

# the Record

Winter 2017



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

# NATIONAL CONGRESS 2017

ONE SOCIETY A UNITED VOICE



'I want to see what we are not seeing. It's always a challenge to step outside my comfort zone. I want to know if I am up for it, and to take a risk or two.'

TONI MUIR, ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY  
TASMANIAN STATE PRESIDENT





St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

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

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

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## Editor's note

***At the National Council meeting in Melbourne late last year, Bertrand Ousset, former President of the Society in France, spoke poignantly of the Vincentian vocation as companionship with the people we assist, or, in his words, those who accompany us.***

The word *companion* comes from the Latin meaning 'with whom one eats bread.'

We generally eat with people we feel comfortable with. As well as providing nourishment, sharing a meal also nourishes friendship.

But being open to the people who accompany us on our journey means facing the challenge posed by NSW President Denis Walsh:

"We need to look at the whole structure of the Society... if we are really going to be companions, if we are really going to be friends with people, if we are really going to help them break the cycle of loneliness..."

For this edition of *The Record* we ask several regional presidents, youth, and others attending the 2017 National Congress in Adelaide from 6-8

October, for their thoughts on living out the vocation and spirituality of companionship across Australia.

In articles on pages 20 and 26, the Society's Queensland and Tasmanian state presidents bring home the fact that even picture perfect towns in their areas contain an underbelly of poverty. South Australian president Cathy Beaton shares a personal account of companionship between herself, her husband and a person experiencing homelessness in Berri on page 27. And on page 38 Vincentian Refugee Network advocate Tim McKenna, who visited Manus Island in April, shows how companionship extends not only to the people we assist at a local level but also those seeking asylum while being condemned to despair in our offshore detention centres.

One of the key reasons for holding the congress is to reflect on how we can attract and retain new members. For Clare Victory, deputy president of the Society's National Council, that could be as simple as going about what we do joyfully, to be excited about it, and sharing our stories.

Optimism from others attending the congress, along with their expectations of what the national event might achieve, are sprinkled throughout this publication. It's not long now until the weekend of 6-8 October. Let the brainstorming begin! ♦

*I am hopeful that the Congress will be held in an environment of co-operation, goodwill and sharing. If this is not achievable we will fall far short of our ideals and expectations. The Congress will not be the end of the journey, but the beginning and it will require us all to work hard with a united voice to achieve whatever the agreed outcome statement delivers. ♦*

John Forrest - State President  
St Vincent de Paul Society Qld



## IN THIS ISSUE

<b>3</b>	<b>EDITOR'S NOTE</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>FAR NORTH NSW</b> Tweed Byron President Brian Donaghy, on the work of the Society in northern NSW	<b>28</b>	<b>CONFERENCE FEEDBACK</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>FRONTLINES</b> From the National President, Graham West.	<b>20</b>	<b>THE OTHER SIDE OF PARADISE</b> Queensland State President John Forrest on challenges on the Sunshine Coast.	<b>29</b>	<b>INDIGENOUS RIGHTS</b> <i>by Phil Glendenning</i>
<b>5</b>	<b>SOCIETY NEWS</b> The Vincentians who made this year's Queens Birthday Honours list.	<b>21</b>	<b>CARING FOR THE CARERS</b> Victorian State President Michael Liddy on a new initiative in Melbourne.	<b>32</b>	<b>REKINDLE THE FLAME: REFLECTIONS FROM A YOUTH NEWBIE</b> Kathryn Petterson on the importance of large gatherings.
<b>6</b>	<b>SOCIAL JUSTICE</b> Poignant words from the Society's National Council CEO, Dr John Falzon.	<b>22</b>	<b>RECRUITING, RETAINING, MOTIVATING</b> Canberra/Goulburn territory president Warwick Fulton on addressing membership issues.	<b>33</b>	<b>DARE TO IMAGINE</b> Patrick Wallis on his hopes for the Society's future.
<b>7</b>	<b>MORE SOCIETY NEWS</b> Dr John Falzon on ABC television's The Drum program.	<b>23</b>	<b>BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEOPLES</b> John Lochowiak on the importance of sharing his culture	<b>34-35</b>	<b>THE SOCIETY INTO THE FUTURE</b> Laura Beres on what companionship means to her and how this applies to her own journey with the Society.
<b>8</b>	<b>SPIRITUAL REFLECTION</b> <i>by Fr Troy Bobbin</i>	<b>24</b>	<b>AFTER THE BOOM</b> Western Australia President Bob Burns, on challenges faced by people in his state in a post mining boom era.	<b>37</b>	<b>PUTTING LAW AND POLITICS ON HOLD TO FURTHER HER FAITH</b> Meet Ashley Carvalho, an inspiring young Vincentian.
<b>9</b>	<b>OBITUARY</b> A tribute to revered Vincentian, Rupert Hudson.	<b>25</b>	<b>THE SOCIETY IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY</b> Northern Territory President Fay Gurr on the unique features of her state.	<b>38</b>	<b>PEOPLE SEEKING REFUGE</b> Tim McKenna on our work with asylum seekers and refugees.
<b>10</b>	<b>COMING TOGETHER</b> A prelude to the congress by Claire Victory, Deputy President of the Society's National Council.	<b>26</b>	<b>TASMANIA'S NORTHWEST COAST</b> Tasmanian President Toni Muir on life in her region following the demise of manufacturing in the state.	<b>39</b>	<b>GLOBAL SOLIDARITY</b> Frank Brassil on the Society's work in the Pacific.
<b>11</b>	<b>CONGRESS 2017 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS</b> Introducing Phil Glendenning and Larissa Behrendt.	<b>27</b>	<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S RIVERLAND</b> South Australia's President Cathy Beaton shares a personal account of her work in her region.	<b>40</b>	<b>CENTRES</b> Lindsay Dunn on serving the community through revenue raised by Vinnies stores
<b>12-15</b>	<b>FEATURE ARTICLE</b> The state of the nation starts in your street, by Dr Hugh Mackay			<b>42</b>	<b>FROM THE ARCHIVES</b> Lauded pilot delivers 1951 congress attendees a happy landing in Hobart
<b>16-17</b>	<b>FEATURE ARTICLE</b> <i>by Mario Trinidad</i> Walking with and walking together			<b>43</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS</b> European forum announces new initiative to reduce and eliminate homelessness
<b>18</b>	<b>ON THE NSW SOUTH COAST</b> NSW State President Denis Walsh on addressing poverty in Wollongong.				

# From the President

BY GRAHAM WEST

***The October Congress is an opportunity to learn from and inspire one another. There's much to be achieved from celebrating the Society's work to date, while brainstorming what we need to do as we move forward.***

We live in an extraordinary time; a time of great challenges and opportunities—social, environmental, technological.

There are new ways people connect, relate and get involved. People are not engaging in institutions and churches in the same way.

This is also a time of great extremes of poverty and wealth.

How do we respond as a Society, as individuals and as part of the church community to these challenges and opportunities?

In some ways it reminds me of the apostles—waiting for Jesus to send them a sign while they were gathered in a locked room, uncertain of what to do, as the massive changes in the wake of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection spread throughout the land.

Jesus, of course, appeared to the apostles and showed them his wounds, speaking words of comfort and reassurance: 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'. John tells us that the apostles, however, continued to need prompting and reassuring before they felt bold enough to set forth into the world.

As those who believe but have



not seen, the task ahead of us is more challenging. Just as the apostles and the early Church gathered together to pray, reflect and act, so too are we called to do the same. In our conferences, our councils, and at our Congress!

How do we reshape our world and share the good news in new ways, true to the vision of our founders, especially Blessed Frederic Ozanam? How do we ensure that we do not lock ourselves away from the world as the apostles tried to do, but rather go forth into the world, full of the Spirit as people of God, with all of our human fallibilities?

How do we ensure that no one need sleep rough in the streets of prosperous Australia; that no one need feel lonely and isolated in our community? How do we ensure that membership of the St Vincent de Paul Society is a joyful experience that brings people together?

These are some of the big questions we need to explore, but there are many more as we go forth. As the Society draws closer to the October Congress, what are some of the big questions for you? ♦

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Graham West is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

# It's an honour



*Barry Finch, second right, hosting a barbecue for new migrants in the Sydney suburb of Chatswood.*

## ***Vincentians shone on 26 January in the Australia Day 2017 honours list.***

The accolades continued on 12 June, when the official list of recipients in the Queen's Birthday Honours list was published.

They included the following:

**Barry Roy Finch: Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia** (from Sydney, NSW).

Barry has served as President of Broken Bay Central Council, Chatswood Regional Council and Forestville Conference.

His friend Bruno Spedalieri, President of Forestville Conference, has known him for 30 years. He said: 'His actions are outstanding and his achievements are powerful.'

The weekend he was acknowledged, Barry was out in the community doing what he loves—hosting a barbecue for new migrants at Our Lady of Dolours Parish in Chatswood. Known to many

as the BBQ King, you'd be hard pressed to find him without a sanger in his hand.

**John Francis D'Souza: Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia** (from Mt Gambier, South Australia).

John has devoted four decades of his time to community service. He migrated to Australia from western India with his wife and daughter in the 1970s. Soon after settling in the South Australian town of Mount Gambier, he joined the St Paul's Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, becoming president in 1983.

He founded the Central Council of South East South Australia, serving as president from 1988 to 1993, 1996 to 2000 and again in 2017.

D'Souza has further served the community through connections with the Mount Gambier Catholic Parish, Mount Gambier Public Hospital, South East Regional Community Health Service, the Mount Gambier Sheltered Workshop, South East Women's Shelter, and many other organisations.

**Mr Kevin Vincent Rucioch: Medal (OAM) in the General Division** (from Victor Harbor, South Australia). For service to the community of Victor Harbour.

**Mrs Lynette Ann Dansie: Member (AM) in the General Division** (from Marion, South Australia). For significant service to the community of South Australia through a range of voluntary roles with service organisations, and to youth.

**Christopher Acott: Member (AM) in the General Division** (From Adelaide, South Australia). For significant service to medicine and to the community.

**Mr Michael James O'Connell: Member (AM) in the General Division** (From Holden Hill, South Australia). For significant service to public administration in South Australia, particularly in the area of criminal justice, and to victims' rights. ♦



# We live in the shelter of each other

DR JOHN FALZON

**Diego Rivera, the great Mexican muralist, had one piece of advice for his students. He told them: Never withdraw from life.**

This was the centrepiece of his vocation as an artist who passionately wanted his art to come from, and to sing to, the hearts of the people, the ordinary people of Mexico and the world. His murals, like life itself, are enormous, chaotic, loving, contradictory, hilarious and tragic, all at once. To paraphrase the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda: 'The people defined him and he never stopped being one of them.'

His life was deeply fractured and flawed.

Like any of us.

In the lead-up to the October congress I have been reflecting on the St Vincent de Paul Society and this is why Diego Rivera's life and work come to mind.

It is fashionable, in a world where not only the economy but society itself is market-based, to see ourselves, individually and organisationally, as being pitted against each other in a struggle for survival and success, a struggle in which the strong and powerful inevitably dominate the weak and discarded.

But we are truest to our prophetic calling when we do not shy away from our deep brokenness. This, paradoxically, is when we are at our strongest. As Paul of Tarsus (2 Corinthians 12:10) famously claimed: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.'

We know about brokenness. We are surrounded by fragility, woundedness, pain; but not from a position of aloofness or superiority. We, the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and indeed all who share the



IMAGE: SUGAR CANE BY DIEGO RIVERA (COURTESY OF PINTEREST)

collective passion for another world, *are* a community of brokenness.

Everyone has the right to a fair crack at happiness. The world in which we live is known for its glorification of wealth and inequality, its idolatry of power, its commodification of everything. Society in the 21st century is like a factory in which people are un-made, fractured, broken, wounded.

People are isolated from each other, atomised, separated, forced to feel as if they are nothing. Young unemployed people, people living with a disability, people experiencing homelessness, sole parents and a growing number of other sections of society, are excluded and exploited while being blamed for their own exclusion and suffering. They are systematically, *not accidentally*, un-made, broken, sometimes crushed. These are the People of God, our People, *the* People. We are deeply privileged when they accompany us. We are deeply blessed when we are invited to walk in solidarity with them.

We are at our strongest when we walk together; not because we have no weaknesses but because

our shared weakness, our shared tenderness, is precisely our strength.

The Irish have a beautiful saying:

*It is in the shelter of each other that the People live.*

It is not without significance that two of the sharpest manifestations of structural inequality are homelessness and incarceration, both being the antithesis of this beautiful saying. Our market-based society teaches us that we are morally bound to stand alone, to be self-reliant, to compete, to condemn, to go it alone and to leave others to go it alone.

But this society is not the mythological *best of all possible worlds*. The People who are excluded and exploited in this world have not failed the system, as we are taught by sections of the mainstream media and political leadership. No, it is the system that has failed them. Often deliberately!

Sometimes our presence in this cold terrain is conceptualised misleadingly as charity for those who have failed to stand alone. Those who view us in this way are trying to use us to reinforce the very structures that crush people's bodies and souls.

# Dr John Falzon on *The Drum*

But ours is a prophetic calling, a gospel vocation: to make sure that the People's voices are heard and to bear witness to the urgent collective desire for another kind of society, a future society that we are modestly building now, a society in which the People *live* instead of being lost, a society in which we all give shelter to each other, instead of locking each other *out* or locking each other *up*. This latter systematic act of mass incarceration is applied especially, but not exclusively, to the First Nations Peoples and to the most recent seekers of refuge.

We have nothing to fear from telling the truth about these problems and we have every good reason to be filled with hope that progressive social change will always come from the very People who are historically crushed. This is the core message of biblical liberation. And we know it from the beautiful stories we are privileged as Vincentians to hear from the people we stand in solidarity with. Change does not happen smoothly of course, but in a jagged sequence of painful setbacks and small steps forward.

As we prepare for the October congress through reflection and dialogue, let us ask ourselves how we can better understand the world around us so that we *do not withdraw from life*. And let us imagine how, now and into the future, we can *live in the shelter of each other*. And let us feel the strength of walking together as companions in brokenness, together yearning for, and building, little by little, a just and compassionate society. ♦

Dr John Falzon is CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.



## ***The Society's National Council CEO Dr John Falzon was a guest panellist on ABC television's The Drum program on Thursday 15 June.***

Topics of discussion included elder abuse, three federal government ministers appearing before the Victorian Supreme Court for suggesting judges were going easy on terrorists, and whether an 'off the record' impersonation of US president Donald Trump by Malcolm Turnbull at the Parliament House mid-winter ball should have been leaked.

Dr Falzon refrained from saying much about Trump or Turnbull, preferring to give cleaners who cleaned up after the ball the last word. It was International Justice Day for Cleaners after all, 'and the cleaners at Parliament House haven't had a pay rise since 2012,' Dr Falzon said.

Hosted by journalist Julia Baird, Dr Falzon was joined by John Lyons, from *The Australian* newspaper, Ian

Yates, CEO of COTA Australia, and Annika Smethurst, from the *Herald Sun*.

It was Dr Falzon's first appearance on the program. In May he was invited by the online political activist group, GetUp, to deliver a few words to the federal government ahead of the 2017 Budget.

Filmed outside Canberra's Parliament House, Dr Falzon's short though poignant message resonated far and wide, clocking up as many as 118,000 views on GetUp's Facebook page within days of the video being posted.

Dr Falzon spoke on behalf of young people and others facing cuts to incomes and essential services, as well as those who had been locked out of the job market altogether. Meanwhile tax cuts for large corporations and the wealthy continue.

"Our economy seems to be based on the perverse notion of 'to those who have much, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even the little they have will be taken away,' Dr Falzon said. ♦

# Placing our lives in the potter's hands

BY FR TROY BOBBIN

***The National Council has, for the first time in more than 60 years, agreed to hold a National Congress in 2017.***

The Society is very excited to be holding this historic gathering at St Aloysius College in Adelaide on the weekend of 6–8 October 2017. We are expecting somewhere between 150 and 200 participants, consisting of Regional Council Presidents, National Council members, other targeted members, especially young people, and some staff.

As we approach this historic moment in the Society's journey in Australia, it might be good for all of us to reflect on how we can let the Holy Spirit mould us, just as a potter moulds their clay.

This metaphor was used in ancient times in the book of Jeremiah (18:1-6):

*The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: rise up, be off to the potter's house; there I will give you my message. I went down to the potter's house and there he was, working at the wheel. Whenever the object of clay which he was making turned out badly in his hands, he tried again, making of the clay another object of whatever sort he pleased. Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do to you, house of Israel, as this potter has done? Indeed, like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in my hands, house of Israel.*

As we journey as members of a spiritual movement for social justice and love, let us begin to be open to the hands of the potter, our God, and feel the tenderness of this inexhaustible love.

Far from being something to be ashamed of, it is actually good to



know that we are not complete. As human beings we are far from complete and as a movement of faith, hope and love, the St Vincent de Paul Society is far from complete.

We need our God to complete us, a God who comes to us through each other and through the people we assist, our companions with whom we break bread and hope, who teach us the meaning of love, who are the sacrament of the presence of God in our lives.

Do you remember the first major interview that Pope Francis gave? The first question he was asked was: 'Who is Pope Francis?'

After reflecting for a moment, the new Pope replied, 'I am a sinner. But I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

This infinite mercy and patience is for all of us and for all who accompany us on our collective journey of building the Kingdom of God. Like Pope Francis, we take heart and are filled with courage because, in the words of St Paul in his Letter to the Romans (5:20): 'Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more'. Or as Pope Francis has said, 'God is greater

than our sin' (General Audience, 30 March 2016).

In other words, our journey towards the October congress is one in which we can feel free to reflect on our imperfections and failures as an organisation—our failures to see Christ in the people who are marginalised and excluded; our failures at times to really minister to their needs, to hear their hearts, to understand the new forms of inequality; our failures to love each other and to be a place of welcome, especially to people who we might feel are different to ourselves or who challenge our beliefs and assumptions.

## For reflection

- 1 How does the St Vincent de Paul Society need to change?
- 2 How can we make the Society a place in which we are moulded anew by God?
- 3 Reflect on a time when you were changed by an encounter with God through someone who was marginalised. ♦

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Fr Troy Bobbin is the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council Spiritual Advisor.



# A life devoted to spirituality, youth, social justice and rugby league

**Rest in peace, Rupert Hudson (1 December 1928 – 18 July 2017)**

***Revered Vincentian Rupert Hudson has died in Sydney after a brief respiratory illness. He was 88.***

A lover of rugby league and a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal in the Australia Day Honours list in 2014, Rupert (otherwise known as Rupe) is remembered for his outspoken mind, passion and humour.

He graduated from Sydney Technical College as a chemical engineer in 1951 and spent 40 years with the American company Ferro Corporation, retiring as General Manager of the Vitreous Products Division in 1985.

In 1980 the Australian Catholic Bishops appointed Rupe to the National Committee of Australian Catholic Relief (Caritas Australia). He served for 12 years as Treasurer, and was Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee.

His commitment to the St Vincent de Paul Society extended over 60 years, commencing in 1957 when he joined the Harbord Conference, on Sydney's northern beaches. He was president of the conference from 1961 to 1964, and later served the Society at a regional and national level.

'As National Council President he pioneered the promotion of youth leadership within the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia and internationally,' the Society's Amelie Housing CEO Brian Murnane said.

When he stepped down from the role in 1991, Rupe became a member of the governing body of the Catholic Theological Union at Hunters Hill, in Sydney's inner west. He also taught religion in state schools.

The Society's archivist, Mike Moran, remembered Rupe as 'a great, knockabout bloke who was down to earth yet highly spiritual'.



Rupe's interest in overseas aid led to the twinning of many Australian conferences with conferences in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji.

Back home, on almost every Friday from 1990 until recently, he visited Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre 'to be a friend, supporter and advocate for people detained, pending a ruling on their refugee status,' Murnane added.

His commitment to social justice was unwavering, and he was well known for speaking his mind.

Hudson wrote the Society's first ever mission statement in 1986. It was written on the back of an envelope while he was traveling on a bus in Canada. A slightly modified version appeared in the 1991 Manual of the St Vincent de Paul Society. It read:

*The Mission of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Australia is to deepen the Catholic faith of its members—to go out into our nation to heighten awareness of Jesus Christ.*

*We do this by sharing ourselves—who*

'If there was something annoying him, he would have to say it outright,' Murnane said.

On one occasion Rupe was asked to pay a tip by a restaurant owner in Canada.

'Rupe said to him: "You should be paying your employees a just wage so that they don't have to rely on tips",' Murnane recalled.

Rupe's interest in rugby league involved a 60-year association with Manly Warringah Rugby League club. He was a foundation member of the club, player, coach and chairman.

Despite losing a leg in a car accident when he was 33, he could still run as fast as the other players, 'with one leg and a crutch,' John Brannan, a fellow parishioner and friend of Rupe's claims.

'He was a Catholic man who always gave a good example of how to live a Catholic life,' he added.

'He loved politics and we got on very well. He was tough and some thought he was abrasive but I knew him as sweet, fair-minded and full of social justice.'

Rupe is survived by his wife Kathleen, who he was married to for more than 60 years, seven children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ♦

*we are and what we have—with the poor on a person-to-person basis.*

*We seek to cooperate in shaping a more just and compassionate Australian community, and share our resources with our twinned countries.*

*Our preferred option in this mission of service is to work with the poor in development, by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.*

# Coming together

BY CLAIRE VICTORY

***Claire Victory got involved with the work of the Society when she was just ten years old, when her mum set up a Young Vinnies group in their parish, as a way of keeping Claire and her friends from primary school connected to the parish and each other once they went to separate high schools.***

What excites me most about Congress is the idea of Vincentians coming together from across Australia to meet and to share their passion for the Society. We have so many members doing such remarkable good works within their conferences and regions, but I think many of them are unaware of the breadth and depth of the Society—that there are so many members across Australia and around the world, in 140 different countries.

In my role on National Council over the past six years, and on national youth committees before that, I have been fortunate to meet Vincentians from around Australia and from other nations. It is always such an enriching experience to meet someone from a vastly different background with whom you share a spiritual and cultural connection through your mutual membership of the Society. It is a good reminder to ensure we live by our mission, not by the habits we have built up over time. This is what can help us to be innovative and courageous in meeting need in the face of real or perceived challenges, whether they be external (government policies forcing people further to the margins) or internal (recruitment and retention of members).

It is easy to feel hopeless when we are constantly faced with questions



*Top: Claire Victory (right) with delegates at an international St Vincent de Paul conference in Lisbon in June 2014; Above: Claire Victory (centre) with Vincentians from Indonesia and elsewhere, at the Indonesian National Conference in Surabaya in 2016.*

around our membership ('Our membership is aging!', 'We can't retain young members!'), but I think it's important to remember that the Society here and abroad has survived war, natural disasters, financial crises and demographic challenges over its 184-year history. Our members, inspired by our mission, are continually initiating new projects and new approaches, through their conferences and special works, to help those in need and to thereby deepen their own faith. Vincentians in Australia are trialling new conference models, instituting effective recruitment programs, establishing conferences that attract members from different sections of the population, and initiating member induction,

training, formation and recognition programs—but often, news of those initiatives does not spread very far. By bringing together Vincentians from across Australia for the first time in over 60 years, I hope that Congress will encourage us to become better at joyfully telling the Society's story and sharing our individual stories with one another to ensure we remain inspired—in the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam: to do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands. ♦

Claire Victory is Deputy President of the Society's National Council. She is chairing a panel titled: "Are conferences a place of welcome and diversity?" at the Society's National Congress 2017



# Congress 2017 keynote speakers

***Our ability to personally help, collectively advocate, and bring about social change—as one Society with a united voice—will be at the heart of the October congress. This is a source of great excitement and joy, but not without a certain sense that we are venturing into unknown spaces.***

We have the right and the duty to be passionate about the fate of the people who face a daily struggle against not just material poverty, but also a degrading sense of loneliness made even harder to bear due to heightened social, political and economic disrespect.

Our privileged vocation of being accompanied on our journey by these People of God, the oppressed and downtrodden, is something that is deeply spiritual, deeply human. As the Society prepares for and seeks to shape the future, we need more than tactics; we need vision. For, as the Book of Proverbs (29:18) puts it so pertinently for us, 'Where there is no vision the people perish'.

To this end, it is with great pleasure that we are able to announce that two of the keynote speakers who will be helping us to reflect on our vision are Mr Phil Glendenning and Professor Larissa Behrendt.

**Phil Glendenning, keynote speaker on Friday 6 October: 'Daily acts of solidarity'**

Phil Glendenning is Director of the Edmund Rice Centre and the President of The Refugee Council of Australia.

He is primarily involved in human rights advocacy and education, peace and reconciliation work, and raising awareness of the impact of climate change on marginalised peoples.



Phil Glendenning.

His search for people the Australian government has forcibly relocated has taken him to Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Rwanda, and Colombo.

He has served on the Boards of the Australian Council for Social Service (ACOSS), various committees of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, and the Centre for an Ethical Society.

He has been presented with several awards and titles for his work in human rights advocacy and education, including an Honorary Doctorate by the Australian Catholic University, the Sir Ron Wilson Award for Human Rights (by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and most recently, an award for Advocacy from Baptistcare in Western Australia.

Music is one of his escapes. When he is not working, he has played in a rock 'n' roll band for many years, and occasionally still does.

**Larissa Behrendt, keynote speaker on Saturday 7 October: 'Sign of the times'**

Professor Larissa Behrendt is a Eualeyai/Kamillaroi woman with a passion for telling stories about



Larissa Behrendt.

Indigenous Australians. She is also Professor of Law and Director of Research at the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney.

She was admitted by the Supreme Court of NSW to practice as a solicitor in 1992. And in 2000 was admitted by the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory to practise as a barrister.

Her screen credentials include writing and directing the Walkley nominated feature length documentary film, *Innocence Betrayed*, which aired on NITV in 2014. The film looks at the murder of three Aboriginal children in the NSW town of Bowraville.

Her works of fiction include the novel *Home*, which won the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, The David Unaipon Award in 2002, and the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Novel in the south-east Asian/South Pacific region in 2005. Another novel, *Legacy*, won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Prize for Indigenous Writing (2010).

In 2009 Larissa was named NAIDOC person of the year. ♦

# Dr Hugh Mackay: the state of the nation starts in your street

BY DR HUGH MACKAY

***The Gandhi Oration is delivered each year at the University of NSW by a person whose life's work exemplifies the ideals of Gandhi. The 2017 Gandhi Oration was delivered by Dr Hugh Mackay.***

I wonder what Gandhi would have made of Australia in 2017—a place that many people who live here regard as the best country in the world.

It's true that we have a robust parliamentary democracy, even if we're replacing prime ministers at an unsustainable rate. Paramedics no longer use the question 'Who is the prime minister?' as a reliable test of cognitive function of the bewildered or concussed.

We have our spectacular beaches, Sydney Harbour, our bush, our mountains, some of the world's cutest wildlife and the world's most liveable cities.

We have a well-educated population, with unprecedented numbers of students enrolled at our universities—many of which are world class.

We have relatively low unemployment. A high—though falling—rate of home ownership. A record period of sustained economic growth and a sound financial system, though accompanied by record—perhaps worrying—levels of personal and government debt.

This is a place where we pride ourselves on the fair go. A place where we enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press.

No wonder we're such a highly desirable destination for tourists, immigrants and, yes, refugees. This is a place where you might think the dream



Street art by Smug, corner of Lonsdale and Spencer Streets, Melbourne.

of egalitarianism could finally come true. It is certainly a place where we have managed to create a harmonious society out of extraordinary cultural and ethnic diversity, bringing together people from almost 200 birthplaces around the world. Remarkable.

And yet, all is clearly not well. We are a society in the grip of epidemics of anxiety, obesity and depression—20 per cent of Australians experience some form of mental illness.

More than 700,000 children are living in poverty.

Although we pride ourselves on our low rate of unemployment, we often overlook the problem of underemployment. About 2 million

Australians are either unemployed or underemployed. 100,000 Australians are homeless.

We are further from egalitarianism than we were 50 years ago. We are showing signs of a disturbing retreat from the values of an open, tolerant society for which we were once famous.

How did this happen? Where did this edgy, anxious, too-violent society come from? This uneasy blend of arrogance and timidity?

Could it be the result of growing income inequality that has produced an unprecedentedly large gap between rich and poor Australians, with greater numbers than ever before at the top and the bottom of the economic heap? Inequality certainly breeds insecurity,





and poverty certainly has bad consequences for health. But anxiety and depression are not confined to any particular social or economic stratum.

Could all this anxiety be the result of declining respect in the community for our institutions—the church, politics, the banks, the trade unions, the media, even universities—that has led to widespread disenchantment and disillusionment?

After all, we create institutions to formalise many of the functions of our society: they exist to serve us, so when we suspect they are being corrupted by their own power, or becoming inward and self-protective in their focus, we are understandably disappointed, and perhaps even outraged.

You may have seen recent media reports of research by the Edelman organisation showing that trust in big business in Australia is in sharp decline. And we all know what has happened to respect for the institutional church—and for politics.

An international survey conducted by Ipsos showed that more than 70 per cent of Australians believe the nation ‘needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful’; 68 per cent believe ‘the economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful’; and 61 per cent believe ‘traditional parties and politicians don’t care about people like me’.

That decline in respect for contemporary institutions of all kinds might well contribute to our level of anxiety, though I suspect the main response among people who lose faith in an institution is disgust rather than anxiety. They are more likely to switch off, or retreat into cynicism, rather than to worry about it.

I believe Mahatma Gandhi might have had something to say about all this. I suspect he would have wanted to remind us that if we lose our capacity for unconditional compassion, if we lose sight of our true nature as members of a society—and if we focus too much on our own wants, our own entitlements and our own gratifications, with little regard for the needs and wellbeing of others—there will be an inevitable threat to our mental health.

What would Gandhi have made of Australia in 2017?

### **‘We don’t know our neighbours’**

Over the years, my own research has consistently identified ‘loss of community’ as one of the most common concerns among contemporary Australians. That concern is often expressed as a regret that local

neighbourhoods are not functioning as well as they once did.

‘We don’t know our neighbours’ has become a cliché of contemporary urban life. That is never said with pride or pleasure: feeling like a stranger in your own street is bound to fuel your insecurities.

A disturbing piece of research from Edith Cowan University has shown that only one-third of Australians say they trust their neighbours. Clearly, that could not possibly mean that 65 per cent of neighbours are untrustworthy—what it must mean is that most people in our society don’t know their neighbours well enough to have learnt to trust them.

I’m not of course suggesting that the erosion of our commitment to the community we live in is the sole cause of anxiety, or even the primary cause in many cases. Anxiety and depression are often the result of a complex blend of biological and social factors.

What I am suggesting is that when we lose sight of our role as neighbours, the health of the neighbourhood suffers. And when the health of the neighbourhood suffers, we all suffer.

When we ignore our biological destiny as social creatures—people who need each other; people for whom a sense of belonging is fundamental to our wellbeing; people who utterly rely on communities to define us, sustain us and protect us—then our level of anxiety is likely to rise.

So, is there less community engagement than previously? Are local neighbourhoods less stable and cohesive than they once were?

When you look at the evidence, it’s hard to argue with the popular perception.



PHOTO: ANDREA CASTELL/FLICR

## A fragmenting society

Let me remind you of some of the factors that have been propelling us in the direction of becoming a more fragmented, more individualistic, more competitive, more aggressive, less cooperative and therefore more anxious society.

First, the most obvious one: the rate and the relentlessness of social, cultural, economic and technological change. Ever since the Industrial Revolution radically changed the way we live and work, we have struggled to adapt to those changes.

And while, as a species, we are still—after 250 years—trying to absorb the impact of that revolution, we have had many more recent revolutions to cope with: the gender revolution, an economic restructure amounting to revolution, an information technology revolution, and even a revolution in our sense of who we are—our cultural identity as Australians.

The symptoms of those revolutions are familiar to us all:

- changing patterns of marriage and divorce, with 36 per cent of contemporary marriages expected to end in divorce and the consequential disruptions of families, friendship circles and communities—including for the 1 million dependent children who are now living with just one of their natural parents;
- a record low birth rate: meaning children, the great social lubricant, are in shorter supply than ever (while compensatory pet ownership has soared);
- the rise of the two-income household, with a greater sense of 'busyness' and less time and energy available to nurture the community;
- our rapidly shrinking households, with the average now down to 2.6 persons per household and single-person households the fastest-growing type, expected to reach 30 per cent of all households within the next ten years—increasing the risk of widespread loneliness, social isolation, even alienation;
- our increasing mobility (we move house on average once every six years);
- our almost universal car ownership reducing footpath traffic; and
- the IT revolution that has led us to confuse data transmission with communication, altered our perceptions of privacy and identity, and, above all, made it easier than ever to remain apart from each other.

The likely cumulative effect of those factors is easy to imagine. Taken together they exert great pressure on the stability and cohesiveness of communities. But that pressure is not irresistible—yet unless we resist it, the pressure will steadily increase the risk of fragmentation and social isolation.

It's already clear that many of us are severely stressed by the struggle to keep up with the rate of change in our lives. One of the consequences of that stress is anxiety; another is violence—both physical and emotional—often in response to a seemingly small irritation that turns out to have been the last straw.



## We can change

To conclude, let me revisit the state of the nation: our growing disenchantment with institutions, our tendency to disengage from the serious social issues that confront us—homelessness, the plight of asylum seekers, the enduring problem of Indigenous Australians' health and wellbeing, the problem of growing inequality of income, the fragmentation of families, neighbourhoods and communities, and—perhaps as a consequence of that—the rising epidemic of anxiety.

It's easy to complain about 'the state of the nation' and to wish that a leader could make everything right. There's a very long history of human societies placing too much faith in their leaders to save them from whatever they think they need saving from.

In Australia, we've had a couple of very recent examples of what happens when we over-invest our faith in leaders—their fall from grace, and our ultimate disappointment in them, is all the more poignant.

It's true that the best leaders can both inspire and reassure us by placing us in a narrative we can understand and by offering visionary policy solutions to our social and economic problems. But, as part of the general decline of trust in politics, our esteem for the current crop of leaders has plummeted. Both Donald Trump and Brexit can be partially interpreted as reactions to similar disenchantment in the US and UK.

In one way, that might be no bad thing. It might encourage us to look differently at the situation and take matters into our own hands by embracing the idea that the state of the nation actually starts in the street where you live.

We can't manage the economy, but we can decide to spend and save wisely, and to be more generous to the needy—the marginalised, the disadvantaged, the brutalised.

We can't stop the rising tide of technology but we can be its masters, not its servants.

And when it comes to the character and the values of our society, it really is up to us. We can have a powerful influence on the state of the various communities we belong to—in the neighbourhood, the workplace, the university, the church or other faith community, the sporting association, the book club or other community organisation. How we contribute to the minutiae of life—in our own family, street, suburb or town—will ultimately help to determine the big picture.

We all know how to act like neighbours when there's a crisis—floods, bushfires, storms, or horrific events like the carnage in Melbourne's Bourke Street in January. Of course bystanders rushed to the aid of the injured. Of course people instinctively help those in obvious pain and distress—that's the kind of species we belong to.

So why does it so often take a crisis to remind us of our responsibility to the other members of our community, including the elderly and the isolated, whose need of help—perhaps in the form of nothing more than a bit of conversation—might not be as immediately obvious as an accident victim's.

You think people aren't as friendly as they once were—that, especially in Sydney, avoiding eye contact with strangers has become an art-form? Then be more friendly. Start making eye contact with strangers. No, do better than that: start smiling and

saying hello—at the bus stop, in a lift, in the checkout queue, and especially in the street or apartment block where you live.

You don't know your neighbours? Try knocking on the door and introducing yourself. Become the kind of person who is always alert to the possibility that someone needs your help or attention.

Join a local book club or a community choir; participate in a community garden; play a team game with a local club; become a regular at your local café. In other words, engage. Be there.

And don't worry about how you're feeling about any of this—whether being kind to people is making you happy. That's not why you're doing it.

If you're looking for something to worry about, worry about whether you gave someone your undivided attention when they needed it—whether you really listened, or just pretended to.

Worry about whether you apologised quickly enough, and sincerely enough, when you wronged or offended someone; whether you forgave someone readily enough when they wronged or offended you; whether you were there when someone—perhaps even a total stranger—needed your encouragement and support.

If enough of us start living as if this is the kind of society we want it to be, that's the kind of society it will become. As Gandhi put it:

*You may never know what results come of your actions but if you do nothing, there will be no results.* ♦

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This is an edited version of a piece that was first published by *The Conversation* website.

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Dr Hugh Mackay is a social researcher and author. His latest book is *Selling the Dream*, a satirical novel set in the advertising industry.

# Walking with and walking together

A new take on empowering those who turn to the Society for help

BY MARIO TRINIDAD

***Mario Trinidad is facilitating a new style of conference that the Society's South Australia branch is trialling in Elizabeth, north of Adelaide. It includes a 'community response team' working with people who have contacted the Society on multiple occasions over 12 months.***

***Key to the initiative is a willingness to serve as companions to people who need help.***

***This is an edited extract of a speech Mario gave at the Society's National Council retreat at the Aboriginal Catholic Community Centre in May.***

*Companionship* is a more appropriate and accurate way of describing our relationship with the people we assist because it emphasises in the first instance our shared humanity. The shared dignity of all human beings comes from the fact that we are all made 'in the image and likeness of God' who walks with his people (Gen 1:26–27).

The Vincentian vocation is to go to where this human dignity is most despised. As *The Rule* of the St Vincent de Paul Society (1.6) points out, we go 'to those who are most rejected by society', the 'poorest of the poor'.

## **Anne\***

Last year, a social work student and I went to visit Anne, a woman living alone in a Housing Trust home in Elizabeth, one of the most

disadvantaged suburbs in South Australia, and indeed in the whole country.

Anne has no interaction with her neighbours. She wants to move to a better neighbourhood, where she will be able to, in her words, 'get away from drug addicts'. She depends on the public transport system to get around, which is not always reliable. Anne is a survivor of domestic violence. Her daughter and her four grandchildren live a few suburbs away, but she seldom sees them. Her daughter has also experienced domestic violence. Once in a while the grandchildren get 'deposited' by their mother to stay with their grandmother, one of the few occasions when she has meaningful human interaction.

Anne is apologetic for being reliant on Vinnies for a number of years. She was diagnosed with cancer early this year

and has been in and out of hospital for the last few months. She expects this will continue over the next few months, and is now more alone than ever, because her grandchildren are scared of seeing her without hair due to the chemotherapy treatment.

I offered to contact the local parish to see if they have a visiting service for the sick. She rejected the offer by simply saying, 'I will be fine. I know how it is to struggle. I don't know any other way'. I also offered to call her or visit her every week. She was pleased with this.

## **Experience as a Missionary and social worker**

As a young man, as a member of a Belgian missionary order, I worked in my native Philippines with young factory workers, landless peasants in rural Guatemala and urban poor







families in Mexico City. I addressed them and referred to them by their names. We were all *compañeros* (companions) and we described our ministry as *acompañamiento*, accompaniment. It was only later as a professional social worker in Australia that I, as with other 'service providers', grappled with how to describe the relationship between those who assess and commission services, and those who are the recipient of those services. 'Client', 'patient', 'customer', 'consumer', 'expert by experience' and 'service user' are often used.

Such labels imply an 'othering exercise' with its own assumptions about the nature of the relationship.

They distance the service provider from the recipient and maintain the separation between the two. They imply a one-way, non-reciprocal movement in the relationship which

'objectifies' the other person, by focussing mainly on their need. Occasionally, perhaps, social workers do rise beyond seeing the client's need and discover the person. But in general, social workers maintain a functional relationship with their clients.

In the process, as Jewish philosopher Avishai Margalit points out, our welfare institutions and bureaucracies, and therefore many of those who work in them, *humiliate* people through objectification (treating them as numbers), snobbery (treating them as 'others' who do not belong to the in-group), and paternalism (treating them as immature).

Part 1 of *The Rule* reminds us that:

*The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact.*

We have tried the cumbersome term people we assist or participant, but these terms still focus on programs and not on the totality of the person in the first instance.

### **Companion and Companionship**

The English word 'companion' comes from the two Latin words *cum* (with) and *pane* (bread). Thus companions were the ones who ate together, broke bread together, and shared the same table. From a Christian point of view the word has strong eucharistic undertones. It was at the Last Supper where Jesus called his disciples 'friends' and it was through the 'breaking of the bread' that the disciples recognised the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus.

One is not a companion right from the

beginning. One *becomes* a companion. Not by standing still. One becomes a companion in the walking. Walking with and walking together. 'The road is made by walking', as the Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote.

What is distinctive about the Vincentian mission is that we have deliberately and freely chosen who our companions are going to be.

While we choose to be companions, a first act as it were, it is really a second act—a response to the people we assist to be their companions. Their request for assistance is really an invitation to us to join their quest for a fuller life.

We see this paradoxical reversal of roles more clearly in the primary mode of Vincentian service, the home visitation, where the giver turns into a guest and recipient. To quote the Swiss church historian Tobias Brandner:

*The respect, the dignity and the value conferred to people when a visit turns them into hosts elevates and empowers them. Empowerment happens because the common distinction of giving and receiving is turned upside down. The visitor, supposed to be the one who gives, turns into a guest and recipient. The supposedly powerless recipient of charitable aid turns into the host.*

Saint Vincent de Paul was converted by the poor. I am pretty confident that this would have been the experience too of St Louise de Marillac, Rosalie Rendu and Frederic Ozanam. And ours too. ♦

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\*Name changed to protect privacy

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Mario Trinidad grew up in the Philippines and later studied social work at Flinders University, where he is a part-time lecturer.

He is chairing the panel: *No such thing as the voiceless: Creating space for our Companions to speak* at Congress 2017.

# On the NSW south coast: Wollongong



Stanwell Park from Bald Hill Lookout, Stanwell Tops.

PHOTO: DAVID MCKELVEY/FLICR

***Denis Walsh is a member of the West Wollongong St Theresa conference. He joined the Society 12 years ago, after holding many senior positions in the insurance and superannuation sector.***

'I always wanted to be involved with something beyond the business aspects of life,' he says.

Denis was elected NSW State President in December 2015. Ahead of the October congress, he says it is more important to address the root causes of poverty than ever.

In Wollongong, where Denis resides, stunning beaches, beachside restaurants and million dollar apartments mask problems including high levels of unemployment and a lack of homelessness services.

'Overwhelmingly, the people who come to the Society for assistance come from social housing backgrounds,' Denis says.

'And single-parent families—sometimes single fathers with children, but overwhelmingly, it is single mothers with children.'

Loneliness, drug and alcohol addictions, and mental illness are other problems.

The Society's shopfronts in the region receive around 20 to 30 people a day seeking appointments for some form of assistance.

'If you have volunteers doing that, they are lucky to spend between five and ten minutes with each person,' Denis says.

'So all you are doing is shovelling material goods into their hands. They go away. And a fortnight later, come back and get more material assistance. And on it goes.

'You have to go back to the basic question and ask, "Are we really trying to get rid of poverty?"'

## **Denis' thoughts on the congress**

The Society's Congress in October will be a tremendous opportunity for St Vincent de Paul Society leaders to dream, inspire and position the Vincentian vocation for the next generation.

Indeed, it has been 60 years since the last congress convened; and during this year's highly anticipated event, we must seize the moment by revisiting the vision of our founder, the young Frederic Ozanam. It was Ozanam who said "It is our vocation to set people's hearts ablaze, to do what the son of God did, who came to light a fire on earth in order to set it ablaze with his love."

This call to action is as relevant today as it was 184 years ago. ♦



# Far North NSW

**Brian Donaghy is President of the Society's Tweed Byron region, which takes in the northern tip of NSW, to Byron Bay. His wife Marie is president of the Mary MacKillop conference, Murwillumbah. The couple live at a small property on the outskirts of Murwillumbah.**

In April the worst floods in 63 years ripped through the region, leaving a trail of battered homes and people with nowhere to go.

Brian will be in Adelaide for the October congress. More than six weeks after the flood, he and Marie spoke of people still living in less than ideal circumstances.

'The Seventh Day Adventist Church has provided a number of people with tents, because there is no accommodation,' Marie said.

Compounding the problem, as many as 18 caravans in the area got washed away, leaving low income people stranded, and the proprietors of several unaffected caravan parks along the coast have raised their prices.

'Some of them are charging as much as \$500 a week for a caravan,' Brian added.

In the meantime, Vinnies at Murwillumbah is one of the few charities people can turn to.

'There is a community centre. But their funding is limited,' Marie said.

'Most of the time when people go there, they send them around to us.'



*Top: Murwillumbah homewares shop Kindred Collective sustained heavy damage during the floods. Image courtesy of Kindred Collective's facebook page; Above: Tweed Byron regional president Brian Donaghy with scholarship recipients from Mount St Patricks College, Murwillumbah Emily Booth, (left) and Jaya Roche (right).*

It helps that an appointment is not needed to speak to members of the Society's Murwillumbah conference.

'Anyone can come in and see us. If people want a clothing voucher we give them one. We also give other assistance like food, help with electricity and telephone bills, and petrol, if need be.'

Aside from regular flooding and a

lack of affordable accommodation for low income people, unemployment is another problem in far north NSW.

'We live in an area where there is very little employment,' Brian points out.

'We have seasonal employment, with the cutting of cane. But there are very few jobs for the people. And that makes it very hard.' ♦

# The other side of paradise

***The Society's Queensland State President John Forrest has access to one of the best views on the Sunshine Coast. Idyllic scenery aside, the Society retains an important presence in the area.***

John lives just north of Mount Ninderry, on the Queensland Sunshine Coast.

In winter it's not unusual to be greeted by mid-20 degree Celsius temperatures at his home, where views of the coastline and cane fields add to the idyllic scenery.

'I also overlook a 15-megawatt solar farm built by the local government council which looks like a 50 acre lake in the middle of the cane fields,' John says.

A short distance away, the regional towns of Montville, Mapleton and Flaxton ensure a regular stream of tourists, and this is supported by a number of high profile triathlon and other sporting events across the coast. When the Australian boxer Jeff Horn defeated Filipino boxer and politician Manny Pacquiao at the WBO world welterweight championship in Brisbane on 2 July, some of the overseas tourists who watched the tournament stayed on in a number of resorts across the coast.

'Tourist resorts and local restaurants have had their best takings in a long time,' John says.

'They were really struggling, up until a couple of years ago, because we had a couple of wet years in a row.

'Some of them went broke. The ones that are there now—they have really made a go of it. And they are doing well.'



*Coolum Beach, Queensland Sunshine coast.*

IMAGE BY HORIZON2036 ON FLICKR

The booming tourist sector also means accommodation options are scarce for low income earners.

At Coolum, where John is a conference member, people queue at the offices of rental agents for properties in the \$300 to \$400pw range. Even properties in the \$400 plus range are in demand.

'While it is hard to quantify, it is estimated that up to 1600 people have no fixed address or stable accommodation and 200 plus are homeless along the Sunshine Coast,' John says.

'Aside from the car sleepers, some even sleep in the sand dunes.'

In response to this challenge, a number of programs have been established. The Society's Cornerstone Homelessness Services program in Nambour aims to, whenever possible, transition people straight from homelessness into stable, long-

term housing, with support provided when necessary to sustain the tenancy. There's also Mackillop Village, which the Society opened in late 2013. It comprises of 17 two-bedroom and 24 one-bedroom apartments.

Additionally, for children of low income families at Coolum State High and State Primary Schools, members from the Society's Coolum Conference provide merit-based scholarships and other practical school assistance.

'There are lots of kids at school who don't go on any of the school excursions. Their parent(s) can't afford them,' John says. ♦

John Forrest has been an active member of the Society since 1991. Before he became Queensland State President, he had been a conference, regional and diocesan president, and chaired the Property and Finance Committee, and the State Centres Committee. He will be representing Queensland's Sunshine Coast at the October congress in Adelaide.



# Caring for the Carers

***Michael Liddy, the Society's Victorian state president, on a new initiative volunteers in his state are undertaking.***

'Many people know the Society for its well branded retail arm and soup vans,' Michael says.

Then there's the lesser known but no less important help its dedicated members and volunteers deliver, such as assistance for relatives of people receiving emergency treatment in Melbourne who don't have anywhere to stay, and can't afford a hotel.

'Some have never been "to the big smoke" and wouldn't know their way around at all,' Michael points out.

Aside from arranging temporary accommodation, people standing by while loved ones receive medical care at St Vincent's Hospital are also offered maps of the city, Myki transport cards, vouchers for food, vouchers that can be used at the nearest Vinnies shop, and toiletry packs.

The assistance is being provided by members through a new special work, Matthew's Offering.

It is hoped the Society will eventually have similar arrangements in place with Melbourne's other seven teaching hospitals.

As Michael points out, while people are being treated at St Vincent's Hospital, other family members, especially children back home, might be feeling vulnerable.

'There might be a relative looking after the children. But they might be short of money for food and



*St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne.*

so on. So we also want to assist family members left at home who might need it,' he says.

Such work is delivered by members who live in the region where the hospitalised patient normally resides.

To be of true value to our companions, Michael says we need to understand what their real, underlying needs are.

'They ask us for things which are usually relatively easy to respond to. But they don't always disclose, for reasons which are understandable, what it is that is really at the heart of the situation they are in,' he says.

'We know there is an issue there. We are not sure how to work our way through it,' he says.

'But we will give it a go.' ♦

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Michael Liddy has been an active member of the Society since joining the Donvale Conference in Victoria 2000. From 2007 to 2009 he was the Ringwood Regional Council President, and from 2009 to 2013 Michael was the Eastern Central Council President.

Until his appointment as the Society's Victorian State President in 2014, Michael was also a member of the VincentCare Victoria board, and sat on their governance committee and social policy and research committee.

He will be representing Victoria at the Society's National Congress 2017.

# Recruiting, retaining, motivating

## ***Attracting and retaining new members is a key reason for holding the congress in Adelaide in October.***

As Canberra/Goulburn Territory Council President Warwick Fulton points out, membership 'is a problem everywhere'.

'We've found that there is no single strategy that works, so you have to try a range of things.'

A Canberra/Goulburn congress in 2013 documented five criteria for addressing the needs of others in the community:

- Make a difference
- Innovate and grow
- Attract new people, especially young people
- Build the capacity of our members
- Be good at change

Four years later, practical measures are underway to address these criteria.

A pilot program aimed at attracting new members in five conferences is being trialed—these include Temora in the NSW Riverina region, Yass in the Southern Tablelands of NSW, Bega in the south-east of NSW, and North Woden and Aranda in Canberra.

For new members to be recruited at the locations, a 10-point checklist must be satisfied to show that the conference is 'recruitment ready'.

It includes making sure new members feel welcome and are given something to do straight away.

Participants at the 2013 Canberra/Goulburn congress determined



*Warwick Fulton, second from right, at a refugee rally in Canberra in April 2017.*

that being 'good at change' requires taking 'reasonable' risk. This includes saying 'no' to the status quo and trying new things.

Narooma on the NSW south coast, for example, was down to two older members at a parish where only about 25 people (mostly elderly) were attending mass. A traditional response to the problem was unsuccessful in encouraging members of that parish to get involved. Instead, an advertisement was placed in a newspaper, and eight people from the local Anglican Church were recruited.

We are a strongly lay Catholic organisation, but that doesn't mean new members can't come from other faiths that share the Society's vision, Warwick says.

'We can't just look within the parish.'

The 2013 Canberra/Goulburn regional congress also found greater flexibility was needed in

terms of when and how often conference meetings take place.

'A meeting held at 2.30pm on Tuesdays automatically excludes people with fulltime day jobs,' Warwick says.

'As do home visitations carried out during the day. Members with day jobs should be given an opportunity to do visits after work.'

Warwick is also aware that some people simply don't enjoy the formality of meetings, and if this is preventing them from getting involved with the Society's work, then associate membership might be a better option for them.

The Canberra/Goulburn Territory includes 25 shops, 12 special works and 50 conferences. Geographically it takes in the ACT and surrounding regions, as well as parts of the NSW South Coast, from Batemans Bay down to the Victorian border. ♦



# Building partnerships with Australia's First Peoples

***John Lochowiak is Vice President of the St Vincent de Paul Society South Australia State Council.***

***He is also chairperson of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Church, and is looking forward to discussing ways the Society can progress its journey of reconciliation at the October congress.***



*John Lochowiak performing a Welcome to Country ceremony.*

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS NEWSPAPER

The ACT has around 1800 homeless people—a figure that rarely fluctuates. Of these, around 100 are sleeping on the streets.

Others are couch surfing or staying temporarily in motels.

Warwick says it is not uncommon for some people who turn to the Society for food to have as little as \$20 a fortnight to live on, after paying rent.

He knows of overcrowded households where two families with children are sharing a two-bedroom flat.

'It has implications for schooling and health,' he says.

A lack of government-funded emergency accommodation on the NSW south coast means conference members are only able to provide motel accommodation for people who are homeless for a couple of nights.

'Housing is key to solving people's problems,' Warwick says.

'If you give a person a home they have a chance of finding a job and looking after themselves.'

A Wati (initiated Man), John has strong ties to many language groups throughout Australia, including the Pitjantjatjara, Kurna, Ramindjeri and Arrernte.

The father-of-five was born in Coober Pedy to a Polish father and Aboriginal mother, Mabel Walker, who was chairperson of the Umoona Community Council for 30 years.

John's great-grandfather, Aboriginal soldier and ANZAC Arthur Walker, landed at Gallipoli in 1915.

John said family ties and being part of four generations of Walkers involved in the Otherway Centre which he now manages, inspired him to help others. He took great joy in helping lead a retreat there for the National Council earlier this year.

'Supporting the community and making society a better place by working together and building friendships and partnerships has always been important to me,' he said.

People enjoy learning about Aboriginal culture, Mr Lochowiak adds.

'It's a very rich culture. We lived in harmony with our land. And people are fascinated with it.'

When he was at school, Mr Lochowiak says he learned about many other cultures, but not his own. It was a shame to not include Aboriginal studies in the school curriculum back then, he says, 'because a lack of knowledge often results in myths. And myths are negative'.

Nowadays he travels across the country, sharing his knowledge of the Aboriginal culture with adults and schoolchildren alike.

He regularly performs Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies, and would like to teach 'all the Vinnies people about our culture', as he believes this is essential for fostering good quality relationships with Aboriginal people and organisations.

'And it will give us an idea of areas we can develop, and how to go about building partnerships. And that will determine the success of the projects we get involved with,' he says. ♦

John will be performing the Welcome to Country ceremony at the October Congress in Adelaide.

# After the boom

***Bob Burns was a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society's State Council for six years prior to his election as Western Australia State President in July 2014. He gives this assessment of challenges faced by the Society in Perth in a post-mining boom era.***

The economy in general in Western Australia is in recession at the moment. There is a lot of unemployment. The state went through a boom period with the mining boom. But that has very much run its course. And a lot of people are now out of work.

There is a lot of mortgage stress. During the good times people bought houses and cars and that sort of thing. Then suddenly they are out of work. There are reposessions.

There is also the situation here where people have come from interstate to find work in Western Australia, and now the work has fallen through. And so they are stuck here because they haven't got enough money to go home or they don't want to, or the kids are at school here and they can't just pack up and go. So recession after the mining boom has caught a lot of people out.

In the case of New Zealanders, if they come here and then find themselves out of work, they are not entitled to Australian social security—they are not eligible for any government assistance at all. So a couple of conferences are supporting them.

I think the type of people who need help hasn't changed much.



But the volume of people needing help is much greater because of unemployment.

Another challenge is that it is becoming harder to raise funds, partly because businesses are less willing to provide income through initiatives like the CEO Sleepout. Money raised through that event is down on what it has been in previous years because businesses are reluctant to spend money if they are not doing well.

As such, our finances are quite tight. We have sent out instructions to conferences to watch what they are spending money on. We are not there to support people over a long period of time. We are there

to help them through an emergency relief period.

In the last year we have expanded our work in the area of migrants and refugees. We have set up a conversational, drop in English language centre at Nollamara (10km from Perth's CBD) where people can drop in, socialise and practice their English. We have retired teachers and other volunteers who are helping us with that.

It's been going for about three months and has turned out to be quite successful. The initiative is led by former Western Australia State President Clem Astruc. He has a team helping him, including migrants who are mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.



# The Society in the Northern Territory



Bob Burns at a kids' camp in Western Australia.

## Bob's thoughts on Congress 2017

I would like to see some sort of direction for the future. One of the things I would like to see the congress achieve is for different sections of the Society to have more integration, such as in the areas of mental health, emergency relief and youth.

It is important for us to work in unison, rather than in silos. That is one thing that I would very much like to see the Society achieve.

I don't feel isolated in Western Australia. We swap ideas with other states, particularly in the area of shops and advertising. And I go to National Council meetings and exchange views with the other presidents. So I think communication is quite good. ♦

***Fay Gurr is the St Vincent de Paul Society's Northern Territory President. She hopes the October congress will bring about a new set of goals the Society can work towards collectively.***

The unique feature of the Territory is the very small population for a very large area.

People who come to us for help are predominantly Indigenous. They need emergency relief like food and sometimes accommodation.

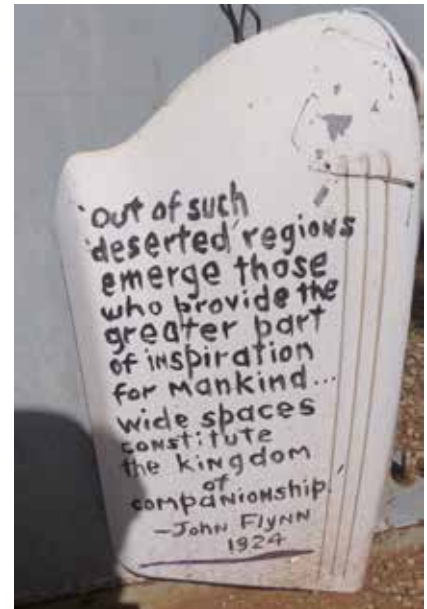
Some Aboriginal people seeking the Society's help are living in what is called 'long grass' in the Territory.

It means that they are homeless. They live in parks and in green areas. Or in long grass, where they can't be seen.

We are presently in the dry season. It is quite cool. It can get cold overnight. So there tends to be a rise in the number of people coming for help and warm shelter.

For housing, options include low-rent emergency housing, mostly for men. We have one centre for families that is run through an agent for rent.

We are looking at expanding these options this year, so that there are specific options for women, and women with families.



Quote by John Flynn, a Presbyterian minister who founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1928.

## Fay's thoughts on Congress 2017.

I'm interested in seeing a more national identity emerge from the congress.

We have very few conferences in the territory, and they are all very small.

We are working to rebuild our financial position. The Society in Queensland has helped improve our processes and procedures, allowing us to remain viable.

So we have been going through a complete rethink of our work. Now we are partnering with a lot more government programs. These revolve around alcohol and drug rehabilitation, supporting elderly people who want to stay in their homes, and prison visits and prison work.

I would like to see the Society set goals that we can all work towards achieving—and for which we will all be held accountable. ♦

# Tasmania's northwest coast

***About an hour and 20 minutes from Launceston, on Tasmania's northwest coast, the Society's Tasmanian state president Toni Muir resides with her husband Tony, in the busy coastal city of Devonport.***

***Born and educated in Launceston, Toni has been committed to the work of the Society for almost 30 years. As well as being a member of the Society's National Council, Toni also sits on the National Rule Review Committee.***

Toni says major challenges in Devonport and at the nearby port city of Burnie include a high number of people battling mental illness and unemployment.

Burnie was once a thriving woodchip export port, and in its heyday The Pulp (the pulp and fine paper mill) saw around 1200 workers enter its gates each morning, until it closed for good in 2010.

Other closures along the northwest coast in the last decade include McCain's vegetable line at Smithton, Tascot Templeton Carpet factory, the Wesley Vale board mill, Swifts King Island abattoir, National Textiles, K&D Warehouse and dairy giant Murray Goulburn.

'What we are seeing now are the people who received a pay-out or entitlement, and have now used all that up. And they are faced with the uncertainty of no employment in the future,' Toni says.



Toni Muir.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ADVOCATE, TASMANIA.

***We must stay true to The Rule and we can do this by going forward with new ideas, new ways and new dreams that will give value and dignity and a better way of life to our vulnerable people.***

This roll call of lost jobs is bringing about emotional and mental strain, further heightened by a lack of affordable housing.

'Rents are high and we are finding people are paying three quarters of their income on accommodation,' Toni says.

An absence of crisis accommodation on the northwest coast means many people are living rough—from bunking down with relatives or friends until they wear out their welcome, to sleeping outdoors.

'It's hard to get a true idea of just how many people are in this situation,' Toni says.

She's now keen to see an expansion of Vinnies soup vans

across the state. Aside from Louie's van in Hobart, there's one in Launceston and others in the southern region.

With any luck, there will soon be one in Burnie too.

Toni sees the October congress as an opportunity to listen and learn from the Society's companions.

'I hope to be challenged by what they tell us about how we can better serve them, what we can do to make a real difference, what we need to change to meet their needs,' she says.

'I want to see what we are not seeing. It's always a challenge to step outside my comfort zone. I want to know if I am up for it, and to take a risk or two.' ♦



# South Australia's Riverland

***Cathy Beaton's work with the St Vincent de Paul Society to date has been focussed mainly in the Riverland area. In 2016 she was elected as Regional President for the Riverland/ Yorke region, and in 2017 became the Society's South Australia President. She shared a personal account of her work in the region.***

The South Australia Riverland covers an area of nearly 10,000 square kilometres along the Murray River.

Situated northeast of Adelaide, the region is rich in agriculture and horticulture and, thanks to massive business and infrastructure investment in the area, it is prospering.

It's a welcome turnaround from the millennium drought of 2000 to 2010 that sent many people broke and forced them off their land. But as Cathy knows, the need continues for emergency relief providers like the St Vincent de Paul Society, Life Without Barriers, Uniting Care, the Salvation Army and Lutheran Care.

An underbelly of poverty and homelessness in Berri, where around 11,000 people reside, includes people who have relocated from Adelaide.

'There are a lot of people from the city that actually go to regional areas because it is easier for them to get assistance,' Cathy explains.

'When you belong to a smaller network, you are less likely to feel lost.'

One man she has come to know



*Berri. Views to the bridge across the Murray River to Loxton.*

PHOTO: DENISIN/FICKR.COM

***He just likes the thought of knowing that if anything happens, he can ring us and someone will be there.***

well is in his late 40s, and living on the banks of the river.

'He made a decision that he just couldn't keep up with normal life, in the normal sense of a house, a car, and living in a suburb,' she says.

'He knew he was never going to get work. And that the system was working against him.

'So he made a decision that he would camp on the river. Where he has a tent, bedding and a gas burner, and doesn't need to pay rent.'

The man is unable to work because he suffers from emphysema. He is eligible for a disability pension, but this isn't enough for him to live in a house and pay household bills.

Fortunately he does have access to a mobile phone, enabling him to contact people like Cathy and

her husband in an emergency. In one such instance his car became bogged during heavy rain.

'He was desperate. He couldn't get out of where he was. Because of his emphysema he couldn't walk more than 100 metres,' Cathy recalls.

'We took a four-wheel drive out to where he was, walked down the river flat, and gave him some food.'

'Sometimes he will say, "Bring some jumper leads out. I'm stuck."'

'We think of it as helping a friend out. He just likes the thought of knowing that if anything happens, he can ring us and someone will be there.' ♦

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Cathy is chairing the panel, "How do we inspire people to join our cause," at the October Congress in Adelaide.

# Congress 2017

**Fr Troy Bobbin, Spiritual Advisor to the Society's National Council is preparing reflections for use by our Conferences ahead of the October Congress. In his first reflection "Placing our lives in the potter's hands" Troy asks us to reflect on 3 questions.**

1. How does the St Vincent de Paul Society need to change?
2. How can we make the Society a place in which we are moulded anew by God?
3. Reflect on a time when you were changed by an encounter with God through someone who was marginalised.

We have received some great responses and would like to share them.

**From Robert Waterman, Wangaratta Regional President:**

*How does the Society need to change?*

SVDP needs to try to draw more people into membership.

We need to help members to interview properly and really address the deep needs of those who seek help.

We need to try to have all members attend and take part in all conference meetings.

We need to help parishes to become more aware of who SVDP is (the conferences doing welfare work) and not just think of Vinnies shops.

*How can we make the Society a place in which we are moulded anew by God?*

We need to have annual retreat days, spiritual reflections at all conference meetings, encourage personal



prayer in all members, and have some involvement in church life and parishes.

Encourage in members a deep and personal awareness of God's presence in daily life.

We need to be mindful in serving Jesus as we help those who need assistance.

*Reflect on a time when you were changed by an encounter with God through someone who was marginalised.*

One time I was changed was when we were helping an Indian family. I kept them in my prayers, and I was challenged in trying to do things for them. There were visa issues, as well as educational costs for the 2 school-age children. They have not yet gone to school at all this year!

Other times: with various people, I became more open to them as they shared stories, needs, and suffering.

**St Patricks Conference Wangaratta shared their thoughts:**

*How does the Society need to change?*

Members need to develop and be given the skills to develop interview techniques so that we come to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the marginalised in our community.

Recruit more and younger.

Build a better awareness of Conference work within the parish.

(Most parishioners think Vinnies shop when you say you belong to a Conference.)

Develop our spirituality and allow that to guide our actions and decisions. Allow ourselves to trust in God.

Be open to the needs of today and change with the times.

We need the potter's approach and be brave enough to say, "this isn't working" and to try a different way.

We need to be guided by the needs of those we help because they may not think the same way as us. Be flexible.

*How can we make the Society a place in which we are moulded anew by God?*

To be mindful and to develop our spiritual self through personal prayer, participating in annual retreat days and spiritual reflections defining the Vincentian way.

Be mindful always that we're serving Jesus, that Jesus is present in us.

Develop a respectfulness for those we help and remember any good we do is the Holy Spirit working through us.

*Reflect on a time when you were changed by an encounter with God through someone who is marginalised.*

We have assisted an Indian family to the extent that we can. It is challenging because they have needs around immigration that we simply can't do anything about. We have helped as far as we are able and can only pray that things will work out for the best. ♦

Fr Troy Bobbin is the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council Spiritual Advisor.



# Long battle for recognition

BY PHIL GLENDENNING

***The notion of ‘unfinished business’ is a term often used to describe the struggle for equality and justice that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders face in Australia today. Record incarceration rates (85% of prisoners in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal) that are higher now than when the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reported in 1991. The nagging life expectancy gap between Indigenous and other Australians remains at 15-17 years.***

And yet, despite these difficulties and the Stolen Generations and a history of dispossession, Aboriginal Australians have survived, and in increasing numbers. Custodians of the world’s oldest living cultures – if you lived here for 60,000 years you probably got something absolutely right! Nevertheless, the struggle for freedom, self-determination and recognition continues.

In terms of this ongoing fight for freedom Senator Patrick Dodson (and former Deaths in Custody Royal Commissioner) said late last year:

“There is nothing wrong with freedom, particularly if you are from the ruling class. There is a hell of a lot wrong with freedom if you have to battle to experience it—if you have to fight for it. I was born before the 1967 referendum, when we as Aboriginal people were not even counted in the census of this country, when this



*This artwork titled ‘Crossing Bridges’ by Victorian secondary school student, Lucia Roobizadegan was a Major Award Winner and recipient of the Vincentian Award as part of the 2017 Just Art competition conducted by the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria. The competition promotes advocacy through art and this year called for a creative exploration, contemplation and celebration of the culture of the first people of Australia. For more information about the competition visit [https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Get\\_Involved/Involve\\_your\\_school/VIC/Just\\_Art/](https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Get_Involved/Involve_your_school/VIC/Just_Art/)*

government did not have any power to make laws for Aboriginal people because it was excluded by the crafters of our Constitution in 1901. The whole battle for recognition—for freedom to enjoy the basics of being a citizen—in this nation had to be fought for by black and white Australians: Jessie Street, Faith Bandler and many others”.

The “freedom to enjoy the basics of being a citizen” would not be a call unfamiliar to those on the goldfields 162 years ago.

This notion of the citizen is one we have to defend, especially in these

days where it often seems we all live together in an *economy* rather than a *society*. This is significant because the people who live in a society are *citizens*, and they have *rights* and they have *responsibilities*. However, those who reside in an economy are *customers* or *consumers*, with *choices* – dependent on how much wealth they have access to.

This paradigm shift from a society to an economy has been accompanied by a shift in language: people who travel in planes are no longer referred to as *passengers*, now they

*continued on page 30 ►*

are *customers* (listen to the boarding announcement next time you are at an airport).

Banks no longer provide *services*, they sell *products* (I remember recently renegotiating my mortgage, and was told by the bank manager how ‘we have some great new products for you’, i.e. how much further into debt he would like me to be!) And those who reside in the care of a psychiatric institution in NSW are no longer *patients* or residents, everyone is a *client* (what are they purchasing?)

Moreover, those who live in a society are valued inherently for *who they are*, as human beings with inalienable rights; in an economy we value people for *what they can do*, for their utility or production value. And once we base our relationships and interactions on economics primarily rather than humanity, it becomes easier to treat people in inhuman ways. Welcome to Don Dale and its torture of Aboriginal youth. Welcome to Nauru and Manus Island.

There is a need for us to reclaim the language, and fundamentally put humanity and the planet back in the picture. The language we use matters, because when we strip back the language we reveal the *assumptions* underpinning decisions, and when we strip back the assumptions underpinning decisions we reveal the *values* decisions are based on.

If we are not attentive to the words we use and the assumptions and values they represent, as Senator Dodson said last week, this enables and emboldens “an ideological creep back to bigotry and to racism”. He explained, “It is fine if you sit in some leafy suburb and never rub shoulders with people who are battling to interpret and navigate their way through modernity in this land of Australia, with its highly-sophisticated culture and its complexities of protocols and procedures and social ethos. We have to understand that today is not the

**“The success of the struggle to achieve freedom and democracy is best witnessed by a society’s treatment of its poorest people.”**

day to be changing this section (18c) of the Racial Discrimination Act. It is not the day. We see every night on the news the bigotry, the racism, the hatred and the killings that take place in the Middle East, borne out by different interpretations that people extract from words”.

David Ervine, a Northern Irish Unionist politician who became great mates with Patrick, the former Aboriginal Catholic priest with Indigenous and Irish ancestry, summed this up when he visited Australia in 2004 to speak at the Treaty Conference, reflecting on the state of race relations in Australia:

“I can smell racism. It doesn’t grow wild in a field. It is tended in a window box”. The point here is simple: words count. Language matters.

The Indigenous people gathered at Standing Rock in the United States do not see themselves as “resisters”; they call themselves “protectors”.

In his speech in the Senate calling for section 18c of the Racial Discrimination Act not to be watered down, Patrick Dodson said: “*If this nation cannot stand up for the weakest, the poorest and those who are*

*most vulnerable because of their race, their ethnicity or their beliefs, then we have become a very sad replication of what democracy is about*”

This is one of the strongest defences of the principles of equality and justice for all that the Australian Parliament has heard in recent times. I recommend it to all Australians.

The success of the struggle to achieve freedom and democracy is best witnessed by a society’s treatment of its poorest people. Today in Australia that is best witnessed in our treatment of our First Peoples but also in the brutality meted out to the ‘last to arrive’ in this land of boundless plains to share with those who come across the sea.

That is, of course, with regard to Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

In the 17th century Emmanuel Kant proposed his Kantian injunction that ‘*Human beings are never a means to an end. They are an end in themselves*’.

His words loudly and baldly echo down the centuries in stark contrast to Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru and Manus Island. The Four Corners program, *The Forgotten Children* gave



Australians an all too rare opportunity to hear from the refugee children of Nauru themselves, and to see for ourselves what is being done in our name. It was very disturbing television.

One day last year here in Sydney, a young asylum seeker rose early, turned on his computer and read that the Government was preparing to ban all post-July 2013 boat arrivals from ever entering Australia under any circumstances. He went straight to his bathroom and swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills. He is one of the 30,000 asylum seekers in the community without rights or resolution to his case.

He has now been released from hospital. He survived but the hope that sustained him for so long from his escape from the Taliban to the dangerous journey to Australia has been extinguished.

The devastating impact of these policies of incarceration and punishment on innocent people simply has to stop.

Since 1946 Australia has resettled more than 850,000 refugees. They have made a remarkable contribution to our country. Despite this, the current Government's proposal to ban boat arrivals from ever entering Australia would mean great Australians like Anh Do, Bishop Vincent Long of Parramatta and South Australian Governor, Hieu Van Le, would never be permitted into the country if they arrived today.

Refugees like Gus Nossal, Victor Chang, Frank Lowy, Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, the 2017 NSW Australian of the Year Deng Adut, and hundreds of thousands of hard working refugees have been nothing but a positive for Australia.

And yet, we have a Minister for Immigration who declared former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser had made a mistake 40 years ago in bringing in Lebanese Muslims from

the civil war in the 1970's, because 22 of the 33 Australians charged with terror related offences were the children or grandchildren of Lebanese Muslim immigrants.

In any other time, this statement would be staggering. To invalidate the existence of hundreds of thousands of Australian citizens because a sum total of 22 of them were charged – charged mind you, not convicted – with serious criminal offences is beyond any reasonable argument. This is not so much a dog whistle as a dog trombone! It is throwing red meat to One Nation supporters, and is more about polling in the northern suburbs of Brisbane, than anything to do with the humanitarian intake. The Minister's words should be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Malcolm Fraser's record on support for refugees, particularly after the Vietnam War, is in stark contrast to the actions of Governments led by both parties since 2001. Fraser and then Opposition Leader Bill Hayden demonstrated what the country now lacks, leadership. Australia led the world in helping 2.1 million people re-settle around the world between 1976-1983. It was no mistake. It was born of bi-partisan leadership, something we do not have now.

Simply, today we treat asylum seekers and refugees who have arrived by boat as if we were at war with them.

Amnesty International reports that Australia's system discriminates and punishes, and in some cases, 'tortures' people who came to us seeking safety and protection. There are around 1200 people on Nauru (including 128 children), a further 920 on Manus, and the 30,000 in the Australian community denied access to legal assistance, medical care and education. They are all trapped in an interminable limbo.

The *Nauru Files*, released by the Guardian, reported over 2000 cases of physical abuse, psychological abuse,

sexual abuse, rape, and 59 incidents of child abuse, including child sexual abuse. For many refugees on Nauru, this sorry story means that life is characterised by fear and uncertainty.

This is certainly the case for Mahomood (name changed), and her 8 year old daughter (who has now spent almost half her life on Nauru). Although recognised as a refugee Mahomood lives on a 3 year visa, a Nauruan passport lists her identity as 'refugee'.

Mahomood and her daughter live in a remote camp. She is too scared to go out for food following an attack by two men on motorbikes as she walked to town to collect groceries. Her life is a two by four metre, plywood walled, tin roofed shack. She spends most of the day crying – she says she has lost all hope.

The tragic irony of this is that Mahomood came on the same boat as her brother. Today he lives in Sydney's south, married to an Australian woman and they are expecting their first baby. Equal laws? Equal rights? I don't think so.

These centres are established by the Australian Government, they are funded by the taxes we pay. They operate under extreme secrecy. There is no transparency, no accountability, no independent monitoring. But the cruelty is plain to see. It is writ large on the faces of the forgotten children all of Australia saw on *Four Corners*.

This whole sorry episode in our history has to be brought to an end.

The priority right now must be to get people off Nauru and Manus.

The policy of turning around boats at sea is deeply problematic, most likely illegal, and dangerous, especially with its potential risk to life and the very real possibility of *refoulement*.

However, the current political reality

*continued on page 36 ►*

# Rekindle the flame: reflections from a youth newbie

***School chaplain Kathryn Pettersen is one of five members of a recently formed Youth Conference in Darwin, where it's been some time since the Society had a dedicated team of young members. When the new group travelled to Queensland in 2016 for the Society's Rekindle the Flame event at Mount Tamborine, they found comfort in knowing they had the full support of a much bigger throng.***

There is always the opportunity to be part of something bigger, to be more, and to experience the world through different perspectives. I joined the St Vincent de Paul Society after I attended the National Youth Event last year, 'Rekindle the Flame.' Having been a part of my high school conference, I was familiar with the Society but had never followed it up or considered membership. I had no idea how widespread the conference model is.

Rekindle the Flame saw five young people from Darwin board a plane to Brisbane to seek understanding of the Society, its works and its people. We knew we were going to be the founding members of our youth conference, but with only five of us, could we really make a difference?

We didn't view the Vinnies world through rose-coloured glasses—we knew there would be struggles along our journey; but our national counterparts gave us the courage we needed. In this large gathering we discovered that we were well supported. Although we were the only youth conference in the Northern Territory, and were more



*Kathryn Pettersen (right) is pictured here with the Society's Northern Territory president Fay Gurr (centre) and Father Roy (left).*

than 2000kms from the nearest youth conference, we came to realise that we were not alone. This was one of the most powerful take-home messages we received that weekend, and it was without doubt the result of the unifying gathering of like-minded society folk who came together to share their experiences.

Large gatherings, I feel, are essential for the unity and connectedness of the Society. There is so much that we can learn from each other; and there is a richness of intergenerational experience within the Society that those of us from small communities would love to tap into. This is one of the things I am most looking forward to about the National Congress later in the year.

Mary MacKillop said: 'Never see a need without doing something about it'.

We, the youth, have seen the need. We have the ideas and many of the necessary skills to do something

about it. The St Vincent de Paul Society gives us the platform, the ability to make a difference, and it is evident through the multitude of programs run by youth conferences around Australia that we truly are doing something about this need.

Too often I hear the phrase, 'The youth are our future'. They are forgetting that together we are also the present. It is my vision for the St Vincent de Paul Society to seek further unity among members of all ages and to action this by having members of a diversity of ages representing the Society in council meetings and on various committees.

We as a Society are always striving to do more and to be more. Our opportunity to be a part of something bigger is here, and I am blessed to be attending the congress. The congress will be my time to experience the world through different Vincentian perspectives; to question, to comment, to listen and to connect. ♦



# Dare to Imagine

***Patrick Wallis is an engineering student who got involved with Vinnies while still at high school in Perth.***

***The 21-year-old provides advice to the Society's Western Australia State Council on youth matters, and has been a kids' camp leader for the past five years.***

***He attended the Rekindle the Flame event for young Vincentians in 2016, and is looking forward to the October congress. Here he shares his youthful optimism and hopes for the future.***

Part 1.6 of *The Rule* states that 'the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions'.

The world is constantly changing and, with this, the St Vincent de Paul Society needs to always adapt and allow for change.

I have seen no greater avenue to this than the opportunities that national events provide.

Membership is the core of this organisation and, through the power of One Society, together we can build the St Vincent de Paul Society towards its fullest potential.

I have seen three major benefits come out of national formation events such as Rekindle the Flame—a national event run by the National Youth Team for Young Vincentians in 2016.

These are:

- the spiritual formation and development of our members



*Patrick at a Vinnies youth camp in Western Australia.*

***“The companions we walk with deserve the best possible future, so we should all encourage and support events such as the National Congress and Rekindle the flame.”***

- promoting a sense of connection to the wider community of Vincentians in order to facilitate a global network of charity
- renewing our members and the structure of the Society to best impact our local communities.

It is these same outcomes that make the National Congress event being held in October so appealing. Together, the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society can work to focus on what really matters: the people.

The companions we walk with deserve the best possible future, so we should all encourage and support events such as the National Congress and Rekindle the Flame. Through the gathering and inspiration of our national Vincentian family, events such as these enhance our core works and help transform Australia with compassion and justice.

One of the core Vincentian values is courage. Courage can be defined as the encouragement of spiritual growth, welcoming innovation and giving

hope for the future. As members, we need to find the courage to innovate for the benefit of all, to give hope for the future of all, and to encourage the spiritual growth of both our members and the companions that walk alongside us in our common mission.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam realised that innovation, hope and spirituality are the fundamental pillars upon which our core works are based. In 1833, in a time of hardship and turmoil for the people of France, Frederic stood apart from the crowd and established the first conference. He worked with friends and mentors to found the Society of which we are now a part and strove to share hope in order to encourage our companions to take hold of their own destinies.

The innovative imaginations of Ozanam, Lamache, Lallier, Devaux, Clave, Taillandier and Bailly created a global network of charity by coming together as one. It is invigorating to dare to imagine what the gathering of members as One Society in Australia could bring. ♦

# The Society into the future

***Close to four years ago, Laura Beres was asked to help establish a Vinnies youth program in Adelaide. She assumed it would only require a short-term commitment, but outside of her HR role at Catholic Education South Australia, she is still finding the time to buddy up with kids who need someone like her in their life. Meetups include jumping on trampolines, rock climbing, scavenger hunts in a national park and cooking.***

***She is also a 'Fred's Van' team leader.***

With ever changing and increasingly complex communities, there has never been a more important time for the Society to consider what being a companion means in the context of diverse needs. Part of this is not only about exploring how we can be the best companions, but also how building capacity and confidence is part of this companionship.

Changes in demographics and the availability of resources for both companions and members demand that the future address how we might meet immediate needs while maintaining an underlying strategy of building confidence, resilience and connections to inspire deep community impact. This future requires a much more proactive approach as well as embracing and utilising the diversity of knowledge and experience that already exists in order to maximise positive impact.

The future of the St Vincent de Paul Society will very much be strengthened by the current strategy of



*Laura Beres (front row, second from left) with other Fred's Van volunteers in Adelaide.*

'One Society'. This approach will be fundamental in opening up dialogue about how we might be able to work together and identify future potential.

During my time with the Society thus far, I have had numerous opportunities for personal and professional reflection, development and growth. Looking to the future, I see this journey of 'faith in action' as an identity rather than a separate part of my life. It is in undertaking this journey of ongoing reflection and growth that I will be better able to remain a relevant companion and servant leader. In undertaking true companionship, building meaningful relationships and ongoing connections will be paramount to future success.

At this stage, where my future within the Society lies, I am unsure. When do I cease being a 'Youth' or a 'young member', and does this mean I need to transition into a more conventional conference? Will I be as engaged and therefore remain as passionate?

As the Society evolves to adapt to the significant changes in its volunteer demographic, there is no doubt that these feelings of uncertainty will be shared. It is my sincere hope that my passion, knowledge and experience will contribute to developing and trialling adaptable and innovative ways to be meaningful companions into the future. I believe our strengths will prevail in being able to offer the companionship that is relevant to the community—whether that is through assistance, connectedness or building confidence and resilience for future generations.

The key opportunities for the Society in the next 10 years or so very much rest in a willingness to adapt to the needs of the community. As a young member, I have had the privilege of seeing the immediate impact on our young companions. In building networks with young people and providing structure and support





*Children at a Vinnies kid's camp.*

while demonstrating our values, our young companions walk away with a sense of belonging and engagement. Together with life skills, this provides a strong platform for a generation of connected and resilient young people. These young people will have a connection with the Society and potentially become our next generations of Vincentians. We have the opportunity to nurture our future by fostering connectedness—while also potentially reducing their dependence on support agencies. Although not the core work of the Society at present, this is a powerful opportunity for building the sustainability of society membership and the work of the Society into the future. This is also an opportunity to offer more leadership opportunities to passionate young Vincentians, to build their capacity to be active leaders in the Society in the future.

Another opportunity that exists involves harnessing the skills that members already have. This includes

promoting an environment that allows members to be creative, explore opportunities and learn from those that don't succeed, without judgement. It is in promoting creativity and diversity that we will be able to remain relevant and engaging with each other. This, for many, is a cultural shift in the short term but an opportunity to carry forward the essence of how the Society was founded. If I could change one thing about the Society, this would be it.

There is no doubt that there are benefits in having structure in terms of how visits are done, or how meetings are held, or the font of our flyers, and at times this is necessary. But we have an opportunity to encourage creativity by offering flexibility. Without providing this flexibility we may never know our full potential.

The October congress will serve as a means of building the future of the Society by allowing for open

dialogue at a national level. This in itself will put into practice the 'One Society' strategy. The congress will hopefully be representative of the diversity within the Society, while providing a genuine opportunity for input and action. In order to harness the passion, commitment and skills that will be present at the congress, it will be necessary for action and future planning to form part of the proceedings. The congress will also serve the purpose of being a conduit between the national dialogue and the regional and conference-based dialogue. This ongoing dialogue will be the foundation of the future of the Society, and it is the responsibility for all those who attend the congress to commit to continuing this dialogue and action into their relevant regions.

I have had the privilege of participating in national gatherings of young members such as Rekindle the Flame. This gathering was a combination of celebrating our achievements as young members, spiritual reflections, and professional development. This event provided the opportunity to understand the diversity of the Society but also appreciate that the challenges we face nationally and more recently, internationally. The congress will build on this in bringing together all regions, and provide an opportunity to contemplate our future and what our next steps might be ... Exciting, without doubt, and it is my hope that we will be able to embrace the challenges ahead while remaining true to our inspirational founders. ♦



is that despite the dangers of the turn-back policy and the need to one day replace it with something ethical and consistent with our international obligations, both major parties currently support the policy. It is not something that will change in the short-term.

But what *can* be done in the short-term, and what *is* achievable, is for the suffering and cruelty on Nauru and Manus to end, and for the 30,000 asylum seekers in limbo in Australia to be given a permanent solution. Boats are not arriving in Australia, they are being deflected away.

There is absolutely no need to prolong the suffering of those on Nauru and Manus for one day longer. They should be brought to Australia.

However, the Government and Opposition are committed to third country options, like the recent announcement of re-settling people in the United States. If this is to happen then firstly, they need to be credible options - nations that are experienced at resettling refugees and with a long-established capacity to do so – countries like the United States, or Canada, Sweden and of course, New Zealand.

Secondly, there needs to be a time limit. If the Government is unable to settle people in nations in a timely manner, then they must be brought to Australia. The Opposition should support the Government so that we can return to a bi-partisan commitment to protect rather than punish.

With Nauru and Manus empty, the next step will be to pivot to a realistic regional processing framework in cooperation with Indonesia, Malaysia, UNHCR and other relevant organisations.

With the offshore processing camps empty, Australia would have ample resources available to re-allocate to the region and help people seeking asylum *before* they are forced into a boat.

Such measures would include:

assistance for access to work, education and health rights whilst claims are processed in the region; increase the annual refugee intake to at least 30,000 and moving to 40,000; increase support for the UNHCR for assessing claims in the region in a timely manner; and, for more resources and diplomatic efforts to be put into the two other 'durable solutions' the UNHCR speaks of – a peaceful return to country of origin when it is safe to do so, and integration into the countries closer to the conflict zone.

Also, when the cruelty has ended and with a comprehensive regional processing framework in place, Australia's military could be used for the positive purpose of *search and rescue*, rather than forcing boats back out to sea.

The current policy of punishment and deterrence has moved Australia further away from engaging in the real global challenge of assisting the 65 million people who are displaced. Last year there were 24 million people recognised as refugees - just 107,000 of these people were resettled: that is less than one percent of the global population of refugees.

Our fixation with securing our borders renders us unable to engage meaningfully in working with the international community to tackle the root causes of displacement and ensure the people that do flee their country can live with dignity in the places they flee to. That the parents can work legally, the children can access school and health care is freely available.

Also, all research indicates that when refugees receive permanent protection they make a sustained positive contribution to the life of their new nation. Any notion of banning former refugees from Australia for all time, even if they are Canadian, New Zealand or US citizens, is a ludicrous proposition and indicative of the sorry state Australia has been reduced to.

These 24 million refugees, the population of Australia – are not just numbers. They are human beings. They are brothers, fathers, sisters, mothers, friends, they are children. More than half are children. They include Mahomood and her daughter. They include a young asylum seeker just released from a Sydney hospital.

Emmanuel Kant was right. None of these people were, or are, a means to an end. All of them are an end in themselves. The wrong done to them must be righted, the cruelty must stop and this sorry chapter in Australian history must be closed.

This generation has a challenge on its hands. All of us, unless you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island person, are descended from someone who came from somewhere else – usually over the course of our history, by boat.

In wrapping up I would like to share with you a poem penned by a young Iranian asylum seeker who spent a number of years in mandatory detention, after arriving in Australia by boat:

*I do not know  
what will happen after I die  
I do not want to know.  
But I would like the Potter  
to make a whistle  
From the clay of my throat.  
May this whistle fall into the hands  
Of a naughty child  
and the child to blow hard on the  
whistle continuously  
with all the suppressed and silent  
air of his lungs  
and disrupt the sleep  
of those who seem dead to my  
cries ♦*

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Phil Glendenning is the Director of the Edmund Rice Centre. This is an edited excerpt from a speech he gave to the Eureka Commemoration Dinner in December last year. To read the speech in full visit [http://www.erc.org.au/eureka\\_commemoration\\_dinner](http://www.erc.org.au/eureka_commemoration_dinner)

# Vincentian puts law and politics on hold to further her faith

***It was a 20-something year old youth, Frederic Ozanam, who founded the Society in 1833. Fast forward to 2017, and 20-year-old Ashley Carvalho is similarly passionate about meeting up with and connecting with others.***

Ashley was set to continue studying law and politics at the University of Notre Dame in Perth when she went on a religious retreat early this year.

The committed Vincentian has been involved with home visitations since she was 18 and is a youth leader at her local Catholic Church parish.

Such is her dedication to her faith that after attending the Disciples of Jesus retreat in January, she decided to put her law and politics studies on hold for a year, and instead study at the *Acts 2 College of Mission and Evangelisation*.

'I do a lot in terms of youth ministry,' she says.

'I thought it would be good to take time off to learn more about the theory and theology of Catholicism, as well as the practical side of running youth groups and working with children.'

This winter Ashley will be involved with her fifth kids' camp run by the Society, which has a Star Wars theme. It will include dressing up as a character from the popular movie franchise and, more importantly, acting as a spiritual adviser.

Ashley is the oldest of three children, and is clearly passionate about building connections with children and supporting teenagers.

'I think every child deserves the opportunity to be able to have fun, make friends and not worry about anything too much,' she says.

'Young Vinnies camps provide them with that.'



IMAGES SUPPLIED BY ASHLEY CARVALHO.

In April Ashley was involved with overseeing activities for Aboriginal children at a remote location in the Northern Territory, after securing a spot in the Society's National Immersion Program.

Now in its 17th year, the program involves flying into the small community of Nganmarriyanga in a private aircraft because the wet season makes road access impossible.

This year's group knew they were in the right place soon after landing, when locals asked if they were 'the Vinnies mob'.

'The whole reason for the Society being invited back each year is that it's really hard for the kids to get out. Because the roads are so blocked. Because it rains so often,' Ashley explains.

Ashley has also travelled to south-east Asia.

She completed a semester at Parahyangan University, in Bandung, Indonesia through an agreement the University of Notre Dame has with the institution.

While there, a connection with an international group known as the Young Christian Workers allowed her to meet people involved with setting up a union for the factory workers.

'It made me realise how important it is to stand up for human rights and dignity,' she said.

When she completes her university studies, Ashley would like to work in the areas of community development and international relations. ♦

# Our work with asylum seekers and refugees

***The St Vincent de Paul Society is united across Australia in its mission to welcome and assist asylum seekers who arrive by any means, including by boat. Refugee advocate Tim McKenna is a member of the Caritas Christi Conference, which leads the Society's support to refugees and asylum seekers in the Canberra Goulburn region. He is also a member of the national Vincentian Refugee Network.***

Tim travelled to Manus Island in April, where he met with men who expressed fears for their safety and future, ahead of the island's detention centre closing in October.

At a time when the federal government has little compassion for asylum seekers, McKenna says it is more important than ever for the Society to remain true to its Christian values and the teachings of the Pope when addressing the mistreatment of desperate people who come to Australian waters by boat.

While the Catholic Bishops' statement on asylum seekers in 2015 was absolutely clear in rejecting arbitrary and long-term detention, McKenna knows of some Catholic parishes that support the type of harsh border protection and 'stopping deaths at sea' rhetoric delivered by Minister



Manus Island detention centre.

for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton.

'There are many people who are good Catholics but who hold the view that it is OK—because we need to protect our borders or to save people's lives—to treat innocent people in a bad way, including through indefinite detention,' he says.

'If that is the case, we need to acknowledge it. But if there are people being persecuted by the Australian government, wherever that is occurring, it is the role of the Society in Australia to stand by them.'

Aside from issuing statements calling for asylum seekers on Manus Island and at Nauru to be brought to Australia, the Society continues to run a wide range of programs for those on Australian soil including tutoring, settlement assistance of all varieties, material

aid, housing, white goods, legal assistance, visits to detention centres and much more.

Although the Society has a presence in Papua New Guinea, McKenna wonders if the Society's members in Australia could further assist asylum seekers and refugees, by regularly visiting them overseas at places like Manus Island.

In an ideal world, McKenna says processing centres established in our region would be maintained by the UNHCR. That way, he says, there would be a greater likelihood of the claims of asylum seekers being processed faster and most justly. There could also be the possibility of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia becoming a partner organisation, allowing for a fairer and more compassionate approach to those seeking safety within our shores. ♦



# The Society in the Pacific

***The St Vincent de Paul Society operates in at least 160 countries across the globe, and has more than 800,000 members. What many people might not realise is the breadth of its existence in Oceania, where Vincentians quietly go about their work in countries as diverse as Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji and the Federated States of Micronesia, writes Frank Brassil.***

The countries vary greatly in size and population and some are in the most isolated parts of the world. There are huge discrepancies in income and infrastructure across these countries, along with a multitude of cultures and languages including Polynesian, Melanesian, Micronesian, English, French and Portuguese, not to mention a diversity of local languages.

The Society has by far the largest presence in Australia, followed by New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. In most other countries in Oceania, it is represented by one or a handful of conferences.

The Society in New Zealand has a long history of commitment to Pacific Island countries and, despite being much smaller than Australia, has been consistently generous and supportive over a long period.

In 2012, the Society's Oceania zone coordinator Keith Norton visited Chuuk, an island within the Federated States of Micronesia. When he arrived the New Zealand fireman found that many important buildings had been



*Above: Proud recipients of a firetruck which arrived at Chuuk airport in 2012, courtesy of the resourcefulness of the Society's Oceania zone coordinator Keith Norton. Right: Frank Brassil.*



lost to fire. This was something he could help with. He persuaded the NZ Fire Service to allow a fire truck that was being decommissioned to be sent to Chuuk. Being a resourceful Vincentian, Keith relied on contacts in the NZ Air Force to arrange for the fire truck to be transported on a Hercules flight as part of a training exercise. As a result, the people of Chuuk can now deal with fires and a valuable resource has been re-purposed.

The Society's Australian conferences support those in Oceania via 'twinning' and 'assist a student' arrangements. Twinning is an arrangement whereby conferences in various countries are partnered with those in a developing country, enabling them to better run their services. 'Assist a student' arrangements allow people greater access to education.

The Society in Papua New Guinea has a complex history and a special team is working towards re-establishing dioceses there. The intention is to support local conferences and build regional councils. At some stage the aim is to establish a national council.

In Fiji the Society has about 30 conferences, allowing for the operation of important services including Vincent House and the Fr Law Home.

As International Territorial Vice President for Oceania, my aspiration is to build connections between Vincentians across the Oceania Region, so that good ideas and expertise can be shared and we can truly be 'One Society', not only in Australia but across the Pacific. ♦

Frank Brassil is National Treasurer of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia and the International Territorial Vice President for Oceania.

# Vinnies stores



BY LINDSAY DUNN

***Our ability to serve the community through Vinnies shops relies solely on the kindness and generosity of those who donate quality items for sale.***

***Donations of clothing, household items, furniture and bric-a-brac are encouraged. Thanks to an army of volunteers in the shops, there are minimal running costs, allowing for profits from the sale of goods to go into community programs and services.***

***For this edition of The Record, Lindsay Dunn discusses why the shops are a success, and what's needed for that success to continue.***

Vinnies shops play a major role in the St Vincent de Paul Society, firstly through being its public 'face'.

With about 640 shops nationally (more than Domino's Pizza), the brand is highly visible and recognisable.

Our brand is trusted, and it is important that we carefully manage the way we use it.

The Vinnies shops exist for three key reasons:

- To act as the fulfilment arm of Conferences and Special Works, through providing clothing, homewares and other items to our companions in need.
- To provide a dignified shopping experience for those who shop with us out of economic necessity.
- To raise necessary profits to fund the wider work of the Society.

Of course there are other benefits, such as providing an opportunity for meaningful volunteering, promoting a sense of community, and at times being the only social outlet for some of our volunteers and customers.

The Vinnies shop network has a golden opportunity to grow and improve. The growth will come from discretionary shoppers; those who choose to shop with us for a variety of reasons, as 'op-shopping' is becoming not only de-stigmatised, but trendy.

Motivating factors for discretionary shoppers include a commitment to recycling and reducing waste, a belief in social justice, a dislike of Australia's retail duopoly, or just the thrill of the chase in finding a unique item.

To underpin this growth, Vinnies shops need to maintain professional standards in order to compete in this market. Shop location, appearance and lay-out are important, along with customer service, work, health and safety and financial management. ♦

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Lindsay Dunn is the South Australian Retail Manager for Vinnies.



# Assist a Student

An education support program aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty.



Where we assist...

Assist a Student is a program of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

Donations from Australians are used to provide education support for students across partner countries in Asia and the Pacific.

Throughout partner countries, local St Vincent de Paul Society members select students from families in need to be supported by the program. They receive support for one year and the money donated contributes to their education needs.

The program includes students at all levels—from primary, secondary and post-secondary. Funds are allocated across the countries to ensure fair distribution. One of the program's strongest and most attractive features is that administration costs, funded by the Society, are kept at an absolute minimum.

No administration cost is deducted from your donation. 100% goes towards the students' education needs for one year.

**100%** of your donation goes to the students' education needs for one year.

It is a common belief that education improves a young person's opportunity of gaining useful employment, thereby increasing their ability to support themselves and their families in the future. It is a means of empowering an individual to break out of the cycle of poverty.

One of the most positive ways of helping families in need throughout Asia and the Pacific to become self sufficient is through education. The Assist a Student program gives you the opportunity to support the education of students in Asia and the Pacific. The students supported by this program may not be able to attend school without this assistance.

In choosing to donate money to the Assist a Student program, you are taking the opportunity to provide education support to overseas students in need throughout their education.

As well as this you will receive:

- A certificate with the student name, country and course of study for each \$70 donation.
- A complimentary copy of *The Record* with an Assist a Student insert will be sent annually.

NB: To protect the privacy and dignity of the student, and in accordance with The Rule of the St Vincent de Paul Society, photographs and addresses of the students are not provided.

**Yes, I want to Assist a Student today!**

To donate online please visit [www.vinnies.org.au/aas](http://www.vinnies.org.au/aas)

- ☐ I am an individual assisting a student; OR  
☐ I am assisting a student on behalf of a group

NAME (group or individual): \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NAME (for group): \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBURB: \_\_\_\_\_

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EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I would like to receive a certificate for this donation.

**I would like to donate** (Donations over \$2 are tax deductible):

☐ \$70 ☐ \$140 ☐ \$210 OR ☐ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ EFT: BSB 062-000 Acc 16047336

☐ Debit my credit card (details below)

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Please post coupon to: St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Office, PO Box 243, Deakin West, ACT 2600

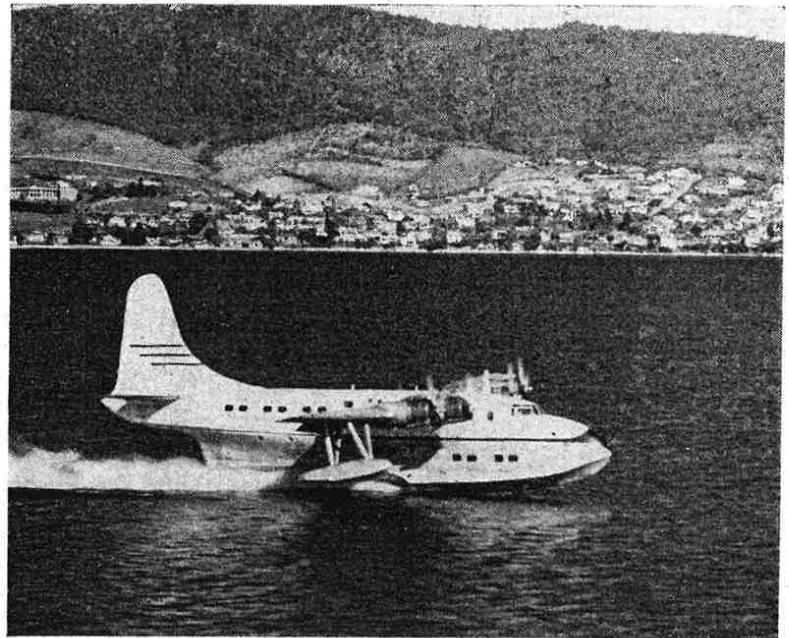


# Lauded pilot delivers 1951 congress attendees a happy landing in Hobart

***Australian aviation hero Sir Patrick Gordon Taylor was a World War One fighter pilot who later formed a flying partnership with Charles Kingsford Smith.***

***He was navigating Kingsford Smith's Southern Cross aircraft from Australia to New Zealand in 1935, when part of the centre engine's exhaust manifold broke off and severely damaged the starboard propeller. He climbed out of the cockpit and crawled along a strut to the dead engine, removing the oil so he could transfer it to the other engine, eventually allowing for the aircraft to land safely. For this he received the equivalent of the George Cross medal for civilian bravery.***

***In 1951, a number of those who attended the St Vincent de Paul Society's Hobart Congress had the good fortune of learning their pilot was none other than the esteemed Captain PG Taylor, as this account testifies.***



The Solent Flying boat, "Star of Papua," touching down on the Derwent River at Hobart.

## I FLY TO THE CONGRESS

To me falls the privilege of being able to attend the Triennial Congress of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Australia in Hobart. I know this is not the first Congress that has been held—indeed, it is the ninth—but this one will be unique, inasmuch as it is practically certain, from the reports to hand, that the great majority of the members attending from other States will go by air to Hobart.

We are a happy party that meet at Macquarie Place, Sydney, on Friday morning, 26th October, and ere our introductions are finished, the Trans-Oceanic parlour coach arrives. Boarding it, we leave at 7 a.m. and finish our "get-together" en route.

On arriving at Rose Bay we are met by other members who had proceeded direct to the flying base. On boarding the Solent flying-boat, "The Star of Papua," we learn that we are to be captained by the world famous pilot, Captain P. G. Taylor. We feel this is a great privilege and it also fills us with confidence.

We are in the air for four hours, and for the most part the rugged Australian coastline is in view under clear blue skies. Then, after passing the Bass Strait, we are thrilled when the mainland of Tasmania comes into view through drifting white clouds. Finally, we are greeted by Mt. Wellington itself, the top of which is covered with snow. We touch down on the glorious Derwent River and, although fitful showers greet us, we are warmed with the enthusiasm and zeal and interest which our Hobart confreres display for our comfort.

HAPPY LANDING!

—"JUST ONE OF THE VISITORS."

# Famvin Homeless Alliance becomes official

***On 28 June, the Worldwide Vincentian Family officially announced the Famvin Homeless Alliance, an initiative to reduce, and wherever possible, eliminate homelessness in its multiple forms. This ceremony took place at the European Parliament, by invitation of its president, Antonio Tajani, who wished to honour the work of the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society with people living in poverty, especially with the homeless.***

In the context of the 400th anniversary of the charism, the Vincentian Family chose to focus particularly on the famous passage of Matthew 25: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'

In harmony with the global definition of homelessness developed by the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH), welcoming the homeless includes attitudes and actions with and in favour of people living on the streets, refugees and internally displaced people, and slum dwellers.

The urgency of this issue is evident: the most recent UN reports on this topic suggest that, of the seven billion people on this planet, more than 1.2 billion fall within this IGH three-tiered definition of global homelessness. It is one of the great social ills of our time.

Mark McGreevy, Depaul International's CEO and coordinator of this project on behalf of the Vincentian Family, explained the



choice of the European forum for the official announcement of the initiative:

'Europe has been home to the Vincentian Family for 400 years and so it is fitting that the EU Parliament is the place where we celebrate the official announcement of this new project. In partnership, we can do great things together.'

Other speakers at the event included: M. Antonio Tajani himself, Rev. Tomaz Mavric (Superior General and President of the Vincentian Family), Fr Pedro Opeka (a Vincentian priest nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize), and Sr Carol Keegan (Daughter of Charity,

president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States).

The launching of this global initiative will take place in an international forum in October, during the Symposium of the Vincentian Family in Rome, Italy, in the presence of hundreds of Vincentian Family members from throughout the world. ♦

Learn more at [vfhomlessalliance.org](http://vfhomlessalliance.org). Join the conversation on Facebook! This piece first appeared on the famvin.org website.

Yasmine Cajuste currently serves as the Project Development Manager for the Famvin Homeless Alliance.





St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

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Vinnies  
*good works*