

# the Record

Autumn 2016



St Vincent de Paul Society

*good works*







**St Vincent de Paul Society**  
*good works*

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

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

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Front cover: image taken from the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn facebook page.  
Back cover: image taken from the Canberra Refugee Action Committee facebook page.

## The Kingdom of God

Convinced of the same deep truths  
and of one heart, like monks singing  
the psalms,  
and interfused with the awareness of  
God,  
we shall be that power  
of which we were always capable,  
ready for any enterprise, whether in  
space  
or the blue oceaned earth.  
Not that there will never be differences  
among us; there must be, since visions  
must be enlarged, but they will be  
concluded well  
and sealed with genial accord.  
Wedded to peace and the ways of  
peace  
we shall eschew violence, and be  
artists of persuasion,  
and if we have to suffer, we shall  
commend ourselves to God.  
  
'All that will never happen,' whisper  
the doubters.  
But never is a long time  
and for an adventure such as this,  
any time is a good time to begin. ♦

*Reg Naulty*

## The Dominican Sisters

Their quiet heroism is now largely  
forgotten,  
living only in fleeting memories of  
ageing people;  
they spent long hours in the class  
room  
attending routinely to their day's work;  
they contended with the vagaries of  
communal life,  
patient with difficult colleagues,  
coping with  
overworked superiors, correcting  
unruly children;  
there were happy times,  
the feast days, the visits of families,  
the pride in diligent pupils, the  
occasions  
when the whole class laughed.  
Who knows what they knew in deep  
prayer?  
The priority of God showed in their  
lives. ♦

*Reg Naulty*

## The Sower

The sower went out to sow the seed,  
Wayside seed: Stolen word.  
Messages never understood.  
Stony ground, hardened heart;  
Proud, unyielding from the start.  
  
Seed among thorns, bush and briar;  
Incessant noise, unending schemes,  
Sated senses, seductive screens,  
Choking obsessions, Idle chatter;  
Still-born 'might have beens'.  
  
Emotional fervour, shallow clay,  
Wilted plants in the heat of the day;  
Noble works, scarcely begun  
Scorched in the burning rays of the  
sun.  
  
Sower and seed and fruitful soil;  
Bountiful crop for the reaper's toil;  
Golden wheat, ripe for the mill;  
Bread for the taking, bread for the  
giving,  
Bread for the joyous feast of living. ♦

*Jim Cleary*  
Mooroolbark conference

## You Are Christ's Hands

Christ has no body here on earth but  
yours,  
No hands but yours,  
No feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which his  
compassion  
looks out on the world;  
Yours are the feet with which he goes  
about doing good;  
Yours are the hands with which he can  
bless all people now.

*(St Teresa of Avila)*

1. Take a little time to think about  
the great gift of your hands and  
all that you can accomplish with  
them; cooking, cleaning, gardening,  
playing, praying, writing and so on.  
When you visit the needy, Christ  
uses your hands to bring them  
some relief.

2. Think about the gift of sight.  
Your eyes enable you to bring  
the outside world into your soul:  
the beauty of nature, the faces of  
family and friends are all given  
to you freely. There is so much  
meaning in the way you look at  
others. Imagine how Christ must  
have looked at Mary and Joseph,  
at the lepers, the blind and the  
lame. Can he now look through  
your eyes at his chosen ones, the  
poor?

3. What a wonderful gift to be able  
to convey your thoughts to others  
by the use of language! Good  
people are happy people and no  
one was as good as the Master.  
His voice must have been filled  
with spirit and joy. If only we  
could convey that optimism to  
others. If only it were said of me:

'Your caring words show you  
to be, a friend of Christ from  
Galilee'.

4. Many are the sounds that delight  
us, the rapture of good music,  
the laughter of children, to name  
a few. An even greater gift is the  
facility of listening. Do we really  
hear the message behind the  
words? Will God hear my prayer  
if I'm deaf to the plea of others?  
Christ has no other ears now but  
yours.

5. We must bring more than material  
help to those we assist. ♦

*Jim Cleary*  
Mooroolbark conference

*(Inspired by the words and example of the  
late Tony Warren, member of the Mooroolbark  
conference and Victorian ECC president)*

# Ozanam Oration 2016

BY GRAHAM WEST

***I want to begin in the past. Not 25 years ago when I joined the Society, nor even 162 years ago when the Society established in Australia, nor even 183 years ago to the founding of the Society but back over 2 millennia to a land occupied by the mighty conquering Roman Army.***

In this occupied, dusty land, ruled by elders, kings and statesmen a young man stands before the great and the good gathered in the synagogue, just as many of us would gather in a church.

The young man is only 30, is without wealth or power and with confidence he stand before his elders and finds the place where it is written:

*"The spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring  
good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to  
the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's  
favour."*

You could imagine the gusto with which this is said, and while we know that this was the start of his mission, imagine what it must have been like in the crowd. You have heard of this young teacher doing the rounds but it turns out it was the young bloke from your home town.

Who can believe it, it's our boy, Mary's son!

Now imagine the reaction when he hands over the scroll and sits down, all eyes upon him and he now has the audacity to say:

*"Today this scripture has been  
fulfilled in your hearing!"*



Frédéric Ozanam

He then goes on and lectures them, suggesting that perhaps they are unable to listen and maybe even not worthy.

The scuttlebutt starts, who does he think he is? People are sitting and saying I remember when he and his mates used to play in the street. Isn't this the carpenter's son?

They are so incensed they form a mob and drive him out of town and almost hurl him off a cliff!

Before the Gospel mysteriously reports "he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

Gentleness had triumphed over anger.

We of course know this young man as Jesus, founder of the Christian Faith and the Catholic Church within it. We know that his words and deeds shook the very core of the known western world at the time and over 2000 years later his message inspires billions of people that share this earth. He shook up notions of justice, success, service. He did all this before he was 33.

And yet once in a small town in Israel, his home town, he was seen as a young bloke who was possibly too big for his boots.

Fast forward in time, to post-revolutionary France. The catchphrase of the era is: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! It is a time of upheaval, riots and strikes, poverty and inequality, people still take to the barricades. It is also a time of hope, science, philosophy and a clash of mighty ideas.

Enter into this fray another young man, 19 going on 20 but like all young men full of self-confidence, entering into debates, defending his church against the socialists. However this young man is not only a keen student of history but a young man filled with compassion.

One day he is shaken by a challenge. You can see the scene. Young men dressed in coats are solving all the world problems in a debate. None taking much notice of each other's arguments, except to respond and score a point. The young hero of our story Frederic Ozanam has no doubt given a sterling performance! Making point and counter point in defence of his Church and the work it does in trying to achieve the mission set by Jesus earlier. His friends would be smiling and calling out "hear hear", patting him on the back and looking forward to the riposte. And the riposte comes. And when it comes it slips through Frederic's guard and pierces his heart.

The young opponent begins more in sorrow than anger. You can see his sly smile forming as he calls for quiet, winking at his colleagues as he stands and saunters up to the table. He runs through a list of good points made by the young Ozanam: "*You are right Ozanam when you speak of the past! In former times Christianity worked wonders*", he pauses waiting for silence. His friends look puzzled, whose side is he on? Frederic's friends start to smile, they may have won the debate... The orator continues: "*but what is it doing for mankind now?*" And now for the killer blow, he turns

looking Ozanam directly in the eye: "*And you, who pride yourself on your Catholicity, what are you doing now for the poor? Show us your works!*" Our young hero takes these words to heart. Shaken he retreats into himself, but he is not beaten. He gathers up some friends and they decide to do good works for the poor and turn words into action. Filled with passion they gather sticks to fuel a fire for a poor person in a garret during the cold nights of Paris, but are so unprepared and inexperienced they run up the stairs, knock on the door, pretty well drop the bundle and run off. It's a disaster. But young Ozanam is once again not put off. He finds Rosalie Rendu, known for her wisdom and service to the poor, and with her assistance and that of Bailey and others they turn their words into actions. These actions attract others and a global movement begins, arriving here in Victoria over 150 years ago, and soon establishes itself through Australia. Today the Society operates in over 147 countries and has over 1000 conferences in Australia alone. Of course the founder of the Society not only began it as a young man, but died a young man, only 40.

These two young people set the foundations that have brought us here today. One the Son of God, the other filled with the Holy Spirit. Both though, challenged us to leave out boats behind and set out into the unknown sharing our love with everyone we meet: Serving in hope, and seeing Christ in those we assist. This challenge is not owned by anyone of us, no one person has all the answers. But it is a challenge that must be shared by all of us.

We must listen with 'the ear of the heart' as St Benedict says. We must listen to those we assist, we must listen to each other, but we must also listen to those who feel unable to join us. We must listen to the young. And we must change, for the world has changed around us.

Within a few years of me joining the St Vincent de Paul Society as a young 17 years old, my conference president was in her 30's, the regional president appeared to my impertinent eyes in his 70's (but on deeper reflection he was still working and probably much younger!), the Diocesan President was in his 30's, and the National President was in his 40's. People of all ages were active in and taking leadership roles in the Society. As a Society we spoke about 'the spirit of youth' observing that this spirit was not a matter of age but of attitude! This spirit of youth worked within the Society, and has kept some younger people involved, but today there are fewer people between 19 (Ozanam's age) and 40 (the age Ozanam died) or indeed up to about 60 than ever before. We have made great strides in schools and much of our youthful membership comes from the Mini-Vinnies and high school conferences, but once they leave these institutions they are not returning in such numbers. And that brings me to an important word: *Institutions*.

Institutions are important. They are made up of practices, norms, history and precedent. They shape actions and guide decisions. But institutions are not good at responding to change. Their very strengths become their undoing. And if we look around our world today, the institutions that once shaped our lives are no longer as relevant to the lives of many, or at least not seen as relevant. Church attendances are down significantly, not just by a little bit; they have crashed. In fact a 2013 Catholic Bishops' Conference report puts the figure of Mass attendees at 12 % of the Catholic Community, and that was in 2011. And while those over 60 made up 17% of the Catholic Community, they accounted for 41% of Mass attendees,

*continued on page 6 ►*



◀ continued from page 5

and this is worse than it was in 2006. By the way over 60% of Mass attendees were women, a statistic not reflected in leadership within the Society. It is not just the Church, we have seen declines in membership of social clubs, political parties, unions, service clubs, the organisations that were the very fabric of our community.

People are not joining institutions. And yet people still are interested in making the world a better place, especially young people. People still get involved and people still care. There has been a change though, for while people are not joining institutions, they are getting involved in causes. Think about successful causes and they are engaging and responsive not just to the needs of those they are trying to help but to the passions of those that are engaging.

I worry that the Society has become an institution, a very successful, effective and important one, but one that is crushing the social movement of passionate young people that founded it. Having become successful and effective, the challenge facing us is how to change and respond to the new emerging needs of those in poverty and to the desire for others, especially young people, to engage with us in a new way. How do we rediscover the spirit of youth that drove Ozanam? That allowed people to meet others as equals and share Christ's love? And the challenge is not about young people, it is about us.

We can't simply lament that people are not joining us, we must find out why and we must change. That change may be confronting. But the change is not just about us missing out. If we truly believe that service with the St Vincent de Paul Society is about putting faith into action, and that it transforms us as much as others then we owe it to those in the community to find new ways for them to join us. For we are a much richer



Graham West

Society when we all participate, and we look outward.

And when I think about how we can bridge our one Society with the wider Community, essentially to be one Society and one Community, I am reminded of the words of His Holiness, our Pope Francis: *"No one saves oneself. The community is essential"*.

Faith in action is what motivated me to join, and indeed what led Ozanam to found the Society. But in a world where Mass attendances are so low, perhaps we are not only about putting faith into action, (for many people may not have a deep faith connection); perhaps we are actually a way for people to find their relationship with God and then strengthen their faith through action. Just as schools have become the Parish of many, perhaps the Society is the parish for some.

Responding to a post-institutional world though should be easy for us.

For at our heart we are not the bricks and mortar, nor are we the presidents or programs. We are people seeing and serving Christ wherever we find him. Just as we are challenged to seek out poverty, so we must seek out new members and new ways to respond to poverty. And turning once more to our Pope, the importance of these works being carried out by ordinary people, broken, humbled but filled with hope is even greater today. In fact this opportunity to see Christ through personal service is essential:

*"As members of popular movements, you carry out your work inspired by fraternal love, which you show in opposing social injustice. When we look into the eyes of the suffering ... we are deeply moved... We are moved because 'we have seen and heard' not a cold statistic but the pain of a suffering humanity, our own pain, our own flesh."*

He could have been talking directly to Ozanam in saying those words, and indeed he was certainly talking to all of us in the Society. And he went on, highlighting the importance of each one of us responding to the call of Jesus and of service:

*“...the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organise. It is in their hands which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change”*

If ever there was an organisation that can respond to the call of our pontiff, it is the St Vincent de Paul Society. The challenge for us, however, is to explore new ways to welcome, engage with and thank the people who are called to join our mission. I say *thank* because it is likely that people will join us for shorter periods of time, quite possibly multiple times but in different roles rather than staying with the one conference, region, diocese, or state.

I often reflect that the Catholic Church is probably one of the largest human rights organisations in the world. Human rights are not an add-on, since human salvation is at our core. And the St Vincent de Paul Society is the largest Catholic membership-based welfare organisation in Australia.

Which means in a world of causes, we are involved in most of the social justice causes that will inspire people and help them find that connection. As our founder said, *no work of Charity is foreign to the Society*.

If we can adjust to this episodic and cause-based volunteering and encourage people to be part of our mission, then the essential question emerges: how do we share the values that unite Vincentians around the world? If we can find a way to share

this identity then we may actually have people becoming less episodic in their engagement. Because people have not simply joined an institution, they have found their calling!

In responding to this desire of people to help, we are also going to have to embrace new non-parish-based conferences. And aggregate them! We are also going to have to take a few risks trying new services and approaches. Especially for young people!

They will have new ways to assist, and instead of finding problems, we need to find ways to empower and fix up the mistakes as they emerge!

These responses require each of us to commit to the challenge, but in terms of facilitating this reenergising, encouraging and sustaining new and young conferences, the more reflect, the more I see the importance of Regional Councils. It is the Regional Council that supports the Conference Presidents; that welcomes the new conference; that shares emerging issues. It is the Regional Council that takes general policy, possibly set by National or State Council and reshapes it to make it work for the local area and needs.

In the 1980's the Society could see that changes were sweeping the church and society and engaged Sydney University to identify membership trends. The results did not look good, an aging and declining membership. They did not however lament this, they took action, including things such as encouraging the Spirit of Youth. And if they had not taken action we would be in a far more serious situation than we find ourselves in today. Having done the survey and developed strategies, they determined that the best way to effectively respond to the challenge was: *To work with Regional Councils!*

There really is nothing new under the sun or in the Society! But just as we faced the challenge in 1988, we do so

again. And learning from our history the response that worked was to bring all the regional presidents together and work on the solutions as a group, changing the way we operate and supporting those who support the conferences.

It is time to do so again.

We need to ensure that our conferences are places that re-charge and respond; that welcome and that are owned by our membership. All of our special work must be connected to the membership. We need to review all of our works and processes and ask: *Are they relevant? Are they making a difference? Can someone do these better? Are they allowing us to see Christ's presence? Are we sharing the positive aspects of our Vincentian Culture? Do we welcome new people? Do we listen to the young? Do we let young people set up and run works or new ways of visiting?* And we must do it throughout the Society.

Or to sum it up in two questions: *Would Frederic Ozanam's youthful voice and call to new action be welcomed in our Society? And would a new Frederic Ozanam filled with passion and a desire to put his faith into action be able to see a role for himself in our Society?*

Earlier I quoted from the *Rule of Benedict*, suggesting we need to listen with the ear of the heart, but the Rule of St Benedict also has a beautiful phrase challenging the community to remember that the Lord often reveals himself to the youngest.

All Vincentians serve in hope. And it is my fervent hope that we will have the courage to listen to Ozanam's call in a new age and that in a further 25 years' time a young person filled with the Spirit is delivering this lecture celebrating the changes we made and challenging us to change again. ♦

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Graham West is National President, St Vincent de Paul Society

# Housing Paper: Executive Summary

***Housing is a core human right and the foundation every Australian needs for full economic and community participation. The St Vincent de Paul Society across Australia is driven to speak out about the need for sufficient housing in our community by the experience of its members and staff who serve people experiencing poverty every day.***

Australia has a crisis in the supply of social and affordable housing. This is evidenced by the hundreds of thousands who are experiencing homelessness, on wait-lists for public housing, or living in severe housing stress. Taken together, the statistics tell us that across Australia there are over 105,000 people experiencing homelessness and 875,000 households experiencing housing stress.

The human reality of homelessness is told through the personal stories of the many people the St Vincent de Paul Society assists every day.

There have been many public policy approaches to increasing the supply of housing. Most have not been successful in providing sufficient social and affordable housing. Generous tax concessions to property investors have been unsuccessful in increasing supply especially at the social and affordable level. Commonwealth Rent Assistance has proven insufficient to enable many of those on low incomes to access secure housing in the private rental market. The St Vincent de Paul Society argues that programs that directly fund the building of affordable houses, embracing a 'Housing First' ethos, hold much more hope for providing an effective supply of housing for people experiencing exclusion. We believe that successful solutions will require engagement of all levels of government,



community housing providers, community organisations, peak bodies and the private sector.

Australia must act and all levels of government and the community must play their part. The St Vincent de Paul Society proposes the following three strategies for achieving the target to halve homelessness and halve the housing shortfall by 2025:

1. To meet the urgent needs for investment in building new houses for the most vulnerable, the Society proposes the Federal Government establishes a \$10 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund.
  - The Fund will provide loans to a range of entities to build new social and affordable housing, with a strong preference for community and locally based providers.
  - The interest payable would be as low as possible and would vary depending on the amount of capital or other contribution the entity brings.
  - The building of housing is to be governed by strict guidelines to ensure high quality, sustainable and environmentally efficient housing in areas where it is needed and which meet the social and community needs of those using it.
2. All governments formally recognise the human right to housing as a basis for housing policy and accept the obligations this places on governments and the community. This requires that:
  - the Federal Government and all state and territory governments include the active responsibility and administration for responding to homelessness in the role of housing ministers and their departments;<sup>2</sup>
  - Ministers of Housing be re-designated as Ministers for Housing & Homelessness, with clearly defined strategic responsibility for ensuring that sufficient housing is available for people experiencing exclusion;



# NEWS IN BRIEF

- all political parties develop a dedicated housing and homelessness strategy before the 2016 federal election;
  - National Human Rights legislation be amended to recognise the right to housing;
  - anti-discrimination legislation be amended to protect those in housing deprivation; and
  - Australia be open to scrutiny of appropriate international bodies for its compliance with provision of housing as a human right.
3. We need reform of housing policy to sustain and adapt the supply of housing to meet the needs of all in the community. This requires:
- a new national multi-sector working group to develop a coherent national strategy to ensure that the capacity to meet all housing needs across Australia is sustained;
  - a national strategy that is guided by respect for human rights and community diversity, balancing the needs for employment, housing, health, education and transport service and the emerging opportunities for improved and ecologically efficient building;
  - changes to negative gearing and capital gains tax to favour building new affordable housing;
  - a review of the rental market to ensure it is operating in a way that both maximises the supply of affordable rental accommodation and provides appropriate protection of the rights of renters;
  - Commonwealth Rent Assistance to be increased and indexed properly. ♦

## Farewell to one of our senior members

With the death of George Eastman on 22 December 2015, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Bendigo lost its most senior member and one of its most devoted workers. George was just two weeks short of his ninety-second birthday and had been active in society work until a few months before his death.

George was born in Maryborough in central Victoria, in January 1924. He attended the local school and technical college. By age eighteen he was in the Merchant Navy and served in the Pacific area for the rest of the war. Most of this time involved very heavy work in the engine room, shoveling coal.

George was a keen and capable footballer. By the late 1940's he was playing for Murtoa and was captain or coach at Rainbow and Yaapect in the far west of Victoria until the late 1950's. In the meantime he had married and was also involved in farm work until buying the local shop which he operated for many years.

George retired to Bendigo after the death of his wife and became involved in St Vincent de Paul Society work in the late 1990's, joining the Cathedral Conference. He excelled at this, having the gift, perhaps developed during his varied work career, of being able to relate to all sorts of people.

Much of his involvement was with people in public housing and he noticed that many of these had major dental problems. It was generally thought that there was not much that could be done for these cases owing to



*George Eastman.*

the widely known horror stories about the years-long waiting lists for public dental services. This did not deter George and he made a point of visiting local dentists involved in these services to get more background. As a result of personally guiding these patients to be assessed, it was found that most of these fitted into the highest priority order for attention and so obtained treatment quite quickly. With the Society paying the relatively low costs involved, the whole operation was an outstanding success. George was involved with this for some ten years and during this time there was an extension assisting people with eye problems. Many of those assisted benefited greatly in terms of self esteem, particularly in situations when they were being interviewed for a job.

George's funeral on 29 December was attended by many Society members. He was laid to rest in the Rainbow cemetery. May he rest in peace. ♦

Prepared by Mal Nolan, Conference colleague.

You can read the full paper at [https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/National/Articles\\_Reports\\_\\_Speeches/TheAcheForHome/](https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/National/Articles_Reports__Speeches/TheAcheForHome/)

# The bleeding obvious—the longer we leave it, the higher the cost

BY DR JOHN FALZON

***The Prime Minister wants us to be clever. Well here's clever: how about we make sure everybody's got a place to call home?***

We're a rich nation, so how can we not afford something as basic, something as essential, as a place to live? What are the compelling economic reasons why we can't make sure everyone has a place to feel safe, a place from which we can go to school, take care of our health, and go to work? How is it okay to deny people, including children, a place where they can love and be loved, where they can connect with each other instead of being cut off and, sometimes literally, locked out?

If we want to be clever, and I agree with the Prime Minister that we should indeed aspire to this in our society, we'll make sure everyone has a place to call home, along with a well-resourced, needs-based education system and universal healthcare. Let's face it: not having a place to live and feel safe in is just about as bad as it gets when it comes to barriers to education. How long do we need to keep stating the obvious? The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society see this day in and day out: families who do not have a place to call home, including those who are cramped into unbearable and overcrowded living conditions, parents struggling with the difficult job of trying to get a job (and being told at the same time that they are just not trying hard enough), or kids trying to attempt the herculean task of studying when all they have is a tiny corner of a cramped and noisy lounge-room that doubles as a bedroom at night.

We can afford to line the pockets of corporations that manage offshore concentration camps in our name, a highly expensive exercise in cruelty



and barbarism; carefully constructing permanent places of limbo to which we consign people who, as it happens, believe so strongly in Australia that they risk life and limb to come here as they flee the cruelty and barbarism that has sadly overtaken their countries of origin.

If we want to be clever—if we want to be innovative—these are the very people we should welcome with open arms; people who believe in us, who believe in and desperately want to build a different future with us.

We believe that the problem of homelessness and the shortage of social and affordable housing is so huge that we need a massive solution and a massive financial commitment if we want to lay claim to being civilised and fair, let alone smart and innovative. This is why, among other things such as reforms to negative gearing and capital gains tax exemptions, the St Vincent de Paul Society is calling for the creation of a \$10 billion social and affordable housing fund. There are more than

100,000 people experiencing homelessness and over 850,000 households experiencing housing stress (where a household's income is in the bottom 40 per cent of incomes and it is paying more than 30 per cent of this income on housing). It's true that to fix a massive problem there will be a massive cost. But, to use a housing analogy, the longer you wait before you repair the roof, the more you'll end up paying to fix the damage being done in the meantime. Similarly, the longer we leave it to fix the housing problem in Australia, the bigger the social and economic cost will be, for all of us. Because the costs of condemning masses of people to unemployment, low education outcomes and poor physical and mental health are incalculable. That's in economic terms. In human terms we're staring down the barrel of a social crisis; a completely avoidable human tragedy writ large.

The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society are doers. I know,

# Universality vs. User Pays

however, that we are going to be written off as dreamers. Perhaps that's because there are forces in Australian society that don't want to acknowledge, let alone address, the actual nightmare that those who bear the daily brunt of inequality are forced to live within. From the First Peoples all the way through to the most recent seekers of refuge, we see the people who suffer precisely because we have failed as a nation to bite the tax reform bullet; because there are those who persist in the fiction that it is justifiable to take away from those at the bottom in order to preserve the perks and privileges of those at the top.

I know too that we are going to be dismissed as bleeding hearts. But we're not bleeding hearts. We're just stating the bleeding obvious. You're not going to create the space for innovation unless you take care of accommodation as well as health and education. And you're certainly not going to encourage innovation if you keep on relying on the blunt tool, but sharp weapon, of class-based, race-based, gender-based, and disability-based incarceration. Because right now, in the midst of the homelessness and housing crisis, we're making an art form out of locking people up instead of housing them. If you're a member of the First Peoples or an asylum seeker or someone forced to bear the brunt of class or gender inequality or someone living with a disability, being locked up follows hot on the heels of being locked out. But as activist and philosopher Angela Davis reminds us: *'Prisons do not disappear problems. Prisons disappear human beings.'* Making sure everyone has a place to call home on the other hand, well, that's what makes us feel human. ♦

Dr John Falzon is Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.



Health expenditure is consuming an increasing proportion of government revenue over time. The Grattan Institute has reported that health expenses cost 19 per cent of Australian government budgets, compared to 17 per cent in 2002–2003.<sup>1</sup> Members of the Liberal party have proposed the implementation of a user-pay model that requires those who are wealthy to pay to use public healthcare services and facilities. These arguments raise the broader question of whether Australia should continue to impose a model based on universality and a citizen-focussed philosophy or a user-pay model based on a consumer-focussed philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Universality rests on the principle that taxpayers contribute revenue that will be used by the government to provide goods and services for society. Under this model, the wealthy and the poor have access to free health care, education and other benefits. On the other hand, the user-pay model stipulates that only those who use have to pay. In the current debate, the user-pay model dictates that those who are wealthy should have to pay to use public healthcare facilities, public schools and other public services. The argument

for user charges derives from the assumption that universal health care leads to inefficient and over-utilisation, and user charges would act to correct this moral hazard and match demand and supply. The rationale behind the current discussion of a user-pay model focusses on the fact that health expenses are rising over time, which displaces government expenditure from other key services. The user-pay model would address this issue by increasing government revenue.

However, developing states that employ a user-pay model demonstrate that there are adverse impacts on society. Under a user-pay model, individuals are less likely to visit health services, which could undermine preventative health care. In the long term, the lack of preventative health care could cause health services to increase spending in treating chronic illnesses, which could increase government spending over time. Furthermore, a user-pay model directly undermines the democratic nature of Australia that stipulates that taxpayers contribute to government revenue which is allocated to provide services for all. ♦

1. <https://theconversation.com/tough-choices-how-to-rein-in-australias-rising-health-bill-13658>.

2. <http://elizabethrhettwoods.ca/universality-vs-user-fees-as-political-philosophies/>.



# Residents' Voices: looking for new ways to understand place and disadvantage

BY MICHAEL DARCY

***Imagine your landlord could force you to move house because he decided that your neighbours were not good for you—even if you were a pensioner who had lived in the same house for decades, or you relied on those same neighbours to help with your mobility or your kids. What if the landlord was a government agency that also planned to sell your house and transfer your tenancy to another organisation you knew nothing about—all supposedly to make you better off?***

You might have something to say about the statistics and the theories that justify such drastic measures. You might want to express your own ideas about the meaning of home and the experience of living in your neighbourhood, or you may just keep quiet for fear of losing your house. This scenario has been a reality for public housing tenants in Australia, the US and the UK where, for well over a decade, policy makers and housing managers have attempted to disperse or dilute public housing communities, including by selling off and redeveloping estates and relocating disadvantaged households. These actions arise from a continuing but inconclusive debate among social researchers about whether living in poor neighbourhoods makes people poorer, whether it is possible to measure this 'neighbourhood effect', and what the factors and mechanisms might be, such as negative role modelling and local culture, inferior

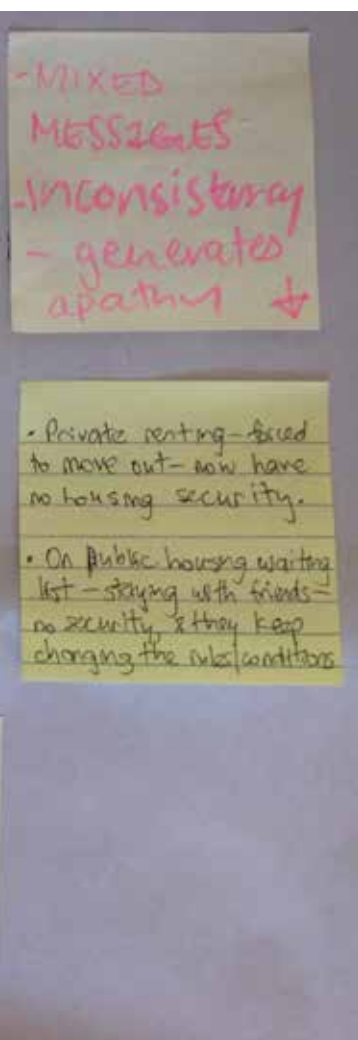


services and infrastructure, and 'stigma'. Greater 'social mix' is proposed as the key to reducing tenants' disadvantage.

'Residents' Voices' aimed to provide opportunities for residents in public housing to create their own narrative about community and place, and to develop new forms of knowledge about these issues that go beyond statistics, academic theories and media accounts. The project, which commenced in 2011, was supported by the Australian Research Council, St Vincent de Paul Society, and the Tenants' Union of NSW, and involved researchers from Western

Sydney University and Loyola University Chicago.

As part of the Residents' Voices initiative, public tenants in Australia and the US initially met with each other and the university researchers over video link. Participants later recorded their experiences and collected photographs to match the verbal narratives. With help from facilitators, residents produced their stories as digital essays on topics including living in social housing with a mental illness, criminal activity and violence, interactions with law enforcement agencies, experiencing and addressing both



personal and geographical stigma, and living in social housing with family members with complex needs. Some participants chose to share these stories on the project website, while others decided to keep them private. Tenant participants also used digital diaries to produce a critical analysis of the SBS comedy series *Housos* and took the opportunity to reflect on stigmatising satire in the media. Their analysis was presented at academic conferences and published in an international academic journal.

Subsequently, a separate group of tenants in Western Sydney

independently asked the same facilitators to assist with production of a suite of short films including a highly professional (fictional) drama *Lost in the Woods*, whose cast was entirely made up of local residents as well as being written and directed by them. The film reflects mainstream discourses about public housing, such as domestic and community violence and drugs, but moves well beyond these well-rehearsed narratives to present lived experiences and local issues in a new light. The writers challenge the boundary between fiction and experience, with one of the filmmaker residents stating in *The Making of Lost in the Woods*, 'Some people could look at it as fiction, but for some people it could touch home'.

These resident-devised projects were not concerned with measuring, proving or disproving the 'neighbourhood effect' argument but rather with challenging how the idea of a 'disadvantaged place' is constructed—where defining and identifying disadvantaged places, and attempts to intervene, appear to be the province of experts and to exclude the views and experiences of residents. For many of the participants however, the most important outcome for these projects was not policy change, but validation as experts on their own lives who can produce and own the knowledge needed to reclaim their identity as individuals and communities. ♦

Michael Darcy is Director, Urban Research Centre; and Associate Professor, Western Sydney University



# Cyclone Winston Victims – Fiji Islands!

BY JOHN PICKERING

***In the wake of Cyclone Winston that hit the Fiji Islands on 20 February 2016, a trail of extensive damage and destruction has been left behind. Cyclone Winston goes down in history as being one of the deadliest and most destructive of all cyclones in Fiji's history. Of the 900,000 population, 62,000 people live in 935 evacuation centers nationwide. 117 Schools have been damaged. Hundreds of families have been left homeless, schools have been damaged and shortage of fresh water, food and shelter remain a growing concern.***

The Natovi Catholic Mission in the province of Tailevu is one of the communities reeling from the extensive damage wrought by cyclone Winston. The Presbytery has been severely damaged and today the Parish Priest sleeps in the secretary's office amidst clutter of boxes, shelves, cabinets, tables and chairs. It is the only space that doesn't leak from the intermittent showers of rain that fall from time to time since the cyclone blew over. The living quarters are no longer safe and habitable. Electricity is still down. The parish priest, Fr Lario Nacola of the Congregation of the Missions is lost as he sets his eyes on rebuilding the Church, the Sister's convent, the primary school and the student hostels.

Fr Lario recalls his experiences of the fear and confusion. Cyclone Winston struck them about 3.00pm on Saturday



20 February, 2016. The wind gales blew off the Ovalau Sea and started to increase with great intensity. Fr. Lario and some members of the Church mission were observing the weather developments around a bowl of kava (traditional Fijian drink). The wind began to pound strongly against the walls of the old convent. Rain started to pour in through the windows as the damaging gale force winds shattered the windows. Huge gusts of wind followed the shattering of the windows. Wind forces intensified and in a short time blew off the roof of the old convent. The torrential rains that accompanied the gale force winds of up to 300 knots per hour drenched all who crowded into a small room. They all moved into another room only to experience the power of nature wreaking havoc throughout the entire building.

Outside, loose corrugated iron sheets were flying dangerously like pieces of paper in the air. As the families of teachers all huddled in their different homes, they were not spared the same experience. Mr.

Petero Kalou, a primary school teacher at the Parish Primary School recounted that as he sat in his home with his family, the windows shattered and the roof of their home flew off. His niece, a class one student at the Parish School froze with fear. He called out to her but in her fear, she stood riveted to the spot where she was standing unable to move. In a swift movement, he gathered her in his arms and with his family behind him, they ran towards the house of another school teacher only to discover that the roof of that house too had been blown away. In the midst of flying corrugated iron, timber, tree branches and debris they ran to another teacher's house. He said this is one of his most terrifying experience.

The new primary school block opened only two years ago was not spared either as the strong gale force winds ripped through the building reducing it to rubble. The roof of one of the teacher's quarters found itself embedded in the branches of a nearby mango tree. The roof of the hostel for the primary school students blew off and now rests in the cassava patch close to the hostel. The destructive





winds literally ripped off the side of the senior girls' hostel.

All around one can hear cries of fear interspersed with litanies of prayer. The forty eight primary school boarders abandoned their hostels and with the help of teachers ran to take shelter in the lower block of the primary school as the Intermediate section of the primary section was reduced to rubble. As they huddled in fear in one classroom, the roof blew off. They ran into another classroom only to experience the same. The boarders in both the Primary School and Secondary School have been sent home but rather sadly and ironically, most will return to homes that no longer exist as the majority of students come from areas that have suffered the most damage. As one teacher recalled, "it was the most frightening experience of our lives as the screams of students merged with the sharp shrill sounds of the damaging gale force winds."

All around the Mission compound, trees snapped like twigs as building after building succumbed to the ravages of the cyclone Winston. Even

the old Church built at the turn of the 20th century had part of its roof blown away. Parts of the Convent where the Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth live were blown away. Both water and electricity were cut off and remains cut off to this day.

Five miles down the road lies the village of Qelekuro, home to about 25 houses and 400 people. Situated by the sea with a flowing river to one side, this village suffered not only extensive damage to homes, food crops and livestock but had to endure the additional pain of death. Cyclone Winston claimed the life of Sera Tinai, a 41 year old mother of nine children.

Sera Tinai was known to all in the village of Qelekuro as a fun-loving person who took her responsibilities in the village very seriously. She placed the needs of her children and her extended family before her own. Her youngest child is only fourteen months old. This child will grow up never knowing her mother except the stories that she will hear of how her mother in the height of the cyclone, took her children to safety and returned to their home

to collect a bagful of clothes for each of them. With the bag strung around her arms she tried to make her way back to her family. Her own family home collapsed pinning her to the ground. Weighed down by one of the beams of her own home she lay trapped and unable to move. The nearby river burst its banks and flooded the village. At the same time, there was a tidal wave. As the tidal wave rushed to cover the village with a destructive fury, it combined forces with the waters of the burst riverbank. Meanwhile Sera was still pinned beneath the beams of her house. Sera Tinai drowned in her own home. She was found later that evening as the villagers mounted a search for her. The spot where she was found is marked by a stick with a bit of blue coloured string attached at its end. Patemosi, Sera's husband could not help the flow of tears. He said "Our nine children no longer have a mother. My best friend and soul mate is gone. She was so full of life and joy. She was always concerned about the needs of others and whenever we had a function in the village; she

*continued on page 16 ►*

◀ continued from page 15

was always busy making others laugh with her jokes and stories. She is now gone". When asked what the most immediate need for his family was, he did not hesitate to say, "We need a house to live in and the sea has claimed all our possession".

The story of the Natovi Catholic Mission and Qelekuro Village are only two of many in the sea of sadness, tragedy and destruction that now envelopes Fiji. Other parts of Fiji, particularly in the provinces of Ra, Lomaiviti, Tailevu and Cakaudrove have their own stories of tragedy and loss. Government, NGOs and religious groups are making a combined effort to alleviate pain, suffering and loss experienced by our people.

The Archdiocese of Suva has set up her Post Disaster Team (PDT). CARITAS is acknowledged who was instrumental in assisting us effectively respond to people's needs in the aftermath of natural disasters. Immediately after the cyclone the PDT team and the Archdiocese of Suva's Commission for Justice and Development conducted a survey around the country. They reported that Cyclone Winston damaged village houses, church buildings, school buildings, hospitals, bridges, electricity power posts and lines, communication networks and plantations.

Cyclone Winston incurred severe damages to Natovi, Wairiki, Navunibitu Catholic Mission Stations. Churches, schools, teachers' quarters, priest's houses and convents were heavily damaged. The cyclone practically ripped off the roofs of the Ra Catholic Maternity Hospital, the Nurses' Quarters and St John's College on Ovalau. They reported that public roads in parts of the country were closed and communication networks in rural areas and outer Islands disrupted. Many low-lying villages were under water including the towns of Rakiraki and Nadi causing damages to shops and homes.

Many of our people are without water and basic food items. Our peoples' immediate food needs for rice, flour, tea, sugar, salt, canned foods like corn beef, fish, cooking oil and other basic items like washing and bathing soap, kerosene stoves, tents, tarpaulins, kerosene lights or solar lamps, cooking stoves, pots, cutlery, clothes, beddings and pillows.

Reports show that at present there are about 62,000 people living in evacuation centers. Our Catholic schools and other schools are currently being used as evacuation centers. The Ministry of Education wants to re-open schools in two weeks' time. Hence we need tarpaulins, tents or temporary shelter for our people to allow schools to re-open. Moreover, our school children need books, pens and bags to replace those damaged by the cyclone.

The Government and NGOs are working together to provide assistance but the magnitude of need for the immediate, short and longer term indicate that the assistance of the international community is also needed.

## Archdiocese of Suva Post Disaster Team Plans

### Immediate Needs

- Tarpaulin, temporary sheds.
- Material and equipment to rebuild or build homes (hammers, nails, pinch bars, timber saw, timber, roofing iron.)
- Digging fork, spades, knives, farming equipment, as well as seeds and crop shoots or stems to replant
- Personnel with skills in building cyclone resistant homes/buildings

### Long Term Needs

- Cyclone Trauma Response: The Post Disaster Team will set up a Trauma Response Team to attend to peoples traumatized by the cyclone.
- PDT will work closely with the Government and other NGOs to

rebuild and build permanent homes, schools, staff quarters, churches, and hospitals and nurses quarters.

### Post Disaster Team Needs

PDT needs funds to provide food, water, tents, tarpaulin, school stationary and furniture, pots and cutlery, temporary toilets and other needs of our peoples.

### Appeal Fund

Pope Francis decreed 2016 as the Year of Mercy. He calls Catholics to reflect constantly of the God of mercy. Mercy is a "re-action love" to human suffering. Pope Francis calls us to rediscover the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.

Donate via our website:  
<https://www.vinnies.org.au/donate#!state=national&appeal=98>

May the God of Mercy comfort the victims of Cyclone Winston and Mary Mother of Mercies, pray for us!

While the work of rebuilding and reconstruction continues, the faith of the Fijian people remains stronger than ever as they go about their lives giving thanks to God and still count as blessing their being able to come through this dark experience and now live to tell the tale. Not only has Cyclone Winston caused pain, suffering and destruction but it has left in its wake a total of 42 deaths. Not only have homes been removed from their foundations, but families now have the additional burden of mourning loved ones who were painfully removed from them by Cyclone Winston. The work of rebuilding and reconstructing the different communities in Fiji continues with local and international aid and assistance for which we are immensely grateful.

God Bless Fiji! ♦

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John Pickering is Communications Manager for the Archdiocese of Fiji.

# Australia Day honours for David Taylor, Toni Muir

**David Taylor**, head of the Society's Knockabout Chefs program in the Northern Territory was named the Territory's Australian of the Year Awards Local Hero for 2016. In being awarded the Territory Local Hero, he was also named a national finalist for the overall Australian Local Hero, which was awarded to Sydney youth educator, Dr Catherine Keenan.

The Australian of the Year Awards full citation for David is as follows: "For the past six years, David Taylor has provided 200 meals a day for Darwin's homeless people. David runs the St Vincent de Paul Society's Knockabout Chefs program, training and mentoring homeless and at-risk people, refugees and those with learning difficulties, in commercial cookery. Some participants go on to work in commercial kitchens, while others learn valuable life skills, improve their English or build their self-esteem.

With patience, love and care, David builds up people who are experiencing extreme hardship and disadvantage, and changes their lives, one at a time. While he's a passionate 'foodie', David also devotes much time to Tracks Dance, a local dance organisation committed to developing people from diverse backgrounds. A committee member since 1999, David volunteers on stage as a performer, in wardrobe and prop production, or front-of-house management to support Tracks Dance in celebrating the stories, truths and diverse heritage of people in the Northern Territory."



*Toni Muir*

Tasmanian State President **Toni Muir** was recently named Devonport Citizen of the Year for 2016, thanks to her tireless work with the St Vincent de Paul Society.

With more than 25 years as an active Vincentian, Toni's Good Works were recognized by the Devonport City Council, who awarded Toni the honour at its Australia Day celebrations.

Toni joined the Society in 1989 as member of St Joseph's Conference East Devonport. She has held many positions within the Society, including volunteer, local and State Centres committee, conference president, regional president and volunteer regional manager.

Away from Vinnies, Toni has been an active volunteer in Devonport, working in other roles including as a board member of the Mount St Vincents nursing home, an active member of the Devonport Mayor's Charitable Trust Fund and numerous other committees.

In naming Toni Citizen of the Year, Devonport Mayor Steve Martin said: "Toni is a selfless and proactive member of our community and a very worthy recipient of the Devonport 2016 Citizen of the Year Award."

Congratulations to David and Toni!



# 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Mt 5: 8)

BY CASSANDRA BULL

***Choosing to attend events such as Australian Catholic Youth Festival can sometimes be a difficult financial decision by some Councils. It often seems like a large investment, not only of people's time but also of human resources and funding. There's no denying it, large events such as ACYF and WYD take work and lots of preparation, but the benefit received from the investment is truly immeasurable. How do you put a quantifying value on 3,500 young people learning and sharing their faith with each other?***

As we know, when young people share their gifts and talents with one another the energy is contagious. For me, watching the group from Vinnies Youth QLD respond and interact with the festival platform was truly a privilege. As Vincentians, our ministry is our service to the poor and our nourishment often comes from knowing that we are the hands and feet of Christ. For some young people in the Society, opportunities to connect on a large scale with other young people is not something that happens regularly, often limited to times of Camps, School Justice Days, or Training Weekends. For three days however, in Adelaide, I witnessed our group journey far beyond the



'good works' they do each week, and saw them become incredible ambassadors for the Society which we know and love. Our young people, from a variety of backgrounds (some not overly active with their local parish), attended workshops and Mass and joined plenary sessions which allowed them the chance to participate and understand (for some their very first time) the sacredness and beauty of Adoration. Together with their peers they were guided in praying the Rosary, and for some of our group, they reconnected with the sacrament of Reconciliation. It was a humbling experience for me to watch our young people engage with the Church in a real way, asking bishops their opinions on Church teachings, sharing their hopes and their fears, talking openly

about the injustices they see each day in the world, and personally gaining a deeper understanding of what faith is for them.

It was an honour to sit with each of them, to learn more of their stories. There were incredible moments of grace and mercy that I will forever hold in a special part in my heart. While all this transformation was happening, it was my wish that all of you in the wider Society had the opportunity to be there, walking with them, seeing and experiencing these incredible Vincentians.

Victoria, South Australia and Queensland all sent groups to the festival and were joined by some members of the Sydney Diocese. The groups shared accommodation in



*They wore their t-shirts with pride, and I loved seeing them explain with joy the work they do with the Society.*

the same space and worked together to support the SA Youth Team with their interactive expo space within the festival program. The generosity of spirit that the group shared, not only with each other but with other young people they met, was life changing for many. As mentioned, as part of the festival Vinnies had an interactive space in the Justice Activity Centre, where young people from across the nation were able to learn more about Vinnies and to give back by expressing themselves creatively and in a variety of mediums. Our young people really stood up, and they took it upon themselves to make sure that all those who were in attendance at the festival had a chance to connect and engage with them over the three days. They wore their t-shirts with

pride, and I loved seeing them explain with joy the work they do with the Society. Over the three days we had a fashion parade showcasing the amazing works our Centres of Charity do on a daily basis, we decorated gift bags with messages of hope and love, we produced a quilt which was hand painted by those present at the festival, we packed hampers, we crowd-funded a couch to give to a family in need, we wrote prayers, and we celebrated with young people from all over Australia our ability to live the gospel message, by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. ♦

Cassandra Bull is Queensland State Youth Manager





# Budget must prioritise housing, health and income adequacy

## ***The St Vincent de Paul Society has called on the Federal Government to focus on housing, health and adequate incomes when preparing the 2016-2017 Budget.***

In a 3500-word submission to the Assistant Treasurer, the Society has asked the government to take these issues into account to 'continue to build a better Australia'.

'By including all Australians in the debate around how we spend our national wealth, and committing to housing, health and income adequacy, this Budget has the potential to strengthen and unite us in our quest for a more fair and prosperous future,' the submission stated.

The Society's 2015 submission argued for the government to support Australian values, not just dollar values, stating sustainability and a surplus are only worthy goals if they sit alongside and support what truly makes Australia great: fairness, equality, and a commitment to dignity and human rights.

One year on, with these goals unmet for many Australians, the Society drew on its Sick With Worry report to demonstrate the devastating effects that inadequate incomes, cuts to essential health infrastructure and the lack of an effective, national approach to housing has on people living on the margins.

'We believe that if we are all working together to build a better Australia, we need the firm foundation of secure housing for everyone, we need strong citizens supported by an equitable health system, and we need everyone to be equipped with the tools for the job: an adequate income to achieve what they need to in life. This year, the Budget must address these three key pillars that support our country,' it stated.

The following is an extract from the submission.

## **A Firm Foundation – Secure Housing**

Safe, affordable and secure housing is the essential basis that many of us take for granted when organising our lives, caring for our families, and working towards our goals. Housing is a human right, but sadly one that all too many people remain locked out of. Insecure, unaffordable and inadequate housing are at chronic levels: housing costs are proportionally far less affordable for those on low incomes; while well over 100,000 people experience homelessness each night. Vinnies alone provides over 350,000 nights of accommodation per year.

If shelter is one of the most basic of all human needs, essential to all other capacities and potentials being fulfilled, then we clearly need a new national plan for housing affordability.

It does not have to be expensive, and can be market-driven. But we need the Federal Government to take the lead in having a genuine conversation about housing reform. Through the Reform of Federation process (which is considering housing), Commonwealth Rent Assistance, the taxation power, and other levers, the government has within its grasp the ability to use this Budget to put forward a concrete plan that will lay a foundation for universal affordable housing.

## **The Strongest Materials – Good Health for All**

On top of the firm foundation of universal housing, in order to build our nation citizens need to be strong and resilient, physically and psychologically. This is the essence of good health, broadly defined, and it is in everyone's best interests that all Australians have access to the

healthcare we need to build the lives and the country that we want.

But Australia's health system is unbalanced. While many get world-class care, there is significant evidence to suggest that a portion of us are still trapped in ill-health and disability, and particular barriers are keeping us there. Research into the Social Determinants of Health consistently shows that health is closely intertwined with socio-economic status. From this perspective, health follows a social gradient: the social, economic and political environments in which people live play a highly significant role in determining their health. As such, socioeconomic position can predict who develops a range of serious health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, and particular cancers. A recent study by Catholic Health Australia and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) has also found that those who are the most socio-economically disadvantaged are twice as likely to have a long-term health condition as the most affluent Australians. Furthermore, the report found that those who are struggling financially are twice as likely to suffer from chronic illnesses and will die on average three years earlier than the wealthiest. Similarly, a report published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that Indigenous Australians, who currently experience great social disadvantage compared with the broader Australian society, have a life expectancy 10 years lower than the national average.

Australia needs a new approach to building our health. Instead of cuts to community health services, Indigenous health, and preventative health, it is time for a national Social Determinants of Health approach that focusses on prevention instead of crisis, and addresses the intersectionality of health with other



factors, including employment, location, race and housing. According to a recent report, if the World Health Organisation's recommendations on a Social Determinants model were adopted in Australia, we would save at least \$15 billion per year. It is time that we really invested in building the strength of the Australian people, and this Budget must provide funding for a national, holistic, Social Determinants of Health framework.

## **Tools to Build – Adequate Income**

The strong foundation of housing and the tough material of great population health are a good start in building the country we want. But to continue to shape this prosperous and lucky nation, we each need to have the right tools: an adequate income that enables us to live decently and pursue our dreams. Sadly, this is far from a reality for many today. Income inequality is continuing to rise in Australia, with over half a million children living in financial poverty. Newstart is so low that it is likely to be breaching the human rights of the unemployed, and Australians in ever-increasing numbers are forced into casual, insecure jobs, working unsociable hours. Here are two real-life case studies of families affected by income inadequacy.

Despite the structural issues keeping people out of work, there is hope. What the 70 case studies highlighted in our national report *Sick With Worry* told us is that everyone wants to participate. We believe that the 2016 Budget is a chance to straighten up some of Australia's imbalanced

economic settings, so that everyone has more of a chance to build themselves up, to contribute what they can, and to support those around them.

First, the Budget must ensure income adequacy. For those on income support, we have consistently opposed cuts to the incomes and resources of people living in poverty in Australia, and supported increasing Newstart and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and indexing all payments appropriately, to reflect the real cost of living now and in the future. For people lucky enough to find work but trapped in low wages, we must not allow penalty rates to be taken away, nor the minimum wage to fall behind the real cost of living.

Secondly, we need a national Jobs Plan, and it must include everyone. We talk about a changing economy, agility and innovation, free trade and global markets, and a shift in Australia's key exports and production sectors. It makes sense to bring every Australian on this journey, not just those who have already been given a complete toolkit for life and start the race in Nike runners, but also those who have only been given a rusty pocketknife and wear sandals. This Budget must invest in all people, through real training and education programs on the one hand, and on the other a focus on how industry can adapt to the needs of workers, rather than the other way around.

Finally, the federal government must recommit to universal education. At pre-school level, significant reforms (like those proposed by the Productivity Commission's recent

Inquiry) need to occur so that every child can access the best quality care, and every parent can return to work if they choose to. At primary and secondary levels, universal education means that all children should have an equal chance to do as well as they can, with full funding based on need, rather than any other criteria. Parents must also be engaged in education: not punished financially when their children don't attend school, as this will only drive them deeper into poverty, but properly engaged with culturally-appropriate programs. For those who go on to post-secondary study, entry to university must be affordable to all, not just those lucky enough to have wealthy parents, and TAFE must be strengthened rather than being undermined.

## **A Budget blueprint: A clear vision**

There are significant opportunities in this Budget for the government to help build the kind of country we all want, one that values fairness, equality, and respect for all of our human rights. Based on what we see every day, what our volunteers tell us, and the stories from those Australians we assist, we believe that the three priorities for this Budget must be a recommitment to housing, a national Social Determinants of Health plan, and a suite of measures to ensure that every Australian enjoys income adequacy. We sincerely hope that the government will take this opportunity to hand down a Budget that strengthens and unites our country, and look forward to working together on building a better society. ♦

# I was homeless at 17, but I was never houseless

BY RACHEL KURZYP

***I was homeless, but never houseless. I've always gone to sleep with a roof over my head. But for a few months, when I was 17, I didn't have a home. I didn't have a space where I felt safe and I could put my things, and I didn't have a permanent address.***

In 2004 I became homeless, and found myself sleeping in the spare bedroom of my then boyfriend's mother's house. My possessions had made their way by car to my temporary room in large, black garbage bags. They covered the entire bedroom floor. I thought about unpacking some of my things but I decided against it. I couldn't face having to stuff clothes and memories back into the bags later. While I took a nap - I was exhausted from the move - my boyfriend quietly placed my candles and photos on the shelves. He wanted to make the room feel more like mine, more homely.

A home is more than four walls and a roof: it's a space where you have security and privacy, where you feel safe and have control over your living space. When asked about the importance of a home, we often recite the famous saying, "Home is where the heart is". So why is it that when we talk about homelessness we do so only in terms of 'houselessness'?

Before the definition of homeless was updated in 2013, homelessness was defined by whether you had a roof over your head. The definition was limiting and only covered those 'sleeping rough' on the streets. Now, the definition has expanded to capture the core elements of a 'home' - and with it the 105,000 odd individuals who are homeless on any given night in Australia.

Yet when asked about homelessness, the public still describes a male with mental or drug and alcohol issues, sleeping on the streets. This sleeping rough group only makes up six per cent of the homeless population in Australia. The full extent of the issue still remains hidden. What we don't see, read or hear from is the individuals who are sleeping on people's couches and in temporary shelters. They are the invisible homeless; just like I was.

Many of my friends and family didn't know I had been homeless until recently when I decided to share my story. It took me over 10 years to identify as having been homeless because, like most Australians, I accepted the definition of homelessness presented to me by society, specifically the news. Now I see that the media's powerful, negative and demoralising stereotype of the homeless is preventing a broader discussion of the issue.

This limited definition of homelessness is linked to the common belief that if you live in Australia - the "land of plenty" where everyone gets "a fair go" - you can't be homeless, so, homelessness must be a choice. And that people don't deserve handouts, like public housing or housing support, because they haven't "worked for it". I've since learnt that a home isn't a privilege, it's a human right.

Definitions are effective. Not only can they determine who is homeless, they can control what kind of support and services people can access. If people don't identify as homeless or at risk of homelessness, they are less likely to seek and access services. And because of the negative labels, many choose not to access services due to shame or risk of further trauma. Because of financial constraints, I had no choice but to access government services and complete the lengthy, complex and dehumanising process.

Addressing the increasing levels of homelessness is a process in itself. While there is a shortage of affordable and appropriate housing, which shouldn't be ignored, I think first we need to acknowledge the causes of homelessness. Because if homelessness was about solving houselessness, we would have solved it already. Families and personal relationships are breaking down not because of the roof over their heads, but because of many complex structural and systemic factors and individual circumstances. Building more public housing will provide the homeless with a physical address, but it won't give them a home. Human beings need access to education, health and transport services, and a connection to their community and to feel like they belong. So, instead of asking questions like, "What does affordable housing look like?", we should be asking, "What does it mean to have a home, not just a house?"

I was surprised when I finally secured a private rental property after only a few short months of filling out rental applications. Once the apartment was furnished and my possessions were freed from their garbage bags, I invited friends over to celebrate. I cooked my first egg and bacon pie (now a sought-after recipe) and we ate it while watching 5pm game shows on my fuzzy analogue TV, propped up by bricks I'd found outside. After another helping of pie, I snuggled into my secondhand couch and thought to myself: it feels good to be home. ♦

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Rachel Kurzyp is a Melbourne-based writer and communications consultant with a focus on human rights and digital inclusion.

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<http://www.dailylife.com.au/news-and-views/dl-opinion/i-was-homeless-at-17-but-i-was-never-houseless-20160112-gm48xd.html>



# Assist a Student

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



Where we assist...

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

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

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

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

No administration cost is deducted from your donation. 100% goes towards the students' education needs (including course fees, uniforms, books etc) for one year.

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

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

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

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

As well as this you will receive:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ POSTCODE: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

**Payment method:**

☐ EFT: BSB 062-000 Acc 16047336

☐ Debit my credit card (details below)

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☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa Card Expiry: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

NAME ON CARD: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Cheque, payable to 'St Vincent de Paul Society'

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



# Strategic Reflection Summary

***The National Council is beginning the process of preparing a new strategic plan. Here is a summary of the responses we have received from the members of the Society across Australia.***

## **A. Reflecting on the Society's National Strategic Plan 2013–2016:**

1. *What are the key lessons to be learned and carried forward for the next few years?*
  - The current Plan is too broad. The new Plan should be limited to no more than six objectives and National Council needs to play a greater role in managing its implementation, especially by setting priorities for national advisory committees and working groups.
  - Work still needs to be done on the three components of Objective 1.2 'One Society—a transformational plan'. The 'One Society' vision has been broadly accepted in principle but there is considerable work to do to make it penetrate deeper into the Society.
  - We need to more actively participate in the Reconciliation movement, and to develop closer relationships with Indigenous communities (2.3.2).
  - The Society continues to advocate passionately for the cause of those in need. There is also a continued need to 'provide the means to enable people who are excluded and disenfranchised to speak for themselves' (3.2.3).
  - We need to be careful not to view our media work through the marketing prism.

- We need to involve staff more as stakeholders in the Society, while ensuring that members are recognised and thanked and receive appropriate training, especially with a view to encouraging members to take up leadership roles at all levels of the Society.
- We need to hear and present the voices of women in the Society, especially in planning.
- We need to explore new Conference models, so that they can be welcoming and comfortable spaces for a diverse range of members.

## **2. Top 3 key issues/problems requiring continued action over the next 4 years?**

- More engagement and development of the youth in our activities.
- Renewal and refocussing of the National Mission and Membership process.
- Allowing our ethos to define what it means to be Catholic, and broadening our membership base accordingly.
- Development of a Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Higher profile at the International General Council.
- Social justice as central to our spirituality and mission.
- Persuading governments to allocate increased funding to the welfare sector, and to increase benefits for the unemployed, marginalised, students, disadvantaged etc.
- Increased capital funding (federal and state) to increase the stock of public/community housing.

## **B. In terms of the next four years for the Society:**

1. *What of significance is changing in*

*the world in which the Society must operate?*

- Global displacement of people resulting in increasing number of asylum seekers.
- Continued increase in the divide between rich and poor in developed countries such as ours.
- Prospect of economic constraints reducing the capabilities of developed countries to respond to natural disasters, wars/terrorism and starvation.
- Increased resistance amongst donors to respond with their time/money to the disadvantaged in our community.
- Connecting the people we assist and our own members to the digital world.
- Need for the development of Conference-based advocacy skills.
- Government focus on the individual consumer-based, rather than service-based or community-based funding models.
- The political election cycle replacing any chances of a long term vision.
- Declining membership-based volunteering.
- Declining church attendance along with Church's poor reputation in the community.

## **2. What new needs of the people we seek to assist are beginning to emerge?**

- Mental health issues.
- Intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage.
- Changing demographic structure of society and the changing ethnographic and religious backgrounds of people in need.
- Drug and alcohol issues.
- Unemployment/underemployment/casualisation.

- Inadequacy of Newstart and other payments.
  - More specific demands for assistance around costs of living.
  - The housing crisis.
  - Domestic violence.
  - Loneliness and sense of disconnectedness.
3. *What new opportunities might there be for the Society over the next four years?*
- Greater sharing, understanding and integration of information, formation and training.
  - Better sharing of experiences, especially in innovative approaches within jurisdictions.
  - Better integration of volunteer (member) and employee services.
  - Stronger focus on services that make a difference in the long term, coupled with much better measurement of the impact we are having.
  - Returning to our original purpose rather than being an agency of government.
  - A strong advocacy campaign around the inadequacy of government pensions/allowances.
  - Pope Francis calling us to action for social justice and the broader community listening to him!
4. *What will be the top challenges the Society will have to face over the next four years?*
- Ageing membership and the decline in the number of 'traditional' members.
  - Convincing members to move to a more flexible model and

making the changes necessary to achieve this.

- Remembering our roots.
- Conservative attitudes within the Society.
- Not becoming a government agency.
- Building a better working relationship between members, volunteers and employees.
- Internal unity.
- Involving members in advocacy and social media.
- Funding streams.
- Community attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers issues and peoples and the ways in which the Society responds to their needs in the face of government policy.
- The mainstream tendency to engage in punishment of the poor.

### **C. Suggested directions for the future:**

*Internally*, the following questions emerge from the above as areas for strategic focus:

- How do return to our roots, whilst embracing new ways of being Vincentians (including a deeper and more organic integration between members and staff)?
- How do we better value, train and resource our members so that they can both assist and advocate for the people on whose side we stand?
- How do we practically advance the goal of being One Society?

- How do we better embrace diversity, particularly ensuring that the voices of women, young people and members of the First Peoples of Australia are heard within the Society?

*Externally*, the key questions are:

- How do we ensure that the voices of people experiencing marginalisation are heard?
- How do we live out our spiritual identity as a social justice movement rather than a government agency or merely a player in the not-for-profit marketplace?
- How do we address the shifting social, political and economic frameworks that increasingly fail to deliver income adequacy, housing, health, education and the other necessities of life, without allowing governments to abrogate their responsibilities?
- How do we address the dehumanising and demeaning treatment of asylum seekers and people experiencing poverty?
- How do we inspire people to want to join us in our mission to create a more just and compassionate society?

Comments specific to the *Strategic Planning process* focussed on:

- Greater brevity and sharper focus in the development of objectives.
- Greater national coordination of the implementation of the next Plan, especially through setting priorities for national advisory committees and working groups. ♦

# The impact of war on one family over the twentieth century

BY ANDREW HAMILTON SJ

***One of the best books to come out of the Vietnam War was Bao Ninh's The Sorrow of War. The narrator in the novel is a North Vietnamese soldier, who describes how his personality and relationships unravel in the war and its horrors.***

The sorrow of war is also the theme of the recent book by historian Michael McKernan, formerly Deputy Director of the Australian War Museum in Canberra. In *When This Thing Happened* his canvas is broader than that of Bao Ninh. He describes the effects of war on his wife's family over two generations.

Michael Stawyskyj was born in the Ukraine. In 1939 he was conscripted as a youth to work in Germany as an agricultural labourer. He never saw his mother again. His buoyant temperament helped him survive his five years in Germany. As the war drew to a close he escaped, fell briefly into the hands of the invading Russian troops, and finally found his way to an American controlled part of Germany. He spent four years in a camp for displaced persons, where he met and married Anna Grad, also from the Ukraine. After they and their two children were accepted by Australia in 1949, they lived initially in an army camp in Bathurst, and later in the NSW suburb of Fairfield. There Michael built a home and settled with Anna, Michalina and Joe.

Their younger child Joe completed his secondary schooling, was a good sportsman, and wanted to make his way in business. But in 1967 he was conscripted in



Michael McKernan,  
*When This Thing Happened*.  
Scribe  
ISBN (13):9781925106893

the lottery that provided troops for the war in Vietnam. He had almost completed his two years of service when the truck he was riding in hit a landmine. It was travelling along an unsafe track. The landmine was probably one of those recklessly sown by an Australian general, lifted by North Vietnamese soldiers, and placed where it could be lethal.

Joe, who suffered massive head and other injuries, was eventually repatriated to Australia in a coma. He was left unable to walk and with no short-term memory (and so unable to engage in conversation). Anna devoted her life to caring for him. He never complained, enjoyed the company of those whom he met and was grateful for their care. After some years his army mates took him to Anzac Day marches in his wheelchair.

In 1987 Anna died suddenly, worn out by her duty of care. Michael, who was then planning his retirement, took over the responsibility for Joe's care until he fell ill. Joe then spent the final years of his life in a nursing home.

This family story is marked by separation, isolation, massive and repeated disruption, and loss of opportunity. But it also includes resilience, constancy, initiative and new beginnings. It speaks of sorrow but not of despair.

The family story also embodies the larger story of war, with its attendant brutality, stupidity, random death, insensitivity and expendability. McKernan tells the story simply and fastidiously, with a restrained anger at the waste of it all.

Good words about war are carved out of silence. War attracts too many easy words: infatuated words about bombs and death, abstract words about strategy and goals, and knavish words about nobility. Those bombed, strafed, exiled and spat out by war find few words to speak of it. That too is part of the sorrow of war.

In Bao Ninh's novel the narrator despairs of finding words and decides to burn his manuscript. It is rescued and passed on by his confidante who is mute. She has no words. In *When This Thing Happened*, Joe's words are necessarily disconnected. Michael and Anna, both exiles, have never had words easily to hand. They have had to let their lives speak. McKernan, too, speaks sparsely, pointing to the pools of silence in which war has obliterated the tracks taken by Michael, Anna and Joe. ♦

Andrew Hamilton SJ is a consulting editor of the Eureka Street news website.



# In the name of charity

BY MICHAEL MORAN

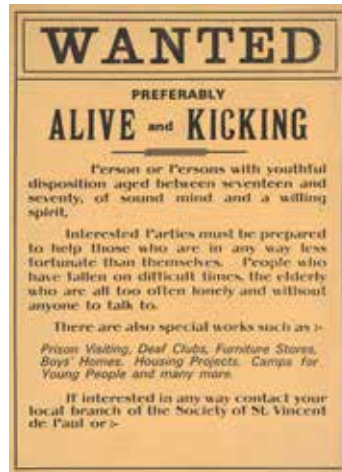
***Groucho Marx famously remarked that he would not want to belong to a club that would accept someone like him as a member. Our Society has sometimes worried about whom to accept, most recently about whether non-Catholics (like Groucho) could become members.***

At the turn of last century, in 1902, our leaders were exercised about whether publicans could be admitted to the Society. Did they have the right sort of character? Our National President wrote to headquarters in Paris and obtained the following helpful advice: 'The business of publican is not usually held in very high esteem', replied the President-General. 'Our brothers of the United States will not admit any publican as a member of the Society there, and we are not aware that there is any person of that business to be found in the Conferences of France. However, there are some countries in which the owner of a public house holds a more respectable position. In Belgium especially certain Conferences hold their meeting rooms in public houses.'

The profession of publican is no longer considered disreputable in Australia and publicans are welcome in the Society, but our Conferences have not followed the Belgian model of meetings.

Perhaps a more subtle or embarrassing membership issue than religion or respectability is class, something occasionally alluded to in the history of the Society.

In 1917 our first National President, a man of some social distinction, advised the President-General in Paris that 'In Australia our brothers are of a humbler social class than is the rule in France'.



The President-General was a French aristocrat, a Vicomte no less. We may be egalitarian now but in the past we hedged our bets.

Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane, speaking to the Society's Fourth Triennial Congress in 1930, pursued a similar theme. 'There is another point that I would like to mention', he said, 'and that is that one finds that the most charity comes from the working classes, and therefore it is not an exaggerated estimate to say that over 75 per cent of the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul are working men. These men are engaged all day long at their daily tasks and they have no leisure except at weekends. Consequently it is impossible for them to do the amount of visiting of the poor that they would like to do or to give the time to the work of the Society that they would wish. I do hope that it will be possible to get in active members of more means or, at least more leisure ... In England I know of centres where men of means are proud to become workers in the interests of charity. Here in Australia, for some reason which I am at a loss to understand, there seems to be a different spirit abroad. Somehow certain classes of the Catholic community, noticeably the professional and the wealthy classes, appear in the work of the Church only on gala occasions and seldom, if ever,

participate in the work such as that done by your Society.'

The Archbishop was echoing our national Spiritual Director, Father Maurice O'Reilly, who observed in Sydney in 1918 'the utter want of either generosity or public spirit among the wealthy Catholics of this State'. He found working people were far more generous than well-off Catholics. Father O'Reilly also observed that Victorian Catholics were far more generous than the Catholics of New South Wales. Is this still true?

Neither O'Reilly nor Duhig were entirely fair. The Society's leaders in our early years were mostly professional or middle-class people, often lawyers and often active politically (on both left and right). Some of our earliest members were prominent or well-off Catholics. In an age when there was no welfare state or health insurance, doctors affiliated with the Society routinely provided free treatment to the needy. So did pharmacists.

Duhig's call for more middle-class members had apparently been achieved in Canberra by the 1970s. A historian of the Society in the Canberra-Goulburn region noted: 'The late Father Tom Wright was the spiritual director to the Archdiocesan Council. I well remember a comment of his made towards the end of the 1970s, that members of the Society in Canberra were middle class and mostly public servants. He observed that there were no artisans or ordinary workers, such as would be found in rural areas, and he challenged the Society not to be elitist in its membership' (JD Howden, 1999).

The body has many members, Saint Paul tells us. They each have different functions but they all make up one body. The Society has many members too, all different and all making up the one body. Ozanam's mansion has many rooms. Just like a pub. ♦

Michael Moran is the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Archivist.

