

# The Record

Winter 2021



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







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

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](mailto:media@svdp.org.au)  
Web: [vinnies.org.au](http://vinnies.org.au)  
Editor: Toby oConnor  
Design: Damon Carr  
[damon.com.au](http://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.

ISSN 2652-8894

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.



Available online:  
[record.vinnies.org.au](http://record.vinnies.org.au)

## IN THIS ISSUE

3	President's Column	<b>Claire Victory</b>
4	Louise de Marillac – a Guide for these Times	<b>Sr Therese Haywood DC</b>
5	Vinnies is more than a shop	<b>Robert Crosby</b>
6	A Spirit of Youth in all We Do	<b>John Feint</b>
8	Witnessing the rekindling of hope	<b>Jocelyn Cull</b>
10	In the Parisian footsteps of our founders	<b>Robin Osborne</b>
11	Sr Joan Chittister and the 2021-22 Plenary Council	<b>John Warhurst</b>
12	Author continues to 'wrestle with the hierarchy'	
14	Book launch	<b>John Warhurst</b>
15	Online conversation on the Church's 'future roadmap'	
16	'Big spending' Budget ignores many and entrenches disadvantage	<b>Rose Beynon</b>
19	Uluru Statement from the Heart	
20	Voice must be enshrined in our Constitution	
21	Enshrine the 'Voice to Parliament' in the Constitution	
22	Australia has not been 'a great country' for Indigenous people	<b>Robin Osborne</b>
23	From the CEO	<b>Toby oConnor</b>
24	Catholics for Refugees: A Call for Action	<b>Tim McKenna</b>
26	Every Council can benefit from youth reps	<b>Rebecca Cassar</b>
27	NT – Darwin's Ozanam House serves a vital need	
28	CEO Sleepout raised a record \$8.19m	
29	QLD – Time called (and recalled) at Brisbane's landmark hostel	<b>Callum Johnson</b>
30	WA – Good Night In supports good works	<b>Deanna Watson</b>
31	WA – WA's Joondalup support centre opens	<b>Deanna Watson</b>
32	Canberra/Goulburn – Friendship is 'powerful medicine' for Compeer artists	<b>Cristina Ocampo</b>
33	International – National Council welcomes new Overseas Development Program Facilitator	
34	First impressions count: help us improve our website	

**On the cover...** Pictured is Northern Territory man Jimmy who painted this work specially for The Record. He is a companion of St Vincent de Paul Society's Ozanam House in Darwin. See story on page 27.

# President's Column

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

In May 2021, National Council held its first face-to-face meeting in over a year, the COVID-19 pandemic having forced us to meet by Zoom since our last meeting in Canberra. The weekend was a clear reminder of how valuable it is to meet in person and speak without screens and hundreds of kilometres separating us.

We know that our Vincentian involvement comprises work, or acts of service; spiritual reflection and sharing in our mission; and an element of business, record-keeping and admin. However, it also involves a social dimension.

I once heard someone criticise one of our youth conferences in these terms: 'They just seem like a bunch of uni friends who catch up and have a good time!' The conference in question was a very hard-working bunch of young Vincentians who were actively involved in good works, reflecting on their work and sharing their spirituality within our mission and the framework set out by the Rule; but they also shared a strong personal friendship, which in turn strengthened their commitment to the Society and their effectiveness in their work. I struggled with the idea that a fellow Vincentian would criticise or look down on this conference just because there was joy and lively chatter in the midst of their meetings or because they were – or were suggested to be – 'friends from uni'.

In a letter to Emmanuel Bailly on 3 November 1834, Frederic Ozanam remarked:

*"If you could see, sir, how our good provincial mothers of families rejoice to think that their sons are not lonely in*



Claire Victory

**'We should not underestimate the value of human connection...'**

*the exile of the capital, that they have friends, and form themselves at the same time in knowledge and virtue!"*

The following day, he wrote to his friend Leonce Curnier and discussed the Paris conference (comprising largely of young people who had come to Paris from other towns to study), emphasising the importance of friendship:

*'It is important then to form an association of mutual encouragement for young Catholic people where one finds friendship, support, and example; where one finds again, so to speak, a likeness of the religious family in which he had been nurtured, where the elders receive the new pilgrims from a province and give them a bit of moral hospitality. But the strongest tie, the principle of true friendship, is charity,*

*and charity could not exist in the hearts of many without sweetening itself from outside. It is a fire that dies without being fed, and good works are the food of charity. So it is in our own interest first of all that our association has been established, and if we assemble under the roof of the poor, it is at least equally for them as for ourselves, so as to become progressively better friends.'*

There is a reason that the bonds existing with friends I made through Vinnies Youth camps are so much stronger and longer lasting than other friendships – they were forged through seriously tough experiences and working together with shared values and a shared mission.

If some people are initially motivated to join the Society by a desire to make friends, that's okay – social bonds between members are important. Likewise, if someone's primary motivation to volunteer is to build on a particular skill set, that's okay too. It is not for us to judge, but rather to welcome people and to ensure that, together, we are working towards our mission, informed by our values and each contributing to the life of our conference and the Society. We should not underestimate the value of human connection – not just with companions, but with our fellow Vincentians – and we should build and celebrate our friendships within our conferences, councils and special works. **R**

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

# Spiritual Reflection

## Louise de Marillac – a Guide for these Times

BY SR THERESE  
HAYWOOD DC

Louise de Marillac was born in Paris in 1591 and died in 1660. She lived so long ago and yet I really believe that she has something to offer each of us today. The world in which Louise lived was a world of war, turmoil, poverty and religious turmoil after the reformation and the Council of Trent. We can see some parallels between those times and our own and we can learn from the way that Louise handled the challenges in her life.

She had such a range of experiences of various aspects of life, and the way that she dealt with them is an inspiration to all of us. She was an illegitimate child, an orphan, a wife, a mother, a widow, a single mother, a consecrated woman, a foundress and a social reformer. This breadth of experience in one person gave her a unique understanding of life.

Louise used the experiences of her childhood and her marriage to help in her service of others, and forming the Confraternities of Charity and the Daughters of Charity. When I imagine Louise setting out on that first mission to visit the Charities I think of her courage to take the risk to travel alone. As she met with each Charity, she formed them for their service. She was a great teacher and the women loved to listen to her.

When in time Louise began the Daughters of Charity her pioneering spirit was also seen as she had the courage to try a new form of religious life.

Louise was a leader who wrote detailed role descriptions for the sisters. She saw these rules as supportive for the sisters as they pioneered a new way of living and serving. She wrote often to her sisters encouraging and guiding them and keeping them informed about their families. She wrote to one of the sisters:

*I beg you, in the name of God, not to be afflicted by the trials which His goodness sends you. This is an occasion for you to prove more clearly than ever your fidelity to Him. I am well aware that it is very difficult for you not to be able to serve the poor in the way you would desire. You must abandon yourself to the care of Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Father of the Poor.*

*I am sending you one of our sisters who will be a great help and consolation to you.<sup>1</sup>*

Her gentle encouragement and care come through in many letters such as this one. Louise de Marillac had great trust in the Providence of God and her advice to one of her sisters after what appears to have been a difficult incident is advice that would be helpful to us at this time:

*All that remains for us is to make good use of the present, but, in order to do so, we must ask this grace of God.<sup>2</sup> R*



Sr Therese Haywood DC is the National Council's Spiritual Adviser.

1. Spiritual Writings of St Louise, 370.  
2. Spiritual Writings of St Louise, 371.



# Vinnies is more than a shop

BY ROBERT CROSBY

*Wagga Wagga (NSW) Central Council President Peter Burgess found his passion for social justice advocacy after a radio interview.*

‘We really do need as a community to support the most needy in our population.’

Peter Burgess spoke these words during his first media interview shortly after becoming Wagga Wagga Central Council President in 2019.

Interviewed by a [local radio station to promote the Vinnies Community Sleepout](#) he used the opportunity to advocate on issues related to poverty and hardship, sparking a fire inside the 71-year-old that has seen him become a respected voice on social justice matters within the region.

‘We want people not to just recognise Vinnies as a shop,’ explains Peter.

‘I want people to understand that we’re actively out there in the community looking after the most needy and that we are there to support them.’

Appearing regularly in the local media to raise awareness of issues such as Christmas hampers and back-to-school drives, it is the COVID-19 situation that has seen his commentary shift towards two key issues – housing ([‘there isn’t the social and affordable housing around Wagga that we badly need’](#)) and income support ([‘we now have people who have never been jobless before reaching out for our support’](#)).

Recognising the influence of the media to raise awareness of the Society’s good works, Peter’s public profile has grown from being recognised in Mass and on the



*Peter Burgess*

street to receiving calls from MPs eager to collaborate on community projects.

Peter joined Vinnies in the 1980s while working at a company manufacturing chlorine tablets for swimming pools. At the time the competing responsibilities of raising a family and serving as an alderman on Kogarah Council saw him drift away for several years.

Retraining as a high school maths teacher and later as a psychologist employed by the Department of Education, he moved to Wagga Wagga in the 2000s and reconnected with the Society on the eve of retirement.

Joining Koorringal’s Sacred Heart Conference in 2014 at the encouragement of a member speaking on the Winter Appeal during Mass, Peter’s road to becoming Central Council President took place in unusual circumstances.

Nominating for the position after the incumbent holder stepped down for family reasons, his election campaign was largely absent due to a pre-booked holiday to visit his son overseas.

‘I put my nomination in on the

Tuesday and I flew out on the Wednesday. When I came back about three days after I landed in Australia, there was the election – and I won!’

Spending his time engaging with Conferences throughout the Riverina while serving on the NSW State Council, Peter sees his work as being influenced by a strong Catholic faith along with a caring mentality that solidified from his time as a teacher.

‘When I was teaching in the state system, they made me year advisor for a group of Year 7 kids. My eldest son was going into Year 7 at the same time; every time a kid came up, I’d think ‘if this was my child how would I want him or her treated?’

‘That’s not so different to what we do now when we have that idea of ‘when we see the poor, we see the face of Christ’ – in a lot of ways it’s very similar.

‘As an organisation we’re not judgemental. We’ve always got to be mindful that we’re dealing with human dignity.’ **R**

---

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

# A Spirit of Youth in all We Do

BY JOHN FEINT

I was born in the former gold-mining town of Adelong, near Tumut, adjacent to the Snowy Mountains. My sister and I grew up in an Anglican household where my mother took charge of our faith upbringing. I valued the sense of community as part of St Paul's Parish.

I came to Canberra in 1974 to the Australian National University and in 1975 joined the Commonwealth Public Service. I was living at the Macquarie Hostel in Barton, where many new arrivals in Canberra resided whilst trying to find scarce rental accommodation. I met my future wife Maria at Macquarie Hostel and we soon moved to shared accommodation in Rivett, and then Mawson, before marrying and building our first home in Wanniasa.

This home proved too small and we upgraded to our current home in Gilmore where we have been blessed to raise four children.

After attending Mass with my Catholic wife for many years, I was received into the Church in 1993 and then proceeded to help others interested in the church for the next decade.

I began my Vincentian journey at Gowrie Conference in 2005 in the parish of Corpus Christi.

After a little time learning the ropes, I moved to the Conference President role and then to Regional President of Tuggeranong Monaro, an interesting region encompassing both ACT and NSW conferences. I then succeeded Warwick Fulton, current National Vice President, in the role of Territory Council President for Canberra Goulburn in June 2019. This coincided with my retirement from the ACT Public Service where I



*John Feint*

had worked since 1983, most recently in regional environmental collaboration.

I have also worked as a volunteer in coaching young people in hockey, cricket, soccer and athletics and continue to hold a warrant as a Scout Leader. All these activities reflect my passion for youth development.

I came to the President's role with three objectives: enlivening our aging conferences; adding a more youthful face to the Society and its governance; and promoting Indigenous reconciliation and advancement.

I had just six months in the Territory Council President role when our region, like much of eastern Australia, suffered major bushfires. Canberra Goulburn Territory Council responded by establishing a task force of Council members who went hands-on into assisting fire victims with their recovery. This work was made more difficult by the COVID outbreak, meaning I could only assist victims over the phone or internet.

I have spent months on this task, talking to hundreds of victims across our region and offering them financial and emotional support. It has been a privilege to do this and it will remain a highlight of my time in the President's role.

In terms of my personal Vincentian journey there have been many landmarks, but a couple stand out. Firstly, the opportunity to participate in the Nganmariyanga Immersion Program in 2018. I really relished the opportunity to gain first-hand insights into life in a remote Indigenous community and to challenge myself to get the best from the physically and emotionally demanding experience.



# Membership and Conferences

I was privileged to have been able to take part and I hope I can now apply what I have learnt to the service of our Indigenous companions.

Secondly, there are many inspirational stories of the companions we assist. Helping with little steps along the way, building relationships and seeing people grow, is part of the Vincentian experience that is impossible to put a value on. We respond with grace and mercy to the needs of the poor, hoping that what we do will make a difference – sometimes we notice the impact, at other times we can only trust in the mystery of the Holy Spirit to take what we have done and put it to the service of our Lord.

Thirdly, and most recently, I have the role on National Council of Bailly to the National Spirit of Youth team – what an honor to work with such a talented and resourceful group of young leaders charged with imbuing that spirit of youth in all we do in our Vincentian mission. **R**

John Feint is President, Canberra Goulburn Territory Council, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

## 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

NATIONAL PRESIDENT

**Claire Victory**

NATIONAL DEPUTY PRESIDENT

**Warwick Fulton**

SPIRITUAL ADVISER

**Sr Therese Haywood DC**

VICE PRESIDENT

**Maurie Ryan**

VICE PRESIDENT

**Patrick Wallis**

VICE PRESIDENT

**Jacob Miller**

NATIONAL TREASURER

**Paul Trezise**

NATIONAL SECRETARY

**Ryan Erlandsen**

CANBERRA GOULBURN PRESIDENT

**John Feint**

NSW STATE PRESIDENT

**Peter McNamara**

NT PRESIDENT

**Jocelyn Cull**

QLD STATE PRESIDENT

**Dennis Innes**

SA STATE PRESIDENT

**Brad Hocking**

TAS STATE PRESIDENT

**Mark Gaetani**

VIC STATE PRESIDENT

**Kevin McMahon**

WA STATE PRESIDENT

**Gladys Demissie**

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

# Witnessing the rekindling of hope



BY JOCELYN CULL

**M**y name is Jocelyn Cull and I am the President of the St Vincent de Paul Society (NT). I have been involved with the Society for about six years, first joining the St Mary's Conference in Darwin in 2015. I have been a conference president and NT Council member, and extensively involved in the co-ordination of emergency relief activities. I have also been NT Council Vice-President and Acting President of the Society before I was elected President late last year.

I am married to Graeme Finch, the current President of St Mary's Conference and have four wonderful children who have also

been involved to varying degrees in conference activities. My family have lived in Darwin for ten years and we are parishioners of the St Mary's Cathedral Parish.

I am a lawyer by trade and I have worked in both the public and private sectors. My current role is with a local government organisation where I work in the regulatory sphere. With the little free time that I have I enjoy the iconic Territory lifestyle: camping out bush, fishing in Darwin Harbour and keeping fit. I am also partial to excellent food (my husband is a great cook) and very good coffee – sometimes to my detriment!

I became involved in the Society largely by chance as I was looking

for a way to get involved in my local Parish when it was suggested that the Society might be a good fit for me. I had no idea about what a conference was or how the Society operated. I was impressed, however, with the mission of the Society and thought that I might be able to do something to assist – the rest as they say is history...

The Northern Territory has amazing country (Uluru, Kakadu, need I say more), a rich cultural heritage going back around 70,000 years, a diverse, multicultural community and the most friendly people in Australia.

However, we have a population of only 250,000 people living across 1.4 million km<sup>2</sup>, with Catholic communities on the Tiwi Islands





*Opposite page – Jocelyn Cull fundraising at Rapid Creek in Darwin with children (l-r) Eliza, Aidan and James.*



*Above – The Church in Nauiyu (Daly River), NT. The group includes community Elder Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann AM, NT Senior Australian of the Year 2021.*

*Left – St Mary's conference hamper deliveries to Nauiyu (Daly River), NT.*

in the tropical top end, Nauiyu and Emu Point in the Big Rivers savannah region and Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Apurte) in the southern desert. These communities are very remote from modern services, with a disproportionate level of unemployment, homelessness, and significant social disfunction that drives intergenerational disadvantage.

The NT Society and the services it provides to companions face very unique challenges in the volume of need, geographical isolation and accompanying logistical complexities in service delivery.

While comparatively small in numbers compared to other States and Territories, our members, volunteers and employees are

passionately committed to helping those in need and are practical and innovative when working with companions. Our local team works across the community, government and local businesses to help people whilst respecting individual needs and cultural differences, adapting our services to meet the changing needs of our community.

I am very proud to be a member of the Society in the Territory. We have faced many challenges in recent years but continue to lay a solid foundation for future growth. There are exciting times ahead, with the opportunity to enter new housing and accommodation ventures.

We are seeking to increase our advocacy work and be the voice

of the poor within the community. I am also inspired by the work of my fellow Vincentians in serving our companions. Some of them have been volunteering their time and services for many decades.

A touching experience for me was a home visit with a companion who had survived horrendous family violence. She had suffered significant trauma and was alone and scared.

Our conference helped this lady establish a new home while she was recovering from a major illness. Over several visits I was privileged to witness the rekindling of hope in this companion. Her quiet dignity and determination to move forward in the most challenging of situations was striking. A poignant moment was the pride you could see in the lady when she had us over to her home for a thank you morning tea – it was an amazing experience.

A highlight of my year is loading 100 plus hampers and gifts in 4x4s for a 600km round trip to Daly River to deliver Vinnies Christmas hampers Territory style. The smiles on the children's faces makes the wet season journey on rough roads all worth it.

I am so glad I took the chance and got involved with the Society. It is extremely rewarding to work with our members, volunteers and employees and see the positive changes that we can make for our companions. It is also great at a personal level to grow spiritually and live our faith with others. **R**

# In the Parisian footsteps of our founders

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Vincentians and other interested folk can now take a guided video tour of all the Parisian landmarks important to the founding and development of the Society, accompanied by the authoritative National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society USA, Ralph Middlecamp.

Fortunately, at a time of restricted travel, the hour-and-a-half tour does not entail leaving home and is free of charge. The narrator says he hopes to be leading an actual tour to Paris from 21-29 September this year, COVID-19 permitting. Either way, tour numbers will be limited but *Walking in the Footsteps of our Founders and Patrons: Vincentian Heritage Tour* is open to all and can be viewed [here](#).

Mr Middlecamp, a recognised expert in the Society's history and a regular visitor to Paris, begins his tour at the Pont de Neuf, once a 'new bridge', now a legendary one, where Blessed Frederic Ozanam first entered Paris in 1831, at the age of 18. We walk with our genial guide thanks largely to Google Street View, while sharing his knowledge of the districts and landmarks that feature in the St Vincent de Paul story.

Destined to become one of the seven founders of the Society, Frederic would go on to study law and literature, deliver lectures to students from ordinary backgrounds, and, two years after his arrival, inspire his confrères to found a charity dedicated to helping the less privileged.

'I am very uncomfortable,' Frederic wrote to his mother shortly after arriving in the fast-growing but largely impoverished city. 'I am a long way from... the centre of my studies... my landlady strikes me as a sly gossip.'



PHOTO: ROBIN OODDE ON UNSPLASH

Mr Middlecamp smiles as he shares this correspondence, before continuing the journey along 'the ground where our Saints and Blesseds walked, the homes where they lived, the churches where they worshipped and preached, and the streets in which they served Christ's poor.'

Highlights include the premises of Bailley's Press, where Frederic and friends would meet, St Sulpice Church where the Society began, and the tombs of St Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam. These sites and many more are in the video and will feature in the actual tour, if it can take place.

Another of Frederic's letters describes Rue Mouffetard, a slum area where the confrères and Sr Rosalie Rendue did home visitations. It consisted of 'narrow, crooked streets where the sun never penetrates... where a man in a coat never passes without making a sensation... attracting to the door-steps groups of naked children and women in rags.'

Times may have changed but visiting such locations, whether literally or virtually, is a salutary reminder of where and why the

Society was founded, as well as highlighting its continuing relevance today.

'We invite our Vincentian brothers and sisters from around the world to watch this recording,' says Tim Williams from our USA counterpart.

'Most of us may never get the chance to visit Paris in person, but these pictures, along with Ralph's historical knowledge, will bring to life for you the Paris of Vincent and Louise, of Frédéric and Rosalie – the Paris we share in our Vincentian Heritage.'

Brother Renato Lima de Oliveira, 16th President General, International St Vincent de Paul Society, said, 'I learned a lot from Ralph as he spoke about topics often not too familiar, such as the campaign launched by the General Council for the construction of the Sacred Heart Church in Paris. Ralph Middlecamp is one of the greatest experts on historical facts of the Society and the Vincentian Family, and we thank God for this great blessing.' **R**

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



# Sr Joan Chittister and the 2021-22 Plenary Council

BY JOHN WARHURST

Sister Joan Chittister's talk by Zoom on 2 May 2021 in the *Convocation of Catholics* series was an inspiring, conscious contribution to the Plenary Council (PC) journey planned by the Australasian Catholic Coalition of Church Reform (ACCCR), the national network of reform groups, which wants to continue to engage with the PC process as it has done since 2018.

The PC should be open and expansive, ready to take up big ideas. If the situation and future of the Catholic Church in Australia really cannot be business as usual, then the PC proceedings should encourage a new way of thinking. It should also be connected to the Australian community rather than being an isolated, quasi-monastic affair.

The *Convocation of Catholics* series contributes to both process and issues. It opens up the process of the PC more widely to the Catholic community, just as this is becoming increasingly closed and top-down, and it advances progressive issues at a time when progress is becoming increasingly bogged-down.

In presenting the Convocation the ACCCR attempted to create an inclusive event in a church dominated by silos and divided geographically and functionally. Communication within the church is one of our great challenges as a community, one that has not been met to any significant degree with regular church-going Catholics, much less others.

The greeting offered at the Convocation by Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, was an important appeal to the broader church, clerical, religious and lay. So is

## Plenary Council 2020

### Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

the partnership of ACCCR with Catholic Religious Australia, the peak body of 5,000 religious, and the religious publisher, Garratt Publishing. We were delighted that the Plenary Council Facilitation Team advertised the event and that many parishes welcomed it. The outcome was about 3,000 direct participants and 1,500 or more who have followed up.

Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, speaking from Erie, Pennsylvania USA, was a breath of fresh air, not dwelling on past failures or a dying church, envisaging bigger and better considerations. Many of these echoed elements of the 17,500 submissions made by the Catholic community during the earlier Listening and Dialogue phase, thus proving that Sister Joan is not alone. These have since been lost or diluted in the production of the Working Document for the PC, which diluted the urgency and sense of proportion and crisis found among the earlier submissions.

Sister Joan's address was wide-ranging and pulled few punches. She called for a 'mountain-climbing people' who aspired to personal conversion and who challenged established institutions to be brave leaders. Her future church is one in which hierarchy and clericalism is replaced with equality for lay people and one in which women take their rightfully equal place;

one in which Catholics sacrificed themselves for the vulnerable in our societies; and one in which the voice of the church would be bold and prophetic rather than self-interested in protecting its own resources.

The next step in the *Convocation of Catholics* takes place on 26 August 2021. Convocation 2 will focus more directly on the PC. The next steps for the PC itself include the publication of the official agenda and the training in procedures and responsibilities of the 280 members in four tranches in late June and early July. The first Assembly will be held in early October in multi-modal format, with five hubs in the five mainland state capitals. The journey will continue during 2022.

St Vincent de Paul Society, the largest lay church organisation, has an important seat at the PC table through its National President. A broader conversation can be conducted nation-wide with PC members by all individual members of the Society. There has been a loss of momentum and we can all play a part in re-energising the PC process.

Recent media coverage [here](#). **R**

Professor John Warhurst is Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University, Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn and a Member of the Plenary Council.



# Author continues to ‘wrestle with the hierarchy’

*The following is an edited version of an introductory address by journalist **Genevieve Jacobs** at the May 2021 launch of the book *Wrestling with the Church Hierarchy: Engaging with the Plenary Council and Beyond* (Garratt Publishing) by **John Warburst**.*

**W**hen I think about being a Catholic, I return to similar places as, perhaps, many of you do.

I remember, as many of you do, a culture, a world, a way of being that was distinctively Australian and Catholic. A world that formed and shaped so many of us.

What is left? What, now, is left?

An empty vessel? All sound and fury, signifying nothing? How has the promise of Vatican II ebbed away?

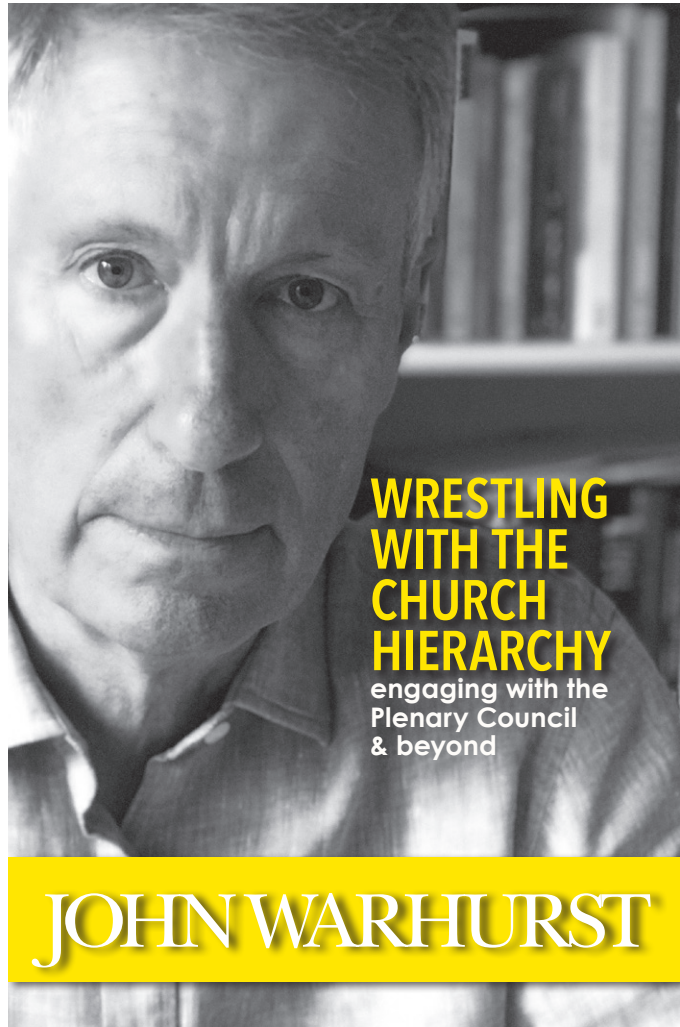
It's been a hard decade or two, hasn't it?

We've learned that the church of our childhoods concealed monstrous sins of commission and omission, sins literally beyond our imagining.

In following Christ's gospel of radical equality and humanity we've discovered we are no longer willing to accept that as Orwell would have it, all animals are equal but some are more equal than others... that many of us will always be deeply, intrinsically, and no matter what we do and what our human gifts are... less than.

We have seen a seemingly impregnable social edifice crumble before our eyes under the weight of those realisations.

The Church of two thousand years, the church so big and beautiful and sprawling in all its mad rich diversity and spectacular embroidered history is shrivelling



in this country until its voice may be no more than a ghost on the wind, sighing away across the water.

But at its head we see a leadership often more willing to batten down the hatches than to admit that it is catastrophically wounded, that the water is rushing in on every side.

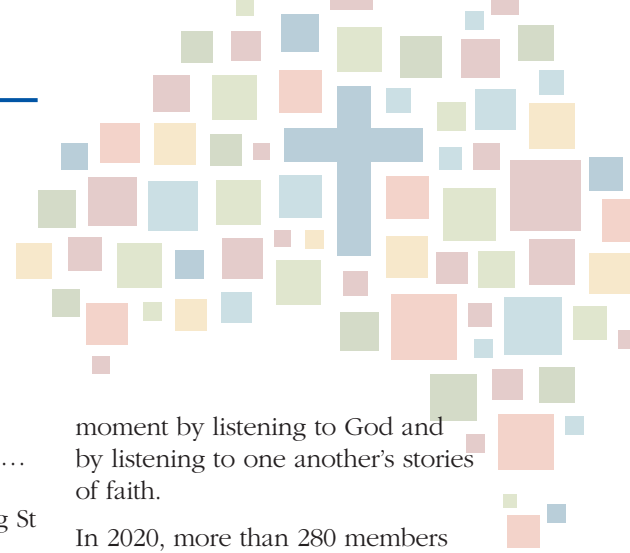
John's book argues precisely this: that the hierarchical Australian church is now all but fatally flawed because of its failure at multiple levels to commit to the principles of equality, transparency and truthfulness that are central to Australian life, and commonly held values by the whole Australian community.

Catholic schools burst at the seams with children, both Catholic and not, whose parents want them to be morally grounded, taught compassion and regard for others, and educated well as whole human beings.

A generation is being shaped by those values – while being unlikely to call themselves Catholics – including perhaps my own children, who are great on the social justice values, less aligned to the actual faith.

Catholic hospitals and Catholic social services are vigorous and much-loved providers of essential human care, underpinned by





respect for fundamental human dignity, as are agencies like Caritas and Vinnies – among the most trusted names in Australia.

Over the past 20 years church attendance among Catholics born in Australia and other English-speaking countries has almost halved. One third of those attending are between 60 and 74; Mass attendance on a typical Sunday is 11.8 per cent of Catholics (9.5 per cent of men and less than 6 per cent of those aged between 20 and 34).

What growth there is happens among people of non-English speaking backgrounds – and arguably that is also subject to generational change.

I sometimes look around me on Saturday nights at Sacred Heart Cootamundra and count who will be left in another 20 years.

Wrestling with the Hierarchy is an attempt to dig deeply into what is going so wrong – and whether there is any hope for change.

It comes from the perspective of someone whose loyalty to the Church is unquestioned but not unquestioning – and as a journalist I am bound to repeat what all of you know – that there is no more valuable person than the one who asks hard questions born of love.

John makes, in this book, such fundamental arguments that they would seem nonsensical if applied to any other institution in Australia.

He says that we need many more women in leadership positions – and this in a church that is, practically speaking, run by women in this country who represent more than 60% of most congregations.

Kristina Keneally [NSW Senator] has been urging women for some time to consider the impact of withdrawing their volunteer labour. Imagine if we stopped washing

the linen, doing the flowers... running the confirmation classes... providing Scripture lessons... secretarial services... and staffing St Vincent de Paul...

But of course, the highest advisory levels in the church are occupied by men and men only and will, by virtue of our bodies alone, always exclude women. Always. We are made in the image of Christ, except when it comes to leadership.

John says that we need much greater lay participation and co-responsible governance – and this in a church where vocations have slowed to a trickle for decades and where many religious orders are in danger of complete extinction.

And yet, recent responses from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Light from the Southern Cross report on Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia say that the hierarchical structure of the church remains a given... that there can be no really substantial change even where willing, able, qualified and committed lay people stand ready to serve.

John says that we need greater transparency and accountability in all aspects of Church affairs including finance and communications – and this in a church that has concealed the most grievous criminal acts of abuse and often attempted to compensate for them, when caught out, with derisory sums for the lives destroyed.

In October 2021, the Catholic Church in Australia will gather for the first Assembly of the Plenary Council to be held since the second Vatican Council.

We are told... that when the decision to hold a Plenary Council was announced, the entire People of God in Australia began preparing for this historic

moment by listening to God and by listening to one another's stories of faith.

In 2020, more than 280 members for the Plenary Council of Australia were announced, including members nominated by dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates, leaders of religious congregations, some church ministries and a personal prelate to represent local churches.

Interesting language about the entire people of God – thanks to six years of classics with the nuns, I'm fairly sure I know who the eparchies and ordinariates are, and personal prelates... but those words alone speak to who is preparing these documents quite strongly on their own.

John says of himself that he wants to be an optimist rather than a nag – and to use the good old Australian phrase – good luck with that in the current situation.

There are capable, intelligent and passionately committed people waiting to serve and that must be good for the church as a whole – and among them priests, lay people and religious, deeply motivated by love and service.

The goodness of the church in the heart of its people is still palpable, evidenced by their refusal to give up caring, fighting and hoping – if only somebody would listen.

Controversial Benedictine nun Sister Joan Chittister recently told the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform that, *'There are one of two ways that this can end. The bishops can embrace the concerns and the need for resolution or they continue to ignore the laity – at which point the church will someday wake up in the morning and find out that the church is in fact gone.'* **R**

*The following address was delivered by John Warhurst at the launch of his book **Wrestling with the Church Hierarchy: Engaging with the Plenary Council and Beyond** (Garratt Publishing).*

It has been a wrestle and the church authorities are unapologetically hierarchical. The bishops are commonly referred to as the hierarchy. That explains the book's title.

I first used this image in 2018 in an article, which is included in the book, called 'Mud Wrestling the Catholic Elephant'. It was a mixed metaphor. I had in mind various parables about the mouse and the elephant to describe the unequal tussle between lay Catholics and the church hierarchy. I also had in mind the difficulty of coming to grips with the hierarchy, given its complex power structures and built-in defence mechanisms.

Getting a grip (another wrestling metaphor) is very difficult because the subject matter is slippery.

It was Doug Hynd, a Baptist friend who reminded me that 'wrestling' has a biblical dimension. In the Book of Genesis Jacob wrestled with an Angel and came away with a blessing, a new name and a limp. Doug hopes that I get a blessing out of the book, even if it does not come from the bishops. Luckily, I don't yet have a limp.

Wrestling has many dimensions and the renewal movement has explored them all: face to face, correspondence, submissions, forums and media.

It is also tiring because it just goes on and on. The church hierarchy moves slowly if at all in response to the voices of lay Catholics. One example is our call for a Diocesan Pastoral Council in Canberra-Goulburn.

It is now or never for the generation of Vatican Two. Age brings confidence but also urgency. I am 73 now and older than most of the bishops. I am no



John Warhurst

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE CANBERRA TIMES

longer willing to be 'seen but not heard'. In speaking out I believe I am fair-minded and balanced. That is what my Canberra Times readers frequently say when they have given me feedback over the past 23 years. There can be no greater compliment.

### **Engagement with the Plenary Council**

The first Plenary Council Assembly is in early October to be followed by a second in July 2022. We still do not really know how it will operate, though its general dimensions have been outlined. The Training Sessions for the 280 Members may make some things clearer as will the PC Agenda, which has been agreed by the bishops and should be released early in June.

The job is in front of us. The church is an almost immovable object. The PC process is controlled by the church hierarchy and is tipped against lay people, who are in a clear minority. Even among lay people there are some who fervently

support the status quo and, frequently as church employees, are very close to the bishops.

Many bishops have an idea of the PC far removed from our own. They look askance at anything that resembles a voice for Catholic people and play the spiritual card to dampen aspirations where necessary.

What we may have going for us is that if the PC is an absolute disaster the image of the church and the hierarchy will suffer even more. They will have to manufacture an outcome which looks like progress. Our challenge and opportunity is to cut through the spin and to demand real substance to the outcomes.

My advice to reformers is to take every opportunity and certainly do not wait for PC outcomes. Our goals of equality for women, co-responsibility for lay Catholics and accountability and transparency in all church affairs, including finance and communications, can be argued for at parish and diocesan level without waiting for national, much less international action.

The bishops have said exactly that in their official response to *The Light from the Southern Cross* and we should hold them to it.

Lay reformers must also help create an atmosphere within the church in which religious and clergy are given a licence and freedom to be themselves free of hierarchical pressures. Within that healthy atmosphere alliances can be built across the church and progress made.

We will all be better off. **R**

---

Professor John Warhurst is Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University, Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn and a Member of the Plenary Council.



# Online conversation on the Church's 'future roadmap'



PHOTO: NEONBRAND ON UNSPLASH

In the lead-up to the Plenary Council and beyond Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) will be hosting a series of online conversations based on the report *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*.

The series will commence on Wednesday 7 July 2021 and focus on 'Mission and Church', the first of three themes from the report selected for discussion during the upcoming year. The other themes are Co-responsibility and Accountability & Synodality.

Published in August 2020 the report is regarded as an important contribution to the life and mission of the Church in Australia, and as a roadmap for the Church's future.

'The Report is a valuable resource and in light of the Plenary Council, the timing is right for the People of God to reflect on the themes in the Report and discern what those themes mean to them,' said CRA President Br Peter Carroll FMS.

Br Peter explained that the

purpose of exploring the Report is to promote co-responsibility in the governance of the Church – reframing how the Church works: 'A conversation can be a catalyst for change and renewal and help to transform culture and institutions.'

Anne Walker, CRA's National Executive Director, added, 'This online conversation is an opportunity for reflective engagement with the document. It opens the way for questions such as, who are you called to be in the Church at this time? What are the possibilities for growth within the Church? What gifts do you bring?'

The first Mission and Church session will be held online on Wednesday 7 July from 9.00am to 2.00pm (AEST). The speakers are Fr Richard Lennan, John Warhurst AO and Melissa Dwyer FDDC.

The two other themes will be discussed before the second assembly of the Plenary Council in July 2022.

Please read the report and supporting documents [here](#). **R**



*Melissa Dwyer FDDC, Congregational Leader of the Canossian Daughters of Charity and Spiritual Adviser for St Vincent de Paul Society, Queensland. She will speak at the Mission and Church session at the Light from the Southern Cross – Catalyst for Conversation.*

# ‘Big spending’ Budget ignores many and entrenches disadvantage

BY ROSE BEYNON

The 2021 Federal Budget has been acclaimed in some quarters for boosting funding in areas such as social services – not least because of pressures resulting from a damning Royal Commission into aged care – training and job subsidies and tax refunds for low and middle-income earners.

Noting that the government had parked its antipathy for ‘debt and deficit’, commentators wryly labelled it a ‘big spending Labor budget’, wondering if the infamous souvenir mugs should be revived with a new message, ‘Back in Red’.

It is true that considerable funding has been directed to some areas long neglected (aged care again, along with disability services) and that Australia’s economy is now in better shape than predicted, even by Treasury’s cautious forecasts.

But given this budget may be the last before the next federal election, how does it stack up in terms of addressing the significant social policy issues likely to face Australia in a post pandemic world, especially as it commits current and future taxpayers to addressing \$1.0 trillion (and rising) in debt?

To answer this question, we turn to The Rule and Catholic Social Teaching Principles to determine whether government policy, spending and fiscal decisions support a just, compassionate and equitable society, whilst maintaining the dignity of the person, the population’s human rights and responsibilities, economic justice, participation and the preferential option for the poor.

It is incumbent on governments to expend revenue in a way that prioritises those most in need and on policies and services that are evidence-based, deemed to



PHOTO: AAP IMAGE/LUKAS COCH

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg holds up the 2021/22 Budget papers ahead of delivering his post Budget Press Club address at Parliament House in Canberra, Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

produce positive outcomes and improve the quality of life.

We know that not every new spending dollar or tax change will deliver the same impact on the economy and the mix of spending and tax cuts matters.

Further, spending alone is unlikely to increase the supply, reduce the cost or improve the quality of social services. There is a risk that without long-term and systemic reform, subsidies will simply end up benefitting the providers of such services, rather than those reliant upon them.

## Aged care

The [Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety](#) made 148 recommendations for fundamental reform. It found that a major contributor to the substandard care experienced by so many older Australians was the decrease, in

real terms, of government funding over the last 20 years.

An increase of \$4.4 billion per year for aged care represents ten percent of the annual total budget spend and addresses existing needs only. Australia’s current spending on aged care, expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product, is relatively low compared with many other OECD countries.

In fact, an additional \$10 billion per year is needed to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations. With a view to sourcing such funding, the Commission reported public support for a levy (through taxation) to ensure that all Australians would be able to access quality aged care when it is needed. However, both the Government and the Opposition have rejected an ‘aged care levy’ and failed to identify an ongoing and reliable funding source, making



it difficult to see how accessibility, staffing and quality of service can be improved over time.

## **Childcare**

A boost of \$0.8 billion per year for childcare represents two percent of the annual total budget spend and will assist one-in-four families. Universal access to preschool will be available for four-year-olds and some improvements have been made to the Child Care Subsidy. However, costs of early education have continued to rise, with the national average up from \$508 in 2019 to \$525 per week in 2020.

The Labor Party's Cheaper Child Care plan goes further by lifting the Child Care Subsidy rate to 90 percent for all families, not just those with more than one child in care, which is the Government's limitation.

Research shows that the first 1000 days are critical to a child's development. Vulnerable children such as those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, remote communities and those living with a disability would benefit the most, yet they are not accessing early learning. The current activity test excludes children from early education when parents and carers do not meet minimum work or study requirements. It should be scrapped to ensure vulnerable children are able to access 30 hours of free care each week.

The dignity of every person, whether young or old, is a foundation of Catholic Social Teaching and this dignity should not be compromised.

## **JobSeeker**

Some \$2.3 billion per year for JobSeeker represents five percent of the annual total budget spend

and equates to an extra \$50 per fortnight for income recipients. Even with this increase and a lifting of the income cap to \$150 per fortnight, a single person is still around \$134 per fortnight below the relative poverty line.

Just over one million people currently receive JobSeeker, which is approximately one-third more than before the pandemic (725,000 in February 2020). Around two-thirds of these people have been on the payment for more than one year (735,000). It is estimated that with JobSeeker payments returning to almost pre-pandemic levels, approximately 85 percent of recipients will be forced back into poverty. Australia is a wealthy country, yet we have one of the lowest rates of unemployment payment in the OECD – the second lowest behind Greece.

One million children were affected by the cuts to the Coronavirus supplement last year and we know that children living in poverty suffer effects far wider than just their material basics. They are 1.7 times more likely to face food insecurity, nearly twice as likely to lack good relationships with friends and almost two and a half times more likely to be missing out on learning at home.

Neither the Government nor the Opposition has committed to increasing the base rate of JobSeeker to ensure that people are not forced to live in poverty while looking for work.

Poverty makes it difficult for a person to live a life commensurate with dignity. Preferential care should be shown to vulnerable and marginalised people.

## **Housing and homelessness**

Equal remuneration order funding for specialist homelessness services is welcomed (\$56.7 million), as is support available through the New

Home Guarantee, First Home Super Saver and Family Home Guarantee. However, the Family Home Guarantee will assist only one-in-100 single parent families.

In the last three months, one-in-six Australians has been unable to pay their rent or mortgage on time. The reality is that affordable housing has become out of reach for the average Australian, with 57 percent feeling unable to afford to buy their own place and 32 percent thinking they will never be able to afford home ownership.

More Australians are moving into homelessness today than ever before and half a million social and affordable homes are needed right now.

Some \$2.3 billion per year represents five percent of the annual total budget spend. This has been committed to infrastructure projects, on top of the \$110 billion already committed over 10 years to the National Infrastructure Plan. Yet nothing substantial has been allocated to increase social and affordable housing even though investment in social housing also generates jobs and stimulates the economy, with every dollar spent estimated to boost GDP by \$1:30.

The Australian Labor Party promises that in government it would commit \$10 billion to a Housing Australia Future Fund to create 30,000 new social and affordable homes.

Human rights and responsibilities must be met to protect human dignity and foster a healthy community. Every person has a fundamental right to the things required for human decency – starting with food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education.

*continued on page 18 ►*

◀ continued from page 17

## People seeking asylum and newly-arrived residents

Funding has been cut for people seeking asylum, while newly-arrived residents are penalised by being made to wait four years before they can access most income support payments. Settlement services that support migrants and refugees to build a new life will not receive equal remuneration order funding.

The Status Resolution Support Service program, one of the few programs that make regular payments to help people meet basic living costs while waiting to hear about their immigration status, has received a 76 percent cut in funding since 2017-18. Yet nearly \$812 million will be spent on the offshore immigration processing system next year, or just under \$3.4 million for each of the 239 people now held on Nauru or in Papua New Guinea.

Neither the Government nor the Opposition has committed to providing additional support to people seeking asylum or newly-arrived residents.

The dignity of people seeking asylum must be upheld. This is removed from all those held in indefinite detention where they are unable to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. Any time in detention should be strictly limited to that required to assess people's health and security status.

## Women

This budget has been touted as one that delivers for women but the National Foundation for Australian Women and the Australian Council of Social Services conclude that most of the expenditure has gone to personal and business tax cuts



and infrastructure, with older women largely ignored.

The sum of \$30.2 billion per year represents 70 percent of the annual total budget spend and this has been committed to personal and business tax cuts. Research identifies the gendered impact of this commitment largely because (as at November 2020) women earn 13.4 percent less than men.

Stages 2 and 3 of the tax cuts will further entrench this inequality because they benefit higher income earners, with men estimated to save five times as much money as women (on average \$2,989 per year compared to \$637 per year). Business tax incentives are also focussed mainly on business write-offs that advantage predominantly male, trade-related workforces.

Finally, women dominate the care workforce, which is underpaid, insecure and supported by insufficient investment.

The Budget provided some much-needed relief in the form of training for new home care workers and nursing scholarships,

but much more needs to be done. An assessment of average cost for each additional job created by this Budget within the next two years shows that jobs in childcare, aged and disability care and mental health are low-cost options (at \$50,000, \$70,000 and \$100,000 respectively), while jobs generated through business and personal tax cuts and infrastructure projects are high-cost options (\$345,000 to \$507,000).

While this can be largely attributed to the undervaluing of care labour, further investment is also needed to support important and vital services provided by the female-dominated care workforce.

The Catholic Social Teaching principle of economic justice states that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages and to safe working conditions. **R**

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



# Uluru Statement from the Heart

“We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately

criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.” R



# Voice must be enshrined in our Constitution



The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has called for a National Voice to be enshrined in the Australian Constitution as part of its response to the Indigenous Voice Co-Design Interim Report to the Australian Government.

A copy of the National Council's submission is available [here](#).

Although not a First Nations Organisation, the Society has been helping the Australian community for over 165 years. People who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander constitute 10 to 95 percent of those we assist in any given year, depending on the type of service and location.

National President, Claire Victory said that enshrining a National Voice in The Constitution would strengthen empowerment, self-determination and subsidiarity and that substantial reform to consultation processes and delivery of programs is also needed.

'In addition to support for the From the Heart Campaign, the Society

calls on the Australian Government to honour its election commitment to hold a referendum once a model for the Voice has been settled,' Ms Victory said.

'The Society supports the passage of enabling legislation for the Voice to be passed after a referendum has been held in the next term of Parliament.

'And we support a membership model for the National Voice that ensures previously unheard Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same chance as established leadership figures of being selected.

'Any membership, representative or consultative body needs to reflect the fact that communities are unique and constantly changing; and the body needs to be agile enough to respond to localised issues but have the mandate to address national matters.

'The approach outlined by the From the Heart campaign will give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a say on the policies and

laws that impact their lives. It will also ensure that Parliament and the Australian Government are more appropriately informed in their approach to Indigenous affairs policy and law-making. Ultimately, this will result in better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

'Better outcomes will only be achieved when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to "live in dignity, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their self-determined development, in keeping with their own needs and aspirations" as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

On a visit to Alice Springs 35 years ago, Pope John Paul II stated that "what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off until tomorrow." **R**



# Enshrine the ‘Voice to Parliament’ in the Constitution

Like governments, referendums come and go, and don’t always leave the desired mark on history. However, one way to optimise permanency is to attach true constitutional change to a referendum, and in regard to ensuring meaningful input to government decisions affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this argument is being advanced strongly in various quarters.

Advocates for this path include the [St Vincent de Paul Society](#) and, in a lengthy article for [The Monthly](#), Megan Davis, a professor of law at the University of New South Wales.

Prof Davis, a Cobble Cobble woman from Queensland, is also a pro vice-chancellor at UNSW and a member of the Referendum Council. Saying Australia ‘stands at a crossroads’ regarding the introduction of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, she writes, ‘Now, in 2021, the nation is preparing for an extraordinary referendum, a constitutional moment, to implement the first step of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, equal parts inspiring and practical, but also transformative.’

However, Prof Davis adds, ‘we are not there yet’, stressing that, in accordance with the Uluru proposal, ‘a voice to parliament must be constitutionally enshrined in order to distinguish it from the usual voices to government, and to be independent from the government of the day.’

Prof Davis says that while the legislated model proposed by Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt ‘empowers a voice to some extent, it can be ignored and rendered silent by government’, citing examples of where this has happened – the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (1972–77), the National Aboriginal Conference (1977–85), the Aboriginal and



*The Fifth Element by Amala Groom, a finalist in the 2020 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. The painting is based on Frederick McCubbin’s celebrated 1889 work ‘Down on His Luck’, using a print found discarded in a car park near the artist’s house.*

Torres Strait Islander Commission (1989–2005) and the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (2010–19).

‘The legislated model, without a constitutional anchor, remains subject to repeal at the whim of the government of the day, as happened to ATSIC. This would be much more difficult with a constitutionally enshrined model.’

Prof Davis explains, ‘The Uluru statement and the constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament are about enhancing the integrity of our democratic culture. A First Nations voice in the Constitution, established by referendum, would shift Indigenous affairs out of the realm of ideological party politics, where our issues are ruthlessly measured against utilitarian rule.’

‘Such a voice would be imbued with the legitimacy of the First Nations peoples and the Australian people voting in unity at a referendum and conducting a dialogue with each other through the parliament for the century ahead. Symbolic and substantive.’

Prof Davis says ‘the crossroads we now face’ entail endorsing a legislated voice to parliament, an ‘anything is better than

nothing’ moment, or endorsing a constitutionally protected voice to parliament, ‘recognising that the lack of progress and the billions of dollars wasted on Indigenous affairs each year occurs because there is minimal Indigenous input into laws and policies aimed at First Nations.’

This reminds her of Wiradyuri artist Amala Groom’s painting *The Fifth Element*, evoking Frederick McCubbin’s 1889 iconic work *Down on His Luck*, a faded print of which the artist found in a nearby Aldi car park: ‘Across the image she painted in red, We Are All In This Together... Ah, bureaucracy: two Australian painters, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, both let down by government, talking to each other across time...’

‘Her take on McCubbin’s much-loved work was “her way of hugging Australians and Australian history, saying ‘it’s going to be all right’”. And in that quote she sums up the generosity of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. In 2017, we invited you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future. And now is the time for Australians to use their voice to make this happen. A constitutional moment beckons.’ **R**

# Australia has not been ‘a great country’ for Indigenous people

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

*Senator Andrew Bragg’s new book urges a Voice to Parliament for Indigenous Australians and an extra public holiday to mark Buraadja (‘Tomorrow’) Day.*

In his maiden parliamentary speech in 2019 Senator Andrew Bragg (Lib, NSW) said, ‘All Australians will always be equal but we cannot have Indigenous people feel estranged in the land of their ancestors. Almost every comparable nation has landed some form of legal recognition of first peoples. We should not wait any longer.’

This conviction has now been expanded into book-length form with the release in May of *Buraadja – The Liberal Case for National Reconciliation* (Connor Court Publishing 2021), spelling out his case for a healing process through supporting the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart and providing a national and local Voice to parliament based on the Langton-Calma co-design process ‘as outlined in the Indigenous Voice Co-design Interim Report to the Australian Government.

*Buraadja* (Tomorrow) comes from the Dhurga language of the Yuin people of the NSW south coast, as do the book’s other two parts, *Bugiya* (Yesterday) and *Nhaway* (Today). The time frames correspond with the three stages of Sen Bragg’s analysis: the contributions of Australian liberalism to Indigenous affairs, the importance of truth telling in order to close the ‘Great Australian Silence’, and options for addressing the ‘valid concern that Australia does not do enough to incorporate Indigenous culture into our national life’.

Regarding the first, he damns the ‘shameful declaration of terra

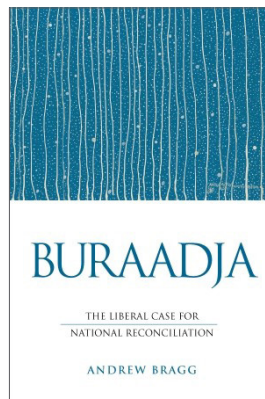
nullius’ in 1770 and discusses the work of historical Liberal figures such as Billy Wentworth, RG Menzies, Harold Holt, Malcolm Fraser and Neville Bonner, and more recently Ken Wyatt. A general awareness of their legacies, which include the creation of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), the 1967 referendum and land rights legislation, has been ‘largely lost to the Liberal tradition’, Sen Bragg believes.

He contends that truth telling should begin today with accepting the Uluru Statement from the Heart, establishing a Voice to Parliament anchored in the constitution and committing to holding a referendum in the 47th Parliament (i.e., after the next federal election). Following interviews with Aboriginal community members during extensive travels in NSW the senator regards the idea of a Voice as a high priority. He argues strongly for land rights and native title schemes not being seen as impediments to economic development but rather as opportunities for sharing the benefits of economic growth and prosperity.

Sen Bragg also advocates for ‘more Indigenous people in the Parliament – especially in the Liberal Party.’

In the words of journalist and author Stan Grant, he does appear to be ‘taking on his own political tribe.’

As for tomorrow’s actions, Sen Bragg wants a national Indigenous institution in Canberra’s Parliamentary Triangle and, with the consent of traditional owners, for our leaders to don traditional cloaks for the opening of Parliament. He steps into the often-turbulent debate over Australia Day (which would



be kept), proposing an additional public holiday on 27 January to be known as Buraadja Day.

‘Australia is a great country but for the most part has not been a great country for Indigenous people,’ Sen Bragg writes.

‘Australians need to care more, we need to listen more, and

we need to deliver. The nation has not delivered for Indigenous people and we have been too comfortable about it. Australia has been too comfortable with the gap in life expectancy and social and economic outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians.

‘*Buraadja* offers a plan to deliver national reconciliation by enacting the Uluru Statement from the Heart along with practical and symbolic changes designed to close the economic and social gaps between Indigenous people and the rest of the Australia population, and further to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our national life.’

The author explains that using the Dhurga language for the title derives from its being brought back to life by the Yuin people – ‘a great story of the rebirth of language’. Craig Ritchie from AIATSIS travelled with Sen Bragg to Moruya to meet with Yuin Traditional Owner Patricia Ellis, who co-authored the Dhurga dictionary and provided her blessing for the use of the Dhurga language here.

The artwork on the book’s cover, ‘Rainy day fishing’, was created by Kuku Yalanji and Kuku Nyungkul woman Karen Gibson. **R**

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



# From the CEO

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

The Federal Government delivered a big-spending budget in May and the Society welcomed the significant commitments across a range of social services.

But looking more closely at this pre-election budget we have to ask whether the government will maintain what it describes as long-term commitments to aged care, disability support, mental health, schools, hospitals and women's safety.

Treasurer Frydenberg said half the spending is temporary, doing what is working to date, extending the Low and Middle Income Tax Offsets that will support more than 10 million Australians with a tax cut.

Weak growth is predicted over the next year or two, wages are going backwards in real terms and the government insists it will go ahead with stage 3 tax cuts that will wind back the LMITOs.

The Treasurer has refused to rule out spending cuts after the next Federal Election, which could take place anytime between August this year and May 2022.

The Government increased spending to ensure those essential services continue but speaking on ABC's *Insiders*, he said, 'We did so in a way that is consistent with Liberal values supporting the private sector with business investment incentives that will help support around \$320 billion of investment, backing families by cutting their taxes and rewarding effort or encouraging personal responsibility, supporting retirees, supporting stronger regions, supporting home ownership...'

It remains unclear how \$130 billion in tax cuts (committed



*Toby O'Connor*

to when the budget was in surplus, but still very much front and centre of the Government's platform) will contribute to economic growth in the years ahead when the government is using government money to pay for them.

The Treasurer described the move as 'rewarding Australians in work and it's returning more of their money. That's our approach. You're rewarding effort, encouraging aspiration, returning more of people's hard-earned money back to them,' he said.

The Society certainly acknowledges the dignity of work and the principle of everyone who can work finding secure employment with enough hours to cover their living costs. However, the experience of our Members informs us that not everyone can find work and not everyone in a job has adequate hours to cover their costs of living.

We are particularly concerned about an ongoing absence of any commitment to social and affordable housing. This was a missed opportunity to increase housing supply, which would

help to rein in housing costs, as well as create jobs and stimulate the economy.

National Council has resolved to develop a pre-Federal Election advocacy strategy and we are now putting this together. The strategy will draw on both Catholic Social Teachings and our Vincentian values in order to highlight the human dignity of those people we seek to give a hand up to.

Working with state and territory social justice contacts we will produce some background information on core social issues. These will be made available to local conferences. We hope these materials will be helpful during the Federal Election campaign when our Members make local approaches on social policy matters of concern to the Society to both sitting MPs and electoral candidates. In addition to their ongoing conference work, the efforts of Members in this important initiative will be valuable and greatly appreciated as the election approaches. **R**

---

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



PHOTO: LAGALERIADE ARCOIANGENTE ON FLICKR CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

## Catholics for Refugees: A Call for Action

BY TIM MCKENNA

In March the Archbishop of Adelaide, the Most Reverend Patrick O'Regan, blessed the re-located Vinnies House of Welcome at Kilburn saying, 'Welcoming a stranger is not an option, it is part of our core. This House of Welcome is at the heart of the Gospel.'<sup>1</sup>

Brad Hocking, the Society's SA President, spoke about the hardships faced by people arriving in Australia nearly a decade ago who are still on temporary protection visas or short-term bridging visas because of Federal Government policy.

About 30,000 such people across the country are in this parlous situation. Over 500 have suffered for years in PNG and Nauru, followed by Australian detention, before release into our community.

'It's not really protection if it's

temporary,' Mr Hocking said. 'This generates the fear of deportation and can generate desperation because there is uncertainty about the future.'<sup>2</sup>

In April the Society's National President, Claire Victory called for the release of the detained Sri Lankan 'Biloela' family on Christmas Island, now there for three years and still fearing deportation. Ms Victory also urged the release from detention of all those medically evacuated from PNG and Nauru and for the federal government to take up New Zealand's long-standing offer to re-settle the remaining refugees from those two countries.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Federal Budget in May, the Society's National Council presented a submission calling for the restoration of previous assistance to the thousands of people seeking asylum now living in poverty and at risk of

homelessness<sup>4</sup> who are now assisted by Vinnies groups, such as the House of Welcome, and other refugee support organizations (including Catholic groups) across the country.

### The Federal Government's Response

One positive step by the Federal Government in June was to finally move the Biloela family to Perth after a serious medical emergency for one of the children, placing them into community detention. At the time of publication the family had been granted a three-month bridging visa. The Government should now take the next step and allow them to return home to Biloela.

Sadly, none of our other calls has yet resulted in any Federal Government action, with allocations in the recent Federal Budget – described by the Refugee



Council of Australia as favouring ‘detention over hope’ for refugees – allocating hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding for immigration detention.<sup>5</sup>

In early May, over a thousand asylum seekers who have waited years for their refugee applications to be processed were given just two weeks to prepare for their first and only interview. Without government assistance for lawyers, these people must rely on pro-bono support for that preparation. The Refugee Advice and Casework Service said legal centres in NSW and Victoria are being inundated. David Manne from Refugee Legal added, ‘This sudden surge will deprive many people of the chance to access the legal help they need – and a real and fair opportunity to prepare and present their case.’<sup>6</sup>

*Together in Safety*, a report by the Human Rights Law Centre in April this year exposes the Federal Government’s ‘deliberate and systematic approach to keeping refugee families apart’, including a ban on family reunion applications for the thousands in the Australian community on temporary protection visas.<sup>7</sup>

## Catholic Responses

Sadly, support for these vulnerable people, including families, is left largely to community organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul

Society and specialist refugee support bodies, many of which are Catholic. Those I am aware of include:

- Melbourne – the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project.<sup>8</sup>
- Sydney – the Jesuit Refugee Service<sup>9</sup> and another ‘House of Welcome’ operated by St Francis Social Services.<sup>10</sup>
- Brisbane – the Mercy Romero Centre.<sup>11</sup>

As well, many Catholic schools and parish groups are doing the best they can to assist.

In light of this effort, earlier this year Bishop Vincent Long launched *Catholics for Refugees*. His aim is to bring together people involved in all these activities to inform and support each other. In doing so he hopes Catholics can create a more compassionate and caring Australia for vulnerable people who have come to our country seeking our protection.<sup>12</sup>

One initiative being supported through *Catholics For Refugees* is a campaign of 150 Days of Action for refugees and people seeking asylum. The campaign is being led by the Sisters of St Joseph in this year of St Joseph, himself a refugee and recently named by Pope Francis as “Patron of Refugees”.<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Terry Brady launched the campaign on 1 May, St

Joseph’s feast day. The campaign will conclude with a Day of Lamentation and Call to Action on the Church’s World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sunday 26 September. During this period, organisers aim to engage with people of good will, and to change Australia’s attitude and policies towards those seeking protection in Australia. In launching the campaign Bishop Brady told participants that they “could make a difference and must work to make a difference.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, *Continuing the Journey*, the working document of the upcoming Plenary Council, in its Chapter 4 ‘Going Forth’, notes that in “many statements in recent years the Catholic Church in Australia has expressed its unease and even shame regarding government policies that treat asylum seekers as criminals.” It calls on the Church in Australia to be “on the lookout for those who are marginalised” and rededicate itself to the service of those Jesus describes in Matt 25:3 1-46 as “the least of these my sisters and brothers”.<sup>15</sup>

The Federal Government has certainly forced people seeking our asylum, who came by boat, into this category. Let us support these Catholic initiatives and hope and pray that more Catholics will indeed ‘make a difference’ for these vulnerable people. **R**

1 [thesouthernreport.com.au/news/2021/03/04/archbishop-oregan-blesses-vinnies-house-of-welcome/](https://thesouthernreport.com.au/news/2021/03/04/archbishop-oregan-blesses-vinnies-house-of-welcome/)

2 Ibid

3 [www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/new-home-affairs-minister-has-opportunities-for-compassion](https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/new-home-affairs-minister-has-opportunities-for-compassion)

4 [treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/115786\\_ST\\_VINCENT\\_DE\\_PAUL\\_SOCIETY\\_-\\_SUBMISSION\\_1.pdf](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/115786_ST_VINCENT_DE_PAUL_SOCIETY_-_SUBMISSION_1.pdf)

5 [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/govt-chooses-detention-over-hope-for-worlds-refugees-in-budget/](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/govt-chooses-detention-over-hope-for-worlds-refugees-in-budget/)

6 [www.sbs.com.au/news/concerns-over-government-s-fast-track-interview-process-for-people-seeking-asylum](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/concerns-over-government-s-fast-track-interview-process-for-people-seeking-asylum)

7 [www.hrlc.org.au/together-in-safety](https://www.hrlc.org.au/together-in-safety)

8 [hasp.org.au/](https://hasp.org.au/)

9 [aus.jrs.net/en/jesuit-refugee-service/](https://aus.jrs.net/en/jesuit-refugee-service/)

10 [www.stfrancis.org.au/house-of-welcome](https://www.stfrancis.org.au/house-of-welcome)

11 [romero.mercycommunity.org.au/](https://romero.mercycommunity.org.au/)

12 [catholicsforrefugees.org.au/](https://catholicsforrefugees.org.au/) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/catholicsforrefugees](https://www.facebook.com/catholicsforrefugees)

13 [cruxnow.com/vatican/2021/05/vatican-approves-new-invocations-for-litany-of-st-joseph/](https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2021/05/vatican-approves-new-invocations-for-litany-of-st-joseph/)

14 [www.sosj.org.au/150-days-for-refugees-josephite-justice-network-launches-new-campaign/](https://www.sosj.org.au/150-days-for-refugees-josephite-justice-network-launches-new-campaign/)

15 [plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IL-document-spreads.pdf](https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IL-document-spreads.pdf)

# Every Council can benefit from youth reps

BY REBECCA CASSAR

Vincentians are familiar with the story of our founders, particularly Frederic, a young man, who, with his peers, dared to show his works in a time of challenge and change. It is through the zeal of Frederic, his young friends and those who guided them, that the Society and the first Conference were created.

It is therefore important to maintain the original vision of the founders by ensuring that young people are represented at each Council level.

*'Young Vincentians reflect the original spirit and charism of the Society by enhancing its mission with their enthusiasm and dynamism.'*

- The Rule, Part III,  
Procedural Guidelines

Our Society structures aim to preserve the spirit of youth displayed by Frederic and his friends. Those young of age and young of heart have a role to play in ensuring that our members act with enthusiasm for their Vincentian vocation and are adaptable and creative in their works.

Ensuring a Youth Representative is present on every Council is one way that the Society safeguards the spirit of youth. Often, young members have a wealth of experience, professional knowledge and a wide range of encounter with those we serve, but this often goes unnoticed. Guided by longer-serving Councillors, the leadership of young Vincentians, particularly Youth Representatives on Council can flourish.

This was especially visible through the important role of young councillors and their advisory committee members during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Works were maintained and adapted to ensure continued



(l-r) Stephanie Reed, Chair Resource Committee – School Communities; Rebecca Cassar, Deputy National Youth Representative; Jacob Miller, National Council Vice President; Denmielle Massang, Chair Advisory Committee – Pathways; Lachlan Dent, Chair, Program Committee – Indigenous Reconciliation; John Feint, Bailly, Standing Committee, Spirit of Youth; Ryan Andrews, Chair, Resource Committee – Youth Engagement; and Wina Zhu, Co-Chair, Program Committee – Emerging Leaders.

service to those in need, especially as vulnerable members were unable to continue their service.

*'Presidents of Councils, after consultation with young members, appoint a Youth Representative who is able to reflect the opinions of young people in all matters discussed by the council.'*

- The Rule, Part III,  
Procedural Guidelines

It is through open communication that young people are embraced as equals in a Society that encircles the world. Youth Representatives on Councils elevate the sense of belonging for young members in the Society, considering their views and promoting the range of works young people engage in with the Councils.

The Youth Representatives, as well as young members, also play a vital role in advocating for and promoting the dignity and personal integrity of those they typically assist through youth-led

works. It is therefore imperative to ensure Councils have a Youth Representative in order to elevate the importance of youth-led works and preserve the Society in the long term.

Youth Representatives are not the future of the Society, rather the here and now, present in shaping Regional, Diocesan, Central and State and Territory Councils' thinking on all matters.

Through forward and future focused thinking young people have a vital role to play in keeping the Society young in an ever-changing Australia. It is my hope that Presidents, whether Council or Conference, embrace the young members of the Society and see them as peers, able to enhance and bring about positive change to those we advocate for and serve, in the example of our founders. **R**

Rebecca Cassar is the Deputy National Youth Representative. She can be contacted for support with appointing Youth Reps on any Council – [Rebecca.cassar@svdvp.org.au](mailto:Rebecca.cassar@svdvp.org.au)



# Darwin's Ozanam House serves a vital need

**D**arwin may have the smallest population of any Australian capital, but it faces significant social challenges, not least homelessness, which has a disproportionate impact on people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Many people come into Darwin from outlying communities, seeking the 'bright lights' of the NT's major city. However, the high cost of living, lack of employment opportunities and shortage of affordable accommodation results in considerable homelessness, which in turn creates a demand for essential day-to-day services, including food, bathroom and laundry facilities, and of course companionship.

Ozanam House, run by St Vincent de Paul Society NT since 1978, greets an average of 200 people each weekday, offering nutritious breakfasts and lunches, a laundry service, bathroom facilities, day beds in a quiet and safe environment, activities, lockers, phone chargers, support from specialist agencies such as health, legal and financial counselling services, and referrals to other community networks or supports.

'While members of our team are not professional counsellors they listen and help our visitors identify challenges as well as suggesting ways forward and linking them to other community networks or support services that may be able to assist,' said Centre Manager, Dona Wright.

'It's the little things that make a big impact, such as refrigerating medications for our clients with cardiac issues, eyedrops and the like. The dignity of having a daily shower with clean clothes is priceless.

Companionship is central to the centre's mission, Dona added: 'At



Visitors to Ozanam House in Darwin include artist Jimmy, pictured with the CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Northern Territory, Rob Lutter.

Ozanam House we seek to foster interaction, companionship and genuine communities of friends from all walks of life. Those visiting the centre can be as involved as much, or as little, as they like. We have games, books, social events and programs such as arts, music, job readiness, to name a few.'

Ozanam House is located in the central suburb of Stuart Park, enabling ready access by those experiencing homelessness,

estimated to total around 2500 people across the city, a much higher rate than in capitals such as Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide ([details here](#)).

This alarming figure means that almost one-in-ten of the city's homeless population relies on Ozanam House for basic personal support, giving it a vital role in Darwin's social structure.

Further information [here](#). **R**



# CEO Sleepout raised a record \$9.2m (and counting)



Left: Mark and Cathy Fren, popular hosts of the television show *Travel Guides*, with Karen Soper, the coordinator of Matthew Talbot Homeless Service in Newcastle.

Below: John McKendry and Ken Hill were among the 1500 participants at the 2021 Vinnies CEO Sleepout.

The 2021 Vinnies CEO Sleepout on 17 June 2021 (24 June in Perth) achieved a record result, raising more than \$9.2 million nationally to support the Society's homelessness services. The national total surpassed the previous record of \$7.9 million.

Since the first event in 2006 the Vinnies CEO Sleepout has raised more than \$60 million. This year more than 1500 participants took part in cities and regional centres across Australia.

The outpouring of generosity from business and community leaders was incredibly heartening, especially given the demand for assistance for Vinnies services as a result of COVID-19. The funds raised will enable the Society to provide crisis accommodation, food, clothing, healthcare, emotional support and long-term assistance for people experiencing homelessness.

At the Sydney event, live-streamed to Newcastle and Wollongong, participants learned from the NSW

Treasurer, Dominic Perrotet, one of the sleepers-out, that the following week's State Budget would allocate \$4.9 million in funding to help develop two Vinnies sites for specialist accommodation for women and children escaping domestic and family violence in the city's southern and western suburbs.

'This is an investment and a testament to the work that Vinnies does,' Mr Perrotet said.

'I think it's important for politicians to join these nights as well. Like all of you tonight, we've been very privileged and blessed to have heard the stories of many women who have – from the bottom of their hearts – told us stories that would have been very difficult to tell.'

The Vinnies CEO Sleepout was also an opportunity to draw attention to the struggles people are facing and for calling on all levels of government to ensure everyone has a safe, secure and stable place to call home. **R**





# Time called (and recalled) at Brisbane's landmark hostel

BY CALLUM JOHNSON

An unassuming brick building, tucked away around the corner from Brisbane's cultural district, has been a place of hope and comfort for the city's homeless community for more than four decades.

But after so many years, the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland Men's Homeless Hostel in South Brisbane, the largest homeless hostel in the state, is now sitting empty for the first time in 20 years as it undergoes a major redesign.

St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland CEO Kevin Mercer said the Hostel was a place that offered critical support to many over the years, but the time had come to move towards a more secure, dignified and person-informed service design that achieves better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Residents have been supported in the move to a more modern and comfortable venue at a site converted from a Spring Hill hotel, as the Society works with the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy to redesign their homelessness community response, including accommodation and support services.

One former resident, James Neilson, recalled his time at the South Brisbane hostel as the beginning of a journey that would forever change his life for the better.

In 2007, James turned up at the hostel during the most difficult time of his life – a drinking addiction had left him with nothing but a backpack full of clothes and a blanket to his name.

'I was spiralling downhill – it felt like the world had defeated me,' he said.



*James was a visitor to the Queensland Men's Homeless Hostel that is now being refurbished. He has since found permanent accommodation.*

But during a recent return to the hostel, this time as a passing visitor, James said the memories were more pleasant than painful.

'Being here brings back feelings of comfort – every time I walked through the front door, it meant I had a place to sleep that night,' he said.

'It's also the place where I decided to turn my life around and began my journey of recovery'.

James said a decision to reach out for help while sleeping in a local park for several months ended up being one of the best things he ever did.

'After I lost everything, it took me a while to come to someone for help – I just assumed there was no support out there for someone like me,' James said.

'The hostel not only gave me somewhere secure to sleep each night, but the staff there were very supportive and really helped me on the road to recovery. My experience there led me to get serious about breaking my addiction and once I left, I immediately checked into rehab.'

While not the fairy tale ending some may hope for, James said he is in a far better place and is now living in community housing.

'I still have my ups and downs, but I've grown as a person along the way and I'm in a much better place now,' he said.

'Becoming homeless makes it so much harder to get help – you don't have a fixed address so you can't get Centrelink and you don't have any money or good clothes or computer, making it really hard to apply for jobs.'

'Without the support of the St Vincent de Paul Society, I really don't know where I would be today.'

As a final send off for the hostel in its current form, the venue was selected as the host of the 2021 Vinnies CEO Sleepout event on 17 June, where local business and community leaders experienced first-hand what it is like to sleep inside a men's shelter.

St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland CEO Kevin Mercer said he could only imagine the triumphs, tribulations, successes, and challenges that were felt by the countless men who have previously slept at the hostel.

'We've had some amazing outcomes for many of the people who have been through those doors over the years,' Mr Mercer said.

'But the building itself is now nearly 40 years old and it's really time for an upgrade. We're looking forward to providing a better experience for vulnerable Queenslanders at our new site in Spring Hill, as we work with the State Government to find a new, permanent solution with even better outcomes.'

'At the new site, we will continue to provide integrated support, connect residents with specialist services and support them in the process of transitioning to a place they can call a home of their very own.' **R**

Callum Johnson is Communications and Media Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society QLD.

# Good Night In supports good works



BY DEANNA WATSON

Although COVID-19 restrictions in Western Australia meant the cancellation of the planned livestreaming of the event, a novel fundraiser called the ‘Vinnies Good Night In’ helped generate individual and corporate donations to support the Society’s WA Emergency Assistance program.

Playing a lead role was the genial high-profile MC, local comedian Ciaran Lyons who shared his ‘Good Night In’ via a pre-recorded presentation featuring stories and interviews about the Vinnies program, including discussions about home visitations, our Support Centres, and conference work with people seeking assistance.

‘It was so great to be involved in this important event that is not only raising money for a great cause, but also helping

us realise how important it is to have close relationships in our lives,’ Ciaran said.

‘It is something many of us take for granted, myself included, but many vulnerable Western Australians don’t have access to.’

Amid mask wearing and social distancing, families took part in their homes, along with a university, with primary and secondary schools registering to take part on future dates. Interest via social media was outstanding, with around 12,000 people engaging with the event since it went live.

It is estimated that some 65,000 residents of WA depend on Vinnies for support each year, making creative fundraisers such as the ‘Vinnies Good Night In’ especially important. **R**

*Perth comedian and media personality Ciaran Lyons.*

---

Deanna Watson is Communication and Content Developer, St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc.



# WA's Joondalup support centre opens

BY DEANNA WATSON

Vinnies WA has opened a new centre providing an easily accessed, one-stop service for people experiencing hardship. After a tight two-week turnaround for painting and fit-out the Joondalup Community Support Centre was blessed and officially opened in early May, offering services such as emergency assistance with food, utility bills, household furniture and bedding, referrals for free financial counselling and other agencies, advocacy and emotional support.

The idea of positioning a Vinnies Support Centre in the northern suburbs was raised during 2020 at the height of COVID-19 restrictions. Prior to this time, Joondalup and Wanneroo had already been identified as two high-need areas for food insecurity that escalated post COVID-19. Vinnies WA Service Development Manager Maija Hildebrand says this is one of the key reasons for the location choice.

'We really wanted to address this need in Joondalup and the surrounding areas by having a space where people can come and receive practical assistance directly and, in most cases, immediately. We are also actively working with other organisations in the area to ensure we are able to support the community where the needs are most pressing.

'We've chosen this location in central Joondalup so that it is easily accessible by the free CAT buses and the train and in close proximity to other services in the area.'

The support centre is designed to be a safe and welcoming space with suitable meeting areas. It houses a well-stocked food pantry, allowing people visiting the support centre to immediately access food relief. Joondalup/Wanneroo Regional Council



President Allan Rose says that this is one way the centre can provide comprehensive support with food relief and provide a pathway to other services.

'We want to help people with their immediate needs and for more complex needs to provide access to specialist financial, social or emotional support services to improve client wellbeing and life outcomes.

Additionally, the Support Centres offer another way the community can be supported other than through our home visitation program.

'Some clients may not have a

home and others may be more comfortable seeing our volunteers here rather than in their home.'

This new Support Centre will offer added flexibility for people needing practical outcomes when seeking emergency assistance and support. It will cover Northern suburbs such as Wanneroo, Woodvale, Ocean Reef, Whitfords, Greenwood and Clarkson. The centre will initially be open Tuesdays and Thursdays. **R**

Deanna Watson is Communication and Content Developer, St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc.

# Friendship is ‘powerful medicine’ for Compeer artists



BY CRISTINA OCAMPO

In late April 2021 participants in the Society’s Compeer program displayed their artwork at a special exhibition in Canberra opened by Dr Mathew Trinca AM, Director of the National Museum of Australia.

Compeer is an acclaimed volunteer program helping people with mental illness through one-on-one friendships based on sharing similar interests and hobbies, and peer support. Its aim is to reduce social isolation and combat the stigma attached to mental illness.

The program is based on the premise that ‘friendship is a powerful medicine’ and it provides a more normalised world that does not revolve around mental illness but around common interests and the appreciation of community.

Compeer is operated by Vinnies with funding from ACT Health. The program is the only one of its kind in Australia and has been operating since 2009.

‘For eight weeks, Compeer participants worked on an art

project to tell the story of their lives and explore their emotions,’ said Barnie van Wyk, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

‘This exhibition is a culmination of their work, and an exciting event for Vinnies.’

Participants in the ‘My Story Through Art’ program focused on creating a safe space to release feelings and tell stories, enjoying a creative experience, developing the courage to try new things, enjoying a peaceful, social, and joyful group environment, and creating a calming and stimulating sense of achievement through challenging activities.

They learnt about art history, applied various elements of art, used a wide range of materials and techniques, and worked on multiple art pieces, including a self-portrait that tells the story of their lives and expresses their emotions through colour and texture. Several pieces from each participant were featured at the exhibition.

‘The program not only gave us self-discovery, but it gave each

of us time to think, create and to share our stories with each other,’ said one Compeer participant. Another said, ‘I feel so happy and motivated... I see that I have some abilities doing art. But most of all this time gave me so much peace and self-confidence. I am so grateful.’

‘The heart and soul of this program are the participants and our incredible volunteers,’ Barnie van Wyk said.

‘They meet on a regular basis for planned social activities. Participants explore what Canberra has to offer, attending open events around the city, visiting galleries and museums, marketplaces, having coffees and chats, walks, going to the movies.’

Compeer invites people who feel able to help our Friends reconnect with their community to consider becoming Volunteers. To enquire about the Compeer program please call (02) 6234 7309. **R**

Cristina Ocampo is Communications Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.



# National Council welcomes new Overseas Development Program Facilitator



Following the recent departure of Jude Blacklock, our highly regarded Overseas Development Program Facilitator, we are pleased to welcome Tricia Wilden to this important position.

In order to ensure that this Program continues to meet the needs of our partners overseas Jude joined our National CEO Toby oConnor in the recruitment of her replacement. Tricia has commenced in this role and will be working Tuesdays to Thursdays. She can be contacted on [overseasdevelopment@svdp.org.au](mailto:overseasdevelopment@svdp.org.au) or +61 2 6202 1215.

National President Claire Victory said, 'Tricia brings to this role her commitment and ability to help people in communities and organisations to work together for positive change. With a

career spanning business and not-for-profits, she has extensive experience in international outreach, including in program management, mentoring and technical advisory roles with supporting academic and professional qualifications.'

Most recently, Tricia has been based in Fiji working in a Pacific-wide disaster preparedness role with the Red Cross. This included supporting Red Cross National Societies in their work with communities in the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu. Since returning to her home base in Canberra prior to COVID-19 Tricia has been working on completing her community-focused PhD.

Tricia learned of the work of St Vincent de Paul through her schooling in Canberra's

Catholic education system and the engagement of her family and friends.

'I am excited to be starting in this role and being able to support the Society to deliver good works in overseas communities where many people are in great need,' Tricia said.

'I am especially proud to be following in the footsteps of my father, who as a Vincentian was involved with the good works undertaken by the Canberra/ Goulburn Archdiocese over many years, and my grandmother who helped establish what could be one of the earliest St Vincent de Paul shopfront stores in NSW at West Wyalong.' **R**

# First impressions count: help us improve our website



[Vinnies.org.au](http://Vinnies.org.au) is the digital face of the Society and we'd love to hear your ideas on making it more effective for Companions, Members, Volunteers and Staff alike.

- Do you use vinnies.org.au, contribute content, or see the website as a key resource for those seeking help?
- If you don't use the website for a particular reason you are still welcome to provide feedback on how it could be improved.

Either way, we'd greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn about your experience.

We're embarking on an exciting initiative to refresh vinnies.org.au for the Society, ensuring we're making the right first impression.

By getting involved you'll be providing valuable feedback and will be invited to test key improvements before they're released.

Able to help? Send your contact details to [website@svdcp.org.au](mailto:website@svdcp.org.au) and we'll be in touch to learn about your experience. Any comments or suggestions you make will be treated in confidence.

We look forward to hearing from you. **R**



*Graphic by Garry Burns, Experience Designer, pictured left.*



Will you help  
me find  
somewhere  
safe  
to sleep  
tonight?



You can help rescue a  
child from homelessness.

**HELP END THE PAIN OF POVERTY. DONATE TODAY.**

Please give by calling 13 18 12  
or visiting [vinnies.org.au/winterappeal](http://vinnies.org.au/winterappeal)



**Vinnies**  
good works

Images have been changed to protect the privacy of the people we assist.





In the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown in Darwin and Alice Springs in late June 2021, locally based artist Chips Mackinolty designed a range of posters for the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) to promote vaccination take-up.