



## Summary of **NATIONAL COUNCIL DELIBERATIONS** FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT FEBRUARY 2024



This Summary has been delayed due to my trip to the US National Council where I outlined our Congress 2023+ initiatives. Our work in revitalising Members was enthusiastically embraced. Our US colleagues were extremely impressed with the thoroughness of the approach and our efforts to have the Congress outcomes advanced by our Members.

During my conversations with our American Vincentians, I reflected just how far the Society in Australia has advanced over the past 2-3 years in exploring how we adapt to the challenges of advancing our Founder' vision in our contemporary world."

**National Council met on 24-25 February in Canberra. Below is a summary of matters discussed.**

### **INCOMING NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBERS**

On behalf of the Society in Australia, the National President welcomes Mr Brian Stacey, President Elect Canberra-Goulburn Territory Council (commenced 11 March 2024) and Mr Danny Cloghan, President Elect West Australia State Council (commencing 1 July 2024) to the National Council meeting. I look forward to their contributions to the National Council and to the Association during their years of appointment.

### **ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY NATIONAL COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

There was consensus by National Council as the member of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc to move to be a company limited by guarantee.

The National Council Secretariat will commence working on a company constitution with our lawyers and the Legal and Governance Standing Committee assisting with the draft. It is anticipated the constitution will be adopted at the Association's 2024 Annual General Meeting.

### **CONGRESS 2023+**

The National Council received a copy of the Congress 2023+ close out report. Main points highlighted were that it was a successful event, with project objectives met and positive feedback received but also detailed challenges, risks and the budget outcome. Many lessons were learned during the project and have been taken on board.

There has been a lot of work undertaken post Congress 2023+ including establishing an IT platform that is accessible to all Congress Delegates. There were three Listening Forums conducted in early February and participants provided updates on the extent of exploring the 15 sub-projects that evolved during the Congress connection within their State and Territory Councils, Central or Diocesan Councils, Regional Councils and Conferences and project teams.

We are in the process of standing up 'Champions' to drive the sub-projects. Sub-projects have a national flavour and are being developed by each of our Champions who are encouraged to be adventurous and outward looking around member revitalisation initiatives. There was an online meeting of Champions convened in early February with a plan to convene further meetings at regular intervals so that Champions can share their projects and outline the supports they need to continue to progress new initiatives.

Workbook 3 was reviewed by the NC and endorsed for distribution in the first week of March.

## **NATIONAL CATHOLIC SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS**

All State and Territory Councils, with the exception of one State Council and most of the Society's related bodies corporate, provided updates on the work in progress they were undertaking to have the respective corporate body comply with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

A national technical working group is assisting Councils and corporate bodies move towards implementing the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. This work includes identifying any additional training that will be required in addition to the current safeguarding training delivered by Councils and their related bodies corporate. Work is also progressing on developing a response that will see an audit program established that meets the criteria established by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd.

There is now a level of confidence that all parts of the Society will have progressed towards compliance of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards by 30 June 2025 - the date set by the Catholic Church in Australia.

## **SPIRIT OF YOUTH (SoY)**

The SoY team nationally will continue to support jurisdictions to implement youth engagement and support strategies.

National Council agreed that a Working Group drawn from SoY Schools group prepare a framework that outlined the Society's present presence in primary and secondary schools and explore how the Society could advance its presence in Catholic primary and secondary schools with an emphasis on aligning to the schools' curriculum.

## **UPDATE ON REVIEW OF THE RULE PART III**

The Rule Review sub-committee is close to finishing its work on the revision and has made a good start on the Procedures.

National Council noted that the current draft is likely to include some reference to dispute resolution protocols and a definition of natural justice to align Part III more closely to civil obligations in this space.

## **OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

The Australian Government recently moved the oversight of overseas development initiatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Australian Taxation Office. This move will likely bring an increased focus on the Society's twinning initiatives in overseas countries.

It was also noted that the matter of best practice around safeguarding will require education in the context of our overseas relationships at the Conference level both in Australia and in twinned countries.

## **ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY REDRESS LTD**

The National Redress Scheme Company administers the Society's responses to Requests for Information received from the Scheme Operator and assists State and Territory Council respond to these requests,

The NRS Company conducted a workshop with delegated National Redress Scheme State and Territory Contact Officers in late February 2024 to develop a Society-wide, trauma informed approach to how State and Territory Council can provide to survivors who request a Direct Personal Responses. Some of the survivors of sexual abuse experienced in organisations seek a meeting with the institution (e.g. a State or Territory Council) to hear how the organisation has mitigated the risk of future sexual abuse against children.

The Society's adoption of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards and an institution's involvement in independent audits of these standards is an essential element to include in any Direct Personal Response.

## **TAX REFORM DEBATE**

In the current environment of cost-of-living crisis and lack of affordable housing and rental opportunities there will be growing pressure on a review of the tax system where everything is on the table. One area that has begun to get media attention is a call for a review of the Goods and Services Tax with various proposals seeking to raise this regressive form of taxation. It was agreed that any increase in the GST would have negative impact on the people the Society assist.