

Society Spotlight

Feb-Mar 2026

MEET **JOE** DUSKOVIC

PUPPY DONATION UPDATE

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR 2026



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

UPDATE

from the desks of

Joe & Trish



CONTINUING OUR GOOD WORKS

Hello to our St Vincent de Paul Members and Volunteers across Queensland, and welcome to the first edition for 2026.

We hope you enjoyed a restful Christmas break. It has been wonderful to see the impact of our Christmas hampers, bringing much-needed support and smiles to Queenslanders doing it tough. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important work.

We have a lot to look forward to this year, beginning with the permanent appointment of Joe Duskovic as Chief Executive Officer. You can read more about Joe's background

and vision in this edition.

You may also notice some changes to Society Spotlight. The Member and Volunteer edition is now more accessible and easier to print and share, supporting people who prefer to stay offline while remaining connected to Society news and updates. Going forward, this edition will be distributed bi-monthly (every second month).

Thank you for the care, commitment and compassion you bring to our work every day. We look forward to continuing this journey together in the year ahead.

We'd *love*
to hear from
you!

Would you like your local Conference news shared in the next edition? Or do you have any feedback about the new *Society Spotlight* format?

Email us at internalcomms@svdpqld.org.au



SEARCH FOR PURPOSE

LEADS TO CEO ROLE

AT ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY QLD



Joe Duskovic is ready to lead our Society as our new CEO

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

That search for purpose led him to St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland.

After 13 years with the Society, Joe was appointed permanently as our Society's new Chief Executive Officer at the start of 2026, ready to lead the Society to continue its Good Works across Queensland.

Joe's new role follows the appointment of our former CEO Kevin Mercer as CEO of Ozcare, at a time

of significant demand and complexity across the community services sector.

State President Patricia McMahon said Joe demonstrated the key values required for the role – the heart of a servant leader and a passion for honouring dignity and empowering others.

“Joe's appointment reflects the State Council's strong confidence in his leadership and readiness to guide the organisation following consistent progression across several senior leadership roles,” Patricia said.

Joe said his background outside the not-for-profit sector has proven valuable

in helping the Society respond at scale, while remaining grounded in its mission.

“Vinnies is member-led, faith-based and deeply practical in the way it serves people. I have been inspired by our Members, Volunteers and Employees and the commitment they share for their communities and those in need,” he said.

“Our work is confronting, it's challenging, and it's often heartbreaking – and there is nowhere else I'd rather be.”

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

The Worth of the Ordinary



Br Damien Price cfc

Many years ago, a dear friend of mine, Peter Fullagar, gathered the reflections I used to write for the weekly newsletter at Gregory Terrace and compiled them into a book.

As we approached publication, we needed to choose a name.

Damien's ramblings? Pricey's Pen? Reflections from the stairwell office? Many different titles were suggested.

Finally, in a moment of frustration, one of the publishing firm representatives said to me, "Damien, what motivated you to write these reflections?" Immediately, I responded, "*I wanted people to know the worth of the ordinary and that in the ordinary – if we have the eyes to see – we will discover the extraordinary!*"

There was a moment of silence and then the young lady said, "Well, we have our title – 'The Worth of the

Ordinary!'"

Too often in life we go looking for the extraordinary to satisfy our hearts. I am often amused by Hollywood movies where everyone is perfect, everyone is beautiful, the men have six-pack abs, and the women smile at you through layers of makeup. These perfect people do not have bad days; life is perfect and the Hollywood music score kicks in.

I had the privilege of working on Eddie's Van for almost twenty years. Eddie's Van was the hospitality van of St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace. We would go out two nights and five mornings each week, seeking to build a sense of community, respect and welcome with Brisbane's inner city homeless. It was wonderful.

One of the greatest gifts that Eddie's Van gave to me was that very quickly what I had initially seen as "extraordinary" became more ordinary. As it became more ordinary it became more real; real people, real faces, real names, real stories – and that reality, while at times difficult, sad or painful – had a beauty about it.

As I have quoted often, "Can you leave that which is essential and attend to the important?" Well, the wonderful motley crew of homeless people who came to Eddie's Van taught me what was "truly important"!

What was important were people and their innate dignity and worth. What was important was to know that each person who came to the van had a sacred story. What was important was that they came to the van for welcome, for hospitality, for community, to find a safe place where they were not a label nor a number – but known by name and loved as totally and as unconditionally as we humanly could.

That, if we could do it or ever get close to doing it - was more than enough. It was ordinary – but extraordinary. It was not flashy, but it was real. It was not Hollywood but much more genuine.

As we go about 2026, our Vinnies world will have great worth, great meaning, great purpose if we, day by day, grow the eyes to see the worth of the ordinary! God bless.

VOLUNTEER RESCUE



Kingaroy Volunteer Corrie Johnston the day she met Vinnie, the “donated” pup.



Vinnie has now found a new home with his loving Chihuahua siblings.

PUPPY “DONATION” SHOCKS VOLUNTEERS

Vinnies Queensland volunteer Corrie Johnston has seen some odd donations in her time at the Kingaroy shop, although usually they don't have a heartbeat.

During a Sunday shift, a customer alerted the Vinnies team to whining noises coming from a cooler bag left in the donation crate outside the shop.

“She brought the bag to the counter, said ‘look what’s in here’ – it was a tiny two-month Chihuahua puppy!” Corrie said.

“As soon as I lifted the flap, he leapt out of the bag, ready to play.

“As cute as the donation was, it was upsetting to see him abandoned. Just a few minutes later, someone threw four big garbage bags full of donations in that crate. Imagine if we hadn't rescued him in time?”

While a shocking incident, the mysteri-

ous donor could not have picked a better Vinnies Queensland shop.

“I already have three chihuahua puppies at home, so I didn't have to think about what to do with him - I knew immediately he'd be coming home with me,” she said.

“My coworkers were telling me to give him a name so naturally we decided on Vinnie.

“I called my husband and said he needed to come pick up a donation I wanted to take home; I doubt he expected a live puppy!”

Corrie said Vinnie has settled in very well at home and gets along great with his siblings.

“He's very cheeky and healthy and loves playing with the other dogs. He's also absolutely spoiled rotten!”

“As soon as I lifted the flap, he leapt out of the bag and was ready to play.”

MEMBER UPDATES

Important **news** for members



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

THE Autumn 2026 edition of Making a Difference, the first for the year, is here.

Making a Difference shares stories of hope, compassion and our Members' Good Works to our supporters, Members, Employees and Volunteers across the state.

In the Autumn 2026 edition, you can read more about how St Vincent de Paul supported Queensland families in need over Christmas and read more about Companions like Chloe, who was facing homelessness after her husband became too ill to work.

All Diocesan Councils, Conferences, Support Centres and Shops should have received copies of the newsletter to share with their community.

You can read the latest version by logging onto the [Vintranet](https://bit.ly/autumnimpact) or go to <https://bit.ly/autumnimpact>.

SPRINGWOOD FESTIVAL MASS

OUR South Coast Diocese had a joyous end to 2025, with a Springwood Region Festival Mass at St Peter's Catholic Church in Rochedale.

More than 100 Members, pictured above, attended the special Mass led by Fr Johny Edapulavan, which was a strong turnout.

The morning's highlights included an introduction of new Members, a Commissioning of five Conference Presidents and one Regional President, Associate Life Membership Awards for Thomas Hamill and Bill Parlour, and a Dedication Award to Jill Flynn.

It's heartening when our Members come together to celebrate one another, welcome new faces, and recognise each other's achievements.

NO INTEREST LOANS SCAM

UNFORTUNATELY, several Members have reported an increase in scam Facebook pages impersonating charities and organisations such as St Vincent de Paul and claiming to offer No-Interest Loan (NILS) services.

Please be vigilant – our Society does not advertise no-interest loan services on social media. Any advertisement for NILs service, such as the example shown below, found on Facebook/Meta is likely a scam.

Fraudsters also impersonate other organisations, such as the Salvation Army, or even claim to be Government services.

Please advise Companions not to provide any of their information to these fraudulent pages and, if they have already been scammed, to contact their bank account as soon as possible.

Log into the [Vintranet](#) to find a Reference Guide for more information on these scams and what to do if a Companion has been impacted or go to <https://bit.ly/nilsscam>.

NILS: No-Interest Loans Made Simple 💰

Centrelink recipient? You may be eligible for up to \$5,000 interest-free!

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| What's NILS? The No Interest Loan Scheme helps low-income Aussies pay for essentials – like car repairs, medical bills, appliances, or education – | Why NILS: ? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No interest, no fees• Easy application• Quick approvals Why NILS? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No interest, no fees• Backed by trusted | Apply To day! <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Send us a message – we'll guide you through it. Apply Today! Send us a message – we'll guide you through it. |
|--|--|---|

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL HELPS PEOPLE

EAP APP LIVE

The AccessEAP App is now live, giving Society Members, Volunteers and Employees quick access to confidential counselling services directly from your phone.

The App allows you to book in or manage appointments and access 24/7 confidential support.

All Society team members, including Volunteers, have access to free counselling services through our Employment Assistance Program, AccessEAP.

The AccessEAP App is available for download on Apple or Android by searching 'accesseap' on your phone's app store.



SOCIETY SHORTS

Your stories from across the state



COUNCIL CHANGES

State Council is changing as we welcome new Diocesan Presidents.

In addition to a new CEO, our Society is entering 2026 with an updated leadership team.

Mark O'Brien has succeeded Shane Blakeley as Diocesan president for the Toowoomba Diocese, while Tony Moore has succeeded John Blake as Diocesan President on the South Coast.

We congratulate Mark and Tony on their appointments and thank Shane and John for all their invaluable contributions to the Society during their terms.

We also welcomed David Coco who is our new General Counsel and Company Secretary, taking on the role held by Jennifer Barrett who is now the General Manager for Governance, Legal and Risk.



CHRISTMAS CHEER

The support our Society provides over Christmas is always appreciated, but something special was happening in the remoWh, nearly a 10-hour drive west of Toowoomba.

In April 2025, the town was devastated by floodwaters that displaced the entire population, with only 12 homes surviving.

While our Toowoomba Diocese worked hard to coordinate a donation of air conditioners to residents across the town, we were also able to spread some further Christmas cheer.

50 fully decorated Christmas trees, along with lights, ornaments, and presents for every local child, were distributed at their local community party in December – a wonderful way to support the town after a challenging year.



MEMBER AWARDS

A big congratulations to all Society Members and Volunteers who were recognised in the recent Australia Day Awards for their commendable support of their community.

Queensland recipients included Carmel Olsen from our Wondai Shop, who received 2026 Citizen of the Year, South Burnett Local Achiever Award, the entire Stanthorpe Society team who received Organisation of the Year for the Granite Belt region, Gemma Di Bella from the Youth Team in FNQ and Mariam Nabizada from the Toowoomba Diocese.

That's just to name a few – apologies to any recipient we missed.

Congratulations again to all recipients on a very well-deserved recognition for all you do for your communities.



TOWNSVILLE VISIT

Our Townsville housing team had a special visit in late 2025 by Year 11 Social Justice students from Burdekin Catholic High School.

The students were able to learn more about our Townsville Hostel, Maria House and our Youth Outreach programs, as well as the support our Society provides for people experiencing homelessness.

Townsville Housing and Homelessness Coordinator Cecilia Butler said the students also discussed the causes of homelessness and how the community can help.

“They were very respectful and interested in the work we do. This was the second year they attended, so hopefully it becomes an ongoing event each year,” she said.

YOUTH PILGRIMAGE

Nine St Vincent de Paul Queensland pilgrims recently travelled down to Melbourne to join 6,000 other young people from across the country for the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF).

Our Society team, including Members and Volunteers, were part of 33 Society representatives nationally who were empowered by a three-day program of keynote speakers, live music and opportunities to strengthen connections to the Church, to their faith, and to each other.

General Manager Mission and Membership Sam Woodland said the trip was an impactful opportunity to dialogue with bishops, church leaders and other young pilgrims from across the country, including a national Vincentian gathering of youth Members across the country.

ADVOCACY UPDATE

The **Cost** of Our Living



As a Society founded on the principles of social justice it was an honor for the Society to support the recent Brisbane Launch of Australian Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement.

Social Justice Statements provide an opportunity to reflect on a significant social, economic, ecological, or moral issue affecting individuals, families, children and the wider community and what each of us can do to play a role in addressing it.

It will come as no surprise that the first Statement for 2026 focuses on the impact of cost-of-living pressures. The Statement *The Cost of Our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good* highlights that behind economic statistics are real people facing food insecurity, housing instability, medical delays, and financial stress, especially among vulnerable groups.

Behind these trends are human stories of individuals skipping meals so children

and pets can eat, delaying medical care due to unaffordable costs, and in some cases being unable to pay electricity bills for almost two years, leading to cycles of mounting debt. The burden falls heaviest on already vulnerable groups, including single parent families, people with disabilities, First Nations communities, refugees, older Australians on fixed incomes, and workers in low-paid or insecure jobs, with financial stress increasingly contributing to fear, isolation, and deteriorating mental health.

How We Can Respond

The Social Justice Statement reminds us that addressing the cost of living crisis is a shared responsibility. While the Society assists hundreds of thousands of people every year, meaningful change also relies on everyday actions within our communities

Here are some practical ways the Statement suggests that we can make a difference.

- **Notice and support those who may be struggling**

Look out for signs of hardship among neighbours, colleagues, parishioners, and community members, and to offer practical help where possible.

- **Offer direct assistance**

Provide small acts of support such as helping someone access services, providing food or essential items, or walking alongside those in crisis.

- **Volunteer time and skills**

Volunteer with organisations that provide emergency relief, financial counselling, housing support, or companionship.

- **Donate to community services**

Financial contributions or donations of essential goods help strengthen the capacity of charities and Catholic social service organisations responding to rising demand.

- **Advocate for fair policies and systems**

Get involved in advocacy for fair wages, affordable housing, and social policies that prioritise human dignity and the common good.

- **Build caring, connected communities**

At a local level, parishes, schools, and neighbourhood groups are encouraged to create spaces of hope, communities that welcome, listen, and respond with compassion.

- **Act with faith, hope, and love**

The Bishops invite all Australians to become “prophets of hope,” responding to hardship not with despair but with courage, solidarity, and kindness.

Find out more about the Social Justice Statement on the [Vintranet](https://vintranet.org.au) or type in <https://bit.ly/46GdadL> to your browser.

For more information, contact Katherine O’Regan, Advocacy and Government Relations Manager, at Katherine.OREgan@svdpqld.org.au.

SOCIAL JUSTICE SHOWCASE

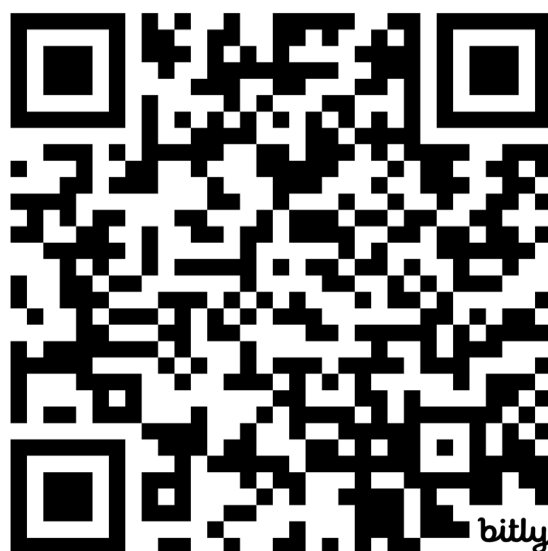
SUPPORT THAT LASTS

You are warmly invited to an virtual showcase of the new report, **Support That Lasts: An Investigation of St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland’s Disaster Assistance Program.**

As Queensland faces increasingly complex and frequent disasters, this new report highlights a critical truth - recovery not only requires monetary investment, but it also requires time and support.

We will explore how community-based, relationship-driven recovery transforms lives. This Showcase will provide unique insights into St Vincent de Paul’s disaster assistance program and how it supports long-term recovery.

Register now and Professor Cameron Parsell, Dr Nikki Sharma and Matt Nunan in the free, informative one hour presentation on Wednesday 11 March online at <https://bit.ly/svdpshowcase> or by scanning the QR code below.



OUR PEOPLE

Bevan Cassady **First Nations Lead**



“It’s been a very fast-paced and energetic start,” Bevan said.

“I’ve attended Conferences, contributed as a panel member for an international forum, delivered professional training and started community visits, all in just a few months,” he said.

“As for the no chocolate thing, let’s just say Easter will be a very difficult time.”

Bevan brings the Society over three decades of experience in cultural leadership, education, and community engagement, from local grassroots support to high-level policy reform.

He said the Society was a natural fit, with many shared personal and cultural values.

“Being able to contribute my experience and knowledge to support people facing real hardship gives my work real purpose,” he said.

“I’m looking forward to working with our people and communities, understanding how we deliver support and seeing how

our Society works together to demonstrate the best of humanity and help others in difficult times.

“For many First Nations Peoples, meaningful action matters most, and the Society’s Mission and Values demonstrate practical, lived commitment to Reconciliation.”

Bevan said he has felt warmly welcomed to the Society and is excited to strengthen our Reconciliation outcomes.

When Bevan joined the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland in August 2025 as First Nations Lead, he set his mind to overcoming two major challenges.

The first was to support the Society in deepening its understanding of First Nations Peoples and cultures, developing strategic frameworks to build strong, place-based relationships between our Conferences, Programs, and local First Nations communities.

The second challenge was for the self-confessed ‘chocoholic’ to continue his three-month streak of being chocolate-free.

So far, Bevan has risen to both challenges – mostly.

“For many First Nations Peoples, meaningful action matters most...”

GIVE TO GAIN

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Give to Gain, the theme of International Women's Day 2026, holds special meaning for Patricia McMahon, St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland's first female State President in its' 130+ year history.

Patricia has dedicated the last 13 years supporting her community as a Member of St Vincent de Paul and, since 2022, has led the Society's efforts to support vulnerable Queenslanders through an ongoing housing and cost-of-living crisis.

For International Women's Day 2026, held on 8 March, the theme of Give to Gain emphasises the power of reciprocity and mutual support.

"I can certainly relate to the theme. I dedicate a lot of time to helping others in my community, and most days it feels I get more out of it than they do," she said.

"We offer a place for people to come in, open up and to freely be themselves. To be able to provide them with help and hope is such a joy.

"I'm blessed to be able to work with so many fantastic women who are dedicated to their community.

"By supporting each other and working together, we can build a stronger Queensland."

Patricia said there was one area with unwelcome growing female representation – Queenslanders struggling with homelessness.

"When I started, we would see more males struggling with homelessness and poverty than females, but now that split is more even," she said.

"During our state housing and cost of living crisis, we've seen a significant increase in domestic and family violence cases and single parents struggling to afford the basics. Those are certainly issues that impact men too, but are predominantly female.

"In fact, women over 55 are one of the fastest growing cohorts of Australians facing homelessness."

Patricia said the St Vincent de Paul Society had come a long way since its' male-only origins in France in 1833.

"For an organisation that started as male-only, we now have more female Members than men on the frontlines of support in Queensland," she said.

"It has changed a lot, and I've been privileged to be able to work with the most dedicated and thoughtful people you could meet. That goes for both men and women.

"When it comes to compassion, what matters the most is what is in your heart, not just your chromosomes."

For more on International Women's Day, visit internationalwomensday.com.