2013 – 2017. Please join us in congratulating Kevin on his appointment to this important leadership role within our organisation and for his willingness to dedicate time to supporting our mission and our members across Victoria.

In his vision statement, Kevin shared: “I have always felt that our most important role, and very reason for being, is to meet the needs of those we serve. To do this, we need to be able to deal with all calls for help and to provide for widely varying types of assistance.”

During the next month, outgoing State President Michael Liddy will be providing a handover and mentorship for Kevin – his role will take effect from Sunday 25 March 2018. There will be a final farewell celebration and Mass for Michael in the Gerald Ward House chapel on Tuesday 27 March.
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AWARDS TO THANK VOLUNTEERS

The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria recently held its Service Awards to officially thank volunteers who have given five years or more to the Society.

Volunteers who celebrated more than 25 years of service were presented with framed certificate of appreciation. Those with more than 40 years of service received a signed letter from CEO Sue Cattermole and State President Michael Liddy.

The Vinnies Shop in Camperdown celebrated an impressive 222 years of collective voluntary service—Margaret Patterson (49 years), Margaret Fleming, Genevieve McMillan (both 44 years), Heather Vagg (43) and Anne Mahony (42). The milestone was marked in the Camperdown Chronicle.

The Service Awards are given out to volunteers across the Society’s various programs annually.

SOMETHING ABOUT SUSAN

Former Vice President of the Western Bulldogs Football Club and new St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria patron, Susan Alberti, dropped by Vinnies Brunswick to meet the volunteers and learn more about the Society.

At the shop Ms Alberti was met by St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria CEO, Sue Cattermole, and St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria General Manager Retail, Jeff Antcliff. She also chatted to Shop Manager, Dale Munro, as well as with several volunteers who were more than happy to strike a pose with Ms Alberti out the front of the Brunswick shop.

WE ENDEAVOUR TO INCLUDE AS MANY ARTICLES AS POSSIBLE IN EACH ISSUE OF SOCIETY NEWS. YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE WELCOME. PLEASE FORWARD TO: MEDIA@SVDP-VIC.ORG.AU

BIG TICK FOR VINNIES OAKLEIGH

Last month, the State Member for Oakleigh, Steve Dimopolous, dropped into Vinnies Oakleigh for a morning tea held to celebrate the shop and its wonderful volunteers.

During the presentation, Mr Dimopolous thanked Vinnies volunteers for all the work they do helping the local community.

“This is such a bright, well-maintained and well-stocked shop that you can absolutely get lost in it and, of course, I’d be very happy to shop here,” he said.

“Even the background music is great, but the most important thing is the work you do and how every dollar you raise in the shop goes towards helping someone struggling in our local community.”

“I loved visiting. Vinnies volunteers do outstanding work. Thank you to all the staff and a very special thank you to the volunteers who give week in, week out.”

CALENDAR DATES

- Back to School Appeal
  29 January to 2 May 2018
- 2018 Ozaman Conversation
  Thursday 26 April 2018, 6.30pm-7.45pm
  Catholic Leadership Centre, 576 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne
- 2018 Vinnies CEO Sleepout
  Thursday 21 June 2018
  University of Melbourne, Parkville Campus, Underground Carpark
- A Call to Serve — 2018 Chapter
  Saturday 15 September 2018
- Annual General Meeting
  Saturday 20 October 2018
- Thanksgiving Mass
  Tuesday 13 November 2018
  St Francis Church, Melbourne

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