

The Record

Spring 2021



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





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

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

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

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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.

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



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IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 President's Column
Claire Victory
- 4 Happy 140th Birthday, Vinnies NSW
Leo Tucker
- 5 Faith and Vinnies journeys 'intrinsically linked'
Bradley Hocking
- 6 Papal honour for Armidale's 'Go-to Man'
- 8 'Tonight is a highlight of our 50 years in Vinnies...'
- 9 'I'm looking forward to this historic Church meeting'
Claire Victory
- 10 Church at the crossroads
- 12 Church urges action for the Earth and the poor
- 13 Australia's face of homelessness is changing
Claire Victory
- 14 PM contacted again on charity control legislation
- 16 NSW Auditor-General marks down response to Homelessness Strategy
Robin Osborne
- 18 Health deficits (should not) result from social inequity
Rose Beynon
- 23 Homelessness report should be a 'blueprint for action'
- 24 Catholics for Refugees: PNG and Australia
Tim McKenna
- 26 PNG Bishops urge Australia to end the 'Pacific solution'
- 27 Our moral duty towards Afghan refugees
Bishop Vincent Nguyen Van Long O.F.M. Conv.
- 28 Christians demand more help for Afghans
Tim McKenna
- 29 Young people living out the Vincentian Charism
Kate Halstead
- 30 From the CEO
Toby oConnor
- 32 Passages program scores a hit with young people
Deanna Watson
- 34 Vinnies Victoria goes solar in a win-win for the environment and people in need
Dee Rudebeck
- 36 Beautiful one day, (almost) perfect the next
Callum Johnson
- 37 Canberra/Goulburn adapts to the COVID-19 lockdown
- 38 Facing the coronavirus challenges
Dee Rudebeck
- 40 Marking the Feast Day of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

On the cover... The golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha* Benth.), which bursts into flower in early Spring, is Australia's national floral emblem, displaying the national colours of green and gold. As one species of a large genus of flora growing across Australia, the golden wattle is regarded as a symbol of unity.

Wattle is ideally suited to withstand Australia's droughts, winds and bushfires, and in so doing its resilience represents the spirit of our people. The golden wattle has been used in the design of Australian stamps and many awards in the Australian honours system. A single wattle flower is the emblem of the Order of Australia.

Many of Australia's First Nations people soaked the gum of the golden wattle in water and honey to produce a sweet, toffee-like substance. The tannin from the bark was known for its antiseptic properties.

President's Column

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

As I write this, I've just posted off my 2021 census form. As a bit of a paperwork nerd, I love a good form; as a proud citizen, I appreciate having the right and responsibility to provide the Australian Bureau of Statistics with some key details about myself and my household.

The ABS website describes the census as 'the most comprehensive snapshot of the country and tells the story of how we are changing...it tells us about the economic, social and cultural make-up of the country'. This enables governments and businesses to make decisions about infrastructure and to plan local services for individuals, families and communities.

In other words, it helps to paint the picture of who we are, and this informs how we respond to the needs of our population and plan for our future.

Within the Society, we haven't always been great at understanding our own demographics. We are not always consistent with who we count as members or how we measure and value the contribution of Vincentians across Australia. This has frequently led us to despair that our membership is in decline and that we do not attract young people, and we formulate all sorts of explanations and possible solutions without stepping back and asking how accurate and comprehensive our 'snapshot' is.

In his article in the Autumn 2021 edition of [The Record](#), National Council Vice President Jacob Miller explained that when we look at how many people aged under 40 are actively engaged with the Society, we find that the number is 28,500, or roughly a third of the Society in Australia. This includes



Claire Victory

Mini Vinnies, members of high school and college conferences, and volunteer members working in our shops and in other special works. This is a cause for optimism and celebration, but we also need to ask ourselves: if this is who we are, are we acting and planning accordingly?

There is strong evidence that Gen Y and Gen Z seek out places to work and volunteer that align with their values. This isn't just relevant to the values present in an organisation's work or involvement on the community; it also applies to the culture and internal workings of the organisation.

An organisation can do lots of good work in the community, but if its commitment to its values and mission doesn't extend to the way people treat each other *within* the organisation, or the way its leaders behave, then young people will vote with their feet and leave. This can be particularly challenging in a volunteer environment, where codes of conduct and disciplinary policies may be less well developed, understood or applied than in a standard workplace.

As hard as it may be, we need to ask ourselves: do our internal relationships embody the values that inform our good works, or

is there a disconnect between our inward and our outward behaviour?

Do we truly welcome people and treat them with love and respect, or do we engage in discriminatory conduct?

Do we encourage younger people, women and people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences to take on leadership roles, and mentor and support them when they do, or do we dismiss and undermine their contributions?

Do we call out aggressive, intimidating and disrespectful behaviour in our conference and council meetings, or do we stand by while people are bullied and harassed?

Do we want to do – and be – better, or are we content for Gen Y and Z members and potential members to vote with their feet and leave us bemoaning the fact that young people are underrepresented within the Society's leadership?

Our snapshot tells us that we have a large, active youth contingent within the Society. We should be listening to those younger members and encouraging their input when it comes to developing our organisational culture. **R**

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

Happy 140th Birthday, Vinnies NSW

BY LEO TUCKER

“Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as if it were for God and not for others...It is God that you are serving.” - Paul’s letter to the community in Colossae.

On the evening of 24 July 1881, 140 years ago (and 27 years after the Society’s founding in Melbourne by Fr Gerald Ward), in the crypt area of St Patrick’s Church in Grosvenor Street, The Rocks the first Conference was established in Sydney.

This meeting, supported spiritually and physically by the Marist Fathers, was the final coming together of much work in raising awareness of the importance of the Society’s charitable works, especially in the slums of the dock areas by Charles Gordon O’Neill (1828-1900).

O’Neill built the Society during the 1880s applying the experience he had gained in Glasgow and New Zealand. During a couple of years, he established additional Society conferences in Sydney: those of St Francis’s Haymarket, St Mary’s Cathedral, St Benedict’s Broadway, St Thomas’ Lewisham, and even as far as Braidwood.

Such early growth of the Society outside of the initial establishment at St Patrick’s and the continued communications between O’Neill and the International Council was possibly the reason the Society remained strong in NSW.

In addition to mainstream assistance such as food, clothing, travel and medicines, he gained approval from the International Council to provide rent money for Sydney’s struggling families. Providing rent assistance was unique and only particular to Sydney.

By 1884, Charles O’Neill had established a higher body, a Particular Council of Sydney, from which he influenced philanthropic activities across Sydney. The Particular Council also provided an avenue for growing Conferences to share initiatives and assist each other in growth. This was the beginning of the Metropolitan Council and then later in 1927, Regional, Central and finally State Councils.

Fundraising began small - from the humble poor box in local parishes, to grander charity balls, raffles, charity bazaars and entertainments. Recruitment of volunteers and members was generally from Catholic parishes although support for the good works of the fledgling Society was widespread.

In 1889, St Patrick’s Conference in the Rocks instituted a risky new project. This was the St Patrick’s Penny Savings Bank, established primarily for encouraging habits of saving and economy in children, particularly in The Rocks and other inner Sydney suburbs. It was used by Catholic and non-Catholic depositors alike (the Society embraced inclusivity from its origins), and parents also could be depositors. No limit was placed on the amount deposited. This crude banking system saved many struggling families through the crushing economic depression years.

In the 1920s, the Society established our places of charity... there is more to our Vinnies stores than pre-loved clothes, although we now have nearly 250 stores across NSW, these humble Vinnies stores offering a beacon of hope to many and being an important part of the story of our State and nation.

St Vincent de Paul Society is a place of charity and visitation. It

is a place of our Vincentian spirit lived out in the marketplace of local communities.

In 1938 a different journey began for us at 420 Kent Street. This site was formally known as St John’s Church Sydney and was the first establishment of the Matthew Talbot Hostel. It was blessed by Archbishop, later Cardinal, Norman Gilroy and was dedicated by the Society as a hostel for ‘friendless’ men, named after the Dublin dockworker and reformed alcoholic, Matt Talbot.

Today, as we continue our journey of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW, let us ask ourselves: How well do we really listen to the voices in need? Do we listen to their stories? Do we acknowledge their potentials? How do we care through the values of *Compassion, Respect, Commitment, Integrity, Empathy, Advocacy, and Courage*?

Happy birthday to you all as One Society of devoted members, dedicated staff and compassionate caring volunteers. May we all in one Vincentian spirit continue our good works through tough times and times of celebrations and may the eternal God bless us each step in the journeys ahead of service to the vulnerable working in compassion for a more just and hope filled society.

This, then, seems to be the work of the Spirit: to keep you growing is to keep you vulnerable to life and love itself. Notice that the major metaphors for the Spirit are always dynamic, energetic, and moving. Spirit-led people never stop growing and never stop changing and recognising the new moments of opportunity.
(Fr Ron Rolheiser) **R**

Leo Tucker is the Executive Director Mission and Spirituality St Vincent de Paul Society of NSW.

Faith and Vinnies journeys ‘intrinsically linked’

BY BRADLEY HOCKING

Be-coming a Vincentian started with a mistake. My youth group double booked a church hall on the same night as another group. That group was the amazing Vinnies conference at Seacombe Gardens. Due to their welcoming nature and focus on assisting companions, I soon became a member.

Years later, another chance encounter sat me next to Cathy Beaton at the National Congress. Cathy was the SA State President at the time and mentored me for years, to a point where I was able to take on the State President role.

Although I have had many volunteering roles (mostly sporting clubs) before Vinnies, I lived most of my life ignorantly unaware of the services that Vinnies and similar organisations contributed to the community. This was despite growing up in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, where family and friends were doing it tough. Although I was surrounded by the poverty that I now seek to tackle, it all seemed normal to me then.

My faith journey and my Vinnies journey are intrinsically linked.

Although I was involved with the Church before my first Vinnies encounter, I became a Vincentian before I was baptised. The spirituality of the society has been a source of nourishment for my journey through RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) and beyond. I would say that my faith is grounded in the radical respect that Jesus had for the dignity of all humans, and how he demonstrated it through his encounters. I'm excited to see this *Spirituality of Encounter* being explored deeply by Vinnies SA this year, led by our Spirituality Working Group.

Alongside my Vinnies role, I'm



My family at the 2020 Toy Run.

lucky enough to be juggling a young family, working as an engineer, part of a wonderful group of friends, and experiencing many more of life's joys. And these aspects of life are not exclusive.

My kids are often with me at Vinnies events. They never miss an opportunity to visit a Vinnies centre, but we usually have a 10:1 policy – need to donate 10 toys to buy one each.

I currently work as a consultant engineer at Copperleaf Technologies, and am very fortunate with how flexible they are, allowing me to manage the other aspects of life. The same goes for my previous employer, Shoal Group. Companies like this not only allow volunteers like me to feel fulfilled, but enable the contribution made to our community. I hope that my working situation can become the norm, not the exception, for corporate Australia.

My role as State President has further shown me the complexities of our world and how we aim to overcome trials for people. As a Society, we certainly have our challenges ahead. I fear that the current housing crisis will get worse before it gets better.

I fear that the effects of climate change will hit the most vulnerable people the hardest.

I fear that our nation will hide

behind tokenistic gestures to excuse continued discrimination of oppressed groups. But rather than let these fears consume me, I'm trying to play a small part, and this excites me.

There is a lot to get excited about with Vinnies SA this year. These are a few initiatives of particular interest:

- Our further push into supporting asylum seekers and refugees through advocacy,
- Our new focus in tackling the low-cost housing crisis plaguing our state,
- Working with Indigenous Australians to remove bias in our services,
- Further developing a thriving youth program that impacts all,
- Working with conferences to implement the 50+ ideas that were generated through our strategy development sessions and,
- Exploring the Spirituality of Encounter with all Vinnies people.

It has been an absolute pleasure to work with our staff, members and volunteers who constantly impress me with their dedication and commitment to the Society and our companions. **R**

Bradley Hocking is State President, St Vincent de Paul Society (SA) Inc.

Papal honour for Armidale's 'Go-to Man'

'Don has always acted out of faith to bring hope through serving in a sensitive manner those in need'
- Papal Medal Award Citation for Don Hewitt

The citation accompanying the Cross Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice ('for the Church and the Pope') awarded to Don Hewitt for his service to the St Vincent de Paul Society describes the humble octogenarian as the 'Go-to Man' in his local area for over fifty years.

His achievements are many and varied, from countless home visits to 'the elderly, lonely, sick, broken, poor, addicted, neglected', through to his key role in the founding and running of Freeman House, the alcohol and drug rehab centre and shelter for the homeless, in Armidale, NSW.

Freeman House began operating in the 1970s and re-opened in 2015 after a major upgrade funded largely through Don Hewitt's tireless efforts. He also did much of the planning for this state-of-the-art complex.

Today, Freeman House – named after Cardinal James Freeman – is the largest residential rehabilitation service in northern NSW, providing long-term drug and alcohol rehabilitation, crisis accommodation, inpatient treatment, aftercare support and programs to accommodate patients with young children.

Don recalls how, 'People found the comfort of the Society members and wanted to stay. Some of the best people who helped us were the people that we'd helped'.

The Vatican's recognition of the man named as 'Donaldo Arturo Hewitt' in the handsome accompanying certificate is an honour established by Pope Leo XIII in 1888 and given for distinguished service to the Church by lay people and clergy.



Above: (l-r) Paul Burton, Armidale Central Council President, Don Hewitt, Member, St Augustine's Armidale Conference and Paul Robinson, President St Augustine's Armidale Conference. Left: The Papal Medal.

It is the highest award that can be awarded to the laity. The medal, cast in gold, depicts the Apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the centre of the Cross. The decoration's ribbon is yellow and white, the colours of the Papacy.

The award was presented to Don by Bishop Michael Kennedy at the Mass at Saints Mary and Joseph's Cathedral, Armidale on 13 June 2021. Members of his family attended, along with many parishioners and admirers of his work over the years.

Don Hewitt commenced employment at the University of New England in 1957 as a laboratory technician, later advancing to manager. He was also a volunteer fireman on campus. At the age of 27 he joined the St Vincent de Paul Society as a means of living out his faith – 'I'm not much good at

prayer, but I'm pretty good at action'. The date was 14 February 1966 – Decimal Currency Day.

The award citation notes, 'Don possesses a calm capacity to be with a person, listens carefully and maintains a humble manner which affirms others... Don is ever prepared to give to those in need that rare, golden gift: his time and enduring patience. There are people with addictions who have consulted Don on a regular basis for years'.

As the Society's Regional Council President he obtained millions of dollars in funding to build or renovate 23 centres across the Armidale Diocese that continue to provide thousands of people with household goods, food, finance, counselling services, contact and rehabilitation. Don continues to provide support to people in need as a member of the local St Augustine Conference.

Membership and Conferences

In June 2015 Don Hewitt was awarded Life Membership of the Society and in 2017 was made Armidale's senior citizen of the year for his work with Vinnies. He continues in a mentor role, drawing people back to the ideals, regulations and spirit of the Society.

Don and Barbara (nee Carey, a Society member for many years) were married in 1961. They have six children – who say their father was always there for them - and six grandchildren.

Paul Robinson, President of St Augustine's Armidale Conference, offered congratulations on behalf of all Vincentians, noting that the Cross Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice is a merit award granted in recognition of service to the Church and society.

'It is granted as a symbol of recognition to those who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in cooperating with the efforts of the Church. It is richly deserved by our brother, Don Hewitt.'

'His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant' - Matt 25:23 **R**

Membership

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

Conferences

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

Meet the National Council

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Claire Victory

NATIONAL DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Warwick Fulton

SPIRITUAL ADVISER

Sr Therese Haywood DC

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VICE PRESIDENT

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SA STATE PRESIDENT

Brad Hocking

TAS STATE PRESIDENT

Mark Gaetani

VIC STATE PRESIDENT

Kevin McMahon

WA STATE PRESIDENT

Gladys Demissie

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

‘Tonight is a highlight of our 50 years in Vinnies...’

At the CEO Sleepout 2021 three long-serving Members talked about their all-women Conference.

Notching up a combined 130 years of service to the St Vincent de Paul Society three Members from the Maitland/Newcastle Diocese had a rare, unexpected moment in the spotlight when they were interviewed on the state-wide video streaming of the CEO Sleepout 2021.

The Sleepout raised more than \$9.2 M to support Vinnies good works in NSW.

Like all Members, they usually work quietly but effectively behind the scenes, and have done so for an extraordinarily long time. They attended the sleepout’s Newcastle event on 17 June at the Macdonald Jones Stadium, usually the home of the Knights NRL club. This night it was the venue for around 60 CEOs and supporters who would bunk down under cardboard to raise funds and awareness for Vinnies work in the field of homelessness.

The three women shared their stories on the big screen with participants locally as well as in Sydney and Wollongong. They work out of St Therese’s in New Lambton, the Conference they were instrumental in starting. **Joy Loas** and **Margaret Wheeler** have both been volunteering as Vinnies members for the past 50 years, with **Barbara Strang**, the ‘newbie’ of the team, putting in 30 years.

Joy began the Conference in 1971 with Margaret and three other ladies. She had been wanting to get involved with Vinnies work but was told the only opportunity for women was to work in the shop. She wasn’t having that, so researched the Conference structure and with the blessing of the parish priest and the curate



started what would become an all-female team.

St Therese’s Conference is based in the Newcastle suburb where it continues a close relationship with the parish and is well supported by St Therese’s Primary School, which has an enthusiastic Mini Vinnies group. Their community support work includes service at John Hunter Hospital as well as at several women’s refuges.

The trio shared their story with CEO Sleepout MC Deb Knight from Radio 2GB who asked what had inspired them to start the Conference.

Joy said the spark was the loneliness being experienced by four local women who had recently been widowed, with 17 children between them.

‘They were lonely and needed someone’s support,’ she recalled.

So the newly formed team, initially comprising five Members, stepped up to provide companionship.

Asked what they personally get from their membership involvement, Margaret said, ‘Oh, we love it, we certainly do, forming great friendships along the way, at times we have had up to 28 members... although many on the SVDP list in New Lambton have passed away. Lovely friendships have developed as well as being able to assist God’s poor, the lonely and the needy...’

Regarding particular moments that stand out from over the years, Joy reminisced about ‘a family from Wee Waa (on the north-western slopes of the New England region)

‘I’m looking forward to this historic Church meeting’

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

I am sincerely hoping that the historic 5th Plenary Council in Australia will lead to greater inclusion and an urgent recasting of church leadership and governance at every level of the Church in Australia.

The Plenary Council [agenda states](#), ‘As children of God, disciples of Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Members of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia are called to develop concrete proposals to create a more missionary, Christ-centred Church in Australia at this time.’

This process is one opportunity for urgently needed cultural and systemic change identified not just by the recent child sex abuse royal commission, but by faithful lay Catholics for decades. As the largest lay-led catholic organisation in Australia the St Vincent de Paul Society has a crucial role to play in the restoration of our church’s credibility.

‘Our mission as a church is not to fill buildings, but to reach people where they are, not where the church wants them to be’

This calls for a paradigm shift – from an authoritarian, hierarchical, patriarchal model to a communion of communities engaged in dialogue, discernment and decision making around both ecclesial and social concerns. To transform itself, the Church must strive to be more representative of the entire community it seeks to serve.

The Society strongly advocates for a Church that condemns clericalism and promotes a more transparent and accountable model where hierarchical structures give way to shared leadership, where wisdom is sought through a process of genuine dialogue and inclusive vision.

We don’t know if the Plenary Council process will enable the voice of lay people to be heard or what will come out of this historic opportunity, but we choose to remain optimistic about the potential for the genuine engagement of lay Catholics.

Do we want the smooth path to completion or are we willing to engage in the radical and confronting work of transformation to make room for the new?

As Vincentians, we hope that this Plenary Council (and the significant hard work that follows it) will lead to a Church that has a more deliberate, inclusive and intentional focus on its fundamental mission of following Christ by serving the poor.

The National Council’s submission to the Plenary Council is available [here](#).

Assembly 1 of the 5th Plenary Council in Australia will be held in a multi-modal form online on 2-10 October 2021 and Assembly 2 will be held in Sydney on 4-9 July 2022.

Claire Victory is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. On 9 Sept 2021 Ms Victory launched the [book](#) *A Church for all: A guide to the Australian Plenary Council and Beyond*.

many years ago. They had a son who’d had a problem and the husband had lost a leg in a tractor accident.

‘They contacted us when we were working at the call centre, and asked for help, they were too embarrassed to ask the people who were visiting them at home at the time.

‘They didn’t even have enough petrol to get back to Wee Waa. We helped them with food, with petrol, then for many years with an arrangement with a pharmacy in Adamstown [Newcastle] we sent the prescriptions through to that young boy.

‘The letters of appreciation that we received from that family have stayed in our hearts forever.’

Barbara added, ‘The main thing is the spiritual association, also the fact that we can go to people’s homes and meet them there, you get a feel of how things are really going for them. So instead of just handing out vouchers for food you’re able to help more. You can both get and give more information, for example about things available in the community that they may not know about.

‘As well as helping them it’s wonderful for ourselves... we can come back to the Conference and share with other members the work we’ve been doing, so it’s very much a joint endeavour.

‘It’s very rewarding, because we are an emergency service, and if you can help them in the first place they are able to have the ‘hand up’, which is what we’re all about.’

Margaret finishes off by saying, ‘Tonight is a highlight of our 50 years in Vinnies... everyone have a wonderful night and raise lots of money to help the homeless and the needy!’ **R**

Church at the crossroads

Mission, Inclusion and Hope for the future



Sr Mel Dwyer FdCC.

Edited version of an address given on 7 July 2021 by Sr Mel Dwyer FdCC at 'Mission and Church', the first online conversation in The Light from the Southern Cross – Catalyst for Conversation series, hosted by Catholic Religious Australia. The full video of the speakers can be viewed [here](#).

The prophet Jeremiah in Chapter 6 verse 16 reminds us: 'This is what the Lord says: 'stand at the crossroads and look; where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.'

Perhaps now more than ever, the Catholic Church in Australia stands at a crossroads.

I was not one of the co-writers of the *Light from the Southern Cross* document, only receiving it in my

inbox at the time of its release, and initially doing little to engage with it as a valuable resource, both for the life of the Catholic Church and for my life as someone with a role to play in the Church's narrative in Australia at this time.

What I share is not the fruit of a scholar nor a theologian with academic credibility to support my views. Rather, I aim for an honest and sincere sharing of what struck me, as a 40-year-old female religious leader from Brisbane, when reflecting on the journey of striving for better governance in the Catholic Church in Australia. My hope is that in wrestling with the questions triggered by this document we might discover within ourselves the truth that we so desperately need to bring to light, and that the *Light from the Southern Cross*, both literally and

figuratively, might help us to see the way forward.

The report outlines, for Australia, a way to discern a synodal path: a new practice of church governance. It advocates for structures that serve the mission of Christ, rather than the serving of human-made governance structures. We must never forget that the goal of the Church is and always will be to live and proclaim the Gospel.

There are significant entry points for those of us who are not ordained, with recommendations centred around imperative concepts including mission, inclusivity and co-responsibility, each of which are vital towards the transformation so desperately needed.

In his 2020 book *Graced Crossroads: Pathways to Deep Change and Transformation* Ted

Dunn writes: 'Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that. You cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new. There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it'.

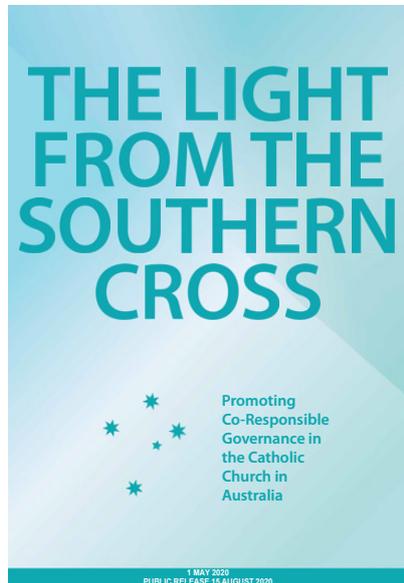
In the light of what I would term a crossroads moment for our Church, the question remains: Are we ready to take the kind of bold actions necessary to bring about true and lasting transformation? We need to decide whether we want the smooth path to completion or whether we are willing to engage in the radical and confronting work of transformation, that is, to make room for the new.

I believe there are definite seeds of hope in this document... hope that ultimately the mission of God will find a way to take precedence in the Church, conscious of the reminder of theologian Stephen Bevans that it is not that the Church has a mission, but rather that the mission has a Church!

I believe that our hope for this moment lies with each one of us who can, in our small sphere of influence, be the change we so desperately want to see in our Australian church. Let us not forget, the Church is neither a building nor a set of guidelines. We are the Church, the body of Christ.

The full text of my address looks at what I see as the three elements I find encouraging from the document if we strive to build bridges in our Church – Mission, Inclusion, and Hope.

As the American author Richard Rohr OFM reminds us, 'A church that has been humbled by abuse, questions of credibility and subsequently declining numbers, may be a less arrogant and presumptuous church. It may have fewer illusions about its own power and centrality.'



'It may become curious. It may be less willing to ally with the empires and powers that have long defined it. It may finally admit how much it needs the true power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. That's a church God can work with.'

That's the Church I want to belong to. Not a perfect Church, but a human Church. I want to be part of a living, breathing group of people who listen and learn from our mistakes and grow into the future unafraid of change and willing to try something new, even if it may not work the first time.

We need to break out of the ghetto of suffocation that fear puts us in and breathe the air of the Spirit. We need to walk in hope, throwing open the windows and doors of our hearts and of our Church, with the expectation that the Spirit will come from any direction.

As we move towards the celebration of the first session of the Plenary Council we are invited again to listen to what the Spirit is saying. But this is not enough. Grounded in our deep listening to the Spirit, we also need to learn how to speak.

French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin reminds us, the only task worthy of our efforts is to construct the future. As we strive to create a future that learns from the past, I said at the outset that I believe the Church in Australia, and the global church, is at a crossroads.

The truth remains, that what we have known as the Church in Australia will never be the same again. Time changes nothing if people do not change. I believe that the Light from the Southern Cross document provides us with a great deal of hope for this moment.

Helen Keller once said, 'a bend in the road is the end of the road unless you fail to make the turn'. The Light from the Southern Cross provides us an opportunity to take a long, loving look at the real. For the bend in the road will be the end of the road for us if we are unwilling to accept the reality of our circumstances and respond courageously.

I spent seven years of my religious life as Principal of a girls' boarding school in Malawi, East Africa. Many nights, as I would walk home from school, I would search the African sky for the Southern Cross. It was my own familiar presence in a land far from home.

May this document, aptly named The Light from the Southern Cross, be a guide that illuminates the path for each one of us on our journey home. Our journey to being at home with ourselves, at home with our vulnerabilities, and at home with our desperate need for the mercy of God who beckons us on in hope of who we are and hope of who we are called to become with God's grace.

A copy of *The Light from the Southern Cross* is available [here](#). **R**

Church urges action for the Earth and the poor

"I strongly encourage the faithful to pray in these days that, as the result of a timely ecumenical initiative, are being celebrated as a Season of Creation. This season of increased prayer and effort on behalf of our common home begins today, September 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and ends on October 4, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi.

It is an opportunity to draw closer to our brothers and sisters of the various Christian confessions. I think in particular of the Orthodox faithful, who have celebrated this Day for thirty years.

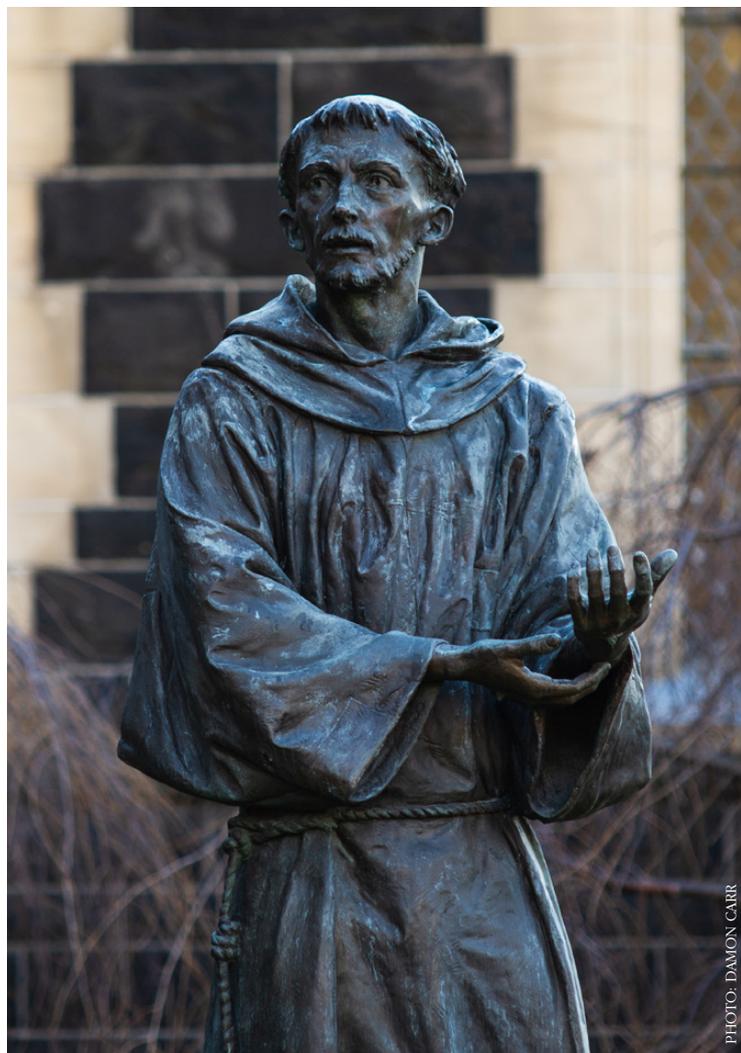
In this ecological crisis affecting everyone, we should also feel close to all other men and women of good will, called to promote stewardship of the network of life of which we are part."

- Pope Francis

In its [annual statement](#) promoting social justice the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has made an historic commitment to work towards a more sustainable Church, saying the world is facing 'an ecological crisis' and invoking Pope Francis' wish for the whole Church to act with a greater sense of urgency.

In *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, the Social Justice Statement 2021-22 launched in early August, the Bishops committed to a seven-year journey towards seven [Laudato Si'](#) Goals.

The chair of the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service, Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, said, 'In Australia, passionate individuals, religious institutes, schools and organisations have been working on ecological issues for a long time. I want to affirm and thank them all, and to urge the whole Catholic community to join them.'



Statue of St Francis of Assisi at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne.

Bishop Long stressed that, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been caring for country from time immemorial. The rest of us need to listen, and to learn how we can walk together to care for the whole of creation – including one another.'

The statement explains that the *Laudato Si'* Goals 'aim to put Pope Francis' [2015] encyclical into practice, making communities around the world sustainable in the spirit of the integral ecology of *Laudato Si'*.'

'We are being called to a new way of thinking, feeling, understanding

and living," the Commission said, urging families, schools, parishes, dioceses and organisations to join the Bishops in signing up to the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform.

Bishop Long added, 'My hope is that *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* will encourage ever deeper and more effective Christian responses to the urgent cries of the earth and of the poor.'

The Bishops Conference's Office for Social Justice has been renamed the Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace, affirming that 'social justice, ecology and peace are inseparable'. **R**

Australia's face of homelessness is changing

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

'Homelessness is no longer that stereotypical person sleeping rough'

– Claire Victory

In an urgent plea during National Homelessness Week (1-7 August 2021), Claire Victory, the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, called on the Federal Government to intervene as house prices soar, wages stagnate and the housing affordability crisis creeps towards middle Australia.

'The Great Australian Dream is fast moving beyond the reach of minimum income earners, placing pressure on a limited, overheated rental market,' Ms Victory said.

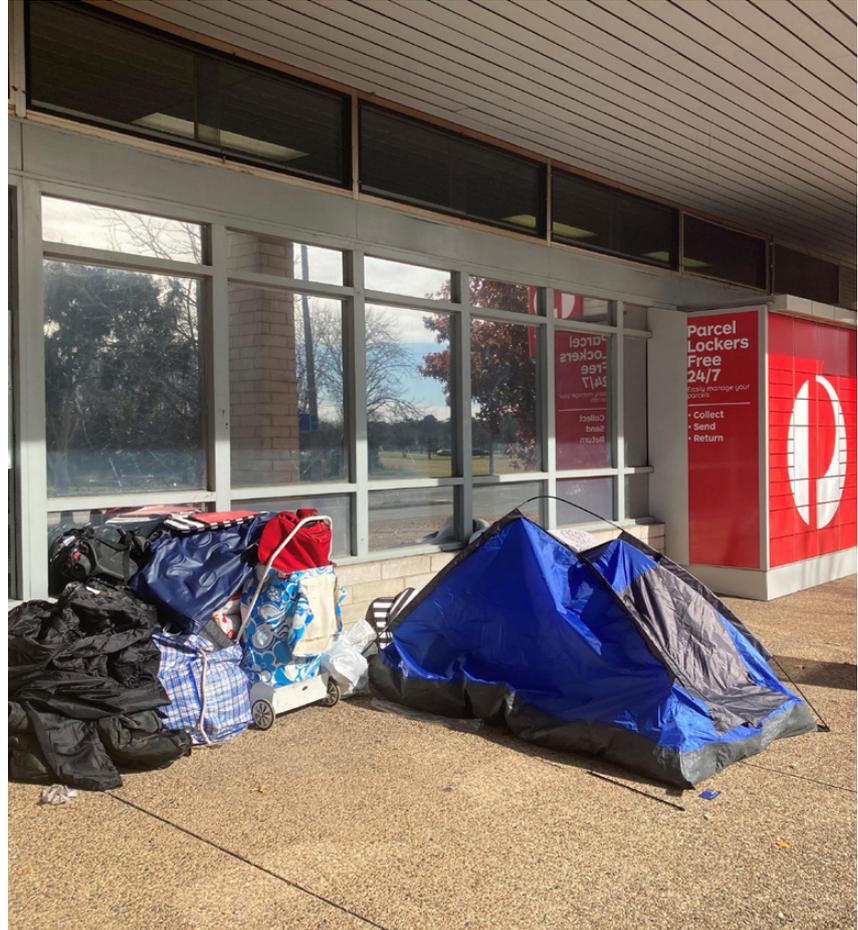
'At least 650,000 social and affordable homes are needed right now, with over 116,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. The Society has repeatedly called for the Federal Government to establish a social housing fund of \$10 billion to augment the efforts of the states and territories to address the chronic and growing shortage.

'Homelessness is no longer that stereotypical person sleeping rough.'

Ms Victory added, 'It's people like you and me, just one life event away from a devastating change in circumstances – illness including mental ill health, relationship breakdown, loss of a spouse, domestic violence, or the loss of a job. Older women are now the fastest growing group of people facing homelessness.

'Older people who do not own their own home, and women and children affected by domestic violence are particularly vulnerable.

'Of 74,000 rental listings in Anglicare's 2021 annual survey,



only three were affordable for a person on Jobseeker and none for a person on Youth Allowance. And two thirds of 170,000 vulnerable private renters are currently in rental stress with less than \$250 a week to live on after paying rent.

'Governments have left housing to the market and the market has failed.

'In the face of the economic facts, it's difficult to understand the lack of political will to invest urgently.

'High housing costs suppress demand for other goods and services. Supported housing saves \$13,100 per person annually in reduced use of overall government services, even while factoring in the cost of supports.

'Without a significant investment, supply will remain limited while negative gearing and low interest rates attract investors, boosting house prices.

'The Commonwealth must drive the implementation of a 30-year national housing strategy.

'Every day charities like St Vincent de Paul provide support to people who have nowhere to call home. It's easy to blame people who haven't got anywhere to live, but if we continue to neglect the deteriorating supply of affordable housing, a rising tide of homeless families will be forced to seek help from our charities just to survive,' Ms Victory said. **R**

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

PM contacted again on charity control legislation



On 3 August 2021 Toby oConnor National Council CEO (third from right) joined representatives from other concerned charities and community groups at a press conference at Parliament House to voice concerns about proposed changes to the ACNC regulations that threaten to undermine charities' ability to advocate.

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has followed up on an earlier appeal to the Prime Minister to amend the proposed [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Amendment \(2021 Measures No. 2\) Regulations 2021](#) (ACNC), which if tabled in Parliament would,

amongst other impacts, 'threaten to shut down charities for very minor acts'.

At the heart of the legislation's intent is the government's concern about the involvement of charities and not-for-profits in publicly visible protest actions or what it might view as inappropriate advocacy for certain causes. In March 2021 the Society produced a [discussion paper](#) on the proposed changes to the governance standards for registered charities, a case outlined in a subsequent letter (6 May 2021) to the Prime Minister as part of the Hands Off Our Charities Alliance.

There, the Society had warned

that the proposed governance changes would have 'dramatic consequences for the charity sector' and were not justified by evidence. It added, 'the government should undertake genuine consultation with the sector on any proposed governance changes in the future'.

While thanking the Treasury 'for reviewing submissions made by our organisations and considering our input in amending the proposed regulations,' the Society said, 'many of our fundamental concerns remain unaddressed'.

'It is our view that the proposed regulations place an unnecessary administrative

burden on our charities and is contrary to the government's objectives of reducing red tape,' the letter said.

'The proposed regulations undermine freedom of expression and would be, in our opinion, unlawful.'

In addition, [it] would 'threaten to shut down charities for very minor acts, including inadvertently failing to have sufficient internal control procedures; undermine our ability to engage in lawful advocacy; unjustifiably broaden the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Commissioner's powers; and be contrary to the 2018 review of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission legislation'.

The letter noted that, 'the Senate Committee on the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation has written to the Assistant Treasurer outlining its concerns with the regulations'

In response, the Hands Off Our Charities Alliance says its members represent millions of Australians concerned with a wide range of issues that include education, social welfare, human rights, animal welfare, the environment, health, climate change, disability rights, inequality and poverty and philanthropy, and that 'given the volume of minor offences that can be unwittingly committed at a protest, the proposed governance standard will make every appearance at, or statement in support of, a protest action a risk to a charity's registration.'

The Society and other members 'share the government's desire for a thriving charity sector, and one that is appropriately

regulated in order to maintain the trust of the Australian public', but maintain that Australian charities are already heavily regulated – 'as the current Commissioner [Dr] Gary Johns has attested to in Senate Estimates, there is no demonstrated need for these new regulations'.

The Alliance points out that, 'Sometimes, charities support public actions to draw attention to pressing societal issues, be it marching against the death of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody, or assembling to demand the end of gender-based violence.'

'Overwhelmingly these public actions are conducted lawfully. Our ability to advocate on issues we work on and understand well, including when it relates to protest, is protected under the [present] Act and by the Australian Constitution. The proposed regulations undermine freedom of expression and would be, in our opinion, unlawful.'

The minister responsible, Assistant Treasurer Michael Sukkar, reportedly said Australians don't expect their donations to support organisations to break the law: 'These important regulatory changes will give Australians greater confidence that the charities they support will direct their resources towards charitable works,' he said.

Tim Costello, chair of the Community Council for Australia, said charities play a vital role in holding governments to account and called for the laws to be abandoned: 'Giving the charity commissioner power to shutter a charity for a minor offence by a member is the equivalent of the electoral commissioner

having discretion to de-register the Liberal Party because a Liberal Party member damages someone's lawn when putting up a sign,' Mr Costello said. Among others to have raised concerns is [Father Frank Brennan AO](#).

As part of its effort to interdict the legislative changes the Society drafted a letter for its State and Territory Presidents to consider sending the Government or their federal MPs. The document, warning that the changes would 'silence charities', noted, 'For the Society, advocacy usually involves conducting, participating, organising or supporting protest action, often on days of symbolic meaning, such as our Palm Sunday rallies for people seeking asylum.'

Under the proposed changes, 'Summary offences could arise if anyone associated with the Society blocks a public area, fails to move on when asked, whether intentionally or not, or tweets/posts support through social media in these instances.'

On 3 August the Society's National Council raised the issue with Government Senator, Concetta Fierravante-Wells, Chair of the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation, questioning the 'unjustifiable broadening of the ACNC's powers' and calling the proposed regulations 'redundant, unnecessarily complex' and likely to 'increase burdensome administrative requirements despite the government's objective to reduce red tape'.

While Sen. Concetta Fierravante-Wells replied that the [Committee](#) had 'identified significant technical scrutiny concerns in relation to the regulations', no other responses to the Society's concerns have been received from the prime Minister's office or from his senior parliamentary colleagues. **R**

NSW Auditor-General marks down response to Homelessness Strategy

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

'It will have a limited short-term impact on homelessness across New South Wales'

Official auditors tend not to be popular with the governments that appoint them, often tendering reports about misdirected (to put it politely) funding or poorly conceived programs.

The latest example of a governance watchdog nipping its master's hand is the NSW Auditor-General's report on the state government's \$169m [Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023](#), half-way into its implementation.

In her performance audit [Responses to Homelessness](#) the NSW Auditor-General, Margaret Crawford has judged the Strategy to be under-funded, of limited reach, likely to have only a narrow impact on homelessness, and unlikely 'as a standalone response' to assist enough people into more permanent accommodation.

The report's aims were to assess how effectively the Department of Communities and Justice is responding to homelessness through the Strategy, and the effectiveness of the department's efforts to address street homelessness in its COVID-19 response.

Released in June 2021 it evaluated the Strategy's 21 actions, ten of which directly target people at risk of, or already experiencing, homelessness through measures such as screening high school students for the risk of homelessness and providing supports; assisting vulnerable people to maintain their tenancies in social housing or the private rental market; and providing purpose-built social housing.

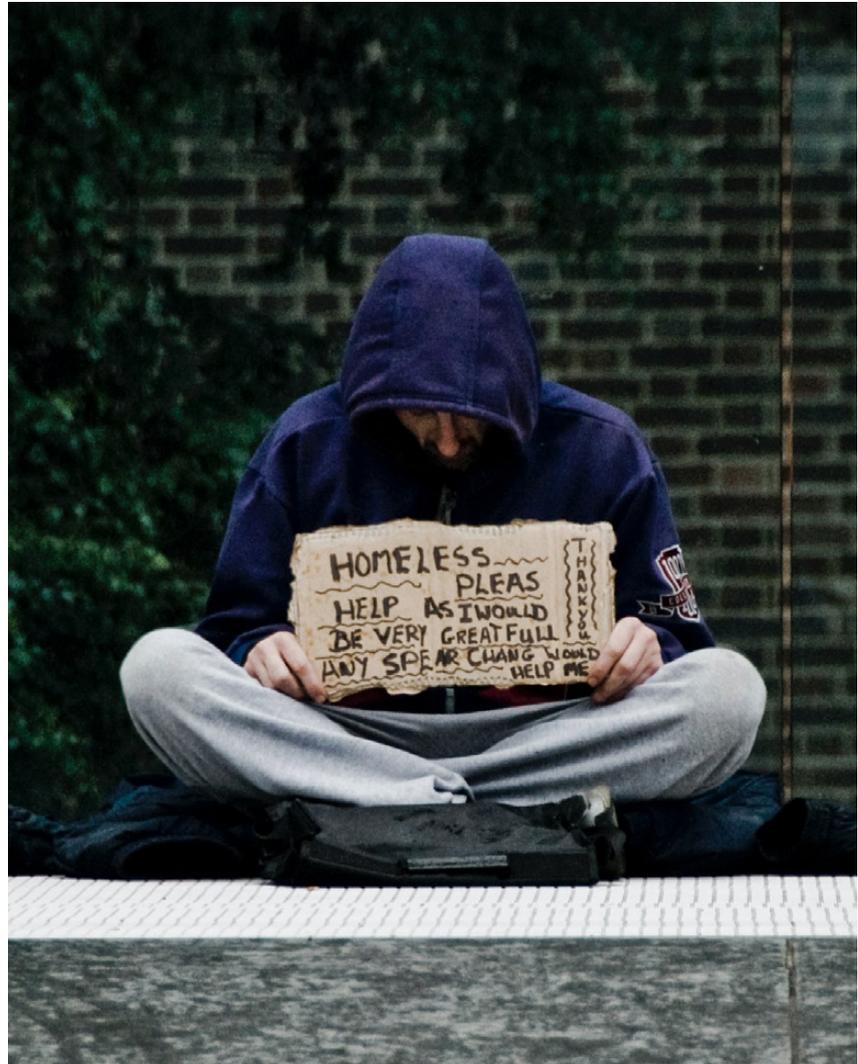


PHOTO: JEAN-LUC BENAZET ON UNSPLASH

In her bold-type conclusion the Auditor-General said the Strategy will have 'a limited short-term impact on homelessness across New South Wales... The Department [Communities and Justice]... received significantly less funding than it sought, and as a result, the Strategy's actions have a narrow reach in terms of the locations and the number of people targeted for assistance.'

Even when – or perhaps, if – fully implemented, the Auditor-General went on, 'most Strategy actions will be available in only a quarter of the state's

128 local government areas, supporting around 8,200 people – what equates to around 22 per cent of the number of people experiencing homelessness in New South Wales at the last census in 2016.'

At the time of the last census in 2016 more than 37,000 people were experiencing homeless in NSW, not including the number of people at risk of homelessness.

'A key gap in Strategy actions is addressing Aboriginal homelessness,' the Auditor-General noted somberly.

“The Department...will need to do more to ensure a sustainable longer-term response which prevents people returning to street homelessness”

Highlighting a disconnect between intent and achievement, she added, “The Department has clearly communicated its aims to intervene early to prevent people from experiencing homelessness; to provide effective supports to people experiencing homelessness; and to create an integrated person-centred system. While these objectives are clear, they are not being pursued state-wide.”

Further, “There is a risk that future funding will not be secured – and Strategy actions not continued or scaled up – if the evidence on effectiveness is incomplete, mixed or unclear when the Strategy concludes. This sits against a backdrop of increasing need for housing and homelessness supports in the state that may become more acute once the full economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are felt.”

To its credit, “The Department effectively planned and implemented a crisis response to assist people sleeping on the streets during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, it will ‘need to do more to ensure a sustainable longer-term response which prevents people returning to street homelessness’.

Along with a funding shortfall a lack of data appears to be another problem: “The Department cannot identify precisely how many people sleeping rough who were assisted during COVID-19 have returned to rough sleeping or other forms of homelessness.

“The Department’s data suggests that 72 per cent of the approximately 4,000 people formerly sleeping rough who left temporary accommodation between April 2020 and April 2021 left with an unknown housing outcome. This includes people who were not eligible for social housing, were stranded due to border closures, or who disengaged from the Department or funded support services.

“The Department also has limited data to understand whether the enhanced temporary accommodation program was more effective in helping to connect participants with services and support them into stable accommodation, than previous approaches.”

The suggestion that up to three-quarters of people who received temporary funded accommodation during the early phase of COVID-19 are back on the streets is disturbing.

Continuing the ‘not nearly enough’ theme that runs through the report, the ‘Together Home’ program, designed to provide longer-term accommodation to people who were sleeping rough during the pandemic, is viewed as being unlikely to ‘meet demand as a standalone response... the total number of 800 Together Home places will not be sufficient to provide housing for the more than 4,000 individuals who were sleeping rough prior to entering enhanced temporary accommodation’.

Central to the report’s six recommendations are that the Department should develop ‘a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness, linked to the government’s ten-year plan for social housing and 20-year housing strategy’, and ‘in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders and communities, design and implement a strategy for early identification and responses to the needs of Aboriginal people vulnerable to homelessness; and build the capacity and resourcing of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector to deliver homelessness services’.

A generous verdict on the implementation of the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 is ‘could do better if tried harder’, which is how the head of the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Michael Coutts-Trotter has responded. The Secretary’s responses to the audit are appended to the report. All the recommendations were accepted and agreed actions outlined. Many of them are said to be in progress already, others are promised to be completed within the ambit of the strategy, or in the subsequent year.

Assuming this is so, the Auditor-General’s efforts are well worth the time and money expended, with many of the lessons learned seeming applicable well beyond NSW. **R**

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

Health deficits (should not) result from social inequity

BY ROSE BEYNON

At the time of writing, First Ministers are providing daily updates on the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19, with the sad count of deaths, infections and hospitalisations being blazoned across the media. Testing, vaccination, modelling and benchmarks are being promoted as the way out of the lockdown society.

There is a necessary air of urgency, even though this was earlier said to not be ‘a race’.

Ministers are trying desperately to ‘alert but not alarm’ communities, in the hope their messages are clear, consistent and heard against an ever changing landscape of medical information, coronavirus weariness, pockets of vaccine hesitation and increased civil unrest.

We know from last year those most adversely impacted by the pandemic were casual workers, forced to leave their homes to earn a living and for whom sick leave was not an option. In fact, casual workers lost employment eight times faster than those in permanent jobs, while part time workers lost work three times faster than full-time workers.¹

Now, governments are providing one-off assistance to cover time off work for testing and isolation, and emergency relief for temporary visa holders who cannot access income support. Australian Government disaster payments are available for those who have lost hours of work and income and those directed to self-isolate.

‘The Delta variant has taken hold in areas where incomes are less secure and socio-economic status is lower...’



PHOTO: TAYLOR BRANDON ON UNSPLASH

However, people who didn’t have paid work going into lockdown have been excluded from the \$200 per week disaster payment.² Data show that only a tenth of those locked down on income support payments, such as JobSeeker, have been able to access the disaster payment. And being told to stay at home while trying to make ends meet through one-off payments is an impossible ask when you are struggling to keep a roof over your head.

COVID-19 distribution and socio-economic status

In NSW, maps of Local Government Area (LGA) hot spots show that the Delta variant has taken hold in areas where incomes are less secure and socio-economic status is lower compared to other Sydney LGAs.

The top three LGAs with COVID-positive cases – Canterbury Bankstown, Cumberland and Fairfield – had a total of 6,250 cases (from June 1 to 23 August 2021) and ranked towards the lowest end of the Socio Economic

Index for Areas (SEIFA) at 103rd, 106th and 128th respectively out of a total of 130 LGAs in NSW.

When cases per head of 100,000 population are considered, Central Darling has the highest rate (1,036 cases per 100,000) and the lowest SEIFA index (130), followed by Cumberland (962 per 100,000), Fairfield (829 per 100,000) and Canterbury Bankstown (728,000 per 100,000). Warren (475 per 100,000) and Dubbo regional (429 per 100,000) then follow.

Conversely, LGAs with the highest SEIFA ranking – Ku-ring-gai, Mosman, Woollahra and Lane Cove – had 82 cases in total, with a rate ranging from 0 to 70 per 100,000 head of population.³

Social determinants of health

Against this backdrop, debate invariably turns to the relationship between the social determinants of health and health outcomes. Evidence shows that socio-economic position (including educational attainment),

employment, power and social support act together to strengthen or undermine the health of individuals and communities.⁴

Other recognised social determinants of health include early life, social exclusion, unemployment, addiction, food and transportation, housing, the living environment, health services and disability.⁵

Professor Sir Michael Marmot's life long work on the social determinants of health demonstrates the close relationship between people's health and the living and working conditions which form their social environment. In 2010, Prof Marmot examined the UK's widening health inequalities and stalling life expectancy. He recently completed a ten year follow up which found that:

- The health of a population is not just about the quality and funding of the health system, although this is important. Health is closely linked to the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age and inequities in power, money and resources.
- Life expectancy follows the social gradient – the more deprived the area the shorter the life expectancy.
- People in more deprived areas spend more of their shorter lives in ill-health than those in less deprived areas.
- Reducing health inequalities requires action on six policy objectives:
 - Give every child the best start in life
 - Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
 - Create fair employment and good work for all

- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention.
- The development of a national health inequalities strategy is an essential first step in leading the necessary national endeavour to reduce health inequalities.⁶

What's happening in Australia?

If you are wondering about the relevance of Prof Marmot's work to Australia I suggest you listen to his ABC [2016 Boyer Lecture series](#) on Fair Australia: Social Justice and the Health Gap. Perhaps we should all be questioning why there continues to be a health outcome divide, along the lines of socio economic status, in a country as wealthy as ours and with a universal health care system that's been in place since 1984.

Now for the good news.

Yes, we are monitoring and reporting on health outcomes by social determinants. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare produces the biennial [Australia's Health report](#)⁷ which includes a chapter on social determinants. For example:

- In 2018, children in the lowest socioeconomic group (32%) were more vulnerable than children in the highest socioeconomic group (15%).
- Child abuse and neglect increases the risk of anxiety disorders, depressive disorders and suicide or self-inflicted injuries, with the largest relative impacts among young adults (15–24 years; 8.0% of disease burden for females and 5.1% for males) and early

working years (25–44 years; 6.5% for females and 4.7% for males).

- 52% of Australians who had a long-term health condition or disability experienced some level of exclusion in 2017, with 16% experiencing deep social exclusion.
- Psychosocial stress caused by unemployment has a strong impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Evidence supports a direct association between poor-quality housing and poor physical and mental health.

'Had there been no socio-economic differences across income groups in 2015, 21% of the disease burden in Australia for that year could have been avoided.'

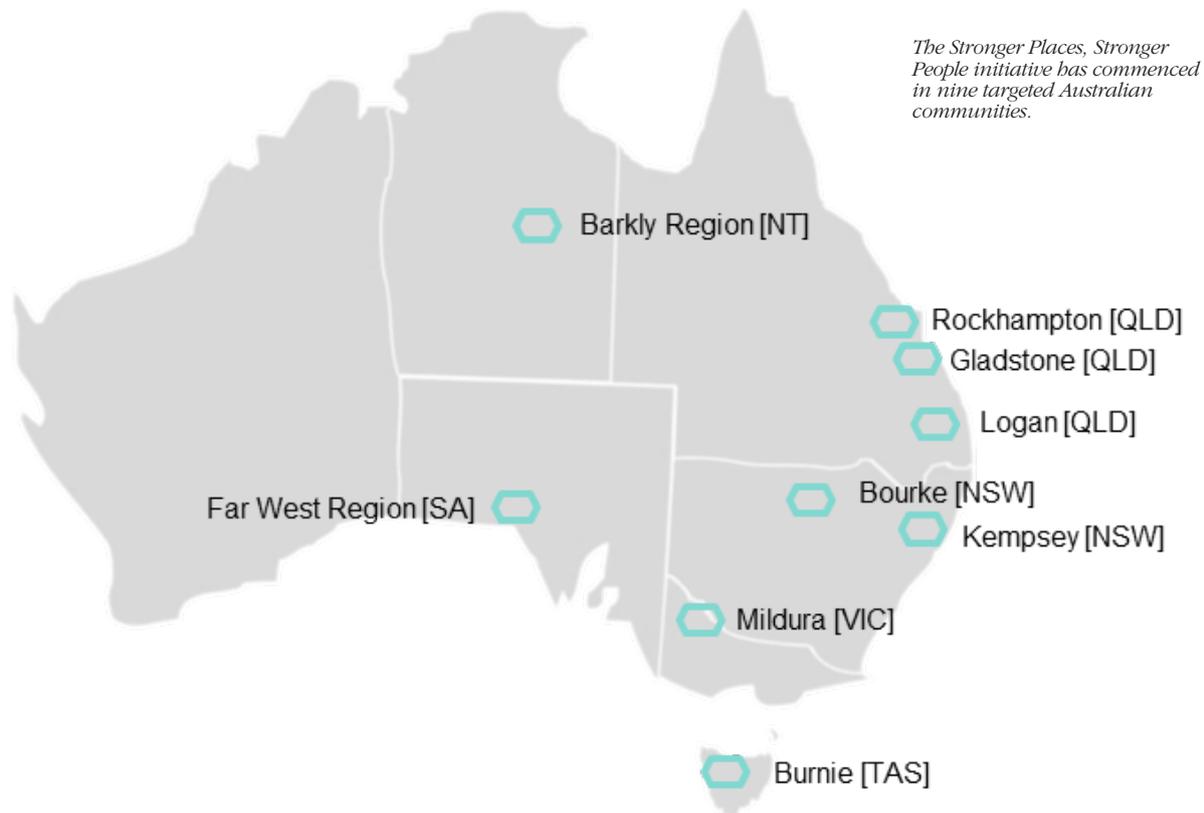
Yes, we have an [Australian Health Performance Framework](#)⁸ with determinants of health that include socioeconomic factors such as income, employment, housing, education and social inequalities.

Yes, we fund Australia's [Monitoring Inequality Project](#) which maps the social health atlas by socio-economic quintiles. We know that:

- There is a very strong correlation between areas with higher rates of vaccination and higher socioeconomic status.
- There are inverse correlations with areas with relatively higher proportions of people born in countries where English is not the main language spoken in capital cities, again indicating lower uptake of the vaccination.
- There is a negative correlation between the percentage of Aboriginal people in an area and the percentage of people vaccinated.

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Overall, life expectancy in Australia continues to increase, infant and child mortality is down, there are fewer avoidable deaths and cancer survival rates continue to improve, although rates of diabetes have stagnated and rates of obesity and death by suicide continue to increase.

Notably, these gross measures mask the significant differences in the distribution of health outcomes across the country. For instance, had there been no socio-economic differences across income groups in 2015, 21% of the disease burden in Australia for that year could have been avoided.⁹

Work, Income and Health Inequity

Recently, ACOSS and UNSW released its [Work, Income](#)

[and Health Inequity report](#), developed by the Poverty and Inequality Partnership and sponsored by the St Vincent de Paul Society. The report affirmed that some groups are at greater risk of poorer health outcomes because of their background and living conditions and some face greater barriers to accessing good health and health services.

There are clear links between health outcomes and socio-economic status over multiple indicators. For example:

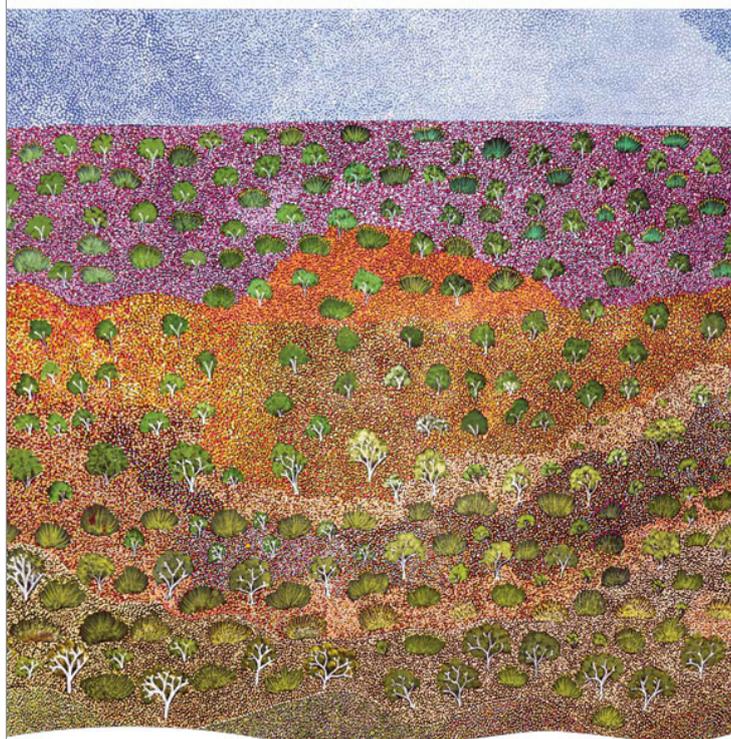
- People under 65 whose main source of income is government income support are more likely to report mental health issues (50%) than those whose main source of income is salary or wages (18%).

- People who are without paid work are almost twice as likely to report mental health issues than people who work full time.
- People with higher incomes (60%) are more likely to report good health, while people with lower incomes are less likely to report good health (32%).¹⁰

What should we be doing?

The solutions to addressing health inequity involve improving the data and developing a data framework and health equity metrics to gauge the complexity and relationships between factors to tackle inequity in health.¹¹ Similarly, the AIHW states that more research is needed, particularly longitudinal studies and linkages between health and welfare data to improve our understanding of the associations between social determinants

Barkly Regional Deal



and health, the experience of population groups, and the causal pathways to good health.¹²

A nuanced approach to policy and service delivery is also required – an approach that is targeted and tailored across portfolios so that a coordinated health, welfare, housing and support service system can be implemented in high-need areas.

The process of government, with separate portfolios submitting new policy proposals through the Budgetary process and annual reporting against portfolio outcomes, does little to foster

cross-portfolio approaches and exacerbates the siloed approach to policy and service delivery.

In a podcast interview given shortly after the 2021 Budget, the Shadow Treasurer Jim Chalmers spoke of the need to tackle intergenerational unemployment and disadvantage and the importance of place-based approaches and longer-term decision-making.¹³

The good news is that work has commenced on trialling place-based models of service delivery.

The [Stronger Places, Stronger People](#) program, jointly funded by the Department of Social Services,

state and territory governments and some philanthropic organisations, has committed \$35 million over five years to support community-led service responses which disrupt disadvantage and create better futures for children and their families. The program operates in nine locations (the final one is yet to be announced) and supports locally tailored and evidence-driven solutions to local problems, in partnership with local people.¹⁴

The [Connected Beginnings Program](#), jointly funded by the Departments of Health and Education, Skills and Employment, aims to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children prepare for school. \$12 million has been made available each year to integrate early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services in selected communities.

[Stronger Communities for Children](#), funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency, supports community-led approaches to the delivery of integrated services for Aboriginal children, young people and families in their local community. The evaluation found early indications of progress towards improved family functioning, positive participation in education, participation in cultural events and safety and wellbeing of children and young people and their families.¹⁵

The [Barkly Regional Deal](#) is a 10-year, \$78.4 million commitment between the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and Barkly Regional Council. The aim is to improve the productivity and liveability of the Barkly region by stimulating economic growth and improving social outcomes, including reducing overcrowding and improving child safety.¹⁶

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Finally, Professor Marmot's recent UK report, [Build Back Fairer: COVID-19 Review](#), contains recommendations that equally apply here, namely -

- the nation's health should be the highest priority for government as we rebuild from the pandemic
- the economy and health are strongly linked – managing the pandemic well allows the economy to flourish in the longer term, which is supportive of health
- reducing health inequalities, including those exacerbated by the pandemic requires long-term policies with equity at the heart
- to build back fairer from the pandemic, multi-sector action from all levels of government is needed
- investment in public health needs to be increased to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on health and health inequalities, and on the social determinants of health.¹⁷

There are no quick fixes to addressing inequity in health outcomes but we are making inroads through targeted, locally-driven responses to community needs, better data and building the evidence base on what works for communities.

A national health inequities strategy is essential to steering and informing a cross-portfolio and cross-sector approach to improving the health outcomes of all Australians.

Policy development in welfare, housing, education and employment, and health must not be done in isolation. As the evidence base on the social determinants of health demonstrates, all are related, impact on each other and, ultimately, influence the health and wellbeing outcomes of all Australians. **R**

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

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PHOTO: JON TYSON ON UNSPLASH

Homelessness report should be a 'blueprint for action'

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia welcomes the recent release of the Federal Parliament's [final report](#) into Housing and Homelessness in Australia, with National President, Claire Victory saying the majority of the 35 recommendations align with the National Council's position, articulated in a number of submissions to the Commonwealth, including the [submission](#) to this inquiry.

'Every day our members and staff come into contact with people whose lives would be markedly different if they had access to the dignity and benefits of safe, affordable housing, including adequate client-centred, trauma-informed support services where and when necessary,' Ms Victory said.

'Our submission lists the growing profile of vulnerable people who've got nowhere safe to call home. Vulnerable groups include single parents with children, single mothers with teenage sons, people living with mental health issues, people experiencing family and domestic violence, asylum seekers, people being discharged from hospital, people being

released from prison, people living with disability, young people experiencing family breakdown, young people in out of home care, older women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

'There is no single cause of homelessness... individual and social circumstances make some groups of Australians particularly vulnerable to the risk of homelessness.'

– Final report of the Inquiry into homelessness in Australia, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs.

'The Society has been calling for some time for a ten-year national strategy on homelessness, and a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention. The call for more crisis, emergency and transitional accommodation, improvements to data collection and reporting and a new funding model to ensure services are provided to people most in need are all welcome,' Ms Victory added.

'We particularly welcome the focus on intergovernmental cooperation, including the call for all governments to provide funding for additional crisis, emergency

and transitional accommodation, and associated support services including pathways to long-term accommodation. And the recommended review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance will help to address the housing shortfall and housing stress.

'A roof over your head, without the right supports in place, is only a partial solution and sets people up to fail.'

– SVDP National Council submission to the Federal Parliament's inquiry into homelessness.

'This report is a solid blueprint for reform that if implemented in full will go a long way to ensuring fuller economic and community participation for some of the most vulnerable people in our community,' Ms Victory said.

She encouraged the Federal Government to provide its response as soon as possible on this urgent and growing issue.

'The National Council will bring knowledge and insight from the states and territories to work closely with the government of the day on implementing these recommendations,' the National President said. **R**



Catholics for Refugees: PNG and Australia

BY TIM MCKENNA

July 19th this year marked the eighth anniversary of the Rudd Government's decision that people seeking asylum, who come by boat, would never settle in Australia and would be sent to offshore processing facilities. Some 239 remain there, 130 in PNG and 109 in Nauru.¹ Nearly all are mentally ill.²

The recent assault and robbery in PNG's capital Port Moresby of one man I know reminds us of the safety issues in that city. A report on offshore processing finds that it is not only cruel and costly, but also an ineffective failure.³

On this anniversary the Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands wrote to the Australian Parliament asking Australia to find a safe

and permanent home for these people as soon as possible.⁴ Father Giorgio, General Secretary of the Bishops Conference, and his team have ministered to those people in PNG for two and half years.⁵ (See separate article).

Both Bishop Vincent Long, on behalf of the Australian Bishops Conference, and the Society's National Council issued media releases supporting the PNG Bishops' call.^{6 7}

The fate of these vulnerable people held by Australia offshore is one of many refugee issues that the Federal Government needs to address.

The recent, and long overdue, release of Priya, Nades, Kopika and Tharunicaa Murugappan (the so-called 'Biloela' family, who are yet to return to the Queensland community that embraced them) is welcome.

However, they are but the public face of the ongoing cruel treatment of thousands more refugees and people seeking asylum in Australian detention and in our community.

During Refugee Week in June our National President, Claire Victory, called for the Federal Government to adopt more humane policies towards these people, particularly in relation to the unjust 'fast-track' assessment and better support for people on temporary visas.⁸

This call echoes demands of the Catholic campaign, *150 Days of Action for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum*, supported by Bishop Long's national *Catholics for Refugees* network. The campaign, launched by Bishop Terry Brady in March, concludes on the Church's World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sunday 26 September. The campaign addresses three issues.

Firstly, there are nearly 20,000 refugees who have been living in Australia for almost a decade, but who have only been given temporary visas. Many of these visas are expiring so these refugees are now being forced to re-apply for protection and will, at best, only receive another three-to-five-year visa. Under current policy they have no realistic prospect of permanent re-settlement,⁹ a particular concern now for more than 4000 Afghans in this group.¹⁰

Secondly, since these people do not have permanent residency they cannot apply to have their family members join them here. Such prolonged family separation impacts on people's physical and mental wellbeing. It affects their ability to integrate in Australia and, for many, it causes a breakdown in relationships with family members overseas.¹¹

Thirdly, like the 'Biloela' family, there are about 10,000 people in Australia who are still struggling through the 'fast-track' process, which has been condemned as unfair by the Australian Human Rights Commission.¹²

Many of these individuals – who are unable to work – are left destitute without any Federal Government assistance other than a Medicare card. There are also hundreds of people medically evacuated from PNG and Nauru, who are in the same situation. So, refugee support groups and charities, including Vinnies, do what they can to help. But it is still insufficient and not sustainable.¹³

Therefore the *150 Days* campaign is calling on the Federal Government to:

1. Provide income support and a financial safety net for all people seeking asylum in Australia,
2. End temporary protection visas and create a clear pathway to permanent residency, and
3. Ensure access to family reunion for refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia.¹⁴

The campaign is raising awareness of the plight of these people in parishes, schools and social justice groups, holding vigils and writing to and visiting politicians seeking support for these changes to Australia's policies. The campaign has also launched an online petition.¹⁵

On 26 September, the campaign will take up Pope Francis' call for us on that day to become more inclusive and move 'towards an ever wider we'.¹⁶ The campaign calls for Australia to treat these people as we would expect to be treated by re-dressing this injustice.

Finally, Catholics continue to support the hundreds of refugees and people seeking asylum who have spent years held indefinitely in Australian detention, at enormous cost. With no hope of release and no prospect of safe re-settlement, these people continue to suffer grievously,¹⁷ particularly the 50 Afghans who are in this group. **R**

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- 2 Submission 52 to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' enquiry into the Migration Amendment Bill 2019 by Dr Neela Janakiramanan, Dr Natalie Thurtle and Dr Sara Townend. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/RepairMedicaltransfers/Submissions
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PNG Bishops urge Australia to end the ‘Pacific solution’



PHOTO: ROBIN OSBORNE

Carved story-board from the upper Sepik region of PNG.

In an impassioned letter to the Australian Parliament the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands has called on the Government to legislate for the freedom and resettlement in Australia of asylum seekers held in PNG (125 as at 30 June 2021, nowadays mostly in the capital Port Moresby) and in the Republic of Nauru (a further 108).

The plea to end the so-called Pacific Solution to boat arrivals was supported by the National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia whose National Council President Claire Victory said the Society had consistently condemned the flawed policy of offshore detention and called again for the immediate release of people unable to return to their home countries.

Urging Australia to revisit the New Zealand Government's offer to resettle these asylum seekers,

who are unable to return to their home countries after being held on Manus island (part of PNG) and Nauru – once known as ‘Pleasant Island’ – Ms Victory said, ‘Accepting the New Zealand offer would be the quickest, simplest and most significant step to an ethical solution.’

The [letter](#) from the Conference's General Secretary, Rev. Fr. Giorgio Licini, PIME was sent on 19 July 2021, the eighth anniversary of the Australian Parliament's legislating the mandatory and indefinite offshore detention of asylum seekers arriving by boat and the prohibition of their settlement in Australia.

In a reference to PNG's past control by Australia, a period known as *taim bilong masta* (‘the time when masters ruled’), the Conference called on the Parliament to ‘erase any trace of past colonial demand and fully implement a new style of compassionate and participative leadership in the Pacific’. It added,

‘Here in Port Moresby not only us, but all those more involved in assisting the men affected by the current policy (particularly the PNG Immigration and the Australian High Commission) are all exhausted by the prolonged effort.’

Suggesting that those held in offshore detention had made ‘sacrifices’ for Australia by being examples of the ‘stopping the boats’ deterrence policy, Fr. Licini said, ‘Their detention has effectively achieved the purpose... thus allowing Australia to cordon off its maritime borders.’

Appealing to the Government through the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate, he urged it to ‘Please, close the Manus and Nauru chapter as soon as possible by allowing people... to access a reasonable and acceptable level of freedom and dignity in Australia.’ **R**

Our moral duty towards Afghan refugees

BY BISHOP VINCENT
NGUYEN VAN LONG
O.F.M. CONV.

I was one of the boat people who escaped from South Vietnam. The escape happened after South Vietnam had fallen to the Vietnamese communist forces in 1975, and my world descended into total chaos with an international embargo, wars against China and Cambodia, forced collectivisation and the insidious spread of what were termed 're-education camps' — but were really communist gulags. My siblings and I grew up in a world of poverty, isolation, oppression and constant fear of what might happen to us or our loved ones.

Finally, my parents, who had escaped by boat themselves from North Vietnam in 1954, encouraged my siblings and me to escape. The boat journey was risky, and there were far more people on the boat than it could carry safely. By the third day, we'd run out of food, water and fuel and were at the mercy of the elements. On the seventh day, we drifted near an oil rig, half alive and half dead. Fortunately, we were rescued, and brought to a refugee camp off the coast of Malaysia, where I stayed for over a year.

In December 1981, I was accepted and brought to a country I knew nothing about: Australia. Here, I built a new life, and worked hard to become a priest, a dream that I had held since I was 13 years old. Growing up in war and later transiting in a refugee camp, all I wanted to do was to help people who suffered, and so in Australia I was finally able to follow that dream properly, eventually even becoming a Bishop, something I never would have imagined when I was clinging to that boat on the ocean.



Today, even though it's been decades since I fled the war, it all comes flooding back as I see footage of people clambering onto planes. Some of the images of people dangling off the stairs to aircraft in Kabul were eerily similar to what happened in Saigon in April 1975.

My Catholic faith compels me to try to address these kinds of injustices, ones that remind me of what I and my loved ones experienced in Vietnam. I believe in the universal and inclusive love of God, a love that seeks to embrace all people, most especially those at the periphery, who are experiencing poverty and injustice.

I also believe that people of faith, and Australians more broadly, must stand for social and moral issues, because this is the only way that we can build the world we want to see in the future. And this is a pivotal moment for us to step up and support those in need in Afghanistan. I hope to see the same level of bipartisan support for Afghan refugees now as there was for Vietnamese refugees then.

We must offer additional refugee resettlement places for Afghan refugees immediately, as we did in 2015 for Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Canada has already committed to 20,000 additional places for Afghan refugees, and we could match this offer to show that we are ready to shoulder our responsibility to those in need.

We must extend the temporary visas of all Afghan citizens in Australia so that they will not be at risk of forced return to a dangerous country, and extend permanent protection to any Afghans on temporary protection visas. Finally, we must support family reunion applications for Afghan Australians whose families are in danger.

We need to support the Afghan people. And we need to live up to our international obligations, and also live up to our status as a prosperous society, one with a courageous past that welcomed previous waves of refugees en masse from Asia.

Australia has changed for the better with each successive wave of new arrivals, because people like me have brought our determination and drive for a better future. We need to honour this legacy by showing the Afghan people our compassion and solidarity, because I believe that this is the true identity of the country I have made my home.

In view of our involvement in the war in Afghanistan, we also have a moral duty to do so. **R**

Vincent Nguyen Van Long O.F.M. Conv. is Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, NSW.

This article appeared previously in [Eureka Street](#), 30 August 2021.

Christians demand more help for Afghans

BY TIM MCKENNA

'We, the Australian Church, are calling on the Federal Government to welcome a special intake of an additional 20,000 Afghan refugees, and support the ongoing well-being of all Afghan refugees and their families.'

– [Christians United for Afghanistan](#)

The long Afghanistan tragedy has taken another sad turn with the rapid Taliban takeover in August.

The Federal Government's response has been to join an emergency multinational evacuation focused on rescuing nationals and Afghans who supported coalition forces in the long military deployment.

The Government has also said it will take 3000 Afghan refugees from within our existing refugee quota for this year, noting that this number will likely grow. As well, it has stated that none of the 4300 Afghan refugees already in Australia on temporary visas will be asked to return to Afghanistan 'while the security situation remains dire'.

These actions have been welcomed, but [Christian leaders](#) have called for the Government to do much more. In the days following the takeover [Archbishop Mark Coleridge](#) called for the Government to provide a more meaningful contribution of 20,000 humanitarian places for Afghans, while Anglican Archbishop of Sydney Kanishka Raffel said Australia should respond as generously to the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan as it did to the Tiananmen Square massacre and Syrian civil war.

Catholic organisations, including, Vinnies signed a Refugee Council of Australia letter calling for seven actions to provide more help to

Afghans in their country and in our community.

In the last days of August an unprecedented coalition of Christian churches and organisations (including Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostals and the Uniting Church) came together under the banner of *Christians United for Afghanistan*, demanding actions to address the situation:

1. **Welcome Afghan Refugees** – Declare an intake of an additional 20,000 refugees focused on those most at risk from the Taliban.
2. **Protect Afghans in Australia** – Grant permanent protection to all people from Afghanistan in Australia on temporary protection visas or currently awaiting application outcomes.
3. **Reunite Refugee Families** – Make immediate arrangements to bring the families of refugees from Afghanistan to Australia.
4. **Support Through Humanitarian Aid** – Provide additional emergency and long-term support through reputable NGOs and organisations working in the region.

On the group's website Bishop Vincent Long [says](#) Australia has a "tradition of generously resettling refugees & displaced persons who flee their home countries due to war, conflict & violence".

In addition to Archbishop's Coleridge's call to increase the Afghan intake, the first of these calls to action, the Victorian Catholic bishops have [supported](#) the 'reunite' call, expressing particular concern for the 5000 Afghan refugees on temporary visas in Australia who are precluded by Australian Government policy from applying for their family members to join them here.

Archbishop Anthony Fischer

has backed the 'support' call by establishing an Afghan Refugee [Appeal](#). The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), part of this group, wrote earlier to Government ministers endorsing the 'support', 'protect' and 'reunite' [calls](#). Catholics for Refugees and the Josephite Sisters, as part of their campaign, *150 Days of Action for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum*, which is supported by Vinnies, have also made these same three [calls](#).

Finally, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands has reminded us that there are still 20 Afghans held in Port Moresby for over eight years, calling for safe re-settlement of these people and of those similarly held on [Nauru](#).

Vincentians working with refugees in our community and in PNG understand the pain people suffer from family separation (particularly for Afghans when the suffering of their country and their families has increased to desperate levels). These Vincentians also understand the contribution family members already in Australia make to the effective settlement of refugees coming to our country. All should be able to understand that taking on 3000 people is insufficient.

As Vincentians we should support all the calls of Christians United for Afghanistan for more help for Afghans seeking safety in our country and for those already here and now facing further suffering.

Bishop Vincent Long says it all in his most recent article in [Eureka Street](#) entitled: *Our moral duty towards Afghan refugees*. So please sign this [petition](#) from *Christians United for Afghanistan* and this one from the [Afghan Australian Advocacy Network](#), an organisation "made up of people from the diverse ethnic and religious groups which form the [Afghan Australian community](#)". **R**

Young people living out the Vincentian Charism

BY KATE HALSTEAD

The mission of the St Vincent de Paul Society resonates deeply within the hearts of our young volunteers and members. Across the country, young people go out into the community on behalf of the Society to serve, care for, and walk with our companions. Young people have always been an active part of the Church and the Society plays a significant part in its mission and outreach to serve those who need a hand up.

The Society nationally engages approximately 28,000 young people working towards supporting their community through many programs and initiatives across states and territories. Celebrating the youthful spirit of our founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam, we spoke to some young members and volunteers to hear their stories.

Lisa Scott is a primary school teacher based in NSW who began volunteering with Vinnies in 2010 as a Kids Camp Leader. She is currently the Deputy Chair of the Resource Committee – School Communities (sitting under the Standing Committee – Spirit of Youth) and leads the Mini Vinnies program at her school.

‘When I started working in a school with the Mini Vinnies program, I was keen to get involved and share the passion and experience I had gained through volunteering with Vinnies myself as a young adult,’ Lisa said.

‘Mini Vinnies allows children to not only learn about the values and mission of the Society but also to get involved in giving a hand up to people in need in our local community.

‘Through connections with our local conference the children love to make cards for the clients they support and visit with the elderly



in our local nursing homes, putting a smile on their face and providing comfort.

‘If you were to ask past students about their experiences with Mini Vinnies many of them would also remember being involved in the Winter Sleep Out, learning about the different types of homelessness and how Vinnies supports people experiencing homelessness in our city.

‘Mini Vinnies not only provides a place for students to build connections with one another, but it also allows students with a passion for social justice to come together and learn about the ways they can create change.’

Alex Vardenega (pictured) is a high school teacher from Brisbane Queensland who has been involved with the Society supporting young people and their families through our camps and youth mentoring programs.

‘I was first introduced to Vinnies Youth by a friend of mine at university at the start of 2016. I felt immediately connected to the mission and the community involved. More importantly, I was inspired to continue the good works by seeing the positive, very real impact that the Youth Programs have on young people,’ Alex said.

‘Six and a half years since my first engagement with Vinnies, I have been blessed to be part of a team of

volunteers in many Youth programs across Brisbane and the Gold Coast, attending, facilitating and leading Buddies Days and Camps as well as being engaged in National events like the 2019 Australian Catholic Youth Festival in Perth and the CEO Sleepouts in Queensland, raising over \$3,000.

‘I have just completed my first 12 months as the Brisbane Youth Representative for the Brisbane Diocesan Central Council and am part of both the Safeguarding and Pathways Advisory Committees for State Council. I look forward to continuing both these roles into the future.

‘As a High School teacher, my volunteer work with Vinnies YOUTH has given me a sense of enjoyment and relationship building as well as a sense of grounding and perspective of what is most important for a wholehearted life – gratitude, strong relationships and connection.’

Hearing these stories provides a wonderful knowledge that the spirit of Blessed Frederic Ozanam’s good works is alive and thriving amongst today’s young members and volunteers.

*‘Charism’ is used to describe a particular spiritual orientation, and any special characteristics of its mission or values (for example, the works of a teaching order as compared with that of a missionary order, or one devoted to care of the poor or the sick). Vincentian charism refers to the charism of St. Vincent de Paul, the 17th century French priest who, along with St. Louise de Marillac, established the first organizations of what is now known as the Vincentian Family movement. **R***

Kate Halstead is Deputy Chair - Resource Committee - Youth Engagement, which also sits under the Standing Committee - Spirit of Youth.

From the CEO

BY TOBY O'CONNOR

We are using the glorious photo of the golden wattle on our cover for a number of reasons, including its beauty and the timeliness of its annual blooming in late Winter-early Spring.

Before the National Council's Secretariate office went into lockdown because of the COVID-19 restrictions implemented throughout the ACT – and, of course, many other parts of Australia – our staff were greeted by a lovely wattle tree flowering close to our front door.

That seems like ancient history now, along with the many 'freedoms' we had taken for granted, such as shaking hands, embracing, shopping or even going for a walk, without donning a mask.



The wattle is another of our wonderful native plants as well as a symbol of the many attributes of Australians at large. It is regarded as being ideally suited to withstand our country's droughts, winds and bushfires, its resilience representing the spirit of our people and the land. Whatever the travails, and the criticisms attached to the management of the pandemic, the fact remains that Australians, in all our diversity, have been remarkably resilient in the face of a crisis that has brought many nations, not all of them poor, to their knees.

Perhaps most importantly the golden wattle is regarded as a symbol of unity. This characteristic has been the most evident over the past two years, and not only in relation to COVID-19.

Well before the east coast bushfires of late 2019-2020, large areas were suffering from a terrible drought, in the case of NSW some 99 per cent of the landmass. No doubt connected to global heating, this caused the collapse of many farms and the ruination of countless rural businesses. It also placed families under immense psychological pressure. Suicides of this magnitude were unprecedented, as St Vincent de Paul Society members came to realise: 'We never thought he'd turn the gun on himself,' was a sentiment expressed widely.

Yet amidst all the hardship and the sadness, the people of Australia, many of them far away and most of them strangers to drought, rose to the occasion and donated with great generosity to the Vinnies Drought Appeal. Our members provided much appreciated care and support, and a hand up to many struggling farmers and their families.

In addition, the Federal Government placed its trust in the Society to manage the distribution



Toby oConnor

of a total of \$60 million worth of assistance to 20,000 eligible applicants under round 2 of the Drought Community Support Initiative (DCSI). Of these, 14,971 applicants were also referred to Vincentian networks or other agencies for further support. This single statistic highlights the vital glue that all charitable organisations offer to help communities facing distressing times together.

To undertake this work between late 2019 and end-June this year we formed a National Drought Relief Team based in Canberra whose members often worked into the night to contact farm families and ensure that everyone entitled to assistance would receive it. The feedback the team received was overwhelmingly heartening. I want to add my deepest thanks for their efforts and the generosity of our members who provided additional supports and assistance.

The Australian National University's [Evaluation](#) of the Society's Implementation of the Drought Community Support Initiative provides further evidence of what works when helping people in crisis. Overall, the report found the grant was well targeted and administered effectively.

Australians have also united in their support over the past two years for the Society's other fundraising

campaigns, despite coming at a time when the prevailing wisdom was that 'compassion fatigue' might be hard to combat. The fact is that many charities, as well as those they assist, have been doing it tough. Yet donations to our Bushfire, Winter and Christmas Appeals, and support for the Vinnies CEO Sleepouts, have not only held up but in many ways surpassed expectations during this difficult period.

Amidst all the barriers thrown up by the coronavirus restrictions our 60,000 members have been doing everything possible – and within the required health precautions – to service people in need. Where home visits are not possible, food parcels have been delivered to doorsteps. Vouchers have been made available, often online, and regular contact with the vulnerable has been maintained by phone. Within the same constraints our vast family of retail volunteers has been working hard to maintain the income so vital to funding our work.

With this background in mind, the National Council has been perplexed by the government's proposed changes to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission's regulations that will hinder the advocacy work of charities. We cannot stand silent where we see injustices and unfairness, particularly where this involves our companions and others who are voiceless.

Let us not be gloomy... 'We are experiencing trouble on every side but are not crushed' – 2 *Corinthians* 4:8-9... for we are continuing to put 'runs on the board' despite all that is happening.

Let's consider the golden wattle and celebrate what unites us and what might inspire us to tackle the challenges ahead. Quite literally, God only knows what they will be! **R**

Toby oConnor is CEO St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.



Passages program scores a hit with young people

BY DEANNA WATSON

The highly successful *Soul'd Out* music program offered at [Passages Youth Engagement Hub](#) in Perth has expanded to include the Passages Peel hub, again using Hip Hop, rap and song to transform the lives of young people visiting the service.*

Each week, one of the consulting rooms at Passages Peel gets transformed into a mini recording studio where Passages Youth worker Aaron D'Vaz collaborates with young people to create a variety of music, from reworking existing songs through to creating new tracks.

'Connecting with young people who visit Passages Youth Engagement Hubs is essential in being able to provide them with

the types of support and referrals they need in a safe, friendly and positive environment,' Aaron says.

'The music program is a way of developing relationships with young people so they can express themselves, build up their confidence and self-esteem, and be a distraction from their current situation. Even though we have only been running the program here at Passages Peel a short time, it's such a massive thing for the young people as they are writing music tracks with each other... they are making a lot more positive relationships through the music, instead of street or drug related ones.'

The innovative program was launched at the Passages Perth hub nearly two years ago, and young people have been getting

into the groove ever since. Every Monday a steady stream of young people arrives for their music session bookings, creating Hip Hop tracks and finding their singing voices.

Soul'd Out was developed by a youth worker who had held workshops with young inmates in prisons, finding it was helpful with rehabilitation. They felt it could be a good way of helping young people at Passages to express themselves, find a distraction from their current situation and work towards building their self-esteem.

'As the facilitator of the program I've seen the confidence it instils in young people,' says Aaron D'Vaz, a successful Hip Hop performer himself.



‘Initially all participants are very nervous but by the end of the session they are on a high and bounce out of the studio. It’s such a great feeling to see how they light up with a newfound belief in themselves.’

One young person to complete a recording session was Jas Rose Chapman Jones, a 19-year-old who had been through a lot – prison, living on the streets and drug issues.

‘I want to do my own music to reach out to other people because I know what it’s like to go through stuff. Just coming to Passages when I was on the streets like this was my safe spot. This was like my family, like I had a reason to belong. They made me feel loved... I wouldn’t be who I am today if it wasn’t for Passages.’

Aaron D’Vaz recalls, ‘Jas was genuinely surprised by how she sounded and the praise being given to her from staff and other

young people on the day. She proudly states, ‘To look back and say six months ago I was a junkie and on the streets, and now look what support can do’.

Aaron adds, ‘In the music sessions at the Hubs each week, young people have the freedom to write and record any style or music genre they want, but the most popular choice is Hip Hop – it’s accessible and so effective in giving young people a voice to talk about feelings and emotions they otherwise couldn’t or don’t want to.

‘You can create or recite lyrics about anything and don’t have to be a singer to do it. But the appeal of Hip Hop is also because it’s not just music, it’s a culture built on peace, respect, self-worth and coming together.

‘I see the positive feelings and emotions it provides young people when they create their own tracks, which can enable them to have the confidence

to make changes in life they want so they can move forward. Young people who visit Passages come from such complex and traumatic backgrounds. They are such an inspiration when they do the program and it’s a privilege to be able to share my skills with them’. **R**

* Passages Youth Engagement Hubs in Perth and Peel are a joint venture between Vinnies WA and the Rotary Club of Perth. They provide a safe and supportive environment for addressing the needs of young people experiencing a range of complex issues, which can include homelessness, mental illness and poverty. The Soul’d Out Music Program in Peel was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Matana Foundation for Young People and the City of Mandurah.

Until recently Deanna Watson was Communication and Content Developer, St Vincent de Paul Society WA

Vinnies Victoria goes solar in a win-win for the environment and people in need

BY DEE RUDEBECK

In an innovative project at St Vincent de Paul Victoria, solar panels are being installed across the organisation's shops and facilities in a program that will save \$1.26 million in energy bills, money that can be diverted into the hands of Victorians in need.

The scheme was launched in June this year at the Vinnies shop in Oakleigh, a south-east Melbourne suburb, which was the first to go live with solar power. The event was attended by the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio, State Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and Minister for Solar Homes.

The project is being carried out in conjunction with [AGL Australia](#) in a 10-year contract, which will see 91 solar installations completed for Vinnies across its network of 110 shops, generating 1992 mega-watt hours (MWh) of energy annually, the equivalent generation of more than 415 average Australian homes.

Last year, Vinnies Victoria was certified carbon neutral, and the solar panel scheme is a major contribution to the organisation's continued commitment to emissions reduction under the Climate Active certification scheme. The event was also attended by Vinnies Victoria CEO Sue Cattermole and State President Kevin McMahon, along with Oakleigh MP Steve Dimopoulos and representatives from Telstra and Deloitte, which both provided instrumental pro bono support in assisting Vinnies Victoria to achieve its



Jeff Antcliff, Executive General Manager – Commercial Services, Vinnies Victoria, Jason Hulbert, Business Development Manager, Vinnies Victoria, and Deloitte's Ashley Wab, Ben Symons and Ka Jbun Lam.

'Thanks Vinnies for being such a wonderful 'not-for-profit corporate citizen'

– Victoria's State Minister for Energy, Lily D'Ambrosio

carbon neutral accreditation last year and in selecting a solar partner.

Sue Cattermole said, 'We are proud that Vinnies Victoria is a leading community sector organisation making the best use of our funds so that we can support more Victorians in need.'

'Last year, we assisted more than 282,625 people with things that we all consider to be necessities – rent, utility bills, food. We provided hundreds of thousands of meals. We also ensured people didn't have to choose between medical treatment and putting fuel in their cars,

and that kids went to school in proper uniforms and school shoes – and much, much more.'

'This year we anticipate the demand to rise. Every cent that Vinnies Victoria saves will be directed to helping vulnerable Victorians. I would like to thank AGL, Telstra and Deloitte in helping us bring this invaluable project to fruition.'

AGL Chief Customer Officer, Christine Corbett said the company is proud to announce its support of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria, which has been helping struggling Victorians for almost 170 years.



Steve Dimopoulos, Oakleigh MP, Sue Cattermole, Vinnies Victoria CEO, Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio, State Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and Minister for Solar Homes and Ryan Warburton, AGL.

'To ensure Vinnies can keep doing what they do best and direct their resources to those who need them most, we are honoured to be playing this small role in reducing everyday operating costs,' Ms Corbett said.

'AGL will install up to 1.6 MW solar systems across Vinnies' Shops, reinforcing their commitment to net-zero emissions.'

Minister D'Ambrosio expressed 'A big congratulations to Vinnies Victoria, this is a wonderful achievement. This is important because none of us can afford to allow the challenges of climate change to become another barrier to vulnerable people in the community getting a fair go.

'This project means that Vinnies frees up more than another

\$100,000 a year, every year, to spend on its good deeds in the community and the people who benefit from that will grow, and the number of people Vinnies reaches will grow.

'It's so smart. And absolutely driven by wanting to go further in terms of the work that Vinnies does and the number of people it helps each and every day. Thanks Vinnies for being such a wonderful 'not-for-profit corporate citizen.'

Steve Dimopoulos added that he is proud to have such a 'gold standard iconic brand in the country such as Vinnies in his electorate. Customers who come in here are from my community and they get the double benefit of contributing

to the environment by preferencing this store, and also supporting the vulnerable people that Vinnies look after, so what a win-win.'

The driving force behind the project and Vinnies Victoria's carbon neutral certification is Policy and Research Manager Gavin Dufty and Business Development Manager Jason Hulbert. Mr Dufty said after the shops are all installed with solar, further emissions reductions programs will focus on tackling Vinnies Victoria's transport fleet with a bid to go hybrid-electric and eventually set up an electric grid that the organisation can run off. **R**

Dee Rudebeck is PR & Communications Co-ordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria.

Beautiful one day, (almost) perfect the next

BY CALLUM JOHNSON

After three new COVID-19 cases were recorded in Queensland in late June, one of which was the Delta variant, many regions of south-east Queensland, including Brisbane, found themselves in a snap nine-day lockdown. On the same day that south-east Queensland came out of lockdown the city of Cairns in Far North Queensland went into their own snap three-day lockdown after a local case was discovered.

Vinnies Queensland CEO Kevin Mercer said this wasn't the first-time members had to quickly adapt to the way they provided support to help those in need during the pandemic.

'Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our members and volunteers have done an exceptional job of supporting people in need while being mindful of ever-changing social distancing, lockdowns and hygiene regulations,' Mr Mercer said.

'We've been working closely with the Queensland Government to provide support for more than fifty requests a day through the Queensland Recovery Hotline for food, medications and other essentials.

'As many of the people we have supported have been in lockdown or quarantine, we have had to adapt our services through contactless drop offs, organising deliveries of essentials like groceries and medication while restricting face-to-face contact.'

The dedication and generosity of our members during lockdown was featured in Channel 7 and Channel 9 news stories on the 'Lockdown Legends' of Brisbane – a title well earned. **R**

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



Canberra/Goulburn adapts to the COVID-19 lockdown

Following the August COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT and the declaration of a lockdown the St Vincent de Paul Society has adapted its operations to assist vulnerable members of the community experiencing distress and hardship.

‘Our teams have worked around the clock to ensure that affected Vinnies members, volunteers and employees are safe and well,’ said Barnie van Wyk, CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

‘To enable Vinnies to continue its vital work in the community, we have swiftly adapted the way we operate our programs and services in the region to ensure the health and safety of our employees, volunteers and people in need is first and foremost.’

The Vinnies conference support model, which consists of groups of devoted volunteers who respond to requests for help and provide financial, material, and emotional relief through home visitations, pivoted towards a virtual, phone-based and contact-less support. The Vinnies Helpline (13 18 12) remained open and all calls for assistance have been directed to available volunteers in the region.

In compliance with ACT and NSW Government public health directives, all Vinnies shops in the Canberra/Goulburn region were closed for trading during the lockdown. The community was asked to hold onto donations until the lockdown ended. A particular request was not to leave any donated goods outside shops as these could not be sorted or processed.

‘We are grateful for the offers of food and other in-kind donations and are appreciative of the community’s understanding and patience as we navigate these complex circumstances,’ Mr van Wyk said.



PHOTO: MAXWELL INGHAM ON UNSPLASH

Vinnies essential services such as Street to Home, Samaritan House and Night Patrol continued to provide assistance with modified safety measures in place. Additionally, Blue Door offered take away options for Ainslie Village residents.

For the Street to Home program, Outreach and Case Managers continued to provide support to the community in accordance with ACT Health guidelines. While some face-to-face and transport options were limited, Vinnies teams were committed to making every reasonable effort to support rough sleepers across the ACT.

To continue to support the youngest members of our community, all Vinnies Youth and Young Adults programs cancelled face to face activities and operated via online platforms.

‘Our Mission has always been to offer a hand-up to any person in our community who seeks help,’ said John Feint, President of the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn.

‘While the method in which we do this has changed slightly, Vinnies will still be here to listen, care and support everyone through these tough times. If any members of the community experienced hardship, whether physical or emotional, we encouraged them to contact our Helpline on 13 18 12,’ he added.

In addition to Vinnies’ assistance, the ACT Government has been partnering with VolunteeringACT and the ACT Emergency Services Agency to provide emergency food relief for Canberrans most in need during the lockdown. **R**

Facing the coronavirus challenges

Since the start of the pandemic Victoria has been 'COVID-19 central', with multiple lockdowns placing extra pressure on St Vincent de Paul Society services. Here's how the state's members and volunteers have been facing the challenges...

Dee Rudebeck reports.

A lot of things were put on hold in Victoria during the last six lockdowns, but not the work of Vinnies Victoria. Our services adapted and carried on, dedicated to delivering assistance to the vulnerable groups impacted by the pandemic.



Conference home visits turned to phone visits

Although Vinnies' signature home visits haven't been possible during COVID, our volunteers were still able to help. Joan Williams, aged 86, a volunteer in Torquay, switched her 'home visits to phone visits', making calls from her house during lockdown like all our members.

Then her daughter stepped in to drop off food hampers on people's doorsteps. Although her son and daughter were worried about her continuing to volunteer, Joan says, "They realise that if I didn't keep doing something, I'd be cranky and then they'd have to put up with that!"

Like many of our volunteers, Joan says she still wants to do what she can to help her community.

Retail

The closure of Vinnies Shops has been one of our biggest challenges, but our Victorian eBay online shop has gone from strength to strength during the pandemic – demand has increased eight to nine fold. Vinnies Victoria eBay has benefitted from a number of recent donations of designer wear and is ready for business 24/7.

Retail General Manager Jeff Antcliff told [The Sydney Morning Herald](#) that the shop had many international customers too: 'We can see it by where we are sending goods ... into Venezuela, Russia - they love Nike. A rare Salvador Dalí ashtray was recently sold to a Singaporean collector for \$960.'



This highly collectible Salvador Dalí-designed ashtray was sold online by Vinnies Victoria. 'Dalí is a good draughtsman and a disgusting human being', wrote George Orwell in 1944.



Education programs went online

Our after-school education programs went online and our volunteers conducted homework clubs and individual reading sessions via Zoom with students. One volunteer was Michael Whalley, who plays Ron Wesley in the *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* stage show. He signed up after the show was suspended early last year. Michael was teamed up with eight-year-old Eamon who had joined the program to get help with reading. The pair met every week online for almost a year but did not meet in person until a special Harry Potter-themed event held earlier this year at one of Vinnies' Melbourne reading clubs between lockdowns.

Soup Vans adapted to hamper packing and delivery

Our Soup Van services around the state switched to contactless delivery of meals to our friends on the street and people experiencing food insecurity in hotels, boarding houses, towers and other residential areas. Last year, Vinnies Victoria delivered 550,000 soup van meals.

Bushfire recovery work

Vinnies Victoria completed the distribution of more than \$5.5 million worth of recovery and rebuild grants to bushfire-affected communities, including 38 higher education scholarships, a new \$250,000 sports facility and the appointment of a trauma counsellor at a Mallacoota school – with the support of funding from Victoria's Jewish community.

International student assistance

Vinnies Youth provided food and material assistance to 700 stranded international students. Calls from this group, along with other people who reported having 'no income', rose during the pandemic and many were people who had lost casual employment and had never had to ask for help before. **R**

Dee Rudebeck is PR & Communications Co-ordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria.



COVID vaccination program at VincentCare's Ozanam House

A vaccination program at Ozanam House, a 134-accommodation setting based in North Melbourne that is classified as a care facility, was welcomed by the residents who received their first round of Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines recently. This was a terrific team effort and partnership between Ozanam House and St Vincent's Hospital, whose staff will return in early September for follow-up vaccines.

Overall, 46 people were vaccinated, which included four staff.

Marking the Feast Day of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

On 9 September 2021 members of the St Vincent de Paul Society around the world again celebrated the Feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, our founder.

At the age of just 20, with support and guidance from Rosalie Rendu and in association with a group of other young men in Paris, Frederic founded what would become known as the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam was born on 23 April, 1813 in Milan, which was then occupied by the French. He went on to become a scholar, journalist, lawyer and social justice advocate, working as a professional while remaining dedicated to the work of the Society for the next 20 years. He died at the age of 40, in Marseille.

‘This year as we reflect on his extraordinary work and legacy, we are especially mindful of the call to walk even more closely with companions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic,’ said Claire Victory, National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

‘Here in Australia, lockdown is demanding. It is isolating and it is very challenging for many.

We have seen emerging mental health issues not evident before the pandemic and we have seen existing conditions aggravated by the challenging conditions.

‘One in four young people in 2020 said they were experiencing mental health challenges. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has had a detrimental impact on many young people’s mental health. Youth mental health is an important national challenge that must be addressed.

‘I attended the [National Women’s Safety Summit](#) where attention was

drawn to women and children fleeing domestic violence.

‘Extended lockdowns have seen vulnerable women and their children in deeper crisis as there is no available safety valve such as the daily work routine and other opportunities to leave the house. Compounding these circumstances, some of our services and the way they are delivered have been necessarily limited this year.

‘But the example of Frederic Ozanam inspires us to assist people with their material and personal needs in whatever way we can, to travel with them, and to demand justice on their behalf.

‘He showed us that simple acts of kindness could lead to lasting change. His mission drives us today as we seek to ensure all people have the dignity of money for basics and a place to call home,’ Ms Victory said. **R**

