

The Record



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

SPRING 2023



ADVOCACY

IN ACTION



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 regularly each year by the National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia.

National Council
PO Box 243
Deakin West, 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:

Robin Osborne
Toby oConnor
Rose Beynon

The St Vincent de Paul Society in 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.

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in 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.



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Australia's refugee shame

It is now ten years since then-PM Kevin Rudd introduced the 'stop the boats' ban that prevented asylum seekers settling in Australia.

Shaminda Kanapathi, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee, was caught up in this nightmare and spent years in Australian-run detention on Manus island, PNG and in Port Moresby.

In 2013 he was visited by Dr Tim McKenna, who today is the President of Caritas Christi Conference (Canberra/Goulburn) and chair of the Vincentian Refugee Network.

They are pictured at their recent reunion in the safety of Finland where Shaminda has finally found refuge.



PHOTO: MARGOT MCKENNA

Read about Shaminda's offshore detention experiences on page 28.

On the cover...

'One of the Society's core Values is advocacy – to push for change to improve people's lives.'

St Vincent de Paul Society National President Mark Gaetani spoke these words during his address to launch *A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia*, a report developed for the Society by the Australian National University's Centre for Social Research and Methods.

Pictured at the launch at Parliament House on 3 September are Bridget Archer MP and Alicia Payne MP, co-Chairs of Parliamentary Friends of Ending Poverty, Mr Mark Gaetani and ANU Associate Professor Ben Phillips.

Ms Payne said the report would give parliamentarians much valuable information to think about in the time ahead.

Full details on the report on page 15.

Photo: Nodi Karimova

Got a story to share?

Do you have a suggestion of an interesting article for *The Record*? Perhaps you would like to write or suggest a story and share your thoughts and photos with our readers? Plenty happens across the St Vincent de Paul Society, but we can't keep our fingers on the pulse of everything. Please contact media@svdp.org.au to discuss how we might help.



‘Never yet was a springtime when the buds forgot to bloom’

– Margaret Elizabeth Sangster

Life is full of unpredictable happenings, not least that I would be standing, as the Society’s National President, before a group of parliamentarians and others, introducing a complex paper on Australia’s tax, welfare and superannuation system developed by a distinguished analyst at the Australian National University (ANU).

A story on that report appears elsewhere in this issue of The Record.

As I explained at the launch at Parliament House, our governing document, The Rule, is all about helping people living in poverty to achieve their full potential. The Society’s central guiding principle is embedded in Catholic Social Teaching which encompasses the dignity of the human person and the common good.

For many years the Society has advocated for increases to working age payments. We’ve done this because most of those we help are unemployed or underemployed.

Most are living in poverty. And we could see no change. Rather than keep asking, we approached ANU to model how these increases could be paid for.

This invariably involves a debate on taxation reform, often seen as a political hot potato, but the Albanese Government has indicated it is open to a debate on tax. This paper will make a significant contribution to this important national conversation.

Another unexpected event was my recent attendance, alongside Oceania National Presidents and selected Members from Australia, at the International General Assembly (IGA) conducted in Rome, from 12-17 June.

The pinnacle of the IGA was the election of a new International President General (IPG) to replace the current IPG – Renato Lima de Oliveira from Brazil. Three candidates placed themselves before the IGA seeking selection as the 17th International President General.

Those nominated candidates were Eduardo Marques from Brazil, Juan Manuel Buergo from Spain and Maria del Carmen Guzman from Guatemala. Following a lengthy election process, Juan Manuel Buergo was announced as the new IPG. Juan’s inauguration was held in Madrid, Spain in September.

Special mention must go to both Claire Victory, my predecessor, and Frank Brassil who were both invited to speak to the IGA on topics that hold special interest to

them both. Claire’s address focused on the importance and need for Safeguarding principles, process and good practice, while Frank spoke on his role as ITVP for the Oceania region.

On the overseas front, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to those young Australian Vincentian pilgrims and their leaders who grasped the opportunity to actively participate in World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal from 1-6 August. Feedback has been that this was an awesome experience that will provide lifelong memories.

As we say goodbye to winter and bid a warm welcome to spring, in my view the most enjoyable season of the year, there is much blooming underway in the Society.

One of the budding good works is Congress 2023+. Members would now be well aware that the National Council has agreed to hold a National Congress on 27-29 October 2023 in Sydney.

Congress 2023+ will bring Society Leaders from across Australia and overseas to reflect on our strategic vision on critical issues relating to the Society’s membership, mission and spirituality, with the view to guiding the direction of the Society into the future.

Congress 2023+ theme is ‘Journeying Together, Revitalising our Mission’. The theme asks us to:

- reflect on our purpose
- share best practices and success stories that are occurring across the country
- think creatively and find new creative ways to engage and support new members and volunteers, and
- contribute to a culture of community and collaboration that aims for continuous improvement.

The event and the workshops that follow the Congress will be critical in the Society’s membership revitalisation agenda. As leaders we can both discuss obstacles to membership and also imagine and visualise what Society work and conference participation can, and should, look like in the years ahead of us.

I wish you the very best for the spring season, as we make our way steadily towards the end of another unpredictable year, and the joyous season that celebrates the birth of our beloved Jesus Christ. **R**



The Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, met with major Church providers – Anglicare Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society (CEO Toby oConnor pictured 2nd from right), The Salvation Army, and UnitingCare Australia - in early September to discuss their unanimous support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

With the recent launch of [A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia](#), the Society's contribution to the Federal Treasurer's invitation to start a conversation around tax reform, it is timely to thank our members for the contribution they make to the development of Society policy papers.

With regard to the taxation paper, National Council engaged the Australian National University to undertake the research and draft the paper. National Council set clear parameters around what revenue raising components were to be included in the modelling (mild increases from high wealth individuals, tackling overly generous superannuation concessions to high wealth individuals, and so on) and what revenue raising components were to be excluded (e.g., increases to the GST).

Determining these parameters was based on the feedback from our Members about the lived experiences of those people we give a hand up to. At the launch of this paper in Parliament House, the people's house, our National President made it clear to our political representatives that Blessed Frédéric Ozanam taught us how to be the voice of the voiceless.

The release of this paper indicated to the Parliament that we appreciate capturing increased budget spending to address the needs of those who are facing the cost of living crisis, are homeless or are at risk of falling into homelessness requires courage. Against the predictions forecast in the Australian Treasury's recent Intergenerational Report, Australia's revenue expectations are insufficient to deliver reasonable living conditions for all in the near future.

The Society joins with other civil society advocacy groups to push for major reform in the present tax and income

support transfer systems. We must not stop listening to those who are in any way excluded from participating to their full potential in their community about what resources they need to regain dignity and independence.

The listening our members do when they undertake home visitations, help out with the Society's soup vans or provide assistance through our Conferences and our retail centres, is crucial to inform us when we visit the Parliament to lobby for a Fairer Australia.

We can take advice from Paul the apostle who tells us that without love we can only sound like a resounding brass or a tinkling cymbal (Corth 13:1). If we do not listen to our Companion's stories our voice will be mute when we seek to promote social justice.

And this brings me to the Voice. The outcome of the referendum will be announced shortly, after this edition has gone to print. National Council's support for the constitutional recognition of our First Nations People has been longstanding.

In my visit to Parliament House on 6 September 2023, speaking on behalf of National Council, I reflected that in the coming weeks, the discussion about the Voice should be respectful. And that we respect the invitation being extended by our First Nations leaders to the Australian community to listen.

Listen to their stories of generational disadvantage and consider how fundamental it is that no initiatives should be designed without the direct involvement of the local people who are the recipients. The approach taken by state and federal governments over more than 200 years has clearly failed and in 2023, we as a nation should be able to accept the invitation to listen. **R**



PHOTO: Y ELOTT REYNA ON UNSPLASH

Walking creatively in the footsteps of Saint Vincent and Blessed Frédéric

BY SISTER THERESE HAYWOOD DC

September is the month in which we celebrate the lives of St Vincent and Blessed Frédéric and what this legacy has given us. Their wisdom and courage ran deep and it is helpful to touch into it regularly.

Fr Luigi Mezzadri CM tells us that:

Vincentian spirituality is not a doctrine but an encounter, an encounter not with Christ seen in a vision, but with Christ who lives in the poor.

We are called to this encounter. As Vincentians we have been drawn to the Society because of our desire to help people and to encounter them where they are.

One of the qualities of encounter with another person is that we need to go into it with an open mind. While we may have had many encounters before, we need to listen to the person in front of us and be open to their unique story. We are led into action guided by the encounter and our experience.

When I think about the Society and the way it has developed over the 210 years since its foundation, collectively we have been encountering people in need. In responding to the different needs that present themselves in different ages, the Society has been open to encounter what is in front of it and to respond accordingly.

As Frédéric Ozanam said:

Charity must never look behind it, but always before, because the number of its past benefits is always very small, and the present and future misery it solaces is infinite.

The creativity of our founders continues in the Society today. As Saint Vincent said, 'Love is inventive to infinity.' We adapt ourselves and our manner of serving to the needs of the people we encounter.

The call to both encounter and creativity is something which we need to apply to ourselves as well. As Conference members, volunteers and staff we are called to have an encounter with each other and to find God in each other.

We are also called to be creative and flexible in the way we structure our conferences and services. We need to adapt to the changing face of our world while still being true to our identity. In holding these things in tension, we are following in the footsteps of our founders who took risks to create something new.

May we continue to be open to encounter and creative in our response as we continue to build on the legacy of Saint Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam. **R**

Sister Therese Haywood DC is the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council's Spiritual Adviser.

Frédéric Ozanam's example inspires Society's advocacy

It may seem a far cry from impoverished Paris in the mid-1800s to urging a “Yes” vote in an Australian referendum in 2023, but a strong commitment to social justice, along with practical help for people in need, has remained a constant for St Vincent de Paul Society over the years.

The life of Frédéric Ozanam, one of the Society's main founders, is marked each year with a celebratory Feast Day on 9 September. A lawyer and journalist, he helped form a group that undertook charitable works as well as advocating for social change in a deeply inequitable society.

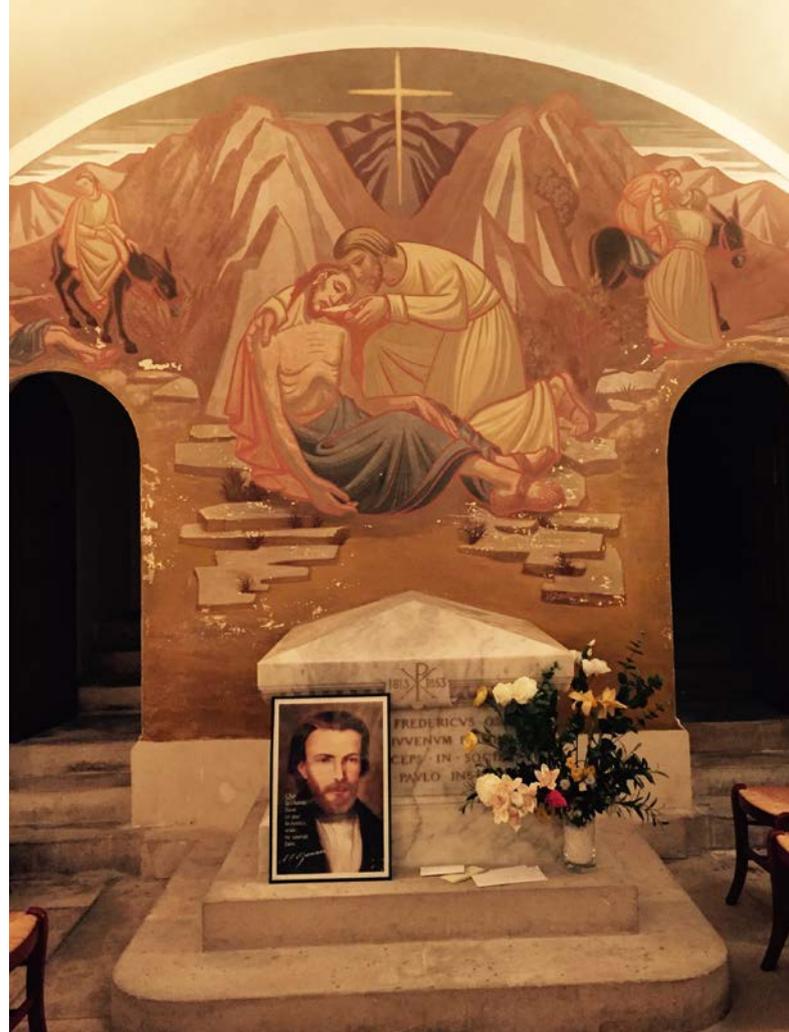
‘Australia is facing many social challenges, such as the need to ensure that First Peoples have a greater say over their own future,’ said St Vincent de Paul Society's National President, Mark Gaetani.

‘There is also the importance of ensuring newcomers are treated properly, as was highlighted by the recent Catholic World Day of Migrants and Refugees (24 September).

‘In addition, we are urging the Government to [reform](#) tax, welfare and superannuation policy in order to provide greater security to people living in, or at risk of facing, poverty.

‘Such injustices show there is no better time to heed the example of Frédéric Ozanam who was an ardent advocate for fairness,’ said Mr Gaetani, who has paid his respects at the tomb of Frédéric Ozanam in central Paris.

‘The Society's focus goes well beyond providing important services such as food vans, emergency assistance and safe accommodation. In line with our inspirational guidelines, known as *The Rule*, we are “concerned not



only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it”.

The Rule commits us “to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all [our] charitable actions there should be a search for justice...”

Mr Gaetani said, ‘The spirit of Frédéric Ozanam looms large in the consciousness of the Society's 45,000 Members and Volunteers around Australia. The events we currently see around us serve as a reminder that the need to engage in targeted and well researched advocacy has never been greater.

‘Sizable groups of the Australian population should not be left out or left behind. It is vital that we help foster a fairer, more inclusive country, and no better example can be found than in the commitment of Frédéric Ozanam, whose work we commemorate this week.’

Regarded as a key founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Frédéric Ozanam (23 April 1813 – 8 Sept 1853) formed a group inspired by the work in the slums of Paris being done by the Congregation of Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, under the guidance of Sister Rosalie Rendu.

He joined his colleagues in visiting the poorer districts of Paris to offer practical support. So began the Society's tradition of home visitations.

*The Society serves people in need in 150 countries, a living monument to Frédéric Ozanam and his companions. Frédéric Ozanam was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1997. **R***



The hope and inspiration of Congress 2023+

This October 27-29, some 200 delegates will gather at [Congress 2023+](#) in Sydney to explore the future of the Society at a time of great challenges to us and other volunteer organisations across the country. A key focus will be to share a vision of membership revitalisation, especially the importance of attracting younger people to join our Conferences and share the experience of serving Australian families and individuals in need.

The theme for Congress 2023+ is 'Journeying Together, Revitalising our Mission', the focus being to:

- reflect on our purpose
- share best practices and success stories that are occurring across the country
- think creatively and find new ways to engage and support new Members and Volunteers
- contribute to a culture of community and collaboration that aims for continuous improvement.

Congress 2023+ will be the first such gathering since 2017 and while many things in society have changed it will again be a moment of prayer, discernment, innovation, and celebration. It will also be a reminder to those attending, and hopefully all of us at home following along, that the Society is a vibrant international organisation that keeps alive the vision and commitment of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and his seven youthful confrères.

In this tradition, service and zeal are the heart of our DNA, guiding our mission to do good in a practical way, no matter how small, and to advocate fearlessly for social justice. The Society was always destined to be something that could grow. We were never intended to become constrained by external pressures or to be self-limiting.

Indeed, it is Part 1 of *The Rule*, a gift of vision from our early founders, that explains it the best – ever adapting, networking with others, no act of charity being foreign, as was exemplified by Jesus Christ.

In the truest Vincentian spirit, and guided by the recent Fifth Plenary Council and the broader Church, we are coming together with the aim of a revitalisation of mission that extends across borders and boundaries of all kinds, including the generational.

Congress 2023+ is a moment of grace for the Society, with its fruits relying on each of us leaning into the opportunity for us to do things differently. We must be willing to change and be willing to try new ways of delivering existing services. The Society of 1833 did not have internet or email to communicate!

continued over page ►

Congress 2023+ is a rare opportunity to connect people from across the Society, to share a dialogue of who we are, where we've been, where we are currently at, and where we should be going.

Delegates have been nominated by each State and Territory Council of the Society, and our National Council. Due to the costs associated with running such a large event, not everyone who might like to attend in person will be able to. As part of the Congress 2023+ program, consultation sessions have been designed and feedback mechanisms provided.

In the lead up to this milestone gathering a series of Listening Forums were conducted. For those who may have missed that opportunity, the invitation to engage remains. The Congress 2023+ Workbook remains a resource for Conferences to reflect on and share. The window for additional formal input will have closed by the time this article goes to print, but the opportunity to engage remains and will be welcomed.

Following the Workbook and Listening Sessions, the next opportunity for input will emerge after the face-to-face component of Congress 2023+, in early 2024. Each State and Territory Council will be listening carefully to all

of the ideas, options and opportunities identified at Congress, and will need to decide what to champion within their jurisdiction.

The areas expected to be championed include leadership initiatives, Membership flexibility, increased opportunities for meaningful collaboration and ways to implement changes that bring about lasting impact and results.

Making necessary change is a collective endeavour and doubtless an evolutionary one. Reform doesn't occur in a day and adapting to our new world of service is a huge challenge for the Society that all of us must be a part of.

In the encouraging words of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, 'Let us go in simplicity where merciful Providence leads us, content to see the stone on which we should step without wanting to discover all at once and completely the windings of the road.' **R**



Congress Prayer

Lord, we pray for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia embarks on a journey together, revitalising our mission.

Give each of us a discerning heart O Lord to hear your voice, an openness to listen, and courage to elevate our voice and the voice of our companions today and in the future.

Lead the Society, especially those chosen as Congress delegates, to be open to inspiration and creative vision.

Help us all to embrace new ways of serving each other and our companions, drawing inspiration from the spirit of our Founders.



l-r - Rob Lutter (SVDP NT CEO), James Finch, Sean, Pat Wallis (National Council, Vice President Youth), Jocelyn Cull (NT President), Emily Wardeiner, Tamara Schaefer (back row), Cassandra Bull, Tim Wallis (front row). Attending, not pictured - Damian Legg and Graeme Finch.

Cultural Connect program planned for 2024

BY CASSANDRA BULL

National Manager – Membership, Mission & Youth

The Society’s National Immersion Program, as it was previously known, has a rich connection with First Nations communities and people in the Northern Territory. After a break in the 19-year-long program, due to COVID-19 and a National Council review, it was a real privilege for the National Immersion Committee to meet with leaders and interested members from the NT Council.

The Committee intends to breathe new life into the program, and it is hoped that a joint partnership between National Council and the NT Council can assist the program to realise its next steps.

All is looking promising for a new look Cultural Connect program to emerge in July 2024. Watch this space!

The National Immersion Committee, which sits under the National Spirit of Youth Committee, is extremely grateful for the contributions of the NT Council and its representatives. They are hopeful that the newly imagined program will bring innovative ways of learning and supporting into the program design. **R**

To learn more about the supporting of Territory Youth please get in touch with Staff on (08) 8948 8100 or nt.office@svdpnt.org.au

Youth events highlight the Society's future

Cassandra Bull, National Manager – Membership, Mission & Youth, attended the recent Vincentian Youth Days in Portugal. Here, she reflects on the importance of youth in the Society of the future.

A capacity crowd at a major sporting event – I'm thinking of the Matildas – is an awesome sight to behold. So imagine an audience of 1.5 million people, all of them backing the same side... this was the size of the gathering of the faithful who assembled in Lisbon for a [Mass](#) to be celebrated by Pope Francis.

The service marked the conclusion of the 37th World Youth Day (actually a week-long event, 1-6 August 2023), that 22 pilgrims from SVdP Queensland were able to attend, along with over 3,000 Australian delegates. Pat Wallis, National Vice President for Youth, and I had the privilege of joining this contingent in advance by attending together the Vincentian Youth Days (VYD), in Felgueiras, Portugal some 305kms away.

Vincentian Youth Days, or FAMVIN is a gathering of Vincentian Youth from all parts of the Vincentian Family. In Felgueiras I joined over 1,000 young people from 54 countries, united by Vincentian Spirituality.

Such gatherings have taken place for many years. Australia was fortunate to host the 2008 VYD Gathering in Bathurst, prior to Sydney WYD 2008. Since then we have seen VYD and WYD events in Madrid (2011), Rio (2013), Krakow (2016), Panama (2019) and then Lisbon. There will be a gathering in Rome as part of the Jubilee for Youth in 2025, with the next WYD announced to be in Seoul, South Korea in 2027.

In an age when conversations about Mass attendances focus on diminished faith and participation of young people, it is heartening to report that the spirit of the proceedings in both Lisbon and Felgueiras was nothing less than inspiring.

An undoubted highlight, especially from an Australian perspective, was when Mikael Pitot, a 20-year-old Vincentian from Brisbane, approached the microphone for the Second Reading at the final Mass with Pope Francis.



As Joe Higgins wrote in the [Catholic Leader](#), Mikael was 'looking out at 1.5 million Catholics – five square kilometres of young people from every corner of the world... He said the crowd alone was incredible. "It's almost like you can't think on that scale until you see it," Mikael said.

The second-year teaching student at the Australian Catholic University, Banyo, Brisbane had been in Paris on a pilgrimage learning about his Vincentian roots when he received a call asking if he could do the reading.

Mikael said he was grateful for the chance to grow closer to his fellow Vincentians. He had done some volunteering with St Vincent de Paul Society in secondary school and had been a Vincentian for about three years. He cherished his chance in Paris to visit the founding sites of Saint Vincent and learn more about the Society.

'This (VYD and WYD) is an experience I can share with my students and hopefully encourage some of them to go to World Youth Day someday,' he said.

There was a real renewal of energy from those who were able to partake in the Vincentian pilgrimage experience.



The Church's (and the Society's) ability at a local parish level to cater for the desires and needs of our young people is indeed something we should continue to ponder.

However, I believe there is hope we can draw upon from the gathering of young people at Vincentian Youth Days, and the World Youth Day events in Portugal. The pilgrimage was a chance for our young people to gather with like-minded Vincentians from around the world, to join together in community and mass, to pray, break bread and celebrate the different ways young people around the globe are serving all parts of the Vincentian Family in need.

In true Vincentian style, there was an incredible feeling of joy, hope and excitement. Our pilgrims shared stories, swapped gifts and learned dances from places as far away as Namibia, attended formation and training workshops, and even attended a festival in the host town Felgueiras, which was joined by the local families and broader community.

For many, their network of fellow young Vincentians back here in Australia can be relatively small. Unless there is a dedicated youth conference and community in their diocese, they are often the only young person in their conference, or the sole Youth Representative and voice on their Council. This joining together with other young people is an important moment in the Vincentian journey.

There is much to be gained for us as an organisation when we invest in our young people to join large youth gatherings and networks both locally and abroad. When we create space for them to gather, we create an intangible amount of good, and provide an energy to sustain their isolation when they return home. Essentially, we offer them hope.

Pope Francis told young people to open their hearts to other peoples and cultures, to thirst for the horizon that makes us grow.



The question for the Society is, are we helping our young people to take up this call and break down walls to seek new ways of serving and growing their faith?

Are we allowing our young people to grow their own communities and make space for those communities in our structures? Do we expect young people to only participate in a style of service created by generations gone by, or do we recognise and encourage them to live out their faith and service works in a way that makes most sense for them today?

Are we actively building communities of young Members, or are we making young Members join communities of the past?

The focus of the Society's upcoming Congress 2023+ is about revitalisation and renewal. As young people gathered in Felgueiras for the Vincentian Youth Days we were reminded that Mary arose and went with haste (Luke 1:39). So too must the Society continue to embrace with haste the enthusiasm of our youth. **R**

The hands behind our help

'In my life I want to become better and do a little good'

– Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

As part of Revitalisation Month (September), Members discuss their motivations for joining the Society and memorable moments shared with companions and fellow confrères.*

CANBERRA/GOULBURN



Fran Neuss says the Society provides support without judgement and with a lot of care and concern to make people's lives better.

Her most memorable moment took place on a very hot day just before Christmas. It had been a long week

packing Christmas hampers and she was feeling tired and a bit cranky. On her delivery run she stopped at the house of one of her Conference's regular companions and four little ones came bounding down the driveway saying, 'Fran you made it – we have been waiting all day for the Vinnies Reindeers to come'.

They were so excited to see her and the Christmas hampers with all the goodies. There are many more wonderful memories but this one stays with her. When she is feeling tired, she thinks of their little faces.



Noel Bentley started his work with the Society to pursue his interest in providing spiritual support to the disadvantaged. His works led him to specialize in Prison Chaplaincy.

His most memorable moment was becoming a Godparent to the children of a companion who had spent 14 years in prison, during three of which Noel worked as a Prison Chaplain. Noel's work with the Companion involved regular meetings and meditations. To this day Noel and the Companion still meet. In the present day, the Companion is studying at university through the Society's Clemente program and working part-time.



Paula Bounds was inspired by the works of her father who was a Vinnies volunteer and she had prior experience working with our Night Patrol in Sydney.

Being a Member has opened her eyes to the poverty that companions

face. The work has also allowed her to live out the values of the gospel by giving back and contributing to those in poverty.

She finds it important for our Members to be non-judgmental, no matter the circumstances. She also believes our Members should have patience, empathy, and be a good listener. At times our Companions just want to be heard.

'Be prepared to learn and have a variety of new experiences. Go into the role with no preconceived ideas,' Paula says.



Teresa Hamer's most memorable moment with the Society was during the 2020 bushfires when Members of both Eden and Merimbula Conferences (on the NSW South coast) joined forces and worked tirelessly for many weeks to assist hundreds of families facing utter destruction and devastation.

'It was an amazing display of cooperation, support and Vinnies spirit,' Teresa recalls.

***confrères** (French) means fellow Members of a fraternity or profession, and was the term used for Frédéric Ozanam's 'conference' of colleagues who performed charitable works in 19th century Paris.

NSW

Cameron Delaney is an active Youth Member of the Frassati Young Adult Conference in Lismore, northern NSW. He enjoys helping others – ‘The perk of supporting vulnerable people is seeing their smiles after a good chat. It helps me strengthen my faith and do what the Lord is asking me to do.’

‘I have become more engaged in my local community and I have the opportunity to interact with people of different backgrounds I wouldn’t normally get to meet.’

Rory Coffey is also a Youth Member of the Frassati Young Adult Conference in Lismore. He facilitates morning teas, conversations, concerts and games at aged care facilities, prepares snack packs for vulnerable individuals and provides outreach to communities still affected by the Lismore floods.

‘I have met so many new people in my community. My work has enabled me to be active socially through service to others,’ he says.

QUEENSLAND



Richard Calligan from Rockhampton is part of a team offering support to people placed in the watchhouse (part of the justice system). This involves listening to their stories with compassion and empathy rather than judgment and

help them in various ways, including contacting their loved ones.

‘Everyday society tends to be too focused on blaming people,’ Richard says. ‘But our job isn’t to go there to assign blame, but to be a listening ear...’

‘You don’t realise how valuable our help is for them until you call their family, usually the family is so grateful that someone has taken the time to reach out to them.’



After finishing working at the Catholic Parish in Biloela, **Ellie Verschaeren** became a Conference Member and enjoyed it from the start.

‘We are a small group of very dedicated and hard-working Members who assist people by

giving them a hand up and not a hand out. I love visiting people in our community and in Wahroonga Retirement Village, assisting our Companions with food, clothing and sometimes paying for some of their household expenses.

‘Being a part of the Vinnies family here in Biloela, both as a Conference Member and as a shop Volunteer, has become very much part of my life. I can truly say it fulfils my life.’

Theresa Nicholas from Toowoomba sees first-hand the needs of people in an underprivileged community.

‘As soon as I finished nursing I wanted to help our community, and joining St Vincent de Paul Society started my rewarding Membership journey. It is a personal gain to assist others to improve their quality of life, which gives me a sense of satisfaction, although sometimes there is frustration due to not being able to change their circumstances.’

Cathy Headford says ‘I joined the St Vincent de Paul Society in 2003 as I thought I could help make a difference to those less fortunate in our community and to do some good. Over the past 20 years I have travelled a journey of spiritual development, grown a closer relationship with God and not only done some good but hopefully also become a better person.’



In 1971, **Warren and Dianne Northey** of Townsville became Members of the St John Fisher’s Currajong Youth Conference. They have a personal conviction to assist Companions who are less fortunate and have now clocked up 52 years of

combined Vincentian service.

A large smile spreads across Warren’s face as he says kids are the most important to him. There are no words to describe the joy he gets when he hands over the groceries to their families.

‘It is also about the fellowship we have with the other Vincentians. We always look forward to the Tuesday weekly Conference meetings where we can discuss how to help others.’

‘We remember our favourite experience as helping Companions in the Men’s Hostel at Ross River Road. On weekends we cooked meals for them and it was a delight to serve them up.’

VICTORIA

Brendan Podbury has been involved with the Society's good works for the past 25 years. He says he loves being a Member of the Society and all it stands for, reaching out to those who seek our support in a non-judgemental way.

'I have met so many wonderful people, Members, Volunteers and staff, all committed to the Mission. Being a Vincentian is being part of a huge family of support'



Rohan Smith recounts 'I love that as a Vincentian I am helping continue the legacy of our founders and in following in Blessed Frédéric Ozanam's footsteps I am part of the global network of charity that he spoke about'.



Susan Dornom, a member of the Society for 34 years, says the Members of her Conference are like family - 'We have met together regularly for a long time and I still look forward to every meeting.

'Being a Member has given me the opportunity to meet and visit many interesting people. We are often unaware of the impact we make on our visits, but every now and then you can see that you have been able to make a real difference to someone's life and it is a very special feeling.

'Good works have the power to make you feel good and mixing with good people helps make me a better person.'



Ken Northwood reflects on his 20-year involvement with the Society: 'I soon found there was a real satisfaction in being able to engage with Companions in their own homes and ascertaining their real needs, to know that I could play a part in making a real difference in their lives'.



For **Louisa Selvadurai**, being a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society is how she lives out important parts of her Catholic faith – 'By serving our brothers and sisters who are struggling and by being part of the faith-led community which is the Society.'

She says, 'I have gained so much from the Society since I joined 10 years ago - wonderful friendships and memories, skills and knowledge, spiritual growth, and being able to share in a shared mission and sense of justice and compassion that reaches all around the world.

'The best part of being a Member is the privilege of entering into people's lives and helping them to improve their situation'.



Natasha Smith says that, 'As a young volunteer, I am often met with a wealth of knowledgeable Volunteers who have all prepared me for life in many ways. It has prepared me with compassion, leadership, job opportunities, teamwork skills and a new level of confidence.

'The best part of being a Volunteer will always be the warmth of helping others, particularly when faced with challenging situations, and the genuine feeling of making a positive change in someone's life'.



Anne Kotsiakos says, 'Sometimes a little help at the right time can be life-changing', adding, 'in giving we receive...'

'It is so rewarding to know you are making a positive change in the life of someone who is going through tough times, and I am grateful to be part of a welcoming, committed and happy team who have become my friends and mentors.

'I have learnt (and am still learning) a great deal and it is wonderful to feel I have a purpose again'.

'All you really need is a willingness to learn and a desire to make a difference, paired with the ability to listen and demonstrate respect, compassion, and non-judgmental attitude – and of course a sense of humour helps'.



St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani, launching the ANU report, A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia, at Parliament House with Federal MPs Alicia Payne and Bridget Archer.

Modest tax and super changes could fund major welfare boost

A report commissioned by St Vincent de Paul Society from the Australian National University (ANU) has revealed how modest changes to personal income tax, welfare and superannuation policy could significantly alleviate poverty and financial stress.

[A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia](#) was released on 4 September 2023 at Parliament House, Canberra. It comes at a time of mounting calls to review taxation and superannuation policy, with the Treasurer himself saying it is time to start discussing the tax regime.

The report from ANU's highly regarded Centre for Social Research and Methods, models three options calculated to reduce the numbers of people living in poverty. Even the most ambitious option would not impact significantly on better-off Australians, yet it could lift 834,000 people out of the poverty they currently face. The ANU report follows the recent release of Treasury's 2023 [Intergenerational Report](#) (IGR) that calls for 'an efficient, fair and sustainable tax system'.

Taxation is clearly an elephant in the room for both major parties. Suggestions of raising taxes sends a shiver through the spine of workers and business, while talk of tax cuts raises the spectre of reduced government services. This is especially concerning for organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul Society which are working exclusively with people who depend on these services to help make ends meet.

We know from research and our experience, that many Australians living in poverty rely on income support as their main source of income. We also know that the gap between income and housing costs is locking low and middle-income earners out of the property market and increasing competition for rentals. With rents soaring, and income support payments below the poverty line, a financial storm has arrived.

The IGR says an improved tax system of the future

continued over page ►

is 'vital to ensuring Australia can pay for the essential public services that will need to be delivered over the decades ahead.' All of these will come with ballooning costs, notably in the areas of health and aged care, and the NDIS. Changes to taxation will be key to this funding, including a growing government reliance on [personal income tax](#).

But we can do much more with taxation to reduce poverty. The tax system has far-reaching consequences and shapes the fabric of our society. The Stage 3 tax cuts, due to take effect from next year, are a particularly egregious example of unfairness. They will divert \$243 billion into the pockets of higher income earners over the next ten years, and the Society continues to voice our strong opposition to them.

If implemented appropriately, a more progressive tax system can reduce poverty. It was therefore heartening to see the Australian Government establish the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, formed to provide advice in the lead-up to budgets on policies to address disadvantage and boost economic participation.

Now we need to heed its advice, particularly its recommendations to increase Job Seeker, other related working age payments, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

The report, *A Fairer Tax and Welfare System*, shows that poverty is worst among JobSeeker recipients, with almost 60 per cent of JobSeeker recipients living in poverty. Working-age pension recipients, single parents, lone individuals, and renters are all grappling with terrible financial stress. *A Fairer Tax and Welfare System* highlights that after paying living costs, including housing expenses, the after-housing poverty rate in Australia is 11.7 per cent of households, or more than three million people.

The ANU report shows that when low income and high housing costs co-exist in any one geographical location, poverty increases. Four of the top five affected locations are in suburban Sydney, the west being specially impacted, and the other in outer Melbourne.

When other factors, including education and occupation, are considered, the ANU found the highest financial stress to exist in regional and remote NT, Far North Queensland, and outer Adelaide. Financial stress is also highest for households whose main source of income is JobSeeker (51 per cent), working age payments (42 per cent) and other welfare payments (48 per cent). And this is much higher than the national average, of around 14 per cent. Single parent households are more likely to experience financial stress than all other households.

Tax changes are the answer

The aim of social security is not to force people to live in poverty but to lift people up. *A Fairer Tax and Welfare System* shows how painless changes to the tax system could demonstrably boost welfare and lift many thousands of Australians out of their current unacceptable circumstances. Simply put, decisive action could reduce the number of households in poverty from 11.7 per cent to 8.6 per cent and give 834,000 Australians a fresh start to life.

We need to consider the younger generations, or those without savings or property. They cannot be sacrificed just to balance the budget or lower inflation. Fairness must be the key consideration for our tax and welfare system. As shown in the IGR report, there is a real danger of an unfair burden being placed on the younger generation.

We can have a fairer tax and welfare system, we can help lower and middle-income earners, and we can reduce poverty. On any given night over 122,000 Australians are homeless. It is high time we had a fairer society for all.

Report proves it can be done

A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia models reforms to personal income taxation thresholds, the capital gains tax discount, and superannuation tax concessions. It lifts the tax-free threshold from \$18,200 to \$24,000 per year for the modest and high options described.

Low option (\$4BN):

This would lift 193,000 people out of poverty by increasing JobSeeker by \$176 per fortnight (pf) and Parenting Payment by \$167 (pf).

Modest option (\$10BN):

This would lift 491,000 people out of poverty by increasing JobSeeker by \$249 (pf), Parenting Payment by \$238 (pf), and Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment by \$69 (pf).

High option (\$20BN):

This would lift 834,000 people out of poverty by increasing JobSeeker by \$338 pf, Parenting Payment by \$351 (pf), Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment by \$249 (pf), the Family Tax Benefit A by 20 per cent, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 25 per cent.

The ANU modelling shows that the proposed tax changes would also increase average superannuation balances for early career people with lower and middle income and wealth by around 16 per cent. **R**

From car bed to campus

Garry Liakoureas recounts his journey out of homelessness with the help of VincentCare's Ozanam House.

I am sitting in my lab reading the latest Census statistics. Every night more than 122,000 Australians are estimated to be experiencing homelessness and the figure continues to rise. In the next laboratory three students I oversee are working on data for my research paper. I am undertaking my PhD at one of Australia's most esteemed universities.

I lean back and take a deep breath. Seven years ago, I would never have thought it possible. Seven years ago, during the most difficult time in my life, I was living in my car – I was a number in those statistics.

Before this, my life had been good. I had a thriving business and consultancy, investment properties, a new car every two to three years, leisure, a happy family life, friends and support.

But a dramatic life event and years of self-neglect changed my life and I was overwhelmed by acute depression and anxiety.

I was mentally, physically and emotionally paralysed, unable to perform life's basic tasks. I communicated with no one; not my family, not my friends. Ultimately, my family and I lost everything, including our home. Separated from my wife and with my family relocated, I started living in my car. Embarrassed and ashamed, I told no one.

Alone and uncertain of what was to come and why this had happened, I had no clue where I would end up. I can't recollect the watershed moment that led me to where I am today, all I remember is making a phone call to a service, unsure of what help to ask for.

What happened next changed my life: I was offered a room at Ozanam House, in North Melbourne, a crisis accommodation centre run by VincentCare part of St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria.

4.00 PM Friday, 17 February 2017 was my induction – a time and date engraved in my memory.

Ozanam House offers a comprehensive support system under the one roof that is a vital step towards achieving long-lasting, sustainable solutions for homelessness. We need more services like that, where those accessing services are offered personalised ways of support to break the cycle.

The Ozanam House model is more than just providing



Garry Liakoureas at CEO Sleepout

food and accommodation. It offers extended crisis accommodation with access to nurses, a GP, a dentist, a podiatrist and an optometrist. You can connect with Centrelink, access legal and financial information and support, and people who will guide, mentor and get to know you. There's no stigma, no judgement, this is a safe port.

Being at Ozanam House helped me regain trust in others and I accessed every service on offer. Acupuncture assisted me with my motivation, art therapy showed me I had an expressive and calm quality (who knew?), and boxing and exercise began my weight loss journey.

Each contributed to who I am today. Joining the Client Volunteer Program, where clients and residents spend time volunteering at the centre, gave me the feeling I had purpose again.

The care is genuine. It made me feel I mattered, and that experiencing homelessness was just an unfortunate part of my story.

Just like people, homelessness is complex. No one has the same story and the solution is not a 'one-size-fits all' outcome. Behind the statistics are people and personalities, all with individual stories and needs. **R**



PHOTO: JONATHAN KHO MING JUN ON UNSPLASH

It's high time to end homelessness

People rolling out swags to bed down for the night in the doorways of office buildings. In some cities, the bedding stays there day in-day out, untouched by passersby or authorities – the alcoves have become permanent homes.

Others curl up on park benches, on the back seat of cars or hang a tarpaulin between trees hoping to create some weather protection and privacy.

These are not scenes from an impoverished country or an apocalyptic movie, but common activities right across Australia.

The theme for Homelessness Week 2023 (7-13 August) was “It’s time to End Homelessness”, highlighting an all-too-real issue for many of the people we assist, and a front of mind challenge for our members, volunteers and staff.

‘All over the country, requests for assistance are increasing and we are seeing people who have previously never sought our help,’ said National President, Mark Gaetani.

‘More and more people are seeking emergency relief to cover the basics, such as food vouchers, while they

prioritise accommodation costs over other essentials. These are choices Australians should not have to make.’

Statistics show more than 122,000 people are homeless each night, with children accounting for one-in-seven. One-in-five homeless are First Nations people and 23 per cent are aged 12-24.

Stressing the need for governments to act urgently, Mr Gaetani said, ‘According to [Homelessness Australia](#) up to half of those seeking assistance do so because of housing or finances, including rent. It is time to end homelessness in this country.

‘Charities cannot carry the burden of homelessness on their own. More people are in need and the Society is finding it increasingly difficult to meet the demand within our resources,’ he added.

Read the Society’s latest [housing and homelessness](#) advocacy materials for details on our policy position and calls for governments action.

[Housing and Homelessness Paper \(vinnies.org.au\)](#) **R**



At the Parliament House launch of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) report were (l-r) Ivan Simon, CEO NATSIHA, Kate Colvin, CEO Homelessness Australia, Selina Walker, Ngunnawal elder, Josh Burns MP, and the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Julie Collins MP.

First Nations women worst affected by housing crisis

A report launched recently at Parliament House has confirmed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the effects of homelessness resulting from the nation's housing crisis.

The [Wiyi Yani U Thangani \(Women's Voices\)](#) report was the focus of the Ending First Nations Homelessness meeting held during Homelessness Week 2023. It highlighted Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data showing the number of First Nations women and girls seeking help has hit 16,535 per month, up 29 per cent in the five years since March 2018.

The Australian Human Rights Commission and the National Indigenous Australians Agency have partnered to elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO, said the project reveals that poor quality and overcrowded housing has a profound impact on the safety of women and children, and on all other aspects of women's lives.

'In every engagement for Wiyi Yani U Thangani, housing was at the forefront of women's priorities,' Dr Oscar said.

'Women were living with large families in houses with broken doors and windows, holes in the walls and no air conditioning. There were many reports of raw sewage and exposed wiring, along with many other hazards. It is not hard to understand that these conditions fuel and compound a range of other issues, such as poor physical and mental health issues.

'Women described households with high rates of unemployment, because of a lack of job opportunities, contributing to disengagement, despair and high rates of drug and alcohol use.

'This toxic mix could frequently lead to violence against women and children, and time again we heard there was nowhere to escape to. We also heard how this causes children to roam streets in groups at night to stay away from unsafe households, or to go in search of food.

'Ultimately women attributed all of these issues to a systems failure, of not investing in housing and not appreciating that housing is a fundamental part of our cultural lives, as well as community, social, economic and regional development.'

Ivan Simon, CEO of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA), said, 'The stark reality is that our First Nations women bear a disproportionate burden in the challenge of securing safe and secure housing in this country.

'We must significantly increase the commitment to funding and resourcing equitable housing solutions, empowering our First Nations communities and taking meaningful steps toward closing the gap once and for all.'

The meeting was hosted by Aboriginal Housing Victoria, Homelessness Australia and NATSIHA. The CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, Toby oConnor, attended the launch on behalf of National Council and as a member of the housing advocacy body National Shelter. **R**



(l-r) CEO St Vincent de Paul Society South Australia, Evelyn O'Loughlin, CEO Canberra/Goulburn, Lucy Hohnen, Spiritual Advisor Sr Therese Haywood DC, CEO Tasmania, Heather Kent, CEO NSW Yolanda Saiz and Queensland State President Trish McMahon. (Absent) Northern Territory President Jocelyn Cull, CEO Victoria, Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald AM (appointed 6 July 2023), and CEO WA, Susan Rooney.

In the footsteps of our founders

An unprecedented number of women are serving in senior volunteer and executive roles at St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, with National Council members including Spiritual Advisor Sr Therese Haywood DC, a member of the [Congregation of Daughters of Charity](#), founded by Saint Vincent de Paul and Louise Marillac in 1633.

The founding members of the Society, led by Frédéric Ozanam, developed their method of service under the guidance of Daughters of Charity Sister [Rosale Rendu](#) who was prominent in serving the poor in the slums of Paris.

Sr Therese's parents were Vincentians and it was their example that encouraged her to join the Society, first as an employee and later as a volunteer.

'Each person brings their unique experience to the Society,' she says.

'Women bring their varied backgrounds which can include caring roles and experiences of disadvantage that men in our society often don't experience.'

Other female members of National Council are Queensland State President Ms Trish McMahon and Northern Territory President Ms Jocelyn Cull, both of whom have been involved with the Society for around ten years.

In addition, six jurisdictions of the Society are now being led by female CEOs. While their periods of employment vary, most have prior involvements with the Society, including familial links that introduced them to our ethos and work.

Western Australia CEO (of six years) Ms Susan Rooney says, 'I was brought up in a Vincentian family with my father and mother being Members for decades so I have a strong connection from my very years to the work of the Society. I therefore felt very drawn to the role as CEO, knowing the impact the Society has in the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged people - it was a little like coming home.'

NSW CEO Ms Yolanda Saiz, who previously held other roles within the organisation, tells the story of a fundraiser with the Vietnamese community in Western Sydney.

‘Women bring compassion, empathy and understanding to the Society’

– Northern Territory State President, Jocelyn Cull

‘After the dinner, an elderly Vietnamese woman approached me and told me that her grandson had recently become a doctor. She recounted that at the end of high school he didn’t want to pursue study and was a little lost. She told him that he had an obligation to make a difference and contribute because Vinnies had believed in her and her family when they had arrived in Australia as refugees.

‘That he had to pay it forward and make that count for something. She then handed me a significant donation and thanked me for what we had done for her and so many in the Vietnamese community at a time of great prejudice and where others had not stepped forward.

‘That story has stuck with me. It is not only the difference we are making today but into the future.’

Queensland State President Trish McMahon, whose father was a Vincentian, says, ‘The Society provides the opportunity for us to really make a difference on a daily basis, personally assisting those less fortunate in our community.’

Nowhere is the need greater than in the Northern Territory. As NT President Jocelyn Cull says, ‘There is a huge amount of poverty and disadvantage, particularly amongst our First Nations People.’

In 2015 she joined the St Mary’s Conference in Darwin: ‘I wanted to help where I could, and the Society was on the ground making a difference. Our innovative approach has seen us deliver more services to those in need, often in remote areas traditionally overlooked by other entities.’

Addressing the Society’s advocacy work, in addition to our support for families and individuals in need, Dr Jennifer Fitzgerald, Victoria CEO – whose mother was a dedicated St Vincent de Paul Society Volunteer – says, ‘I envisage a future where every person, regardless of their circumstances, has access to housing, support, resources and opportunities they need to thrive.’

On the role of women and their strengths, NT’s State President, Jocelyn Cull says ‘Women bring compassion, empathy and understanding to the Society. We are also resilient and innovative in our dealings with others.

‘I think sometimes there is a deeper sense of empathy and compassion shown by women that delivers a more subtle but strong approach to our work’

– Tasmania CEO, Heather Kent

Similar to our male counterparts, we care about others and do what we can to assist and make things better in our community.’

NSW’s Yolanda Saiz adds, ‘Women have played an important role in the history of the Society, from St Louise de Marillac to Rosalie Rendu.

‘There has been a lot of research highlighting that organisations with diversity and more female leadership outperform other organisations. Whilst not unique to women, many female leaders demonstrate strong emotional intelligence and natural empathy - both incredibly important in today’s leadership.’

Tasmania’s Heather Kent says, ‘I think sometimes there is a deeper sense of empathy and compassion shown by women that delivers a more subtle but strong approach to our work. In a busy and complex organisation, the capacity to do a thousand things at once is always handy and sometimes our balancing act in our private lives (caring for elderly parents, children, making time for personal growth, etc) can help to build our ability to juggle professional roles too.’ **R**

Replenishment of membership is absolutely vital

Patrick Wallis is a Vice President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council with a focus on youth. He discusses his interests, ambitions and lengthy attachment to the Society over a coffee with Robin Osborne.

As my mother would say, Patrick Wallis is 'one of those people who could do almost anything'.

So far this has included an Honours degree in Chemical Engineering at Curtin University (WA), an MBA in progress, helping run a major cinema, and managing coffee shops run by Perth's high-performing Modus group.

'Effectively I'm just an overqualified barista,' Patrick quips, although he does some hard yards, starting work before 6.00am each day.

Patrick is proficient with various instruments, including piano, guitar and clarinet, with some mandolin and ukulele for good measure. He sings, too, which I fully believe, although he was unwilling to demonstrate when he visited the Society's Secretariate office in Canberra when attending the National Council's June meeting.

He plays hockey, enjoys drawing and wood whittling, camping and hiking, and bought a van that he is converting into a camper – 'extremely slowly, when I have a bit of spare cash'.

Patrick can also drink eight coffees a day without apparent ill effect, although he realises this is not ideal and is trying to restrict himself to two or three. This would put him roughly in line with Italy's national average of four a day. Patrick's family is of Italian and Irish extraction, and one of his favourite pastimes is visiting the vegetable and herb patch at his nonna's (grandmother's) house.

He has a commitment to the farm-to-table concept and plans to establish himself in the hospitality industry when the time is right.

'People running hospitality businesses often have the skills to prepare and serve food and drink but lack the business skills to make things viable. You need more than passion,' Patrick says.

His future hopes include a 'coffee-specialty cocktail bar' using ingredients such as cherry coffee (the newly picked



beans before dehusking and roasting), and restaurants featuring locally sourced produce. Patrick is vegetarian himself but has no issues with serving meat as long as it is ethically farmed.

Running social enterprise venues, for instance cafes and restaurants training and employing at-risk young people, is also on his drawing board.

Another culinary passion is fermenting – think sauerkraut and kim-chi – especially tomato products. He's working on the perfect formula using tomatoes from his nonna's garden.

When I ask about the correlation between his degree and daily life the subject of coffee again comes up. It's mostly to do with the water, Patrick explains.

'Bear in mind that a cup of coffee is 98 per cent water, and it's essential to get this ingredient right. Most cafes have water filters using reverse osmosis, but the challenge is not to remove all the chemicals apart from the hydrogen and oxygen, the H₂O, but to leave enough of the right chemicals to attach to the coffee and bring out the flavour... the key is finding the middle ground, and a lot of places don't get it right.'

Where coffee is sourced is also important, and for the record his favourite beans at present come from Ethiopia, Kenya and Colombia. He stresses the importance of 'traceability', not just the well promoted concept of 'single origin', 'Which means nothing because it can be a mix of variable product from across a whole country. Sourcing quality beans from individual farms is the best way of ensuring consistency.'

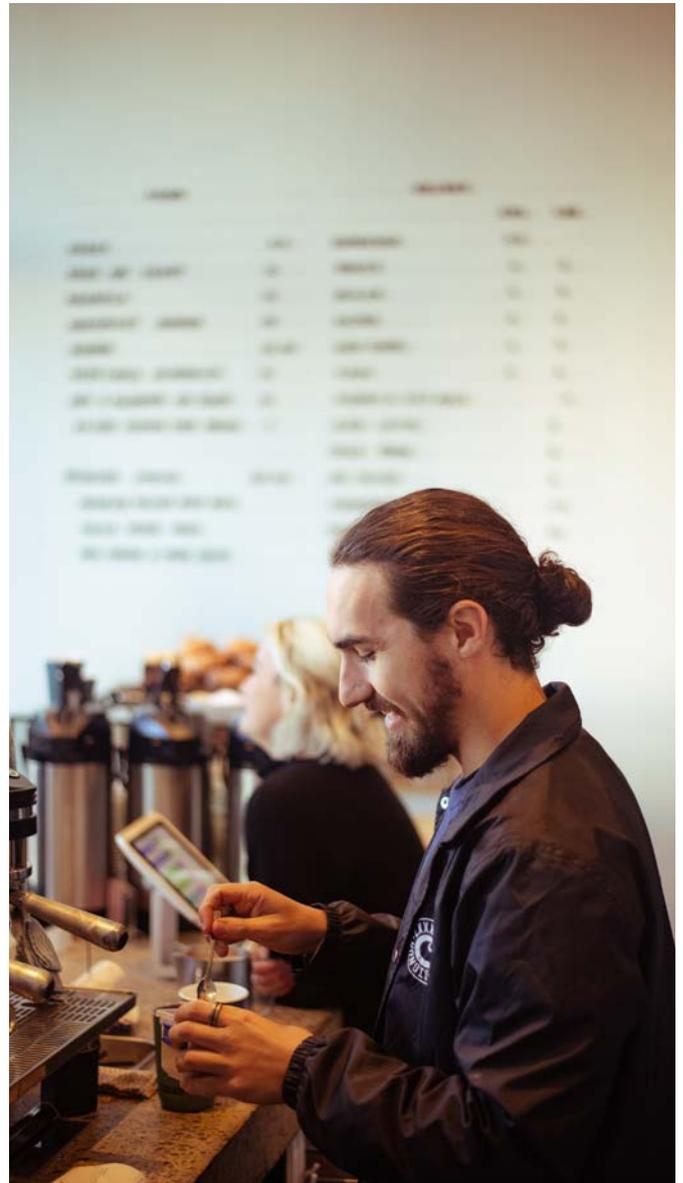
The other half of Patrick's life involves the St Vincent de Paul Society, an engagement that began in high school in 2009 when he joined the Mazenod College Conference, later becoming its President and continuing his involvement into university.

This commitment is in the family blood, as his father had run a drop-in centre for homeless people in Perth, offering food, financial counselling and other support, and his mother was an active school teacher. Patrick attended Vinnies youth camps, later becoming a camp leader, and was impressed by the ethos of the Society and the success of diversion programs for young people doing it tough.

Later he became the state youth representative in WA, ideal preparation for his new role as a National Council Vice-President with a particular focus on youth, including the challenges of attracting and retaining young Vincentians. He is also on the Society's international territorial committee for Oceania.

'I am often asked what I get out of volunteering by being removed from ground-level work and working directly with people who are vulnerable and suffering. I think of the words of Rosalie Rendu about being able to serve those in need in different ways and aspiring to a more complete and longer-lasting benefit for our companions.

'Long-term change comes from all areas and I believe that all Vincentians make an impact, no matter the work. However, it's clear that youth are the Society's future and we must do everything possible to encourage a greater involvement from young people, ranging from Mini Vinnies groups through to secondary schools, higher education and into young adulthood. Replenishment of membership is absolutely vital.



Patrick Wallis in barista mode.

'The National Council is driven to make a transparent One Society. One that does not differentiate age, race, gender, or any other silo. A Society that truly engulfs both Australia and the world in a network of charity.

'We are in such a fortunate position as an organisation to make real systemic change on every level. Our members are on the ground serving those who are suffering, yet are also able to advocate on behalf of and with our Companions on a federal level.

'We are drivers of change in Australia and through the support of all Vincentians we continue to make a difference in the lives of thousands of people every day.' **R**

Yes or No... the referendum can be a vote for action

Regardless of the result, the Voice referendum – held after *The Record* went to press – should provide a strong incentive for the government to develop and enact policies informed by what First Nations people believe will benefit them most.

St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani, explained that, ‘The divisiveness aside, this milestone referendum, the first in 24 years, has put the need for better policy development and service delivery on First Nations’ matters right at the top of the agenda.

‘This is an ideal opportunity for the Albanese Government, as well as State and Territory Governments, to better listen to what First Nations people want and for the Opposition to support urgent action on improved services and proper justice for Australia’s First Nations families and communities.

‘We applaud Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia for introducing initiatives that seek to consult with local First Nations people on matters that concern them.

‘We hope government has heard the message that the great majority of Indigenous citizens of our country want things that affect them to be done differently.

‘There’s an old saying, “Never let a good crisis go to waste”, and we urge our parliamentary leaders not to let this occasion slip by.’

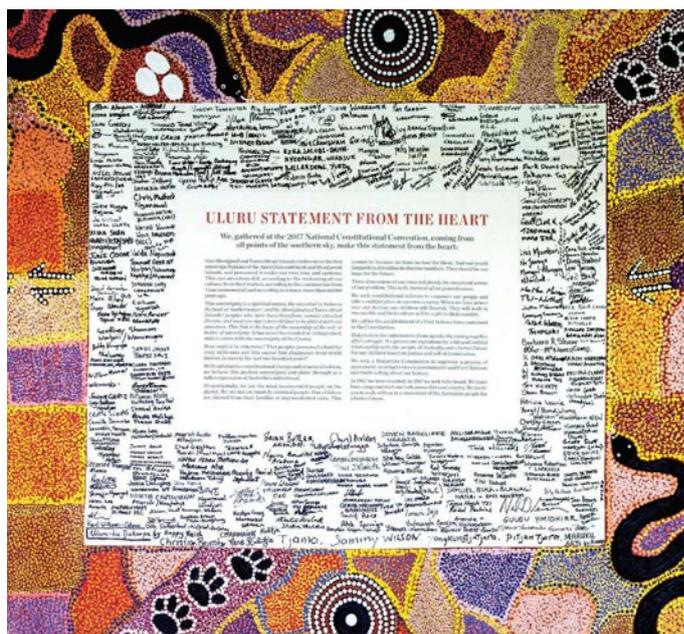
In the lead-up to polling, the Society confirmed it was putting its ‘heart, soul and prayers’ into supporting the Yes case for enshrining a First Nations voice in the Australian Constitution.

Mr Gaetani said the Society’s position reflected that of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

‘Their website, [One Journey Together](#), explains how supporting The Voice aligned with Catholic Social Teaching principles,’ he added.

‘Our position on the Voice was firmly based on the values of our founders who two centuries ago showed courageous advocacy and fought for equality for all before the law.

‘The Society has long-standing connections with the First Nations people of Australia, and we are well acquainted with the challenges they continue to experience. Depending on the location, between ten



and twenty per cent of all people assisted by the Society identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

‘There have been few significant improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of our First Nations peoples, despite decades of changed governments and policies.’

Mr Gaetani said, ‘Whatever the result of the vote, we hope and pray that the Albanese Government will put more effort into developing ways for First Nations people to provide meaningful input into the development of policies that impact on their wellbeing and advancement.

‘Regardless of the schisms this referendum has opened up, it has highlighted that all right-minded people support fairness for First Nations people.

‘The Society will continue to work closely with Indigenous-led and faith-based organisations to improve the daily lives of the almost one million Australians of First Nations heritage.’

‘We are deeply concerned about the personal impacts of the referendum on many Australians, especially First Nations people. The Society will do everything possible to assist with healing the emotional scars resulting from the divisiveness of the campaign and the outcome of the vote.

‘Of course, we must respect Australians’ democratic will, but things will need to be calmed down. Unfortunately, the many challenges facing First Nations people will continue.

A No win would not mean an end to the gaps in mortality and morbidity rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Conversely, a Yes vote would not automatically stop young Aboriginal kids going to jail or falling behind in their education. Closing these gaps are among the goals we must work for.

‘This referendum is only the latest step on the long road to achieving a truly fair Australia for everyone.’ **R**

FIRST NATIONS CONFERENCES



First Nations Conferences to care for local community

The St Vincent de Paul Society has established First Nations Conferences in Walgett and Moree to empower and meet the needs of local communities.

The word *Guniinii* translates to “queen bee” in the language of the Gamilaraay traditional custodians. The word carries additional meaning as the name representing the St Vincent de Paul Society’s newly formed First Nations Conference in Moree.

‘The whole idea being that the queen bee looks after the whole community and it grows, provides,’ says Phil Donnan, St Vincent de Paul Society North West Regional Director.

Conceived by a group of three First Nations women, working in coordination with the Society’s membership team, the Conference aims to serve the needs of the community and has since grown to eight Members.

A naming and blessing ceremony for the *Guniinii* Conference was held at the St Pius X Chapel, with members of the Conference coming from all three distinct parts of the First Nations community in Moree.

According to Phil Donnan, the success of the initiative is in combining the Society’s resources with people understanding the needs of where they live.

‘Rather than us saying, ‘this is what we think you want’, it’s them saying ‘this is what we need’. We’re allowing them control of their own destiny using our resourcing and within our mission.’

‘It’s incredible to see the energy and enthusiasm and we’re thrilled to be able to resource them to make a change in their community.’

The initiative to establish First Nations Conferences originated in Walgett after the previous Conference had been disbanded for a number of years.

After establishing relationships with the local community, an inaugural First Nations Conference was established in Walgett in late 2022, which saw people reach out for assistance for the first time due to the connection of the conference with the community.

By establishing First Nations Conferences, the Society aims to increase cultural knowledge across the wider membership base as a whole.

‘One of the issues for us is to be culturally appropriate with First Nations people. We’ll be engaging with these Conferences to train and educate our existing members on being more appropriate and relatable, so there will be better engagement at all levels of the organisation.’

The establishment of First Nations Conferences is one of the actions the Society has taken as part of the current Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations people.

Plans are underway for the *Guniinii* Conference to complement the existing St Therese Conference by establishing a drop-in centre and offering financial aid programs such as EAPA and NILS in Moree, while Members in Walgett are engaging with local elders to formally name their Conference. **R**



Gavin Dufty presenting at the 2023 Energy Networks Regulation Seminar, "New Horizons: Regulation and the Energy Transition".

Fairness essential for tomorrow's zero carbon economy

BY GAVIN DUFTY

Policy and Research Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

We are currently transitioning from a fossil fuel to a zero carbon economy, probably in less than 30 years.

Even by 2030, at least AU\$1.5 trillion of investment will be needed on large-scale infrastructure, such as transmission lines and renewable energy generation.

Additionally, most households will be making their own investments. For example, if five million households spent \$50,000 on energy improvements such as electric vehicles, converting reticulated gas to electric appliances, home batteries, and other smart home energy technologies, there will be an additional \$250 billion worth of direct household spending.

This transformation of our energy system, and hence the foundations of our economy, will impact every household now and in the future.

This presents huge opportunities for inclusion and equity, but also creates enormous risks, potentially leaving low income and other disadvantaged households behind, excluded from new technologies and burdened with disproportionate costs and low value services and products.

Consumer-focused investments in the transmission and distribution networks, and large-scale renewable generation, must be coordinated in order to support all households, not just those with new technologies.

Renters in high-rises, many of them public housing tenants, must be able to access low-cost renewable energy. People with special needs, such as disability, pensioners and single parents, must have the opportunity to access low-cost renewable energy. And we must not load the cost burden on future generations.

Inequity a risk in gas switch-off

In a [recent report](#) with national relevance, the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) noted that disadvantaged groups are at serious risk of being negatively impacted by the switch away from fossil fuels, especially gas.

Supporting a fair, fast and inclusive energy transition in the ACT said, 'We must ensure that a fair and equitable transition for vulnerable households, including renters and those on lower incomes, remains a priority...

'If consideration of equity is left until last, there is a risk that the transition away from gas will further entrench disadvantage in the ACT and leave the most vulnerable Canberrans facing higher utilities costs, more health risks and less efficient homes.'

Regarding what it called 'Energy hardship', the report explained that, 'People on low incomes spend a greater proportion of their incomes on essentials, including energy bills... Across the country, the number of utilities hardship customers has been increasing, as has the average level of debt incurred and the number of hardship customers holding debt for longer than two years.'

Equity challenges include inefficient housing, low incomes, and high energy costs, with many households reducing their use of heaters and going without food or medication to pay the bills.

Low-income households and renters are particularly vulnerable to energy hardship. These households face what is often called the 'poverty premium' as the upfront costs of transitioning from gas to energy efficient appliances and resources such as solar panels and household battery storage systems prevent them from accessing significant long-term energy savings.

Low quality housing is associated with ill health, including "respiratory infections, asthma, lead poisoning, injuries" and poor mental health. Forgoing food or medicine also compromises health, and having to make decisions about which things to sacrifice can induce significant stress and mental ill-health. Living in a house that uses gas also directly affects health and exposes residents to a complex range of pollutants.

'The poverty premium prevents many low-income households from moving away from gas... Currently, the level of incentive to transition for people on the margin is extremely low and people are generally unwilling to take on extra financial risk when they already have a low income.'

ACTCOSS chief executive Dr Devin Bowles said, 'There are technical issues in transitioning off gas that mean we need to be really thoughtful about how we do it or we're going to entrench inequity.' **R**

In short, we need to ensure the costs are allocated fairly and equitably.

In the past, households with new technologies have been able to avoid costs, with these being reallocated to other consumers.

We need to ensure that as energy efficient technology comes further into play, it is coordinated in a way that supports all households, not just the privileged. We need future-focused and clear pricing platforms for both associated costs and rewards.

The lagging pace of the current regulatory framework is creating potential inequities. Governments need to review and ensure that their complementary measures, such as energy concession frameworks, and other supports for low income and disadvantaged households, are well targeted, appropriately funded and durable through this energy transition.

Finally, as governments move to outlaw new (primarily piped gas) connections and phase out gas use, we should ensure we have the right policy settings to ensure nobody is left behind.

Transitioning households to all-electric homes or zero carbon alternatives will carry significant costs, including stranded assets risk and the managing of depreciation costs of the current gas networks. It also has huge implications in terms of costs to retrofit households.

St Vincent de Paul Society is deeply concerned about the potential for an inequitable transition to net zero and we need to ensure that all Australians are able to participate in the no-carbon future. The most vulnerable must not be left to face increased costs in a new economy. **R**

Life after Australia's refugee shame

It had been six years since Tim McKenna first met Shaminda Kanapathi and the locations and their moods could not have been more different.

In 2017, Shaminda, a Hindu Tamil refugee from Sri Lanka, was being held in the Australian-run detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Dr McKenna was visiting on behalf of St Vincent de Paul Society's refugee network, and the overall picture was grim.

Today, Shaminda is a free man, living in the safety of distant Finland, able to work, even travel without restriction. Needless to say, there were smiles all round when they reunited.

'Shaminda's looking and doing incredibly well,' Dr McKenna told *The Record* after returning from a European holiday that included a detour to visit his friend, now living close to the capital, Helsinki.

'He's even planning a trip to meet up with his family in a third country. The sad thing is that he still can't go home, despite the political troubles in Sri Lanka supposedly being long over.'

Back in 2013, Shaminda was interviewed by the Sri Lankan authorities on suspicion of supporting the militant Tamils whose revolt was only ended by a brutal government crackdown.

Yet Shaminda was not involved in such support, nor did he live in the Tamil north where the civil war had raged. Living in Colombo, he counted many non-Tamils as his friends.

But after the way the interview was conducted, he feared for his life, so he bought an air ticket and fled his homeland.

In southeast Asia, where he travelled for six months, he sought a path to safety, despite setbacks such as losing money and his passport to people smugglers. Desperate, he bought a passage to what he hoped would be the sanctuary of Australia.

Instead, the boatload of asylum seekers from various perilous places reached Christmas Island in July 2013 and were placed in the purpose-built detention centre.

For Shaminda, things got progressively worse. Under the so-called "PNG Solution" he was transferred to distant Manus Island, joining asylum seekers whom successive Australian governments had ruled would be "processed" offshore in order to stop them claiming sanctuary on the mainland.



Dr Tim McKenna, chair of the Vincentian Refugee Network, visited Sri Lankan Tamil refugee Shaminda Kanapathi in the safety of his new home near Helsinki, Finland. Photo: Margot McKenna

'He feared for his life, so he bought an air ticket and fled his homeland'

The time (years) passed slowly and badly (suicides, violence from guards, poor health and minimal care). Shaminda, whose command of English was excellent, helped fellow detainees with communications, including writing refugee applications to countries that might be more compassionate than Australia.

During this time Reza Barati, a young Iranian Kurd, was beaten to death by guards and other contractors during a violent rampage inside the centre. In August 2023, the Australian Government and the security firm G4S confidentially settled civil proceedings with Barati's parents.

Four years after his incarceration, a period in which Australia continued to breach the UN's refugee conventions, Shaminda met Tim McKenna who was visiting PNG on behalf of the Vincentian Refugee Network and the Canberra-based group, Manus Lives Matter.

'It was April 2017,' Dr McKenna recalls, 'and Shaminda met me at Manus airport. I found him an intelligent, pleasant and engaging fellow. He and one other Tamil refugee stayed with us at the lodge on the outskirts of Lorengau where the other men came to meet us over the next five days.'

Just before we arrived there was a notorious shooting incident, when PNG military lifted rifles from the armoury

and fired into the refugee compound. Apart from the trauma of being shot at, the refugees were particularly upset with the Minister (Peter Dutton) suggesting it was due to an incident relating to a child, an assertion which thankfully the local police commander [dismissed](#).

'Later, I was able to socialise with Shaminda and some of the other refugees. He said at the time it was the happiest day and evening he'd spent on Manus.'

Returning in October, Dr McKenna found the camp in the process of closing down and the authorities trying to coerce the inmates to move into accommodation around the township. Then came the suicide of a Tamil refugee named Rajeev whose death had to be explained to his friend by Dr McKenna, with Shaminda as translator.

And so it went on, with neglect, brutality and increasing restiveness from men forced together with little to do and no hope for their future.

'Regular deaths and the attempted suicides of men on Manus was one of the most upsetting things for him', Dr McKenna recalls. 'It was an appalling situation.'

Fast forward to mid-2019, by which time the broader Manus community, which is majority Catholic and includes Vincentians, demanded the men be moved off the island and the PNG Government agreed. Within months they were taken to the capital Port Moresby, where nearly 80 remain to this day.

'Life there wasn't easy either,' Dr McKenna says of the last time he'd seen Shaminda in early 2020. 'I noticed all the men, including Shaminda, were deteriorating mentally and physically in Port Moresby.'

'Port Moresby had its own difficulties with security and with medical treatment remaining poor. The hopes of safe resettlement for the refugees remained – and for those still there today, continue to remain – at all-time lows. The hopelessness of their situation clouds everything.'

Shaminda, now aged 32, has finally escaped the nightmare cycle. Following an arrangement brokered by UNHCR he was able to leave PNG in late 2020 for Finland, a place where he has established friendships, including Tamil and non-Tamil Sri Lankans, made impressive steps in learning a difficult language, and taken two jobs in the hope of saving to start his own business.

'I'm blown away by what he's achieved so quickly in a very foreign land,' Dr McKenna says. 'but sadly there are nearly 80 still held in PNG, many of them with no path to safe resettlement.'

'At least a dozen are so sick that they need immediate evacuation to Australia. Without specialist treatment in Australia their health issues will never be addressed.'

'Shaminda is now safe and well, but his friends still in PNG are not. The Australian Government says it now has no responsibility for those still in PNG because the previous government signed an agreement to that effect in 2021,' Dr McKenna says.

'This is cruel nonsense. Even Labor's own national platform states that Australia retains an obligation to support these people, whom Australia sent there against their will, despite whatever agreements the previous government made.' **R**

Protesting 10 years of Australia's shame

St Vincent de Paul Society joined a protest rally in Canberra on 23 July to mark the tenth anniversary of then-PM Kevin Rudd's 'stop the boats' ban on people seeking genuine asylum in Australia.

The ruling was continued by the Coalition and is still followed by the Albanese government. The impact: thousands fleeing for their lives have suffered physical and emotional trauma, not least for children. Up to 1200 people brought to Australia from offshore holding centres are still denied permanent residency here.

Speakers included Mostafa "Moz" Azimitabar who sued the Australian government for unlawful imprisonment after spending 14 months in isolated detention in Melbourne hotels.

[Vinnies calls for just and humane treatment for all refugees and asylum seekers.](#) **R**





Support for parliamentary inquiry into detention

In advance of Catholic World Day of Migrants and Refugees (24 September), the Society welcomed the Australian Labor Party's recent decision to support a parliamentary inquiry into immigration detention.

The policy was added to the ALP's platform at the recent National Conference in Brisbane.

The Society urged the Government to commence the parliamentary inquiry before the end of this year. Backing the inquiry is one of the priority items in the Society's newly updated [Policy on People Seeking Asylum](#), which has been presented to the Australian Government.

'We believe that, is a suitable time to focus attention on the secrecy that has surrounded immigration detention in the offshore facilities under Australia's control as well as here on the mainland,' said National President, Mark Gaetani.

Pope Francis' theme for the Day is '[Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay](#)', highlighting that no one should be forced to flee their country seeking safety but if they do they should be welcomed and protected.

Mr Gaetani said, 'People go into exile through no fault of their own, and we must show compassion when they come to us seeking refuge.'

'Australia has consistently failed to heed the Pope's message to 'welcome and protect' refugees coming here by boat, although in the last eighteen months there has been some improvement.

'From the stories told by refugees and the experiences of our members there is no doubt that our treatment of many people seeking asylum has been unjust and callous, and that this continues.

'Labor's platform says we will treat people seeking our protection with dignity and compassion, and as a nation we must not harm people seeking refuge. But we need to know the full truth about the cruelty, both offshore and in Australia.



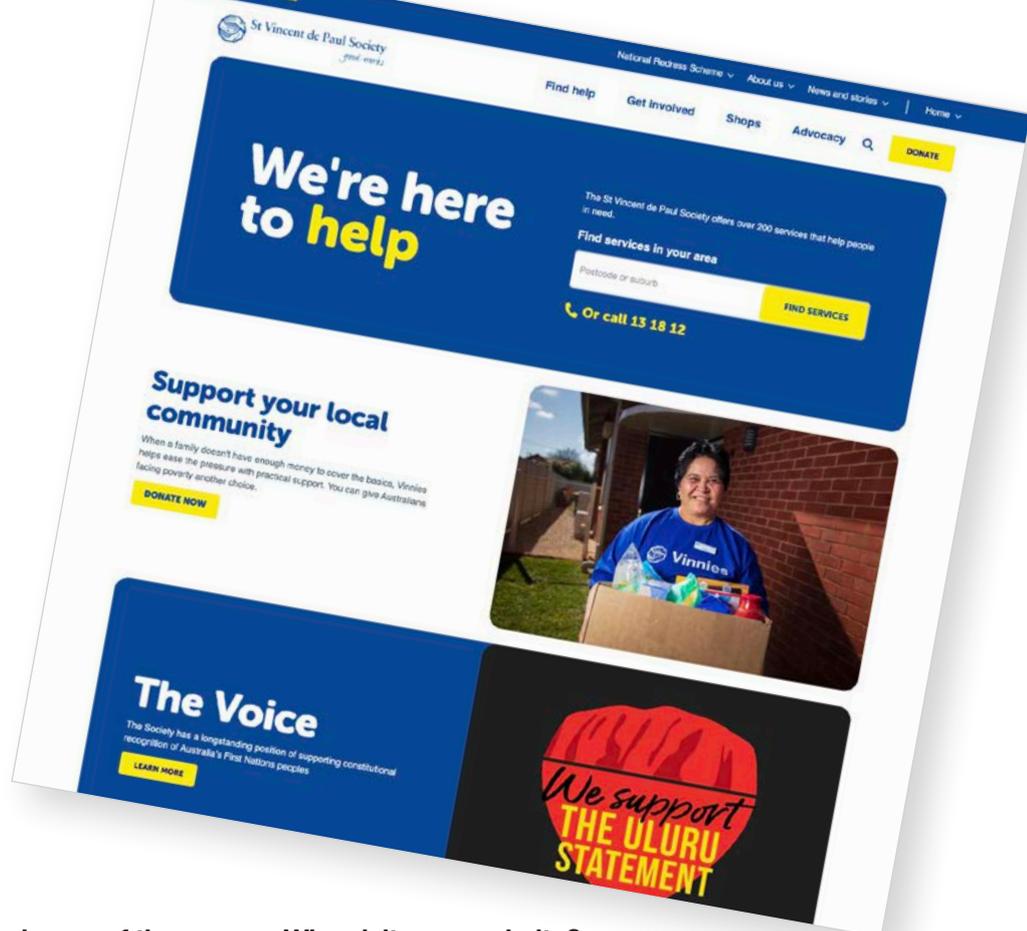
'So the Society welcomes Labor's new policy to initiate a parliamentary inquiry, which should have a key aim of getting quick action to eliminate the remaining injustices,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society calls on Catholics to use the [booklet](#) issued by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) to pray for all migrants and refugees on 24 September.

The Society invites Catholics to sign a [letter from people of faith](#) urging the transfer to Australia of refugees and people seeking asylum still held in Papua New Guinea. Australians are also invited to sign a similar [letter to their Federal MP](#). **R**

OUR WEBSITE

Behind the scenes at vinnies.org.au



St Vincent de Paul Society website is one of the main ways the community interacts with the Society and our services, and learns about our important advocacy work.

Let's dig deeper to find out about the people who use our website and what they look for.

Our new website was launched on 9 May this year. The project that led to the new national website took a collaborative approach to project management and stakeholder engagement.

During this project, Tasmania and Western Australia joined the new national website (after operating separate sites) and Queensland is currently doing the same. With all states and territories represented on the one site we can provide a better experience for our website visitors.

Since the launch, over 713,000 people have visited our website.

At any one time around 260 people across the country are looking for help, shop locations, or information on our website.

The new St Vincent de Paul Society website is made up of a central page that promotes the Society as a whole and highlights current campaigns and activities.

Each state and territory manages their own pages, with information and services relevant to their community and of course, information on Vinnies shops.

The National Council Secretariate, based in Canberra, manages pages that include details on our advocacy work, focused on delivering *A Fairer Australia*, and links to our publications. They also work closely with the website company to administer the site, provide user support to state and territory content editors, and manage ongoing improvements.

Who visits our website?

Our users are about 60 per cent female to 40 per cent male, mainly English speaking, live predominantly in our cities – as would be expected – and are often younger people. Today, most visitors are using smartphones to access the website.

What do they look for?

Some people use Google and other search engines to find us, others follow links from email, publications, social media and online advertising.

Our goal is to make sure the website is simple to navigate and our information easy to understand and act upon.

The most popular pages on the website are:

- Our [home page](#) and access to help
- Current campaign pages (Gift a Night, Winter and Christmas Appeals, etc)
- [Our shops](#)
- Information about [donating goods](#)
- Our [search function](#)

Visitors can also find information on our [advocacy work](#), subscribe to [our publications](#) and learn about how to [get involved](#).

Feedback

We have a button on the website to capture feedback from people looking for information. This interaction and other data informs ongoing changes and improvements to the website.

We welcome getting feedback – what do you think of the new St Vincent de Paul Society website? [Please let us know.](#) **R**



Vicki and Mark Youngberry in their South Lismore home, now fully restored through their own labour, helped by family members and friends. The Youngberrys were rescued by boat from the top level of their house and taken to the safety of higher ground, via Lismore Base Hospital where Mark was treated for chest pains.

Taking heart – life in a disaster zone

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Society members were a key part of the recovery effort after the catastrophic Northern NSW flooding of early 2022. One of them, **Jacklyn Wagner**, documented the impact of the disaster on a cross-section of local families.

There were several deaths, widespread destruction of homes, businesses, farm and domestic animals, and a massive recovery effort that continues to this day.

Along with the scarring emotional costs, the economic impact of the early 2022 flood on the NSW Far North Coast – which also hit SE Queensland – has run into the billions of dollars. Many say that Lismore, the epicentre of the flooding, will never be the same again, and while valiant efforts have been made, it's hard to argue otherwise.

St Vincent de Paul Society's long-established Lismore Central Council office, the Vinnies shop beneath it and the nearby Conference rooms were swamped and have not reopened. Alternative premises have since been found, and conference work and retail activities have resumed.

Members and staff of the Society were deeply involved with the flood rescue effort, rallying to the cause as soon as it was safe, helping to provide temporary accommodation and daily essentials, and to this day they continue to assist people whose lives have been upended.

'Following the flood, I joined other Volunteers at the flood recovery centre in higher ground,' recalls Jacklyn Wagner, a member of St Carthage's Lismore Conference and a shop Volunteer for the past nine years.

'Many services were there,' she says, 'it was very raw.'

Jacklyn is also a well-known photographer, formerly with *The Northern Star*, for which she covered the Sydney Olympics, as well as *The Lismore Echo*, a community paper that I had edited.

She decided to put her professional skills to work by travelling around Lismore in the weeks after one of Australia's worst ever natural disasters and producing what has become a unique record of the flood's impact on residents of the city's low-lying areas. Some had returned to their homes, or have done since, although many have not.



Clockwise from top left: Helena Hainaut and daughter Genevieve; Victoria Baker; Kerry Andersen; Laraine and Trev Acfield.

Photos by Jacklyn Wagner.

Jacklyn said, 'I would simply ask people who had lost everything or saved something - people who now needed to start reclaiming their homes and lives - if I may take a picture of them. No lights, no paraphernalia - just a picture.'

The photographs were assembled in a book, [Through the Heart ... a flood of fears and tears](#), which was launched at NSW Parliament by then-Premier Perrottet and Lismore MP Janelle Saffin who had swum for her life when the waters topped her home,

The 'heart' became a popular symbol of the Lismore CBD, which had been badly impacted by an earlier flood, in 2017, that swamped the Vinnies shop and conference rooms, but came nowhere near the offices.

Proceeds from sales of the book, which is now being reprinted, are being donated to local businesses to help them re-establish. It is hoped there will be a 100-image exhibition in Lismore next year when suitable space can be found.

Laraine and Trev Acfield had lived in their South Lismore home since 2013. Although the 2017 flood came up three steps there had never been water in the house before. A musical family, they lost their piano and all Laraine's musical instruments. Trev saved two guitars in the hope of restoring them.

Helene Hainaut, her daughter Genevieve, 6, her father and two cats were rescued by civilians from her roof, distracting the child by playing I-Spy.

'I put the cats in milk crates,' Helene said, 'a cow swam over our carport.'

A Cabrogal woman of the Dharug Nation, **Kerry Andersen** has lived in South Lismore since 2006, on Wujabul land of the Bundjalung Nation: 'My home is like a shell of its former self and that is how I feel about myself.'

The houses in **Victoria Baker's** street were solidly built in the 1930s for returned servicemen. There's a strong sense of community in the neighbourhood.

'I had to leave my cat behind... I have to come back. This is my home,' Victoria said. **R**

A video of the book launch at NSW Parliament can be viewed [here](#).

Jacklyn Wagner was assisted in producing "Through the Heart ... a flood of fears and tears" by local businesses [Graphiti Design Studio](#), [Lismore City Printery](#) and [The New Camera House](#). The book is sponsored by [Nikon Australia](#) and a private citizen.

Robin Osborne is National Director of Communications and Media, St Vincent de Paul Society.



A gift from heaven

SVdP Victoria's Spring Appeal will keep food programs running.

In a world where the rising price of necessities seems unstoppable – from groceries and utilities to petrol, rents and medical expenses – even the simplest aspects of daily living have become challenging.

The pursuit of a fulfilling life has become an uphill battle for Australians such as Miriam*, who fled her country of origin due to violence and persecution, arriving in Australia in 2021 with her husband and a toddler.

Her husband works as a labourer, however his salary hardly covers their rent and utilities – not to mention food.

Miriam looks forward to welcoming her new baby. However, she is worried, having developed gestational diabetes

during pregnancy. Her doctor prescribed medications but the choice between filling her prescriptions and providing nourishing food for her family is an agonising one.

Miriam recalls, 'It broke my heart when my daughter asked me: Mummy, why do I not have a fresh apple in my lunch box like all others?'

Luckily, Miriam heard of Vinnies mobile pantries - vans stocked with free staples such as pasta, rice, tinned food, milk. Miriam can fill her bags, ensuring she can feed her family for several days.

'This is a gift from heaven,' Miriam says. With the money saved, she can buy fresh produce and her medications, vital for their health and wellbeing. **R**

*Miriam's real name and photo have not been used.

OVERSEAS PARTNERSHIPS



Society Members from across the Pacific, including New Zealand and Australia, and Asia came together for the Oceania Meeting in Sydney earlier this year.

New developments regarding Twinning for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia

With a long history of being part of the global Vincentian network of charity, relationships between the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia and its overseas partner countries have grown over time. Relationships between it and Society's partners in Oceania will evolve further with an important new development.

Historically, international engagement by the Society in Australia involved sending physical resources to people in need in countries overseas. This changed circa 1960 when, at the request of Council General International (CGI) and with the support of Members, Conferences and Councils, the Society in Australia began its engagement in what was then known as the Adoption of Overseas Conference Program. Under this Program the Society in Australia initially established an ongoing relationship with 12 conferences in India.

Growing from these small but important beginnings, the National Council of Australia now oversees the Society's Overseas Partnerships Program (OPP) supported by the enthusiasm and hard work of Members and their Conferences and Councils at State and Territory levels. The strength of the OPP can be seen in its current levels of participation and support.

In the calendar year 2022, Conferences and Councils across the Society in Australia sent quarterly remittances to 1,549 'twinning' Conferences and Councils in 10 countries

across Asia and the Pacific, supported 23 Community and Emergency Relief Projects in four countries and provided educational support for 1,436 students in six countries.

In a significant development for the Overseas Partnerships Program, the National Council of Australia is working with the CGI's Oceania team, the National Council of New Zealand and the National Councils of Federated States of Micronesia – Chuuk, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu to collaborate in the establishing of a partnership to further the mission of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Oceania through the Society of St Vincent de Paul Oceania Program.

This initiative arose from the [St Vincent de Paul Society Oceania Meeting](#) held in Sydney in April 2023.

While the focus is on our nearest neighbours in the Pacific, the Society in Australia will continue to work to strengthen its engagements with its partner National Societies in Asia.

This will include the potential for Australia's State/Territory Councils to twin with Overseas National Councils in Asia or the Pacific, with the first three Twinning already in formation.

Updates about the National Society of Australia's Overseas Partnerships Program and the Society of St Vincent de Paul Oceania Program will be shared via its networks and on the [National Council's website](#). **R**



St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

good works

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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.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OFFICE

PO BOX 243, Deakin West ACT 2600
Phone: 02 6202 1200
Email: admin@svdp.org.au