



Summary of
NATIONAL COUNCIL DELIBERATIONS
FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT
NOVEMBER 2024



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This weekend marked the last face to face meeting for National Council for 2024. It has been a big year with many advances in various areas of our work. We were also able to meet face to face with our State and Territory CEOs on the Friday before to discuss updates on The Vincentian Way a project moving ahead in the Membership, Mission and Spirituality space, Congress23+ and our advocacy strategy ahead of the Federal Election next year.

Below is a summary of key matters discussed at the National Council Meeting.

UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS OF CONGRESS 23+ PROJECTS

Congress 23+ observations of lessons learnt during the first 12 months of implementation of the Congress Projects were arranged under the following areas:

- Increased diversity
- Development and strengthening of informal networks
- Development of leadership skills
- Value of a shared vision
- Challenges with engagement
- Challenges with technology
- Importance of staff support
- Pace of project delivery
- Involvement of Society CEOs

State and Territory CEOs are provided with regular early insights into those Congress Projects that might have governance or financial implications for Councils or possibly have operational relevance.

Over the past 12 months, Congress Project participants, Project Leaders and members of the Membership, Mission and Spirituality Standing Committee have made significant contributions to move the Society in Australia forward on revitalisation initiatives. National Council's Secretariate has fulfilled an essential role in facilitating communications involving all stakeholders.

An important conclusion of National Council a year on from Sydney is that Member-led projects have enormous value to the Society so on behalf of the National Council I thank all of those members and staff that have contributed.

UPDATE ON THE VINCENTIAN WAY (THE SOCIETY AS A LAY CATHOLIC ORGANISATION)

We recalled that National Council determined at it's retreat in May this year, to develop a single national framework to articulate clearly what it means for the Society to be a Catholic lay organisation in 2024 and beyond. Following significant consultation with members of National Council, our Spiritual Adviser, specialists drawn from the spirituality and the mission national networks and the Society's CEOs I am pleased to report this foundational document is close to being complete. We have asked the drafting group to explore how the concepts contained in the document can be brought to life through a curriculum that will have a wider audience.

In the coming 3-4 months National Council is keen to share *The Vincentian Way* with members of State and Territory Councils who, together with National Council, are the Stewards of the Society in Australia. Society CEOs and executive leadership teams will be invited to participate in these discussions.

UPDATE ON SAFEGUARDING MATTERS

The National Council Secretariate continues to review National Council's policy instruments to ensure that safeguarding practice is embedded in all relevant policies. At the same time, the Safeguarding Standards Office is considering issues of accessibility and reviewing National Council web content to ensure policies that have a connection to safeguarding are accessible to the widest possible audience.

SPIRIT OF YOUTH

The Australian Catholic Youth Festival is to be convened in December 2025 and there was unanimous support for our Spirit of Youth Members to participate in and represent the Society at this event. Youth representatives have been advised to discuss event attendance with Councils to consider associated registration, travel, and accommodation costs and each State and Territory will be involved and support the attendance of their youth.

The Spirit of Youth team has informed National Council that it will be seeking support to establish an 'Encounter' experience/stall at the festival. This presence would seek to engage with the 4,000+ festival goers, introducing them to Vinnies Youth and inviting their involvement at their local level.

OCEANIA PROGRAM

A paper was presented on the SSVP Oceania Partnership Program which provided National Council with an update on developments designed to progress on the ground operationalisation of the SSVP Oceania Partnership and related program of initiatives across National Councils twinned with Australia in the Oceania Zone. This paper was designed to further the understanding of, and solidarity with, the different Society National Councils in the Oceania region and to ensure agreement on the aims, purpose and governance arrangements of the SSVP Oceania Partnership. It also provided increased understanding of and engagement in the Partnership by Oceania National Councils and National Presidents as well as outlining the strategic and operational plan for the SSVP Oceania Partnership over the shorter and longer term.

UPDATE ON REVIEW OF *The Rule Part III*

There was an enormous amount of material provided by State and Territory Councils in response to the proposed 2nd amendments for which the National Council and myself were pleased to see.

The Rule Review Drafting Group will seek to provide feedback on the comments/suggestions received from Councils. The group is to meet in Canberra on 2-4 December to consider the feedback and to prepare the 3rd amendments.

It is proposed to have the 3rd amendments available for National Council consideration for the February 2025 meeting of National Council. The amendments will then be forwarded to State and Territory Councils with a goal of forwarding through to the CGI governance review committee.

FEDERAL ELECTION MATTERS

The Society's national advocacy work strongly draws on Catholic Social Teaching that provide the principles to judge the adequacy of government policies. In this respect, social policy initiatives that emerge as part of the next Federal Election will be assessed against how these announcements encourage the common good, support human dignity and promote a fairer Australia for all citizens.

Since the 2022 Federal Election material was published, the National Council Secretariate has revised those papers as policy decisions have been implemented by the Government. We acknowledged the Commonwealth Government has made policy and program inroads in some areas (such as secure work and housing) but less so in others (such as people seeking asylum) and these initiatives need to be reflected in the content and National Council's final public positions.

The revised document and policy priorities which have had input and advice from the National Council Social Justice Advisory Committee was considered by National Council. We confirmed that the Society's policy positions reflect the Society's most current reflections of the experiences of our Companions and the views of the general community over a significant period, which include a pandemic and more recently cost of living and housing crises. Also, the revisions reflect the growing social policy evidence base and significant research commissioned by the Society over the same time.

The Secretariate has collaborated and consulted with the Society's advocacy employees in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, and Canberra-Goulburn and, members of the NCSJAC and the Vincentian Refugee Network have been involved in and agree with the proposals outlined in the revised advocacy papers.