



the Record

Summer 2014-15



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

NATIONAL CONGRESS 2015

Celebrating our past - defining our future

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I will rise (after Maya Angelou)

You now lock me in detention
and damage my hopes
but it's like dust
and one day I will rise.

You may avoid my sadness
and send me to Manus
but one day I will rise.

You may hide the reality
and break my heart
but one day I will rise.

You may send me somewhere else.

Why can't you help me?

I may be a female of under age
who needs assistance from you.
You may send me to other countries
and shoot me with your words
but one day I will rise.

You may punish me
by saying lies
but one day I will rise.

You may kill me with your hateful action
but it's like air
and one day I will rise.

You may never care about my awful past
and enjoy my tears
but one day I will rise.



I may have bad memories
rooted in pain
but one day I will rise.

I may have left a fearful life of horror
but one day I will rise.

Does my mind upset you
so full of thoughts?

I am an asylum seeker
who seeks for freedom and doesn't
have anywhere else to go.

Does it come as a surprise to you
that whatever you have done to me
I will forgive you?

Wherever you send me
as long as I see the sun rise and the
moon come up
I will rise...

Hani Aden is a Somali writer who is currently detained in the Australian Immigration Detention in Sydney. She is an honorary member of PEN international. This poem was first published in The Arrivalists writing from within detention at <http://thearrivalists.tumblr.com/archive>



At Capernaum

You ask if we would leave you
The answer of course is no
We have come to believe in you
Where then should we go
I was drowning when you rescued me
From the raging sea last night
You came for me across the sea
When you saw my plight
You have the words of eternal life
We believe every word you said
We believe with faith beyond belief
Your body will be our bread
When the sea had risen above my head
And all the world was dark
On a golden table I saw the bread
That lies before the Ark
I saw Frankincense between the bread
On the table there catch fire
The fragrant cloud consumed the bread
Consumed the bread entire.

Pat Cunneen

Whitfords Conference, WA



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:

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Vinnies Street Van

The Vinnies' Van roster has let them down
so there are only two to bear the northern suburbs rush.
Serving minestrone to chilled hands,
Milo to crumpled kids, and hand over fist,
the baker's unwanted dozens to happier homes.

Later they drive past the Grand Chancellor
and imagine they see through the high glass windows
the bishop and his higher priests being served
beetroot Borscht as cold as charity.

At the last stop a stranger sees they're short-handed.
After the last loaves and late goodbyes
they pour out the dregs of the minestrone to share.



And the stranger breaks off some roll,
and dunking it in his polystyrene cup says

Here's the bread that's never day-old;
Here's the soup that never gets cold.

Tony Brennan
Tasmania

Celebrating our past— defining our future

BY ANTHONY THORNTON

You will by now have heard that we are hoping to hold a national congress of the Society in Australia. This will be the first national congress in 60 years and will involve representatives of the Society from right across our nation. We anticipate that it will also be the biggest gathering of members of the Society in its 160-year history in Australia.

The proposed theme of the congress is: *Celebrating our past—defining our future.*

We have a proud tradition of assisting and standing with Australia's most disadvantaged people. This national congress comes at a crucial point in our history as we discern how we can best face the challenges of the 21st Century as poverty and exclusion take on new forms and so many good people are left out of the prosperity that our nation has generated.

We have had an excellent response to a questionnaire that was sent out to Conferences across Australia. There appears to be a strong level of interest in holding the congress. Clearly, we can only go ahead if members of the Society are in support of this event. We need to make the most of this opportunity to involve as many Vincentians as possible in shaping the Society's future.

My term as National President finishes in March 2015. It has been, and continues to be, a great privilege to serve the Society in this role. When I was elected, I shared a vision



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for the Society in Australia to think and act as *One Society*, committed to serving Christ in the poor and marginalised.

This national congress will be a time to reflect on our past and to determine our future. We are a member-based organisation. This is something we should never

forget. We are a spiritual and social movement. If we stand still or rest on our laurels we will lose our momentum.

Blessed Frederic teaches us that: *'The knowledge of social well-being and of reform is to be learned, not from books nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs*

to the poor person's garret, sitting by their bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces them, sharing the secret of their lonely heart and troubled mind.'

Let our national congress be a time when we focus not on ourselves but on the poor; a time when we ask ourselves if we are truly learning from the poor so that we may fulfil our sacred duty of standing on the side of the poor and fearlessly challenging the unjust economic, political or social structures, described in The Rule as 'structures of sin'.

As Blessed Frederic put it: *'Do not be afraid of new beginnings. Be creative. Be inventive. Organise new works of love in the service of the poor.'*

We live in a time when the federal government, rather than supporting the vulnerable, is making life harder for the people we serve and stand with.

We are called to take a stand for the poor no matter who is in government.

As The Rule says very clearly: *'the Society should speak out clearly against the situation' whenever 'injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust economic, political or social structures or to inadequate or unjust legislation'.*

If we are to take a stand, and take a stand we must, then it is imperative that now, more than ever, we should work very closely with each other.

Only by standing together will our voice be strong and our love for the poor be recognised.

This is our calling, and no matter what the cost, we answer this call gladly.

In the words of the Scriptures:

'Happy are you who hunger and thirst for justice; you will be satisfied.' ♦

Anthony Thornton is the National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Members of the National Council at the Commissioning Mass, back row from left, Vice President Graham West, Spiritual Advisor Fr Troy Bobbin, Queensland State President John Forrest, Vice President Tony Muir and Tasmanian State President Vin Hindmarsh. Front row from left, Northern Territory President Gerry McCormack, Territory Council of Canberra Goulburn President Frank Brassil, National President Anthony Thornton, West Australian State President Bob Burns and National Secretary Norm Moore.

On Saturday 25 October, the St Vincent de Paul Society in WA commissioned a new state president, Robert (Bob) Burns. Mr Burns took over the presidency from outgoing State President, Jeff Trew, who retired on 1 July 2014. Father Sunny Abraham was chief celebrant at the Commissioning Mass, which was well attended, including by National President Anthony Thornton and several other members of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.



Vinnies staff and volunteers did not shy away from braving the elements

Community Sleepout held in Canberra

On 14 November, 2014 the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn held a successful Community Sleepout event in Canberra. The event was held in conjunction with Communities@Work, a Canberra-based NFP. Seven hundred people signed up to sleep out in order to raise awareness and funds to combat homelessness. Over \$100,000 was raised.

SOCIAL JUSTICE UPDATE

In its role of advocating for the rights of marginalised groups in the community, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia office regularly produces publications, submissions and reports.

Message from the CEO, Dr John Falzon

It was disconcerting to learn the review of homelessness policy had been shelved in late October. An article published on the Pro Bono News website on 28 October, 2014 reported the development, which was confirmed by the Minister for Social Services, Kevin Andrews. Earlier this year Vinnies joined a host of other NFPs calling on the Minister to announce concrete dates for the review. The St Vincent de Paul Society is disappointed the long-awaited review has been axed, but what concerns us most is the future of homelessness services funding. We once again call on the

Minister to commit to a long-term National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness before the current agreement expires mid next year.

The inadequacy of income support payments was a major topic of discussion when I attended the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) board meeting in Melbourne on 10 November, 2014.

The St Vincent de Paul Society is eagerly awaiting the final report on the Review of Australia's welfare system and while the Society is not opposed to the Welfare Review's suggestion that income support payments be streamlined (providing they are not reduced), we think the elephant in

the room is the inadequacy of the payments themselves. The fact is no matter how much the Government streamlines our welfare system; people are still going to be poor, due to the paltry level of the payments. That is why we are committed to calling for a \$50 per week minimum increase in the Newstart Allowance.

On 18 November, 2014 I addressed the National Carer Conference in the Gold Coast and I was reminded of the vital and, largely unrecognised role, that carers play in our community. There are 2.7 million carers in Australia and the national Conference gives carers the opportunity to voice what is important to them and to have input into national issues.

CEO among Human Rights Medal finalists

On 19 November, 2014 the St Vincent de Paul Society CEO, Dr John Falzon, was announced as one of four finalists for the Australian Human Rights Medal as part of the annual awards held by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Dr Falzon was shortlisted for the award along with Dorothy Hoddinott AO, Noel Tovey and Michael Traill AM. Dr Falzon's advocacy efforts

to address the structural causes of poverty and inequality did not go unnoticed by the judges. The winner of the Australian Human Rights Medal is announced at an award ceremony held in Sydney on 10 December, 2014. Previous winners of the prestigious Human Rights Medal include Sister Clare Condon; philanthropist and swimming champion Ian Thorpe; respected lawyer Ron Merkel QC; and disability advocate Thérèse Rein.



The finalists for the Human Rights Medal, from left, Dorothy Hoddinott AO, Noel Tovey, Michael Traill AM and Dr John Falzon.

Migration Act and Asylum Legacy Bill

Anticipation has been building in recent months over the proposed legislation to change the Migration Act and Asylum Legacy Bill, including the re-introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) which leave refugees in a state of uncertainty about their futures.

On November 21 the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia issued a media release titled 'Urgent revision of Refugee

Bill required' calling on Senators to reconsider their support for the Bill, which if passed by the Senate in its current form would see the reintroduction of TPVs and a new visa called a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). Neither visa would allow for permanent settlement in Australia, leaving refugees in a state of in a state of limbo, and unable to reunite with their families.

Chief Executive, Dr John Falzon, said: 'We urge Senators to restore fairness in the treatment of refugees, by taking heed of the Refugee Council of

Australia's ecommended modifications to TPVs and SHEVs that could reduce the harm of this Bill. This includes allowing refugees to ultimately apply for a Permanent Protection Visa, enabling family reunion – a human right, and providing all refugees with access to the full suite of settlement services and the right to work, especially those people who relocate to regional towns under the SHEV scheme,' Dr Falzon said. 'It is time', he added, 'that we as a nation rejected the politics of cruelty rather than rejecting people who seek refuge.'

WA State president driven by core beliefs

Name:

Robert (Bob) Burns

Position in the Society:

State president, St Vincent de Paul Society WA.

I am a retired chartered accountant, operating my own business, Burns & Associates, from 1984 to 2008.

Hometown:

I was born in Katanning, Western Australia. My family moved to Albany when I was two years old and this is where I grew up, completed school and commenced my accountancy. I now live in Morley, a suburb of Perth, and am a member of the Morley Conference based at the Infant Jesus Parish.

How did you first become involved with the Society?

I was introduced to the Society by a Carmelite parish priest in the early 1980s. I joined the Morley Conference and was a member for a few years, but due to the demands of a young family and the time required in establishing my own accountancy firm, I withdrew from the conference. Some years later I was invited to become the State auditor of the Society, which is a role I



WA State President, Bob Burns.

served in for many years. Then, on my retirement, I was approached to take on the role of State treasurer, which I held for six years.

Why did you become a Conference member?

My core belief is that all people should have the chance to make the most of their lives, and where we have the opportunity to assist people, who for various reasons have suffered a setback in life, we should offer assistance—this is Christianity in practice. From the age of 14 I was raised in a low income, single parent family and this has helped me understand the difficulties that some people face.

What will be your focus during your term as State president?

My initial focus will be to strengthen the Conferences and provide them with the support they need. We must remember that Conference members are volunteers. I want to make sure they feel valued and are given the support to carry out this important work. We want to encourage Conferences to utilise the resources of other support services where available.

What have been the highlights of your time as WA president so far?

I have enjoyed meeting like-minded people with a similar proclivity to help others. I have had the opportunity to visit some country locations and appreciate some of their local issues. The goodwill and generosity of our donors has also been heartening.

Where would you like to see the Society in five years?

My wish is to have a Society where every volunteer, member, employee and person we assist feels valued. I also want to ensure the Society continues to be a respected organisation within the community. As well as being a place for developing relationships with those we assist, I believe the Society must be a place of genuine community where members encourage and respect each other, working together in unity.

We must always explore new ways of doing things. We should not become vulnerable to the whims of Government policy but work in cooperation with Government and other agencies. The Society should be a leading advocate for the marginalised, and we should vigorously speak out against injustices. ♦

Christmas Appeal 2014

On 1 November the St Vincent de Paul Society launched its Vinnies Christmas Appeal for 2014. This Christmas, the Society will provide people across Australia with financial assistance, clothing, utilities, food hampers and gifts for children. National President, Anthony Thornton said most people are turning to us for the basics such as food, paying a bill and keeping a roof over their head. 'The reality is that for many people Christmas is a stressful time and far from the joyous celebration it is for most Australians. These people will struggle to pay their bills and put food on the table let alone dream of buying gifts for their children or preparing a special Christmas meal,' Mr Thornton said. The St Vincent de Paul Society needs the support of those Australians who can afford to do so, to dig deep and make a generous donation to the Vinnies Christmas Appeal. People can donate by visiting vinnies.org.au or calling 13 18 12.

We have only one enemy: inequality

DR JOHN FALZON

***'In the same town were two men, one rich, the other poor. The rich man had flocks and herds in great abundance; the poor man had nothing but a ewe lamb, only a single little one which he had bought. He fostered it and it grew up with him and his children, eating his bread, drinking from his cup, sleeping in his arms ... When a traveller came to stay, the rich man would not take anything from his own flock or herd to provide for the wayfarer who had come to him. Instead, he stole the poor man's lamb and prepared that for his guest.'* (2 Sam 12:1-4)**

This is an ancient story. But isn't it exactly what we're up against in our struggle to reduce poverty and inequality in the 21st century? We are still coming to grips with the Federal Budget, with its measures that would rip the guts out of what remains of a fair and egalitarian Australia.

Like forcing young people to live on fresh air and sunshine for six months of every year, forcing them to rely on charity or to survive through crime. As if this was ever going to address the underlying structural causes of youth unemployment!

It isn't charity that young people should have to depend on. It's justice they should be able to count on. And you don't reduce youth unemployment by increasing youth incarceration. The rejection of these measures reflects the will of the vast majority of Australians.



We have only one enemy. It is called inequality. It's the meanness of spirit entailed in taking the little that people who are living in poverty have in order, supposedly, to reduce the deficit. It's taking the lamb instead of drawing on 'the flocks and herds in abundance'.

You don't build a strong economy by increasing the level of inequality. You don't create a strong country on the backs of the already poor. There's nothing human about humiliating people because they are outside the labour market or on its low-paid fringes. There's nothing smart about making it unaffordable for people to see a doctor or for their kids to go to university.

We are not in the throes of a fiscal crisis, but if we embark on this treacherous path of US-style austerity we will be staring down the barrel of a social crisis. We will be facing a social crisis if the people who bear the burden of inequality, especially the people who are forced into poverty and even homelessness, are made to pay so that the generous tax concessions enjoyed by the wealthy are protected and preserved. We will be facing a social crisis if, as a society, we are silent in the face of these attempts to grind down people's lives, humiliating them and hurting them instead of helping them.

The Prime Minister promised his government would stand by the



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vulnerable. The response to his first Budget by ordinary Australians proclaims a very simple and very beautiful message: *It is we, the people, who are on the side of the vulnerable. And we will not be silenced.*

We all have personal vulnerabilities. To be human is to be vulnerable. Many of us are also economically vulnerable, and some of us in the current political and economic situation are very vulnerable—vulnerable to the threat of unemployment, or to losing our benefits, vulnerable to the threat of fewer casual shifts or the loss of penalty rates, vulnerable to losing the place we call home, no matter how humble it may be.

These economic vulnerabilities become personal vulnerabilities. Because it's hard to feel like you have dignity when you can't afford to eat or when you have no place to sleep. As the Feminist Movement taught us, the personal is political. So our task is to transform our personal stories of injustice into a powerful, collective struggle for a new society—a society in which people are not blamed because economic structures lock them out or, in some cases, lock them up; one in which people are not told that they would not be poor if only they chose to be a little more productive.

At a recent meeting of Popular Movements, Pope Francis called for a people's struggle 'against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and shelter, the denial of social and labour rights'. This, he told the assembled social activists, entails confronting the 'empire of money'.

Rather than standing aloof from the struggle of the despised and excluded, Francis told them, *'Today I want to join my voice to yours and accompany you in your struggle.'*

'Every worker', he argued, 'whether or not part of a formal system of salaried work, has the right to a decent wage, social security and a pension plan'.

The rights of workers, including all who have been residualised and discarded, people who are unemployed or underemployed, must take priority over the maximisation of profits.

As I am writing this, the world's leaders are gathering for the G20 Summit in Brisbane. We are told that the focus of the summit is economic growth.

In the name of the people we stand with, in accordance with the very simple, very human message of the Beatitudes, which turn the values of the world upside down, we say:

You don't build a strong economy by excluding people. You might achieve profits for some, but only at the cost of a deeply unequal society.

A strong economy does not come about by abandoning our sense of the social; or by humiliating people because they are unemployed.

A strong economy doesn't mean making young people survive on fresh air and sunshine.

A strong economy doesn't mean leaving people at the mercy of the market in areas such as health and education.

A strong economy doesn't mean an unjust society.

The Bible is very clear about who the people of God are. They are not an ethnic group. Nor are they a religious group.

The people with whom the God of the Bible unequivocally and unapologetically takes sides are the scattered and crushed, the despised and ignored, the dispossessed and degraded, the humbled and humiliated.

We take the side of the people who are made to feel like they are nothing.

Join us in working towards the kind of society where vulnerability is respectfully shared and supported rather than brutally exploited. We believe that humanity will win against humiliation. Because our solidarity is stronger than our sadness and even though our struggle is enormous, so too is our hope. ♦

Dr John Falzon is the Chief Executive Office of the St Vincent de Paul Society. A shorter version of this article appeared in Eureka Street during Anti-Poverty Week 2014.

Treading the Vincentian's path from a woman's perspective

In light of the national congress planned for 2015, Victorian State Council member Dr Margaret Gearon draws inspiration from two great women in history, Louise de Marillac and Blessed Rosalie Rendu, as she reflects on her personal journey as a Vincentian and on the wider role of women in the Society in the 21st century.

BY DR MARGARET
GEARON

As a Vincentian, who am I?

First and foremost, I am a woman who is committed to social justice and advocacy for all members of Australian society, and this commitment is firmly based within the mission statement of the Society, namely working to shape a more just and compassionate society. Indeed, I have been connected to the St Vincent de Paul Society since the late 1970s because of my father's involvement in and commitment to the works of the Society in the Sandhurst Diocese. Later, his appointment as president of the Diocesan Centres Board in the 1980s meant that frequently I accompanied him to St Vincent de Paul Society functions, where it was evident that the Society was directed and dominated by male members. Women played a mainly supportive role to their husbands who implemented The Rule, ran meetings and organised the business of the conferences and the Society. The women volunteered to serve in the stores, sorting, pricing and selling donated goods,



Blessed Rosalie Rendu climbed up on the barricades—risking her life—to help wounded soldiers, regardless of which side they were fighting on during uprisings in France in the 1830s and 1840s. She also helped Frederic Ozanam and his friends to do good works, which is how the St Vincent de Paul Society started.

and prepared and served food and beverages at meetings. A notable exception and role model for my sisters and me was Pat Murphy, from Kerang.

During my 20 years in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, I was able to live the social justice vision of the Society by assisting AusAID, and also by providing a 'hand up' to international students. We set up what was affectionately known as the 'St Vincent de Paul cupboard', where we sorted household items and clothing to assist newly arrived students and their families who could not afford to buy what they needed because of the high cost of accommodation; we also helped them to find reasonable housing and provided medical advice and counselling.

After joining my local conference in Blackburn South in 2011, I was surprised by the lack of women representatives—one of my first comments at a meeting was to note the predominance of men. This earned me an invitation from Tony

Keaney, the Ringwood Regional President, to join that region's council as a vice president, together with Wal Stevens from the Blackburn Conference. I am indebted to these two men and to the current State President, Michael Liddy, who saw the potential contribution which I, as a woman, could make to our region and to the work of the Society. Indeed, such was Tony Keaney's confidence and belief in my potential, that he asked me to represent him at a central council meeting and a state regional and central council presidents' forum so that I could quickly gain an understanding of how the Society currently operated in Victoria, and be able to suggest ways in which women could become more involved in its operations.

When I accepted the role of Blackburn South Conference president in 2012, I was still the only woman on the Ringwood Regional Council, except for the twinning officer and the minutes secretary. This has changed over the last two years, with two other conferences in the region electing women as



In 1642 Louise de Marillac, together with Vincent de Paul, founded the Daughters of Charity, a revolutionary order of the poor. Today there are over 20,000 Daughters of Charity who continue to help people in need.

presidents. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of women at both regional and central council level in positions of responsibility. I believe that the encouragement given to members of the first conference in Paris in the mid-19th century by Rosalie Rendu provides the Society with an example to encourage today's conferences, regions and central councils in Victoria to be pro-active in recruiting more women to undertake visible roles. Women are not just able to provide support and encouragement, but also leadership. Women bring a different perspective to addressing the needs of the people we assist, and a different, more eclectic and creative set of solutions to problems which conference members encounter. In my own conference, the women we have been visiting for many years frequently ask for a woman to be one of the two people who attend because they feel that they can talk about their issues, particularly those around domestic violence, more openly and freely than if two men visited.

At regional and central council levels, there is still a long way to go to ensure a visible presence of women. Exceptionally, the Victorian Social Policy and Advocacy Committee has six women representatives and is now chaired by the State vice president, also a woman. Rural areas in Victoria present particular challenges and women in these areas need much support and encouragement to assume responsibilities that, in the past, were automatically delegated to men.

There is a definite need within the Society for the establishment of a women's support network. Perhaps it is also time for a pro-active recruitment policy, using the examples of the leadership and attentiveness to social issues of

their times exemplified in the works of Louise de Marillac and Rosalie Rendu, two outstanding women, Daughters of Charity, who inspire and guide the involvement of many women in today's Society. ♦

Dr Margaret Gearon is Victorian State Vice-President, Social Policy and Advocacy and Chairperson of the Social Justice Committee, and Victoria's representative on the National Social Justice and Advocacy Committee.

To read the biographies of Blessed Rosalie Rendu and Lousie de Marillac in full, visit www.vinnies.org.au/page/About/History/

Expressions of Interest sought

If you would like to hear more about a Vincentian women's support group or find out how you can become involved, please contact Margaret Gearon via email at margaret.gearon@monash.edu

INSPIRATIONAL ROLE MODELS

Louise de Marillac

Louise was born in Paris on 12 August 1591, and went on to become one of the most educated women of her time. She was educated by the Dominican sisters and later at a residence for young girls in Paris. Louise had a desire to join a religious order, but she was not permitted to do so. She married Antoine le Gras, secretary to the Queen Mother, in 1611 and they had a son, Michael. They lived together happily for many years until Antoine became sick and died in 1625. Despite the fact that she had come from a background of wealth, Louise was just as comfortable around the poor. She met and became friends with Vincent de Paul. With Vincent, Louise started the Daughters of Charity, a revolutionary order of the poor in 1642. Louise died on 15 March 1660. Her legacy lives on, with over 20,000 Daughters of Charity across the world today. Louise is the patron saint of sick people, widows and orphans, and in 1960, Pope John XXIII proclaimed her the Patroness of Social Workers. The Feast Day of Louise de Marillac is 15 March.

Blessed Rosalie Rendu

Born Jeanne Marie Rendu in Confort, France, on 7 February 1786, Jeanne entered the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity when she was nearly 17 years old, and received the name Rosalie. As well as assisting the poor in the streets and in their homes for 50 years, Sister Rosalie showed great courage and leadership during the bloody uprisings that took place in France in 1830 and 1848. She became known as the 'good mother of all', and helped Frederic Ozanam and his friends to do good works, which is how the St Vincent de Paul Society started. Although her health was always fragile, Sister Rosalie never rested; she preferred to keep serving the poor, and managed to overcome fatigue and illness. She became progressively blind during the last two years of her life and died on 7 February 1856. Blessed Rosalie Rendu was beatified on 9 November 2003 and her Feast Day is celebrated on 7 February.

A national congress—why?

BY FRANK BRASSIL

It is 60 years since we had a national congress of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. Since that time there have been many congresses at state/territory or diocesan levels, but never at a national level. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask, 'Why do we need one now?' The next questions are: 'What could it achieve?' and 'Is it worth the cost?'

It is facile to say that the Society has changed greatly in the past 60 years—so has the world we live in and the Society belongs in the world. It is not the changes in the past 60 years that call for a national congress—it is the challenges that are coming, both for the Society and for the world in which it works.

The key challenge for the Society is to retain its essential charism as a lay Catholic organisation fundamentally based on a Conference model, closely linked to the core values of Catholic faith and living the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The core of the Conference model is a group of people committed to the values of the Society working together under the Rule to serve people in need in their community. The Society has for 180 years been built on the Conference system and I believe that the vast majority of its members see the Conference as the core of the Society and as its key distinguishing characteristic. Without the Conference system we would cease to be the St Vincent de Paul Society.

One of the treasures of the Society is its Youth and Young



Over 400 visitors attended the St Vincent de Paul Society's 1948 Triennial Congress held in Brisbane. For more information about this congress and others see pages 17-21.

Adults Conferences and a strong participation by our younger people is an unquestionable necessity if the congress is to succeed.

The Rule defines Conference members, associate members and volunteer members (Part 3 Article 1). The Society is now a broad and diverse organisation with a huge range of volunteers and thousands of staff, all of whom are welcomed as Vincentians and all of whom have a legitimate contribution to make to the future of the Society. The Society depends on the excellent contribution of its staff, who have every right to identify as Vincentians. Equally, there are many thousands of people who volunteer at Centres and Special Works and in other ways, who are

not Conference members, and who make a wonderful contribution to this large, diverse and truly extraordinary Society. We must embrace all who are part of the Society in addressing its future. All Vincentians are welcome at the congress and it will be a better event if we have strong representation from all parts of the Society.

I believe that the challenge we must address is that the St Vincent de Paul Society may become an organisation run largely as a staffed business while retaining its origins as 'fig leaf' branding in an essentially secular corporation. This has happened to many previously Christian organisations and it would be a betrayal of the spirit of Ozanam and the other founders to allow



One of the treasures of the Society is its Youth and Young Adults Conferences and a strong participation by our younger people is an unquestionable necessity if the congress is to succeed.

the Society to go this way. It could happen if we allow the Conference system to wither slowly as an ageing membership gradually retires and is not replaced with new and vibrant members strongly committed to the mission and vision of the Society, working alongside our staff and

volunteers in exercising the charism of St Vincent de Paul and Ozanam.

It is clear that we face critical challenges in sustaining the Society over the next 20 years and the people who should be most involved in determining the future of the Society are its members. That is what a congress is for—to enable members to come together to address important questions. I am confident that much good thinking and many good ideas can arise when Vincentians from many different places and backgrounds come together, ‘for when two or three are gathered in my name ...’.

The reason for doing it soon is that the problems we face, particularly with the age distribution of our membership, are clear and are not going to be made any easier by delay. Indeed, it is self-evident that the sooner we address the problems, the sooner we can put solutions in place together.

But, one may ask: ‘Why is it to be done nationally rather than locally?’ The answer is that the problems are the same across the country and we need a nationally consistent approach in responding to the challenges. The Society is a much more integrated organisation than in previous decades. A key to effective and efficient change management is to minimise complexity by using consistent and well developed approaches. Moreover, I believe that by bringing together Vincentians from all over the country we have the best chance of finding the best solutions. The alternative is a fragmented and disconnected set of approaches in different places. This would be a poor outcome which would have less likelihood of success. Nothing prevents adaptation of national approaches to local needs, but the core strategy needs to be a national approach formulated by a national consensus.

An obvious concern is the cost of such an exercise. This is a difficult matter for many people, but it has to be considered in light of the principle of ‘value for money’. Over the next 20 years, at current levels, the Society will turn over more than \$7 billion. This is a huge amount of money and we have a huge responsibility for its stewardship. The question then becomes: ‘How much should the Society invest in its members collectively exercising control of its direction and strategy?’ I can’t give a specific figure to answer that question, but I can assure you that the team planning the congress is very sensitive to the issue and will certainly be looking to ensure that we obtain the best value for money. In particular, we would expect people attending who have the means, to contribute to the cost of their attendance. Equally, we will look at a fair level of support for those travelling long distances for whom the cost would be prohibitive. This is only natural in a country the size of Australia.

The congress will not be a ‘one-off’ event. The planning team anticipates that there will be a series of activities across the country in the lead-up to the congress, which will bring together people to look at the questions to be addressed in the congress so that those who attend can truly represent the views and consensus of the members in their Conference, region, diocese or state.

The outcomes of the congress will be published formally and will be a critical and essential input to the work of the National Council as it seeks to steer the Society across Australia into the future in a way that is both sustainable and remains true to the core spirit and values of our founders. ♦

Frank Brassil is President of the St Vincent de Paul Society Territory Council of Canberra Goulburn.

Vincentian leadership— Is there such a thing?



Participants in the Vincentian Mission and Values Centered Leadership Program outside St Francis' Church in Melbourne, where they met in October.

BY LIVIA CARUSI AND
JENNY PAPPS

'You say you experience great difficulty in the mission. Alas! Monsieur, there is no lot in life where there is nothing to be endured' (Vincent de Paul, patron saint of the St Vincent de Paul Society).

It is believed that Vincent de Paul wrote over 30,000 letters during his life. For Vincentians, his letters provide a small window into his character, his courage, his struggles and achievements over a lifetime

of service and leadership which was marked with great personal transformation as well as a steadfast vision for mission, charity, justice, spirituality and servant leadership.

Fast forward a couple of hundred years, and a young French man, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and his companions, with the guidance of a Daughter of Charity, Blessed Rosalie Rendu, made a conscious and heartfelt decision to name our organisation in honor of Vincent de Paul. This decision, we suspect, would not have been taken lightly, and in choosing the name 'Society of St Vincent de Paul', they too would have understood the very essence of the man, his vision for the world and also the magnitude of his legacy.

The Vincentian model of leadership is quite simple—servant leadership. Servant leadership is not connected to a person's title, as it is quite different to the function of management.

Like other community organisations doing 'good works', the St Vincent de Paul Society has its own unique DNA, of which our leadership model is a large part.

So what makes our DNA unique?

Briefly, it is our founding story, which no other organisation can claim.



It is our place within the broader Vincentian family; our model of assisting people; home visitation (which remains authentic to our founder's vision of assisting people in need and in pairs), and also being part of an international organisation; the opportunities that we afford to members, volunteers and staff to connect and engage in our mission, our governance model of subsidiarity as well as our model of leadership.

The Vincentian model of leadership is quite simple—servant leadership.

Servant leadership is not connected to a person's title, as it is quite different to the function of management. The cornerstone of this model is the belief that all people have within them leadership qualities and that an office,

Conference or Special Work should facilitate opportunities for individual and collective leadership qualities to come to the fore.

Servant leadership echoes the message of Christ, Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam and the countless number of Vincentian men and women around the world whose primary mission is to serve another first—so yes, there is such a thing as Vincentian leadership that is very much a part of our DNA.

In accord with the *One Society, One Voice* National Strategic Plan 2013–2016, namely objective priority focus area 1, 'Building a unified, spiritual and sustainable Society', the Society in Victoria undertook a process to identify leadership programs within the Vincentian tradition. This task was made much easier as a result of being part of the broader Vincentian family and in 2012 the Society in Victoria discovered the DePaul University Vincentian Leadership program operating in Chicago in the United States.

In 2013, the State Council of South Australia initiated a project titled 'Vinnies Values Volunteers' to gain a better understanding of volunteer attitudes and issues. The project included a survey which showed that volunteers sought knowledge of and training in all aspects of leadership and to be more involved in the decision making processes of the Society. Following the State Council's search for appropriate leadership training that would enrich volunteers and staff alike, this course was discovered. Its focus on servant leadership and Vincentian values convinced the State Council to approve a trial.

Following two years of negotiations with DePaul, the establishment of a Victorian Project Advisory Committee to oversee implementation and on-going program development to ensure 'fit' for the Australian context, the

Servant leadership echoes the message of Christ, Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam and the countless number of Vincentian men and women around the world whose primary mission is to serve another first—so yes, there is such a thing as Vincentian leadership that is very much a part of our DNA.

inaugural annual Vincentian Mission and Values Centered Leadership Program was launched on 27 August 2014.

Twenty-nine participants, including representatives from South Australia and Tasmania, are participating in the 15-week course. They have embraced the course with great gusto and all have furthered their individual and collective knowledge of Vincentian leadership.

As we turn our attention to 2015, the Society in South Australia is embarking upon an implementation strategy that will result in the program being offered in that state. The Society in Victoria will continue to offer Level 1 on an annual basis and is currently exploring models with DePaul to offer the next level of the program. We welcome further opportunities for other states and territories to hear more about our leadership partnership with DePaul, our Victorian model and the benefits of offering a leadership program within the Vincentian tradition. ♦

Livia Carusi is Mission Officer for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria and coordinated the Vincentian Mission and Values Centered Leadership Program. Jenny Papps is Executive Assistant to the State President and Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent de Paul Society in South Australia and is a participant in the 2014 Vincentian Leadership course.

My introduction to the Society

BY IRENE GOUGH

I was living in Byron Bay when I first felt a call to work for the St Vincent de Paul Society, or Vinnies as we are lovingly known.

I was thrown in the deep end and asked if I would like to join the Conference, the section of Vinnies that helped the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our society. I felt that that was where God wanted me to go. Although I was unaware of it at the time, I had become involved in what I call 'grassroots social justice'.

I was completely overwhelmed by the people who came in off the streets to our Vinnies Conference and asked for help. I was somewhat taken aback at how society treated these vulnerable people, the disrespect that was afforded them. They told me stories of how they had been mistreated and shunned by their own families and had no option but to live on the streets or in sheltered refuges, or even in tents on the beach where they were regularly harassed by authorities to 'move on' ... but where to?

I will never forget the time when a distraught and inebriated lady came into our shop to shelter from the rain. While there, she asked for 'a frypan, please'. The lady, who was Indigenous, must have been a 'regular', for she was looked at rather disdainfully, and questioned as to what had happened to the frypan she had been given last week. 'Someone stole it', she said, 'and now I have nothing to cook on'.

I could not believe that we would not give someone a bent old frypan that nobody else wanted, no questions asked. She said she lived on the beachfront with other homeless people and they were always stealing her things.

I gave her clean, dry clothes, a frypan, a new tent as hers leaked she said, and a bag of food to share with other people experiencing homelessness. That lady



Irene Gough is a member of the St James Conference in Yamba, NSW.

inn keeper gave them the use of the barn out of the weather to share with the warmth of the animals.

I didn't realise it at the time, but as a Vincentian I had begun to advocate for people, working to alleviate the injustices that were enacted upon them just because they did not have the necessary skills, money or abilities at that point in time to get by without a helping hand.

How can we help these people to help themselves? We can look at what options are available to them and guide them through the process.

The continuous training of members and volunteers is vital if we are to be fully equipped to meet people's needs. Networking is also essential—getting to know what services are available in the area, compiling lists of these services and keeping them on hand when going out on visitations. This will ensure that members are able to provide useful, up-to-date information.

I set about learning everything I could about the available services, networking with the organisations that were out there that these people could link into for help. I even went to an AA meeting just to learn how families coped with that situation. I came to understand that alcoholism and drug addiction are illnesses, not choices, and are an overpowering and hopeless way to live.

If I could have my say on issues involving the Society, as part of the

had been given back her dignity and walked out with her head held high. It reminded me of Joseph and Mary on the road with all their worldly possessions on the back of a donkey, and the

national congress in 2015, I would start by saying respectfully that members need to catch up with the times. Fifty dollars does not go far nowadays!

I'd urge Conferences to help more with urgent debts; for example, pay a Greenslip [third party insurance in NSW] so a mum can take her kids to school, help with sporting fees where multiple family members are engaged in sport. Pay the odd week's rent for people to give them a hand up and space to breathe. If these actions are not happening across the board, they should be.

Vincentians need to do more than just hand out food vouchers as a band aid treatment to get a client through the day. We need to delve a little deeper with the people we are assisting to find out why they have no money, why they are behind in the rent; for example, is it because they have too many other bills to pay?

One homeless and drug-addicted young man came to see me because his entire income support payment was gone—he had shared it around all his other homeless friends. I asked him where his family was, as he was so young. He said his mother had thrown him out because he could not get along with his stepfather, and that he had drifted into town a few weeks ago. We may see a lot more homeless youngsters in the future if they are cut off income support benefits and their parents cannot afford to keep them.

The term social justice means fairness for all and advocacy means being there for the long run. We need to concentrate on a person's most fundamental needs, the right to be free from hunger, discrimination and abuse, and to feel safe. It means being on the side of the disadvantaged person with God's love in your heart. ♦

Irene Gough is a member of the St James Conference in Yamba, NSW, and Social Justice Co-Ordinator, Lismore Central Council, Lismore Diocese.

Triennial national congresses spanned 33 years

The St Vincent de Paul Society's National Archivist, Mike Moran, has compiled the following extracts, notes and photos from the 10 congresses held by the St Vincent de Paul Society early last century.

Mike notes that during this period the St Vincent de Paul Society had separate Conferences for men and women, but around 1967-1968 the women's and men's chapters of the Society had merged and the organisation was all the stronger for it.

BY MIKE MORAN

The Society held 10 national congresses between 1921 and 1954. Only three of the 10 congresses were held in Sydney. Given that the Society's national leadership and most of its members were in Sydney, this may have been a deliberate effort to foster national feeling in the Society. The others were held in Melbourne (2), Brisbane (2), Hobart (2) and Adelaide. None were held in Perth.

Each congress lasted one week. Most of them were held in the September–November period. They all had a very strong hierarchical and clerical presence—not just the local bishop, but bishops from other dioceses.

Social activities were a very big part of the congresses. The general pattern was: social activities during the day, papers and discussions in the evening. The social activities were usually Church related, such as visits to monasteries, schools and orphanages, but also, increasingly, of a tourist nature.



A contingent of Vincentians leaving Sydney for Hobart to attend the 1951 Triennial Congress.

'Each congress resulted in a publication—at first a stand-alone book or booklet, then a special issue of The Record. The publications recorded all the social activities, papers and discussions, and were well-illustrated with photos of people and places.'

Papers and discussions focussed on the Society, its works and the spiritual life of its members rather than on social issues or policies. There were no papers between 1921 and 1954 on what we would call social justice issues or Catholic social teaching. 'Catholic Action' popped up occasionally, but as a matter of religious zeal rather than social reform (the 1906 Jubilee meeting had a paper on housing for the poor which referred to the need for appropriate legislation, but this kind of policy suggestion was exceptional).

Most papers were delivered by lay members of the Society, some by bishops and clergy. This may have been unusual for a Catholic organisation in those years. The discussions seem to have provided an opportunity for ordinary members, not just Society leaders, to speak.

Each congress was organised by the local Society. There was talk of establishing a national congress committee at one stage.

Each congress also resulted in a publication—at first a stand-alone book or booklet, then a special issue of *The Record*. The publications recorded all the social activities, papers and discussions, and were well-illustrated with photos of people and places.

At the first two congresses, in 1921 and 1924, visitors were put up by local members in their own homes. By the third congress, in 1927, this had started to change and visitors stayed in hotels. ♦

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

1921 SYDNEY



The programme for the first Australasian Congress held in Sydney from 17th to 23rd October, 1921 states that:

*This card will admit to all Sessions of the Congress.
Kindly present at the door.*

The inscription on the middle page reads:

The title of the Poor / to our commiseration / is their poverty itself; we are not to inquire / to what party or sect they belong (St Vincent's Manual)

The congress attracted up to 1400 people from as far afield as Perth and Rockhampton.

1924 MELBOURNE

Additional records from the triennial congress held in Melbourne in 1924 state that 160 members of the Society from outside of Victoria attended the event, of whom 133 were from NSW.

The scene on the Spencer Street Railway Station on that Saturday afternoon was a memorable one. There were hundreds of Victorian Brothers in waiting, when the express drew alongside, and in a moment, those who had been complete strangers up to that moment, threw aside all the trammels of conventionality. The beautiful bond of brotherhood, which unites St. Vincent de Paul men all over the world, was at once brought into evidence. And as the stranger delegates, tired and weary after their long journey, stepped on to the platform, they were surrounded by their Victorian Brothers, and received with hearty handshakes, and whole-hearted expressions of welcome.

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1927 HOBART



Hobart 1927: Society Mass, St Mary's Cathedral. During the 1927 congress a garden party was also held at Government House (The Governor had been a member of the Society in his youth). State Premier Lyons attended a session.

1930 BRISBANE

National President JL Mullen gave this report on the congress on 10 August 1930. He notes that a special train was organised to travel from Sydney to Brisbane. Reports also noted that 100 brothers spent a few days in Lismore on their way home.

A very large contingent of brothers, numbering in all, with lady friends, nearly 200, left the Central Station at Sydney by special train on Sunday, 3rd August. The greatest number, naturally, came from Sydney, but Melbourne also sent a fine contingent, most of whom had arrived that morning. There was an excellent representation, too, from the various Councils and Conferences in New South Wales, while brothers came from South Australia, Tasmania, West Australia and New Zealand.

The gathering was considerably added to en route, as the train passed through the northern towns on its way to the Queensland border. At Newcastle and Maitland especially, goodly numbers joined up, and so it was at other places. But it was a singularly happy party, for within a few hours of leaving Sydney, it might be truly said that "everybody knew everybody else." As the brothers had almost the entire train to themselves, they moved from car to car, making new acquaintances, and spreading everywhere the "St. Vincent de Paul atmosphere."

Over the Queensland border, the brothers were paid a delightful compliment, and one which they deeply appreciated, when, on reaching the beautiful city of Toowoomba, they found awaiting them at the railway station, His Lordship the Right Rev. Dr. Byrne, Bishop of Toowoomba, accompanied by the Right Rev. Mgr. McKenna, V.G. His Lordship explained that he had found it quite impossible for him to get away from his Cathedral city, to take part in the deliberations of the Congress, as he had hoped to do. But he lunched with the brothers, and sent them on to Brisbane with his blessing and good wishes.

It was a very tired, but very happy party that landed on the Brisbane Station on the Monday evening. And such a welcome as they received! It seemed as though the whole city of Brisbane were there to greet them. The northern capital has ever been noted for its whole-hearted hospitality, and never was that hospitality given more warmly, than it was to those tired and weary travellers from the South. And then the "sorting-out" began, and for a while "confusion reigned supreme." But in a very short space of time, the visitors were being conveyed to the various hotels and private houses where accommodation had been arranged for them.

An unusually large number of ladies had travelled to Brisbane with the delegates, and in order to provide for their entertainment during their stay, a special Reception Committee of the Catholic Daughters of Australia had been formed. Just as in the case of the men, no effort was spared by the Brisbane ladies to make the lady visitors feel that they were quite at home, and among friends.

Of the several Congresses which have been held in different States in connection with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul during recent years, that which was held in Brisbane during August, 1930, was outstandingly successful. There were several contributory causes for this. There was first, the fact that every State in the Commonwealth was represented, brothers coming even from Perth, 3,000 miles distant. And one brother had crossed the Tasman Sea from New Zealand, bringing with him the good wishes of our confreres in the Dominion.

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1933 SYDNEY

The 1933 congress coincided with Centenary celebrations (1833–1933). One hundred and forty visitors from other States attended the meeting, of whom 100 were from Victoria.



1936 ADELAIDE

Extract from address by National President, JL Mullen. The 1936 congress coincided with an all-Australian Catholic Education congress. There were 499 visitors from all States outside South Australia (including 119 'lady friends'). The visitors took in the Adelaide hills, Onkaparinga Racecourse and Penfolds on their trip.

The main purpose of these Congresses, as you know, is that we may come together from the different parts of the Commonwealth in order to imbibe fresh zeal and new inspiration to carry on the apostolate that was referred to so eloquently by Dr. Farrelly this afternoon. We are able to view things in the broadest

Extract: The main purpose of these Congresses, as you know, is that we may come together from the different parts of the Commonwealth in order to imbibe fresh zeal and new inspiration to carry on the apostolate that was referred to so eloquently by Dr. Farrelly this afternoon. We are able to view things in the broadest sense by meeting in this way.

There was a time when the Society in Sydney knew nothing of the Society, say in Melbourne, the Society in Bathurst knew nothing of the Society in Wagga, and so on. We were all separate units as it were, certainly working to the one ideal and under the same Manual, but scarcely, if ever, meeting one another in the flesh and discussing our work, our activities and learning from one another in the way that we are able to learn by meeting together on occasions such as this.

Topics of discussion at congresses often included:

- The spirit of the Society
- reports by State presidents surveying activities in each State (given at the start of the congress)
- child welfare
- children's court and probation work for boys
- school and youth conferences
- visitation: home, hospital, prison and other institutions
- special works, e.g. Seafarers, stores
- Catholic literature
- country conferences
- proposed new special works
- migrants and refugees (especially but not only post-war)
- duties of presidents and members
- relationship with the clergy
- services for the aged, the sick and pensioners (post-war)

1939 MELBOURNE

Melbourne 1939: The 7th Triennial Congress opened the month after war was declared and numbers were down as a result, with only about 300 to 400 people in attendance.



MELBOURNE, the Queen City of the South, was, on the 29th October, arrayed in all the beauty of an ideal Spring day. Masses of blossom greeted the eye on every side, and the trees lining the wide streets seemed to have specially adopted a freshness of varied hues to lend pleasing colour for the occasion. A hot sun, tempered by a gentle breeze, shone from a cloudless sky. . . . Truly, Nature was arrayed in all her glory.

The Melbourne Congress will go down in Society history as one in which the organisation for the comfort and convenience of those attending, especially the visitors, was well nigh perfect. This is all the more meritorious when it is considered that, just as final preparations were being made, a halt had to be called on account of our country becoming engaged in war, and the Superior Council was obliged to reach a momentous decision as to whether the Congress should be proceeded with or not. The wonderful Congress spirit displayed proved that, although the number of brothers attending was somewhat reduced by the prevailing national crisis, the decision to go ahead with the Congress was a wise one. . . . The Melbourne Congress will leave its mark on the whole Society throughout this huge circumscription of Australia. Enthusiasm was manifested by all, old friendships were renewed and new ones were made, discussion at the Sessions was keen, and the Addresses of the Hierarchy and Clergy and the Papers read contained gems of Vincentian thought that will enrich all our members.

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1948 BRISBANE



The 8th Triennial Congress was held at Nudgee Junior College, Indooroopilly, Brisbane, in 1948. A congress had been planned for 1942 in Hobart before war broke out. After the war, difficulties with accommodation and transport ruled Hobart out. Over 400 visitors plus locals attended the congress in Brisbane in 1948.

1951 HOBART



Landing at New Norfolk, Tasmania, 1951. It was noted that 400 people attended the opening session of the congress and members, not just presidents, had the opportunity to give addresses.

Other national gatherings

Triennial congresses were not the only large-scale meetings held by the Society. For example, as early as 1906 we held a Jubilee meeting in Sydney, celebrating the foundation of the Society in NSW 25 years before. The meeting lasted five days, attracted interstate visitors and included many papers on topics often similar to those discussed at the later triennial congresses, such as the care of youth, visitation and Catholic literature. The proceedings were published in a 116-page book. Some of our regular Festival meetings were also big events. For example a Festival meeting at Malvern in Melbourne in 1944 drew 600 people.

1954 SYDNEY



Thirty-three years after they began, the final triennial congress to be held by the Society took place in Sydney in 1954. It was estimated that 2000 people attended the event.

The ten triennial congresses

- 1st Sydney 1921
- 2nd Melbourne 1924
- 3rd Hobart 1927
- 4th Brisbane 1930
- 5th Sydney 1933
- 6th Adelaide 1936
- 7th Melbourne 1939
- 8th Brisbane 1948
- 9th Hobart 1951
- 10th Sydney 1954

National leaders attended 'New Ways Forum' 13 years ago

In October 2001, over 130 Society representatives from around Australia met in Melbourne to share their experiences and ideas for developing the Society's work. Geoff Brown provided an overview of the gathering and notes a few of the outcomes in the following article, which was published in the Viewpoint publication in autumn 2002. Thanks go to St Vincent de Paul Society of Victoria's archivist, Kevin Slattery for locating the article.

After eight months of planning, Victoria recently hosted an important Society forum for State Council members and others from around Australia. Held over a weekend in October, the venue was Bayview Conference Centre, Clayton in Melbourne's southeast – previously the site of the diocesan seminary. The Forum's focus was new ways of undertaking the Society's mission.

Former Victorian Minister for Community Services, Christine Campbell, opened the Forum on Friday evening and spoke at length of her personal knowledge and admiration for the works of the Society.

'For the first time in Australia's history,' remarked National President John Moore, 'we have the leaders of all parts of the Australian Society gathered together. The future of the Society in Australia is in the hands of those participating this weekend.'

Forum's purpose

The convening of this national forum was a response to Jubilee 2000 and the International Year of Volunteers.



Participants in the national New Ways Forum held in Melbourne in 2001.

Hosted by the Society in Victoria but planned and sponsored by a committee spanning all Australian states and territories, preparations began eight months earlier and involved a number of telephone hook-ups, faxes and emails across the country.

The Forum was planned around two objectives: the sharing of new and existing ways of better undertaking our Society work and the use of a format that allowed maximum participation in issues that are important to participants. The organising committee chose a program used widely in business and education known as 'Open Space', coordinated by Father Brian Bainbridge of Blackburn Parish.

With the need to keep numbers to a workable size and cost, invitations were sent to members of the various State and Territory Councils and a number of other key people. In addition, all Victorian Regional Presidents were invited in lieu of their regular six-monthly gathering.

Through much of Saturday and Sunday, participants chose a succession of topics to discuss. For example:

WORKSHOP:

Involving full time workers and busy people in the Society

An introduction to the workshop provided by the convenor:

One of the characteristics of the Society is our ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Recent examples of this are the realisation in the late 1960s that women should join men in the same conference, and the development of soup vans and small conference shop-fronts near high rise flats in Melbourne. In the last few years a number of members have realised that further adaption is needed.

A large number of men and women in their 30s, 40s and 50s are involved in volunteering. Much of this is centred on school sport and community activities. These commitments, when combined with paid employment, mean that many people in these age brackets don't easily fit into the current parish conference structure. Already some members and conferences have established alternative approaches with home visitation on weekends and special one-off events in which full-time workers can participate.

The challenge for conference and regional councils is to find new ways of involving generous men and women from these age groups. These are two key reasons why it should occur.

1. We need to broaden the assistance the Society provides to so many people in need. Those who have retired from the workforce currently shoulder much of this responsibility. But extra hands are needed, and if they are younger people with enthusiasm and energy, this will benefit both those in need and fellow members.
2. Ozanam himself identified a second and equally important reason. To paraphrase his words the life of those in need is best understood not from news articles and TV documentaries but by visiting such people in their

homes or shelters, listening to them, experiencing the isolation that they experience. The Society is about bringing together those who 'have' with those who 'have not'. This cannot wait until people have retired from the workforce.

Some of the strategies suggested at the workshop:

- Produce a booklet for conferences which outlines a variety of ways that such people can be involved such as the following:
 - A support conference within a region which can follow up more detailed problems;
 - Share office bearer positions so busy people can be office bearers;
 - Undertake one-off events or projects on weekends to include busy people as helpers;
 - Use the variety of skills that new & younger members bring, e.g. teaching computer skills, helping with small home repairs, budget assistance.

WORKSHOP: Rejuvenating tired conferences

Some strategies suggested at the workshop:

- Encourage discussion of spirituality;
- Promote Society in Parish and ensure positive communication with Parish Priest;
- Ensure members have access to formation and training by conducting them at the conference;
- Encourage new members, use the buddy system;
- Review meeting times & who it excludes;
- Consider two conferences within the parish with different roles;
- Find local solutions where traditional assistance is not working.

WORKSHOP: Encouraging the poor to be agents of change in their community

- Some strategies suggested at the workshop:
- Establish a community house for residents as a focus;
- Provide a welcome pack of information for newcomers;
- Start social support networks;
- Fortnightly lunch before pension day to discuss issues;
- Lobby transport company to improve service;
- Develop laundry/coffee shop for residence if nothing like this exists;
- Assist with clothing for job interviews;
- Increase playing facilities for children.

PRIORITIES

- Through much of Saturday and Sunday, participants chose a succession of workshops run by fellow participants. A full list of the 60 workshops and their recommendations is contained in the 60 page summary provided to each participant.
- In the final hours of the Forum, participants chose the following as priorities for the Society in the future:
- Improving conferences and their work
- Promoting spirituality
- Ensuring that youth are part of One Society
- Training and renewal
- Building a more effective Society
- Developing conference leadership & support for Regional Presidents
- Overcoming welfare dependency
- Supporting those with mental health issues
- Promoting social justice issues

'This Forum has been a renewal of Ozanam's vigorous and innovative

approach to addressing poverty and social injustice,' noted Victorian State President Syd Tutton.

NEXT STEPS

From the initial comments of many participants, various councils around Australia will be taking on a number of the proposals made at the Forum. If Victorian members are interested in more detail, best contact is your Regional Council President who was a participant and has a copy of the full summary. In addition, a recommendation has been made to convene further national gatherings on a biannual basis. ♦

What is 'Open-Space'?

The name 'Open Space' refers to the many gatherings where participants choose their most interesting issues and talk with those who share similar passions. This format originated a number of years ago when seminar organisers noticed that it was the coffee breaks and other informal times between speeches which participants found the most productive time for exchanging ideas.

Did the format work for all participants? There seemed to be times, particularly in the early hours, when a number were a little daunted by the extensive activity and long list of options. Yet the level of exchange throughout, as well as the concluding evaluation session, indicated that the majority of participants found it stimulating and extremely worthwhile. Open Space seemed to promote enthusiasm for Society involved that can be as important as lists of strategies.

A long history of work with migrants and refugees

The Fourth National Conference on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees was held in Sydney from 1 to 3 October 2014. The Towards a Better World Conference was organised by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) and the speakers' program included the director of ACMRO, Fr Maurizio Pettena CS, the president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs, and medical doctor and cultural activist Dr Jamal Rifi, among others. The following is an edited extract from the address the St Vincent de Paul Society's national research officer, Rik Sutherland, gave to the Conference on 1 October 2014.

BY RIK SUTHERLAND

The St Vincent de Paul Society's mission is to provide help for those who are marginalised by structures of exclusion and injustice, and our programs assist around 2.5 million Australians each year. These include people living with mental illness, people who are homeless and insecurely housed, and people experiencing poverty.

Some of our earliest records going back a hundred years refer to the care given by our volunteers to newly arrived migrants. For example, in 1910, the Victorian branch of the Society reported that, 'The suggestion

of His Grace Archbishop Carr as to meeting Catholic immigrants on their arrival at this port was being adopted. Catholics coming to these shores would receive all possible attention, and nothing would be left undone to bring them into touch with Catholic life in the city'.

Also, we know that, in Tasmania, volunteers used to actually board the ships that people were arriving on, meeting migrants before they even set foot on Australian soil, and then assisting with accommodation and other emergency needs.

But it was really after the Second World War that the Society became heavily involved with the influx of migrants to Australia. In fact, a Society circular from 1948 headed 'Migrants and Displaced Persons' suggests that the Vatican itself had requested the Society to consider the issue.

In Melbourne, there were large numbers of people arriving from

overseas requiring significant help to resettle. In the Victorian Annual Report of 1950, it was noted that 'From week to week parties of children varying from 50 to 150 are taken by bus from the holding camps at Broadmeadows and Maribyrnong to the homes of parishioners in many suburbs. The children in twos and threes are entertained at lunch and the evening meal in the homes of the parishioners, and then taken to the parish church for evening devotions ... newcomers are informed of the time of Mass in the parish and are invited to associate themselves in all parish activities'.

The next phase of the Society's assistance to refugees began in the mid-1970s, with the arrival of people from Vietnam and Timor, and a little later from Lebanon and South America. In September 1975, the first 150 refugees from Timor arrived in Western Australia. They were housed by the government in hostels, and the Society immediately got involved with taking the asylum seekers on



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outings, connecting them with other services and organising Christmas parties for them. A year later, the arrival at Geraldton of Taiwanese fishing boats caused a political stir in Western Australia, as the boats were moored offshore but the passengers not allowed to disembark. Just as volunteers had more than 50 years before, the Society members got on to the boats where the men were effectively detained and brought them food, clothing and blankets until they were freed.

In 1986, the Society's National Migrants and Refugees Committee was established, to keep state committees informed of changes in government policy and of important statements by the Pope and other world leaders; and to encourage positive attitudes towards acceptance of migrants and refugees, especially through the regular publication of the Holy Family Newsletter, which was also forwarded to all MPs and Senators. The Committee was headed by Ted Bacon, a founding member of the Refugee Council, and the committee also administered the loans scheme known as CALFRIC, which the government established to make interest-free loans available to refugees from Indo-China. These loans really enabled refugees to help themselves, mostly by empowering them to move out of hostels and into private rental.

Meanwhile, Queensland was seeing growing numbers of refugees, particularly from Latin America, and in 1988 Queensland formed its own Migrant and Refugee Committee to deal with the growing need. There is further evidence here that many of those that the Society assisted would later return and volunteer with us. This seems true for many from South America, and also some from Vietnam.

In 1991, the National Committee published a set of national guidelines

for working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The guidelines emphasised the need to respect the individual and their unique needs in every case, and our vision of an Australia that welcomed everyone, regardless of religion, skin colour or language spoken. Again, there was also an emphasis on recruiting people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Mandatory detention began in Australia in 1992, and, a year later, a Parliamentary Inquiry into the policy was launched. The Society's 23-page submission vehemently opposed mandatory detention, arguing then, as we do today, that it is hugely harmful to all involved, as well as incredibly expensive. We highlighted, more than 20 years ago, the egregious impact on children, and referred to the research that supported our assertions about the mental health impact of detention.

That same year, 1993, we published our first national policy for Migrants and Refugees. That document identified three stages at which the Society could get involved, including arrival, resettlement and development, and the importance of advocacy. Homelessness, loneliness and communication problems were identified as of central importance.

At that time, much as today, the government's asylum seeker policy was not only being criticised by many in the community, but was being challenged in the courts. Then in 1999 came the Kosovo refugee crisis. As part of Operation Safe Haven, the Department of Defence established initial processing of people at East Hills, near Sydney. As many as 50 of the Society's volunteers were on call for every plane that arrived, to help with issuing of travel documents, health checks, clothing, phone cards and the first instalment of a weekly cash allowance.

Today, there is a lot that we have learnt from our history of working with migrants and refugees:

We have stopped targeting our assistance at Catholics, or including attendance at Mass etc as part of our work. We now provide material and emotional support to any refugee who needs it, regardless of background.

Since the 1980s, the importance of national coordinated advocacy has been recognised, and has been increasing.

It is clear looking through the archival documents that what we have observed asylum seekers wanting, perhaps more than material assistance, is a sense of belonging and community in their new homes. I hope that the Society continues to provide the human touch, through our large network of unpaid volunteers who are driven by compassion and humanity.

For the last decade and up to today, the St Vincent de Paul Society has continued to run a wide range of programs for refugees, including tutoring, settlement assistance of all varieties, material aid, housing, white goods, legal assistance, visits to detention centres, and much more. And at the national level, we have continued our advocacy for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers—the last edition of our magazine, *The Record*, featured a nine-page spread on this issue.

We recognise that refugees pose one of the largest moral issues of our time and we hope that, learning from the past, the Society can help move Australia's policy and practice in this area towards a better future. ♦

Rik Sutherland is the St Vincent de Paul Society's national research officer. The speech can also be viewed online at www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/National/Articles_and_speeches/

Pope Francis confronts the dark side of capitalism

BY BRUCE DUNCAN

Pope Francis has emerged as one of the most important voices on the global stage about the need for a stronger moral dimension in economic policies. This has caused some upset in business and financial circles.

Prominent US political commentator Keith Farrell responded by accusing Pope Francis of being overly influenced by Marxist ideas that 'the rich have only gotten rich at the expense of the poor'.

Farrell argues that 'the inequality gap simply doesn't matter'. He wrote that 'capitalism has produced unrivalled economic growth' and is 'chiefly responsible for halving of world poverty rates over the past 20 years'.

What Farrell fails to acknowledge is that most of the recent global improvement in living standards is occurring in communist China, hardly a model capitalist country; that the global financial system is fragile; and that globally two billion people still struggle in severe poverty.

Pope Francis acknowledges the progress already made to improve living standards in many countries, but is urging that priority be given to lifting living standards for the rest of the world. He is highlighting the 'dark side' of our capitalist economic systems, and particularly how extreme economic inequality is harming millions of people.

Francis does not speak as an armchair philosopher, moralising from afar. He personally experienced the devastation in Argentina when it defaulted on its debts in 2001–02, driving half the population into poverty and crippling the country economically. Banks failed and many people lost their life savings.



The crowd waiting in St. Peter Square before the first Angelus prayer of Pope Francis I at Vatican City, Rome, Italy - March 17, 2013.

Even in Italy Francis sees the prolonged economic depression, with unemployment at over 12 per cent, and youth unemployment at 40 per cent. In Europe as a whole, 25 million (11.5 per cent) are unemployed, including 5.3 million young people (10.2 per cent), while in Greece and Spain over 25 per cent are unemployed, with over 55 per cent for youth.

Francis repeated his strong attack on such economic inequality during his

recent visit to South Korea, where millions of people turned out to greet him. On the first day of his visit, he urged Koreans to show 'special concern for the poor, the vulnerable and those who have no voice', and to be 'leaders in the globalisation of solidarity'.

Some 800,000 people crowded into Seoul as the Pope beatified 124 Korean martyrs. Francis urged Asian Catholic youth to build 'a more missionary and humbler church',



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one that 'loves and worships God by seeking to serve the poor, the lonely, the infirm and the marginalised'.

Francis applauds capitalist economies that offer just and reasonable outcomes for all citizens, with supports for the disadvantaged. This is the sort of economy that most countries aspire to, and which we see most evident in the Scandinavian and northern European countries, but also to a lesser degree in Australia.

Religion still plays a part in Australian society, as census data reveals. The papal message of opposition to extreme capitalism may resonate in Australia. Francis rejects the neoliberal notion that the market of itself will resolve moral dilemmas and reward people appropriately, with governments playing only a very minimal role.

Francis is appalled that so many people are still barely surviving in many countries when the world

has such unprecedented wealth and could do much more to lift the living standards of poorer populations with better policies.

Moreover, as development economists well know, even countries with a relatively low Gross Domestic Income can achieve greatly improved health care, education and life expectancy with good policies, like many of those in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. They show that, far from social equity being a subversive or communist notion, it can promote rapid social uplift for whole populations.

Francis insists that the current situation for millions of people is fiercely unjust and needs to change radically. He is not calling for violent revolution of course, but he fears such outcomes unless improved economics produce more viable outcomes for those in severe poverty.

He repeatedly calls on the many people in business, finance and governments who are genuinely concerned about social justice to help develop more equitable policies.

Pope Francis is appealing for globalisation with a conscience. In June he praised businesses that served genuine human needs, but saw it as 'intolerable' that economies were being reshaped to serve the interests of financial markets. This was accumulating immense wealth in the hands of relatively few while depriving many others of decent livelihoods.

Keith Farrell is right that the Pope thinks some financial interests have exploited the poor, but who can credibly deny it? We can expect to hear more from Pope Francis along these lines, especially in a new document on environmental responsibility and sustainability now being prepared. ♦

Bruce Duncan is director of the Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy. This article was first published in The Conversation at www.theconversation.com

The Global Financial Crisis and Austerity

BY JONATHAN DREW &
RIK SUTHERLAND

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) emerged from the pandemonium of bank bailouts, the stock market crash, plummeting house prices, job losses and credit tightening as the greatest recession since the 1930s.

While we are all aware of its immediate effects, what has been more hidden are its lasting consequences for many societies around the world. What the research shows is that the GFC has in fact deepened inequality and poverty in many countries, justified by an overarching policy broadly known as austerity.

Austerity is an economic theory that champions cutting government spending, increasing taxes, privatising services, reconfiguring public services and freezing labour costs as a way of empowering the private sector to generate economic growth. There is a time and place for these policies: famed economist John Maynard Keynes argued that the economic boom is the right time for austerity policy, and subsequent evidence bears this out. However, the use of austerity policies in times of financial crisis—that is, government contracting at the same time as the market contracts—has produced incredibly poor results for citizens, and especially for those experiencing disadvantage.

The current Australian Budget and suite of other domestic policy measures are reminiscent of austerity policies in other countries. Our analysis, and the anecdotal evidence that we hear, strongly suggests that the people we assist will be heavily disadvantaged by these measures.



A demonstration against austerity measures held in London in June. The UK-based, People's Assembly Against Austerity's most recent demonstration against attracted 100,000 people from across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland on 18th October 2014.

'Famed economist John Maynard Keynes argued that the economic boom is the right time for austerity policy, and subsequent evidence bears this out.'

Labour and employment losses under austerity

As a direct result of a lack of government spending and investment across all areas, unemployment has risen significantly in Europe in the wake of austerity policies. In Spain, for example, unemployment has climbed to 26.9 per cent and in Greece to 26.8 per cent. The rates for youth unemployment are almost double these figures. In the European Union as a whole, 5.5 million people



'As a direct result of a lack of government spending and investment across all areas, unemployment has risen significantly in Europe in the wake of austerity policies.'

Business suffers under austerity

Businesses have experienced significant losses in austerity-driven economies. For example, at the height of austerity in Europe, between 2008 and 2012, the business investment rate fell from above 20 per cent to 19.7 per cent. On the other hand, while social security benefits and support to local business have been slashed, subsidies, tax cuts and bailouts for enormous corporations worldwide have seen effective wealth transfers from taxpayers to the wealthy. For example, in Europe, a €200 billion subsidy went to sovereign creditors, and the price for the Wall Street bailout in the US is often put at a staggering \$700 billion. This is money that flows mostly from average citizens into the pockets of executives, CEOs and the richest shareholders.

Flawed assumptions about debt

Early in the GFC, governments were concerned with the bankruptcy of banks. However, by 2009 we were seeing the potential bankruptcy of governments. Around this time, much cited research by Reinhart and Rogoff argued that once a country's debt surpassed 90 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) its economy inevitably fails. This research was supported by the very visible example of Greece, which had a 150 per cent debt to GDP ratio in 2007 and an economy that was failing spectacularly. Based on this evidence, policymakers worldwide made austerity their core policy.

However, only recently, the Reinhart-Rogoff research was undermined by a severe calculation error, an inaccurate weighting scheme, and the exclusion of three Allied nations from its analysis of the Great Depression. This has led to the conclusion by most economists that the core policy of numerous governments was founded on erroneous evidence.

Austerity in our Budget

Given the evidence above, it is clear that if a government sees an economic contraction, austerity is not the answer. However, the 2014–15 Budget contains many points that are characteristic of other nations' failed austerity policies; for example, lowering the effective rates and decreasing eligibility for a range of income support payments (the age pension, disability pension, youth allowance and Newstart), decreasing taxation on large companies (including lowering the company tax rate and abolishing the Minerals Rent Resource Tax) and reducing access to community services (abolishing many services such as Youth Connections and Aboriginal Legal Aid, increasing the cost of universal healthcare, increasing the cost of tertiary education). ♦

Jonathan Drew is a student at RMIT and intern with the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia. Rik Sutherland is national research officer for the Society based at the National Council office in Canberra.

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under 25 are unemployed. Moreover, the trend towards casual labour is making it easier for employers to drop casual employees, and harder for those who only have access to casual jobs to maintain a liveable income. The lack of secure work and tightening of access to welfare mean that those receiving income support are now simply too poor to engage with the labour market: it is far too risky to lose the welfare payment for work that will probably evaporate within a month, only to then end up ineligible to receive further income support.

Overcoming the burden of silence

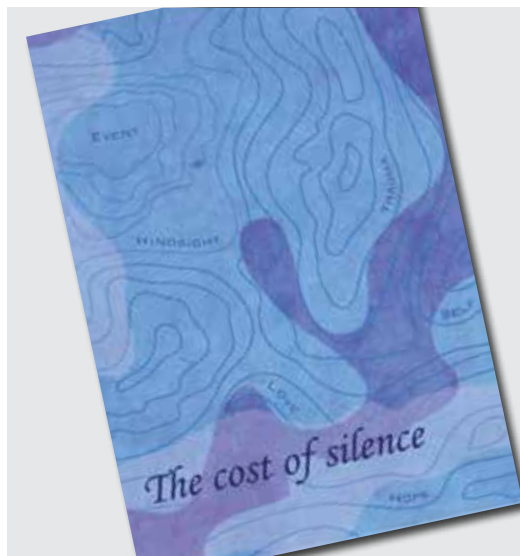
BY ANDREW HAMILTON SJ

The summer is about Christmas, holidays, being carefree. So a little book whose focus is on suicide may seem to be inappropriate in this festive season edition of The Record. But we know in the Conferences that Christmas can be a hard time for people in need. And the pain suffered by people whose relative or friend has taken his or her own life can be very great indeed.

The Cost of Silence is one of a series of collections of writings by people who have found support in the Jesuit Social Services program, Support after Suicide.

We tend to shy away from thinking and speaking about suicide because it is shrouded in silence. It is a dark mystery, and is surrounded by a stigma that makes people reluctant to talk about it and ill at ease in speaking to those affected by it, thereby creating further acts of exclusion. Once, people who took their own lives could not be buried in consecrated ground, and were even symbolically executed to show society's abhorrence of the deed. These taboos and exclusions further silenced relatives and friends of people who had taken their own lives. They were left to deal alone with the confusion, grief, resentment, guilt and bewilderment they felt.

The writings in *The cost of silence* are a testimony both to the possibility of overcoming the burden of silence and also to the costs of doing so. All the writers are men, who often experience difficulty in accepting formal counselling. So they met in less formal



*The cost of silence:
Men bereaved by suicide tell
it like it is.*

Jesuit Social Services, 2014.

meetings in which they could talk safely together about their loss and its effect on them.

One of the most striking features of the booklet is the vividness of people's memories of their relatives in life, of their death and of its aftermath. All memories are double edged. One of the writers speaks finely of 'every memory's double-entendre'. Memories remind people of the person whom they loved, but also of their death and the silence at its heart. 'A spectacular view across the bay, sun high in the sky and the water a beautiful blue ... But you were not there, you can't be there, you won't be there.' And the deeper pain of questioning why their relatives died in this way.

When these memories are suppressed, the resentment, guilt and pain remain unseen to work destructively in people's lives. Silence has a cost. But these writings also show that there is a way through pain, so that memories will always be tinged with loss but can also celebrate the life and the gift of the person who died.

'Every time Carlton wins I still think of him after the final siren, and how he would love to be singing the theme song.'

That quotation gets close to the heart of St Vincent de Paul Society spirituality. It is about big things like hope and love as they are embedded in the everyday and earthy activities of life like football.

Reminds you of the first Christmas, doesn't it? ♦

Andrew Hamilton SJ is a consulting editor of the Eureka Street news website. The cost of silence is available to read online at <http://community.supportaftersuicide.org.au> by clicking on the news and events section.

If reading this article has raised any concerns for you or if you, or someone you know, needs urgent help, please contact one of these national 24/7 crisis services:

Lifeline

13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Mensline Australia

1300 78 99 78
www.mensline.org.au

Kids Help Line

1800 55 1800
www.kidshelpline.com.au

Young Vincentian embraces change

BY RUTH SIMPSON

It was the second last day of the 2014 Immersion Program, and I was about to begin a one-on-one session with our spiritual advisor. As we both sat down and took a breath, I said to him, 'I was worried that I would come here and God would call me'. With a look of amusement and confusion he asked, 'What do you mean call you?' 'To be a Nun', I clarified.

He then looked me in the eye and queried, 'Do you want to be a Nun?' 'No', I replied immediately. He then smiled and said, 'I don't think God would waste a call on you for the religious life then'. After we both laughed, my tone became serious and I said, 'But I have found my calling here in Nganmarriyanga. Without taking a pause, he guessed what profession that was, and it was in that moment that I realised God really had called me, and this was his way of acknowledging that I had listened.

Growing up, I had always been involved with the St Vincent de Paul Society through my Catholic primary and secondary schools and my parish. However, my inclusion into a youth and young adult conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Canberra happened by chance through a social netball game the year before. Half the netball team were members of the St Nick's Young Carers Conference. St Nick's is a program that provides respite and recreation camps and activities for young people who care for a family member with an illness or disability. I had just returned to my home city from Brisbane and was missing the



Participants in the 2014 Immersion Program take time out to reflect.

experience of volunteering that I had there. It was an added bonus that this volunteering opportunity was a youth program, as I am passionate about working with children and young people. That was one of the main reasons I applied for the Immersion Program, as it was an opportunity to engage with Aboriginal children and young people in their community.

The two weeks that encompassed the immersion experience were life changing, to say the least. I am not a big crier, but I shed enough tears to fill the Jordan River in my last couple of days in the community, in Darwin and on the plane home. They were tears of happiness for the opportunity I had been given to meet nine fantastic people, aged from 22 to 72 years, from Sydney, Melbourne or Port Augustus, who all had different life experiences that they shared with me. They were tears of joy for being welcomed not only into the community, but also into the lives of the people who call it home. They were tears of thanksgiving for having the opportunity to go somewhere remote and just live each moment as it happened. They were also tears of gratitude for being given inspiration



Vincentians Ruth Simpson, left, and Alicia Webster.

and motivation to pursue a new career direction that I am excited about.

It might have been that I was surrounded by two former members of this profession that was the catalyst for my career change. It could have been my interactions with those in the community who get to do this every day that helped me make up my mind to go for it. It might also have been that I had the time on Immersion to reflect on what really made me happy. Regardless, I write this having passed my first semester of a Master of Teaching in Secondary Science, and I look forward to encouraging learning in all my future students. ♦

Ruth Simpson is a St Vincent de Paul Society member who lives in Canberra.

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