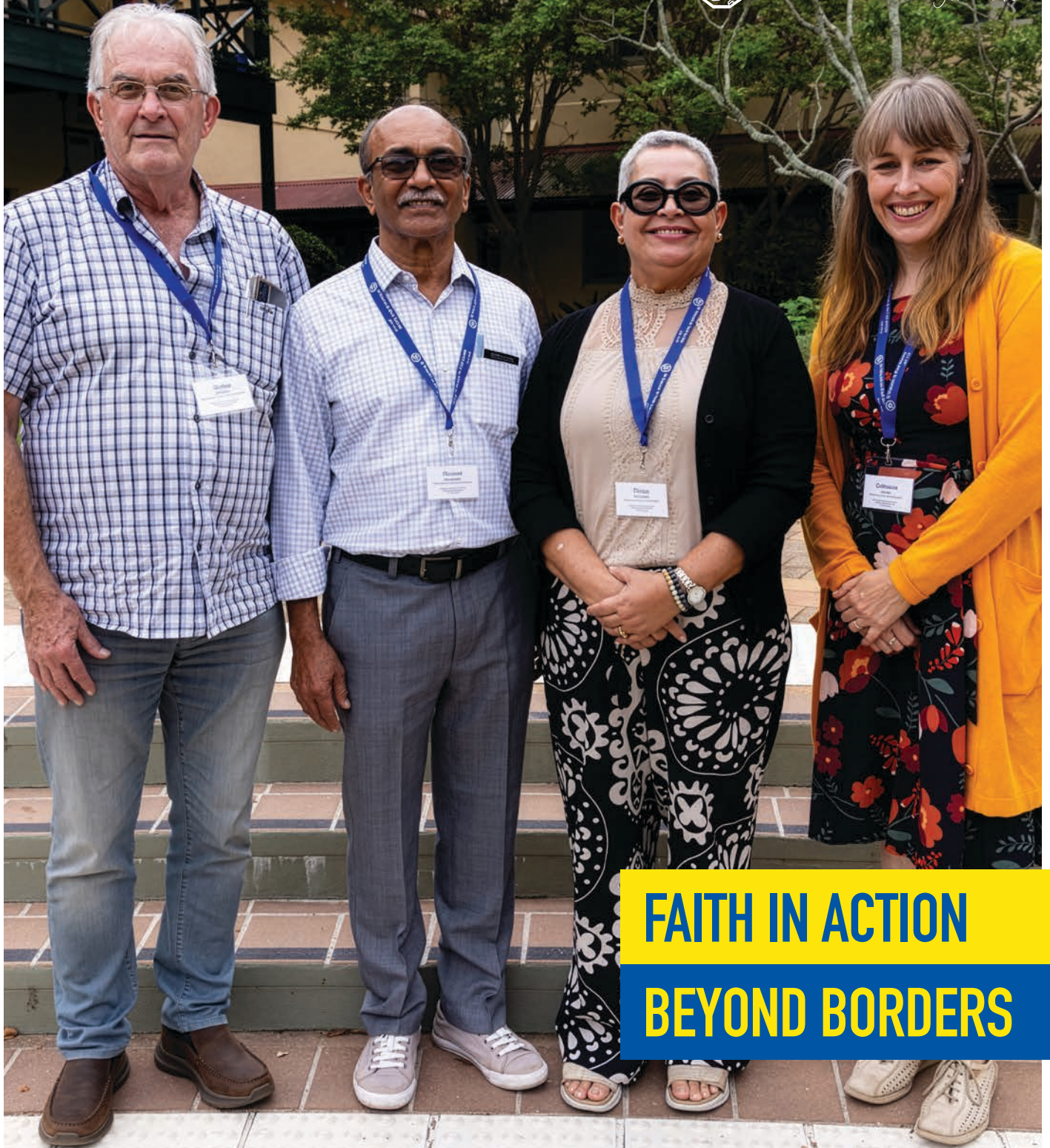


The Record

AUTUMN 2026



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*



FAITH IN ACTION

BEYOND BORDERS



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *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.

The Record is published quarterly by the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

National Council
PO Box 9427
Deakin ACT 2600

Phone: 02 6202 1200
Email: media@svdp.org.au
Web: vinnies.org.au
Design: Damon Carr
damon.com.au

Production of *The Record* is overseen by the Editorial Committee:

Toby oConnor
Rose Beynon
Julie Samaras

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia acknowledges that we are on Aboriginal land. We pay respects to all traditional custodians. This publication may contain images of deceased Members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are used with the greatest respect and appreciation.

Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the publishers.

ISSN 2652-8894

Contributions welcome. Perhaps you would like to write or suggest a story and share photos with our readers. We can't track everything happening across the Society, so your involvement would be appreciated. Please contact media@svdp.org.au to discuss your ideas.

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia consists of 45,000 Members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.



**Subscribe to
*The Record.***
vinnies.link/TheRecord

On the cover



The Overseas Partnerships Program National Network met in Sydney on 7-8 March for their first in-person gathering since 2024, strengthening connections across Australia and with international partners from Fiji, India and New Zealand.

Pictured are National Twinning Coordinators (from left): Arthur Schultze (New Zealand/Oceania Twinning Coordinator), Norbert Gonzalves (India), Flolyn Simpson (Fiji) and Catherine Smith (Australia).

Turn to page 14 for more photos and the cover story.

Photo: Fletcher Ruddick, Vision House Creative

Responsibility for this document rests with the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc.

Publisher and copyright © 2026

CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE

The text of this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - Share Alike 3.0 Australia Licence.

This resource may be reproduced or photocopied in its entirety or in part. No copyright fee is payable.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia respects the privacy of the people it assists, our Members, Volunteers and employees. As a result, the names of clients, Members, Volunteers or employees featured in this report may have been changed and pictorial models used.



Time to reflect on our shared mission



PHOTO BY AARON BURDEN ON UNSPASH

“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.”

The coming months will be significant for our Society, both in our continuing service to people experiencing hardship and in advocating key policy decisions that will affect their lives. As this Autumn issue of *The Record* reaches you, we stand at the threshold of Easter, still within the penitential season of Lent. It is a fitting time to fast, to pray, and to reflect on our shared mission and the key developments that lie ahead.

At the national level, we are encouraged by the Federal Government’s apparent willingness to explore changes to the 50 percent Capital Gains Tax discount in the upcoming Budget. Any reform must be tested against a simple Gospel-inspired question: does this help or harm people who are already doing it tough? With the housing and cost-of-living crises worsening, tax settings are part of the web of policies that can either entrench intergenerational inequality or open pathways to secure housing and dignified work. As a Society grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, our contributions to this discussion will continue to focus on fairness, the common good and the preferential option for people living in poverty.

These developments sit within our suite of advocacy priorities. The Society remains committed to speaking fearlessly on issues such as housing and homelessness, income support and cost of living, the dignity of work, the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum, and the needs of First Nations peoples. Our advocacy flows from what Members see and hear every day in home visits, Conferences and services. Policies and systems must

never lose sight of the human faces behind the statistics, and I encourage Members to continue sharing the stories and insights that arise from your local experience, which inform our national voice.

As a democratic, Member-led organisation, the Society regularly experiences transitions in leadership. I warmly congratulate Brendan Podbury on his recent election as State President for Victoria and welcome him to National Council. Brendan brings a deep Vincentian spirit and many years of service to his new role, and I trust the Victorian State Council and Members will be well served by his leadership.

Brendan succeeds Michael Quinn, whose four-year term as Victorian State President ended in February. I offer heartfelt thanks to Michael for his generous service to National Council over the past four years. His contribution has been marked by fidelity to *The Rule*, a genuine concern for Members and volunteers, and a constant focus on the Companions we assist. Our councils and committees rely on people who are willing to give of their time, energy and professional skills, compassionately and without public recognition; Michael’s service is a reminder of the many quiet acts of leadership and kindness that sustain the Society.

Looking ahead, we also prepare to welcome new leadership in Queensland, with the election of Peter Dougherty as the next State President due to occur in

continued over page ►

◀ continued from previous page

June. As Peter prepares to take up this responsibility, we give thanks for those who have gone before him in leadership in Queensland and across Australia. We ask that the Holy Spirit guide Peter in discerning how best to support Vincentians, our Companions and the Society's services, volunteers and staff in the years to come.

On the international front, our bonds with the wider Vincentian family continue to expand. A face-to-face meeting of the SVdP Oceania Partnership Program is planned for Auckland from 9 to 11 April. This gathering will allow us to strengthen relationships across the Oceania region, share experiences of responding to poverty and climate-related challenges, and explore new ways to collaborate. The Society in Australia stands ready to respond to the needs of our sisters and brothers in the Pacific, including the impacts of environmental degradation, displacement and economic vulnerability.

Another important recent development has been the Permanent Section's approval of changes to Part III of *The Rule*. *The Rule* is not merely an administrative document; it is a spiritual and practical guide that keeps Members close to the charism of the Society's founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and our patron Saint Vincent de Paul. Any revision is undertaken with great care to ensure that how we organise ourselves truly supports our mission of compassionate service and spiritual growth. In coming months, we will provide further information to help Members understand and live these changes. (Turn to page 6 for more details.)

As we move through Lent toward Easter, may the Society continue to be a beacon of hope: in the way we accompany people experiencing hardship, in the humility and courage of our service and advocacy, and in the way we support one another as Vincentians. I thank you for your commitment to our Vincentian mission, and I pray that this Easter will bring you, your families and the people we serve a sense of peace and renewed purpose. ■

Finding new life amid suffering



SISTER THERESE HAYWOOD D.C.
Spiritual Advisor

At this time of year we are reflecting on the Easter mystery, the cycle of death and new life that is part of life. These words of scripture remind us that in order for there to be growth and new life, there must first be dying and letting go:

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Jn 12:24

Louise de Marillac is a great companion for us as we contemplate this mystery. Louise wrote these words about her own experience of suffering and loss:

God, who has granted me so many graces, led me to understand that it was His holy will that I go to Him by way of the Cross. His goodness chose to mark me with it from my birth and He has hardly ever left me, at any age, without some occasion of suffering. (Spiritual writings, 711)

Louise never knew her mother, she was rejected by her stepmother, her father died when she was 12 and she was widowed after only a few years of marriage. Louise's experience of suffering opened her heart. She showed compassion to people in need and in the way that she taught the Ladies of Charity and then the Daughters of Charity. Louise chose 'The love of Jesus crucified urges us' as the motto for the Daughters of Charity, which indicates the centrality of the cross in her spirituality.

In our world there is always a lot of suffering, this can affect us personally or we can see all the suffering that is in our world. The message of Easter is that suffering and death do not have the last word. Louise also reminds us that we cannot relieve all the suffering around us but that we can journey with people who suffer.

In the name of God, my very dear Sisters, do not be impatient with your trials, and at seeing yourselves as receiving no other consolation but God's. Oh, if we only knew God's secrets when He places us in this state, we would see that this must be the time of our greatest consolation. In fact, you will see a great amount of misery that you cannot relieve. God sees it as well and does not want to give those who suffer greater abundance. Share their trials with them; do all you can to provide them with a little assistance and remain at peace. (Spiritual writings, 397)

Let us continue to support each other in suffering and to look for the moments of new life that are around us. ■



Standing together against hate and fear

Since our last edition, a lot has happened in our country.

There are simply no words to describe the terrible anti-Semitic actions of terrorists who killed innocent people in an iconic Australian public space during a religious festival.

The Society stood in solidarity with our Jewish sisters and brothers during those deeply saddening days and weeks that followed. We continue to stand with them.

It is really quite impossible to try to think about Australia as a nation that has welcomed all peoples from across the waters, regardless of their religion, their ethnicity, their gender, is now confronting such vile hatred in our very midst. I ask myself what can I do? What can organisations like the Society do?

Like many bewildered Australians, as we come through the fog of unknowingness, we must hold on to the truth that each one of us can make a difference. We can. And we must.

The Society draws on wonderfully diverse individuals and groups who join together to do their best to bring about a better world for people in their local community as well as those in faraway countries. Our generous and caring Members and volunteers do make a difference.

Right now, they are continuing to build cohesion in neighbourhoods that now might have to deal with elements of fear. Fear of being different, fear of being pointed out because they are different.

Our Members and volunteers are just ordinary citizens. But “just ordinary citizens” provide the foundation of our caring Society. Like many other “just ordinary citizens” across communities in all parts of our nation, our volunteers bring comfort, care and respect to those who might struggle to get through their day. We welcome all people. We offer them a hand up when they might find that helpful.

We must call out those who visit disrespect or threaten harm to any and all innocent people in our communities. This can take courage. The Society’s founding Members had that courage; they were not afraid to speak out when they saw powerful interests denying the human dignity of those in their midst in the streets of Paris as their homes were crushed to give way to fancier boulevards. Progress is fine but the common good demands that we bring everyone along that path rather than delivering them hardship.

Conversations our Members and our volunteers have with ordinary citizens in need who live in their neighbourhoods are often relayed to National Council. National Council’s office in Canberra is a few short minutes from our Parliament



PHOTO COURTESY SSVFGLOBAL.ORG

As Vincentians, we will give our Jewish and Muslim friends our hand when we see you are the target of un-Australian behaviours.

House. An important aspect of how our National Councillors live their faith is through their own commitment to carrying the voice to our federal politicians. The voice of those who do not have a voice; of those who are not in a position to be able to exercise their voice; and of those who might be afraid to speak up.

And, for our Indigenous sisters and brothers whose voice continues to struggle to be heard. We are proud to advocate for a fairer Australia for all Australians.

While we pursue public policy for the purpose of enhancing a fairer Australia, we also know from lived experience that in local communities it is our conversations and our inclusive actions that build cohesion. There are many out there who understand the real power of listening ... Listening is a cornerstone for all respectful friendships. As Vincentians, we treat those we listen to as a Companion.

As we are in the time of Lent and Ramadan, perhaps it might be timely to reflect on the feeling of being different that some Jewish and Muslim families might be experiencing at this time for living out their faith. To you my friends, the Society stands alongside you in solidarity. We will give you our hand when we see you are the target of behaviours that are un-Australian.

Finally, we acknowledge all our politicians, no matter what side they sit, for the leadership they display at this time of unrest and unsureness. They are leading us in the moment. Our unity must not be distracted by personalities or by external forces that seek to threaten the Australia that all of us, in our own way, have helped to build and feel so very proud to be a member of. ■

New Part III of *The Rule* coming soon

On 17 January 2026, the Permanent Section of Council General International approved amendments to Part III of *The Rule* proposed by Australia's National Council, marking an important milestone in strengthening how the Society in Australia organises and governs our shared mission.

The new Part III of *The Rule* will take effect in Australia from 1 July 2026. A PDF version is already available on the National Council website for Members and supporters to read and reflect on.

From March to June 2026, briefings will be held for State and Territory Council Members, directors of related bodies corporate and Executive Leadership Teams to walk through key changes and what they mean in practice.

In parallel, Town Halls for Society Members are being planned for June 2026, both online and in person, offering a chance for Society Members and interested volunteers and staff to hear an overview of the changes and to ask questions.

Each State and Territory has also nominated an Ambassador to act as a first point of contact for questions about how particular Articles or Procedures apply in real situations.

The Rule Review Ambassadors are:

- Kerry Muir - NSW
- Corey McGrath - TAS

Victoria elects Brendan Podbury as State President

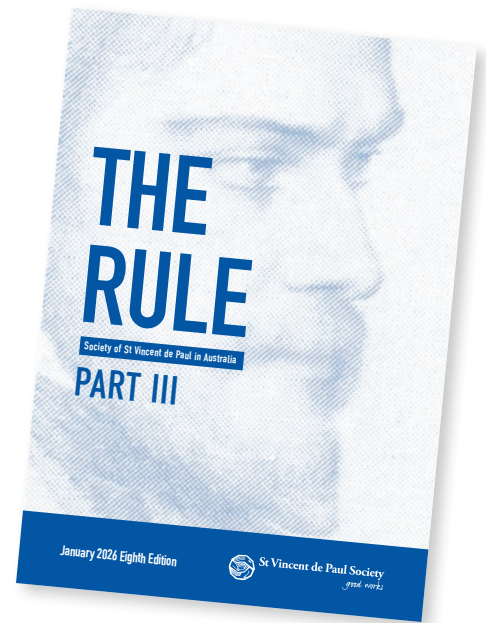
Brendan Podbury was elected State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria on 14 February 2026 to take effect from 20 February.

Brendan is a long-standing Member of the Society since joining as a Conference Support Officer in 1998 and as a Conference Member since 2002. He has held numerous leadership and governance roles, most recently completing a four-year term as Northern Central Council President in 2025.

Brendan brings extensive experience in community and faith-based leadership, with a deep commitment to social justice, pastoral care and volunteer development. His background includes youth work and ministry, and more than two decades of service in charitable and mission-focused settings. Within the broader Society, he has contributed to

- Mark Jaksa - SA
- Belinda Becker - WA
- John Feint - C-G
- Samantha Woodland - QLD
- Ken Northwood - VIC
- Kay Fitzpatrick - NT

Procedures to accompany Part III of *The Rule* are expected to be finalised by 9 April 2026 and will be available in a booklet that will sit alongside the full revised version of *The Rule* when it is released in July 2026, while the Appendices, which contain links to key reference documents, will be available online only. ■



Scan the QR code or visit vinnies.link/therule to find more information, dates for Town Halls and to register online.



strategic planning, leadership development and the Congress and Beyond process, helping to strengthen Vincentian formation and embed Congress outcomes into practical structures, policies and ways of working.

Known for his collaborative and values-driven leadership style, Brendan combines a deep respect for the Vincentian tradition with a practical approach to change management in volunteer-based organisations.

He lives in Northcote with his wife Helen, and they have three adult children and three grandchildren. ■



Brendan Podbury has been elected the Society's new State President in Victoria.

Refreshing *Let's Build a Fairer Australia!*

BY MIRIELLE AUGUSTIN

Policy and Advocacy, National Council Secretariate

Every day across the country, our Members meet people facing impossible choices between paying rent or buying food, keeping the lights on or covering medical costs. These experiences continue to shape the Society's national advocacy.

Over the past few months, we have refreshed our federal policy platform, *Let's Build a Fairer Australia!*, to ensure it reflects both what our Members are seeing on the ground and the current national policy landscape. The document will now be updated twice each year so that our advocacy remains timely, focused and evidence based.

New focus areas: Children and Energy

Two new policy papers have been added.

The first focuses on Children. We know that poverty in childhood can have lifelong consequences. This paper strengthens our call to measure and reduce child poverty, prioritise children's wellbeing in national decision-making, and ensure families have adequate income and access to essential services.

The second addresses Energy. A home must be more than shelter; it must be affordable to power. Rising energy costs are placing significant pressure on low-income households. Our new paper calls for targeted bill relief, stronger consumer protections and greater support to improve the energy efficiency of homes.

Continuing our key priorities

Our existing papers have also been updated. We continue



The Society's new policy paper on Children strengthens our call to measure and reduce child poverty and to ensure families have adequate income.

to call for a significant expansion of social and affordable housing, with a long-term goal of reaching 10 percent of total housing stock.

While there have been welcome improvements in wages and industrial relations, we are also highlighting the ongoing need to better support people who are long-term unemployed.

In areas where governments have taken action, including Buy Now Pay Later regulation and expanded bulk billing, we have adjusted our calls accordingly, while continuing to monitor developments.

Grounded in the experience of the people we assist and guided by our Vincentian commitment to justice and dignity, the Society will continue to advocate for practical solutions that build a more compassionate and fairer Australia. ■



The Society on Energy Fairness

Australia's energy system is being reshaped by rooftop solar, home batteries and emerging smart technologies. But are the benefits being shared fairly or are the costs of transition to net zero emissions being moved to those least able to afford it? In the 9 March episode of the SwitchedOn Australia podcast, Gavin Dufty, the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Director, Energy Policy and Research, examines how these changes are affecting household electricity bills, drawing on years of insight from the Society's Tariff Tracker project.

As the Australian Energy Market Commission's draft review sparks debate about new pricing models, Gavin highlights growing concerns that low-income households and renters may be left behind. While some Australians can reduce their bills through solar power and battery storage, others face rising costs just to stay connected to the grid.

The discussion explores how future pricing might balance reward and responsibility in the nation's energy transition and what that means for equity and affordability.

Scan the QR code or visit vinnies.link/energy-podcasts to listen to the episode.



Capital Gains Tax reform on the agenda

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia is urging the Federal Government to reform the Capital Gains Tax (CGT) discount to create a fairer, more equitable tax system and help address Australia's housing crisis.

In its submission to the Inquiry into the Operation of the Capital Gains Tax Discount earlier this year, the Society is calling for a reduction of the CGT discount from 50 percent to 25 percent over five years, applied consistently across individuals, trusts and superannuation funds. The policy is grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and the principles of human dignity and the common good.

The current 50 percent discount unfairly benefits high-income earners, fuels investor demand for existing housing stock and drives up prices, leaving renters and first-home buyers at a severe disadvantage.

The Parliamentary Budget Office's (PBO) latest costings (10 February) demonstrate that the distribution of benefits from the CGT discount is highly skewed towards Australia's very highest-income taxpayers:

- the top 10 percent of income earners accrue around 82 percent of the tax savings from the CGT discount in 2025-26
- Within that group, the top 1 percent account for almost 60 percent of total tax benefits.

This exposes the myth that the 50 percent CGT discount largely benefits so-called "mum & dad" investors as misleading; it mostly benefits those with established wealth.

The PBO cites the Tax Expenditures and Insights Statement estimates foregone revenue from the CGT discount on property to be \$8.9 billion in 2025-26 alone.

The Society believes these billions of dollars in tax breaks to Australia's wealthiest could be better invested in rebuilding depleted social housing stocks and measures to reduce housing stress and homelessness, such as boosting Commonwealth Rent Assistance for low-income households.

It is anticipated the Federal Government will announce CGT reform in the May Budget.

To support the Society's advocacy on CGT reform, contact your local federal representative and ask them to take action for a fairer Australia. ■



Scan the QR code or visit vinnies.link/cgt-submission to read the Society's Submission on the CGT Discount.



Why the Society is involved in advocacy

The St Vincent de Paul Society is involved in advocacy because our Mission is not only to provide practical help and compassion to people in need, but to help shape a fairer, more just and compassionate Australia where everyone has the opportunity to reach their life potential.

Since its beginnings in Paris in 1833, advocacy has been an essential dimension of the Society's Mission, alongside offering practical help and compassion to people experiencing hardship. Blessed Frédéric Ozanam's conviction that we must study and address the injustices that create poverty while "tiding the poor over the poverty crisis," continues to guide this commitment to long-term social change.

In practice, this means the Society works with governments and like-minded organisations to influence public policy so that the structures contributing to poverty, inequality and exclusion are transformed.

Advocacy complements the Society's wide range of support services by tackling the root causes of disadvantage; over time, this can reduce the ever-growing demand for our services, especially emergency relief, and empower people to participate more fully in community life.

The National Council Social Justice Advisory Committee (NCSJAC) plays a key role in shaping the Society's advocacy positions. Comprised of experienced and youth Members from across Australia, the NCSJAC advises the National Council, shares knowledge on social justice issues, and provides a forum for Vincentians to coordinate advocacy that is grounded in the experiences of people who seek our help. Guided by its Terms of Reference, the NCSJAC helps ensure that the Society's public voice is informed, consistent and faithful to our vision of a fairer, more just and compassionate Australia. ■

Society continues to call for Human Rights Act

Continuing to press for a national Human Rights Act that would enshrine protections for the basic rights everyone in Australia deserves is a key element of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council's advocacy priorities.

Representatives of the Society's National Council joined Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) and Amnesty International for a series of meetings with federal parliamentarians at Australian Parliament House from 3 to 5 February.

Meetings were held with Senators Charlotte Walker and Tony Sheldon (Labor), David Shoebridge (Greens), and Lidia Thorpe (Ind), MPs Dr Mike Freeland and Rowan Holzberger (Labor), Dr Helen Haines and Andrew Wilkie (Ind), and advisors to Sarrah Witty MP and Senator Lisa Darmanin (Labor).

The Society is part of a coalition of more than 130 not-for-profit organisations and legal experts calling on the Australian Parliament to legislate a national Human Rights Act. Such an Act would:

- protect fundamental rights including housing, healthcare, education and economic security that are essential to people thriving
- hold government accountable by ensuring human rights are considered in all laws, decisions and services
- empower people to challenge injustices when their rights are violated
- foster a rights-respecting culture built on the values of fairness, respect, dignity and compassion.

In a media statement marking UN Human Rights Day on 10 December 2025, the Society's National President, Mark Gaetani, reminded Australians that housing, health and education are everyday essentials, not aspirations, and should be protected by law.

"We know from communities we serve every day that many people's human rights are at risk, especially the almost 4 million people living in poverty in Australia today," he said.



Nicole Tooby, HRLC, Kym Duggan SVdP, Daney Faddoul, HRLC, Nikita White, Amnesty, and Toby oConnor, SVdP National Council CEO, met with federal parliamentarians at Parliament House in Canberra in February.

"When families can't afford rent, when children miss school because they're hungry, or people avoid seeking medical treatment because they're afraid of costs, we are failing as a community to protect people's fundamental human rights."

The Society believes this is not a partisan issue. "It is about building a fairer Australia where the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted nearly 80 years ago, becomes a reality for all who live here," Mr Gaetani said.

"Human rights are positive; they bring safety, joy, dignity and hope. Now is the time to enshrine them in Australian law and to create a Human Rights Act that protects our everyday essentials and holds the government to account." ■



For more information about the Society's position, scan the QR code or visit vinnies.link/human-rights-framework



Bishops focus on cost-of-living crisis

The St Vincent de Paul Society has welcomed the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's new Social Justice Statement 2026, *The Cost of Our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good*, which addresses Australia's worsening cost-of-living crisis. Released on 9 February, the statement warns of growing inequality and hardship as more Australians struggle to cover basics.

National President Mark Gaetani said the Bishops' message reflects what the Society's Members hear daily; that rising costs are pushing people who were just getting by into poverty.

The statement highlights structural inequalities such as low income supports, stagnant wages, and a lack of affordable housing, urging governments and communities to act with courage and compassion.

The Bishops encourage all Australians to respond through advocacy, volunteering and support.

Read the full story online at vinnies.link/acbc-col



Walk for refugee justice on Palm Sunday

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council and Jesuit Refugee Service Australia (JRS) have called on Australians to join peaceful Palm Sunday rallies around the country on 29 March in solidarity with refugees and people seeking asylum, and to demand an end to Australia's inhumane offshore processing and resettlement regime.

Palm Sunday, which always falls in Lent one week before Easter Sunday, marks the beginning of Holy Week and is a time of prayerful reflection and renewed commitment to justice, peace and mercy.

"In his 2026 Lent message, Pope Leo XIV urged us to 'recognise and respond to the cry of those anguished and suffering,' and to disarm our language, so that words of hatred 'give way to words of hope and peace'," said the Society's National President, Mark Gaetani.

"In that same spirit, the Society is inviting people of all backgrounds to come together in peaceful public witness to support those vulnerable people who seek safety on our shores," Mr Gaetani said.

"Seeking refuge is a tragedy, not a crime. On Palm Sunday, we remember that our nation is at its best when we welcome those in need with open hands and open hearts."

The Society is one of at least nine Catholic submissions to the Senate Inquiry into offshore processing and resettlement arrangements, led by the [Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum \(CAPSA\)](#). JRS Australia is one of these organisations, whose mission is to serve, accompany and advocate for refugees and people seeking

asylum in Western Sydney. JRS Australia's [submission](#) highlights the fate of those evacuated to Australia, who remain without hope of safe, permanent settlement and require ongoing support from refugee support organisations and charities.

The Society and JRS Australia encourage Australians to participate in Palm Sunday rallies across the country; visit www.commongrace.org.au/palm_sunday_2026 to find a rally near you.

"At the beginning of Holy Week, Christians are reminded on Palm Sunday that God accompanies humanity in vulnerability and suffering. Through these Palm Sunday rallies, Christians can demonstrate how they, in turn, stand in solidarity with those who suffer today," said JRS Australia Country Director Fr Brett O'Neill, SJ.

For people seeking safety who have endured years of uncertainty, detention and separation from family, the human cost is profound. We stand with them, and we call on the Australian community to do the same, by joining us at Palm Sunday rallies across the country."

Read the Society's submission to the Offshore Processing Inquiry at vinnies.link/sub-offshore-processing

and JRS Australia's submission (No 29) here: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Offshoreprocessing2025/Submissions. ■

Advocating for vulnerable communities

On Friday 30 January, representatives from the St Vincent de Paul Society met with Senator for NSW David Shoebridge (Greens) to discuss key issues emerging from our frontline work, particularly the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the impacts of inadequate government support payments, and refugee policy, with a focus on people affected by Australia's offshore processing arrangements in Manus Island and Papua New Guinea.

Drawing on the Society's frontline experience, the discussion highlighted how rising living costs and low income support are placing growing pressure on individuals, families and community services across NSW.

The Society appreciated the opportunity to share insights from our work with vulnerable communities, including the



Greens Senator David Shoebridge from NSW (second from left) met with representatives of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Tom Gersbach (left), Megan Bingham and Tim McKenna, at Australian Parliament House on 30 January.

role of local Conferences and Vinnies services in providing practical support, dignity and connection for people doing it tough.

The Society looks forward to continuing this important conversation and contributing to policies that strengthen Australia's social safety net.

Representatives from the Society included Jack Barlow, Megan Bingham, Tom Gersbach and Tim McKenna. ■

New CEO in Queensland: Joe Duskovic

After two decades working across law, property and corporate governance, Joe Duskovic reached a moment of quiet clarity: professional success alone was no longer enough.

That search for purpose led him to St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland. After 13 years of service there, Joe was recently appointed as the Society's new Chief Executive Officer, ready to lead the organisation in providing charitable assistance and support to Queenslanders experiencing homelessness, poverty and other hardships across the state.

"I realised I was looking for something more meaningful," Joe said. "I've always been interested in people more than property, and I wanted my work to reflect the values I live by."

Joe takes over the CEO role following Kevin Mercer's appointment as CEO of Ozcare, at a time of significant demand and complexity across the community services sector.

"The need for what we do is growing, particularly as Queensland faces a severe housing shortage and

rising levels of poverty and homelessness," Joe said.

"These challenges require compassion, but they also demand strong governance, disciplined delivery and collaboration across sectors."

Queensland State President Patricia McMahon said Joe had demonstrated the key values required for a leadership role with the Society: the heart of a servant leader and a passion for honouring dignity and empowering others.

Joe said his background outside the not-for-profit sector has proven valuable in helping Vinnies respond at scale, while remaining grounded in its mission.

"Working for St Vincent de Paul means seeing first-hand just how homelessness, poverty and hardship impact our communities. When people have lost all hope, our response is to help them find it," he said.

For the full story, visit vinnies.link/new-qld-ceo. ■



CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland, Joe Duskovic.

New CEO in Tasmania: Connie Digolis

On New Year's Eve 2025, Tasmanian State President Corey McGrath announced the appointment of Connie Digolis as the new CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania, commencing on 5 January 2026.

"Connie is a highly respected Tasmanian leader with deep experience across community organisations, advocacy and system reform," Corey said.

"Most recently, she served as CEO of the Mental Health Council of Tasmania, where she worked closely with boards, staff, lived-experience leaders and government to strengthen services and to advocate for a people-first system of care."

"Connie brings a strong alignment with the mission and values of the Society. She is known for her collaborative and grounded leadership style, her commitment to dignity and social justice, and her ability to balance big-picture thinking with practical action. These qualities will serve our Society well as we respond to increasing need across Tasmania," he said.

"Many Tasmanians are currently facing significant and compounding pressures, including cost-of-living

challenges, housing insecurity, food stress, rising energy costs and barriers to health and wellbeing. As Members, you see this firsthand through your service in Conferences and programs across the state.

Under Connie's leadership, we will continue to provide practical and compassionate support, while strengthening our capacity to respond sustainably and advocate for the systemic changes needed to reduce hardship over time.

"Connie has a deep respect for the work of Members, volunteers, staff and supporters, and is committed to listening, learning and working alongside us. She places strong value on connection, collaboration, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

"I look forward to the next chapter of our shared work as we continue to serve those in need with compassion, dignity and hope," Corey said. ■



CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society Tasmania, Connie Digolis.

Victorian Vincentian awarded OAM

Gerard O'Donnell, President of the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria's Doncaster Conference, was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in this year's Australia Day Honours.

Gerard was recognised for his service to the community through a range of organisations, including his work with the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria over the past 15 years.

A dedicated Vincentian leader, he has served as President and Vice President of the Box Hill Regional Council, chaired the Overseas Partnership Committee, and volunteered with the Compeer Friendship Program and Vinnies Soup Vans.

Beyond the Society, Gerard has contributed to local sport, leading the Box Hill Little Athletics Club and documenting the history of the Surrey Park Swimming Club. He also manages the Coats for the Homeless Program run by the Order of Malta Association. Gerard said he volunteers to use his skills in service of others, not for recognition.

"The St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria is based on Catholic values, and I gravitate to this work to bring the love of Christ to those in need," he said.

Gerard's wife, Margaret O'Donnell, is also a dedicated



Gerard O'Donnell OAM

Vincentian and has served as the President of the Eastern Central Council and as a board member. Margaret was the recipient of an OAM awarded in 2024 for services to education and to the community.

Read the full story at vinnies.link/gerard-odonnell ■

Volunteers celebrate connections

Two long-time Vinnies WA volunteers are proving that friendship is one of the great rewards of giving back to the community.

Sandy and Mercia first met 13 years ago while volunteering at the Vinnies Busselton shop and have since built a close bond grounded in fun, mutual support and good works.

Mercia, who has volunteered with Vinnies for 25 years across the Busselton shop and the adjacent Emergency Relief Support Centre, says keeping busy and connected is what keeps her coming back each week.

Sandy recalls being warmly welcomed by Mercia and fellow volunteer Dot, and says their friendship helped her through a breast cancer diagnosis five years ago.

Although Dot sadly died from cancer three years ago, Sandy and Mercia continue to honour her memory and support each other through life's ups and downs.

Vinnies WA celebrates their friendship and invites others to create lasting connections and make a difference in your local community by becoming a Vinnies volunteer.

Visit vinnies.link/busselton-volunteers for the full story. ■



Good friends and Vinnies Busselton retail volunteers, Sandy and Mercia. Photo: Vinnies WA

Vinnies NSW launches outlet stores

The fashion industry is expanding faster than ever. Australians are currently buying more clothes per person than any other country, with the average person snapping up 56 items per year. Shoppers are also buying around 60 percent more clothing than 15 years ago and keeping those pieces for roughly half as long.*

As a result, more items are being donated to Vinnies than ever before, and our shops are receiving an incredible volume of preloved goods. Last financial year alone, Vinnies NSW received and sorted 3.7 million kilograms of donated textiles and sold 10.7 million units across the state. With so many items arriving each week and shoppers eager to discover a preloved find, our stores are constantly refreshing their collections.

So how does Vinnies NSW manage all these donations while keeping op-shopping accessible?

Vinnies NSW now offers a range of store formats to meet different community needs, these include our new Mega and Outlet stores.

Mega stores offer expansive layouts with a wide variety of products across many categories, while our outlet stores play a distinct role within this mix, concentrating on high-volume, low-priced items to extend the life of preloved goods.

Launched in December 2025 in Surry Hills and January 2026 in South Nowra, the Vinnies NSW warehouse-style outlet shops are designed to give high-turnover clothes, homeware and bric-a-brac a final chance to be used, loved and kept out of landfill.

Across the two outlet stores, shoppers can explore thousands of items, from racks of tees and dresses to books and quirky bric-a-brac. But the real difference is the focus on value. Bundle deals and regular promotional offers across selected categories ensure great value for every budget. In just a couple of months, the two outlet stores have sold close to 54,000 items, keeping everyday



Bargains galore at the new Vinnies NSW outlet store in Surry Hills, Sydney. Photos: Vinnies NSW.

items in circulation for longer and giving customers bang for their buck.

And like every Vinnies shop, the money generated from these outlets goes directly to supporting people facing hardship in the local community. In the last financial year, Vinnies NSW's 220 shops and six distribution centres raised \$91.7 million, which was reinvested in our services and programs that provide essentials such as food, clothing, housing support, and financial assistance to those doing it tough.

Visit the Vinnies NSW outlet stores at:

- South Nowra Shop - 1/142 Princes Highway, South Nowra NSW 2541
- Surry Hills Shop - 406 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW 2010 ■

* Fast fashion statistics from Clean Up Australia: www.cleanup.org.au/fast-fashion/



Puppy 'donation' shocks Australia

Did you hear about Vinnie, the tiny chihuahua pup that made national headlines after being discovered inside a cooler bag in a donation crate at Vinnies Kingaroy? What began as a shocking discovery turned into a heartwarming story when a Vinnies volunteer gave him a forever home.

Visit vinnies.link/vinnie-puppy to read little Vinnie's remarkable tale.



Corrie Johnston with Vinnie, the chihuahua pup found in a cooler bag in a donation crate at Vinnies Kingaroy. The pair attracted national media coverage in January after their story came to light. Photo: SVdP Queensland.



OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM



PHOTOS: FLETCHER RUDDICK; VISION HOUSE CREATIVE

Members and staff from across the country and international guests in attendance at the OPP National Network meeting.

Faith in action beyond borders

The Society's Overseas Partnerships Program (OPP) National Network met in Sydney on 7-8 March for their first in-person gathering since the inaugural meeting in 2024, strengthening connections across Australia and with international partners from Fiji, India and New Zealand. The weekend fostered collaboration, reflection and renewed commitment to supporting Vincentian works through Twinning, Projects, Assist A Student and shared faith in action.

The OPP National Network is made up of the OPP Standing Committee, state and territory Overseas Partnerships Committee Chairs and an administrative support staff member from each state or territory, and staff from the National Council Secretariate. In addition, three overseas guests were in attendance: Arthur Schultze (Oceania Twinning Coordinator and National Twinning Coordinator – New Zealand), Flolyn Simpson (National Twinning Coordinator – Fiji), and Norbert Gonzalves (National Twinning Coordinator – India).

The Network meets regularly online but this in-person meeting allowed for much deeper discussions. The first session of the meeting, facilitated by Network co-chairs Catherine Smith (newly appointed National Twinning Officer - Australia) and Rozlyn Kelly (OPP Facilitator – Asia), looked back at the Network's achievements over the past two years and began planning its priorities for 2026 and beyond.

A highlight for everyone was the question-and-answer panel on Saturday evening facilitated by Bec Bromhead, National Council Vice President – Oceania and member of the OPP Standing Committee. The panel consisted of Kevin McMahon (OPP Standing Committee Chair) and the three overseas guests in attendance. They fielded questions submitted by OPP Network members, with many directed to Flolyn and Norbert about the Society in Australia's



Clockwise from top left:
Panel (from left): Bec Bromhead, Kevin McMahon, Norbert Gonzalves, Flolyn Simpson and Arthur Schultze. Bec Bromhead (National Council VP – Oceania) welcoming on behalf of National President. Brian Headford, Queensland OPC Chair, speaking with Vyvyan Allchin, Tasmania OPC Chair. Bec Pefkos (Standing Committee/ Queensland) and Norbert Gonzalves (India Twinning Coordinator).

partner countries, India and Fiji, and the people they assist. There were several questions about Twinning between Australian and overseas Conferences. The panel session was recorded and will be made available to Society Members in the coming months.

Catherine Smith, National Twinning Coordinator, said, “We learnt so much from their stories and insights about how the support provided from Australian Conferences and Councils really does make a difference on the ground to some of the poorest people in our neighbouring countries. These stories of good works, which we hope to share with the wider Vincentian membership, are powerful reminders of faith in action in all its forms.”

Over dinner, Kevin McMahon formally thanked the outgoing National Twinning Officer, Mike Reynolds, for his dedication to the role over the past six years, and his work with the Network over the past two years as one of its inaugural co-chairs.

On Sunday the meeting opened with a reflection by the National Assist A Student Coordinator, Anita Williams, sharing vulnerably about her experience of visiting Thailand and Cambodia in 2025. This set the tone for the day, covering the topics of strength-based and partnerships approaches, a privacy and safeguarding workshop, and Mass at the Mary MacKillop Chapel. The day concluded with some small group discussions about Twinning, Assist A Student, Projects and administration support, building on the previous day’s session and identifying any new areas of focus for the Network.

Since the Network’s first meeting in 2024, there have been minimal changes to state and territory Overseas Partnerships Committee Chairs. However, the staff supporting the Chairs and Committees have changed in most states and territories. The opportunity for the staff to meet in person has been invaluable for the sharing of knowledge and resources. One staff member reflected that they “believe building relationships with other administrative staff will help with ongoing discussions and online meetings”.

Catherine said it was so fruitful to meet together in person.

“The opportunity to discuss the strengths and challenges going forward was timely and productive. Like most Vincentian works, the strengthening of relationships was invaluable – and it was often the casual conversations outside of the main sessions where these connections were really cemented,” she said.

“I am looking forward to seeing the fruits of this in-person meeting in the ongoing works in the year ahead and beyond.” ■



Scan the QR code or visit vinnies.link/international-impact to find out more about the Society’s international impact.



ASSIST A STUDENT

An education support program that assists in breaking the cycle of poverty



Assist A Student is a program of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. Donations from Australians are used to provide funds to students from partner countries in the Asia-Pacific Region to assist with education expenses.

The Assist A Student program reflects the Mission Statement of the St Vincent de Paul Society – to serve the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. We do this by sharing some of ourselves – what we have – with those in need in our neighbouring countries.

Access to education is a proven way of assisting individuals to reach their full potential and is a pathway to breaking

the cycle of poverty. Students are supported at all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary.

In our partner countries, local Vincentians select students to participate in the program. The program is managed by Conferences on the ground overseas and is highly valued by Conferences and beneficiaries.

'Education is important to me to get a job. I want to work for government and need to do well at Senior Secondary School.'

(Student, Kiribati)

'The support helps students to fit in and work hard. It also supports the school as it means that students have the materials they need.'

(School principal, Indonesia)



Scan to donate online

To donate online visit donate.vinnies.org.au/assist-a-student

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

NAME (group or individual): _____

CONTACT NAME (for group): _____

TELEPHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

SUBURB: _____

STATE: _____ POSTCODE: _____

EMAIL: _____

I would like to donate:

\$100 \$200 \$300 OR \$ _____

Payment method:

EFT: BSB 062-000 Acc 16047336

Debit my credit card (details below)

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Mastercard Visa Card Expiry: ____ / ____

NAME ON CARD: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Please complete your details and email to admin@svdp.org.au or post to: St Vincent de Paul Society National Council Office, PO Box 9427, Deakin ACT 2600

Privacy Statement: St Vincent de Paul Society collects the information you provide on this form for the primary purpose of processing your kind donation. We may also use your personal information to provide you with further information about the Assist a Student Program. If you do not provide the information requested on this form, we may not be able to do these things. We may share your personal information with other St Vincent de Paul Societies and third parties who provide us with professional or technology services, including some that are based overseas. Our privacy policy is available on our website: www.vinnies.org.au