

The Record

Autumn 2022

 St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*





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The 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.

This logo represents the hand of Christ that blesses the cup, the hand of love that offers the cup, and the hand of suffering that receives the cup.

Our Strategic Goals: Spirituality and Membership, Our Advocacy, Our Governance and Leadership, Our Work Together, Our Sustainability

The Record is published regularly each year by the National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

National Council
PO Box 243
Deakin West, ACT, 2600

Phone: 02 6202 1200
Email: media@svdp.org.au
Web: vinnies.org.au
Editor: Toby oConnor
Design: Damon Carr
damon.com.au

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia acknowledges that we are on Aboriginal land. We pay respects to all traditional custodians. This publication may contain images of deceased members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are used with the greatest respect and appreciation.

Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the publishers.

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.



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Easter in the words of Pope Francis

Easter brought radical news for all the world

‘Easter is the event that brought radical news for every human being, for history and for the world: the triumph of life over death; it is the feast of reawakening and of rebirth.

Let us allow our lives to be conquered and transformed by the Resurrection!’

– Pope Francis, [Regina Cæli, 6th April 2015](#)

To celebrate Easter is to allow Jesus to triumph

‘To celebrate Easter is to believe once more that God constantly breaks into our personal histories, challenging our “conventions”, those fixed ways of thinking and acting that end up paralyzing us. To celebrate Easter is to allow Jesus to triumph over the craven fear that so often assails us and tries to bury every kind of hope.’

– Pope Francis, [Homily, 31st March 2018](#)

(Selected by Greg Ryan, Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner, Lismore Central Council St Vincent de Paul Society NSW)

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Your input is appreciated

The Record is the national magazine of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, produced quarterly at the National Council office in Canberra by our Secretariat staff with input from Vinnies people around Australia.

In the previous issue we invited reader feedback about content and were pleased to see that responses were extremely positive. We also noted a rise in subscription numbers, many of them facilitated by scanning the QR code.

With the aim of making *The Record* even better we welcome comments and editorial suggestions. Please contact us through admin@svdp.org.au

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Scan this code to receive an email link to *The Record* every third month.



On the cover... Joy Bowen, Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner, Matthew Talbot Hostel, Woolloomooloo, Sydney with one of Stephen Corry’s remarkable paintings of the life of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the founding of St Vincent de Paul Society. The work was commissioned from Stephen, a recognised artist and a companion of Vinnies, from funds raised on *HMAS Adelaide*, a Royal Australian Navy ship whose chosen charity is the Matthew Talbot Hostel. Full story on page 22.

Leadership is a focus in this election year

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

Over the course of 2021 I had many reasons to reflect on the concept of leadership.

Some leadership examples were positive and inspiring: seeing individuals and groups stepping up to lead their cohorts or organisations through the challenges of COVID-19, and a number of our female advocates, including journalists, leading the charge against gendered violence and mistreatment in the halls of power and workplaces around the country.

Disappointingly, some instances of leadership were shown to be lacking, with people in positions of power declining to take responsibility or to use their influential powers for good.

In the St Vincent de Paul Society we subscribe to a servant leader model of leadership. Following Christ's example, our model of leadership involves putting the needs of others before yourself; uplifting and empowering others and encouraging them to use their unique talents and capacities in the service of the poor.

The Rule makes it clear that the Society is concerned not only with alleviating need, but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it and working to eliminate the root causes of poverty and disadvantage.

We are called to look towards sustainable development and protection of the environment for future generations; to see social justice issues from the perspective of those who suffer from injustice; to speak on behalf of those who are ignored; to oppose discrimination; and to strive to change attitudes and speak out against unjust legislation and economic conditions.



Claire Victory

With this in mind National Council has formulated a suite of election policies which we believe can contribute to making Australia a fairer country if implemented – in full, or even in part – by this or any future government. National Council is grateful to the small but passionate team in the National Secretariate, which has put considerable energy into this project and is continuing to support Society members nationally to advocate for our policies in the lead-up to the election.

The Society's policy positions are informed by the experiences of our members and their interactions with companions. They draw strongly on Catholic Social Teaching principles and are supported by evidence-based analysis of social policy.

The five pillars were developed by National Council, including the State and Territory Council Presidents, in collaboration with the National Council Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network.

Our policies are to –

- Increase affordable housing options and address homelessness;
- Provide an adequate safety net; Assist people seeking asylum;

- Support First Nations people;
- and Improve job security and assist the long-term unemployed.

There is also an overarching tax reform policy aimed at providing the necessary funding for fostering economic justice and better life opportunities across the Australian community.

Our policies for Federal Election 2022 are described in more detail in the article on pages 16-17. We see these policies as valuable tools for members across the country to draw on when advocating on behalf of the Society in the lead-up to this year's poll.

At its core, as confirmed by the writings of our founders and other luminaries, the St Vincent de Paul Society is all about people, and this is the continuing focus of this publication.

Those populating the pages of this first edition of *The Record* for 2022 include our companions, members and office-bearers, retail and other special works volunteers, and our staff. As a trusted national organisation with a grassroots presence, the Society is well placed to gain vital support from political leaders, whether they be incumbent or aspiring, in government or in opposition or on the crossbench.

In the lead-up to the election, and at all times, let us keep in mind our values and our mission to strive for justice. As we commit to fearlessly advocating on behalf of those who struggle to be heard, let us consider the qualities of those who seek to lead and whether they have what it takes to help build a more just and compassionate society. **R**

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. She is a Member of the Plenary Council.

Celebrating the life of Blessed Rosalie Rendu

On 7 February this year the Society and the Daughters of Charity remembered, commemorated and hopefully celebrated the life and contribution of one of our founders Bl. Rosalie Rendu through the 166th anniversary of her death, in the year 1856.

Sr Rosalie was a significant voice of influence for young university students in the 1830s, especially that of one Frederic Ozanam. In her lifetime she provided a great example of humility, compassion, diligence and wise counsel, possibly essential values for this Board going forward, these values led her to do incredible work with those suffering in the depths of poverty.

During her time in the District where she worked for over 50 years Rosalie was a nurse, a justice of the peace, a catechist for the street children, and even a peacemaker between revolutionaries. 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 was a counsellor and advisor to many.

Reading from the Song of Songs

“Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep love away.

If one were to give all the wealth of one’s house to obtain love,

Love would be utterly belittled”

With one hand she received from the rich, with the other she gave to the poor. She became known as the “good mother of all”. Sr Rosalie influenced, encouraged, supported and assisted Frederic Ozanam and his companions to work with the marginalised.

Because Rosalie’s good work had made her a recognised household



name, the new group of university students gained instant respect which they would not have had otherwise. This was invaluable to the beginnings of the Society and through this the good works of serving Christ in the poor in the Society truly began.

There is much that Sister Rosalie can teach us. She is attributed with saying ‘Never have I prayed so well as in the streets’, and this a reminder that even as we give, we receive. Sister Rosalie encourages us that we are not superior as we go into the homes of people who are experiencing disadvantage, that we have as much to learn as to teach, and that there is value in every human being. Even as we work we are blessed, and our spirituality is not only applied by our good works, it is also nurtured by those good works.

Rosalie counselled Frederic, and I believe she continues to counsel us today, with these lasting words...

‘God has already touched your heart, or you would not be giving

up your precious day to serve the disadvantaged. And, because you see Christ in his poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility as their servant.

‘Always remember, that if we had been through the hardships they have had to meet, if our childhood had been one of constant want, perhaps, we too, would have given way to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter.

‘So, be kind and love, for love is your first gift

to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you bring them.’

May these words of Rosalie guides us again today as Members, Volunteers and Staff in our deliberations and discernments working in the service of love, joy, respect, hope and justice being enlivened and inspired by the determination and courage of those that we serve.

To this we pray, Blessed Rosalie Rendu, through your closeness with Christ and by your example of humility, compassion and love for those most vulnerable continue to guide us as you led Frederic and his young companions.

May our service be open to the presence of Christ listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and may our actions, decisions and deliberations reflect this same profound love for those we serve and those we walk with in this service.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen! R

Honouring a lifetime of good works

BY ROBERT CROSBY

Maurice O'Donoghue speaks with more than a hint of humility when reflecting upon his years of service as a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

'I have just hung around a little longer.'

Honoured with Life Membership at St Mary's Church, Corowa in December 2021 in recognition of his 60 years of service, the 83-year-old Wahgunyah farmer has performed a variety of roles over that time, most notably acting as secretary of the local Corowa Conference for the past 25 years.

Developing a unique ability to succinctly reproduce handwritten and typed meeting minutes twice a month in his role as secretary, the self-described 'run-of-the-mill' member has seldom missed a meeting since joining the Society on 11 December 1961.

Born in 1939, without marrying, Maurice has lived on the border of the Murray River for most of his days while spending his young working life carrying out jobs on the railways and shearing sheep for 30 years.

Following the passing of his father in 1990, Maurice returned to his family farm where he continues to tend the land to this day. Through all that Maurice has seen over the years, attending Conference meetings and carrying out jobs as a Vinnies member has been a constant.

First attracting the attention of the Corowa Conference president through his involvement with the local church and Young Christian Workers organisation, Maurice was invited to join Vinnies as a 22-year-old.

'My first job was periodically mowing an old lady's lawn,' he recalls.



Past Corowa, NSW Presidents (l-r) Arthur Campbell, Kevin Freeman & Peter Bates, Secretary Maurice O'Donoghue, and President Paul Lemmon.

'I never thought at the time whether she donated any money for this duty. When you're young you're idealistic and it gave one pleasure to be helping people.'

Among the other tasks he has performed during his six decades include visiting the needy in their homes, hospitals and aged care, cutting and delivering firewood, helping with the production of Christmas hampers annually, clearing out donation bins, fundraising and much more.

In reflecting on the impact Vinnies is able to make in communities every day, Maurice views individuals coming together for collective good as a key factor.

'One gets a certain satisfaction when one has arranged something that makes the recipient better off...'

'The saying is that one person alone can only do so much, but a group is able to achieve a lot more. Experience is a great teacher, and a group of people are most likely to have much more than an individual. Also, one does more collectively because one doesn't want to let the team down.'

While his role within the Society is less consistent from earlier days, Maurice can still be found each Sunday helping to put away donated goods and fulfilling his duties as Conference secretary.

'Now, my main thought is to allow those at the 'Coalface' to tackle the main work and I will be a back-up man when required.'

Beloved by his fellow Conference members for all that he has done over the course of 60 years, Maurice remains humble as ever in the recognition of serving those in need within the community and supporting fellow members.

'I cannot say that there's been any overwhelming moments, but naturally one gets a certain satisfaction when one has arranged something that makes the recipient better off.'

'Of course, working with generous people is itself a great reward. I've heard it said that we need the Society as much as it needs us, and I agree wholeheartedly.' **R**

Robert Crosby is Communications Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Food vouchers and hampers are no longer enough

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Mark Gaetani, State President St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania, inherited not only his Italian-born father's surname but the ability to respond quickly when opportunity, or need, arises. This paternal trait is serving the Society well.

First, some family history. Luigi Gaetani was born in Italy in 1932 and migrated to Australia at the age of 19, arriving at George Town on Tasmania's north coast where he spotted a group of similarly aged locals on the beach. One young lady, whose name he learned was Edna, caught his eye and before long she would also capture his heart.

Mark Gaetani was born in George Town, a company town based around heavy industry – Comalco and BHP – and dependent on migrant labour. He completed primary and early high school studies at the Star of the Sea in George Town before entering St Patrick's in Launceston for his senior years, moving on to study at the University of Tasmania's campus. He was awarded an MBA in 2011, at which time he was working in the regional and agri banking area of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

Mark's CV confirms that he is someone who knows how many beans make five: Manager – Lending Services, Farm Finance Liaison Officer, Credit Controller, Corporate Services Manager and, just five weeks before our interview, taking up a position in agricultural risk mitigation with a Dutch international.

While he'd always understood money Mark was less well acquainted with St Vincent de Paul Society, apart from knowing we run op shops – doesn't everyone?



Volunteers helping out at a Tasmanian 'dining with friends' program.

'That's all most outsiders know about Vinnies,' Mark says, 'unless you've been in a situation to need the Society's help. Mercifully, I've not been, but I know plenty of folk who have.'

In 2016, when Mark was attending a Launceston men's group, one of the company asked out of the blue whether he might be interested in joining Vinnies State Council as Treasurer.

'To put it mildly, I was surprised. The State Council President had apparently asked her Vice President to "scout around" and see if he might find someone suitable for the role. I met the President and agreed to take it on.

'I loved it from day one and found that the values of the Society really took hold of me emotionally. I really feel it's a calling and have become involved ever since.'

In late 2018 Mark was nominated and endorsed for the position of Tasmania State President, a rapid move worthy of his fast-acting dad, and he regards his appointment as 'a wonderful honour and, of course, a tremendous challenge.'

The Society's structure in the state comprises of three regional councils (Southern, Northern and North-West), with 28 conferences and around 258 members.

Volunteer numbers sit at around 1000, their commitments including the running of Vinnies shops, food vans and a popular support program focused on Companions known as Dining with Friends, which Mark speaks about highly.

As is the case Australia-wide, a situation made more complicated by COVID-19, the attracting and retaining of new members and volunteers is a major challenge.

'One approach paying dividends is



Members and staff at the opening and blessing of Vinnies Tasmania's Community Hub at Somerset.



Mark Gaetani

looking at our volunteer base, who have been exposed to our Mission and Vision, and seeing if they might be interested is becoming a member or associate member,' Mark says, giving a special shout-out to the state's 'very active' Membership Manager Melissa White.

'Melissa, who's both an employee and a Vincentian, has recently recruited 14 new members on the North-West coast alone. She always seems to be in her car, dropping by our community hubs, chatting with volunteers and family members, seeing if we might find a suitable slot for them.'

When it comes to his own mission and vision, Mark Gaetani tends to think big, as important as individual assistance for companions can be.

'I've set high expectations on our Council and the management

team... we can no longer just rely on food vouchers and hampers. The challenges are so great, especially homelessness and the lack of affordable housing, and to succeed with major services and programs we need to collaborate with other organisations in similar fields, including state and local government.'

This has included the establishment of three Vinnies community hubs (Launceston, Somerset and Smithton) in buildings that were formerly shops. Partners include Catholic Care Tasmania, Presbyterian Care and Uniting Care, with connections to community centres.

Perhaps the most ambitious success story has been a major social housing collaboration with Centrecare Evolve Housing and state government to develop 20 one and two-bedroom homes in

Smithton. The development is scheduled for completion in June 2023, with tenants to take up their residency soon afterwards.

'These initiatives, modern as they seem, are all underpinned by The Rule,' Mark stresses, 'namely the principle that no service should be considered foreign. The needs of our companions are changing... becoming more complex and demanding, and the pressures are greatly inhibiting their opportunity for the kinds of social and economic involvement the rest of us enjoy.'

'I want to expand their prospects, and in the spirit of 'working together' I believe we can do that when our members, volunteers and staff are working together for better outcomes.' **R**

Robin Osborne is National Publications Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Seeking a ‘communion of communities’

In October 2021, the Catholic Church in Australia gathered for the first Assembly of the Plenary Council to be held since the second Vatican Council. The members were commissioned and participated in formation sessions in preparation towards fulfilling their role.

*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first Assembly was conducted online, with some attendees in the same room (in Adelaide) participating via Teams. On 8 December 2021, the document *First Assembly Proposals from Small Groups and Individual Members* was [published](#). The second assembly will be held in Sydney in July 2022.*

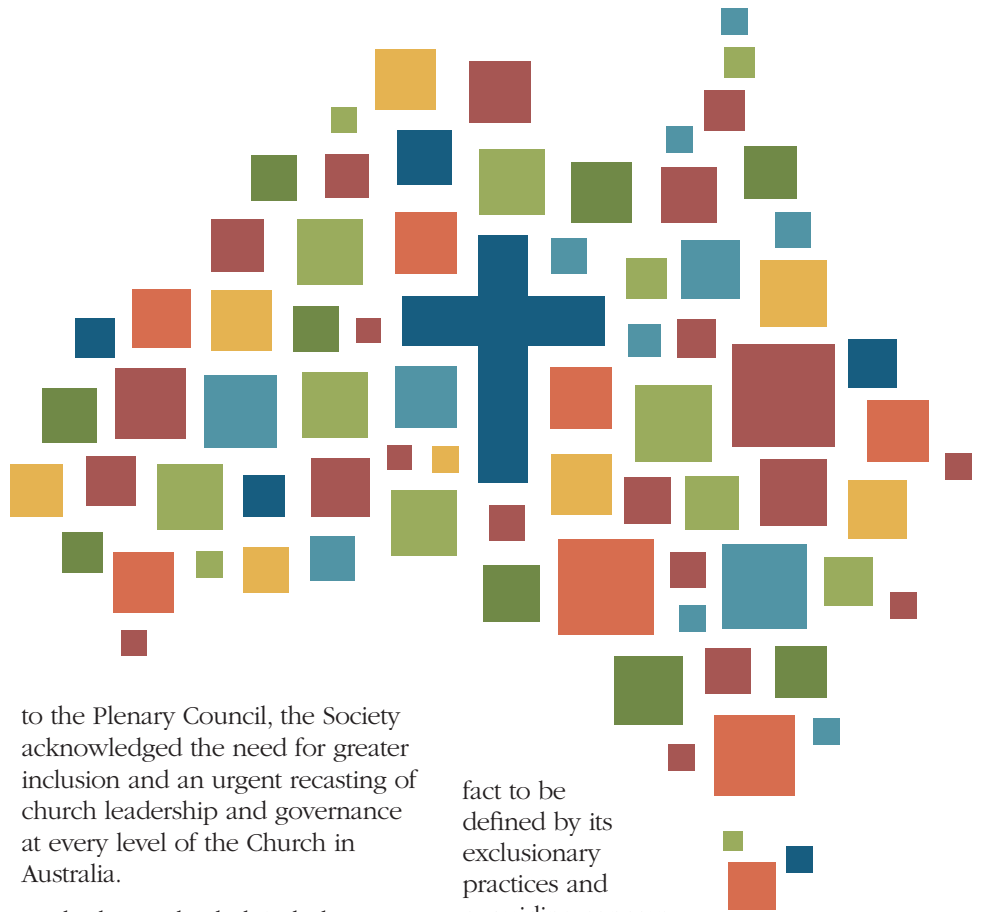
CLAIRE VICTORY, National President, St Vincent de Paul Society and a member of the Plenary Council, reflects on the body’s work to date.

Prior to the First Assembly of the Plenary Council in October last year, I did not realise what a huge moment the Plenary would be for the Society and the Church in Australia.

Like many others, I am not yet sure that the Plenary itself will achieve much in the way of actual, significant outcomes. However, it has become clear over the past six months that the Plenary Council has unleashed something that will be impossible to simply push back into the box.

Around the Plenary, and energised and inspired by it, there is a whole dialogue that shows no signs of abating, and those conversations, and the relationships being formed through them, are powerful. They give me a real sense of hope that the Church will emerge a better, more welcoming and more inclusive entity in the near future.

In the National Council’s [submission](#)



to the Plenary Council, the Society acknowledged the need for greater inclusion and an urgent recasting of church leadership and governance at every level of the Church in Australia.

As the largest lay-led Catholic organisation in Australia the St Vincent de Paul Society has a crucial role to play in the restoration of our church’s credibility.

I feel this responsibility keenly and am both reminded of it and motivated to commit to it every day that I am approached, as I have been so often before, during and since the First Assembly, by people keen to thank the Society for our work in speaking up for those who are marginalised in our community.

I have spoken with many Catholics who have felt shunned by the Church, or who cannot in good conscience remain involved in the same way as previously because they or their loved ones have been hurt by discriminatory actions. Those of us who share these concerns despair that the Church that should be leading the way in love and good works seems in

fact to be defined by its exclusionary practices and overriding concern for itself.

The Plenary process has shown that having a particular title doesn’t necessarily make you a true leader; so many Catholics out there want the Church – their Church – to be leading the way in love, compassion and advocating on behalf of those who are otherwise shunned, neglected or punished because of their gender or sexuality, their refugee status or their poverty.

To transform itself, the Church must strive to be more representative of the entire community it seeks to serve. We want our Church to be known for its commitment to the poor, not as passive recipients of our benevolence but as people central to the Church’s life and mission.

The Society strongly advocates for a Church that condemns clericalism and promotes a more transparent

and accountable model where hierarchical structures give way to shared leadership, where wisdom is sought through a process of genuine dialogue and inclusive vision.

The Society has its own challenges on this front, and this National Council is working hard to improve our own governance and diversity at all levels, so that we may serve as an example to the Church and the community.

To that end, the National Council has been working with other like-minded organisations that are passionate about building a more inclusive church, committed to transparency and accountability.

In September, I contributed to the launch of *A Church for all: A guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond*. It's an inspiring record of two historic webinars hosted by the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform, attended by thousands, in the lead up to the first assembly of the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia. (Speech is [here](#))

Sr Joan Chittister, Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, Debra Zanella, Robert Fitzgerald and Professor Emeritus John Warhurst all articulate in different ways the yearning for a different way of "being church" in the 21st century.

It is packed with wisdom and insight, with brave and prophetic statements and observations. I hope it will be read widely by people who are hanging on by their fingernails.

As a Member of the Plenary Council I have contributed in my role as the National President in a number of ways.

Enlightened ideas were captured in the 17,500 submissions to the Plenary Council but were not necessarily reflected in the agenda.

The National Council's submission called for a paradigm shift from an authoritarian, hierarchical, patriarchal model of church to a communion of communities engaged in dialogue, discernment and decision making around both ecclesial and social concerns.

It also noted that to transform itself the church must strive to be more representative of the entire community it seeks to serve. It must address clericalism and promote a more transparent and accountable model where hierarchical structures give way to shared leadership and where wisdom is sought through a process of genuine dialogue and inclusive vision.

During the Plenary Council I contributed to a series of [webinars](#) produced by Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn in partnership with ACCCR. My particular focus was inclusion, particularly around the LGBTQIA+ community.

I contributed to the 'interventions' crafted in my small group discussions.

The thoughts expressed in this personal intervention were developed further in an [article](#) published in *Pearls and Irritations*.

In a webinar hosted by ACCCR following the Plenary Council I said too many people have been alienated because of the rigid application of dogma and canon law established in the last 200 years or so. This is especially so for young people, divorced and remarried Catholics and LGBTQIA+ people.

I hope the sentiment expressed through all these efforts will be reflected in the agenda for the second and final assembly of the Plenary Council in July this year.

I heard it said somewhere recently that it is worth remembering that Jesus was an "itinerant, unemployed Palestinian tradie". I wonder what he would make of the evolution of his church? **R**

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. She is a Member of the Plenary Council.

Links to relevant material from SVDP website:

- 18 November 2021: Media Release [Vinnies National President to join discussion panel on future of Catholicism in Australia](#)
- 26 October 2021: Article [Were the good old days in the Catholic Church really that good?](#)
- 10 September 2021: Media Release [Book Launch: Church is living and working with the poor](#)
- 9 September 2021: Speech [Book Launch: A Church for all – A guide to the Plenary Council and Beyond](#)
- 9 August 2021: Media Release [Vinnies National President to participate in historic Catholic Church Plenary Council meeting](#)
- 23 July 2021: Submission [National Council Submission to the Plenary Council](#)

‘Core principles’ of social Catholicism inspire new book

A fresh reflection on Catholic Social Teaching, the principles underpinning the St Vincent de Paul Society’s work for over 150 years, was launched on 19 January 2022 by National President Claire Victory. *Catholic Social Teaching: Dreaming as a Single Human Family* was written by theologian Dr John Honner and is now available on the National Council’s [website](#).

Launching the work Claire Victory said that in a world where individualism trumps the common good, it is worth reflecting on the core principles that motivated our forebears and inspire us still.

‘As Vincentians the dignity of every human being is at the core of our work,’ she said.

‘We oppose individualism as we commit to the common good. And we encourage the empowerment of people through participation at whatever level might be possible. We stand with others who share these values and above all we defend our priority for people living with the impact of the structural causes of poverty and disadvantage. In addition, we share the care of our common home.

‘Catholic Social Teaching is the collective name given to the church’s formal pronouncements – authorised by papal encyclicals – on matters of social structures and social justice since 1891.

‘It is grounded in the critical social questions of the day and draws on contemporary economics, and social and political sciences.

‘A lead founder of the Society, Frederic Ozanam, was a pioneer in articulating a Catholic response to capitalism and communism and was instrumental in shaping ‘social Catholicism’. The key features of Ozanam’s social Catholicism remain relevant today: the personal comes before the political: equality comes

before economy: and the sacred can be found in the secular.

Frederic Ozanam’s writings provided Pope Leo XIII with the foundations for the Papal encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which was the first social encyclical of the modern era in 1891.

‘In helping to shape a charitable organisation that was independent of clerical control, yet both profoundly Christian and absolutely lay, Ozanam not only gave the Vincentian spirit a new dimension but also anticipated the renewal of the Church conceived at the Second Vatican Council,’ Ms Victory said.

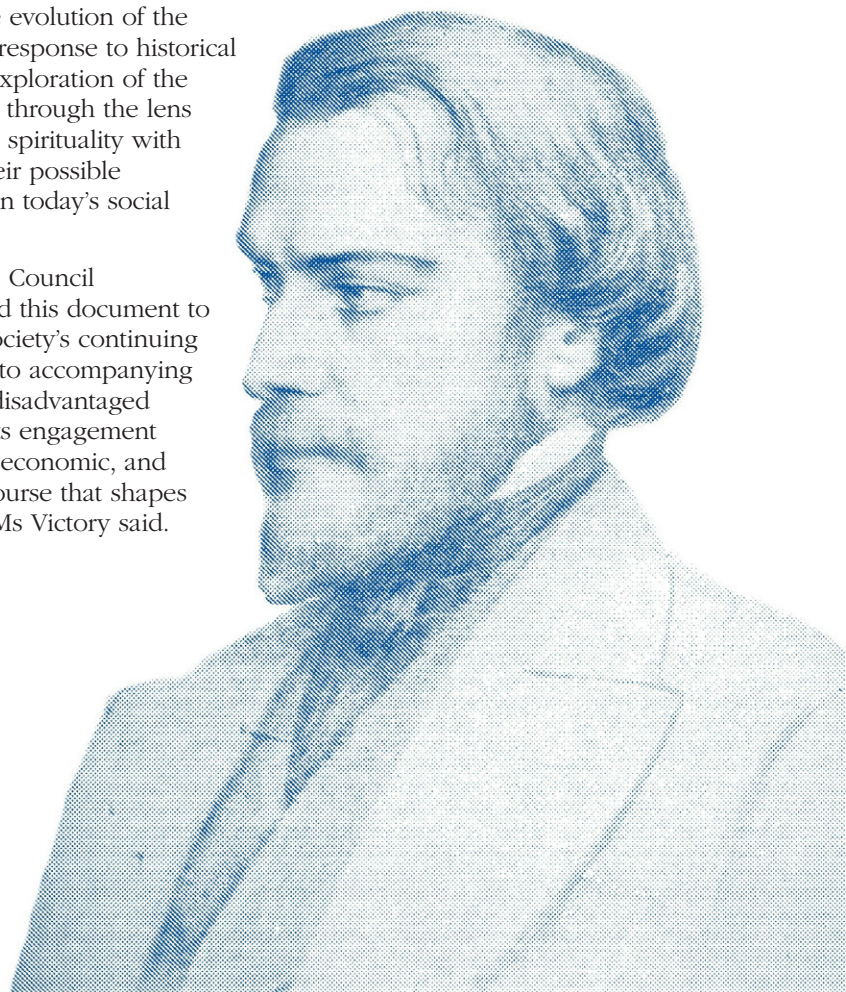
‘The Honner report visits Frederic Ozanam’s vision which influenced the formation of Catholic Social Teaching; the evolution of the principles in response to historical events; and exploration of the six principles through the lens of Vincentian spirituality with an eye on their possible applications in today’s social context.

‘The National Council commissioned this document to inform the Society’s continuing commitment to accompanying and serving disadvantaged people and its engagement in the social, economic, and political discourse that shapes our society,’ Ms Victory said.

Catholic Social Teaching Principles are...

1. The Dignity of the Human Person: Freedom to be
2. The Common Good: We are more connected than separate
3. Subsidiarity: Participation and empowerment
4. Solidarity: Intense effort
5. Preferential Option for the Poor: Our priority
6. Care for our common home: Dreaming as a single human family

Catholic Social Teaching: Dreaming as a Single Human Family is available [here](#). **R**



The Vincentian spirit amidst a global pandemic

BY MARIA NGUYEN

‘But I feel fine!’, the woman insisted, as she sat there inhaling the oxygen streaming out of her nasal prongs, the first of a variety of oxygenation devices that have become a cornerstone to COVID-19 treatment.

‘Do I really need to stay?’

‘I’m sorry, you really do need to stay,’ I would explain, calmly but firmly. ‘Your body simply won’t get enough oxygen otherwise. Your lungs are essentially failing because of the virus.’

I would have these sorts of conversations over and over, with patient after patient, as I worked through the latest COVID-19 wave as a junior doctor in a busy metropolitan hospital. My job was to assess patients who had presented to the Emergency Department and, if they were unwell enough, clerk them for a longer stay in hospital.

Community fatigue at the COVID pandemic has become more than palpable, and the fatigue experienced in our public hospital system, into the third year now, is overwhelming. Sick patients have appeared in an unrelenting march, filling the Emergency corridors as Victoria announced a Pandemic Code Brown.

Beds were sparse, and patients were shuttled around hospitals in an effort to find space. Family and friends were prohibited from visiting all but the sickest of their loved ones. Frustrations ran high.

As a somewhat lapsed Vincentian (home visitations and Kids Days Out had been replaced by stay-at-home orders and long hospital shifts), I couldn’t help but notice the similarities in the Vincentian Works that I’ve done in the past, and the medical work that I now do.

The populations are similar – in almost every way they are vulnerable. Disenfranchised, wary of authority, struggling to survive (literally gasping for air), they come – sometimes begrudgingly accepting help and care, and in the same breath accusing medical staff of withholding special treatments and cures, of not giving the full story.

Broken people trying to be saved by a broken system. Our “grassroots” public health service desperately looking to the government for strong leadership and change in a time of crisis.

The response? Often too little too late.

And then there’s the crippling effect of COVID illness on whole families. The descent into poverty, we are told, can begin with a single event, and can happen to anyone – someone injures themselves, and then loses their job. In this case, it’s a microscopic virus.

Entire family structures broke down as one or more family members became unwell and were hospitalised. Partners, siblings, parents and their children alike, admitted for the same illness but with varying degrees of severity. Over the past two years I’ve told a mother with only mild oxygen requirements that her daughter was intubated and critically unwell in Intensive Care. I told a parent that both their children needed to be transferred urgently to another hospital for life-saving treatment. I told a young man, practically a teenager, that despite maximal treatment, his father looked like he was dying of COVID illness. Could he visit his father? No – he was too unwell with COVID himself.

The ramifications that unfolded, including at times, bereavement, saw social work being engaged in new, complex ways. Regular multi-disciplinary meetings were

held for staff, in part to advise on problematic scenarios, and in part to debrief. Nurses learnt to use tablet devices to connect patients to their families, sometimes in heartbreaking situations.

As this pandemic recedes, the rising need for ongoing financial and social support for the survivors of COVID-19 will continue. In the end, it is the poorest and more vulnerable of our community that COVID-19 affects, and the need that arises from the pandemic can feel impossible to overcome. But hope prevails in the Vincentian spirit.

‘Let us do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands’... Frederic Ozanam knew that service to our Companions can be overwhelming at times, and spoke of our need as volunteers to not work beyond our means, to go gently. But, like the story of the first work – the nervous offering of some leftover wood to a widow – it is the dignity of the person that should remain foremost in our minds, reminding me of an old aphorism passed down through centuries of medicine: our role being ‘To cure sometimes, to relieve often, and to comfort always.’

And so just as Vincentians across the country continue to reassure those we visit, facing first time disadvantage, or another setback in the course of long-term adversity, I tell my patient, ‘You’re going to be okay. We’re going to give you all the treatment we can.’ I patiently answer all her questions. When she tells me she is unvaccinated, I don’t judge. And when she says, ‘Thank-you,’ I like to think it is not just for the treatment I offer but for simply being present with her, just as the Society continues to be present to our Companions. **R**

Dr Maria Nguyen is a medical practitioner and a member of St Vincent de Paul Society’s Spirit of Youth committee.

‘People are the most important thing...’

Maddy Forde addressed the 6 October 2021 session of the Assembly of the Plenary Council Plenary Council, focusing on the challenges facing young people at this time in history.

Maddy (Madeline) Forde's home is originally in Kaurna Country (Adelaide). She was educated in a Marist school and has spent the past six years working alongside young people for the Marist Brothers, De La Salle Brothers and Sacred Heart College in Youth Ministry.

She is currently residing in Bidjigal and Gadigal Country (Sydney) studying a Masters of Social Work, whilst working as a campus pastoral associate with the Australian Catholic University on Dharug Country (Blacktown), and as a support worker with people with disabilities.

Maddy says she is driven to redefine our perception of peripheries, and people on the margins, challenging the discourse to recognise everyone is at the centre of their own worlds: ‘So we accept the invitation to take the time to sit with and amongst people learning from them. By doing this we are providing a space in which everyone feels safe, heard and unconditionally loved.’

She has connected with First Nations communities as well as others in Cambodia, emphasising ethical engagement with reciprocal learning from communities to visitors. She feels privileged to be journeying with young people, walking alongside them, and watching them grow to be the best version of themselves whilst being confident leaders for the betterment of our world.

Now 25, Maddy Forde has been appointed to the international



Maddy Forde

youth advisory body established by the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. Her appointment was welcomed by the Archbishop of Adelaide Patrick O'Regan who said, ‘She is energetic, has a preferential option to stand with the marginalised and is a strong young woman of faith. She will make an invaluable contribution as she takes on this role.’

Maddy has facilitated national dialogue between young people and bishops at the Australian Catholic Youth Festival and is also a member of the Plenary Council for the Archdiocese of Adelaide.

Maddy Forde's address to the Plenary Council...

NIINA MARNI (Hello in Kaurna Language)

I speak from the unceded lands of the Bidjigal and Gadigal people, and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

I acknowledge my privilege but also recognise I am in a vulnerable position as a young female, speaking these words.

I don't have a theological

understanding or vocabulary, so I speak instead from a place of experience, where there is uncertainty and fear that the reality is not being accepted.

The reality of increasing mental health rates, the reality of young people facing increased insecurity in all areas of their lives, the reality of climate change,

the reality of the challenges our First Nations brothers and sisters encounter daily.

We forget at the core of these realities are people.

I look at the people who made me feel welcomed within the church, that fostered and supported my growth as a young woman with love, care, compassion, and role modelling to encounter everyone in our lives with love, love being the greatest gift we have to offer others.

I look at the people who made me feel safe, welcomed and gave me that ability to encounter the goodness of the faith, who have now left the church. I still see in them, the goodness, and the love they offer to others, and I still see God and the love of God, outside of the church walls.

It breaks my heart that the goodness they introduced me to, they no longer feel for themselves. But I understand because I feel the same tension.

I witness a church guarding tradition and choosing to ignore the pain they have caused, and still cause. Words are not enough

Membership and Conferences

because our actions offer no learnings. I chose to no longer use the word church as I feel we are so far from its core of love, and inclusion, it no longer has the same meaning.

I have listened to young people within our community who say they don't belong because of their gender and their age. I have witnessed young people excluded, and their future taken away, because of who they love.

Where in this, is the unconditional love I grew up hearing about?

What God do we show to young people in this? Are we really offering unconditional love, acceptance, and safety?

Where is our focus? Who is at the centre?

The answer for me is from a Maori proverb:

He aba te mea nui o te ao
What is the most important thing in the world?
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata
It is the people, it is the people, it is the people **R**

For more information on the Council visit plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au

Membership

There are three categories of membership of the Society. **Conference members** are those who belong to the grassroots groups within the Society known as conferences. They live their Catholic faith in action through the spirit of Christian charity. **Associate members** are those who are committed to the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who assist the work of the Society, but do not attend conference meetings. **Volunteer members** are those who respect the ethos, mission, aims and objects of the Society and who volunteer in any of the Society's works. Associate and Volunteer members are registered by procedures established by the relevant State or Territory Council. Please visit the [Become a Member](#) section of this website for more information.

Conferences

A conference can be established within any community such as a parish, town, suburb, school, university, workplace, ethnic or social group providing they are endorsed by an appropriate Council within the Society. Conference members meet regularly, usually weekly but at least fortnightly and no work of charity is foreign to them. Together they visit people in their homes, in hospitals, institutions or wherever else they may be found needing aid or comfort. Conference work is not limited to home visitation; members also meet and pray together at other times. To read more about the role of prayer in conferences please visit [Spirituality of the Society](#). **R**

Meet the National Council Board

NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Claire Victory

NATIONAL DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Warwick Fulton

SPIRITUAL ADVISER

Sr Therese Haywood DC

VICE PRESIDENT

Maurie Ryan

VICE PRESIDENT

Patrick Wallis

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Dennis Innes

SA STATE PRESIDENT

Brad Hocking

TAS STATE PRESIDENT

Mark Gaetani

VIC STATE PRESIDENT

Kevin McMahon

WA STATE REPRESENTATIVE

David Kennedy

Read more [here](#). **R**

From Vietnam to Vinnies... refugees give back to S.A. community



St Vincent de Paul Society S.A. President Brad Hocking, fellow Vincentians and members of the Vietnamese community with the donation.

The generosity of former refugees from South Australia's Vietnamese community is helping refugees and asylum seekers become job ready and obtain employment through a program developed by the Vinnies Refugee and Asylum Seeker Service.

Total contributions to the project reached \$100,000 and the funds will be used to expand a program providing English language tutoring, assistance with job applications, and financial support for training.

Hon. Tung Ngo MLC, co-chair and founder of the Vietnamese Boat People Monument Association, presented a donation of \$50,000 to the St Vincent de Paul Society S.A.

'Members of the South Australian Vietnamese community remember first-hand the plight of refugees,' Mr Ngo said.

'Australians such as Vinnies

(members) opened their arms to welcome me and thousands of other Vietnamese refugees after the fall of Saigon in 1975, and now we want to open our arms to today's refugees and help in any way we can.'

Mr Ngo fled communist Vietnam at the age of nine with his older sister and her young family, travelling on a small fishing boat across the sea with 32 other refugees. After a year and a half in a Philippines refugee camp they were accepted by Australia in 1981.

The first Vietnamese-born Member of the South Australian Parliament, Mr Ngo said he remembers the kindness and practical assistance given to him and other refugees by church groups such as Vinnies.

'Many Vietnamese were virtually destitute on arrival and faced an uphill battle finding work, while also trying to acclimatise and come to grips with the largely western

values in a strange new world,' he said at the cheque presentation ceremony at Kilburn.

'Four decades later asylum seekers and refugees face exactly the same challenges as we did.'

The Association had funds remaining after the completion of the monument honouring Vietnamese boat people, located at the corner of Victoria Drive and Kintore Ave, city.

St Vincent de Paul Society S.A. President Brad Hocking said Vinnies members were there to greet the Vietnamese refugees at the Pennington Migrant Hostel at Rosewater and played an important part in their resettlement as new Australians. **R**

A version of this story appeared in *The Southern Cross*, the official publication of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, in December 2021.

2022 Federal Budget and Reply

BY ROSE BEYNON

National Council's media release on the Federal Budget and reply outlined the Society's concerns about the lack of detail and practical solutions needed to address housing and homelessness and inadequate JobSeeker, DSP and Parenting Payment (Single).

Some announcements were welcomed in the budget strategies of the major parties, including one-off payments to pensioners and welfare recipients, one-off tax rebates for low and middle income earners, an additional 16,500 places for Afghan nationals, increased wages and standards in aged care, additional support for child care and constitutionally enshrining a Voice to Parliament.

However, members are witnessing the challenges faced by companions struggling with rising cost of living pressures and not being able to afford healthy food, pay their rent and utility bills and put fuel in their cars.

While financial assistance is always welcome, one-off payments do little to help people who are disproportionately at risk of poverty – those on JobSeeker, single parents, young people and people living with disability. And it won't lift 774,000 children out of poverty.

The Australian Government's [Infrastructure Plan 2021](#) for the first time identifies social housing and associated energy issues as part of social infrastructure. It notes that housing quality, supply and design are inadequate across the country and recommends increased investment and improvements to the standard of dwellings to address the growing shortfall of housing and provide a greater range of housing types.

Yet, of \$17.6 billion committed to



Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg with last year's Budget paper. This year's Budget, and the Opposition's reply, did not present adequate measures to assist Australians in real need.

infrastructure projects, not a single cent has gone towards increasing social and affordable housing.

While the First Home Guarantee Scheme has been extended, leading economists consider it is unlikely to offset the impact of deteriorating affordability and rising mortgage rates. Price caps also limit where purchases can be made.

[UNSW/ACOSS](#) research shows that rent increased to over 8 per cent by Q3, 2021 - the fastest rate of increase in over a decade and far ahead of wage growth (1.7 per cent). Regional rents surged by 12.4 per cent in the year to August 2021.

[National Shelter Australia's](#) research shows that there is currently no affordable rental housing in Australia for single pensioners, people on JobSeeker, pensioner couples and single part-time working parents also on benefits, apart from in regional South Australia.

Yet, no commitment was made to increase Commonwealth Rent

Assistance or to find a replacement for the National Rental Affordability Scheme, which funded 38,000 newly built rental homes for key workers and other disadvantaged renters to be leased at 75-80 per cent of market rates.

Finally, much has been made of the record low unemployment rate of 3.75 per cent but 'employment' is defined as working one hour or more in the reference week.

The reality is that underemployment and long-term unemployment are static and remain of concern, particularly when coupled with low and slow wage growth, which has failed to keep pace with cost of living pressures. Ongoing commitment to, and review of, well-targetted wage subsidies and vocational training programs is needed. So too, is a redefinition of casual work, with pathways to permanency implemented. **R**

Rose Beynon is National Director Policy and Research, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

The Society's Federal Election statement

BY ROSE BEYNON

St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council, in collaboration with State and Territory Council Presidents, the National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network, has developed a Federal Election Statement for use by members when advocating on behalf of the Society in the lead up to this year's Federal Election.

The Society's policy positions are informed by the experiences of our members, companions, volunteers and staff. They strongly draw on Catholic Social Teaching principles, and are qualified by Australia's evidence base on social policy.

There are many social justice issues that are close to the hearts of our members and, most importantly, that impact on companions. However, to make the documents accessible and effective in reaching their target audiences, National Council decided to hone its messaging to five key policies or 'asks'.

The theme of the Federal Election Statement is **A Fairer Australia** and the 'asks' are to:

Increase affordable housing options and address homelessness

- develop a 10-year National Housing Strategy
- establish a \$10 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund
- increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 50 percent
- reinstate the National Rental Affordability Scheme
- fund the National Low Income Energy Productivity Program
- develop national minimum standards for renters and landlords



PHOTO: DANIEL MORTON ON UNSPLASH

Provide an adequate safety net

- monitor poverty and inequity
- establish an independent advisory body to advise Government on levels of income support payments
- increase the base rate of working age payments
- index income support payments biannually in line with wage growth and CPI, and
- increase the earnings threshold of income support payments

Assist people seeking asylum

- accept an annual minimum of 20,000 refugees, excluding the Community Support Program
- recognise the ongoing need to offer additional places above the annual humanitarian intake in response to crises as they arise
- end the fast-track assessment

process, temporary protection visas and offshore processing

- fund an adequate safety net for people seeking asylum
- support family reunion for all refugees
- make detention a last resort. Let asylum seekers to live in the community while their immigration status is resolved.

Support First Nations people

- commit to the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart by constitutionally recognising First Nations people and then implementing a Voice to Parliament
- raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years of age
- fund Aboriginal-controlled organisations to meet the 17 targets in Closing the Gap



Improve job security and assist the long-term unemployed

- redefine casual work and create pathways to permanency
- develop a national system of labour hire licencing
- review mutual obligation requirements and employment programs
- invest in wage subsidies and vocational training programs

[A Fairer Australia](#) comprises the following materials, also available on the website:

- A brochure summarising the five key ‘asks’
- A booklet with one page on each of the policy ‘asks’, providing further information on what action is needed and why
- Position Statements on People Seeking Asylum, Housing and Homelessness, Poverty and Inequity, Catholic Social Teaching and Welfare and Tax Reform.
- Source documents that identify relevant sections cited in the Society’s submissions, along with references used in the development of policy materials.

The website contains short videos prepared by National Council members on each of the five ‘asks’.

A report card will be added to the website that monitors policy mandates released by parties during the election period and assesses the extent to which they meet the Society’s asks.

An Australia-wide webinar, held in early April, was well attended by members from across the country. Key speakers included Claire Victory, Dr Tim McKenna and Associate Professor Ben Phillips. The webinar was an opportunity to go through our Federal Election Statement and discuss how best to advocate on key issues.

National Council Secretariate will email **A Fairer Australia** to the main political parties seeking their feedback, as well as to targeted electorates (determined by State and Territory Presidents), sitting MPs and the half Senate.

Media releases, opinion pieces and social media activities will increase during the election period.

As always, National Council will be guided by members on how best to raise issues with candidates in

their local electorates. Hopefully, these materials can support you in that work. Be confident in knowing that your voice and experience resonate strongly with those who seek to represent us in Federal Parliament.

To facilitate the information sharing process, please send any feedback received from candidates to svdpfedelect@svdp.org.au.

We are in this for the long haul. Our aim is to raise the issues that affect our companions, to be a voice for the voiceless and to have the opportunity to influence policies that affect that wellbeing of so many.

We fully appreciate your support.

Special thanks go to St Vincent de Paul NSW for their help with drafting the Position Statement on People Seeking Asylum and to Refugee Council of Australia for reviewing it, and to the ANU’s Centre for Social Research and Methods for their work on the Welfare and Tax Reform paper. **R**

Rose Beynon is National Director Policy and Research, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

Taliban takeover highlights need to boost refugee intake

In mid-February 2022, on the eve of the six-month anniversary of the takeover of Afghanistan's capital Kabul by the Taliban militants, representatives and leaders from across the faith, veteran and Afghanistan-Australian Advocacy Network communities met with Federal MPs to urge greater action to help people fleeing the country.

Delegates at the Parliament House meetings included Dr Tim McKenna, Chair of the St Vincent de Paul Society's Refugee Network and an Advisory Group member of the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA).

The Society is a member of CAPSA and, together with CAPSA, supports *Christians United for Refugees* in its calls for Australia to do [more to help](#) the Afghan people.

'The scale and severity of the Afghan humanitarian crisis continues to worsen,' Dr McKenna said.

'CAPSA reiterates its call on the Australian Government to announce a special intake of at least 20,000 humanitarian visas for vulnerable people from Afghanistan additional to our annual humanitarian intake.

'Catholic Church agencies, parishes, schools, and community groups are already assisting Afghan refugees. We stand ready to do our part in a more ambitious, compassionate response.'

The forming of the delegation came following the Federal Government's announcement that 15,000 places would be allocated to refugees within existing Humanitarian and Family Visa pathways over a four-year period. CAPSA called this an [inadequate response](#) that would create no additional places for those fleeing Afghanistan.

'Six months after Kabul fell to the



The violent imagery from Afghanistan's decades of war has found its way into one of the country's famous art forms, handwoven wool rugs. This example is part of the exhibition "I weave what I have seen: The War Rugs of Afghanistan" that emerged from a research project undertaken at the Australian National University by Tim Bonybady and Nigel Lendon.

Taliban, the Australian Government has still not provided permanent protection to refugees like me who have been living in Australia for ten years in permanent limbo,' said Zaki Haidari, a refugee leader on a temporary visa from Afghanistan and Leadership Coordinator at the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia.

'Refugees on temporary visas in the community are under extreme stress because we cannot sponsor their families, cannot plan for the future, and cannot contribute to Australia as we would want to.

'We have nowhere else to go. Australia is our home, but we cannot call it our permanent home.'

Six months since the fall of Kabul, CAPSA acknowledges the pain felt by many at this time. In the last 183 days, the world has witnessed ongoing violence, targeted persecution and widespread devastation in Afghanistan at the hands of the Taliban regime.

In addition to an immediate additional intake of at least 20,000 resettlement places for people from Afghanistan, CAPSA has called for permanent protection for refugees on temporary visas in Australia and expedited family reunion pathways for families of people from Afghanistan already in Australia.

At the meeting and later to the [media](#) the Immigration Minister, Alex Hawke, said the government would have more to say on the issue in 'the weeks and months ahead'. **R**

Providing laptops for Afghan youth



In late January this year a batch of 25 reconditioned laptop computers with well-researched education specifications were packed and delivered to two Afghan community representatives in Brisbane. The recipients were Afghan evacuees aged 18-25 years of age who will start studying at TAFE this year.

Rebecca Lim from the Vincentian Refugee Network consulted with her Afghan community friends who identified the needs of this group of young women and men. (Children who attend school are supported reasonably well).

The project was a collaborative effort between St Vincent de Paul Queensland's 'back to school' program, St Peter and

Paul Bulimba parish social justice group who donated money and sought donors (Catholic schools and religious people), then did the IT research and collected the items.

Further funding came from Rebecca Lim's networks, which, along with the Brisbane On-Arrival Refugee and Asylum Seeker Response, facilitated the donations and payment.

The laptops cost around \$600 each, with SVdP matching the cost of up to \$500 per item.

On behalf of the recipients, Zainab wrote, 'The 25 laptops have been delivered to young people with the help of my colleague Asad. We received lots of appreciation and some very positive feedback that made my heart sing.

'I used to study computer science back at home because I loved it. But I didn't have a computer to practise and do my assignment and every time I used to get low marks. I was so poor and couldn't afford to buy a computer.

'I was in a family of eight... my parents used to pay attention more on boys as they think one day girls will get married and will look only after their kid... I never thought one day I would have my own computer'.

'Normally in Afghanistan the family size is big and only one or two people have incomes. I always wished to buy a computer for myself but could never afford. This is my 1st computer in my life.

Thank you – Zainab'. **R**

Timor-Leste inaugurates first Catholic university



Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak and Archbishop Dom Virgilio Do Carmo da Silva of Dili inaugurate the Catholic University of St. John Paul II on December 8.

BY RYAN DAGUR

Timor-Leste [formerly known as East Timor] has inaugurated its first Catholic university, dedicated to St. John Paul II who is considered to have inspired the country's struggle for independence.

The Catholic University of St. John Paul II was inaugurated on 8 December 2021 by Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak and Archbishop Dom Virgilio Do Carmo da Silva of Dili.

PM Ruak said the university was dedicated to St. John Paul II — who visited the country while it was still under Indonesian rule in 1989 — ‘with whom our country has a great bond of love and devotion. Almost 20 years after the restoration of independence, with great joy, we celebrate the opening of the Catholic University of Timor, with patron St. John Paul II.’

The PM said the university is a form of state support for the Catholic Church in assisting the integral formation of youth and adults in the Catholic-majority country so that they become ‘people of faith and develop to become more tolerant, just, inclusive, democratic and peaceful.’

Archbishop Silva said the university had been a long-standing goal of the archdiocese and was first touted by Salesian Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and again by the late Bishop Alberto Ricardo da Silva.

‘The Catholic University of Timor must provide a world-class education in all areas of human activity inspired by the Catholic intellectual, moral and spiritual traditions,’ he said.

‘We live today in the midst of socioeconomic and cultural

realities that give us many challenges. On the other hand, we educate future generations to enter and survive in the labor market in today's social structure’, he stressed.

The university will be open to students of other faiths: ‘There is no discrimination but indeed rules must be in accordance with the principles and norms of our religion,’ he said.

The university is financed by the government through a subsidy every year given to [Dili Diocese](#), half of which is focused on education. It is housed in a building used by St. Joseph High School in Balide on the outskirts of Dili. **R**

Ryan Dagur is a journalist based in Jakarta, Indonesia. This article appeared in the Union of Catholic Asian News - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/timor-leste-inaugurates-first-catholic-university/95327>

The Feast of St Josephine Bakhita

Sr Mel Dwyer, Leader of the Canossian Sisters in Australia and Spiritual Adviser, St Vincent de Paul Society State Council Queensland shares these thoughts...

The story of Bakhita's life was undeniably one of great suffering. Kidnapped from her family in Sudan as a child; bought and sold and tortured as a slave. So traumatised as to forget her name, yet somehow surviving, receiving the title Bakhita which is Arabic means "lucky one". Yet Bakhita would not see her survival as luck, but rather as a blessing as through it she came to know God as her true master.

At a surface level, Bakhita seemingly did not do anything that the world would regard as significant. She was a cook, she looked after the sacristy in the Church, she answered the door of the convent. It was not so much what Bakhita did, but who she was and the love with which she lived that makes her memorable.

Breaking the shackles of slavery, Bakhita stands as a reminder that light can overcome darkness; that mercy can overcome evil; that in the midst of the greatest sufferings hope never dies.

As we reflect on the life of Bakhita, there are many virtues that she radiated. We can read much of her merciful heart towards those who tortured her, wanting to bend and kiss their feet because without her suffering she would not have come to know God.

In her humility and total abandonment to God Bakhita teaches us to have complete trust in him, who is present always and everywhere, even in the most challenging moments of our lives.



The 8th of February marked the celebration of the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita, a Canossian sister.

Bakhita was a woman who urged people to embrace a common solidarity. Known as the universal Sister, Bakhita represents to us a Church that is truly universal, with a heart open to all.

'May St Josephine Bakhita help us in this Easter time to become the hands and feet of Christ...'

St Bakhita dreamt of a future that echoes the invitation of Pope Francis in Fratelli Tutti embracing this same universal heart, 'as a single human family, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all'.

As we remember today we are reminded that slavery still exists. In different ways in 2022, people still remain captive through human trafficking, domestic violence and other forms of oppression.

As we celebrate with joy, let us pray for those who continue to struggle for freedom throughout our world. Let us pray for an

end to human trafficking. And let us pray that the way we treat all those whom we encounter reflects the virtues of Bakhita - as women of hope, of generosity of spirit and of an inner joy that comes from our relationship with God.

We will never suffer in exactly the same ways as Bakhita did. Yet in small ways we are called to that same heart of love without measure that is open to all and ready to thank God for whatever God places before us.

As we celebrate the Feast of Bakhita this year, may we draw courage from her example so as to continue our own journeys from slavery to freedom; slavery from whatever it is that binds us and prevents us from knowing the unconditional forgiveness of God.

May we draw **hope** from the example of Bakhita who assures us that we are definitively loved by God, no matter what.

May we draw **simplicity** from the example of Bakhita as we seek to lay down our preferences and embrace the radical freedom and joy of encountering the Lord.

And may the truth that we are known and loved by God be enough for us as we seek to embrace all that the Lord wants of us today, and in the year ahead.

May St Josephine Bakhita who constantly sought the Lord in all things help us in this Easter time to become the hands and feet of Christ in a world where some have plenty, and others struggle to survive.

May St Josephine Bakhita pray for us. **R**

With editing assistance from Leo Tucker, Executive Director – Mission and Spirituality, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

This Balmain boy makes art and music

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

‘Balmain boys don’t cry’, quipped former NSW Premier Neville Wran as a boast of the Sydney suburb’s toughness, and one of the local alumni, Stephen Corry, agrees the observation applies to him. Sadly, the reason is that ‘they knocked all the tears out of me when I was young.’

‘They’ were the Catholic institutions to which he was sent from the tender age of three when his mother, an immigrant from Northern Ireland, found herself unable to cope with young children.

‘Both my parents were badly damaged by growing up in Northern Ireland,’ Stephen explains, adding, ‘the welfare would come along to the house... my story is one of triumph against the odds’.

More of which later.

Stephen, whose middle name ‘is Mannix’, after the long-time, Irish-born Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Patrick Mannix (1864-1963), says that in adult life he would make a point of visiting Ireland, north and south, to gain some understanding of the sectarian ‘Troubles’ and his parents’ backgrounds.

His first out-of-home placement was at the NSW Central Coast institution run by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, a.k.a. the ‘Brown Joeys’. This wasn’t so bad, he remembers, saying he ‘even met a saint or two’ and had his introduction to the world of art. In an early childhood memory he recalls that at age three he was put on the floor with drawing materials. By five, ‘people were calling me the art kid.’

The real problems began at St Vincent’s Boys’ Home in Westmead, a violent place, long-closed, that



Artist Stephen Corry at the ordination of his ‘good mate’ Bishop Danny Meagher as Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Sydney in November 2021. Bishop Meagher completed his secondary schooling at St Ignatius College Riverview in 1979, going on to study economics and law at The University of Sydney. He felt a strong calling to serve the marginalised and volunteered at the Matthew Talbot hostel for homeless men – where he would conduct Mass in later years – and at the local St Vincent de Paul conference at St Canice’s parish in Elizabeth Bay.

was filled with tough kids and marked by abusive practices that Stephen prefers not to discuss. It was here that he first learned not to cry, ingraining a stoicism that would later help him through the toughest of times.

As much as possible he kept up his art and then added music to his creative store, learning the cornet, trumpet, accordion... Today, he prefers the sax, which helps him ‘belt out the blues’ with the Forbes Street Band, named after the

street adjacent to Vinnies Matthew Talbot Hostel for homeless men in Woolloomooloo. The band performed at the hostel’s pre-Christmas lunch.

Photos of a teenaged Stephen – long blonde hair, lean physique, more like a surfer than a footballer – belie a toughness that those opposing him on the rugby field soon discovered. By now he had returned to live with his mum in Sydney’s inner west and begun high school at Christian Brothers Balmain.



Stephen Corry's 'View from a window – after Vincent' was a finalist in 2011 Dobell Prize for Drawing.

'I was strong and muscly in those days,' the 58-year-old says, bringing up a contemporary photo to show how much he's aged. Don't we all!

'I'd target the big props and knock them to the ground,' he adds, with evident pride.

'I loved tackling those big guys.'

Stephen Corry excelled in all sports, captaining his house team, winning the athletics and the swimming, and also, if he may say so, being 'somewhat of an intellectual', enjoying the likes of Hermann Hesse and Friedrich Nietzsche.

However, school wasn't his thing and by the end of fourth form (year 10) he decided to leave, getting a job as an apprentice spray painter. Perhaps not quite art but getting there. Later he would work in various fields, from selling hardware and records to being a 'dunny sanitiser' and driving a community bus.

In 1995-6 he studied art at the well-regarded Meadowbank TAFE but by now he was suffering mental

health concerns that impacted on his ability to function properly in broader society. This was when he first made contact with the team at Matthew Talbot Hostel, including Joy Bowen, Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner, who describes Stephen as 'an amazing man considering his suffering,' adding that his honest and deep sharing indicates how much he has been taken advantage of.

He was offered a small commission to paint portraits of local street people for an exhibition depicting the plight of the homeless, and these caught the eye of local federal MP Tanya Plibersek who 'knows me well enough now', as Stephen puts it.

Since then he has broadened his canvas in every sense, becoming a finalist in the prestigious Dobell Prize in 2011, the year before it concluded. His entry was an astoundingly detailed aerial urbanscape titled 'View from a window, after Vincent [Van Gogh]'. The Society later auctioned the work for a substantial sum, and Stephen used some of the money

he received to buy the motorbike he loves riding to this day.

Now living in secure housing, with his health properly managed and his skills suitably recognised, Stephen draws and paints (and plays sax), and teaches visual art, including a project mentoring participants in a community art project developed by Vinnies [Ozanam Learning Centre](#) in partnership with [Art Space](#). During 2021 emerging artists and community members submitted ideas incorporating local Woolloomooloo stories into prospective street murals in Brougham Lane.

Stephen's latest suite of works features the 'saints of St Vincent de Paul Society', including St Vincent himself and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. These superb portraits, located amidst the poor and suffering in historical European settings, have an unusual genesis. The funds raised to pay Stephen for the works were raised on board *HMAS Adelaide*, a naval ship whose chosen charity is Matthew Talbot Hostel. One of the sailors accepted a challenge to shave off his beard if his shipmates would donate generously.

The resulting paintings, large in scale and ambition, are helping achieve Stephen Corry's aim of 'leaving my mark at Matthew Talbot and on Australia'. **R**

An opportunity to bring about a fairer Australia

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

Blessed Frederic Ozanam has inspired people to action for nearly 190 years. He was a committed Catholic who demonstrated how lay people in the Church could live out the mission of the Gospels. He brought a practical approach to living his faith. One of his early 'good works' saw him and his house mate Auguste Le Taillandier, a fellow law student, deliver their leftover firewood to a person in need, living in the Mouffetard district, then the poorest district in Paris.

This act of kindness set the scene for how Vincentian caring works best; personal contact with those in need – actions rather than words. Seeing Christ in those in need. Walking alongside people as their companion. Accepting all in need without judgement.

Frederic's commitment to having a positive impact on every area of human life continues to be a beacon for lay people who thirst to be active in bringing about a fairer society for all.

People who were inspired by Frederic's good works in Paris joined him to become a growing band of Catholic laity enthusiastic in their giving to those who were doing it tough. They kept faith connected to their daily life, to the community in which they lived and to their social commitment to help those less well off.

These cornerstones, evidenced during the origins of what we now might identify as 'the Vincentian movement', have spread far and wide, and the presence of the Society of St Vincent de Paul across the globe is evidence that our vision remains not only relevant but acts as a magnet attracting all people of goodwill to be active in our cause.



Toby O'Connor

Our members are at the frontline of carrying Frederic's passion for responding to our fellow citizens who face real obstacles to being active in the life of their communities. Their commitment to continuing to strive for social justice and a more caring society inspires others to support our good works.

While some come to the Society without knowledge of the founders' social commitment and the strong links to Catholic Social Teachings, they quickly take on the enthusiasm demonstrated by those young Parisian students. We are blessed to have so many supporters in the Vincentian army of volunteers. Our members, volunteers and employees come from diverse backgrounds and work together in the true spirit of our founders.

Indeed, Frederic Ozanam would have welcomed all people with a passion to bring about a fairer Australia.

One of the strengths of the Society comes from its being a strong and persistent advocate for the needs of people facing social disadvantage – our companions. National Council has a long history of presenting the Society's demands for a fairer Australia to the Federal Parliament. This commitment is peaking as we move towards a federal election.

When building a case for change to policies that damage many of our citizens, National Council draws on the direct experiences of our conference members along with research and reference materials.

In May 2021, National Council set out its vision for a fairer Australia. This vision encompasses – Addressing Homelessness and Affordable Housing, Income Support and an Adequate Safety Net, Secure Work, People Seeking Asylum, First Nations People and the overarching need for Tax Reform.

The 2022 Federal Election offers a real opportunity for Australians to address ongoing injustices across the above policy areas. National Council is seeking commitment from the major political parties and all candidates to deliver a fairer Australia. It is looking to enlist the support of our members to advocate for our demands with candidates who will stand in a range of key electorates, and in so doing help turn words into verifiable actions.

You can follow our Federal Election advocacy campaign [here](#). **R**

Toby O'Connor is CEO St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

High homelessness challenges Darwin's Ozanam House

BY LUCI LLOYD

The Northern Territory has 12 times the national average of Homelessness, with 1-in-17 Territorians sleeping rough. Shelter, or a place to call home, is a fundamental human need, and yet so many in our community continue to go without or live with the constant anxiety of being 'at risk' of homelessness.

Vinnies NT receives numerous calls daily with people in need reaching out for support. These desperate callers are pointed from one 'Full House' notice to another due to the lack of affordable housing available across the Community, Government and Not-for-Profit Sectors. With Emergency Housing bursting at the seams and waiting lists as long a piece of string, the gap between the haves and have nots has increased. Our Vincentians are working towards hope and reprieve to be restored to the poor in the complex realm of our Territory housing crisis.

Vinnies receives calls for help from people from all walks of life and the issues that lead to homelessness are complicated and multifaceted. These individuals may have experienced, a loss of employment, a relationship breakdown, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol or mental and physical disabilities.

Vinnies NT offers support to our homeless companions with access to case management, referrals to mental health, accommodation, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, financial counselling, and similar support services. We are grateful to local organizations like Orange Sky Laundry Service, Darwin Community Legal Services and Casuarina Community Health Clinic who visit Ozanam House weekly, and [Danila Dilba Health Service](#) attends when they can. Every day



our compassionate conference members, volunteers and staff connect with our companions, meet these challenges and build hope for the future.

Ozanam House Day Centre is a hub to restore dignity to those homeless Territorians who have fallen through the cracks of community care services and found themselves on the streets of Darwin. Well known locally, Ozanam House is the largest Day Centre in Darwin, a place without judgment and a lifeline to the poor. Companions are rejuvenated after accessing hot showers with soap, shampoo and conditioner and a dry towel! A simple dignity so often underappreciated as a privilege in our modern sociology.

Open from 7.00 am Monday through Friday for nutritious breakfast and lunch, guests are greeted with warmth by Staff and Volunteers who have built trust and friendship within the Centre. Companions can enjoy a warm cup of tea and coffee or an icy cold cordial whilst their personal items are washed and dried by Vinnies Volunteers.

Last year saw the Ozanam House service delivery model altered

to accommodate the necessary requirements to protect both companions and our committed conference members, volunteers and employees. Extra hand sanitation points, social distancing measures and The Territory Check In was employed with our services non-stop, however our companion access was restricted to allow only 80 people per day on site.

After a year of trepidation and struggle our 2021 Christmas Party was a joyous occasion for our homeless companions. Vinnies NT was awestruck with community support and is ever grateful to the yearly supporters who contribute to the event.

Simon George and Sons, a local grocer provided delicious salads and a generous selection of soft fruit which is preferred by those with teeth issues and often craved by the poor as a luxury. A local family business Rachael Designa Cakes contributed beautifully decorated hand-made Christmas theme cakes that were well received by companions and volunteers. Nightcliff Woolworths donated soft drinks and juice, Christmas theme plates, napkins and bon bons, a timeless tradition that made the occasion very festive with people sharing a laugh over the 'pop' of a Christmas cracker.

Other special mentions and thanks go to our generous Volunteers, Foodies Book Club, Double Tree by Hilton and The Christmas Band without whom our celebration for the homeless would not have been possible. Vinnies NT is proud of our good works at Ozanam House Day Centre for the homeless. Operating since 1974, it's a safe place and a compassionate community embracing all who visit. **R**

Luci Lloyd is Marketing and Fundraising Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society (NT) Inc.

Small online post leads to large housing project boost

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

The timely sighting of a Facebook post from the Society's National Council has resulted in a generous donation to support the building expansion of Seton Villa, a work of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, in the Sydney suburb of Ryde.

[Seton Villa](#), which provides accommodation for women with intellectual disability, was opened in 1966 to accommodate 20 women with the aim of encouraging and nurturing their development and potential.

As part of Seton Villa's \$11 million investment plan, two of its seven planned new homes were opened in February last year. The latest is Leia's Place, just opened, with a fourth, Lavender Cottage, due to open soon.

'Seton Villa is replacing all its existing houses with brand new homes to Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) design standards,' explains Peter Gardiner, Seton Villa's CEO.

A mid-2021 online post about the 'Homes For Life' crowdfunding campaign highlighted the need to purchase specialised equipment and furnishings as well as a range of resident comforts.

Peter adds, 'The much-needed funds raised by this crowdfunding campaign are aimed at turning the houses into comfortable and well-equipped homes for the residents to live great lives.'

'It's the finishing touches – like kitchen appliances, soft furnishings and outdoor settings – that will give these houses a real sense of home and help give residents greater independence.'

As fate had it, the theme of 'Turning houses into homes' struck



gold with a prospective donor, a western suburbs woman who prefers to remain anonymous, who saw a Facebook post about the crowdfunding campaign on the [Vinnies Australia Facebook page](#). She was immediately captivated, gleaned more information and then made the \$100,000 donation.

'We were thrilled and astounded by it,' says Peter.

While insisting she not be named, the generous benefactor agreed to provide some information about the reasons for her support.

'After a number of invitations from a wonderful Vincentian I joined the St Vincent de Paul Society in a western Sydney conference in the early 1990s,' she told us.

'Like many Vincentians, being a member of a conference gave me an opportunity to put my faith into action. I'm still a conference member. One of the many things I've learnt is the importance of safe and secure homes for everyone in our communities.'

After receiving an unexpected inheritance, she was intending to support a community housing project. Reading about the Seton Villa crowdfunding campaign she was captivated by the message of

'turning houses into homes'.

The donor realised contributing to the fit-out was 'just as appealing and important'.

She continues, 'I clicked through to the Homes For Life web page to get further information about this worthwhile initiative. It was clear that Seton Villa had a big vision and is committed to creating beautiful homes for their residents while helping maximise their independence and choice.'

'To see the photographs of some of the residents and their smiling faces, this initiative appealed to me on so many levels.'

'I was captivated by the vision of creating independence and choice, plus the emotional benefit of turning houses into warm and welcoming homes because that is what we all want and need. It's clear that Seton Villa has the experience and team to create the necessary Specialist Disability Accommodation plus all the comforts of home that cater to the residents' specific needs.'

'I wanted to be able to help them achieve their aims and create truly happy homes. I'm thrilled that my donation has contributed to the project's success and the residents' wellbeing.'

CEO, Peter Gardiner says, 'The two new homes are the third and fourth in the Seton Villa community, built as part of our asset redevelopment program. We are delighted to receive this very significant donation.'

'It's so powerful and validating that others want to support our work at Seton Villa and the vision of independence and choice for people with disability.'

'Philanthropy such as this will help us grow to support more and more people in our community to live their best lives.' **R**

Vinnies financial counsellor helps wipe \$1.0m debts

BY DAVID SETTELMAIER

Dozens of Peel residents kicked off 2022 with fresh hope after a local Vinnies financial counsellor had over \$1.0 million of their debts waived.

Just before Christmas, Liza Chatterton (pictured) had eliminated or substantially reduced debts to the tune of \$1,018,396.87 for 79 clients in the Mandurah area, an hour south of Perth. The waived debts ranged from \$77 for unfair bank charges to more than \$300,000 for mortgages that could not be repaid.

The major issues facing clients in debt relate to mortgage stress, loss of employment, and the ready



access to short term loans like ZipPay and Afterpay.

‘Some people can have up to 20 loans at once with no questions asked, and of course, the low-income earners are the ones targeted and the most vulnerable,’ Ms Chatterton said.

She works in the Vinnies Support

Centre in Mandurah, a one-stop-shop for clients experiencing hardship and needing some emergency relief.

For the year ahead, Ms Chatterton has a clear message to anyone thinking of getting a loan: ‘Think twice before going into debt. If you cannot afford it now, then can you afford it in two weeks? If the answer is “yes” then it is a good tool to use, but it’s definitely not a wise decision if the answer is “no”.’

Ms Chatterton has been the Peel Region’s Financial Counsellor for Vinnies for seven years, after a previous career in the banking sector. She won the top award from the Financial Counsellors Association of WA as the Best-Established Practice for 2021. **R**

Harvey Mini Vinnies acknowledged for community work

BY DAVID SETTELMAIER

A group of primary students from St Anne’s School in Harvey, south of Perth, has been recognised for helping bring their community together. Volunteering alongside staff and parents the students have prepared meals for sharing with up to 150 local residents.

The Harvey Community Dinner is held on Mondays and has been going for several years, first as a sit-down dinner, but as takeaway-only since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The students are part of Mini Vinnies, a school program run by Vinnies WA, which teaches kids to become advocates for social justice and take an active role in their community. The students have now been recognised for their efforts



by receiving the Catholic Identity award for primary schools, which is part of the Quality Catholic Education Awards.

‘It’s an acknowledgement of what the community is able to do, and it teaches the students to see that it’s good to help people in need,’ said Leanne Pronk, a teacher at St Anne’s and organiser of Mini Vinnies.

She said the students – all from Years four, five and six – are involved in the community dinner by helping their parents prepare the meals at the Parish Hall, usually on a Sunday. Before the dinners became takeaway-only, the Mini Vinnies participants would also help set and clear the tables.

Ms Pronk said that while the dinners were a whole-of-community effort, she is proud that the students have been recognised for their own contributions.

‘It’s about giving back to the community, and it opens the children’s eyes to being able to give something back themselves,’ she said. **R**

David Settelmaier is Media and Communications Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc.

Chris and Roxie find a new home

After spending more than 10 months homeless and living in his car, Community Inclusion Program companion Chris and his fur baby Roxie have finally found a stable home. It's been a difficult journey for Chris, who endured great hardship while living in his car. During the dead of Canberra winter, the alternator on his car broke and he spent many freezing nights exposed to the elements.

The steep costs of keeping his car in working order took most of his income and there were many weeks when he had no money left over to buy basic necessities like food. Chris was also assaulted by a stranger who attempted to steal the few belongings he had left. On top of all this, the 2021 COVID-19 lockdown meant that many emergency relief services shut their doors and Chris found he had fewer and fewer places to turn to for help.



Chris' unit includes a courtyard for Roxie to run in.

These events caused Chris's mental health to plummet and he began to lose hope. Chris says the one thing that kept him going was his Roxie, who he refused to be parted with under any circumstances.

Chris sought help from the Vinnies Community Inclusion Program (CIP) at Oaks Estate, a program

which kept its doors open for face-to-face support every single day throughout the COVID-19 lockdown.

Chris also relied on the outreach services that continued to visit Oaks Estate each week. These included Orange Sky Laundry and the Chat to Pat mobile health clinic. He also relied heavily on free food provided in the CIP Community Room and the program's regular barbeques. Case Managers at CIP met with Chris regularly to offer him support.

CIP assisted him to complete referrals to multiple organisations that assisted him to find temporary accommodation and now, long-term accommodation in his own unit. Stable housing means the world to Chris, who can now shift his focus from simply surviving to thriving. The unit even has a courtyard which means Roxie will have plenty of space to run around. **R**

Oaks Estate's bike builder is on a roll

Oaks Estate resident Darren Hawkes, a companion of Vinnies Community Inclusion Program, is making his own contribution to sustainable transport by building electric bikes from scratch. So far he's made five and is now aiming to turn his hobby into a small business and start selling his custom-built two-wheelers to paying customers.

Despite having no formal qualifications in mechanics Darren is turning out personalised, durable bikes that last longer than mass-produced options from shops. He

says he can customise each bike to suit an individual's needs, including what surface they will be riding on, their weight and height, and how much power they desire.

Darren also has a well-developed understanding of legislation to ensure everything he builds complies with state and territory laws.

His next step is to further his business skills by looking into NEIS funding for training and assistance. He also intends to pursue a formal qualification in mechanics to further develop his skillset. **R**





ASSIST A STUDENT

An education support program which assists in breaking the cycle of poverty

Assist A Student is a program of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. Donations from Australians are used to provide funds to students from partner countries in the Asia-Pacific Region to assist with education expenses.

'Education is important to me to get a job. I want to work for government and need to do well at Senior Secondary School.'

(Student, Kiribati)

'The support helps students to fit in and work hard. It also supports the school as it means that students have the materials they need.'

(School principal, Indonesia)

The Assist A Student program reflects the Mission Statement of the St Vincent de Paul Society – to serve the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. We do this by sharing some of ourselves – what we have – with those in need in our neighbouring countries.

Access to education is a proven way of assisting individuals to reach their full potential and is a pathway to breaking

the cycle of poverty. Students are supported at all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary.

In our partner countries, local Vincentians select students to participate in the program. The program is managed by conferences on the ground overseas and is highly valued by conferences and beneficiaries.



Scan to donate online

To donate online visit donate.vinnies.org.au/assist-a-student

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Privacy Statement: St Vincent de Paul Society collects the information you provide on this form for the primary purpose of processing your kind donation. We may also use your personal information to provide you with further information about the Assist a Student Program. If you do not provide the information requested on this form, we may not be able to do these things. We may share your personal information with other St Vincent de Paul Societies and third parties who provide us with professional or technology services, including some that are based overseas. Our privacy policy is available on our website: www.vinnies.org.au

The Society's Overseas Development Program – partnering abroad



Good Shepard Conference, Cambodia, building school latrines as part of their Good Works Program.

BY TRICIA WILDEN

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia continues to support fellow Vincentians to undertake good works in our partnered countries in the Asia-Pacific region through its Overseas Development Program, encompassing Twinning, Project Support, the Assist-a-Student (AAS) Program and, as needed, in response to Emergencies.

Twining is the pairing of a Vincentian Conference or Council in one country with a reciprocal Conference or Council in another country with the support of their respective National Council.

In Australia this occurs within our overseas partner countries of Cambodia, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, one of the four states in the FSM), India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

We are pleased to be sharing profiles of two of our overseas partners in this edition of The Record and look forward to sharing more in forthcoming editions.

The Society in Asia – Cambodia

Established in 2004, the Santa Vincent de Paul Charity Society of Cambodia (SVDP Cambodia) was officially registered in the country in 2019. There are 21 members on its National Council with a newly elected president Ms Sokhim Khoem.

SVDP Cambodia has more than 200 members, mostly young people who are studying or working. These members are active in 28 conferences in three Dioceses: Phnom Penh (11 conferences), Kampong Cham (10 conferences) and Battambang (8 conferences) with more seeking aggregation.

With support from Council General International, their overseas partners and their spiritual advisor Bishop Oliver Schmitthaeusler, SVDP Cambodia works co-operatively with the church communities to serve people living with poverty in Cambodia.

Activities they undertook include: visiting and conducting welfare activities supporting people in need undertaking projects and supporting students through AAS.

There are currently 20 twinnings between Australian and Cambodian conferences. These consist of three conferences twinned in NSW, one in QLD, eight in VIC and eight in WA.

Two projects were approved for Cambodia in FY 2020-2021 with new project proposals in development.

St Clara Conference in Kompong Siem District of Phnom Penh received project funding support from their twin St Thomas the



St Theresa Conference Members, Solomon Islands

Apostle in Claremont, Western Australia to improve and repair the facilities of Koh Roka Krau Primary School.

This included repairing the classroom roof, doors, window and installing wall fans in the kindergarten classroom and setting up 10 ceiling fans, hand washing station and playground equipment in the primary school. This project will benefit 37 kindergarten students and 196 primary student as well new students in coming years.

The un-twinning Good Shepherd Conference in Kampong Thom Province received project funding from the Preston Regional Council in Victoria to repair the four toilets at Prek Sbow elementary school at Kampong Thom Province for the benefit of its 142 male students age from 4 to 14 and those to follow.

Assist-A-Student - In 2021, 155 children from three dioceses in Cambodia were supported by

the AAS program. Support was reported as being used for a range of items including online classes, food allowance and purchase of stationary or bicycles for transport.

National Society in the Pacific - Solomon Islands

Serving those in need in one of the poorest countries in Oceania, the Society of St Vincent de Paul Solomon Islands (SSVP) currently has conferences on the islands of Guadalcanal and Malaita. The National President, Ms Julian Ketai is also a member of St Louis de Montfort Conference in Burns Creek in Honiara.

There are currently six twinings between conferences in Australia and Solomon Islands. This comprises three conferences twinned in Canberra-Goulburn and three in NSW.

Five projects were approved for Solomon Islands in FY 2020-2021

with a large project proposal already approved for the new financial year.

St Theresa Conference in Auki in Malaita Province was supported by its twin, St Monica's Conference in Evatt in the ACT to build and establish SSVDP service outlet/shop for the community ensuring they can access goods and services locally and at affordable prices.

Through another project, the conference was also able to support the educational needs of selected students in the village in early childhood, primary and secondary school levels to contribute to the development of their community. More information about these initiatives can be found on the [CGI website](#). **R**

Tricia Wilden is Overseas Development Program Facilitator, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia. overseasdevelopment@svdp.org.au

the 1990s, the incidence of dengue fever has increased in many tropical and subtropical regions, including Hong Kong [1].

There are four species of dengue virus (DENV) that cause dengue fever: DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3 and DENV-4. DENV-2 is the most common and is responsible for the majority of dengue fever cases. DENV-1, DENV-3 and DENV-4 are less common and are responsible for a smaller proportion of cases.

Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne viral infection. The mosquito *Aedes albopictus* is the primary vector of DENV. The mosquito feeds on humans and other animals, and it is responsible for the transmission of the virus. The incubation period of dengue fever is typically 3–14 days.

The symptoms of dengue fever include fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, and a skin rash. In some cases, dengue fever can be severe and lead to complications such as dengue shock syndrome and dengue haemorrhagic fever. Dengue fever is a public health problem in many tropical and subtropical regions, and it is important to understand the epidemiology of the disease in order to develop effective control strategies.

In Hong Kong, dengue fever was first reported in 1968. The disease was caused by DENV-2. In the 1990s, there was a resurgence of dengue fever in Hong Kong, and the disease was caused by DENV-2. The incidence of dengue fever in Hong Kong has increased significantly since the 1990s, and it is now a major public health problem.

The purpose of this study was to determine the seroprevalence of DENV-2 in Hong Kong. The study was conducted in a community-based setting, and it involved the collection of blood samples from a representative sample of the population. The results of the study are presented in this paper.

The study was conducted in the New Territories of Hong Kong. The New Territories is a large area of land that is located to the north and west of Hong Kong Island. It is home to a large population of people, and it is a major economic and residential area. The study was conducted in a community-based setting, and it involved the collection of blood samples from a representative sample of the population.

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