“...while attitudes shift towards the last to arrive, Indigenous people continue to find themselves at the bottom of every social indicator...”
THE WINDOW

She stands,
a division
solid, but fragile
Sometimes draped
hiding fractured lives
and broken spirits
Her heavy dress concealing
chaos, disorder and unhealthy
secrets
At other times
she is the victim
Battered by winds,
pelted with rain and hail
iced by winter frost
She is vulnerable
So easily shattered,
children's games
branches estranged
fire and idle stones
All vehemently test her mettle
Sometimes an interface,
at other times a passage
linking inner and outer worlds
Cool breezes, fresh air
Pungent odours, fragrant scents
Deafening noises, sirens, traffic
Dancing sunbeams
lightening heavy hearts within
she maintains her guard
If neglected
she keeps company with spiders
and their webby homes
Her essence becomes crazed,
chipped and cracked
Oh Window of Opportunity
Window of Life
Window to my Soul
You never reveal your secrets
Yours is a thankless task
Anonymous

TO THE TRINITY!

We praise you, Sacred Trinity,
Perfect throughout eternity
You give us such unending rest
Father, Son and Spirit blest!

Eternal Godhead, One in Three,
Supreme in everlasting majesty,
Beyond the bonds of space and time
Your glory shines in light sublime!

Almighty Father, you did create
The universe in far reaching state,
All to show your perfect worth,
And for praise by men on earth.

And man was your greatest work of art –
To him a timeless soul you did impart,
Which through eternity endures –
A glorious soul, akin to yours.

O, Jesus, Saviour, God's only Son,
With the Almighty Father you are one;
By the Holy Spirit, Mary did conceive,
And the flesh of man you did receive.

And on this earth you did atone
For sin's scourge which man did own,
And to end sin's tragic loss,
You died for us upon the Cross!

But from the dark of death you did rise,
In the power the Father did devise.
And you, his beloved Son did bring
To the glory of Christ the King.

And from the heavens he did send
The blessed Spirit, ever to extend
To all those enslaved in grief and pain
A faithful peace that all would gain.

O, Spirit of wonder! Spirit of light!
You fill us with your perfect sight!
Spirit of glory! Spirit supreme!
Throughout eternity does you glory gleam!

Praise to the Trinity all ways divine!
I am yours – through you I shine;
But only in the awe of eternity
Will I know your Triune Mystery!

May the Most Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and
Holy Spirit bless you and love you!

John Rudd,
Holy Family, Mt Waverley Conference.
From March to September, we will commemorate the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St Louise de Marillac and St Vincent de Paul. Celebrations of our Vincentian models of spirituality will be followed in October by the canonisation of Blessed Mary Mackillop.

We reflect on the heroic lives of these ‘stars’ to inspire us in our works and life in the Society of St Vincent de Paul. We use them as examples to reflect upon in our own lives and upon the gifts we have received from those who have gone before us, and ask the question: what gifts will we leave to those who come after us? We ponder, do we live our life in a way that makes a positive difference to others? Will we be remembered as one who defended the poor and gave deliverance to the needy?

People on the edges can be transformed by a radical love that knows no boundaries. Society members should, in their spiritual lives, be open to this radical love, willing to trust and be transformed. Not be content to watch and judge. As instruments of God’s love, we have in our hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty.

This world of ours is constantly changing. The old eras are ending, the old ways will not do. It is time for a new generation of leadership, new people to cope with new problems and new opportunities on the service of those on the edges. The Society, through its emphasis on Refounding, is attempting to refocus on the ethos of our founders (Blessed Frederic Ozanam and companions) in serving those in need. May the love of God let the Society always remember how futures are built.

Our Society’s core activities are home visitations to those in need and advocacy to address the causes of their need. No activity is foreign to our work, so we address contemporary problems; for example, mental health and homelessness. Therefore, I wish to suggest a challenge for 2010:

The major trend of the past few years has been towards trying to help elderly people stay at home, rather than have them go into residential care homes. This can mean providing an intensive level of home visits from professional carers etc. But elderly people have other needs, not least for company and a sense of community. Rushed visits from hurried strangers hardly meet the need. I suggest that this should be included in the home visitation mission of our Society; it is assisting those in need.

It appears that the elderly are the last minority against whom it is lawful to discriminate. But behind all the political, economic and social questions of growing old is a human face, a life, a person – the elderly are not a burden, but a gift.

Our Society, great as it is, can only be as great as the women and men of our Conferences who work for its Mission. I believe our Society must always be strong enough to use words such as love and compassion.

May I wish everyone God’s blessing for 2010 and conclude with the words of Martin Luther King – “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream”. ♦

Syd Tutton
National President
St Vincent de Paul Society, Australia
WE ASKED NATIONAL COUNCIL member Alicia Luchetti a few questions about her life as a Vincentian. Read on to see a little of why we are so blessed to have Alicia in a leadership role for the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The Record: Where were you born?
Alicia Luchetti: I was born in Coffs Harbour on the NSW north coast and grew up there until I was 18 years of age.

R: What is one of your happiest memories?
AL: All the moments that come to mind are times spent with family and close friends. My brothers taught me how to play cards when I was younger and now, when we all get together, I love to play with the whole family.

R: Who are your heroes? Why?
AL: My mother has always been one of my biggest heroes. She raised six children, always has a kind word for everyone and is the most loving mother.

R: How and when did you begin your involvement with the Society?
AL: I started out with Vinnies in a school conference when I was in Year 11 at John Paul College. We used to run ‘buddies days’ and kids camps every year. When I moved to Sydney, I fell out of touch with the Society for a few years, but when I moved to Brisbane around five years ago, I phoned the youth department and got involved again in buddies days.

R: What do you think is going to be the future of the Society in Australia?
AL: The way I picture the Society in the future is how it is today: Compassionate people, helping people in need.

R: What’s one country you’d like to visit and why?
AL: I’d love to visit India. I have some very close friends from the south of India and I’d love to experience their culture.

R: Are there any books that have changed the way you look at the world?
AL: Simple Abundance, a day book of comfort and joy by Sarah Ban Breathnach – a gift from my mother. It’s a daily journey for the whole year. It focuses on six main concepts: simplicity, order, gratitude, harmony, beauty and joy. It makes me feel extremely grateful for everything that God has blessed me with. My mum has littered photos, prayers and letters all through the book. I sometimes still come across something I haven’t seen before that makes me smile.

Caring for carers
Terry Ryan knows what it is to nurture a child with an intellectual disability – he has devoted his life to the care of his son Chris. And over the years, he has devised a comprehensive approach he calls FamilyCare that deals with every aspect of such care. Extensively practical, and positive and encouraging, this book is a must for families in a similar situation as well as professionals who wish to help such families.

WHAT ABOUT ME … Terry & Christopher Ryan, rrp $29.95 (incl GST)
Available from your religious bookstore or direct from the publisher.
David Lovell Publishing PO Box 44 East Kew 3102 tel/fax 03 9859 0000
FR GERALD ARCHIBALD WARD WAS born in London in 1806 and came to Australia in September 1850. He brought with him a great concern and compassion for people in need, a great love for the apostle of the poor, St Vincent de Paul, and an awareness of the work of the Society. He established the Society in Australia at St Francis, Melbourne on 4 March 1854, less than six months after the death of Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Gerald Ward was a man of compassion. Remembering that, it is significant that we gather in this building, the National Museum of Australia. In the brief history of establishing this museum was a desire to present Australians with the truth of our history that did not exclude the most marginalised group in our nation’s history.

Under Dawn Casey’s leadership, in this place we saw the compassionate history that we lacked: the Indigenous perspective was at the centre of our nation’s story.

The story of Aboriginal people was not airbrushed out of history in favour of a version written by those who did the dispossessing. Of course, it was a difficult process that brought this museum into conflict with the government of the day. I guess when you are over the target you get flak.

Yet the struggle for Indigenous people to take their rightful place in the life of this nation remains the great unfinished business of our history.

For too long, compassion has been viewed as a form of weakness. Yet, I believe it to be perhaps our greatest civilising strength. A compassionate history is something I contend this country needs to come to terms with. I salute Dawn Casey for her vision and courage, even though it cost her her job, she remained an Indigenous woman of compassion committed to telling the truth in this, our national museum.

That truth remains. The fact that an Aboriginal child born in Brewarrina

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6
or Balgo today has a 17-year lower life-expectancy than a non-Indigenous child born today is not something we can continue to live with. All of us are diminished whilst this continues. Why does this happen? The answer lies in our history.

I believe over the course of our history we have discriminated most consistently against two groups of people in Australia – those who were here first, our Indigenous peoples, and those who were here last, especially refugees.

We have had new terms of derogatory language to accompany each new group of arrivals, whether it was with the Irish ‘paddies’ and the ‘coolies’ in the 19th century, through to the ‘wogs’, ‘dagoes’, of the 1950’s and 60’s to other ugly terms used to describe those who came from south-east Asia in the seventies, those from the Middle East in recent years and from Africa now. Such characterisations were used in order to say to people, “you are less equal than me.”

Sadly, this rise of ugly racism is not far below the surface in this country. I must say, I struggle with the way Australia Day is increasingly being celebrated with the outbreak of flag-waving often accompanied by the bumper sticker slogan ‘Australia – love it or leave it’.

Yet whilst attitudes shift towards the last to arrive, Indigenous people continue to find themselves at the bottom of every social indicator in the nation. In NSW, Indigenous people make up 2 per cent of the population but make up 52 per cent of the jail population. Enough. Enough. Enough.

You’d think we could learn from our history rather than continue to repeat it.

In this place, people like Dawn Casey sought to present to Australians a history not based in conquest, triumph of colonials over Indigenous, but a history that brought to its centre the position of Aboriginal people and that which they have lost.

There is plenty of evidence as to why this is necessary, including the Prime Minister’s apology to the Stolen Generation. This was a good start but it was only a start. So much remains to be done.

The apology in Parliament to those taken by the state as children is a reminder of the great unfinished business stemming from the apology last year [in 2008] to the Stolen Generations.

To remedy this, we begin with an acknowledgment that history happened here! That history requires that we acknowledge that, since 1788, this country has been based on a history of taking away – the taking away of land, of culture, of heritage and, as last year’s apology acknowledged, the taking away of children. This is the truth.

To remedy this requires recognition that Australia is a particularly clear example of the continuity of ownership and possession of the land by Indigenous people.

While European nations returned African land to Indigenous ownership, that has not happened in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and most of Canada.

The British left India and the Dutch left Indonesia.

The practical answer to the differences is that Indigenous Indians, Africans, and Indonesians were in the majority. In Australia and those other jurisdictions, they are not. That means that those who stole the country, and the genocide that followed, were rewarded.

We Europeans coveted space for a penal colony, new opportunities and great wealth. We came, we coveted, we stole and we murdered.

It is worth noting that those jurisdictions we compare ourselves to – the US, Canada and New Zealand – have all signed treaties with their Indigenous peoples in the 19th century. This does not mean there are not ongoing problems but they have at least recognised the legal place of Indigenous peoples in their nations. Australia remains the odd one out.

Of course, the Prime Minister was right to say sorry. The taking away of children, in particular, involved serious crimes.

People benefited from this dispossession and continue to benefit. Many have grown wealthy on the poverty of others.

Saying sorry is the very least we should do – sadly, for many, that is the only thing that has been done. It is not enough
to say that present generations are not responsible for the actions of previous generations, since present generations benefit from that original dispossession and its ongoing repercussions.

The policy of assimilation was something many Australians complied with. Even if there were good intentions, this policy was so destructive of the social structures of Indigenous communities and resulted in immense personal suffering.

In all parts of our society, if I have hurt someone, it is not enough to be sorry, not even enough to repent. I must recompense the person, or else my repentance is shown to be a sham.

For those of us descended from those who arrived in 1788, we would recognise that compensation for past injustices should actually be based on our duty, not just on the needs of Indigenous people.

We should also recognise that no compensation could ever be satisfactory because, as Peter Adam said in a powerful speech in Melbourne earlier this year, what was done was so terrible, so immense, so universal and so pervasive, so destructive, and so irreparable.

But recompense we must.

The idea of recompense is not alien to our society. James Hardie had to recompense workers harmed by asbestos. There was widespread support that this should be the case. If this recompense is right, then surely it is also right to offer recompense to the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

The Bringing Them Home report into the removal of Aboriginal children from their families noted that compensation or reparation had to be part of the holistic approach towards delivering justice and facilitating healing. It recognised the enormous barriers that face members of the Stolen Generations in seeking to now make claims of compensation for emotional, sexual and physical abuse.

It proposed a national tribunal to facilitate these claims and assist people with a legitimate legal right in accessing compensation. The proposed tribunal would be a partnership between governments, churches, Indigenous organisations and the Stolen Generation’s community, but would also be independent.

The premise was that governments should stop tenaciously defending claims by the Stolen Generations and instead facilitate appropriate compensation in situations where it was merited.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), in its release of Restoring Identity: Final Report puts this option squarely back on the table. It proposes that such a tribunal be based upon principles that include acknowledgement of the racist nature of removal policies, self-determination, and access to redress for people affected by the policy, and prevention of the causes of contemporary separation of Indigenous children from their families.

To this end, the tribunal would also be a forum in which Indigenous people affected by policies could tell their stories, provide reparation through appropriate compensation packages and make recommendations about government and church activities that affect the current rates at which Indigenous children are removed from their families.

Restoring Identity also points out that successful and workable compensation schemes for Indigenous children separated from their families have been established in Tasmania, and in other countries, namely Canada and New Zealand.

The Federal Government has refused to address the issue of compensation. It is technically correct when it argues the legal responsibility for compensation will mostly fall to the states, churches and other groups.

But there is nothing to prevent the Federal Government from taking a leadership position in facilitating a reparations tribunal that could, like the PIAC model suggests, process claims and coordinate payments from liable parties.

As we have seen concerning boat people lately, there is a crisis of moral leadership in the country. Where are our moral leaders with the courage to advocate with passion for necessary changes, rather than continue to start from a fear of offending the powerful, or the static desire to maintain the status quo?

This government is better placed than most to do this, but the window may not be open for long.

We have a Prime Minister sitting at record levels in the polls. He and his Ministers could change the discourse. They could change the manner of debate that puts the human being back in the picture.

Perhaps a starting point would be to reclaim the language in the national debate. If we were to go back 25 years and listen to the debate in parliament and in the media, it was clear that we lived together in a society. If we unpack the debate today, we seem to live together in an economy.

This is significant because the people who live together in a society are citizens; those who live together in an economy are customers or consumers. Thus every human relationship is reduced to an economic relationship.

I was reminded of this at Sydney airport today with the boarding announcement for customers, not passengers, to board the flight. In the same way, banks no longer provide services, they sell products. Thus it is easier for a bank to foreclose on the family farm, as services for people are not as important as the profits from product sale.

Recently, I renegotiated my mortgage, requiring a visit to the bank where the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

“...the people who live together in a society are citizens; those who live together in an economy are customers or consumers. Thus every human relationship is reduced to an economic relationship.”
There is something about us and boats. Maybe they hold up a mirror to the rest of us. Maybe they remind us of the unfinished business of our history. Maybe if we want to begin treating refugees better, we might need to seek some sort of treaty with Aboriginal people. The first and last peoples remind us of what needs to be done.

The politics of fear have characterised much of the debate around asylum seekers and refugees. We have locked people away in remote detention centres, and denied them a face. Again the language used points to the ethos at work: ‘The Pacific Solution’. If ever there was a chilling policy in Australian history it was this one, resonating down the years to Europe in the 1940s. Thank God the Pacific Solution is no more.

At the Edmund Rice Centre, we undertook to examine what happens to asylum seekers who were deported against their will. In the past five years we have visited 22 countries – from Rwanda to Iran to Afghanistan to Colombia – and we have interviewed over 250 returnees. We found that only 5 per cent were safe. The overwhelming majority are living in danger, in hiding, or continually on the move. Returnees had been killed in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Colombia and Sri Lanka. Returnees’ children had been killed in Afghanistan.

Of course Australia has the absolute right to return people if they are found to have invalid claims. If the right decision is made they can be returned safely and can life safely after they return. But if they are returned to the danger and persecution they were fleeing in the first place – or even to death – then clearly, the wrong decision has been made. And when wrong decisions are made here, people die.

Azim Abdul Rajabi is an Afghan man whose family had connections to the Majibullah Government. The Taliban murdered his father and then they came after him. He fled and spent three years on Nauru, from where he was returned to Kabul. Four weeks after his return, a hand grenade was thrown at his house one night whilst the family were eating dinner. His daughters Yalda, aged 9, and Rona, aged 6, were both killed.

Newspaper reports and the Lutheran missionaries in Kabul confirmed their deaths and the fact they were targeted by the Taliban.

Azim told me the day we visited the graves of his children that he and his fellow Afghans got caught up in politics in Australia. “We became part of the election. All after the Tampa. My children died so that John Howard could win an election.”

Surely we must never allow ourselves through poor moral-less leadership to succumb to the politics of fear.

The way to deal with the politics of fear is to separate the myths from the facts. There have been a number of falsehoods circulating once more concerning people coming to Australia by boat, led by shock-
jock radio hosts, the press, and politicians with a taste for the playing of the race card.

The best way to confront the politics of fear is to spread the truth around, to separate the myths from the facts. At the Edmund Rice Centre we have been in this business of 'Debunking the Myths' since the time of the Tampa, and we have recently published another edition. So let's look at the facts:

Myth: Australia is being inundated by people in boats

This is false. The 2000 boat people who have sought to seek asylum in Australia this year is tiny when compared to other countries. Even given an increase this year, the number is dwarfed when we consider the 95 per cent of asylum seekers who arrive on average by plane in Australia each year, and the 50,000 visa over-stayers annually.

Myth: The numbers coming to Australia are higher than other countries

This is false. By the end of 2008, 42 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced from their homes. During 2008, 88,800 refugees were resettled in various countries throughout the world including Australia, while another 839,000 applied for asylum. Only 4,750 of these claims were made in Australia: this is 0.57 per cent of all asylum claims. In the same period, France received 35,400 claims, the USA received 49,600 and South Africa 207,000.

Myth: Australia receives more refugees than most other countries

This is untrue. The number of asylum seekers worldwide has increased significantly over the past two years. From 2007 to 2008, asylum seeker numbers rose by 122 per cent in Italy, 121 per cent in Norway, 89 per cent in the Netherlands, 70 per cent in Turkey, 53 per cent in Switzerland, 30 per cent in Canada and 20 per cent in France. In the same period, Australia had only a 19 per cent increase.

Myth: Australia hosts more refugees than most other countries

Developing countries host four-fifths of the world's refugees. According to the UN's global statistics on asylum seekers, the major refugee-hosting countries at the end of 2008 were Pakistan (1,780,900); Egypt (1,105,700); Iran (980,100); Germany (582,700); Jordan (500,400); Chad (330,500); Tanzania (321,900); Kenya (320,600); China (301,000) and the United Kingdom (292,100). Australia comes in 32nd out of 71 countries resettling refugees (slightly behind Kazakhstan, Guinea, and Djibouti).

Myth: More boats are coming because of a 'softening' of asylum seeker policy in Australia

Asylum seeker numbers have increased in 2009 all over the world, not just in Australia. Australia has received far less applications than other countries. The reason for large increases internationally is not because countries have 'gone soft', but because the violence in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and Sri Lanka has worsened. An increase in the number and intensity of worldwide 'push factors' has forced many to flee.

Myth: Australia takes more asylum seekers now than ever before

Wrong. Despite our recent increase, we still have far fewer asylum seekers now than we did in 2001 (when we received more than 5500 by boat) or in 2002 (about 3000).

Myth: Temporary protection visas and the 'Pacific Solution' stopped the boats

Unauthorised boat arrivals to Australia increased after the introduction of temporary protection visas (TPVs) in 1999 (48 per cent more asylum seekers arrived by boat in 2001 than in 1999). Boat arrivals only started decreasing in 2003 when global asylum seeker numbers started dropping, not because of TPVs and the Pacific Solution.

Myth: People who come by boat are 'illegals'

Anyone who comes to Australia seeking protection – regardless of whether they come on a boat or on a plane – has a right under international and Australian law to apply for that protection. As an asylum seeker, they have legal status.

Myth: Most asylum seekers come by boat

Most asylum seekers come to Australia by plane. In 2008, more than 95 per cent of asylum seekers arrived by plane.

Myth: There are terrorists on the boats

There is no evidence for this. All asylum seekers are subject to rigorous security checks upon arrival and they are held in detention. In the entire period of the Howard and Rudd Governments, not one asylum seeker was found to be a security risk to the country. Anyone who has been charged with terror-related activities was either born here or arrived on a plane with a valid visa.

Myth: Now that war has ended in Sri Lanka, it is perfectly safe to send back asylum seekers

The absence of war in Sri Lanka does not mean peace. The Government of Sri Lanka was a party to one of the
most violent civil wars the world has seen. There are very few signs that the cycle of violence has been broken in Sri Lanka. According to international and Australian law, asylum seekers need to have their claims for protection assessed so that a correct determination can be made as to whether or not they are refugees. To send anyone back before processing is completed not only breaches our international obligations, it runs the risk of sending legitimate refugees back to the very dangers they need to be protected from.

So, after sorting the facts from the myths, the politics of fear need to be confronted with the reality of hope. This is not a sort of ‘bleeding-hearted’ aspiration but inspired by what we find when we take another look at history globally.

Twenty-five years ago, if I had said these things will happen in the next two decades, you would not have believed me: the Berlin Wall will come down, the Iron Curtain will collapse and the Soviet union will fall and it would not take a nuclear war. If I said to you that the environmental movement would become so important as a political issue that we would even have a Department of the Environment, headed by the singer from Midnight Oil, you might suggest I go to Tasmania and hug a tree. If I told you that the Marcos regime in the Philippines would end by people power, that Nelson Mandela would be released from jail and would be President, and that it would happen peacefully, you might wonder if I had missed my medication. And if I told you that the President of the US would be a black man, you simply would not believe me.

None of these changes have been perfect but they are proof that change can happen and change for the good can happen.

“In the light of Christian faith lies a fundamental belief that it is possible to live on this planet like a human being: this is the Good News we can never lose sight of.

Ultimately, if we remain close to the people we seek to assist we will also hear the truth that liberates us all. A wonderful Columban once told me that the truth is to be found at the edges.

I realised this again recently in Afghanistan in the strength of an elderly woman who had one son killed and had another missing after returning from Australia. I did not know how I could help her so I reached into my wallet and offered her $20 to cover her costs for travel. She lives on $4 a week. Zahra gently refused and said, “No sir. Sometimes when you offer money it makes it worse. Just because one lives in poverty and oppression, doesn’t mean they live without dignity.” I will never forget her courage, wisdom and strength.

And so we have a job to do. In the words of Br Philip Pinto, the Congregational Leader of the Christian Brothers:

“It is futile for earthbound humanity to cling to the dark and poisoning superstition that our world is somehow bounded by the nearest hill, ends at the river shore, or is enclosed in the tight circle of those who share our town, our views and the colour of our skin.

“Surely it is the task of our educators and our young people – and all people of good will – to work together to strip the last remnants of that cruel and ancient belief from the fabric of humankind.”

To do that, we seek a world where those who come first and last in this country might be able to enjoy an equitable place in the life of the nation.

We seek a world where the needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich; the freedom of the weak takes priority over liberty of the powerful, and the access of marginalised people in society takes priority over the preservation of an order that excludes them.

When we do this and work to achieve this, we will attract criticism – at times, persecution and calumny. But when you are over the target, you have to expect flak. It’s part of the deal.

So let’s debunk the myths and spread the truth around; let’s reclaim the language and rehumanise our relationships. The first and the last have paid too high a price in this nation. Drawing on the inspiration of Gerald Ward, the wonderful work of the St Vincent de Paul Society in our society, means we can do no less, and as a nation we must be no less. It is still possible to live on the planet like a human being. That’s the Good News. Let’s spread it around.

**Phil Glendenning** is the director of the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney. He is also the National President of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation.
THE SILENCE OF THE GOOD

Dr John Falzon presented this response to Phil Glendenning’s Gerald Ward Lecture.

Agh! tear out the page / forget his age thin skull they cried / that's why he died!
But I can't forget / the silhouette of a concrete floor / a cell door / and John Pat.

This is the first biblical attempt, in the book of Genesis, to historicise the fact of injustice and to take a stand on the side of those who have suffered injustice.

In 1848, Frederic Ozanam, the founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Paris, wrote that “we should take responsibility for those who have too many needs and not enough rights.”

This is a fitting description of the St Vincent de Paul Society's position regarding our nation's need for appropriate legislative instruments that would not only protect the human rights of the people who have been pushed to the margins, but also heighten social awareness of the structural and historical causes of inequality and oppression, beginning with the colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal nations.

We could also start with a speedy reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act following its unconscionable suspension as part of the Northern Territory intervention. Incidentally, if, as rumoured in some circles, compulsory income management is rolled out for all social security recipients, black and white, we will shamefully be augmenting racial discrimination with class discrimination.

This is not peripheral to our mission. This call to compassion and justice is central to our mission. Compassion and justice are what matter.

And in the wise words of Dr King: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.”

DR MARTIN LUTHER KING ONCE wrote that “the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamour of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.”

Phil, you are one of the good people who can never be accused of being silent. May we all take a leaf out of your book, my brother.

My friends, tonight we have heard a call to struggle, as well as a call to deep reflection.

In truth, the two go together. Just like the coming together of the prophetic denunciation of the bad news and the prophetic announcement of the good news, to use Paulo Freire's terminology.

A struggle for justice that makes no room for reflection will be defeated by its own lack of clarity.

And reflection that does not come from, or lead to, struggle, is nothing more than the dancing of clouds. It brings no rain to the earth, no sustenance, no growth.

Like the red land, we long for the life-giving rain of deep reflection, grounded in the struggle for justice.

But we also long for the lightning flash of social change, the real cause for hope.

Why? Because our history, since colonisation, has not only accepted oppression; it has enshrined it, as structure, as attitude, even as law. I am reminded of the powerful poem by Aboriginal poet Jack Davis on the death in custody of 16-year-old John Pat in 1983. He writes of the dangerous power of Guddia (or whitefella) law:

Write of life / the pious said forget the past / the past is dead.
But all I see / in front of me is a concrete floor / a cell door / and John Pat.

This is a viaduct / for fang and claw, and a place to dwell / like Roebourne's hell of a concrete floor / a cell door / and John Pat.

It is no accident that among the First Peoples of this land, adults are 13 times more likely than non-Indigenous adults to be sent to gaol. Being 'locked up' follows hot on the heels of being 'locked out'.

In reflecting with us on the story of injustice perpetrated against Aboriginal people in Australia, Phil Glendenning has issued a prophetic call for us to care deeply and to act passionately in the cause of liberation. His call belongs to that long and sacred tradition of movements for progressive social change; a tradition that finds eloquent expression in the scriptures.

Recently, I travelled for the first time through Wiradjuri Country on the way to Rylestone, NSW. The land there was beautiful but the hills were crying. I could feel an incredible sense of sadness in the landscape, a feeling that something was not right. This is, of course, the place where countless Wiradjuri women, men and children fled and were mercilessly slaughtered. This is exactly where we encounter that primieval call to social justice in the scriptures:

“Listen to the sound of your brother's blood crying out to me from the ground!” (Genesis 4:10)
ON BEHALF OF THE 130,000 MEMBERS of the Society in the United States, I thank you for your hospitality and friendship. You are our heroes. We are impressed by the great support you have provided to our International Council in Paris. The United States is working hard to do our fair share. I am looking forward to an exchange of ideas because I think we have much to learn from each other.

In order to understand the Society in the United States, I will first describe our structure. We operate under the servant leadership model. Picture an inverted triangle, where the members are at the top of the triangle where they engage the poor. The conference supports the members, the councils support the conferences. Our eight regions support the councils, and National supports the regions. We have 380 councils supporting 3541 conferences. Those conferences support our 130,000 members.

The Society in the US served 19 million people last year, spending $US326 million on services to the poor. The National Council’s income and expenses were $US3.2 million each. This illustrates that the funds and decisions for serving the poor in the US are made at the conference and council level. We do this in order to promote subsidiarity so that decisions are made as close to the point of contact to the poor as possible.

Today in the USA, we are experiencing an unemployment rate of 10.2 per cent, a housing bust, and we are recovering from the financial abuses of Wall Street. The politics are divisive. There is a struggle between the factions of war and peace, and our media exploits sensationalism. There is a struggle between the proponents of individualism vs. those who promote the common good.

In this climate, the Society in the USA continues to promote home visits as our primary method of interacting with the poor. We use our Special Works to serve the needs of the poor that are best addressed outside of home visits. Those works are: food pantries, dining halls, disaster relief, employment services, legal assistance, medical and dental care, adult education, homeless shelters, housing, job training, nutritional education, prison ministry, substance abuse, youth in crisis, and thrift stores. We have 412 thrift stores. The stores have 1,500 full-time employees and 900 part-time employees and 11,600 volunteers.

We have been working on our strategic plan for 10 years. Our number one goal was spiritual formation and it has been a resounding success. The Serving in Hope program contains modules that are designed to be used at our conference meetings. The modules educate our Vincentians on our traditions, our mission, our ministry and our work. There is a CD and a workbook that each member receives and will be used at the meeting for discussion and for the member to take home for reflection. Invitation to Renewal is a leadership and motivation, five-day training session that we conduct three times a year. The attendees come out of these sessions highly motivated.

We are working with the graduate school of DePaul University in Chicago on a leadership development curriculum that we are using at our meetings. We now ask
that all our activities go through the prism of Vincentian formation.

In the area of communications, we send our Ozanam News to 60,000 members, four times a year. We send emails and alerts to our leaders on a real-time basis. Our website contains a public section and a section for our members, where they can access practically all the resources they need for their information and development.

We have been working hard on good governance practices for our conferences and councils. We have recently introduced a Standards of Excellence process that we will use to review and recognise our councils and conferences over the next three to five years.

We have hired a person on our national staff to facilitate the expansion of our youth and young adult conferences. We have a work group composed of people from different cultures to recommend ways in which the Society can serve and include all cultures, particularly the Hispanic community. In addition, our efforts continue to form new conferences and councils.

The Voice of the Poor is our advocacy committee. We are encouraging all councils and conferences to form a Voice of the Poor committee. Our goal is to have 10 per cent of our members, 13,000 people, who are committed to participate in our advocacy effort. Presently we have over 7,000 members of Voice of the Poor. The members are asked to send an email to their congressmen and women on issues that affect the poor. We use an electronic email system that allows us to send letters in three minutes. We have established position papers on major areas that affect poverty.

The USA has traditionally been focused on Central and South America for our twinning efforts. We are revitalising our twinning by matching our councils with national councils in the twinning zones. This focus will allow members, conferences and councils to provide integrated support for countries that they are building relationships with. This way we will be able to exchange young people and do major projects, as well as involving members in the effort.

“Today in the USA, we are experiencing an unemployment rate of 10.2 per cent, a housing bust, and we are recovering from the financial abuses of Wall Street. The politics are divisive. There is a struggle between the factions of war and peace, and our media exploits sensationalism.”

Terry Wilson, US Council First Vice President, has done a terrific job in informing our members of the good work that International does around the world and the need to support our Paris operation. We are working hard to convince our membership of the need for our support and to fulfil our Concordat responsibilities.

A new initiative in our national development work is our Friends of the Poor Walk. Last year was the inaugural walk and took place on the feast of St Vincent de Paul. We raised $US830,000 online; all of the proceeds went to the conferences to aid the poor. This year we raised $1.25 million. In December, we will consider undertaking a national car donation program.

The Vincentian Family is promoting systemic change as a way to address the root causes of poverty. The Health Care Bill before Congress has the potential for systemic change in reducing poverty. We are working hard to make this happen. At the parish level, we hope to use the Unity Square Project as a plan to bring about a systemic change that will address all the contributing factors of poverty.

We hope to promote this model for poor neighborhoods on a national basis.

I thank you again for your friendship and wonderful hospitality. I look forward to a flourishing partnership that helps the Society address poverty throughout the world. ♦

Joe Flannigan is National President of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
The economy has no relevance and no purpose without reference to society.
IT WOULD BE FAIR TO SAY THAT over recent decades the economy has played an increasingly central role in our lives.

We read about it, have significant time allocated to it on the nightly news and whole sections of the daily papers are dedicated to the economy.

Over the past 18 months, however, with the advent of the Global Financial Crisis, the economy has become even more central and impacted on most facets of our lives.

It is interesting that when we talk of the economy we often refer to it as if we are talking of a person: we give it human characteristics; it takes on anthropomorphic form, which assumes it has morals and values to guide it and dictate its course of action.

We refer to the health of the economy, saying it is ‘suffering’ or ‘thriving’. We consider particular decisions and their potential effect on the long-term future of the economy. We have developed many tools to measure the health and vitality of the economy, and indexes to tell us how the economy is performing and what needs to be done to ensure its continued health.

In many ways, we have made the economy preeminent – something to be nurtured and protected; something we sometimes must make sacrifices for; something to which we are subservient.

We have also seen the economy manipulated by those who are motivated by greed and self interest, generating disproportionate wealth for themselves with little or no regard for the impact on others in our society.

Economic terms have entered into the language of our everyday lives and, in many ways, the language of economics has redefined the way in which we describe ourselves.

In the economic world, we are consumers, taxpayers, welfare recipients, workers, unemployed, pensioners, customers.

Whilst we can be all these things at different times in our lives, it is important to remember that at all times we are first and foremost citizens, members of our community and of our society.

In reality, the economy is a tool and servant of society: the economy has no relevance and no purpose without reference to society.

When we look at the definition of economy and consider the origins of the word, we see that it is derived from the simple concept of managing the house, via Latin from the Greek, oikonomia, ‘household management,’ based on oikos, ‘house’ + nemein ‘manage’.

How does this definition of the economy apply to our modern and complex society? I believe it remains as true today as it did in ages gone by… the economy is a tool by which we manage the affairs of society, it is a tool to assist in the development and improvement of society for all citizens.

So let’s undo some of the language we use:

- When we refer to the health of the economy, we are really asking about the health of society.
- When we say the economy is suffering or thriving, we are really saying people are suffering or thriving.
- When we consider particular decisions and their effect on the long-term future of the economy, what we are really determining is the long-term impact on the society and its citizens.

“"When assessing the performance of the economy, we must be able to measure its contribution to further advancing the society in which we live.”

My hope is that, in the future, we can develop new ways of measuring the performance of the economy: creating new indexes that go beyond mathematical equations that measure simple growth or decline but rather measure the effect of the economy in human and social terms, which in turn would become a reference point for social and political decision-making.

When assessing the performance of the economy, we must be able to measure its contribution to further advancing the society in which we live.

In order to achieve this, we need to ask the following questions. Do the current economic settings:

- contribute to improving the lives of citizens in the community?
- enable communities to reach their potential?
- liberate people from poverty?
- contribute to justice and equity?
- contribute to social inclusion?

The above measures will help to ensure that the economy remains in its rightful place as a valued and important servant to society.

Peter Quarmby is the executive director of Community Sector Banking, a specialist banking service for not-for-profit organisations.
IN 1994, I STARTED WORKING IN community development in some of the large public housing estates around Sydney. There I learnt a valuable lesson: that everyone has a story. That might sound obvious. It is, however, the most obvious truths that sometimes need to be spoken.

Now is one of those times. On one hand, we have a government committed to the humiliating blanket imposition of compulsory income-management on the basis of race and class. On the other hand, we have a Leader of the Opposition who persists with the most offensive attitudes to our sisters and brothers who are doing it tough.

Everyone has a story. And they don’t happen in limbo. They happen in the context of developing social and economic structures. Each person’s story is a unique intersection of the personal and the political. Each intersection continues to change.

Tony Abbott’s recent comments* on poverty and homelessness reveal an inability to understand these intersections. If you don’t know how intersections work, you’re sure to come a cropper!

The deeply offensive aspect of Abbott’s comments is that he blames people for being left out or pushed out. Nothing could be further from the truth. Choices are constrained for those who have been systematically locked out of the nation’s prosperity. There’s not much choice between a rock and a hard place. But of course, such a world view lets governments off the hook. It denies the reality of the social.

When I was forced to engage with what was happening in people’s lives, I was able to see the bigger picture emerging. I found myself being completely re-educated on the causes of inequality and how these social relations intersected in the lives of the people who were pushed to the edges of society.

Every day, the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society and many NGOs across Australia see and touch the Australian face of marginalisation. Many of us see this experience as a sacramental encounter.

Many of us believe in the real presence of Christ in our disadvantaged and demonised sisters and brothers.

We are driven by the truth of what we see and touch. And the truth is that we, as a society, have within our means the ability to change the structures that cause or exacerbate poverty and exclusion. The question is whether we, as a nation, have the political will.

We continue to be subjected to social policies that mimic the paternalism exemplified in Margaret Thatcher’s contention, “there is no such thing as society”. Paternalism starts (and ends!) with a highly unequal relationship of power. It is described by Lawrence Mead, one of its leading US proponents, as “the close supervision of the poor”.

The New Paternalism is a relatively recent version of this approach. The focus is on the supposed individual deficit rather than structural deficits. The very name bespeaks the manner in which people are objectified and treated like young children who have no capacity to make decisions or take control. Any decision imputed to them is roundly condemned by a moralising discourse from on high.

The New Paternalism is exemplified by such policies as compulsory income-management or using the threat of financial penalties on sole parents or people in receipt of unemployment benefits.

* see ‘Abbott’s homelessness stance dismays welfare services’, Cathnews.com, 16 February 2010.
The New Paternalism assumes that people are largely to blame for their own marginalisation; that people who are marginalised are naturally without power; that power naturally rests with those who deserve it; that those with power can, at best, use their power to bring about a change in the behaviour of those without power; and that the problems experienced by people who are marginalised are their own problems, but bleed into the ‘mainstream’ through increased costs, increased crime, loss of productivity, market constraints and disorder.

These assumptions are as pernicious as they are unproven. They lead to either treating people as if they are ‘sick’ (pathologisation) or as if they are morally bad (criminalisation). Being ‘locked up’ often follows hot on the heels of being ‘locked out’.

Nothing good can come out of these approaches. They are cursed not only by their lack of compassion but also by their denial of justice. We should be listening to the people who are most oppressed by the structures that cause inequality and marginalisation. We are obliged to engage in bringing about the necessary social change.

The only lasting liberation is won collectively by the people who hunger for it, to paraphrase the Beatitude.

Jean-Paul Sartre once noted that no matter how terrible the situation a person finds themselves in, the impetus to seek change does not come automatically. Someone does not wake up one morning and decide that this is enough, that something must be done. Rather, you will do something about the situation only when you realise that an alternative is possible.

This must happen on a collective level if we are serious about creating genuine pathways out of homelessness and poverty. We must create the alternatives, rather than condemning our own to be imprisoned in an oppressive status quo. More than this, together we must have the courage to imagine the possible if we are to build the kind of society where homelessness and exclusion are prevented in the first place.

**Dr John Falzon** is Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council and a member of the Australian Social Inclusion Board.

This article was published in Eureka Street on 18 February 2010. (www.eurekastreet.com.au)

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**SUDAN VISIT**

**THE NATIONAL SECRETARY OF THE St Vincent de Paul Society in Sudan, Rev. Deacon Kamal Tadros, recently addressed the Australian National Council.**

A Catholic deacon, Kamal is married with one child who lives in Australia and four grandchildren.

In 1986, the former Shell chief accountant helped open a home in Sudan for orphaned boys who he literally fetched from the streets. The same year saw him appointed headmaster of the local Archbishop’s schools, located within camps for people who had fled from their homes.

Unfortunately, Kamal and the St Vincent de Paul Society had to endure all sorts of harassment and pressure from the government. In 1994, he was jailed for two weeks under very harsh conditions that almost resulted in his death in custody. In 2002, he resigned as headmaster to devote himself entirely to the work of St Vincent de Paul in the war torn country.

In Australia, Kamal described to national councillors his distress at the condition of the street children in Sudan. Many of these children had lost their parents during the longest-running war of modern times, which has seen enormous movements of people away from the battle zones. This brave and humble man has asked us to support him; and the Society in Australia has provided a grant of $185,000.

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**PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION CALLS FOR REFORMS TO STRENGTHEN NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR**

**WIDE-RANGING REFORMS ARE needed to remove unnecessary burdens and costs faced by the not-for-profit sector, and to improve its accountability.**

This is the key message of a research report released recently by the Productivity Commission. Better regulation, improved funding arrangements and enhanced opportunities for innovation would improve outcomes for the community and the public’s confidence in the sector.

Putting the Commission’s case for reform, Presiding Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald said, “the proposed reforms would directly address concerns about the multiplicity of regulatory requirements, poor collaboration between the sector and governments and emerging capacity constraints. They would thereby create a much stronger foundation for this expanding sector.”

To consolidate regulatory oversight and enhance transparency, the Commission proposes a ‘one-stop shop’ for Commonwealth-based regulation in the form of a Registrar for Community and Charitable Purpose Organisations. An Office for Sector Engagement should also be established to drive reform and policy development at the Commonwealth level.

Associate Commissioner Dennis Trewin said, “Australia has 600,000 not-for-profit organisations which contributed $43 billion to Australia’s GDP growing at an annual rate of 7.7 per cent since 2000. If you count the contribution of 4.6 million volunteers, with an imputed value of $15 billion, this would make it a similar contribution to the retail industry.”

The report makes a number of other recommendations aimed at:

- building a better knowledge-base, through a national measurement framework and a Centre for Community Service Effectiveness to act as a clearinghouse to promote best practice evaluation;
- encouraging smarter regulation, including a more coherent endorsement process for tax status, to be administered by the proposed Registrar, and a new definition of charities;
- promoting giving through a broader scope of gift deductibility, the promotion of planned giving and nationally harmonised fundraising regulation;
- facilitating innovation and sector development through a variety of initiatives; and
- reforming government purchasing and contracting arrangements.
My grace is sufficient for you; my power is made perfect in weakness.

THE LENTEN SEASON HAS ONCE again come upon us and, in order to help us as a Vincentian Family to enter deeply into this time of grace, I propose to you the following reflection.

I had a fruitful dialogue recently with a friend of mine from my Central American experience as a missionary. This friend is very committed to the poor, and considers herself to be a Catholic Christian. One of her distinguishing characteristics is that she is in favour of revolution, including armed revolution, especially in and for developing countries that are struggling to progress in this world today.

Our discussion centered on the question of peace and non-violence. My position is totally opposed to armed revolution and more open to, as I consider it, an evangelical approach to non-violent revolution that Jesus Christ proposed in and through the different examples that He gives us for the transformation of society, not through force but through love.

My friend sent me an article on non-violence that she had come across. Even though perhaps she was not fully in agreement with its content, it made her think about the value that non-violence has in the world today. For me, it showed a very deep reflection on non-violence and as the basis of our Christian tradition from the very life example of Jesus Christ himself.

The author of the very brief reflection on non-violence begins by noting that we are part of a culture that has historically justified the use of violence. As history has developed, progressed and become so sophisticated, even with its use of modern technological means of producing arms, it has constructed a cultural paradigm that, in one sense, we can say, has put the human race and the whole life of the planet on the border of extinction. But at the same time, parallel to this cultural proposal that we have lived for centuries, new ways of acting are emerging that begin by dismantling the justification of the methods of violence of all types. These propose that, in the diversity of expressions of human life, life in itself can be enriched rather than destroyed. In other words, it is possible to build a world in which people of different backgrounds and cultural expressions can learn to live together and therefore create harmony based on diversity rather than diversity being the justification for violence and therefore destruction.

Among the different creative ways of resisting violence in our world today, the author puts forth fragility as an essential. At the same time, he proposes the strength of horizontal dimensions in the organisation of society as a solution, rather than hierarchical structures. In other words, the basis of solutions is achieved in a circular fashion, a sort of ‘around the table’ type of discussion where all those who are at the table, including the poor and the marginalised, are given the opportunity to express themselves as equals in the discussions.

The article further shows that the image of the enemy has to be deconstructed by recognising that those who have a contrary opinion also may be able to contribute in a significant way to the construction of the truth. In other words, all those who sit at the table, even if their opinion is a different one from the...
“For some, non-violence is considered to be utopian, unrealistic. As Christians and as followers of Jesus Christ evangelising and serving the poor, we know that such is not the case and, in many places around the globe, non-violence succeeds.”

other, have a part of the truth and can contribute to the construction of the whole of the truth. We, as Christians, see the truth being constructed in the values that are contained in the richness of the life of Jesus Christ. It goes without saying that war in itself, in these days, is an illegitimate way of achieving harmony in the human society.

Furthermore, humanity, throughout its history, has dominated the planet to the point that now the planet is beginning to show its wear and tear. Harmony with nature is an alternative to the need to harness and dominate nature.

If we neglect to care for our planet, there is greater likelihood that the poor will suffer the most. Care for the planet is one of the signs of the times that we, as people of the 21st century, ought to respond to as a Vincentian Family. To quote Pope Benedict XVI,

“Today, the great gift of God’s creation is exposed to serious dangers and life-styles which can degrade it. Environmental pollution is making particularly unsustainable the lives of the poor of the world. We must pledge ourselves the care of creation and to share its resources in solidarity.” (Angelus for 27 August 2006 at Castel Gandolfo prior to the celebration of the Day for the Protection of Creation.)

Care for creation also is an issue of systemic change. There is an enormous system that is prevalent throughout the world that focuses far too much on efficiency and economic good without sufficiently considering the impact of our choices on the planet, particularly on the poor. It would be good for us as a Vincentian Family to involve ourselves with other organisations seeking to change this destructive system by getting to the root causes of it.

These presuppositions are put forth as different elements involved in the transformation and cultural reconstruction of our world. A key element in making that possible is non-violence. It involves an unconditional protection of life in all its forms, protection that is promoted through concrete actions. These actions move us towards a greater attempt to understand one another and our relationships as human beings in the political, social and economic fields. The basic understanding is that, as human beings, we share with others this planet that God has graciously provided for us.

For some, non-violence is considered to be utopian, unrealistic. As Christians and as followers of Jesus Christ evangelising and serving the poor, we know that such is not the case and, in many places around the globe, non-violence succeeds.

My brothers and sisters, the reflection on non-violence is very much a part of our tradition as Catholic Christians and very much at the heart of what Lent means to us. We focus on the need to change our attitudes in order to live more deeply the life that has been given us in the person of Jesus Christ and through his passion, his death and his resurrection. At the very heart of that gift of new life is fragility.

Let us reflect this Lenten season on the fragility of Jesus Christ and on our own fragility: to see it not as a limitation but rather as a means of building a new life for ourselves and others and the world in which we live. Jesus’ fragility is most concretely expressed as he gives up his spirit after the experience of his own passion prior to, and on, the cross itself. St Paul’s letter to the Philippians expresses the deep theological reflection in the Christological hymn which says that Jesus emptied himself, becoming nothing in order to make of us something through the fullness of life in the resurrection. Prior to this complete gift of himself on the cross, Jesus shows how fragility has its place in the transformation of society. The night before his death, Jesus showed us the way to be, the way to act. He washed the feet of his disciples – an act that would only be carried out in his time by slaves. He became the servant of the servants.

St Vincent, in his writings to both the confreres and the Daughters of Charity, called us to be unworthy servants, seeking lowly places. This reflection of St Vincent de Paul is simply yet eloquently reflected in the article written by Fr Jean Pierre Renouard as the fifth theme reflected on as part of our ongoing formation during our 350th anniversary year. In Fr Renouard’s article, “Who was Jesus for Vincent?”, he quotes St Vincent de Paul, and I include part of that quote here:

“What touched me the most is what has been told about Our Lord, who was the natural Master of everyone, and yet made himself the least of all, the disgrace and abjection of men, always taking the last place wherever he went. Perhaps, my dear confreres, you think that a man is truly humble and has really abased himself when he has taken the last place. Does a man humble himself when he takes the place of our Lord? Yes, brothers, the place of our Lord is the last place.”

Is there any more humble place to be taken at this time in history than to be at the service of the poor in Haiti? The Haitians are said to be an incredible people whose power to resist suffering has been proven time and time again throughout the history of their country, considered to be the poorest of the poor in the western hemisphere. Today, after the most destructive earthquake that they have seen
HELPING HAITI - IT’S OUR BUSINESS

A NEW WEBSITE TO IMPROVE THE lives of those living in Haiti through bolstering the economy will soon be launched.

The website is joint project of the worldwide Vincentian Family, Fonkoze (the largest microfinance institute in Haiti), DePaul University, and the Haitian Hometown Association Resource Group Initiated. The project has been developed in commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of St Louis de Marillac and St Vincent de Paul, to celebrate their historical, spiritual and charitable legacy.

The Zafen.org project aims to empower sustainable, economic development in Haiti. Zafen, Creole for ‘It’s our business’, has been developed to bring together a global community of lenders and donors who believe in the power of entrepreneurship to bolster the Haitian community, and to create jobs for those living in some of the poorest conditions in the world. The project has now been made all the more timely and vital due to the devastating 12 January earthquake.

Zafen.org is a unique opportunity to make a long-term difference in rebuilding Haiti. Loans or donations of any size will give individuals a chance to build resources and to exit conditions of poverty. Funds will be directed to projects in Haiti, rather than to individuals, encouraging greater long-term success of the projects.

Lenders and donors will be able to select projects they wish funding to go to, and track the projects’ progress in real-time on the website.

Zafen.org will be launched on 1 April 2010, and Vincentians are asked to help make the project a success in a number of ways.

- Visit the temporary website (www.zafen.org) and register to be notified of the official launch.
- Discuss with your group (community, conference, parish, school), family and friends the types of projects you would like to support, either as lenders or donors. Consider forming lending groups to support larger projects.
- Share information with others, both inside and outside the Vincentian community, about this unique opportunity to contribute to sustainable, economic development in Haiti.

Visit www.zafen.org for more details. ☞

“As people of this world, we can work together, putting aside our differences in order that the most fragile among us might be cared for...”

My brothers and sisters, I bring this reflection to a conclusion, but not to a close, for I hope it will open further personal reflection as well as reflection and discussion among yourselves. At the heart of our Christian faith is the reality of fragility in which new life came to be. We, as followers of Jesus Christ and faithful to his call, recognise our fragility and that of others, and we promote new life whether through non-violent means or through the care of our planet. Through our fragility we respond to the fragile state of the world and of all creation.

Our God, the God of Jesus Christ, is a God of Life and a God of Love. God pours out that love continually in and through the gift of his resurrection, which we celebrate at the culmination of the Lenten season. Let us never forget that the resurrection is who we are. We are a resurrection people, and Alleluia is our song. So let us sing, and let us do so as a family, together with our brothers and sisters who are poor. ☞

We present this reflection in this edition as we believe that its message is of great spiritual significance beyond the Lenten season.
I WAS ALWAYS TOLD THAT WHEN I grew up, I could be whatever I wanted to be. I’m not quite grown up yet, but having just commenced my fourth year of university studies, I am on the way to doing what I want with my career. For many of the families and individuals that the Society assists – and many more that it does not – the idea of growing up to have some kind of tertiary education is an impossible one because of the financial constraints of the ‘student’ status.

The reasons in favour of an adequate student income support system are many. The Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee found more students in recent years were forced to undertake employment to meet the basic costs of living during their studies than students 25 years ago. They also worked three times as many hours. Another investigation identified that skipping meals and other necessities due to financial hardship was a regular component of university life for as many as one in eight students. Some government assistance has the objective of easing the financial burdens of higher education, but many students are increasingly finding that accessing or completing tertiary study is out of reach due to insufficient support or exclusion from government assistance.

Governments continually argue the need for a more skilled workforce. The Commonwealth’s 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education concluded that tertiary study was the means to a skilled workforce but that “as never before, we must address the rights of all citizens to share in its benefits”. Of course, the propensity for education to empower – even to break cycles of poverty – has been well established throughout history. However, it is taking this arguably idealistic notion and forging a system that truly offers a ‘hand up’ through education that challenges government and those involved in the administration of education. As an organisation instructed by its founder to study the condition of the poor, and not merely tide them over the poverty crisis, these issues are very real for the Society too.

Last year, the Commonwealth Government proposed changes to eligibility for payments such as Youth Allowance and the withdrawal of substantial funding from the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme. For now, the passage of these proposals has been suspended and the state of limbo for students commencing tertiary education in 2010 has been perpetuated.

I am proud to say that the Society is involved in supporting national advocacy campaigns on the complex issues surrounding student poverty, not the least of which is the financial support available to students. Struggling students may not be aware of the existence of support networks, let alone ways to access them. They may not have encountered the Society before and may never contact a referral agency that points them to us. It is for this reason that regardless of the outcomes of the progress of student welfare legislation in the months ahead, Vincentians everywhere should be challenged to renew their approach to reaching out to assist students in need.

Incredible achievements begin in tertiary institutions. The founding of the St Vincent de Paul Society by Frederic Ozanam and his companions is merely one example. The need for more substantial support for Australian students, and for breaking down the isolating effects of student poverty through Vincentian charity is more necessary now than ever for children to know that they truly can grow up to be whatever they want to be.

CATHRYN MOORE is a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Queensland.
Australian Vincentians brought aid to people in crisis after successive world wars.

At the beginning of 1923, the French army occupied the Ruhr, in Germany’s Rhineland, after a dispute over the payment of war reparations. The Ruhr was the centre of German industry, and the Rhineland was overwhelmingly Catholic. Chaos ensued. Poverty and dislocation in the aftermath of the First World War were now joined by a deepening political and social crisis in the form of strikes and separatism. Looting took place. Children were evacuated. Cologne was the main railway centre and the centre of go-slows which damaged the economic aims of the French invasion. Catholic trade unions supported strikes, if out of patriotism rather than a sense of social justice.

The Vatican sided with Germany rather than France over the reparations issue. In the chaos, Cardinal Schulte, the Archbishop of Cologne, appealed to Catholics everywhere for relief, and the Superior Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Cologne appealed specifically to Society members in other countries.

Our Society responded with donations from members and conferences in Bendigo, Ballarat, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. The money was sent directly to the Society in Cologne. Perhaps aid to former enemies, then, was our Society’s first overseas relief effort.

FROM ITS EARLY DAYS, THE Society in Australia has had a strong sense of being part of an international Society and part of an international Church. To this, we may add the sense today of being part of the global community.

The early national journals such as the Quarterly (1916-1919) and the Monthly (1935-1941), which preceded The Record, carried frequent items of international news, perhaps reflecting a sense of Australian isolation, as well as membership of an international community.

This membership was also reflected in the Society’s early willingness to aid those overseas and not just those ‘like us’ or close to home. Our support for overseas relief began with crises far from Australia, notably in Germany after the First World War, and in the Middle East after the Second. Even the Twinning program began not with a close neighbour but with a distant partner, India (1960).

In 1923, the Society in Australia contributed the equivalent of about $20,000 in today’s money to the relief of distress in Germany. How did it come about that Australian Vincentians found themselves sending relief to people with whom their country had only recently been at war?

A 1923 report from the St Patrick’s Conference, Ballarat, contains this poignant juxtaposition: “The sum of 19 pounds was spent in the purchase of firewood for needy cases. The distress appeal from Europe was responded to and a donation sent.”

Pope Pius XII’s Pontifical Mission for Palestine was another appeal to which the Society responded. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Arab-Israeli war that followed produced a huge refugee crisis. A vast number of Palestinians fled or were driven out of their homes in what is now the state of Israel, taking refuge on the West Bank and in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Gaza. Many were children.

In response, Pius established the Pontifical Mission in 1949 as a vehicle for emergency relief – food, clothing, medicines – from Catholics throughout the world. The Record of 1 July 1950, in language that would not now be considered politically correct, reminded readers of the Crusades: “Time rolls on and now the Pope has issued an appeal for a second crusade, a crusade which differs from the first in that this time it is a crusade of help to relieve the misery of upwards of three to four million displaced Arabs in the Holy Land – the majority Moslems”.

Support for the Pontifical Mission became a Special Work of the Society here. A committee was formed in Sydney with George Scarf of Randwick as President. However, the Work may have struggled. Monsignor Gerald Bartlett, Spiritual Director of the Particular Council of Sydney, told a Festival Meeting that “he was unhappy to say that he considered the Pontifical Mission to Palestine (Sydney committee) was not receiving the support and assistance it deserved”.

This may be borne out by its relative absence from later issues of The Record.

The Pontifical Mission for Palestine still exists today as, sadly, does the refugee tragedy. And the Holy Land, where the Society has been established since 1851 (in Frederic Ozanam’s lifetime), still awaits peace.

Michael Moran is the National Council Archivist.
REMEmBERING LOuISE DE MARILLAC

ST LOuISE DE MARILLAC DIED 350 years ago, on 15 March 1660. Though the Marillacs were a powerful family in 17th century France, Louise was known to most people as Mademoiselle Le Gras.

Because she was of illegitimate birth, she could not marry into nobility and could not be called ‘Madame’. Instead, her family arranged the next best thing: she was married in 1613 to Antoine Le Gras, who was personal secretary to the most powerful person in France, the Regent and Queen Mother, Marie de Medici.

The marriage appears to have been contented. Louise would become a mother and a grandmother, but her husband would take ill and die in 1625. Louise then pursued a deeper calling: in 1623 she experienced an overpowering spiritual assurance that God would lead her to “a place where I could help my neighbour.”

France, in the first part of the 17th century, was in permanent crisis. There were wars everywhere. Alexandre Dumas, in The Three Musketeers, describes the year 1625 thus:

“In those times panics were common… There were nobles, who made war against each other; there was the king, who made war against the cardinal; there was Spain, which made war against the king. Then, in addition to these concealed or public, secret or open wars, there were robbers, mendicants, Huguenots, wolves, and scoundrels, who made war on everybody.”

These wars also meant heavy taxes, pillaging, devastation, and widespread misery. In that same year, 1625, Louise first sought direction from Vincent de Paul as to what she should do. He gently guided Mademoiselle Le Gras, as he always called her, to organise the noble Ladies of Charity to use their wealth and influence to give help to the poor, and later, in 1642, to establish the Daughters of Charity to work with and for the poor.

France was no small country then, its population being estimated at around 20 million, with between 210,000 and 420,000 people living in Paris. In 1652, for example, there were 100,000 beggars in Paris alone. The church historian and Vincentian, Fr Edward Udovic, comments, “one could neither escape nor ignore the poor because they were everywhere.” What could Louise do?

The Council of Trent, in trying to reform monastic life, had decreed that women’s religious orders should stay enclosed in their monasteries. Vincent and Louise, however, gradually developed a new model for service of the poor, not through power and wealth, but through the faith and commitment of working-class, peasant women who came to stay with her.

They would not become nuns, they would not wear a particular habit, but they would form a “little company” of charity, and their monastery would be the streets and the homes of the poor.

Although Louise was particular about every detail of the lives and works of this “little company”, and worked strenuously to ensure its survival and growth, one thing she stressed above all else was that their service must be “from the heart”.

The surviving letters between Vincent and Louise might suggest that she was a scrupulous and uncertain person, but they should be read as an account of her concerns rather than as a portrayal of her full personality. Everything else in her life points to a woman who combined her family’s gifts for detailed administration and creative leadership with a mystic’s experience of the love of God and a profound sense of Christ’s compassion for the poor.

Louise and Vincent both died in 1660. Two years after their deaths, King Louis XIV, the famous “Sun King” who built the Palace of Versailles, bowed to pressure from devout Catholic aristocrats and caused his government to take a role in administering relief for the poor and the creation of general hospitals in every town and city. The influence of Louise and Vincent was undoubtedly at work here.

And then, a century and a half later, in a new era of poverty and revolution and government neglect, a Daughter of Charity called Rosalie Rendu, imbued with the spirit of Louise, would guide a young Frederic Ozanam in the formation of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

We would do well to learn more about Louise de Marillac.

For recent research into the context of Louise de Marillac’s life and work, see:

- Tim McHugh, Hospital Politics in Seventeenth-Century France (Ashgate Publishing, 2007); and

JOHN HONNER is the author of Love and Politics: The Revolutionary Frederic Ozanam (David Lovell Publishing, 2007). He is currently writing a small book on Louise de Marillac, due for publication later this year.

ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY AUSTRALIA
AOTEAROA ODYSSEY
NATIONAL PRESIDENT, SYD TUTTON, and Victorian State President, Jim Grealish, made a short visit to New Zealand in January.

The visit had a threefold purpose:
• to be briefed on the New Zealand Charities Act, an Act based on the UK model, and which could be the basis of an Australian Act in the future;
• to meet the new President of the Society in New Zealand, Michael Hanrahan; and
• to build upon our relationship with our close neighbours.

About 25,000 charities in New Zealand are registered under the Charities Act. The required reporting applies to finances, activities, disaster relief, special works and centres and is administered continually. The rationale for the NZ legislation is that it gives unlimited tax benefits to donors, which is the supposed quid pro quo of having to provide complete transparency for donors and prospective donors who can view all details of a charity online.

Until the late 1930s, the Society in New Zealand was part of the Australian National Council.

PAN ASIAN CONGRESS:
A REVOLUTIONARY FORUM FOR THOSE ON THE EDGES
NEARLY 250 VINCENTIANS WILL gather in Goa, India, from 13 – 17 September for the 7th Pan Asian Congress (PANASCO). These Congresses are held each four to five years, the last two were held in Seoul, Korea and Perth, Australia.

The purpose of PANASCO is to look at issues of hope, to assist those on the margins. This will be done through keynote lectures, followed by workshops. The speakers and six topics are:
• Twinning – A path towards self-reliance: Speaker, Sr Catherine, Vietnam
• Social responsibility – Partnership to progress: Speaker, Dr John Falzon, Australia
• New poor – A trio of challenges (homelessness, education, alienation): Speaker, Fr Desmond D’Souza, India
• Spirituality – The force from within: Speaker, Fr Joseph Francis, India
• Youth and experience – A positive coming together: Speaker, Brother Joseph Pandian, India
• HIV/AIDS – Social responsibility: Speaker, Danusia Kaska, Australia.

From the workshops on these subjects, actions will be identified that can be implemented across cultural and language boundaries and a monitoring process will be put in place. The aim is to ensure the Congress is action-oriented, not just a talk fest.

The Cardinal Archbishop Oswald Gracias of Bombay will celebrate the opening Mass and other dignitaries will include the President-General, Jose Ramon Diaz Torremocha; the Patriarch of the East Indies and Archbishop of Goa, Filip Neri; the Governor of Goa, Dr. Shivinder Singh Sidhu; the Vice-President of the Society, Brian O’Reilly; the International Treasurer, Ian McTurk; and many other notables.

There will be a strong accent on Vincentian spirituality, with daily Mass and evening prayers. A highlight will be the closing Mass at the Basilica of Bom Jesus, where the body of St Francis Xavier lies in a crystal coffin.

SOCIETY LOGO DESIGNER TOM BASS DIES
THE SCULPTOR WHO DESIGNED the St Vincent de Paul Society’s logo has died at the age of 94.

Tom Bass was received into the Catholic faith in 1958 and joined the St Vincent de Paul Society soon after. He lived in Minto, NSW, and became a member of the Ingleburn Conference when it had only five or so members.

At the conclusion of Vatican II, much change was about to take place, including a suggestion that the Society needed a new logo to replace the image of St Vincent de Paul; an image that had been used for more than a century.

Tom, who had attended the first session of Vatican II in Rome, addressed a festival meeting at the Society in Ingleburn about his impressions. Apparently, Tom spoke with such enthusiasm and passion that the president of the conference invited Tom to consider the logo suggestion and assist the Society in its renewal by updating its image.

He asked whether Tom would consider re-designing the logo. After some thought, Tom reflected on the words of Christ: “A cup of water given in my name is given unto me.”

“I thought: ‘That’s it.’ That was one of the origins of the logo. I started drawing and got ideas floating,” he said.

The bottom hand of the logo represents the hand of suffering, which receives the cup. The middle hand (positioned above the hand of suffering) represents the hand of love, which offers the cup, and the first hand (above all others) is the hand of Christ, which blesses the cup.

This symbol of the hands truly reflects the work of the members, volunteers and employees of the Society. The hand of giving symbolises our good works, the hand of suffering symbolises those we serve, and the hand of Christ is present, above all others. This acknowledges His strong presence in the relationship between ourselves and those we help.
The Deputy National President, Teresa Wilson (above, with husband John Rhynehart), was married in January. Celebrant Bishop Tim Costelloe said the event was a ‘hot spot’, it was a very hot day. Despite her youth, Teresa has been a devoted Vincentian for 20 years!

John Campbell resigned as State President of Queensland on Christmas eve, due to health reasons.

The Society forwarded nearly $100,000 to relief in Haiti. The money is being put to use in reconstruction by FamVin.

ST VINCENT DE PAUL VOLUNTEER

Frank Hillas won this year’s Star award at the annual Footscray Rotary John Kerr Community Service Awards night in December 2009. Mr Hillas, 88, visits at least 16 families a week to distribute food and food vouchers, clothing, furniture and bedding to people in need in the local community through the St Vincent de Paul’s Maribyrnong branch. He frequently goes above and beyond the call of duty and has personally approached various utility companies and other organisations to assist with the repayment of overdue bills and outstanding debts.

“To get an award is great, but there are so many people helping others, so to pick one is very hard,” he said.

Mr Hillas said he was horrified, upon joining St Vincent de Paul, to see vast numbers of disadvantaged people and the conditions in which they lived.

“When I joined, the first thing I found was the position people were in and I didn’t know that people lived like that. I couldn’t leave without doing something.”

“He has an amazing empathy with people,” wife Pamela, who nominated him for the award, said.

Mr Hillas was one of five people to receive the John H Kerr community service award, which celebrates the unsung heroes of Melbourne’s west.◆

Charlene Gatt

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VALE LAURENCE SMITH

Laurence Smith (1924 – 2010) Asquith Conference, NSW

Our Brother, Laurie, Entered Eternal Life on 3 February 2010 after a long illness. He was held in high esteem throughout his parish in Ku-ring-gai Chase. He continued to be involved with our conference in his role as treasurer until a week before his passing.

Laurie was an inaugural member of our conference and officiated on the committee at all times. In 2008, he was presented with a Papal blessing to mark more than 50 years of membership and service to the society. Laurie was everything a Vincentian should be: committed to the ethos of respect and compassionate service to our clients. He was a fine example to his fellow conference members who all had a deep affection and respect for him.◆
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Leave proposals to citizens, politicians
DURING THE LAST FEDERAL Election campaign, Dr John Falzon gave, in the press, St Vincent De Paul Society approval to a Kevin Rudd proposal. The SVDP NSW State President agreed that SVDP should not endorse nor oppose any candidate’s proposals during an election campaign.

Recently, Dr Falzon stated in the Catholic Weekly that the SVDP rejected Temporary Protection Visas: similar problem.

Solution: The SVDP should enunciate Catholic Social Justice principles, but must leave it to political parties and citizens to accept or reject such particular proposals.

Joe Lopez, Warrimoo, NSW

Help for all, not just Catholics
IN THE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR in the Summer Edition of The Record, the sectarian comments regarding Dr Falzon deeply saddened my heart.

It is my belief that Catholic is Christian and, if I am right, then the comments of the Bishop of Armidale and others would not reflect what I believe to be Christian comments. Perhaps Matthew 11:18-19 may help them.

If we in the Society were to follow their comments, then when calling in response for help we should first find out who are Catholic for preference and then help the remainder: hardly Vincentian. I will pray for them that their eyes will be open wider.

Gratefully yours,
Aldinga Beach, SA

Tom Togher,
Ramsgate, NSW

Grateful greetings from India
I do enjoy reading your renowned magazine. It helps me a lot in my mission. It supplies me ample matters for my daily and Sunday homilies.

I value highly the tremendous efforts that you all have put in bringing out such a wonderful and useful magazine. I appreciate your cooperation and collaboration. I congratulate all the readers for their valuable and constant support for the viability of this magazine.

Go ahead, shine forth and give a face-lift to the value-lossing humanity. My prayerful support is for you.

Margaret Benson,
Burnie, TAS

May I request you to continue to lend your helping hand to my mission, as in the past, with your prayers, religious and school items. We will remain ever grateful to you and we do promise our prayers and Masses for you.

Fr S. John Joseph,
Parish priest and Vicar Forane,
St Cecily Church, Pettaipalayam,
Tamil Nadu, India.

Truth and goodness not Catholic exclusives
I REALLY ENJOY READING THE articles in The Record. However, I find some letters rather disturbing, but not surprising. Catholics see Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Light. His message was simple – God loves us, wants us to be happy and to live a life of service to others.

If Jesus was anything, He was inclusive. He came for us all. Sometimes I think some Catholics think they have exclusive rights on truth and goodness. God is everywhere, even in the most distressing circumstances. The fullness of truth lies in Jesus Christ – in his teaching. Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has at times lost touch with His teaching, e.g. the Inquisition. That is because its members are human and make mistakes. So the fullness of truth lies in the Catholic faith only when it proclaims the Jesus of the gospels.

I enjoy the spiritual readings we have in our Conference. The gospel message relates very much to everyday life. Jesus made his teaching very relevant to our time. Why do people see error in relating it to the behaviour of world leaders or organisations such as the United Nations? Why is this “secularising” our faith? I think we have to stop nit picking about small matters and live the gospel with all our hearts in a very complex but wonderful modern world. Catholics have access to great help in the Mass and the sacraments. Where much is given, much is expected. “By their fruits you shall know them.”

A Hobbs, address withheld by request.

Greens in disguise
The article, Australia and asylum seekers: the myths and the facts (The Record, Summer 2009/2010), causes concern. The content of the article sounds eerily familiar. All is explained by the acknowledgement at the end: ‘Facts’ (my emphasis) reproduced with permission of the GetUp! organisation’. One quick visit to the GetUp! organisation’s website shows it appears to be the Greens Party in disguise (and not very well disguised at that). Amongst its usual ‘Green agenda’ activities, we also see advocacy of same-sex marriage.

Some earlier letters by readers express misgivings about where The Record is obtaining its quotes. I express serious misgivings about whom The Record turns to for its socio-political input.

Surely The Record can lift its game
Mark Ross,
President, St Peter’s Conference, Rockhampton, QLD

Quote not offensive
I HAVE ONLY RECENTLY SEEN THE objection by the Bishop of Armidale to the Society’s use of a quote by Nelson Mandela (Mandelas no hero, Letters, Spring 2009).

The objection seems to be based on the source of the quote, rather than its content.

I would respectfully ask Bishop Luc Matthys to reflect on Jesus’ response in John 18:23, “If there is something wrong in what I said, point it out; but if there is no offence in it, why do you strike me?”

Tom Togher,
Ramsgate, NSW

‘Doors’ scheme support welcome
RE: OPENING THE DOORS, (NEWS IN brief, The Record, Spring 2009), I think it would be just wonderful if the National Council agreed to support the above “scheme” in all of Australia. It is so needed.

Margaret Benson,
Burnie, TAS

Same Old...
As usual we look forward receiving our issues of The Record for distribution and spring (and today summer) was no exception. Charity in Justice (Bec Bromhead) was one that stood out. National President Syd Tutton in his “Ministry on the Margins”... “It is easy to forget we are surrounded by a multitude of saints, men and women, young and old, unrecognised by both church or state”. This sums it up. We are an inclusive Society and as such have Vincentians of...
all stripes. This identifies us as we stand together as Vincentians in today’s world.

Then I came across the Bishop of Armidale’s “You will understand that I will not allow the Foundation to advertise in this Diocese, nor to solicit funds until the offensive quotation (by Nelson Mandela) is removed.” We got a laugh out of that one especially the word “solicit” and all that conjures up! News for the Bishop... this mediaeval approach never worked in the past and certainly will not now. Then in today’s summer edition same again. Please read again Mr Tutton’s quote above Bishop Matthys.

Then the 1950’s attack on Dr John Falzon by V.K. Ignatius. I have not read such twaddle since I was an apprentice boilermaker and the NCC was trying to save my soul and wreck the world at the same time! The poor and disadvantaged need men and women of Dr Falzon’s stature to defend them. What do we not need are more plaster saints, but people who serve their God in a human and imperfect way, such as the many followers of Frederic Ozanam (whatever their faith preferences).

Peter Lyall
State President SVDP Tasmania

Corporate approach lets members down
I WAS DEEPLY UPSET TO SEE THE poor publicity the Society received in The Sydney Morning Herald earlier this year over the Society’s use in NSW of a survey with the company, Acxiom. This kind of image is such a let-down for members.

And so badly handled by the people in NSW management who spoke on behalf of the Society! Looks like the corporate approach does no-one any favours.

“Disturbed”, NSW

Note from the editor: National Council has initiated an investigation into this matter with a view to ensuring that in the future, privacy principles are respected and decision-making processes are improved.

The Record welcomes letters but we reserve the right to edit them for legal reasons, space or clarity. Articles will be published only if full name and address and telephone numbers are provided, although the address will be withheld from publication if so requested. Post to: The Record, PO Box 243, Deakin West ACT 2600 or email to admin@svdpancl.org.au. Everyone whose letter is published will receive a free book courtesy of David Lovell Publishing.

LENT IS TIME FOR GETTING BACK to basics. The scriptures speak to us very bluntly during this season. On the day I happen to be writing this reflection, the day’s gospel has Jesus telling the crowds and his disciples to listen to what the scribes and Pharisees have to say: “Do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not as they do, for they do not practise what they teach.”

It’s easy to label religious leaders of any age or of any religious tradition as hypocrites. That can be a cop-out for not doing the hard thing, the right thing, or the better thing. Jesus goes well beyond the teaching of his predecessors, telling us, “The greatest among you will be your servant.” For Vinnies, simple, direct action and humble service are the call.

A recurring theme in the Old Testament readings for Lent is the call: “seek justice.” But what is justice? Isaiah gives us three simple items on the checklist: “rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Do something for those who have no-one and who have nothing. Extend your circle of concern to those who are not your own, to those who will not be able to reciprocate, to those who do not have political power or influence, to those who do not feature in the media. Charity begins at home but it comes into its own when practiced on the streets and in the public square.

In his first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI reflects on the parable of the Good Samaritan and says, “Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour.” He puts the challenge, particularly to the laity of the Church: “Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew.” He says “the direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful.”

So there are some matters on which we cannot be waiting for the bishops and priests to show us how – the Pope has told us so! Even if our politicians and bureaucrats get the policy settings right, the Pope reminds us, “There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love.” There will always be a need for Vinnies, no matter what the policies coming out of Canberra.

Pope Benedict has made his own the call by his predecessor, John Paul II: we Christians need to speak with a united voice working to inculcate “respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenceless”. But often we cannot agree even theoretically on what is just, and what are people’s rights.

The philosopher, Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for Economics, has just published a book, The Idea of Justice. He gives a simple example of three children and a flute. Bob is very poor and would like to have the flute because he has nothing else to play with. Carla made the flute and wants to keep it. Anne is the only one of the three children who knows how to play the flute and she plays it beautifully, bringing pleasure to all who hear her. Who has the best claim on the flute? Sen tells us that the economic egalitarian would give it to Bob. The libertarian would insist that Carla retain the fruits of her labour. The utilitarian hedonist would give it to Anne. What would the good Vincentian do?

We need to theorise; we need to discuss and disagree; we need to pray; but in the end, we always come back to doing the practical thing for the oppressed, the widow and the orphan.

Professor Frank Brennan SJ AO is the Catholic Advocate in Residence for the St Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Health Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, and ACU’s Public Policy Institute.
With the 150th anniversary of the death of the Curé of Ars, St John Vianney - the patron saint of priests - Pope Benedict XVI invites all Catholics to celebrate the Year for Priests which began on the 19th of June 2009.

A unique way to support this cause would be to help with the training of our future priests from countries where the Church is poor, persecuted or threatened. Over the past 10 years Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has helped one diocese in every six around the world, and supported every seventh candidate to the priesthood. In today's economic crisis many seminaries are struggling to survive. The poverty is great and often means suitable candidates being turned away, since neither their families nor their bishops have the funds to support their training. Meanwhile for the ones who are accepted into the seminary, it is a journey of great sacrifice; food and books are scarce with several students often sharing small rooms in dilapidated and unheated seminaries.

It is vital to the future of the Church that not one vocation to the priesthood goes astray due to lack of finance. They are the future of Christ's Holy Catholic Church.

Join us in prayer with the Pope to honour the service offered to the Church by her priests.

Anyone able to help this cause will be sent a complimentary Rosary blessed by Pope Benedict XVI, and a holy card with a prayer for priests. We ask you to join the Holy Father and the Catholic community to pray for our priests and pray that many more will respond to the call to priesthood.

A new rosary has been designed by the Vatican’s Rosary Makers for the Year for Priests. The centerpiece features the hands of the priest during the Consecration with the reverse side beautifully depicting the Merciful Jesus by St Faustina Kowalska. The Cross takes inspiration from the Gospel story about the call to Priesthood where Christ says “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few...”. The labourers are those who work in the vineyard of the Lord. In our time it refers to our priests.

To send your donation please fill out the coupon below and tick the box* if you would like to receive the complimentary Rosary and Holy card.

Help Seminarians from Poor and Oppressed countries to become Priests

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I/We enclose a donation of $ .............. to help with the training of our future priests from poor and oppressed countries.

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