

A CALL TO SERVE

VINCENTIAN STORIES

“ Let us do ”
without
hesitation
whatever good
lies at our
hands



-Frederic Ozanam



St Vincent de Paul Society
VICTORIA
good works

2018 CHAPTER

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OUR MISSION

The St Vincent de Paul 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.

OUR VISION

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering 'a hand up' to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

OUR VALUES

Commitment

Loyalty in service to our mission, vision and values.

Compassion

Welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement.

Respect

Service to all regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions.

Integrity

Promoting, maintaining and adhering to our mission, vision and values.

Empathy

Establishing relationships based on respect, trust, friendship and perception.

Advocacy

Working to transform the causes of poverty and challenging the causes of human injustice.

Courage

Encouraging spiritual growth, welcoming innovation and giving hope for the future.



STATE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear members, volunteers and employees,

You hold in your hands the sixth issue of A Call to Serve, which honours the magnificent contribution of our volunteer members. Put simply, they – and others like them who selflessly serve people in need – are the reason the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria exists.

From the moment the Society began in Australia in 1854 when our first conference was established at St Francis' Church, Lonsdale Street, in Melbourne's CBD, it was first and foremost, a volunteer organisation. Today, our members and volunteers are still the backbone that supports everything we do.

This year's stories, like those before them, continue to inspire. Within these pages you will read about our honoured members sharing their gifts of friendship, compassion, initiative, determination and faith to the benefit of individuals and the broader community.

These honoured members openly grapple with issues of wanting to do more, and yet remain true to the spirit of Blessed Frederic Ozanam's model of Servant Leadership. Our ageing membership is clearly a challenge to the future of the Society, and yet the stories illustrate the ongoing influence of our members and their good works in their local communities. And regarding the Society's future, one story in particular shows that our young members are continuing to live out our foundational story with joyous exuberance.

I congratulate each of the honoured members for their service, but at the same time we must recognise that their conference members are always part of these success stories as well. Being a member is to be part of a team and our teams do extraordinary work to achieve the level of assistance they provide every year to people struggling with personal hardship, the cost of living and loneliness. I commend these stories to you all.

Kevin McMahon

State President

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria



JOHN McCARTHY OAM

A GIFT FOR FRIENDSHIP

Norlane Conference's John McCarthy doesn't just believe in the Christian Gospel, he lives it out every day. When asked to pick a passage from the Bible that he's most guided by, John can't go past Matthew 25:35–40:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.”

This passage has come to signify the personal mission that was first sparked in John as a young man while studying for the priesthood in the seminary. Over the years, John's mission has only been strengthened by his devotion to his work as a conference member and volunteer.

Becoming a Vincentian was, for John, both a way of helping people and a strong evocation of his faith and adherence to Catholic Social Teaching. His approach models much of what St Vincent de Paul Society Founder Frederic Ozanam himself taught and enacted.

Geelong's northern suburbs of Norlane, Corio and North Shore are some of Victoria's most disadvantaged areas, and volunteers from Norlane Conference make, on average, 10–12 home visits every day, Monday to Friday, which amounts to more than 220 visits per month.

This work has taught John much about people, their various needs and the importance of seeing God in each person's unique make-up. Getting to know each and every person they visit allows the volunteers to respond to everyone's circumstances.

John says the work is so much more than merely handing out vouchers, and he couldn't do this work without support from his fellow volunteers. They motivate him through their ability to manage a heavy workload with care and love. John sees the volunteers honouring the Society's foundational story of kindness and respect; as Frederic said, “Yours must be a work of love, of kindness, you must give of your time, your talent, yourselves”, and in always looking to do more.

“So many people we assist have their backs to the walls and we help in whatever way we can. We review cases in detail. Our fortnightly conference meetings often go for three to four hours.”

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

John is renowned for his thoroughness in attending to all details requiring follow up. In this he mirrors both St Vincent de Paul (“To be fully effective, charity must be organised”) and Society Co-Founder St Louise de Marillac, who was also known for combining tireless dedication to administrative duties along with her loving care for people that society had turned its back on.

John's office is a shrine to both this disciplined observance of administrative and financial conference matters and his faith. The book shelves and cupboards are lined with folders recording a chronology of John's involvement in conference work, as well as religious images.

As one conference member reflected, “It is true to say John has been running Norlane Conference for the last 21 years”.

“I don’t do as many home visits nowadays; more the ringing people, sorting out payment for things like rent arrears, car expenses, white goods, arranging skips where people need help with clean ups when landlords complain.”

While these days John keeps in the background, he and his wife Elizabeth remain in touch with the stark realities facing the people the volunteers assist, and provide back up for home visits when necessary.

John sees new demands emerging, such as the rising costs of pharmaceuticals, yet another pressure point for people already stretched past their limits. The conference always does what it can, such as helping a recovering addict to cover the cost of methadone (a crucial step in the road to recovery), or a person with a chronic health condition struggling with the cost of essential medications.

John understands that conferences operate on two crucial levels: material support and emotional and spiritual support. They overlap, of course, but for John being a Vincentian is foremost a spiritual experience that leads to action. This calls to mind how St Vincent de Paul Co-Founder Blessed Rosalie Rendu gently reminded Frederic Ozanam when he dropped off firewood at the house of a family in need, that the firewood was only partly the reason he was there.

John enthuses about the model of the home visit as being the unique foundation of conference work.

“Meeting people on their own territory, being invited into their homes and responding practically and swiftly. This is unique to the Society and is a wonderful way of connecting with people.”

John feels there is much to be proud about: the Society ethos, its foundational story and the fact it’s not beholden to government.

This allows conferences to stand apart from other agencies that rely on government funding. “We can be our own master,” he says.

But, like any large organisation, John recognises that conferences have their own struggles; people leave and there are different views to navigate, but John’s faith means he trusts in God, and he has an absolute and irrevocable belief that challenges are there to be overcome.

John also understands that it begins from one’s own stance and actions. As he says, “To master the world, you must first master yourself”. He firmly believes if you want others to follow, you must first burn with the “fire of God’s love” that St Vincent de Paul so aptly urged. As The Rule says, “No work of charity is foreign to the Society”, and anything, and everything, is possible.

PRISON, PRAYER, PEACE

For 20 years, John was a familiar face at several prisons where he was highly regarded by both the prisoners and the officers. If there was a prisoner in solitary confinement struggling to cope, John would be often one of the first people the prison officials would call. His ability to relate to people from all walks of life has served him well.

Much like Ozanam, John has a gift for friendship. He has also demonstrated another Vincentian quality – the capacity for supporting people in desperate situations.

He recalls visiting men in maximum security confined to their cells for 23 hours a day. One of these men pressed his palm up on the Perspex glass divider, and John placed his own hand on the other side as a gesture of contact and human connection. During another regular visit, a serious offender would always offer to make John a coffee, which he’d then pass through the food slot.

John received as much respect and friendship from the men he visited as he gave.

“I draw inspiration from Our Lord, St Paul, my favourite apostle, the Sacred Heart, and St Francis of Assisi. I also admire greatly the late Fred Hollows who spent his life helping those who couldn’t afford basic eye care.”

John remembers giving a copy of St Francis of Assisi’s Peace Prayer to a distraught young woman trying to overcome substance abuse. She had hit rock bottom, and the serenity of the prayer seemed to have given her hope. “Looking into her eyes it was like a light switch went on,” says John.

A ‘LIVING SAINT’

John is very proud of another organisation he’s involved with, the Geelong Food Relief Centre, which provides value-for-money grocery items in return for vouchers which people obtain from various local charities and community organisations including Norlane conference. The conference reimburses the centre for the equivalent cost of the vouchers it hands out. John once served as

one of its board directors, and he remains actively involved in the organisation, which continues to be generously supported by local philanthropic organisations and community agencies. While Norlane Conference remains John’s main focus, he is also involved in many other good works, such as hospital visitation and taking communion to the sick and the elderly. John served on St Thomas’ Norlane Parish Council for 17 years, and many other committees and boards, such as chairing the Barwon Disability Resource Council.

In 2015, John was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his services to the Norlane community. He has been described as a ‘living saint’.

There is little doubt that Matthew’s Gospel has touched every corner of John’s life and service, and will continue to do so for years to come.

“I truly believe that the Society gives us all an incredible opportunity to energise ourselves and make a difference to people’s lives. Norlane conference will be here for as long as we are needed.”

A snapshot of service

1995	Joined Norlane Conference
1997	Commenced Prison Visitation
2004 – 2007	Western Central Council President
2011	Treasurer, Norlane Conference
2013	Secretary, Norlane Conference
2016	Member, Geelong Hospital visitation team



PATT
50

Vinnies
GERALDINE
Volunteer



Vinnies

GOING GREEN
ASK ME HOW!
Vinnies



GERALDINE GRIMMETT

A WOMAN OF MANY HATS

Geraldine Grimmett is a woman of contradiction. She has a gentle grace, and yet is imbued with a formidable vitality and drive, which belie her age.

Geraldine is well-known around the traps for her trademark hats, but, as one of St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's long-serving Vinnies Shops volunteers, they're certainly not the only hats that Geraldine wears.

Despite being honoured for her 25 years of outstanding service across two Vinnies Shops – at Mont Albert and the former Surrey Hills – Geraldine remains nonplussed at all the fuss, and insists that the attention be put back where it belongs: on the Mont Albert shop and its volunteers.

Turning the pages in her cherished photo albums, Geraldine remembers every volunteer's name and the role they each played in making the Vinnies Shops a success. She remembers some intriguing stories, too. Geraldine knows everyone's quirks and often smiles when talking about her volunteers, past and present. These two shops have been her life's work for a quarter of a century.

In Geraldine's mind, Vinnies Mont Albert and its volunteers are intertwined. Neither would exist without the other and she understands the shop's importance in people's daily lives. With so many people now living alone, coming into a Vinnies Shop might be the only time in the day they have a conversation with another person and experience genuine human contact.

Geraldine describes Vinnies Mont Albert as a house of welcome. In her self-effacing way, Geraldine explains that time is what she has to offer and

that it has been a most worthwhile investment, echoing the sentiment of St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's Co-Founder Blessed Rosalie Rendu who often spoke of the importance of taking time to "be kind and love".

Some who have volunteered alongside Geraldine expand on what this shop is really about and the contribution that Geraldine has made, Monday through to Friday (and formerly Saturdays), since 1993:

“Over these years I've observed Geraldine working in the footsteps of Blessed Rosalie Rendu, caring for people who have entered either of the two Vinnies Shops she has managed. Geraldine's example has been to show respect, discretion and care to everyone equally.” - Helene Emery

“I worked for many years in human resources and have never seen a better example of a high performing team than that led by Geraldine. She identifies and nurtures the talents of individuals to the betterment of the shop. All the volunteers I know who worked with her loved and respected her. She would not ask anyone to undertake a task she would not undertake herself.”

- Patrick McGlin

CARE AND COMPASSION

A word that is often raised in relation to Geraldine is compassion; and she shows an endless capacity for this quality when dealing with her team of volunteers and customers.

Volunteers speak of Geraldine regularly calling to ask about people's health after an illness, visiting them in hospital and staying in touch after a bereavement. She makes the effort to know the personal circumstances of all her volunteers, in an unobtrusive way.

“When volunteers were sick and didn't have anyone to talk to, I'd ask how they are. Even when they have families, they don't always want to discuss some matters with family members.”

Geraldine attributes much of this to her upbringing. Born in the 1930s – during the Great Depression – Geraldine, an only child, grew up in a family with a strong sense of civic and moral duty and, from an early age, she was encouraged to help people doing it tough. Her parents also taught her to be respectful, and she believes that as a young child she learned a great deal about people's natures and this has held her in good stead throughout her life.

In the past, Geraldine trained as a mothercraft nurse, and she travelled extensively with families who employed her. This skill took her to large stations in outback Australia, where her adaptability and strong work ethic came to the fore. She would take on additional roles, such as cook when there was a need. This was something she adopted later when working in retail. As Geraldine puts it: “I have made the best of whatever I could.”

LEADING THROUGH EXAMPLE

In 1993, as a parishioner of St Francis Xavier, Box Hill, Geraldine learned that the conference was looking for volunteers at their Union Road Surrey Hills shop. Thanks to her past experience working in op-shops and other retail outlets, she quickly became a valuable team member. When the manager left, Geraldine took the reins.

Geraldine has a canny knowledge of the true value of items and prices them accordingly. Her motto is always to price the donations quickly and get them out on the floor.

In the late nineties when it was decided the Surrey Hills premises was no longer suitable, the move to Mont Albert began in earnest. In those days, funds were limited, and Geraldine knew that the only way that the job would get done was if everyone rolled up their sleeves.

Among her team of cherished volunteers were retired carpenters, handymen and capable women who could help to bring the shop to the required standard.

This kind of teamwork brought everyone together, with volunteers' painting, building shelves, cleaning; each one invested in seeing the shop succeed. Geraldine goes well beyond the job description and never asks anyone to undertake a task she wouldn't undertake herself.

Geraldine believes she learns more from people than what they learn from her. “No-one knows everything,” she says. “I learn from all my volunteers.”

In the beginning, when seeking volunteers, Geraldine advertised through local church newsletters but everyone was welcome, regardless of background; building a relationship with each other and the customer was always the key.

SEEING STRENGTH IN OTHERS

Some Vinnies Shop volunteers have a tendency to shy away from new roles preferring to stay safely in their comfort zone. Often, this is due to a lack of confidence, a trait that Geraldine seems to quickly enable others to overcome.

One such volunteer is Liz O'Brien. Despite having volunteered at the shop for 15 years, Liz never put her hand up to be on the cash register because she was nervous about having to deal directly with customers. But Geraldine would have none of that. While acknowledging Liz's anxiety, it was through gentle persuasion that Geraldine gave Liz the confidence to give the register a go.

Today, Liz says she thoroughly enjoys communicating with customers and looks forward to her time in the shop, something, she admits, she would never have experienced had Geraldine not given her a little nudge.

Geraldine herself recalls challenges such as being asked to help with the off-site coordination of the public's support in the aftermath of one of Victoria's worst bushfires in 2009. Always the consummate manager, when her volunteers came to her asking how they would manage, Geraldine assured them, "Of course you'll manage; you all know what to do. Have faith and everything will be alright."

Blackburn South Conference President Tony Keaney says this is just another example of how Geraldine reflects the true Vincentian spirit. She has always treated people and, especially those requiring assistance, with respect and dignity.

It's no surprise then that Geraldine is a well-known face among the Mont Albert shopping village.

She's been a great supporter of the local retail precinct and served for many years on the committee for the Christmas street party.

Every year, Geraldine organised chairs from nearby Vinnies Shops for the parties.

Geraldine is aware that she is getting on in years, as are many of her contemporaries. She praises the ongoing commitment of the volunteers, and hopes Vinnies Shops will retain the traditional essence of what many volunteers have built with love and dedication over many years.

"I have been very privileged to have good volunteers. Some of the original group are still with us. The shop has provided an immense sense of belonging and community and I want this to continue."

Volunteer, manager, coordinator, counsellor, friend—and a woman not ready to hang up her hat just yet.

A snapshot of service

- 1993** Joined Box Hill Conference
- 1993** Commenced volunteering with the Surrey Hills Vinnies Shop and then later, the Mont Albert Vinnies Shop
- 1994** Appointed Manager, Surrey Hills Vinnies Shop, a role that continued at Mont Albert shop until 2017



EVERT JANSEN

UNWAVERING COMMITMENT

Evert Jansen, a Vincentian of more than 45 years, is a man of unquestioning faith. Migrating to Australia from Holland as a 16-year-old, Evert had been raised nominally Dutch Reformed Church but, after an intense search to find the right religion Evert saw an advertisement for people seeking to learn about Catholicism.

For almost a year, Evert read every pamphlet about Catholicism he could get his hands on. During this time he wrote many letters to the church and received thoughtful answers, culminating with an invitation to meet with the local priest. Evert took his time making an appointment, expecting another sales pitch, yet, refreshingly, the older Irish priest did not rush to recruit him, and instead encouraged his search with further reading material.

Finally, the priest delivered an edict to Evert: “You either believe the tenets of the Catholic doctrine or you do not”. There were no half measures to being a Catholic, he was told.

This forthright message sat well with Evert, and so his religious flame was lit in his mid-20s with a conversion to Catholicism. Meeting his Dutch-born wife-to-be Mia soon after further consolidated his belief that he had made the right choice. A Catholic from birth, Mia was able to fill in many pieces of the jigsaw that were missing because of his late introduction.

At this point, however, Evert was unaware of the St Vincent de Paul Society. It was his brother-in-law who invited him to join and it seemed to him like a perfect way to live out his faith.

In 1973, Evert became a Vincentian, but while his newfound fervour at becoming a Catholic would soon be matched by his enthusiasm and joy in the service of others, it took him a while to grow into the role.

“The first time I did a home visit, I felt at a loss and worried that I might say the wrong thing. I was also not used to public displays of grief. My wife has always been a great help with this. Another person who helped me enormously through his example was Bill Hitchcock, a wonderful Vincentian, who is no longer alive. Bill was an alcoholic who was dry for 40 years. I’ve never met a couple like Bill and his wife Jean who spent so much time helping others. If he got a call at midnight, he’d tell the person he’d be there in five minutes. Bill taught me the true meaning of humility and service.”

“Bill and I often went out together in the early days. We had some funny encounters amid the harsh reality of people struggling to manage. The visits grow on you and you appreciate that you are helping people in different ways. You learn to be comfortable with people in different circumstances.”

An unwavering commitment to Belgrave Conference has seen Evert and Mia visiting people across a wide area of the Dandenong Ranges and surrounds, taking in Upwey to Selby, Belgrave South to Sherbrooke. He has been confronted by situations far removed from his own sphere of reference: intergenerational poverty, teenagers with children, and families where no-one has a job.

But the experience of being with people in their homes, and often at their most vulnerable, is, for Evert, to be made humble in the presence of God.

Evert's dedication to the Society also involved helping with the hands-on work to convert an old butcher's shop in Ferntree Gully into a Vinnies Shop. He volunteered there and at the Bayswater Vinnies Shop between 1977 and 2017.

Evert and Mia also visit people in a number of aged-care facilities, bringing communion and companionship. Their faith and commitment to service are bound together. They attend Mass every day with Evert happy to assist around the parish in whichever way he can.

A SOCIETY DOUBLE ACT

Evert is at pains to acknowledge Mia's contribution. Together, they personify another incredible Society double act. Evert describes the ease with which, as a couple, they can jump into their car whenever they receive a call for assistance. He and Mia receive calls for home visits most weekdays and they try to respond on the same day.

Every week, for 22 years, Evert and another member, Judd Moore, visited St John of God Accord disability services in Lilydale. The volunteers helped the clients with learning to write and other useful skills, particularly in the annual lead up to the Christmas play.

Until recently, Evert and Mia also provided weekend respite care every month to Robert*, who was born with Prader Willi syndrome. Robert has significant intellectual disabilities, but despite the intense challenges posed by the disability, for almost 40 years. Evert and Mia were his dedicated weekend carers.

***“Life has been good to Mia and me. We want to give back to society. We have two healthy sons; they now have families of their own. It was good for them to experience what other people face in their lives.*”**

Robert will always have a special place in the lives of all our family.”

Evert has clearly taken on many challenges that others would find extremely confronting, but he believes that any task can get easier over time.

Over the years, Evert has prayed for guidance and has learned to become accustomed to the occasional feeling of helplessness in the face of the rising number of people needing assistance.

The cost of living, particularly housing and utilities, is beyond the capacity of many.

He has noticed that as more people are attracted to the tree change lifestyle of the Dandenong Ranges, rents have also increased.

***“I always try to give more the first time, never knowing if we will see this person again. With all these cases, I'd like to do more. Some cases stay with you – the woman whose husband walked out on her with no warning, the young woman rejected by her family. As a man and a father, I cannot understand what some people do, but I try not to judge.*”**

“I remind myself that I am following in the footsteps of Founder Frederic Ozanam. It is good to know we are all touched by the same sense of humanity and realisation we are the same. We just have different problems and battles we must face.”

A LIFE FILLED WITH LOVE

While Evert understands that many young adults or people with young families are so busy with the work/life balance that they would struggle to find time outside the family for volunteering, he knows he is blessed to have had the call.

***“I wish people were more compassionate towards the people we assist as we have a shortage of members. Anyone with free time should consider volunteering.*”**

I get up in the morning and know I have things to do; worthwhile things. We all need this to keep going. It's important to put something back into society, to help people.

“For me, volunteering is simply living out my faith in practical ways. The work can be challenging and you have to overcome your judgement and what will confront you, but the rewards are tremendous. You need nothing in return. That said, I always remember the first time I received a hug from someone we had assisted. Once you get a hug, that is worth more than anything!”

Evert cannot imagine a life without his Vinnies involvement and stresses the importance of remaining true to the foundations of the St Vincent

de Paul Society. As St Vincent de Paul argued in the 1600s, to be truly Christian one must become a servant to the poor, for it's there that Christ dwells.

“Our volunteer work gives my life a great sense of purpose and meaning. I would tell anyone considering becoming a conference member, you will gain great satisfaction from being of service in this way. Once you are familiar with the work, you will realise your life will be empty without it.

“Who we are and what we do needs to stand out. Our actions are a sign of who we are. How does the Society want to be viewed by the community?”

**Not his real name.*

A snapshot of service

2008 – 2011	Regional president, Knox-Sherbrooke Regional Council
2007 – 2012	Conference president
2011 – 2012	Twinning officer
1977 – 2015	Volunteer, Ferntree Gully Vinnies Shop
2002 – 2017	Volunteer, Bayswater Vinnies Shop
1973 – present	Belgrave Conference member



MARY & GRAHAM FARRELL

LEONGATHA'S GOOD SAMARITANS

The story of the late Mary and Graham Farrell in many ways parallels the story of the Good Samaritan. Mary and Graham devoted their life to helping people with immediacy and the utmost discretion.

Both Mary and Graham were devout Catholics and their good works were always done in the true spirit of St Vincent de Paul and along social justice principles. Family and friends are at pains to point out that most people have no idea of the extent of people assisted because Mary and Graham were very discreet and shunned recognition of any kind. This approach mirrors the humility that Frederic Ozanam espouses; we must give of ourselves selflessly, expecting nothing in return.

As fellow long-term member of Leongatha Conference John Casey recalls:

“Graham was the kind of bloke that if he saw someone lying on the ground he’d pick him up and take him home. His was always an immediate response to need, whatever it was; food or paying the rent. He acted automatically, never had to think what to do.”

Angelina Polato, another long-term Leongatha Conference member, recalls that “whenever anyone spoke of the St Vincent de Paul Society, you automatically thought of Mary... Mary was ‘it’; she represented the Society in Leongatha. Her life was all about service to others.”

Daughter Bernadette Farrell recalls that her parents took the privacy of others extremely seriously.

“They didn’t discuss people’s circumstances or problems. They kept people’s secrets and never passed them onto anyone.”

In 1974, the Farrells moved to Leongatha and through the Church quickly became involved with the St Vincent de Paul Society. Shortly after this, they provided the Society with the use of a bungalow at the back of their house to accommodate the mounting supply of donations. Clothing continued to be donated, sorted and distributed from here until 1978.

In 1976, a small portable building was donated and placed at the rear of the church. This little shop was quickly filled to capacity and the need for a larger premises became evident. Mary and Graham were heavily involved with the setup of the little shop and then with the subsequent purchase and store fit out of the new premises at Michael Place.

None of this would have happened had Mary not have offered her time to run the shop, as Bernadette explains:

“As the volunteer manager Mary was the first one there to open the shop and the last one there to close it. On the open day a lot of people came through and said how marvellous it was. Mary talked to them and asked them to become volunteers and help out... And so began a new chapter in the St Vincent de Paul Society in Leongatha.”

Mary and Graham were a great team. While both were good at initiating ideas, Mary was usually the one to make these ideas happen. She was always looking to make improvements to the shop

and ensure it was fit for purpose. Graham was the backbone for Mary and anyone else who needed support. Graham spent a great deal of time at the centre, which catered to much of Gippsland, once he retired. Often he and the men would leave with a packed lunch and a thermos knowing they wouldn't be back before closing time even though they would try to combine dropping off, collecting furniture and emptying the donation bins in one trip.

“Dad was happy to be doing whatever was needed to be done within the shop or out on the road. He was a gentle and kind man. He enjoyed having a chat with people. He had a lot of patience and wisdom.”

The conference and the centre could see that the district was growing and they realised that a much larger premises would one day be required. In 1991, a block of land in Peart Street in the main retail centre, an ideal future location, was purchased. Mary had gained a great deal of knowledge from the Michael Place centre and was instrumental in the planning and construction of the current, purpose-built facility which was officially opened in May 1996.

Mary and Graham embraced change, providing it would benefit the people they served. They were always looking to the future and had clear long-term goals. Mary had been a book-keeper and an office manager before marrying, and she drew on these skills often, particularly, when inducting conference members and keeping them up to date with new procedures and protocols. She was often called upon to teach record-keeping and office practices to other centre managers and volunteers.

Back then, the centre was only open Mondays to Fridays and later Saturday mornings, so if there was an out-of-hours emergency, such as a house fire, people would knock on the Farrells' door asking for help. Mary and Graham would quickly ascertain what was needed and then take people to the Vinnies Shop and assistance centre where they would be helped with clothing, toiletries, food, kind words and helpful information about how to get through the next few days.

As Bernadette explains:

“Mum was a well-known, caring identity around Leongatha. When people worked out Mary was my mum they would say ‘Oh! Your mum is the lady from the op shop!’ Then they would often tell me about the help she had given them and my dad and other volunteers coming around with furniture or other things they needed.”

“My parents were always there for people. They led by example and also recognised that actions speak louder than words and they were always in action.”

Bernadette remembers her parents taking her and her brothers on a trip to the crisis accommodation centre, Ozanam House, in North Melbourne. As she says, it was very much an “eye-opener for a young child from the country to understand that these men did not have a home of their own and these were the people the St Vincent de Paul Society was helping”.

Every team needs a strong leader, good organisation and someone who cares – and that is exactly what Mary provided.

She treated everyone as equal and expected that everyone did their bit to achieve a shared goal. That was the beginning and the end of it. Her skill was organising everyone to get the job done. She was a hard worker and she expected everyone else to work to the best of their ability, too.

While Mary's focus was firmly on the shop and assistance centre, she also held several other positions in the Society. She was the secretary and treasurer for the Regional Council for many years. One conference member, who wishes to remain anonymous, remembers her encouragement and strong advocacy when injustice and inequity confronted the conference.

“Several decades ago, I came across a child with severe physical disabilities that prevented him from enjoying a normal childhood. The surgical costs were beyond the parents. I talked to Mary

about whether the Society could cover the cost. She confronted the enormity of the issue and told me firmly, 'Just do it'. That child went on to lead a happy and successful life."

Due to Mary's legendary organisational acumen she was put in charge of organising the State-wide donated goods sent to a warehouse in the aftermath of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires so they could be distributed to people in need as quickly as possible.

Mary did all this while juggling a busy family life. In addition to coaching netball, she was also the netball club president and office bearer for many years, and both she and Graham were involved in the boys' sporting activities. Mary and Graham would often chauffeur, not only their children, but other children around to sporting, musical and other activities.

Finding time for prayer was extremely important to Mary and Graham. They and a group of conference members regularly said the rosary in each other's homes. As one conference member Angelina Polato remembers, there was an emphasis on sharing the founder Frederic Ozanam's story:

"His story was the centrepiece of our work and we knew the stories. It was the impetus for our visiting people."

Like so many honoured in A Call to Serve, Mary and Graham were dedicated to every aspect of parish

life, such as running fetes and looking after the school students and their families.

They recognised the importance of community, and knew that by helping one person, you often helped an entire family.

"We are really proud of what our parents achieved. They have helped so many people, more than anyone knows about. They didn't want accolades. Their joy came from knowing they had helped someone." - Bernadette Farrell

Angelina Polato misses them terribly and says their absence has "left a big hole, but the St Vincent de Paul Society will always be here in Leongatha. It's an institution that's here to help. We pick people up, brush them off and help them back on their feet. Always have, always will."

Bernadette adds:

"Mary and Graham were quiet achievers. It came naturally to them to try and make the world a better place by helping those in need. They didn't view themselves as special and knew it took everyone doing their part to make this happen. The people who they helped saw them as special and beacons of hope at times when their lives were not going so well. They appreciated the care and matter-of-fact attitude that Mary and Graham had about how the world could be righted again. God bless."

A snapshot of service

Mary Farrell:

1975 Joined Leongatha Conference (served in a number of regional positions, including treasurer and secretary)

Graham Farrell:

1975 Joined Leongatha Conference (conference president for a term)

In 2014, after 40 years of service, Mary and Graham retired from Leongatha Conference; Graham due to ill health and Mary to care for him. Graham died in 2015 and Mary in 2017.



MATT DILEO

RIPPLES OF KINDNESS

This year's Rising Vincentian, Matt Dileo has mastered the 'ripple effect' – just like the ripples that extend out from where a stone hits the surface of the water, Matt is having an impact on many works within the St Vincent de Paul Society. Most notably, with Young Vinnies' Special Works.

In the case of these programs with young people, the ripple effect isn't only far-reaching – it can be transformative.

Much like St Vincent de Paul Society Founder, Frederic Ozanam, Matt first became involved as a university student. It was 2012 and Matt was volunteering with Vinnies Roadshow, an annual school holiday program for 6- to-12-year-olds run by conferences in three Victorian regional towns.

Secondary students from local Catholic schools are encouraged to become involved, engendering an awareness of local needs and the active role the Society can play in people's lives.

The following year, Matt volunteered with the Young Vinnies' youth camps. Camps are a Special Work of the Society and operate as a conference. After seeing the young peoples' enthusiasm first hand, and realising how much they gained from it, Matt was hooked. He's been coming back to Vinnies ever since.

At 25, and now a qualified teacher, Matt is six months into his four-year term as Camps Conference President. The conference has 10

members and meets every two months during the three main school holidays.

As president, Matt focuses on overseeing the programs and helping others achieve what they need to do, including enlisting volunteers through Vinnies' networks and universities, and encouraging members to develop their skills as camp leaders.

“We have recently been able to enlist 16-to-18-year-olds to volunteer on camps. That's been a positive breakthrough. Ideally, we need about 30 volunteers for 40 kids. It can be challenging getting this number. But last summer, after I sent out a call for more volunteers, the response was amazing! It is reassuring how people come out of the woodwork at the vital moment. Perhaps it was a flow-on effect of kindness.”

Or perhaps, a ripple effect.

This special work is highly valued by the students who participate, their families, their schools and the conference members who refer the students. The camps have several key aims: to offer a memorable experience for students who may otherwise miss out due to a family breakdown, bereavement or social disadvantage.

The camps and Roadshow also promote the idea of establishing conferences in schools, known as College Conferences.

There are wonderful benefits for young people having these experiences in their formative years; often sowing a seed for later involvement with the Society. Matt describes what he has gained from his involvement:

“I’ve gained so much experience and skill working with young people, understanding what energises them, how to relate to them and to recognise when they are upset or something is wrong. These are all valuable, practical skills you don’t learn in lecture theatres.”

The roles of teacher and Vinnies volunteer dovetail nicely. Matt’s school has a Mini Vinnies and is initiating Footsteps of Frederic, a leadership program for young people who have completed year 12. Matt is a proud, vocal champion of the Society and the breadth of what it offers – from practical assistance to social justice and advocacy.

On the Youth Roadshow T-shirts is the Ozanam quote:

“Yours must be a work of love, of kindness, you must give your time, your talents, yourselves.”

It’s a quote that resonates strongly with Matt, and helps explain what he means about the deep connection that can occur between two people of all ages.

“Only when giving yourself and being open to the other person is deep engagement possible. There are times where you witness the kids’ happiness, where they’re ‘in the moment’, focused on enjoying themselves and being part of the group. These moments may appear ordinary on the surface, but something special happens. Everything comes together.”

LEARNING BY DOING

As a relatively recent recruit, Matt feels he is still on a steep learning path to fully understanding the Society’s story, but he relishes the insights he has learned so far.

Matt particularly relates to Ozanam’s account of being challenged by Blessed Rosalie Rendu while delivering firewood:

“Frederic was initially reluctant to encounter the person; he just wanted to drop off the firewood and leave. Blessed Rosalie Rendu challenged him to connect and understand the personal circumstances. I remember initially feeling quite challenged and out of my comfort zone doing a program with a group of people I’d never met before, until I opened myself to the possibilities that could emerge from this encounter.”

“You have to be engaging. It is really important and may be more important than talking about things. You have to live what you say, otherwise, it lacks authenticity.”

In all his interactions, Matt takes inspiration from people close to him.

“Watching my family, friends, people I work with as a teacher, I see their qualities and what they achieve. I guess my goal is to emulate many of the fantastic skills I see in these people and utilise these on the camps and in my duties as president.”

TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT

Matt is often struck by the challenges the students face, not to mention their incredible resilience and insight. He remembers one camp where a brother and sister attended, and then, the following year, seeing the boy was there on his own, without his sister. She had passed away in tragic circumstances.

“This camp was the first time the boy had given himself licence to enjoy himself. At home he was constantly reminded of his loss, and this was very hard for him. That has stuck with me. I still wonder how he is getting on.”

Matt says his work with Vinnies has offered him many opportunities that he wouldn’t have had otherwise, and he was privileged to take part in a

Society-run immersion program to an Indigenous community, Nganmariyanga, near Wadeye, 300km from Darwin. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet with many inspiring young people from across Australia.

Matt recalls one episode that occurred at the end of an activity with the six- to eight-year-olds, when everyone was exhausted and relaxing in front of a movie:

“One of the young boys looked at me and commented that I looked tired. That’s never happened before with a child that young. These kids were more switched on about others and saw things differently to most children of their age.”

Matt also speaks of the considerable satisfaction of being a part of something that makes a difference to young people’s lives.

“When a program finishes there is always a great sense of having achieved something worthwhile. It’s that sense of togetherness: together we achieved something wonderful.

“Feedback can be fantastic; we write letters to the kids and they write letters back and to each other. I have kept them all. There are always so many positive messages that make you want to keep going. Messages as simple as: ‘Dear Matt, you’re awesome!’

“No matter what the program is, I always enjoy watching the relationships that develop between the students, and the students and leaders, and the leaders themselves. I’ve met so many good people through Vinnies.”

THAT RIPPLE EFFECT

Matt knows he’s blessed to be part of Vinnies’ Special Works. He sees himself playing a small role in creating a better world, and wants to be part of addressing long-term change. He believes the camps are a good start, helping students to recognise their worth, and strive to be their best in order to actively participate in society.

In the future Matt would like to see camps that engage older students, but in the meantime he is focused on up-skilling the volunteers and students who participate. Matt’s also open to any future roles in the Society.

Young Vincentians like Matt help to ensure the youthful spirit of Ozanam is ever present and sowing wonderful seeds of good works with young people who may represent the next generation of Vincentians. His story is yet another Vincentian example of Ozanam’s words: “In my life I want to become better and do a little good”.

A snapshot of service

2012	Joined South Eastern Young Vinnies
2015	Joined Kids Camps Special Works Conference
2016 – 2017	Secretary, Kids Camps Special Works Conference
2018	Joined State Youth Team and President of Kids Camps Special Works Conference

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