

# The Record

SUMMER 2022/23



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



**GOOD  
WORKS  
GARDEN**



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.

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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 45,000 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)

# POETRY

## The Heaven Tree

Are you despondent, modern man,  
as you labour to earn your bread?  
Do you do the best you can  
with a heart as heavy as lead?

You'll find in your heart a seed is there,  
the seed of heaven above;  
you must nurture it with daily prayer  
and water it with love.

Then yours, of all the host of seeds  
waiting for life to start  
will begin to swell, then burst, and then proceed  
to grow inside your heart.

As it grows, you will spread your arms out wide  
and become a heaven tree  
and love and comfort for all provide  
and solace for the grieving be

And a joyful peace will go with you  
as you earn your daily bread,  
for every day is a day brand new  
when you've risen from the dead.

*Original poem contributed by Vincentian Pat Cunneen,  
Whitfords Conference, Western Australia.*

## Got a story to share?

Do you have a suggestion of an interesting article for *The Record*? Perhaps you would like to write or suggest a story and share your thoughts and photos with our readers? Plenty happens across the St Vincent de Paul Society, but we can't keep our fingers on the pulse of everything. Please contact [media@svdp.org.au](mailto:media@svdp.org.au) to discuss how we might help.

**On the cover...** The newly established Good Works Garden is a collaboration between St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/ Goulburn, Argyle Housing, a community housing provider, and Dirty Janes, the vintage and collectible emporium that operates in Canberra and Bowral, NSW.

The garden is located in Fyshwick, ACT and is a space for the community and our companions to learn new skills, be part of a community inclusion program and grow fresh produce to create meals for those in need.



## 'The youth are our future'

Despite these words usually being said with good intent, I have long hated this phrase. It diminishes, dismisses and disregards the valuable contribution that our young people are making now, and promotes the idea that leadership is something they can aspire to... one day, when they're grown up.

Frederic Ozanam and his confreres were aged about 20 when they founded what became the St Vincent de Paul Society. Frederic didn't live to see 41 but by the time he died the Society had spread beyond Paris to a number of countries and was soon to reach our own. The wise 'old' nun, Rosalie Rendu, to whom the young students looked for guidance, was aged about 47. The 'old' man mentor of their group, Emmanuel Bailly, was 39.

Our Society has always been youthful.

A great privilege of my time on National Council has been the opportunity it has provided to meet with younger Vincentians from around Australia; each time I encounter their passion and wisdom – as I did recently at the 'Activate 2022' Vinnies NSW Youth Convention – I become more assured in my belief that our Society is in good hands; not just because we have bright and brilliant people who can lead us in the future but because we have skilled and energetic people in the here and now, filled with zeal and committed to carrying out our mission.

An organisation that seeks to serve the community should be reflective of that community, and its leadership should reflect its membership; the St Vincent de Paul Society is no exception. We must always strive to do right by our members and our companions, and this includes ensuring a diversity of voices and talents within our ranks and in all places where decisions are made. Having a good mix of ages, genders, cultural backgrounds, skills and life experiences in our conferences and works, and especially on our councils and boards, is essential.

National Council met on the first weekend in November. It was our first face-to-face meeting since February 2022, and it was a reminder of the importance of personal connection in the work we do.

The approach we have adopted in the past year, of having the occasional 'National Leadership Team' meeting with National Council and State/Territory CEOs, appears to be improving our national communication and collaboration. It was a real pleasure to meet our newest CEOs and to have them join us on Friday 4 November to have discussions

about matters of national priority; in particular, membership recruitment and retention, models of service, and what we can learn from the volunteering situation in Australia more broadly.

Over the course of the National Council meeting on 5 – 6 November, we had excellent discussions, and reached points of agreement, on some of the biggest challenges and key strategic issues facing the Society nationally.

Amongst other things, we committed to a national approach to innovative conference models and leadership formation, agreed to move to the next round of member consultation as part of the review of Part III of The Rule, and committed to closer collaboration with our national housing company, Amélie Housing, to respond in a real and meaningful way to addressing poverty and homelessness by getting more people into secure housing.

This meeting was the last substantive face-to-face meeting of this Council; having elected our next National President, our March 2023 meeting will serve as a handover from the current Council to the incoming Council under the leadership of Mark Gaetani.

I congratulate Mark and am grateful to him for his willingness to take on this challenging but deeply rewarding task. While excited to see how the next iteration of National Council will meet the challenges of the next four years, I finish my time on Council with a tinge of sadness. At our November meeting it was, at it always is, so encouraging to see a group of wonderful people giving up their time to come together and work towards a better future for our members and those we assist.

This particular Council contains a number of truly inspiring leaders who work together in a spirit of collaboration, with a deep, shared commitment to our mission. More so than at some previous stages of our history, it is diverse in the ages, genders and life experiences represented around the table; we still have a long way to go, but it is clear that this diversity enhances the quality of our discussions and our decisions.

My hope for the incoming National Council is that it empowers our members to be bold and creative, to take on leadership roles, and to make it clear to the Australian community that all are welcome at Vinnies; not *regardless* of their youth, gender, sexuality or cultural background, but *because* of it. **R**



*Members of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council who met in Canberra in early November 2022.*

**As 2022 draws to an end, it offers** an opportunity to reflect on some of the strategic achievements National Council worked towards over the past year.

Two of the biggest initiatives centred around our Members - the heart and soul of the Society.

A *Fairer Australia* campaign rolled out prior to the Federal Election. This was the culmination of National Council's decision in May 2021 to prepare resource materials that set out the Society's policy positions on a number of issues central to our advocacy. Importantly, National Council asked for a foundational document to be developed which would outline Catholic Social Teachings.

*Dreaming as a Single Human Family: Initial reflections on Catholic Social Teachings*, published in November 2021, provides an objective, non-partisan lens through which the impact of public policy on disadvantaged Australians and our Companions can be assessed. It also provides reference points for when the Society's makes public comment about an existing or proposed policy.

The reference material prepared by National Council and distributed to our Members and to the public was thorough. Following an online webinar with Members, as a team we set about contacting Federal Election candidates seeking their positions on our key asks. The advocacy work carried out by our Members within their local communities and electorates is testimony to the Society's role in civil society to be a voice for all people who are indisposed, disadvantaged and excluded from participating in the life of their own community.

As a follow-up to this successful Member-based project, National Council is in the process of revising material under the name of *Let's Build a Fairer Australia* which will be released in February 2023. This initiative is designed to

hold the Albanese Government to account for delivering on many of the core asks the Society made during the Federal Election campaign. We are planning to convene another webinar in the early part of 2023 to brief Members.

A second major project, which will continue through the year, is the review of *The Rule* Part III. Feedback from Members about aspects of Part III was received during 2021 and the first half of 2022. National Council has approved the first draft of proposed amendments to the Articles and to the Procedural Guidelines.

These proposed amendments, along with an Explanatory Memorandum, will be distributed to membership soon. There is now a five-month consultation period. National Council is very keen to listen to the views of Members about the proposed amendments and encourages Members to communicate their feedback through their State or Territory Council. It is proposed that a second draft will be circulated to Members in mid-2023.

I want to thank members of the Society's National Council for the vision they continue to bring to facilitating and supporting the good works performed by Conferences and by Members in their local communities.

The Secretariate knows it exists to support the implementation of this vision. Staff of the Secretariate continue to offer advice on a broad range of interests to National Council in the domestic and international spheres. This role is important, but we are never the decision-makers.

May our Members, our volunteers and our employees have a restful Christmastide. And may we come back in 2023 full of hope derived from the Christ Child's thirst for a welcoming and fairer world for all. **R**



ONLY  
JESUS

## BY ANGELA UYBARRETA MGL

Vincentians are entering a new mission field. Fear has given birth to our current main opponents which are food insecurity, the need for authenticity and homelessness of the heart. Emerging from the pandemic, everyone and everything has changed. Our servant hearts have changed.

We turn to our saints who lived through their own changing times. Sold as a slave, St Vincent de Paul experienced how it was to be poor. Blessed Rosalie Rendu tenderly cared for patients during a cholera epidemic, organising field hospitals in the 17th century. Around that same time Blessed Frederic's first act of charity was to simply take a supply of winter firewood to a widow whose husband died of cholera. Each of these saints heeded the call to serve despite fear of danger and being targeted for journeying with the vulnerable. Their radical responses and steadfastness in service inspires us now as a Society who continue this work.

During this Advent season and the hope of Christ's coming, we are invited to reflect upon this hope and light in our Vincentian spirit to the poor and vulnerable of our time.

Perhaps the answer lies in how we live. Our choice to not allow fear and uncertainty to affect how we can help our neighbour. Jesus' coming symbolises new life. Instead of reluctance, his arrival brings anticipation. Instead of oppression, his arrival brings freedom. Following the

example of our Vincentian saints, may we find ways of bringing Jesus to others in these changing times.

Those facing food insecurity? We can nourish with the truth that circumstances will change.

In a society craving authenticity? We can be encouraged to be real with God in prayer.

In response to the homelessness of the heart felt by many, let us continue to nurture relationships that speak loudly that we are not alone.

Let's reflect on the self-giving, self-emptying ways in which we, as Vincentians, can imitate Jesus. We can live Christmas daily, believing that the Light of Christ has dispelled the darkness for all of us.

Please pray this with me. Lord of Love, I pray that when Your children look for You, in the midst of their fear, that they would find me. And when they find me, O, Lord, I pray that they would find You. Amen. **R**

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Angela Uybarreta is in her third year as a novice of the Missionaries of God's Love Sisters. She is originally from the Philippines. Growing up, her volunteering heart was stirred to help the poor and the needy through packing relief goods during times of floods and natural disasters. She migrated to Darwin and lived there for 11 years before joining the MGL in Canberra in 2020. She has been a Vincentian since 2013 and was part of the National Youth Team as the NT Youth Representative from 2017-2018.

## Preamble to Society Prayers

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia, through the National Spirituality and Mission Standing Committee, has developed alternate opening and closing prayers, which are now offered to conferences to use during opening and closing prayers. When revising these alternate prayers, the following was considered:

1. *The Rule* reminds us that we are called to journey together to holiness. In 2.2 we read that this journey is made by:

Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, and sharing with their fellow members. Meditating on Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others, and the goodness of God.

2. Part 3 Article 3 outlines what is required for the prayers:

Conference meetings begin and end with the Society prayers, or other appropriate prayers, but a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and a prayer for those suffering that members nominate are obligatory. A period of spiritual reflection should also be included.

3. The international statutes also indicate what is required for prayer at conference meetings.

B.R. 5: A Conference meeting always includes the following:

Opening and closing prayers, formal and spontaneous. (A prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and a prayer for those whose suffering they wish to share are obligatory)

Prayer is an essential element of all Society meetings. The following is just one option of prayer which is endorsed by National Council. We invite you to be flexible and use what meets your own conference meeting needs. Through our Society prayers we aim to be inclusive and aware of people's different spiritual journeys. A spiritual reflection should follow your opening prayers and there are several resources available via the Society website.

One example is the Spiritual Reflection Guides produced by NSW via the following link [www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/NSW/Spiritual\\_Reflection\\_Guides/](http://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/NSW/Spiritual_Reflection_Guides/)

Please note, National Council is currently engaging a graphic artist to prepare the revision. When complete and approved, the design will be forwarded to the States and Territories so that they can arrange printing and distribution of the document. **R**



## Opening Prayers

### Let us pause and become aware of the presence of God

*In the name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit  
Amen*

### Prayer of Acknowledgement

*Holy Spirit,*

*We invoke your blessing on this country and on each of us as we gather. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present and support emerging leaders and we respect the continued cultural and spiritual connection to the land and waters.*

*May Your Grace bless and honour our joining hands and hearts in healing one another and the land, so our lives may flow with harmony living with love and deep respect. Amen*

### Prayer of the Holy Spirit

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.*

*O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.*

### We pray for all people of God

*Lord, we pray for all people of God, may we know your love and share it with each other. We pray for our Founders and all the Vincentians who have walked the path before us, may their spirit be our inspiration as we live out our Vincentian mission today. Be with us today as we share ourselves and our resources with your people.*

### Our Father

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day  
our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

Let us now move into a time of spiritual reading and reflection...

## Closing Prayers

As we bring our meeting to a close and prepare to move forward from this place, may we remember the words Jesus told us: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you". We hold these words as a reminder of our Vincentian vocation and journey together towards holiness.

### Let us pray...

We pray for all our companions with whom we have journeyed

**R.** God of love hear us

We pray for all conferences, especially those with whom we are twinned

**R.** God of love hear us

We pray that you inspire others to hear your call for compassionate service.

**R.** God of love hear us

We pray that all faith communities be one as you and the Father are one

**R.** God of love hear us

We pray for all deceased members of our Vincentian family

**R.** God of love hear us

### We pause to offer any personal intentions...

Lord, we ask you to hear all these prayers and those that dwell within our hearts as we pray:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

### Blessing

*May the blessing of Christ infuse in us a love without measure. May our actions, deliberations and decisions guide us in a revolution of tenderness modelling in our ministry inclusion, accompaniment and restoration with those we serve and those we walk with in service. And may we be blessed + Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen*

### The Society sought the protection of Our Lady, so we have the confidence to pray

*Hail, Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you.  
Blessed are you amongst women  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death.  
Amen.*

## Amendments to The Rule

At its November 2022 meeting, National Council approved the first draft of amendments to the Articles and the Procedural Guidelines for Part III of The Rule. It now embarks on five months of consultation with the Members.

The proposed amendments are presented to Members in three documents:

- (i) a comparison of the current Part III Articles and the proposed re-draft of the Articles;
- (ii) a comparison of the current Part III Procedural Guidelines and the proposed re-draft of the Procedural Guidelines; and
- (iii) an Explanatory Memorandum outlining the reasons for the proposed amendments to the Articles and the Procedural Guidelines.

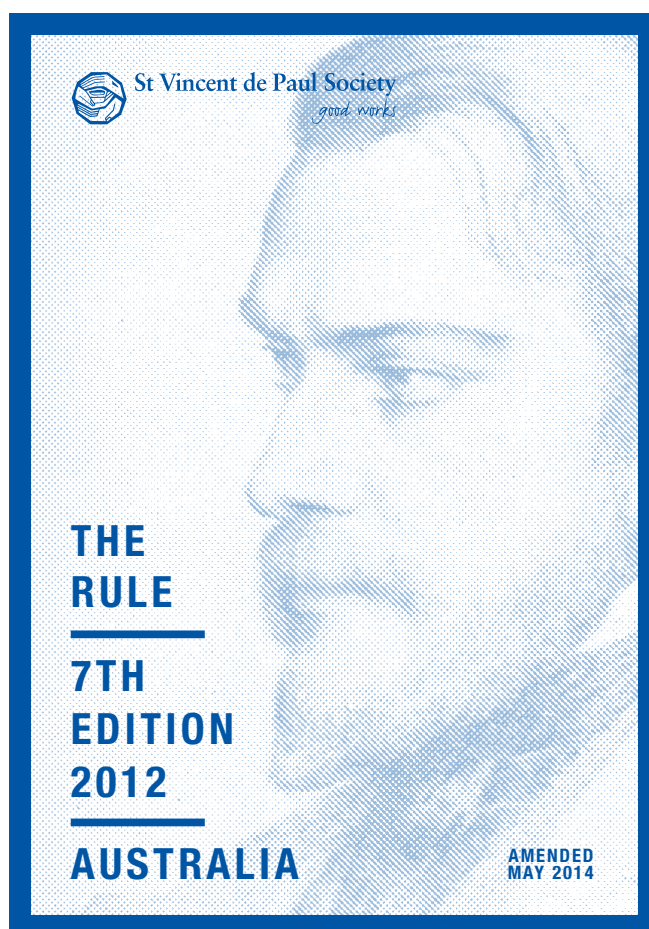
The method of presenting the proposed revised Articles and the Procedural Guidelines is user friendly in both printed and on-screen formats. These are long documents with the revised Articles sitting at 102 pages. The Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared to provide to Members the reasons for amending existing Articles and outlining why a number of new Articles and Procedural Guidelines are being recommended to add.

National Council must rely on State and Territory Councils to circulate the documents through their own networks to all Councils, Conferences and Members within their respective jurisdictions.

The Committee wants to try to avoid receiving numerous individual submissions from Members which will make collating common themes very slow and complex. Such a method also risks losing nuances expressed in an individual response due to the volume of submissions to take into account during any redrafting process.

The Rule Review Committee is requesting that feedback and comments from Members be forwarded through State and Territory Councils.

Members are encouraged to provide their feedback to their State or Territory or Regional Council so that these comments can be incorporated into the feedback forwarded by each State and Territory Council.



Comments and feedback will be received from State and Territory Councils until Friday 28 April 2023.

There will be further re-drafting undertaken by the Rule Review Committee based on feedback from Members before a second revision is submitted to National Council for its endorsement in May 2023.

The revised amended documents will be re-circulated in June 2023 for additional comment over a further five months ending in October 2023.

Members who have difficulties accessing these documents can request PDF copies from [rulereview@svdp.org.au](mailto:rulereview@svdp.org.au)

Please be aware the file size may present problems when downloading. **R**



# St Vincent de Paul Society chooses next National President

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has chosen its next National President to head the charity after the incumbent Ms Claire Victory steps down in March 2023.

The National President elected for a four-year term is Mr Mark Gaetani (*pictured right*), President of the Society's Tasmanian State Council. Based in Launceston, Mr Gaetani had a long career in the banking and finance sectors before becoming Treasurer of the Tasmanian State Council in 2016. Two years later he was elected State President of the Society in Tasmania.

In an election held by the Society's National Council in Canberra on 5 November 2022 he was chosen by his peers to lead the Society nationally. Like most roles within the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, including the member-based conferences and many of the retail shops, the position of National President is a voluntary one.

Mark Gaetani and his wife Mary are active members of the Catholic Parish of Launceston, and Mark is a member of the Society's Apostles Conference. In 2021 he was one of 12 Catholics to be awarded the inaugural Guilford Young Medal by Archbishop Julian Porteous for his outstanding contributions to both the Society and the Church in Tasmania.

'Mark Gaetani has given great service to the St Vincent de Paul Society in his home state and beyond,' Ms Victory said.

'Mark's understanding of how the Society assists Australians in need, along with his dedication to our work, will be important in the increasingly challenging times we face.

'On behalf of our National Council and the Society's conference members around the country, I congratulate him on his appointment. Until the handover takes place next March, I will be working closely with Mark to ensure a smooth transition to his leadership,' Ms Victory said.

Mr Gaetani said he was honoured to receive the endorsement of his State and Territory Council colleagues and looked forward to leading the Society at a time of great challenge for Australians.



*The next National President of St Vincent de Paul Society Australia, Mark Gaetani.*

'Many people are struggling with homelessness and the shortage of affordable housing, rising food prices and power bills, and inadequate incomes,' he said.

'Never has the work of the Society been so important.

'Since the Society's founding in Paris in 1833 our members have been dedicated to serving people in need in the spirit of Jesus Christ. I am proud to be able to further contribute to the tradition of Vincentian spirituality, which encompasses compassion and a commitment to the democratic ideals of seeking truth, reform, and social justice.

'The St Vincent de Paul Society is a grass-roots organisation and it gives me comfort to know I will be well supported by our membership throughout Australia.'

Ms Victory endorsed Mr Gaetani's comments, adding: 'The success of both our welfare and our advocacy efforts depends on working as an effective and harmonious team across all the States and Territories as well as at the local level where membership is all important.

'National Council plays a key role in this and I am confident that Mark will serve Council well in his new role. I would like to thank my National Council colleagues for their valuable and unflagging support over the past three-plus years. I feel privileged to have been part of such a wonderful team,' Ms Victory said. **R**

## Blessed Frederic Ozanam Feast Day

On 9 September, across the globe, members of the St Vincent de Paul Society celebrated the feast of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

For those unfamiliar, A Feast Day is a day set aside for a religious or other celebration. In the Catholic Tradition, feast days are usually focussed on holy people such as Jesus or the saints, but can also commemorate events, such as Christmas Day and the birth of Jesus. The Blessed Frederic Ozanam feast day is a chance for Society representatives around the world to call to mind the great witness of Frederic Ozanam, and to celebrate his legacy.

Born in 1813 in Milan, Frederic was a gifted scholar who studied at Sorbonne University in Paris. At this time, large numbers of country people were moving to the cities, such as Paris, to work in factories. They often arrived to discover that there was no work, little pay, and that many of the factories were closed due to the Industrial Revolution. An epidemic of cholera was also sweeping Paris at the time, reportedly killing up to 1,200 people each day. Large slum areas were forming in Paris, and as a young student, Frederic Ozanam was having to walk through these poorer suburbs on his way to university each day.

It is widely documented that at that time, religion also was under attack in Europe. It was the taunt thrown to Frederic Ozanam by an anti-religious opponent in a debating society that Frederic was a part of, that stung him to action. 'You are right Ozanam when you speak of the past! In former times Christianity worked wonders, but what is it doing for mankind now? And you, who pride yourself on your Catholicity, what are you doing now for the poor? Show us your works.'

Frederic rose to the challenge. Frederic had been deeply moved at the hopeless state of families who had been left without the support of the breadwinners after the Cholera epidemic, and so together with a group of fellow friends and students, on his 20th birthday, formed the 'Conference of History', and working with Daughters of Charity, began to visit and help the poor in some of the most impoverished neighbourhoods of Paris. This organisation of groups called '[Conferences](#)' remains today, modelled on this first Conference founded by Frederic.

### Meeting People Where They Live

The Daughters of Charity who taught Frederic and the first [Vincentians](#) how to help those in need felt strongly that it was critical to meet with those in need in their homes. Frederic wrote, 'The knowledge of social wellbeing and reform is not to be learned not from books...but by sitting by [the person in need's] bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him, hearing the secret of his lonely...mind". This tradition of meeting people in their homes, maintaining their confidentiality and dignity, and truly seeing Christ in them, is still the heart of what our members do.

It is our ability to respond locally, to seek out those in need within our communities, and to understand and advocate for local matters that makes us unique. We have seen this lived out most recently through the Society's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in our drought and bushfire response at a time when some communities were facing multiple disasters, and also in the day-to-day financial aid, emergency relief and compassionate listening provided by members across the country.

### Frederic's Legacy Lives On

Frederic was a pioneer in many ways. He spoke out against abuse of children, unsafe conditions in industry, and government corruption. He envisioned the establishment of a network of charity that would span the world. His dream has been realized –there are now Conferences in over 140 countries around the world. Sadly, he died in 1853 when he was just 40 years old, but his legacy lives on in hundreds of thousands of Vincentians who have followed in his footsteps, still meeting with and serving those in need in any way possible.

As we continue to innovate together within our Conferences, exploring new ways of serving and including people in our Mission, Blessed Frederic Ozanam's Feast Day gives us an opportunity regardless of our role, or office, to reflect on how our Founding story can continue to inspire us and challenge us today. It is a good reminder, that simple acts of kindness can lead to lasting change. It is inspiring that 189 years on, Frederic's mission continues to be increasingly relevant. Let us continue to carry Frederic's vision, as we work together across Australia to provide help to those in need that aims to alleviate suffering, and to promote human dignity and personal integrity.

'Do not be afraid of new beginnings. Be creative. Be inventive. You who have energy: who have enthusiasm; who want to do something of value for the future; Be inventive, launch out; Do not wait!' -Blessed Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853)

[Frederic Ozanam: A life in Letters is available here.](#) **R**

## Ask a busy person...

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Despite the area's pastoral wealth and the presence of a major university the City of Armidale has considerable social disadvantage. Kerry Steller moved here in 1981, teaching at O'Connor Catholic College and getting involved with the St Vincent de Paul Society, which left her with strong memories.

They include former residents of Freeman House, the Society's Special Works service providing residential and community-based programs for adults experiencing drug and alcohol addiction along with men's homelessness.

'I remember some of these folk working through their issues and later returning to join our St Augustine's Conference where they could reach out to other people in need,' Kerry recalls.

'Coming back to join was amazing.'

Another standout is the Taiwanese nursing student at the University of New England.

'She boarded with us for a while and came along to our English literacy classes at the Ozanam Learning Centre. Most of the attendees were from the refugee Yazidi community from Iraq.

'This girl knew nothing about Vinnies or even Christianity, but when she saw the work we were doing, she joined up and helped us out. It was wonderful to see how the experience affected her.'

Kerry Steller is the President of the Armidale Regional Council, and secretary of St Augustine's Conference, closely linked to Freeman House, founded by local Vincentian Don Hewitt who was honoured by the Vatican and this year received an OAM award.

She was raised on the land near Canowindra, schooled in Sydney, completed a Bachelor of Science degree (geology and geophysics) at The University of Sydney, and a DipEd at UNE after moving to Armidale.

Now retired, Kerry retains close links with O'Connor Catholic College where many students are Vinnies supporters and fundraisers. She has arranged visitations to nursing homes and many excursions to Sydney where students visited St Canice's church close to Kings Cross which assists many homeless people.



*Armidale Regional Council President Kerry Steller and Peter Grace (St Augustine's Conference) preparing dinner for residents at Freeman House in Armidale.*

Activities for Freeman House residents include weekly coffee and cake afternoons, cooking, music, bowling, childcare, and bush walks where staff and Conference members join companions, male and female, aged from their 20s to 60s.

The 'Fresh Start' program, a recipient of community sleepout funds, focuses on personal welfare such as dental and eye health, community involvement with varied outings, and arranging furniture storage for people who had to vacate accommodation.

'These practical measures have tangible outcomes,' Kerry says, 'including a role in helping reunite people with family members they thought they'd lost forever.'

Another innovation is a 'family conference' pilot that sees parents and their children visiting an individual or family once a month to discuss their needs and concerns. Each Vinnies family has access to a mentor who can assist with the practicalities such as food if need be.

At the other end of the age spectrum the local conferences are working on ways of bringing back older Vincentians who moved away from Society work because of the COVID-19 requirements.

Kerry Steller works with the parish and the Catholic Schools office, is a member of Zonta and has a long commitment to the Armidale Tree Group that regenerates bushfire-affected land and helps to restore koala habitat. Then there are her three grandchildren and of course seven SVDP conferences.

Her phone's ringing constantly...

'I'd better go,' Kerry says, and who would dare stand in her way? **R**

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



Attendees at the International Youth Meeting in Paris, 7-12 September 2022 with a portrait of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of the Society and one of the French capital's most famous residents.

## SSVP\* International Youth Meeting

**BY LUKE BROUWER**

Oceania Youth Representative

After a few years of delay, in September I was lucky enough to represent Oceania at the International Youth, Children and Adolescent Committee in Paris. The meeting over three days was an opportunity to discuss and share our activities and learnings from the past few years, as well as looking to the next year and our legacy to the next committee. The Committee is formed of the 12 regional youth co-ordinators and the International Vice-President for Youth that sits on the International General Council.

The meeting went for three days and was held in four languages (English, French, Portuguese, Spanish) with full translation from the Madrid based translator team via headsets. Some of the main themes of the meeting included.

- Evaluation of Committee activities
- International Youth Manual
- World Youth Day 2023 in Portugal
- Territorial Program Updates
- Planning for 2023

The three days were a great insight into the varying activities of The Society across the world and how young Vincentians connect with the community. We were able to share meals, sightsee and enjoy time with the International General Council and friends we have not seen for the past few years.

### Challenges for Vincentian Youth

- Youth Identity: The standing and reputation of youth in the leadership of SSVP
- Voice at the Table: Youth representation on National Councils and across CGI Structure
- Activating Talent: Meaningful Projects, Utilising Professional Skills, Future Leadership Pathways
- Participating in projects that matter: Safeguarding Children, Environment
- Avoiding Burnout: Sharing the load, Sharing Resources, Effective International Youth Committee Structure

### Other Highlights

- Visit to Colombieres, Normandy to witness the tomb of Jules Devaux (Founder)
- Youth Committee sitting in the International General meeting, which gave the chance to witness the executive level of The Society
- SVDP National President Claire Victory's lecture on the Young Founders and motivations for youth leadership
- Experiencing the Paris nightlife and restaurants

It was another brilliant Vincentian experience in my role as Oceania Youth Co-Ordinator. For any further information please contact me at [cgi.oceania-youth@ssvpglobal.org](mailto:cgi.oceania-youth@ssvpglobal.org) **R**

\* Society of St Vincent de Paul

## 'Young' Pope Francis signs up for World Youth Day

Using a tablet and addressing a large crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis became the first person to register for next year's World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal.

Covering the event's official kick-off, the Catholic News Agency reported on 22 October 2022 that the Pope, who has more than a few years' seniority on the event's target audience of 16-to-35-year-olds, strongly encouraged young people to join him in signing up.

World Youth Day 2023, which is actually a week long, is the largest international Catholic youth gathering. It is scheduled to take place from 1-6 August 2023. The American-born Australian politician Kristina Keneally met her future husband Ben at World Youth Day 1991 in Poland.

'Dear young people, I invite you to register for this meeting in which, after a long period of staying at a distance, we will rediscover the joy of the fraternal embrace between peoples and between generations, which we need so much,' Pope Francis said.

He especially asked young people from Portugal to join him in the window of the Apostolic Palace for the announcement at the end of his Angelus address.

The international event was established in 1985 by St. John Paul II. It is typically held on a different continent every three years but was postponed to 2023 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, is just 75 miles from Fatima, one of the most visited Marian pilgrimage sites in the world. In Fatima, the Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children in 1917 with a message of peace and a request for prayer.

The theme of Lisbon's World Youth Day is "Mary arose and went with haste."

In his message for the event, Pope Francis said, 'Now is the time to arise! Like Mary, let us 'arise and go in haste.' Let us carry Jesus within our hearts and bring him to all those whom we meet.' **R**





## Happy 100th birthday for Vinnies shops

*Celebrating the opening of the refurbished Newtown store were manager Cata Franklin, Jack de Groot SVDP NSW CEO, Richard Stewart, SVDP NSW Chair and Jenny Leong MP, MP for Newtown.*

Celebrations were held across NSW to commemorate 100 Years of Vinnies Shops in September. To mark the momentous occasion, events were held in Armidale, Belmont North, Bondi Beach, Brookvale, Casino, Dubbo, Paddington, Parkes, Picton, Newtown, Springwood, Sutherland, and Wagga Wagga, along with a grand re-opening following refurbishments at Vinnies Newtown – the site of the very first Vinnies Shop opened in 1922.

‘Vinnies Shops are an institution in Australia where people can discover a treasure and give it a second life,’ said Jack de Groot, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

The community was able to get involved in the festivities through a campaign offering customers the opportunity to discover 100 exclusive treasures at featured shops. These included clothing, accessories, and homewares from brands including Alex and Trahanas, Bassike, Blanca, Double Rainbouu, Dylan Kain, Ellery, Furla, Henne, Jac + Jack, Jets, Kathmandu, Lee Mathews, Matteau, Mulberry, Mulberry x Acne Studios, Reliquia, Sarah Jane Clarke, Seafolly, Shona Joy, plus many more who donated a generous amount of brand-new goods.

Customers who made a purchase from any Vinnies shop during the centenary celebrations went in the draw to win a vintage Chanel handbag, valued at \$5,000, and a DeLonghi La Specialista Arte coffee machine.

Shops play a vital role in enabling the good works of the Society, with sales going directly to funding programs and services which assist people with food, clothing, crisis accommodation, emergency response, healthcare, education, financial aid and much more.

‘We have Vinnies Shops in 225 locations throughout NSW which rely strongly on the generosity and goodwill of volunteers who give of their time to support the community,’ said Jack de Groot.

‘A lot has changed over the past 100 years but the core of Vinnies Shops remains the same in giving items a second life and using the sales to help people who fall on hard times.’

From humble beginnings to standing as one of the most recognised brands in the Australian retail market, the story of Vinnies shops is one of charity, enterprise and renewal. A well-deserved birthday, indeed. **R**



PHOTO: MAGGI BARNARD/PARKES PHOTOX

*Cutting the special Vinnies cake were Lesley Crowe (centre president from 2006 to 2010), Barbara Scott (centre president from 2016 to 2022) and Christine Cox (centre president from 2011 to 2016) and current retail team leader.*

## Parkes volunteers go for gold to celebrate centenary

More than 50 former and current volunteers did not miss the golden opportunity in Parkes in late October to celebrate 100 years of Vinnies shops in NSW.

The tables were decorated in gold and filled with delicious cakes and treats for the special occasion. Vinnies NSW Regional Retail Manager Tanya Godden thanked all the volunteers for their service saying they played an extremely important role. She handed over a framed certificate of appreciation.

Tanya said the Vinnies shop first opened in Parkes in 1947. Barbara Scott, who was centre president from 2016 to August 2022, said she loved the people and the one-on-one interaction she had with customers. **R**

**THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY**  
 NOW HAS IN OPERATION

**TWO DEPOTS FOR UNWANTED AND USELESS ARTICLES.**

**No. 380 King Street, Newtown**  
 (Near Railway Bridge),

**No. 346A Parramatta Road, Petersham**  
 (Near Cannon Street).

You can materially help the Society by sending to either of the Depots all kinds of useless and unwanted articles, such as:—

Furniture.	Men's Clothing.	Tooth Paste Tubes.	Shaving Tubes.
Bedsteads.	Women's Clothing	Whisky Capsules.	Wine Capsules.
Paper.	Boots and Shoes.	Mirrors.	Silver Paper.
Bottles.	Tools of all kinds.	Gas Fittings.	Umbrellas.
Baths.	Old iron.	Lead.	(Men's and Women's).

Send a Post Card to either address, or 'phone L1996, and the Society's Motor Lorry will immediately call.

*A 1929 advertisement for the Society's early fundraising activities in Sydney from the Freeman's Journal. Image courtesy of Sydney Archdiocesan Archives.*

## Regional leaders, far and wide, unite

BY LACHLAN JONES



Speakers included Jann Browne, Tamworth Regional Council President, Pat Cudmore Sutherland Regional Council President and Sue Vit, St George Regional Council President.

Vincentians from across the state united for a day of leadership and recognition as part of the inaugural Regional President's Forum held at Mary MacKillop Place over the October 2022 long weekend.

Conceived by Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council President, the event sought to recognise the important contribution of Regional Presidents in managing and supporting the work of members.

In his opening remarks, he told the room, 'Trust is the foundation of leadership. It is character that makes trust possible. And in turn, trust makes leadership possible.'

CEO, Jack de Groot spoke of the merits of the One Society approach.

He emphasised that the collaboration of members, volunteers, and employees does not change the mission or values of the Society.

He pointed to the essential virtues in the Rule: simplicity, humility, gentleness, selflessness, and zeal.

'These things are not up for change,' he said.

Jann Browne, Tamworth Regional Council President, Pat Cudmore Sutherland Regional Council President, and Sue Vit, St George Regional Council President, spoke about their experience in growing membership in their areas.

In Tamworth, the St Louise Conference Care and Support conference needed to be rebuilt from the ground up.

'This is the sole care and support conference for the region. So, you can imagine the loss by the community and how devastated we felt that this conference had virtually just broken down,' Jann said.

She spoke about speaking doing letterbox drops, speaking after mass (and the challenges of keeping parishioners there long enough to hear), and other ways to encourage people to join.

Pat spoke about help she received from Society employee and Manager of Member and Community Engagement, Janice Stokes, in setting up an information night for prospective members.

'From that evening I can happily say we now have established a new conference with eight enthusiastic and – dare I say – younger members.'

Sue thanked Executive Director of Membership, Volunteers and Regional Operations, Sam Crosby, for his help in re-establishing conferences in her area.

'I have to say thank you to Sam for supporting me last Sunday and we have got Rockdale Conference back after, probably, 10 or 15 years.'

Brian McCarney, Cudgegong Regional Council President, spoke about his role in the Social Justice Network, praising the success of the Build Homes Build Hope campaign to collect over 15,000 signatures to trigger a debate in NSW Parliament on the need to build more social housing.

'It meant that ministers and MPs sought to focus on the issue in front of their colleagues,' he said.

The gathering also heard from:

- Joy Kyriacou, Manager of Member and Volunteer programs, about the Vinnies No Interest Loans Scheme
- Rob Cohen, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's Aboriginal Engagement Partner, about ongoing progress on the Society's reconciliation action plan
- Phil Coyte, Director of Retail and Logistics, on the future of Vinnies Shops
- Belinda-Jayne Davis, Safeguarding Coordinator, on safeguarding children
- CEO of Amelie Housing, Brian Murnane, on the benefits to the Society of having the expertise of members, volunteers, and employees to draw on. **R**

Lachlan Jones is Media Manager of St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.



## Call for Parliament to help halve child poverty by 2030

This year's Anti-Poverty Week (16-22 October) was the 20<sup>th</sup> since its founding yet poverty continues to affect far too many Australian children and families, diminishing their lives now and in the future.

Currently, 1-in-6 of Australian children – a total of around 774,000 children - grows up in poverty. Not having enough money to cover the necessities restricts daily life and crushes hope for the future.

This Anti-Poverty Week a coalition of charities, including St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, and other likeminded organisations and individuals are calling on Parliamentarians to commit to halve child poverty by 2030. This means we can meet our international commitments to the UN Convention on the [Rights of the Child](#) and UN [Global Goals](#) (Sustainable Development Goals).

The New Zealand Government introduced such legislation in 2018 and they've made great [progress](#) so that fewer children live in poverty. Setting targets enshrined in legislation works and changes lives for the better.

The campaign says, 'We've heard shocking stories of mothers pretending they've eaten dinner while cooking when in fact, there was not enough food to feed the whole family; of mothers forced to forego important medications and unable to maintain or fix their car.

'All of which has the compounding effect of restricting their employment options. We've also heard of children telling their younger siblings to drink less milk and not even telling their parents about after-school activities and excursions because they know the family cannot afford them.'

The full Coronavirus Supplement saw poverty drop by more than half for the poorest families – those headed by single parents. According to [ANU research](#) commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Social Ventures Australia, poverty rates for these families reduced from 39% to 17%.



*The National President of St Vincent de Paul Society, Claire Victory, signed up to the [Halve Child Poverty Pledge](#), which involved taking a photo holding the pledge and posting it on social media, with a copy to [apw@antipovertyweek.org.au](mailto:apw@antipovertyweek.org.au)*

Many low-income families with children would also benefit hugely from Federal and State/Territory governments investing in social housing, ensuring they have a safe, affordable home. Children can thrive and be healthy when they have what they need to develop well. A legislated plan to halve child poverty by 2030 would be a huge step to achieving this.

SVDP National President, Claire Victory strongly supports the pledge to halve child poverty by 2030: 'This is the natural extension of the Society's core mission to assist those in need. In the areas of housing, homelessness and poverty alleviation, we urge all key stakeholders to join together and combat childhood poverty. It is clear that so much more needs to be done in order to address this issue.

'The impact of child poverty is lifelong. Emerging research indicates that the experience of poverty during childhood and adolescence suggests that poverty early in a child's life may be particularly harmful.

'The inability to access secure and safe housing, or afford clothing and other items, impacts on health, education and wellbeing. Opportunities lost during childhood might influence education, employment or medical outcomes for the rest of their lives.' **R**

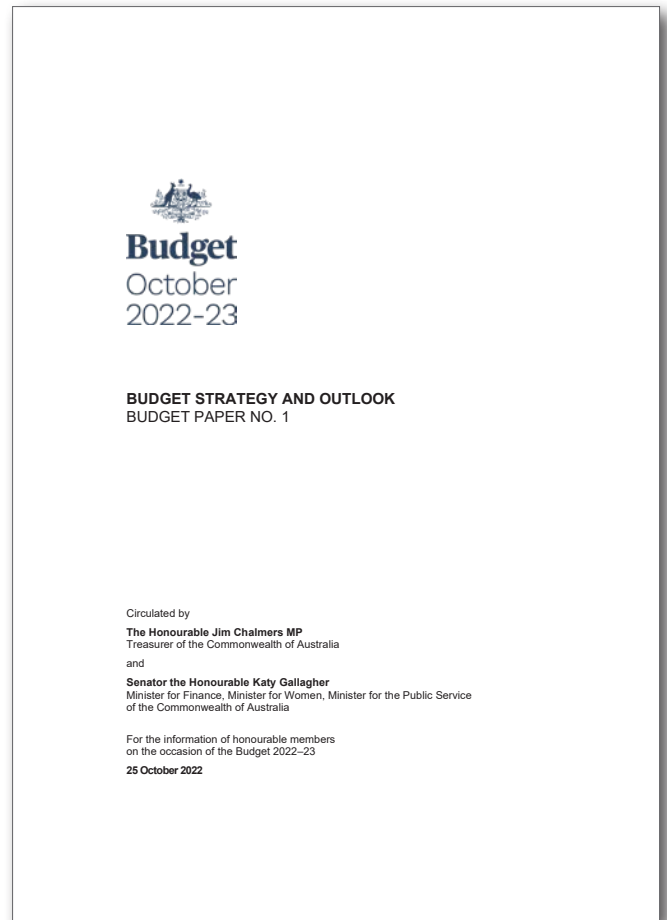
# Federal Budget fails to relieve poverty pressures

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia welcomed the Federal Budget's investment in social and affordable housing, aged care, community services, childcare and domestic violence, but was deeply concerned that the budget failed to relieve the pressures exacerbating poverty and disadvantage now.

'The Albanese Government's first budget lays a number of foundations for a better Australia in the future but sadly condemns Australians living in poverty now to despair and disadvantage as the cost-of-living continues to surge,' National President Claire Victory said.

'We were disappointed the Government has failed to increase the JobSeeker rate, which at \$48 a day consigns around 830,000 Australians to live below the poverty line.

'The plight of disadvantaged Australians is getting worse every day that the Government fails to act, as inflation, interest rates and the cost-of-living surge higher. 'We need the Government to enter a Compact with people who are struggling to survive as everyday living costs escalate.



'We must not leave those on low incomes or government benefits to continue to struggle to put food on their table or to secure affordable houses,' said Ms Victory who also spoke of 'the inequitable stage 3 tax package, the cost of which has blown out by \$11 billion to \$254 billion over 10 years...

'As a country we must have a conversation about what matters most. Can we give funds to those who are already very comfortable while a growing number of people in our community will struggle to afford the essentials of life?' **R**



## Higher bank rates impact struggling families

In the wake of the latest Reserve Bank of Australia the Society has called on the Albanese Government to provide urgent help to the growing number of Australians struggling to survive amid surging inflation and interest rates.

National President Claire Victory said the decision by the Reserve Bank of Australia on 1 November 2022 to increase the official rate by 25 basis points, and that of 6 December to raise it by a further 25 basis points to 3.1 per cent – the eighth hike in as many months – will push more Australians into hardship and despair this Christmas.

The interest rate increase would inevitably be passed on through higher prices and rents, which will have a particularly devastating impact on those already struggling to survive, Ms Victory said.

It was the seventh interest rate increase in as many months and another blow for many struggling Australians disappointed by the lack of support with cost-of-living pressures in last week's Federal Budget.

'Despite laying a foundation for a better Australia in the future, the Albanese Government's first budget did not provide the emergency assistance needed to lift Australians out of despair and disadvantage now,' Ms Victory said.

'The failure of last week's budget to increase income support payments and Commonwealth

Rent Assistance was cruel and unnecessary, particularly as the Government recommitted itself to the inequitable stage 3 tax cuts. Low-income earners are carrying the burden of hurt.

'JobSeeker, at \$48 a day, consigns around 830,000 Australians to live below the poverty line, and should be unacceptable in Australia which prides itself on being the country of the 'fair go'.

'Working age payments have not kept up with the cost of living and Australians' unemployment payment rates are among the lowest out of 37 members of the OECD.

'This situation is getting worse every day the Government fails to act, as inflation, interest rates and the cost-of-living surges higher,' Ms Victory said.



PHOTO: BRYTNY.COM/INSTAFASH

The Government's failure to lift Commonwealth Rent Assistance is another brutal blow to disadvantaged Australians hoping to find a safe, secure home for them and their families.

'Housing is simply unaffordable for many Australians and rental costs have skyrocketed, particularly in regional Australia where they have risen 12.5 per cent in the last year,' Ms Victory said.

'Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) has not kept up with these rental increases and must be urgently increased in order to help vulnerable Australians secure housing,' Ms Victory said.

The Society is experiencing a huge jump in demand from Australians struggling to afford basic living expenses, such as housing, food, utilities and health care.

Many are coming to the Society for the first time in chronic financial stress as month after month of skyrocketing inflation and the flow-on effects of higher interest rates leave them unable to cope.

The Society is asking Australians to support people in their community struggling to make ends meet by donating to the Vinnies Christmas Appeal.

'We know that Australian families are struggling to survive the increasing cost-of-living pressures this Christmas,' Ms Victory said.

'Your generosity can provide urgent relief for families doing it tough this Christmas, and give them hope for a better future,' Ms Victory said. Information on the Christmas Appeal is available here. **R**

## National plan to end violence against women and children

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has welcomed the release of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.

'Violence against women and children is completely unacceptable,' National President Claire Victory said.

'It is a critical welfare issue in Australia that has devastating impacts on individuals, families and communities. Every day, the Society's members are witness to the immediate and enduring impacts of violence against women and children, and to their strength and resilience in overcoming adversity.'

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children establishes priorities for action and investment over the next 10 years, including prevention, early intervention, responses to victim survivors and perpetrators, and recovery and healing.

'We support the plan's acknowledgement of the need to ensure that women and children escaping violence can access safe and secure housing, from crisis accommodation to longer-term, sustainable social housing.

'Women and children escaping violence are often confronted with overcrowding in crisis accommodation and the terrible choice between homelessness and staying in, or returning to, a violent home.

'To achieve the plan's ambitious goal of ending violence against women and children in a generation, housing must be fixed—and substantial new funding provided by the Commonwealth and State governments,' Ms Victory said.

The Society welcomes the plan's focus on the connection between gender inequality and gender violence, and on engaging men and boys in efforts to halt violence against women and children. The St Vincent de Paul Society has supported Australians in need for almost 170 years, providing emergency supporting, housing and other support services. **R**



## SVDP NSW highlights housing as key election issue

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is placing housing at the forefront of its election statement ahead of the NSW State Election next March.

The Society's 2023 election statement *Housing Justice: A Home For Everyone* calls on all parties to commit to policy action to ensure people can live securely in housing; that support is available in times of hardship; and that underlying issues contributing to housing stress are remedied.

'More than half of the people who sought assistance from our members in the past year were experiencing housing stress,' said Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW President.

SVDP NSW calls on the next NSW Government to:

- Ensure our housing system delivers on the right to home
- Protect renters through fairer tenancy laws
- Fund specialist services for people who are homeless

'We are seeing this grim reality every day and without courageous leadership it will only get worse. Our members do fantastic work in communities across the state supporting people experiencing housing stress, but when we are faced with normalised instances of families living in cars, tents or worse, it is clear we need more meaningful government policy, backed by adequate resourcing, in response,' Mr Burton said. **R**

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If you'd like to share your experience in a visit with your MP and candidates, contact your Vinnies Social Justice representative or the Social Justice team at: [social.justice@vinnies.org.au](mailto:social.justice@vinnies.org.au)

Can your Conference join the *Build Homes, Build Hope* letter-writing campaign? More information can be found in the Conference Reflection and Action Kit: *Addressing the Housing and Homelessness Crisis*.

## Buy now, regret later... BNPL concerns mount

It may sound like a modern-day version of the lay-by system of old, whereby a deposit kept a desired item from being sold until regular payments eventually secured the purchase. Usually, no interest or extra charges were involved.

However, Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) loans charge high penalty rates for late payments, and prey on economically vulnerable Australians who may not qualify for a credit card because of low incomes or who are unaware of no interest loans from the not-for-profit sector, which have realistic assessment criteria.

The BNPL sector is growing rapidly. In the past financial year the number of accounts ballooned from five million to seven million, mostly held by people aged 18 to 34. A Treasury report on the sector said BNPL transactions accounted for about two per cent of all card purchases in the last financial year, worth about \$16 billion.

However, the increasing popularity of BNPL contracts is ringing alarm bells and attracting criticism from a range of charities, including St Vincent de Paul Society, as well as from independent financial counsellors.

There are about 20 BNPL services in Australia, including Afterpay, Zip Pay and Klarna. These allow shoppers to immediately purchase items and pay in several equal instalments. The companies earn money from fees paid by sellers as well as late fees incurred by customers who miss a payment.

The latest analysis of the BNPL phenomenon has come from the organisation Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand whose [report](#) *Safety Net For Sale: The role of Buy Now Pay Later in exploiting financial vulnerability* has heightened concerns about the indebtedness being caused by the process.

'The groups with highest BNPL use are women, younger people, single parents, and people living on lower incomes,' the report notes.

'BNPL is a highly gendered phenomenon tied to women's economic insecurity. Contrary to the characterisation of BNPL as a discretionary spending tool, people on lower incomes are using BNPL for essentials.'

It adds: 'Women are accumulating unmanageable BNPL debts after fleeing family violence and needing money for basics,' and concludes that, 'BNPL is used by 25% of our financial counselling clients who rely on social security as their main income source... BNPL is taking the place of



adequate social security payments, which represents a commercialisation of the social safety net.

'The debt cycle triggered by BNPL – including multiple BNPL accounts and use of credit cards to pay for BNPL – has been transformed into a profitable industry by lenders, with high effective interest rates disguised as late payment and account-keeping fees.'

The statistics are deeply concerning:

- Approximately 73% of Good Shepherd practitioners say that clients have missed essential payments, or cut back on or gone without essentials, in order to service BNPL debt
- 25% of practitioners see coercive/ abusive debt in at least half of their clients using BNPL
- 84% of practitioners report that clients with BNPL debt have tried to manage the debt by opening additional BNPL accounts
- 75% of practitioners report BNPL use for children's needs such as clothing and baby products.

The report made nine recommendations, including that government should 'Develop a regulatory regime that prevents unaffordable BNPL debts, unmanageable multiple accounts, and misleading marketing of BNPL.'

Commenting on the Good Shepherd report the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council CEO Toby oConnor said, 'As the cost-of-living rises, more and more people are turning to BNPL and wage advance products that they simply cannot afford. This can have disastrous results and push already vulnerable people further into poverty and disadvantage.'

The Society is a member of a coalition of organisations concerned about unregulated credit and its impact on vulnerable Australians. It awaits the imminent release of a Treasury consultation paper and understands that options will range from a mandated code to full regulation under relevant legislation.

National Council will be preparing a submission in response to the consultation paper.

The Australian Government has committed to regulate the BNPL sector, with Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services Stephen Jones saying 'Let's start working on regulating [them] within the credit space. We welcome the fact that they've introduced a code, [and we will] move to legislate it and fill any gaps.' **R**



*National Council CEO Toby oConnor (2nd from right) with fellow panelists.*

## CEO addresses keystone Revenue Summit

On 6 October 2022 the CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, Toby oConnor addressed The Australia Institute’s [Revenue Summit 2022](#) at Parliament House.

Highlights of the CEO’s speech...

In the lead up to the election just past, the St Vincent de Paul Society developed a set of advocacy materials, calling for a Fairer Australia, in other words a fair go for all. It’s important in this debate that we don’t lose sight of the fact that Australians are generous people...

A recent ANU survey found that 42% of respondents placed assisting people living in poverty in the top three priorities for the federal election, while reducing the budget deficit was a low priority. So, why isn’t there a public outcry for more to be done?

The Society’s reality is that our members spend most of their time providing emergency relief and housing support. We’re seeing:

- People presenting five or more times a year for help
- More people seeking help for the first time
- More people needing help with the basics, including food, rent, electricity and phone bills

- Requests for assistance increasing month on month
- A lack of accommodation and increasing housing stress – people are sleeping in their cars or living in temporary accommodation such as motels and caravan parks
- A growing number experiencing multiple crises such as COVID, flood and fire in addition to cost of living pressures.

At this time in our national journey, the most urgent need is not about giving our wealthy households a tax break.

How do we lift people out of poverty? We must increase income support payments. Even a \$10 to \$15 a day increase would help lift up to 1 million people out of poverty. And the earnings threshold for income support recipients must be increased.

We must continue to push for a significant increase in housing supply, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance must be reviewed and increased by 50 per cent.

If all of us are serious about ensuring no one goes backwards, we have to be open to reviewing the tax and welfare systems. And we need to start now. **R**

[Address to the Australia Institute](#)



The ACT's [Home Energy Tune-Up](#), launched in late November, will provide expert advice on saving energy costs and accessing free home energy assessments. The program is run by [St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn](#) and [Care](#), and is funded by the ACT Government. Pictured: [Shane Rattenbury](#), ACT Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Care's CEO, Carmel Franklin (left), and Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn CEO, Lucy Hohnen.

## Power to the people

**Energy crisis highlights the urgent need for affordable supply and more efficient homes.**

**BY ROSE BEYNON**

National Director Policy and Research

At a recent Senate Estimates hearing, The Treasury Secretary justified 'direct intervention' in the domestic energy market given the extraordinary circumstances brought about by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the projected increases in electricity and gas prices over the coming two years.

It is widely acknowledged that energy exporters' soaring profits – notably in the gas market, as the majority of Australian supplies are committed under high-priced overseas contracts - are coming at the expense of increased costs to consumers. This impacts particularly on lower income households.

The Federal Industry Minister has indicated that action is needed but at the time of writing, the Australian Government is still considering a range of options that may include a new tax on gas producers, a price cap and direct assistance to industry.

Given that the Society distributes over \$50 million each year in emergency relief and a significant portion goes

to covering utilities/energy costs, all efforts to improve energy efficiency and costs for low-income households, including public and private renters, are supported.

A recent survey found that Australians want greater action from governments on rising energy prices including price caps on electricity and gas, limits on gas exports, a code of conduct for gas producers to make more gas available for domestic consumption, restoration of public ownership of power generation assets and acceleration of renewable energy projects.

The Australian Government's recently released consultation paper on the [national energy performance strategy](#) is an opportunity to address the energy affordability and climate change crisis, and reduce poverty and inequality. The Government states the aim is to lower costs for households and businesses, reduce pressure on the energy system and help meet Australia's emission reduction goals.

The consultation paper seeks feedback on opportunities to improve or streamline the energy performance



of new and existing residential buildings, the existing policies aimed at empowering consumers to undertake energy performance improvements to their homes, key financial and non-financial barriers to the uptake of energy performance improvements and managing demand and electrification while lowering energy bills and emissions.

Feedback is sought specifically on low-income households, renters, and regional, remote and First Nations communities. Submissions close on 3 February 2023.

ACOSS has also called on the Australian Government to prioritise energy efficiency for people on low incomes. Too often low-income households are left behind, with energy efficiency subsidies and schemes benefitting those who can afford to 'take up the offer'. Landlords, despite having the negative gearing tax benefit from undertaking upgrades, tend to feel they are left out of pocket and seek to pass on expenses to tenants.

Living in a home that is warm in winter and cool in summer is a basic human right and reducing energy expenditure while improving energy performance and cutting emissions is a win-win. However, getting the balance right is difficult.

National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee membership includes Gavin Dufty, Manager, Social Policy Unit Victoria, who is the Society's subject matter expert on energy. Gavin has worked in partnership for many years with Alviss Consulting Pty Ltd to produce a tariff tracker that monitors the utilities market and financial impact of any price changes on families and individuals.

The aim is to inform the broader community about bill impacts and potential savings to be made, and the development of energy concessions and consumer protections for households. Improving community awareness also helps ensure the regulatory framework is adequate and the retail market remains competitive.

The tracker enables analysis of price and product developments resulting from changes to the regulation of retail prices, 'green policies', smart meter rollouts and transitions towards other smart grid developments.

Annual jurisdiction-specific reports on electricity and gas tariffs have been published for New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, along with a national overview. Workbooks are also available to enable the user to enter consumption levels and analyse household bills.

A 10-year recap of the Tariff Tracking project, [\*The NEM – Volatile prices, vanishing retailers and vulnerable consumers\*](#), was released in October 2022. Interactive online maps are also available that summarise the change in electricity prices from 2010 to 2019. All materials are accessible on the Society's website.

Gavin is also the Society's representative on the Australian

Energy Regulator's (AER) Customer Consultative Group (2021-24). The group is an important source of consumer insights and intelligence for the AER and helps to ensure consumers' voices are heard.

Recently the ACT was the first jurisdiction to regulate a minimum energy efficiency standard for ceiling insulation in rental properties, requiring rental homes with no insulation or insulation below an R-Value (thermal insulation) of 2 to upgrade to R-5. The regulatory scheme will be phased in over several years, will apply to public as well as private rentals, will make no-interest loans available to eligible rental providers and includes safety provisions to ensure electrical and insulation installation meet certified standards.

Other programs underway in the ACT include the ACT Smart Home Energy Efficiency for Low Income Households Program. For over 10 years, St Vincent de Paul Canberra-Goulburn has been funded by the ACT Government to help people living in low-income households remain comfortable in their homes through affordable means. The aim is to reduce electricity and gas bills by providing education on energy usage and practical ways to reduce energy bills, including through modifications

to homes. In the last financial year 620 households were assisted.

A multi-pronged approach to policy, regulation and funding across federal and state levels is required to ensure low-income households are not left behind or suffer unintended consequences as communities are faced with rising energy costs while at the same time trying to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions.

Finally, the Society is one of over 50 organisations that continues to call on the Australian and State governments to fund the National Low Income Energy Productivity Program. If funded by all governments, 1.8 million energy inefficient homes occupied by low-income earners and renters could be retrofitted.

Deloitte Access Economics assessed the Program and found an average spend of \$5,000 per home by providing insulation, air conditioning, draught sealing and solar panels would have profound and sustained economic, social and health outcomes for decades to come. Some 22,000 jobs would be generated and Australia's GDP boosted by between \$3.4 billion and \$4.9 billion. ACOSS will be consulting further with organisations to explore additional pathways to improving energy efficiency for low-income households as the Program has not been funded by governments to date. **R**

***'A multi-pronged approach to policy, regulation and funding across federal and state levels is required to ensure low-income households are not left behind...'***

# STATES & TERRITORIES – CHRISTMAS APPEALS 2022



## Cost-of-living focus for Christmas Appeal

This year's [Vinnies Christmas Appeal](#), traditionally the Society's major annual fundraiser, is focusing on raising money to support Australian families struggling to pay their rent and keep pace with the rising cost of food, energy bills and other household expenses.

Noting that 47 per cent of renters are under severe financial stress, and 43 per cent of homeowners are experiencing mortgage stress, the appeal presents 'before and after' scenarios for a mum, Kelly, who has scoliosis in her spine, dad David, and their two teenaged girls, Layla and Ruby.

When she opens a newly arrived bill Kelly wonders whether she should pay it or use the money to buy medicine: 'Layla and Ruby's medications have almost run out and I'm worried about being able to afford the next lot. Even the generic brand is so expensive...'

'Should she buy food for her children or pay rent to keep a roof over their heads?', the copy reads.

'More and more often, she can't do both. And as the cost-of-living increases, she's afraid that one day soon she may not be able to do either.'

After months of battling to manage their expenses, the family calls the Vinnies helpline and next day is visited by the volunteer team: 'We made sure that within 24 hours, Kelly had food vouchers, giving immediate relief from the difficult choices she had been living with for so long,' say Tiana and Matt.

'Vinnies also gave us drawers for the children and two doonas,' Kelly adds. 'I don't know what we would have done without them.'

At a time of rapidly rising living costs, there has never been a greater need for the Vinnies Christmas Appeal, which is supported by local Conferences around the country, including the packing and distribution of festive hampers made possible by donated food items and children's Christmas gifts from supporters Australia-wide. **R**

## Conferences rally to bring joy at Christmas

Christmas is a joyous time for Australian families but sadly many people feel left out, unable to afford even basic food, let alone festive fare, or to buy toys for their children.

Right around the nation, in cities and country towns, St Vincent de Paul Society members have been working hard for months to prepare gift hampers to brighten the lives of local people they know are doing it tough.

Many of these goods have been donated by supportive businesses, others have been collected by schoolchildren who have opened their hearts to helping families in need.

The Vinnies Christmas Appeal is again an important part of our seasonal commitment and the Society is deeply grateful to everyone who has helped us in the lead-up to Christmas and over the past year. **R**

## IGA Christmas partnership is on again

For the tenth Christmas running, the network of locally owned supermarkets known collectively as the Independent Grocers Alliance, or IGA, is partnering with St Vincent de Paul Society to raise funds to help families struggling to cope with rising costs and the added demands of the festive season.

IGA has been a national partner of Vinnies since 2012. Through the sales of IGA Community Chest products and Vinnies Appeal tokens, IGA has raised close to \$4.5 million to support people during festive seasons and natural disasters.

In the leadup to this Christmas the 1400-strong, Australia-wide network is asking shoppers to help people in need by purchasing a \$2.00 Vinnies bauble, on display at checkouts, or any stocked products with a Community Chest ticket.

IGA store locations can be found [here](#) and the promotion is easy to access. It runs until Christmas Day. **R**



## Tasmania targets \$250,000 for Christmas Appeal

The St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania launched its Christmas Appeal on 16 November, with State President Mark Gaetani saying ‘the community would be truly shocked if they knew how many Tasmanians required the assistance of a charity to get through the Christmas, New Year, back-to-school period – many of them the in-work poor and low-income families who have never had to rely on a charity or ask for assistance from Vinnies before.’

‘We usually say we want to raise \$250,000 for our Christmas Appeal, but this year – due to the cost-of-living crisis that is affecting the disadvantaged and low-income earners – many at risk of homelessness – we truly need to raise \$250,000.’

‘A mountain of bills and costs arrive at the same time over the Christmas period and, sadly, due to the cost-of-living crisis more Tasmanians than ever need support from Vinnies and help from the community,’ Mr Gaetani said.

‘Vinnies is always grateful for the generosity of the Tasmanian community and the many businesses and schools that raise money and donate to Vinnies Christmas Appeal. We are particularly thrilled that IGA is partnering with Vinnies again this Christmas.’ **R**

*Above: Mark Gaetani, State President St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania and Sam Grace, Youth & Community Manager.*



## Hands on the wheel in regional WA

In the lead-up to Christmas residents of the Harvey area in southwest Western Australia dug deep to help community members in need. To support Vinnies Christmas Appeal a partnership was formed between the Society in Harvey, the Harvey Community Resource Centre and the Harvey Family Support Service.

Harvey CRC manager Tracey-Ann Davis said the trio of organisations had worked together intensively over the past year on several issues affecting the community.

‘Last year was the first year that we collaborated on doing a street stall for the Christmas Hampers [to be distributed by Vinnies] and this year it is a much stronger network and all three of us are represented now,’ she said.

‘Harvey has one of the strongest support networks in any of the country towns. More and more, people who didn’t expect to be struggling are now, with the lack of housing, and it is hard for so many people in the community,’ she said.

‘We’re so grateful that we have got a community that is so generous and who are so willing to put their hand in their pocket and help wherever they can.’ **R**

*Above: Leanne Pronk (left) SVDP Harvey Conference President and Tracey-Anne Davis, Manager Harvey Community Resource Centre.*

# Tasmania's Governor visits Vincent Industries

*Emeritus Professor Don Chalmers AO, National Council Member and State President, St Vincent de Paul Society (Tas), Mark Gaetani, Waratah-Wynyard Council Mayor, Councillor Robert 'Robby' Walsh, Governor of Tasmania, Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC, Waratah-Wynyard Council General Manager, Shane Crawford and Vincent Industries Executive Manager, Nellie McKenna.*

The St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania was honoured to welcome Tasmania's Governor, Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC, on an official visit to Vincent Industries in Wynyard on 13 October 2022.

Apart from the joy it brought the staff and supported employees who had an opportunity to meet the Governor, Her Excellency's visit recognised the valuable contribution the charity sector makes towards building communities and offering hope and opportunity to marginalised and disadvantaged people in our society.

Of course, offering meaningful employment to people who would otherwise find it difficult to secure a job, is only part of what Vincent Industries offers. No matter where anyone is employed, to be truly successful, they must have a sense of fulfilment – a sense of making a difference or a contribution. Vincent Industries employees are no different; and what a contribution they make.

From sorting fabric for the export market, to creating rags for the manufacturing sector, to securely shredding documents, very little of the raw materials that enter their doors are wasted. Their daily efforts reduce landfill significantly. Their commitment to caring for the environment and supporting the circular economy is apparent and they are justifiably proud of their contribution.

Although charities and service organisations rarely seek recognition for their community service, they continue to play an important role in promoting social cohesion, advocating for those who do not have a voice, and delivering services that would otherwise be difficult to find if you are disadvantaged or living with a disability.

In June 2022, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) released the eighth edition of the Australian Charities Report. It is published to share the latest information about the charity sector with the Australian public.

Reading the report I was humbled by the compassion and generosity of Australians. During the 2020 reporting period, in one form or another, Australians donated \$176 billion to the charity sector. This represents an increase of \$10 billion over the previous year and includes \$90 billion in funding from State and Federal governments.

It does not include the countless donations of food, clothing, in-kind services, and of course the millions of hours donated by dedicated volunteers. Charities are grateful for every dollar donated to help those in need, otherwise it would be impossible to deliver crucial services when and where they are needed most – including creating employment opportunities at enterprises such as Vincent Industries.



*Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC, Governor of Tasmania, Vincent Industries Executive Manager, Nellie McKenna and George Bridges.*

The report also found that of the approximately 75,000 programs analysed, the most common classification across all charity sizes was 'Religion', which delivered approximately 17,000 programs (22.3%). This was followed by 'Education', which delivered approximately 12,300 programs (16.5%) and 'Human Services', which delivered 11,900 programs (15.8%). Without the generosity of individuals, businesses, and governments very few of these programs, which helped millions of Australians, would have been possible. These programs were delivered in part by an estimated 3.4 million volunteers Australia-wide.

We at the St Vincent de Paul Society are grateful for the donations we receive, and the countless hours our dedicated members, volunteers, and staff give towards helping others. We are also grateful for the honour bestowed on the whole charity sector when dignitaries, such as Her Excellency the Governor of Tasmania, visits one of the thousands of organisations doing great work to assist those in need. **R**



*Emeritus Professor Don Chalmers AO, Rae Gatenby, Lynette Rieder (Disability Support Worker) and Annette Spinks.*



## Kicking a goal on Night Patrol

*Night Patrol volunteer Elizabeth Heath, Senator David Pocock, CEO Lucy Hohnen and volunteers Ben Fitzgerald and Tim Maher.*

Taking a break from the heat of Federal Parliament the former rugby union star-turned independent senator for the ACT, David Pocock, spent an unseasonably cold and wet November evening with the Vinnies Night Patrol Van volunteers and the Street-to-Home program staff.

Senator Pocock was able to witness first-hand the critical work the team does for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

‘We are seeing an increase in need in our community and we are seeing a change in the profile of people coming to us for support,’ said the Society’s Canberra/Goulburn CEO Lucy Hohnen.

‘We are seeing people who have not had to go to a charity

for assistance before. They have jobs and traditionally have been able to manage their lives but at the moment are really struggling to make ends meet.

‘It was a great pleasure to meet Senator David Pocock and to discuss the increasing impact of the current cost of living crisis in our region. We value his commitment to helping address these complex issues,’ Ms Hohnen added.

‘Even in an affluent area such as the national capital nearly 1-in-10 people live in poverty and the current cost-of-living crisis has magnified life’s pressures. Through our specialist services, we provide support and foster connections to other community services to help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.’ **R**

# ACT Senator's pivotal role in benefits review and financial sector reform process

ACT Senator David Pocock's commitment to helping improve the lives of everyday Australians, especially those doing it tough, has been welcomed by the Society in the light of his role in brokering amendments to the Government's Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill. The Bill was passed as the Parliament entered its final sitting days of 2022.

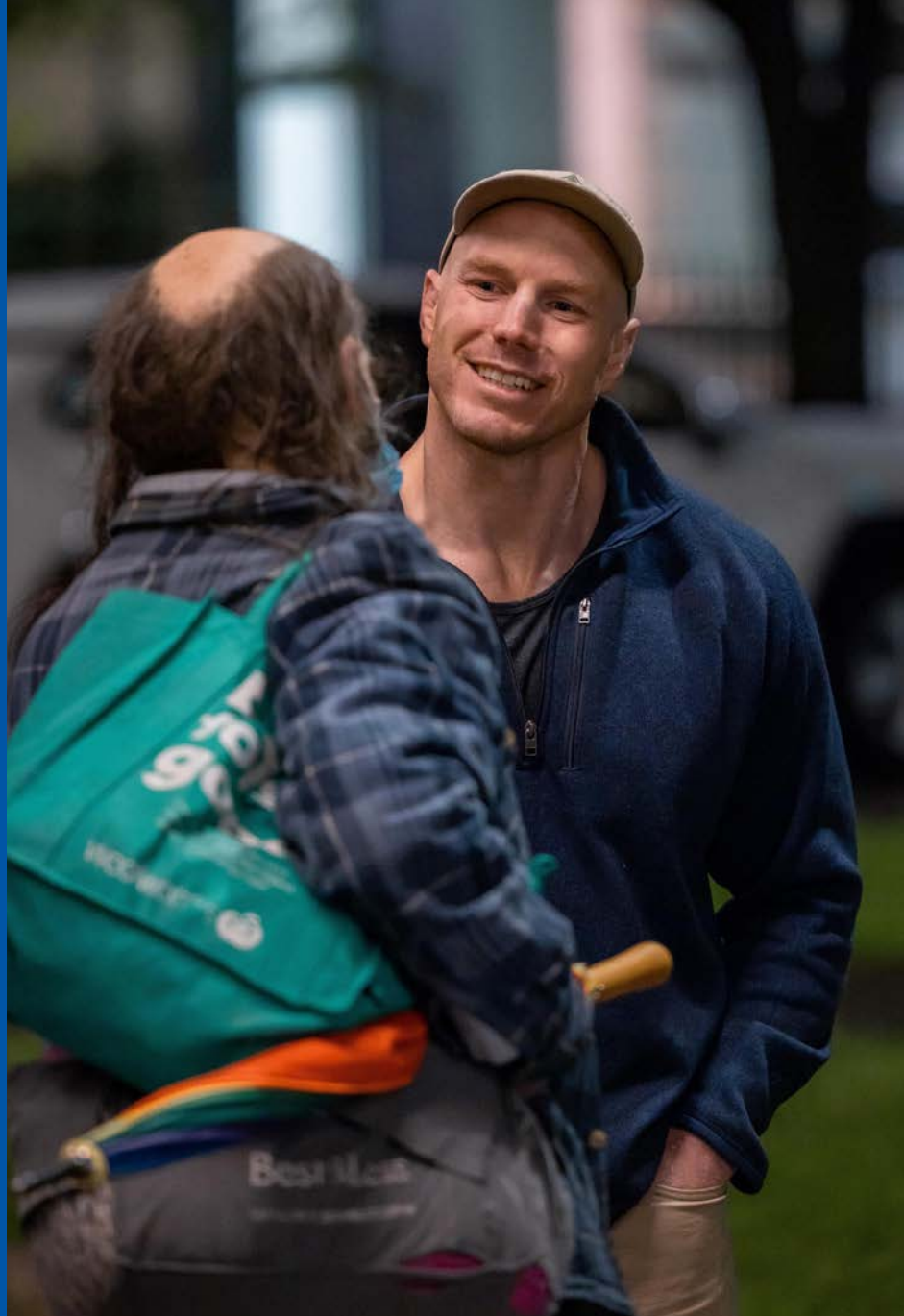
The Bill is an important first step in the reform needed to increase job security, wages, and equity. St Vincent de Paul Society's A Fairer Australia electoral policy platform identified job security as one of our five key social policy issues. A review process, built into the legislation, will help manage its implementation and identify any unintended consequences.

As part of the brokering process, the Australian Government has committed to establishing an independent Economic Inclusion Advisory Panel. We understand an interim Panel will be formed by the end of this year, in time to prepare for the May 2023 Budget, and that enabling legislation will be introduced next year. The Panel will be led by the Treasurer and the Minister for Social Services and comprise experts able to put an informed spotlight on the adequacy of income support payments such as JobSeeker.

'Households relying on income support are five times more likely to experience poverty'

The Society has called for such a panel in several submissions in recent years. The reality is that households relying on income support are five times more likely to experience poverty. We believe that as a community we cannot begin to address the problem until we define, understand and monitor it.

The Society looks forward to the Advisory Panel's regular reports and hopes that this will depoliticise this issue and help government prioritise the action/s needed to fix the income support system.



Senator Pocock was also key to facilitating the passage of the Financial Sector Reform Bill. The Society is a strong advocate for increased consumer protections in the financial sector.

We are active members of the Stop the Debt Trap coalition and prepared a submission on this Bill. The passage of this Bill was important because the lack of a regulatory framework for payday loans and consumer leases has caused serious harm to vulnerable Australians.

We are now working with the Stop the Debt Trap coalition to advocate for regulation of Buy Now Pay Later Schemes. A recent survey conducted by Choice has found that one in seven users of credit from buy-now-pay-later providers had more than 20 loans last year; and that consumers were using buy now pay later services to cover essential bills, with one in six using the short-term loans to cover supermarket purchases and 14 per cent to pay for power.

We know that when people worry over essentials they have poorer mental health outcomes. Eighty-five per cent of those who worry about everyday essentials also have their mental health impacted every day. **R**



## Tas Textiles re-dedicated after 75 years

*Tas Textiles Business Manager, Linda Goram-Aitken with Mathew Midgley, and St Vincent de Paul Society State President, Mark Gaetani.*

The St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania rededicated its Special Work, Tas Textiles, at a ceremony in Hobart in late September 2022.

Since 1946, the company has been offering meaningful employment to people with intellectual disabilities along with producing a wide range of premium textile products and services, including woollen knitwear for schools and corporate markets, embroidery services, a range of hand-made soft toys, and much more.

The company works closely with schools, businesses, sporting teams, and the general public across Tasmania and Australia who depend on Tas Textiles to deliver unsurpassed quality and workmanship.

St Vincent de Paul Society CEO, Heather Kent said that for over 75 years, Tas Textiles has offered people living with an intellectual disability the opportunity to enjoy a high level of social independence, built on the dignity of employment, in a supportive environment.

‘Tas Textile’s mission statement is to enable people with intellectual disabilities to experience meaningful employment in a supportive environment. The supported employees and supervisory staff at Tas Textiles live this mission every day, while building confidence and self-esteem,’ Heather Kent said.

‘When the Society resumed oversight and management of Tas Textiles in 2021, we used the opportunity to look at ways to improve the business. Our priority was to identify programmes that encouraged independence and offered opportunity, freedom of choice, and quality of life to all of our supported employees.

‘Tas Textiles is one of Tasmania’s most successful Australian Disability Enterprises and, more recently, an NDIS participant workplace. Many of our supported employees have worked at Tas Textiles for 30 to 40 years and take immense pride in producing some of the highest quality knitwear in Australia.’ **R**





St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania CEO, Heather Kent with Vinnies Store Retail Coordinator, Kirilee Thompson

## Bag-A-Bargain campaign launched

The St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania launched an innovative Spring campaign designed to make it easy for everyone to clear out pre-loved clothes, unwanted towels, sheets, and other household items and bric-a-brac, and donate them to their local Vinnies Store.

Tasmania CEO Heather Kent said the campaign's aim is to make it as easy as possible for people to donate clothing and other household items to their local Vinnies Store.

'We are encouraging everyone to collect a Vinnies' Bag-A-Bargain kit from any Vinnies store across Tasmania. They can take them home, fill the yellow donation bags with unwanted items around their homes, before returning them to their local Vinnies Store.

'When customers return to the store, they will be offered a replacement Bag-A-Bargain kit to fill with more unwanted items, or to pass it on to a family member, friend, or neighbour.

'We also introduced Bag-A-Bargain in an attempt to reduce the amount of dumping that occurs when the weather improves. If people have an easy option to donate clothing and unwanted household goods to Vinnies, they are less likely to dump clothing and household goods outside our stores, where they can be damaged.' **R**

## Food Drive targets 1-in-5 Tasmanians facing food insecurity

In mid-September 2022 the St Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania launched a state-wide food drive to assist the nearly 1-in-5 residents of the state who are suffering food poverty. The drive will see 200 food bins distributed across Tasmania, complete with shopping lists, to encourage people to donate food to people in need.

CEO, Ms Heather Kent, said the food drive was necessary due to an overwhelming increase in the number of Tasmanians requesting food parcels and financial assistance to purchase groceries.

'Every month, the St Vincent de Paul Society distributes food parcels to hundreds of hungry families and the underprivileged. Vinnies food vans also serve over 20,000 meals and countless hot beverages on an annual basis.

'It is particularly concerning that a University of Tasmania report, *Is high food insecurity the new normal in Tasmania?*, found that food insecurity has prevailed since the pandemic and that close to 1-in-5 (18%) Tasmanians have run out of food and cannot afford to buy more. When this happens, they have to turn to Vinnies and other charities for assistance.

'Key findings in the report suggest 11% of Tasmanian households are experiencing severe food insecurity\*, meaning they are regularly going without food... Vinnies needs help from the community to assist people, particularly children, who are literally going to bed hungry and waking up to no food in the cupboard.' **R**



*At the official opening of the Good Works Garden were the CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, Lucy Hohnen, the CEO of Argyle Housing, Carolyn Doherty and the Founder of Dirty Jane's, Jane Crowley.*

## Good Works Garden opens in suburban Canberra

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn is one of nine not-for-profit organisations to benefit from this year's ACT Government Community Garden Grants program, which provides funding for materials and tools or contractor hire for work on new or existing gardens.

The Society's Good Works Garden is a collaboration with Argyle Housing, a community housing provider, and Dirty Janes, a vintage and collectible emporium operating in Canberra and Bowral, NSW. The garden is located in Fyshwick, ACT and is a space for the community and our companions to learn new skills, be part of a community inclusion program and grow fresh produce to create meals for those in need.

The Good Works Garden is run by volunteers, including residents of housing supported by Argyle Housing and the Society. It provides them with a beautiful space to relax and connect with nature.

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra-Goulburn's Director of Marketing, Fundraising and Communications Phillip Jones said the collaborative project would transform what Dirty Jane's calls its 'long paddock' into an accessible

garden that can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

'Through the creation and cultivation of this garden we will create specific inclusion opportunities for residents of housing run by Argyle Housing and Vinnies,' Phillip said.

'The funding supplied as part of the Community Garden Grants program will be used to purchase materials for wicking beds including soil and mulch, composting equipment, garden tools and trellises to grow vines on the back wall.'

Jane Crowley from Dirty Jane's added, 'Regreening our environment is always front of mind for Dirty Jane's. We are mindful of being an active member of the community in which we are situated. The garden has been designed with a focus on sustainability and repurposing. We are looking forward to seeing green thumbs working on the project.'

There are more than 100 community gardens scattered throughout the ACT's suburbs, providing a food source, empowering people to learn gardening skills, and connecting like-minded Canberrans.

More information at [www.goodworksgarden.org](http://www.goodworksgarden.org) **R**

## STATES & TERRITORIES



Marisa Chapman, centre-manager for St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, and volunteer Barbara received \$2000 from an anonymous donor to buy a defibrillator for the Narooma Vinnies shop.

## Lifesaving partnership gives heart to Vinnies shops

Every second counts when it comes to saving the life of a person having a sudden heart attack, and all 27 Vinnies shops across the Canberra/Goulburn Archdiocese are participating in the Heart of Vinnies partnership with St John Ambulance ACT and the broader community.

The campaign centres on installing lifesaving defibrillators, costing \$2000 at a discounted rate, in every retail premise, SVDP building and the Night Patrol vehicle, as well as conducting first aid training from St. John's for all staff and volunteers.

The ambulance service estimates the inaccessibility of defibrillators could cost the lives of up to 100 Canberrans each year and many more in the region.

Soon after the campaign launched an anonymous donor gave \$2000 to the Narooma shop to enable the purchase of an in-store defibrillator.

'Vinnies staff and volunteers are so grateful to this wonderful donor and they know that the local community will be too,' said Marisa Chapman, centre-manager for St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

'Whoever you are, you have definitely made a difference to everyone.'

The beneficiaries are not only those involved with the Society but members of the public who visit the shops where donations to the campaign can be made directly, as well as online at [www.shoutforgood.com/fundraisers/theheartsofvinnies](http://www.shoutforgood.com/fundraisers/theheartsofvinnies) **R**

## RECONCILIATION ACTION

- Consensus was that they saw the document but knew very little on how to implement
- Welcomed support to unpack and address

### Actions Taken

- Cultural Competency Framework established (as prescribed by R.A.)
- Dedicated on-line Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training developed (in na)
- Overhaul of Statewide RWG – ensuring representation from all areas
- RWGs established in Vinnies NSW Regions (5)
- Community Aboriginal Advisory Group established (Bulbulwool Bay)
- Data now collected by P&C on diversity within the Society - creation



Rob Cohen, Aboriginal Engagement Partner, St Vincent de Paul NSW



(l-r) Toby oConnor, Rob Cohen, NSW and Tony Roach, SA at the Virginia Centre of Charity in Brisbane.

# Leaders commit to First Nations Reconciliation

In October 2022, Vincentian leaders met at the St Teresa Spirituality Centre in Brisbane to re-commit the Society to Reconciliation with Australia's First Nations people. The *National Indigenous Reconciliation Workshop* was organized by the Queensland Society's Reconciliation Action Group (RAP) Working Group as an initiative of the National Social Justice Advisory Committee (NSJAC).

The attendees included the Society's next National President Mark Gaetani (who was representing Tasmania) and National Secretariate CEO, Toby oConnor, along with leaders from the NSW, Victoria, South Australia, Northern Territory and Canberra/Goulburn Societies.

The workshop heard from the Society's Indigenous Leaders, Leon Epong (Qld) and Rob Cohen (NSW) on the activities that their States were working on to build relationships with First Nations people. The workshop noted that many State and Territory Societies had Reconciliation Action Plans but that there was now a need to build on this work to raise awareness with Society members, volunteers and workers, and to share resources.

NSJAC Chair Matt Nunan told the workshop that now was the time for the Society to re-commit to Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Mr Nunan outlined the Society's long history of support for Reconciliation with Australia's First Nations people, starting with National Council's year 2000 Alice Springs statement *Reflections in Partnership with Aboriginal People* through to the recent support for the *Uluru Statement From the Heart*, which was part of the Society's Federal Election statement, *A Fairer Australia*.

Mr Nunan said that the Society has a unique role to play in the discussion about Reconciliation and welcomed the current government's plan to introduce a referendum for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Australian Constitution with a Voice to Parliament. However, he noted that *Uluru Statement from the Heart* also asked for Treaty and Truth-telling.

'Recognizing the injustices of the past experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be part of the national healing process,' Mr Nunan said.

'I encourage Vincentian members, staff and volunteers to listen respectfully and with empathy and compassion to Indigenous people as they tell their stories. These are core values of the Society'.

Victorian delegate, Dr Linette Etheredge outlined her key takeaways from the workshop:

1. Take the time to listen to our Elders' truth-telling and Reconciliation stories - both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal - is something we can all do at a very local level.
2. Truth-telling will be painful for all. Some people may feel pain, shame or guilt – this may be unrecognised.
3. Creating the opportunity for Truth-telling, Yarning Circles and meet ups is the starting place for healing
4. A lot of the Society's work will be done by talking to one person at a time with compassion and kindness.

The National Indigenous Reconciliation Workshop participants will continue to work on programs to promote Reconciliation in their States and Territories and will gather again in 2023. **R**

### Further reading

[The NSW Society has developed several factsheets on topics related to Reconciliation, including the \*Uluru Statement From The Heart\*.](#)

[Watch the short video from Bishop Mark Coleridge on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops in support of the \*Uluru Statement From The Heart\*.](#)

[Read the \*Uluru Statement from the Heart\* and learn about \*Voice, Treaty and Makaratta\* \(truth-telling\) and the aspirations of the leaders who met to develop the statement in 2017.](#)

## Former SVDP National President to head Amélie Housing

The Board of Amélie Housing has announced the appointment of The Hon Graham West as its new Chief Executive Officer. The organisation is a national community housing provider and designated Special Work of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Mr West is a former CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW and in 2015 was elected National President for a four-year term. He joined the Society at the age of 17.

At the time of his election, Mr West said: 'We are one of the largest human rights organisations in Australia, responding to need wherever it is found. We are also especially entrusted to advocate on behalf of people who are marginalised and we are committed to building an Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice.'

Mr West replaces current CEO Brian Murnane, who was also a National President of the Society (1992-1994) and commenced work with Amélie Housing in 2013.

'It has been my absolute privilege to serve at Amélie for the last nine years,' Mr Murnane said.

'When I started in 2013, I was their first and only employee. Now we have over 40 staff, Tier 1 Registration, and manage approximately 1,500 dwellings across NSW, ACT and SA with plans to grow to around 2,500 dwellings by 2027.'

'I have every confidence that Amélie will go on to achieve many more milestones and I wish Mr West and the Amélie team the absolute best in the journey ahead,' Mr Murnane said.

Mr West was most recently a Management Consultant in the not-for-profit sector and was previously a former Member of Parliament in NSW for 10 years representing the Campbelltown area. He held a number of Ministerial positions including Juvenile Justice and Youth, and has been active at the board level in the community sector for many years, including in community development and youth drug and alcohol education and support.

In addition, he has a continuing interest in community engagement policies, environmental strategies at the local level, and issues concerning indigenous youth, especially in the areas of employment and education. Mr West has written on youth engagement in decision-making using social networking and is a regular speaker on the importance of community development.



At the opening of the Nagel Centre in Albury NSW were (l-r) Brian Murnane, Denis Walsh, Beverley Kerr, Vice President Special Works, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, and retiring NSW CEO, Jack de Groot.



Graham West

'After a comprehensive search and candidate evaluation process, the Amélie Housing Board is confident that Graham will bring invaluable knowledge and experience to this critical leadership role. We are very pleased to have Graham join us in advocating for justice in housing markets nationally,' said Amélie Housing's Chair Tony Carpani.

'We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Brian Murnane, who retires from Amélie after serving as CEO for nine years. Brian has dedicated much of his life to improving housing services and outcomes for our community's most vulnerable and he has played an instrumental role in shaping our community housing sector over the last 40 years. Our community is indebted to Brian for his leadership, and for the dedication he has shown to shaping a more just and compassionate society,' Mr Carpani added.

Mr West said: 'I am honoured to be appointed as Amélie Housing's next CEO and to have the opportunity to work with such a dedicated team of people who are so passionately committed to creating safe and secure pathways to housing for those at greatest risk of homelessness throughout our nation.'

'I share the team's passion for providing quality, affordable housing and support for all, and I look forward to working with a spirit of collaboration to pursue justice and charity, as was done by the St Vincent de Paul Society's founder, Frederic Ozanam.' **R**

# REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS

## Urgent action should match Government's promises

BY TIM MCKENNA

Chair Vincentian Refugee Network



CEO Toby oConnor (third from left) joined members of the Vincentian Refugee Network at the rally to support refugees in Canberra on 29 November 2022. Dr Tim McKenna, Chair of the Network, is next to the Vinnies Good Works banner.

The Albanese Labor Government has been in office for six months and produced its first budget, so this is a good time to assess its performance on helping refugees and people seeking asylum.

### Government promises

Before the election Labor made two key promises on refugees:

- give permanent residency to the Nadesalingam family from Biloela, and
- grant permanent visas to 19,000 refugees still on temporary visas after nearly a decade

Since the election Andrew Giles, the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs has stated his determination to implement all the commitments in Labor's National Platform on refugees and asylum seekers, which include:

- abolishing the unfair fast-track refugee assessment process, instead ensuring all claims for asylum are assessed with procedural fairness in line with our international obligations,
- granting people seeking asylum means-tested access to funded migration assistance and to appropriate social services,
- giving priority to suitable third country resettlement for people subject to offshore processing, while noting the Government retains its obligation to support them until they are re-settled,
- taking a more humane, risk-based approach to immigration detention, and
- acknowledging family reunion for refugees is important to successful settlement.

### Government actions to date

Thankfully, within weeks of the election, the Government returned the Nadesalingam family to their home in Biloela and in August granted them permanent residency. But sadly, action on its other commitments has been disappointing.

In relation to granting permanent protection to refugees on temporary visas, Mr Giles has stated as recently as 10 September that the Government is making 'good progress' in resolving this issue.<sup>1</sup> However, both he and Claire O'Neil, the Minister for Home Affairs, have refused give dates for implementation. Unfortunately, a promise without a timeline is no plan at all.

On a slightly positive note, it appears that one reason for this delay and uncertainty is that the Government is also considering, as part of this process, a fairer approach to the 11,000 people still suffering under the fast-track process. But again, without stated timings, it's hard to offer hope to these vulnerable and long-suffering people.

Even worse, the financial destitution continues for many of these people, together with many other asylum seekers, who have suffered under the Coalition's 85 per cent cuts to the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS). The Society and other refugee support agencies advocated strongly for the restoration of SRSS to its 2017-18 level in the Government's October 2022 Budget. So, this suffering will continue at least until the end of this financial year; and longer unless the Government acts in the May 2023 budget.

Equally disturbing was that the largest October 2022 Budget allocation concerning refugees was an increase of \$150 million in spending this financial year on offshore processing, above the already monstrous figure of \$632.5 million allocated by the Coalition in its earlier 2022-23 Budget



That said, for people involved in offshore processing, who are in either Nauru or Australia, there have been small improvements under the new Government. At least 50 people have been re-settled in a third country since the election (including the first six to NZ), while none were settled in the last five months of the Coalition Government. As well, a small number of people (less than 10) have been medically evacuated from Nauru to Australia.<sup>2</sup>

However, for those in PNG, the new Government is continuing to implement the previous Government's unconscionable decision late last year, to abandon any responsibly for the welfare and re-settlement of the 100 people still held there. About a dozen need medical evacuation to Australia, which is now no longer to be considered, and about 70 have no plausible path to third country re-settlement.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Labor's platform, the Government is no longer accepting its obligations to them.

On a more positive note, the Government has made a small start in reducing the numbers in immigration detention.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, on another positive note, Minister Giles made a small change to family reunion guidelines. Refugees on some temporary visas will be able to travel overseas to visit family in more circumstances than was possible under the previous Government. Furthermore, when these people do become permanent residents, they will no longer receive the lowest processing priority in their family reunion applications.<sup>5</sup>

### More needs to be done quickly

The Society continues to call on the Government to do quickly do four things, all of which are consistent with Labor election and platform commitments:

- Implement permanent protection for all refugees on temporary visas, including access to family reunion.
- Implement a fairer process for all affected by the unjust fast-track process and provide an adequate safety net for all asylum seekers.
- Resettle all people still subject to offshore processing and move people held offshore to Australia while they await resettlement.
- Make detention a last resort and improve the living conditions of those that must be detained for security reasons.

Vinnies acknowledges that some small initial action has commenced on family reunion, for those in immigration detention and for those subject to the offshore processing regime in Nauru and Australia. We hope that other improvements continue at a more rapid pace.

For the four issues listed above, we call for concrete action by 30 Mar 2023 with the necessary funds for full implementation of all these activities allocated in the May 2023 Budget. **R**

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/audio/2022/sep/10/immigration-minister-andrew-giles-on-labors-plan-for-migration-and-building-pathways-to-permanency>
2. Operation Sovereign Borders Monthly Reports Jan-Oct 22, <https://www.abf.gov.au/sitenewsroom>
3. Fr Giorgio Lucini, Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference in PNG <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/what-will-happen-to-the-asylum-seekers-who-australia-refused-to-let-in/5e75c9twl>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/sep/25/refugee-advocates-encouraged-as-albanese-government-considers-ways-to-reduce-immigration-detention-backlog>
5. <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/AndrewGiles/Pages/goodwill-measures-for-tpvshev-holders.aspx>

EVERYONE IS  
WELCOME

## World Day of Migrants and Refugees

*Sunday 25 September marked the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Pope Francis' theme for the day was 'Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees'.*

*The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office produced a kit giving guidance to assist parishes and other Church communities celebrate this day.*

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia marked the Catholic Church's World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sunday 25 September by urging the Australian Government to fulfil its promise to give permanent protection to 19,000 refugees trapped for nearly a decade on temporary visas.

The Australian Government's recent decisions to increase our 2022-23 migrant intake to 195,000 places and to reform Australia's migration system are clear commitments to see migrants as crucial to building country's future. The Society welcomed these decisions, as well as the Government's election commitment to give permanent protection to 19,000 refugees on temporary visas, so that they too can contribute with us to Australia's future.

However, four months after the election the Government had not yet announced its plan to implement this commitment, nor given a time when it will be announced. This delay is causing unnecessary distress to these

vulnerable people, many of whom the Society supports.

The Society called on Vincentians and other Catholics to encourage their parishes to use this kit in their Masses. The kit includes stories celebrating the Australian Church's commitment to a future with migrants and refugees but also includes a video commenting on the darker side of Australia's approach to many other vulnerable people seeking our protection, many of whom the Society also supports.

The Society welcomes Minister Giles' recent statement that he is determined to implement all aspects of the ALP's National Platform on refugees which, in addition to granting permanent protection to refugees on temporary visas, includes abolishing the unfair fast-track refugee assessment process and ensuring people in need (including asylum seekers) have a safety net.

As outlined in the Society's 2022 *A Fairer Australia* election statement, much more than this needs to be done to provide justice to the many people seeking our protection. But quick implementation of the Government party's own platform would be a good start. **R**





Photographed in Macquarie Place, Sydney on 26 October 1951, this group of delegates and their spouses was preparing to travel to Tasmania for the Hobart Triennial Congress of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

Despite the destination sign on the coach, they did not travel by land but were ferried to the suburb of Rose Bay to board a Trans Oceanic Airways flying boat, the *Star of Papua*, which would fly them to their southern destination.

'We are in the air for four hours,' wrote one member in an article for the 1 December 1951 issue of an early version of this magazine, *The Record*.

'For the most part the rugged Australian coastline is in view under clear blue skies. Then, after passing the Bass Strait, we are thrilled when the mainland of Tasmania comes into view through drifting white clouds.

'Finally, we are greeted by Mt. Wellington itself, the top of which is covered by snow. We touch down on the glorious Derwent River and, though fitful showers greet us, we are warmed with the enthusiasm and zeal and interest which our Hobart confreres display for our comfort.'

The travel arrangements were less streamlined back in February 1927 when an earlier group of Vincentians from Queensland and NSW boarded the S.S. *Riverina* bound for the Society's Third Australasian Congress, also in Hobart. It was a 'glorious day' on Sydney harbour and the three-day voyage was 'favoured with perfect weather throughout', according to the account published in the celebratory booklet also held in our historical archives. **R**

### About our archives

BY PAUL DALGLEISH, Archivist

This photograph of delegates setting off for the Triennial Congress comes from the archives of the National Council. The delegates are gathered in Macquarie Place in Sydney, warmly dressed in anticipation of entering a colder southern climate. Ahead of the delegates is an exciting four hours in the air in the *Star of Papua*.

As the newly appointed archivist to the National Council, I have been impressed by the breadth and richness of the archival collection which sheds so much light on the history of the Society in Australia.

Items such as this photograph allow a glimpse into the human dimension of the Society and its members. The Society has a proud history and there is no better way to acknowledge this than through the care of its archival heritage.

I come to the Society after a career in the National Archives of Australia, followed by several years as archivist at Catholic Social Services Australia and the University of New South Wales, Canberra. I look forward to working with this interesting archive and contributing to the preservation of the Society's history. **R**

## A Long Time Coming

Melanie Joosten  
Scribe 232pp

In the introduction to her 'Essays on old age', to quote the sub-title, social worker turned writer Melanie Joosten explains how she conducted a series of interviews with older (over sixty-five) Australians, although 'I wasn't sure that old age was enough of a unifying experience to draw any conclusions or observations.'

It turned out that it was, even if they all had a distinctive story to tell.

Meeting her subjects at 'kitchen tables, in living rooms, in noisy cafes' she discussed a range of issues, not the least being, understandably, health, but more importantly the way 'society orchestrates our gradual exit from public life as we age, recasting us from lead players with individual agency to burdensome detritus.'

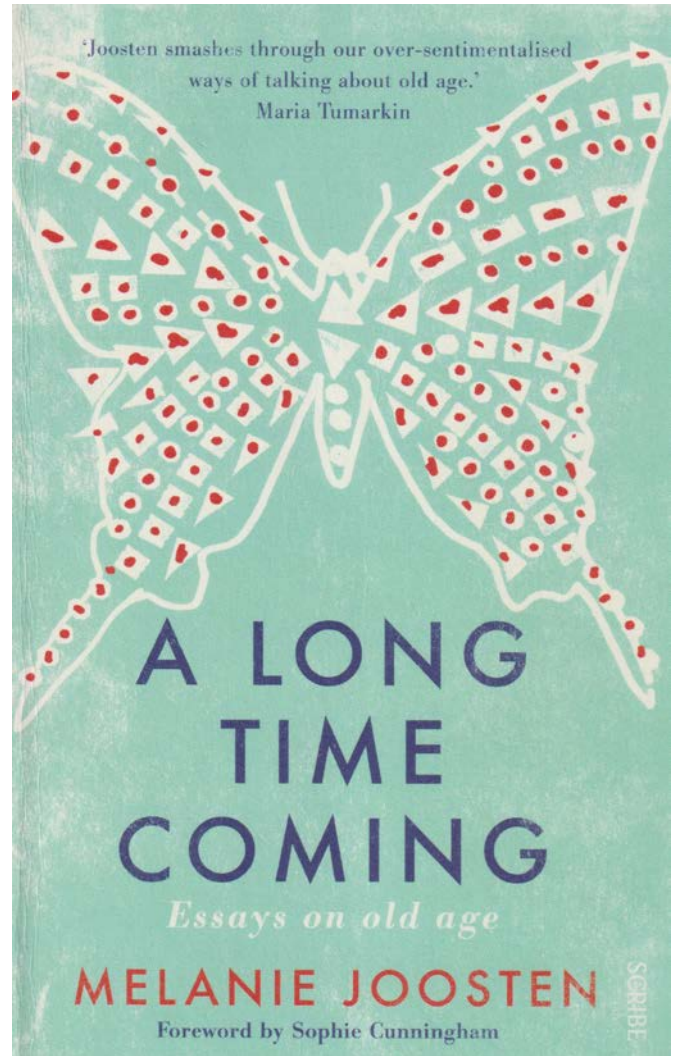
It is hardly a cheery tale and Joosten pulls no punches in telling it: 'I was astounded to learn that the highest age-specific rate of suicide for men is in the group aged eighty-five and above, that older single women are increasingly facing possible homelessness and poverty in retirement, or that individuals frequently languish for years without proper care in chronically understaffed nursing homes.'

She started her visit to the land of the elderly, which will be populated by 25 per cent of Australians by the year 2060, with a trip to the Tiwi islands where residents at the main aged care facility are assisted to return to their homes, or those of family members, during the day.

'This kind of permeability between family and institutional life no doubt makes the option much more attractive: people don't become cut off from the community where they built their lives simply because their body or mind is slowing down.'

Along with examining the notion that 'the clearly preferred method of successful ageing is not to age at all', a view that 'doesn't challenge the ageist stereotype, only the application of it to ourselves,' she presents the socio-economic realities: one-third of older Australians live in poverty, on incomes less than half of the national median, which makes for 'a miserable day-to-day existence' with poverty and disadvantage being risk factors for chronic physical and mental illness, as well as hospitalisation, social isolation and early death.

While they may not be the first things all interviewees raise, they are close to the surface, even among those fortunate enough to have reasonable health and financial security, largely defined by owning a mortgage-free property, rather than renting.



'There was nothing wrong with the furniture at the op shop,' begins the sad story of how retiree Neville had set about reordering his life when the home he shared with his wife had been lost through a failed loan to his stock trading son-in-law. His marriage broke down and Neville found himself living out of his car.

'Homeless and penniless. They're not words I ever thought would apply to me,' he told the author.

'How many couches had he owned in a lifetime? He hadn't expected to buy another at the age of seventy-six. At least not from the Salvos or Vinnies, or whichever kind-hearted charity had herded all the couches into this warehouse for him to take his pick...'

Loneliness, family violence, women's economic inequality ('on average, women in Australia will retire with just over half of the superannuation of men'), the impacts of dementia (more than 1,800 new cases nationally each week), and the challenges faced by LGBTQI older people in aged-care facilities are among the topics analysed sensitively yet unsentimentally.

A book for our times, given that old age awaits us all. **R**



**Christmas Greetings to all our Members,  
Volunteers, Families and Friends around Australia.**

May your holiday season be filled with happiness and may God give us the strength to meet the challenges of 2023 in the spirit of Frederic Ozanam and the founders of the St Vincent de Paul Society, inspired by the timeless example of Lord Jesus Christ.

**Best wishes from the National Council  
and the National Secretariate.**

*This glorious native Callistemon burst into festive flower outside the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council office in Canberra.*



## St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

*good works*

Responsibility for this document rests with the  
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc.

ISSN: 2652-8894

### **PRIVACY STATEMENT**

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia respects the privacy of the people it assists, our members, volunteers and employees. As a result, the names of clients, members, volunteers or employees featured in this report may have been changed and pictorial models used.

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