

News in Brief

E-news May 2023 | Issue 31

Welcome to our latest e-news, which is filled with stories from around the country from hard-working volunteers and staff who are helping people in a practical way every day. If you have a story you would like us to share, please email it to us at: national@svdp.org.nz



MEMBRE DE LA SOCIETE
DE SAINT-VINCENT DE PAUL



NATIONAL YOUTH REPORT

Paola Minehan – Youth Advisor to National Board



Young Adult Vinnies – The aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle

The aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle was something a group of Young Vinnies aged between 17-20 will always remember and will leave a humbling, compassionate print on their hearts forever.

On the 14th of February, Hawkes Bay and other parts of Aotearoa awoke to the devastation of destruction that was left by Cyclone Gabrielle. Incredibly horrific scenes no one had anticipated or imagined. Many were left in disbelief - what had suddenly happened?

The need for aid became very obvious and the young vinnies team got straight to work. Food, clothing, manchester and many other goods were donated by our wonderful community including St Patrick's Conference in Napier. Our young group, guided by myself and Victoria Vo were able to visit, pack, deliver and help with clean-up in the areas surrounding Hawkes Bay. They visited RSE workers who took up residence at a local Church in Maraenui, the elderly, families, most Napier suburbs, evacuation centers and schools. Aid went out to all quarters.

This was such a humbling experience for many of our young adults, some had never experienced this kind of work or seen anything like this on such a huge scale. Over the coming weeks we visited Hastings, Waiohiki, Omahu, Puketapu, Eskdale, Bayview,

Tongoio, Rissington, Whirinaki, Fernhill, Flaxmere, Otane, Waipawa, Twyford, Patoka, Glengarry, Dartmoor and Puketitiri.

Taylah explains:

"I met a 76-year-old farming couple today. As we knocked on the door we were met with a frown. He said who are you? I told him we are from St Vincent de Paul and that we had come to bring food and to see how they were doing. He looked confused, probably wondering why strangers had turned up to his door. We were finally invited in and offered a cuppa. We chatted for ages with them both and listened to them describe what they had been through. Their house was surrounded by thick silt, up to the waist. They had made a pathway so that they could get in and out of their home. It was hard to leave because you could feel they enjoyed our company. I asked if I could pray for them before we left and they become overwhelmed with joy saying, "we are not religious at all but that was something different". They both had tears in their eyes and gave us all hug before we left."



The rural areas of Hawkes Bay were such a challenge to get to but the locals welcomed us with warm loving smiles. They were so happy they hadn't been forgotten. Many visits were met with a packet of biscuits, chats and a prayer as we left.

Some children begin to cry when rains - both adults and children continue to be traumatised. Mental health referrals are something we are working on with other organisations. Those grieving over the loss of life, property, land and community will need to talk about it and it's critical as many people as possible are involved in the exchange of information.

Future projects include working with some famous faces, and running family days for those affected by the cyclone. We continue to aid those affected and it is our intention to re-visit those we met. We know the re-build will take years and those we have encountered along the way will always be in our hearts, minds and prayers.

Highlights from our youth coordinators

We've all just returned from our National AGM in Dunedin Otepoti. As has been tradition for the last few years, I organise a professional development day on the Friday prior to the AGM. This year, Jo Bell, the local coordinator was our generous host. This AGM offered a plethora of accommodation choices, so she picked us up from various places each day sharing her expertise of local culture along the way making it very memorable.



Pictured: Some of the devastation in Hawke's Bay

Continuing the theme from earlier AGM's, we listened to developers of the new religious education curriculum followed by an opportunity to develop practical skills. This time making rag rugs.

Kapi Mana coordinator, Amanda Joe's inspiring report to the members during AGM told members about Vinnies from three of the Kapi Mana schools (St Francis Xavier School, St Theresa's School, and Holy Family Kura), who collectively removed an awesome 10 garbage bags of rubbish from Te Awarua-o-Porirua (Porirua Harbour) over 6 lunch breaks.

Along with being part of the team organising and planning for this AGM, Jo Bell is the youth coordinator in Dunedin Otepoti. Recently, Trinity Vinnies and the University Vinnies made meals for the food bank. 26 family meals for 5 and 27 meals for 2, enough to feed 314 mouths!

Recently Chris Fillipo (a former National Coordinator) moved to Hamilton. Along with his family's relocation, Chris is volunteering time to oversee and nurture a couple of the schools in Hamilton, in particular, Sacred Heart College Vinnies.

Those of you who attended the AGM are aware of my report about the devastation after Cyclone Gabrielle. This is when I became very much aware that young adults were searching for ways to help. Some I knew me from my work in the schools quickly contacted me to see if it was possible to help within the structure of Saint Vincent De Paul. This resulted in a new and very active young adult conference who are now working alongside the younger, school age Vinnies on projects, for example, becoming volunteers to help with the clean-up in Hawkes Bay.

HAWKE'S BAY 'NEW' YOUNG ADULTS GROUP

Shown here getting together on a Friday night to make vases and cups to donate to the hospital.



YOUNG VINNIES OTAGO

Our schools in Otago have been focusing on the dignity of human beings, and what that means to us as Young Vinnies, as people who serve.

Our students have been looking at ways to be more aware of the 'Divine DNA' in everyone, so that we can treat each other with respect and dignity. They spent some time dramatising the Gospel Reading based on Matthew 25:35-45, and completing activities that centre on seeing the image and likeness of God in themselves and others.

From this sessions some of our schools chose to make care parcels for elderly people in their Parish, others helped with a cook-up for the Food bank, our Catholic High School Kavanagh College (soon to be Trinity Catholic College) spent a Saturday morning helping to clean up back yards and organised activity vouchers for Christmas parcels so families could have fun together, one school presented the idea of a 'buddy-bench for lonely children' to their student council and our students at St Mary's Milton decided to write letters and make some decorations for the people who will be spending Christmas in the local Correctional Facility.

While making these Christmas decorations to brighten up their cells, we were talking about what it might be like to be away from family and friends at special times, one of the students asked why we were even making gifts for people who had been naughty. A reasonable question considering our common Santa story, stresses that we only receive gifts if we are on the good list.

This inquiry opened a wonderful conversation around the understanding that we do not earn dignity, and that despite how we choose to act we ALL contain Divine DNA, which means that we are created in the image and likeness of God. As we enter into this season what a wonderful thing to be reminded of, not only is God's mercy limitless, but we can do nothing that will cause God to walk away from us.

Jo Bell – Youth Coordinator

CYCLONE UPDATE - HASTINGS AREA COUNCIL

Cyclone Gabrielle has had a devastating effect on many areas here in Hawkes Bay and throughout the East Coast region. So many families have suffered great losses: family members, entire homes, homes which now require substantial rebuilding, livelihoods, crops, road access, change of schools, and the sense of security they once felt in their lives. Most of these families will feel the impact of this storm for many years and will require on going support.

Our local SVDP conferences have received generous donations of money, food, clothing, and bedding, not only from Hawkes Bay residents but also from several areas throughout New Zealand. We are immensely grateful to them and to the many SVDP area Councils and Conferences for their donations, prayers, and supportive messages and calls.

We answered the call from many local organizations for bedding food, and clothing – particularly for the many RSE workers who lost everything. As the 15 Emergency Centres provided food and essential needs for those requiring immediate assistance, our Hastings SVDP prioritized assistance to those who hosted some of the homeless families. We will continue to do so while the need continues.

The generosity of so many people has been heart-warming. The gratitude of those assisted is truly humbling. We are privileged indeed to be members of SVDP.

Please continue your prayerful support for all who continue to work repairing the infrastructure and homes, for the support services, but most of all for those who have lost so much and are beginning the uphill journey of rebuilding their lives.

Jim Leogreen
– Area Council President,



QUILTING GROUP KINDNESS

Kathy Egan of our Taradale Conference sent this pic of an example of quilts being made by a Palmerston North quilting group and given to families affected by the cyclone in Hawke's Bay.

CYCLONE UPDATE - NAPIER AREA COUNCIL

Our Conferences and our Young Adult Vinnies, guided by Victoria and Paola, have been doing outstanding work out in the community during the recent cyclone. Our community has generously donated money, food, vouchers, bedding, clothing and so many items towards those who have been affected, including a generous amount of food, clothing and manchester from the Palmerston North Diocese. 193 food parcels were distributed to most Napier evacuation centres and schools and over 300 food parcels and visits to outlying areas. The rural areas of HB were such a challenge to get to but locals welcomed Conference members and were so happy they weren't forgotten.

We have funded a bus for Eskdale primary school pupils whose homes have been flooded so students could be picked up from wherever they've been staying to attend classes at Westshore school hall. Our contribution to schools in affected areas is ongoing.

Our Taradale Conference was approached by the principal of Puketapu school if we could provide books, coloured pencils, puzzles, games and many other activities so that they would have things to do on the boat which picked them up from Dartmoor Rd to attend their classes because the Dartmoor bridge had collapsed in the flood. Many of these kids' families had lost everything. We have also assisted with whitewear, beds, manchester and clothing in these areas where needed.

One family visited in temporary accommodation recalled the devastation they have been through with the loss of everything and their three children who still have nightmares reliving their escape through the flood waters.

Currently the surrounding Napier area is in a state of major clean up. Some communities including Esk Valley, Dartmoor, Puketapu, Omaranui and Pakowhai

have largely been abandoned. I've been in touch with some of these folk and they informed me that they would be grateful for help but currently they are waiting on authorities to assess their properties.

One thing is certain is that emotional support and financial help will be needed for so many families in the months to come.

We are grateful to all those who have supported and are continuing to support the devastation of Cyclone Gabrielle and for keeping those affected in your prayers.

Christine Tong – Area Council President, Napier

YOUNG VINNIES NAPIER

Below is a pic of the Sacred Heart College Napier Young Vinnies who helped students from St Peters, Palmerston North unload a van full of non-perishable food and clothing today for the cyclone people. Nick Wilson of the Palmerston North Diocese was the driver. We are so appreciative of their help!



NORTHLAND AREA COUNCIL

By Vernice Young

Denny and Rosemary Rundlett have been members of SVDP Northland since moving to Whangarei in 2000. Prior to that they were active in other SVDP organisations around the country. They have fulfilled many roles, helping in the shop (when we had one), visiting parishioners, helping with Christmas presents, attending meetings and Rosemary was the secretary for many years. They are now moving to Wellington to be closer to their children for a well deserved retirement. We thank them for the blessings of their tireless support and care of the people of Whangarei.



WE'RE THERE FOR THE LONG HAUL



A cyclone hits suddenly with devastating force. But recovery takes a long time.

When the TV cameras pack up and leave, local Vinnies will still be there on the ground, helping people get back on their feet. Help us to support those struggling in the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle.



Photo: Hawkes Bay Civil Defence

You can make a donation to our bank account:

**Society of St Vincent De Paul
BNZ 02-0528-0208598-027**



Please use your name and email address as a reference and we will send you a receipt.

www.svdp.org.nz

FLOODS - AUCKLAND VINNIES UPDATE

By Delphina Soti

We have serviced families affected by the floods with Essential supplies and this is ongoing. The helpline is very busy redirecting people to the suitable places and providing assistance. We are focussing on Central Auckland and parts of South and West Auckland that have been worst hit. Yet to connect with North Auckland (due to distance).

THE FOCUS OF THE VINNIES AUCKLAND OPERATION

First Phase - Second phase long term

1

Essential Supplies

- We are providing **Flood Response Food Boxes**
- ambient goods, frozen meat, fresh produce, dairy products
- Cleaning products
- Sanitary personal products
- Sanitation pack PPE
- Blankets
- Underwear and intimates
- Hotmeals - we are producing bulk hot nutritious meals (inhouse) catering kitchen and delivering to families
- We have partnered with the local evacuation centres to supply bulk essential supplies sending out pallets and staff.

2

Community connection / Face to Face / Advocacy / Follow Up

- Providing advocacy and follow up to families and provide support to refer to the relevant agencies.
- Vinnies staff and volunteers are door knocking daily on the most affected parts of Central Auckland with a special focus on families that have not made it out to evacuation centres, providing essential supplies and also gathering information to connect them to MSD. Housing and all local providers (60 families per day).
- There are many isolated and vulnerable families not asking for help.

3

Networking with and partnering

- St Vincent De Paul National Council
- Catholic Caring Foundation
- Community Volunteer
- Wesley Community Evacuation Centre
- Auckland City Mission
- Little Buddies Early Childhood Centre - Evacuation Centre Mt Roskill
- Local network of Catholic Parishes
- MSD
- NZFN
- Kainga Ora
- ARK Foundation
- Lotofale
- St Patrick's Cathedral
- St Peter's College
- Catholic Social Services

4

Helpline and Foodhub support

- Operating helpline for people affected by the floods
- Triage and Follow up
- Foodbank Drive through to pick up supplies
- Donation drop off centre for goods and essentials.



Twining Report

APRIL 2023
By Arthur, NZ Twining



SRI LANKA

During 2022 we provided funding to a village of 2,000 people in Aligambay to establish a safe drinking water supply. This village is in the east of Sri Lanka inland from Batticaloa.

We have also updated our records on the number of Councils and active Conferences in Sri Lanka. There are 25 Councils and 345 active Conferences. We currently support the 25 Councils and 179 Conferences.



TONGA

After the disruption of Covid and the Tsunami we are finally in the process of activating the shop project. National President Sakapo will be meeting with the Cardinal in Tonga next week to sign of the Licence to Occupy which is on the Cathedral land. Once this is completed, we will release the funds for Phase 1 of the project. The building will meet all building standards.

Recent discussion has seen the need for youth programmes to be addressed. Paola Minehan will be directly involved in the establishment of and the review of the best structure to cater for their needs.

In September Tonga will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Society in their country. The planned celebration will be near the St Vincent de Paul Feast Day.

SAMOA

We are waiting on project proposals from Samoa. Once these are received we will review and work through any proposals with them.

ASSIST A STUDENT

This was launched at the AGM. As in the AAS document it is a voluntary donation project so we welcome any contributions which will allow us to fund and support applications in 2024.

INTERNATIONAL

As we consolidate twinning and projects funding returns for 2022, we expect similar support as received for 2021. This will be in the area of Euros 2.5m, NZ\$4.4m. Final reports will be presented at the Rome meeting in June.



FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM: LIFE, LOVE, FAITH AND HOLINESS

An edited transcript of John Honner's reflections for the 2023 Annual General Meeting in Dunedin

1 Life and Love

I have been asked to reflect with you on some things in relation to Frederic Ozanam's mysterious imagination about the purpose of the St Vincent De Paul society, which he sees as being for our sake and for our holiness, rather even more than for helping those who are in need and who are afflicted.

In Frederic's life-story we see a movement from the head to the heart, and a growth in love and holiness. Growing in love, and growing in faith and holiness, are all one with growing in union with Christ, which also entails growing with one another in friendship and fellowship, and growing in solidarity with those who are poor and afflicted, and finding there the deep love of God.

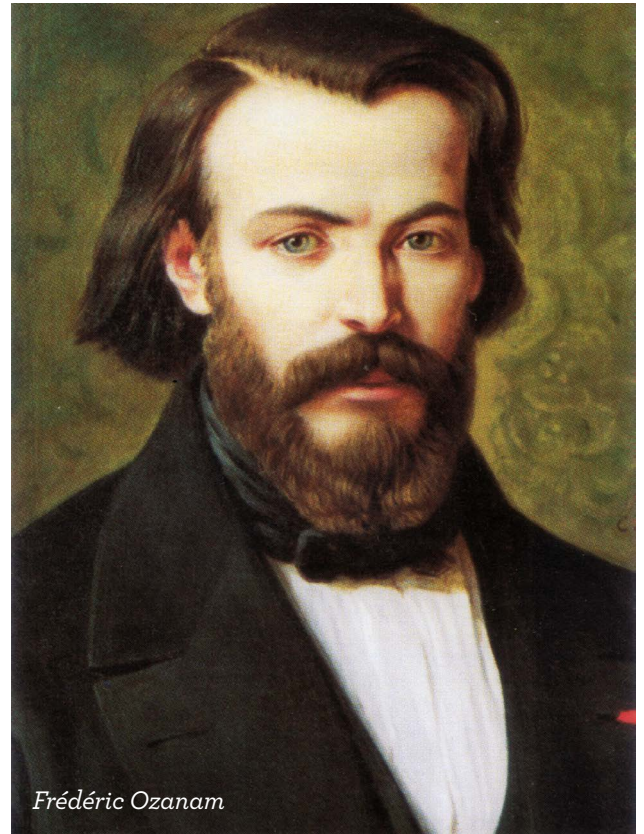
His life is a movement from being a good struggling person of faith. He was no magical saint with great mystical visions. In some ways he was a plodder—but he was touched by love at the start of his life and then grew more and more deeply in love.

Most of you will know Frederic's story: upper middle-class family, his father was a doctor, regional education in Lyon, one of the major cities of France. Born in 1813, went to university in the Sorbonne 20 years later, and in 1833 he founded, with his friends, the St Vincent de Paul Society and begins many long friendships. There is a letter he writes to one of his friends as a 20-year-old student:

It's a Saturday evening, midnight is about to strike, a new day will begin, a great and solemn day, the anniversary of the first homage rendered by the pagan world. [It's the vigil of the feast of the Epiphany, and he continues]: We need poetry in the midst of this prosaic and cold world, and at the same time a philosophy which gives some reality to our ideal conceptions.¹

So, you see here the heart and the head together, in tension, but also in complementarity.

In 1836 he qualifies in law; he becomes a barrister and he writes again *"I believe In authority [which is the order of the head] as a means, in liberty as a means [which is the human spirit] and in love as the end [the*



heart]. Even though he has a fairly intellectual idea of love, he's touched by poetry, and he's touched by the spirit, but he is also at this stage becoming a professor of commercial law in Lyon, which was in 1839, and then he's married in 1841.

Then his life changes completely. He marries Amélie, his angel. She called him Fred. I rather like that. His love letters to his wife, just extraordinary. There is a whole chapter on them in Sickinger's book, called 'Husband and Father'. His letters are just extraordinarily gentle. He was in Paris a lot of the time and she was in Lyon, so here's a letter just at random:

Can you believe that only a week has passed since the day of parting, since the moment when on your threshold I still held your hand, since I threw myself into that fatal carriage, looking back time and again at the walls of Lyon from which I have exiled myself for two months? Can you believe that seven more dragging weeks must pass before the blessed hour which will unite me to you? I dare hope that you have some pain in thinking of it; as for me I do not

¹ John Honner, *Love and Politics: the Revolutionary Frédéric Ozanam* (Melbourne: David Lovell, 2007), 12.

*know how to reconcile myself. Mon Dieu! What must purgatory be, what suffering, after having seen the eternal Beauty face to face, to be separated from it for ages, if absence brings so much bitterness to the affections here below! To have gazed upon you so for some days, to have been able to sit beside you, to look into your eyes, to read your smile, to hear that sweet tongue whose accents are like rose-dew to the dryness of my soul, to exchange all my thoughts with yours in silence....*²

His letters are constantly amazing: they run for pages and pages, and he used to write one every couple of days to her.

What happened next? So, he's now married in 1841, he's 28 years old. In 1844 he moves from being Professor of Commercial Law in Lyon to being Professor of European Literature at the Sorbonne University of Paris. This is very significant, because Paris at this time is anti-Catholic and so to have someone who is a Catholic appointed to a University Professorship is quite remarkable. He is using these two gifts he has, this talent for law and order and understanding society on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his growing sense of finding Christ in the service of the poor, not just as individuals, but as a class in society.

These gifts bring Ozanam to a very intense period in 1848. Now he is 35. Revolution is in the air. 1848 is the year Karl Marx finished his book on Capitalism, and he came to Paris at the same time that Frederic went into a very frenetic writing period. Ozanam basically founded what's called Catholic socialism and he got wedged between the very conservative Catholics who didn't like the socialists and the revolutionaries who wanted socialism. And he's trying to find the way in the middle, and he got wedged by both. He didn't want to stand for parliament, but he let himself be persuaded, but he didn't win his seat.

And all this time he's working hard, he's married, he's got a child now and he is getting sick. He starts to reflect on his illness, but what I find in his dying, is that he remains intensely and more closely united with his wife, with a love of God, and with his friends and the Society.

There's that famous story of him, which I presume is true, which we're all probably guilty of — when somebody knocks at your door and you know they're a ne'er-do-well and they're taking advantage of you

—well Frederic told this man knocking on his door to get lost, more or less, but politely maybe. Perhaps he was too busy or something. Frederic went back inside, closed the door, and went up his stairs. He got up two or three stairs and then he turned around, opened the door, and ran after the man in the street.

This is unreasonable love, this is ecstatic love, this is love that makes no sense to most people. This is God's love. I think that's the journey of Frederic's life, how he had these great gifts for order and organisation, for inspiring people, for gathering friends together, but above all for growing in closeness to God, through his marriage and through his work and service.

2 Faith and Holiness

Ozanam talks about the rule of society in 1835 in these terms:

*Growth in holiness, especially but not only, in service to those in poverty, was its [the Society's] ultimate and overarching goal.... Our mutual goodwill should proceed from the heart. The Society should be a model of Christian friendship.*³

I want to reflect here on faith and holiness, and growth and holiness. As you may know, faith comes in two kinds, though ideally it comes both together. One kind of faith is belief in a truth, a belief that a statement is true. When we say the creed we are stating things we believe in, they are words. But faith is ultimately belief in a person, so there is more belief 'in' a person, rather than belief 'that' a statement is true. I think in holiness we grow deeper and deeper, moving from beliefs that something is true to belief in a person. It's a movement to that ecstatic love of God that I was talking about at the end of the first talk.

When Frederic was dying (he died in 1853), he was very troubled about it, but he still had a number of things to say and to wonder about, and he bargained with God:

If I sold half of my books in order to give the money for them to the poor and...I would consecrate the rest of my life to visiting the poor and teaching apprentices and soldiers. Lord, would you be satisfied and allow me the pleasure of growing old in the company of my wife and seeing through my child's education? Perhaps my God you do not want this? You do not

² Raymond L. Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam* (South Bend IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 97.

³ Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam*, 67ff.

*accept these self-serving offerings; you reject my holocausts and sacrifices. It is me you want....*⁴

Faith is a relationship. So also, holiness is moving into this union with God. What service of the poor and being a society together teaches us, is that we are more connected than we are separate. We love the poor not because they are an object, but a subject, a person. We love them, we see in them what God sees in them. And to do that we need to see in ourselves what God sees in us. This is the mystery of faith and holiness that Frederic's life, I think, exemplifies.

I was a bit harsh at the start of these talks when I said Frederic was a plodder. It might have been better to say he is a pilgrim. He gradually grew in his practice of faith. Sickinger reports:

*Amélie attested to the fact that prayer and scripture reading (what Frederic called his "daily bread") were an intimate part of his daily routine "I never saw him wake up or fall asleep without making the sign of the cross and praying. In the morning he read the bible, in Greek, on which he meditated about half an hour. In the last years of his life he went to Mass every day for his support and consolation. He never did anything serious without praying. Before leaving for his course, he always got on his knees to ask God for the grace of saying nothing which would attract public praise to himself but of only speaking for the Glory of God and the service of the truth. Reading from the Imitation of Christ, which has justly been called the "bedside book of generations of Catholics", was a regular part of his evenings.*⁵

So, there's a model of practice of a pilgrim. God deals with each of us in different ways, and we don't all have to imitate Frederic, but we do have to find what God has given us as a spirituality and how we are going to follow and develop it as our practice of faith. We can grow in holiness and spirituality through practising: you can get better as an athlete and in physicality through doing exercise and training, and similarly our prayer times alone and together are not per functionary things like saying a creed where we are being objective, but where we are actually exploring that God loves each one of us intimately and deeply and ecstatically. And in that exploration, we come to understand why Jesus is to be found in the poor because that's where the extremes of love are shown. That is the lesson of all the lives of the saints, is this journey through a faith that we are taught into a faith that we walk and practice. Our prayer is not from our

head but from our heart, and our love is not of a truth but of a person. We learn this in persons and with one another.

Let us go back to the quotation from Sickinger that I started with: Growth in holiness, especially but not only, in service to those in poverty, was its [the Society's] ultimate and overarching goal.... Our mutual goodwill should proceed from the heart. The Society should be a model of Christian friendship. Our mutual goodwill for each other, and for those we walk among and in solidarity with, proceeds from the heart.

In the Society we model, as Frederic and his friends did, Christian friendship. That takes some holiness. It takes trust in one another, and learning to walk together, and committing ourselves to the practice of letting God nourish the seeds of holiness that are different in each of us, but which are certainly there.

Let me conclude with another excerpt from Frederic's letters to Amélie in 1843, it's about love, the "end" of life.

*Come, then, my well-beloved, my dove, my angel, come into my arms, against my heart...come and God bless you that after two years we still love each other a thousand times more than on the first day!.... How sad and painful it is for me not to be at your side.... Accept my well-beloved, the tenderest and purest kiss that the love of a husband content with your tenderness can give.*⁶

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Honner, alongside his teaching and writing in theology, has been active in community services. He has been Director of Practice and Policy at MacKillop Family Services, a director of the Victorian Council of Social Service, a member of the Board of Catholic Social Services Victoria, Director of Edmund Rice Community Services, and a member of the Council of Edmund Rice Education Australia.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria commissioned John to write a book on Frederic Ozanam (*Love and Politics*, 2007). Subsequently the National Council commissioned a book on Louise de Marillac (*Holy Humanity*, 2010) and a paper on Frederic Ozanam and Catholic Social Teaching (*Dreaming as a Single Human Family*, 2021). His most recent books, published by Paulist Press, are *Does God like Being God?* (2019); *Did Jesus have a Girlfriend* (2022); and *What's Church all about?* (2022).

⁴ Honner, *Love and Politics*, 100.

⁵ Sickinger, *Antoine Frédéric Ozanam*, 196.

⁶ Honner, *Love and Politics*, 89f.

SOUTH AUCKLAND APPEAL REPORT



Thank you for the very kind support we received from Vinnie Councils and Conferences last November.

OUR ACTIVITIES FOR SUPPORT ARE:

- BFC – Building Financial Capability/Budgeting Services
- Scholarships for 3 Catholic Secondary Schools to help year 12 & 13 students continue their education.
- A truck on the road to assist with food and furniture movements.
- Food support for those in immediate need
- Conference support

WHAT IS BFC?

BFC – Building Financial Capability/Budgeting Services: The assistance provided includes helping our clients with, reducing debt repayments, reducing overall debt, budget worksheets for social housing applications and increasing income through checking all available entitlements. A recent example is one of our team successfully getting a client out of an unaffordable car contract under the CCCFA rules. (Unfair credit contracts.)

Other benefits for the wider community:

We have set up a communities of practice for south Auckland Financial mentors to better share information and allow a platform for guest speakers from relative organizations.

We are active in a group that is aimed at getting information on a specific car loan provider and working with the commerce commission in an ongoing investigation into their practice.

We are also part of the current discussion and lobbying into Buy now pay later lending such as Zip and AfterPay and the harm it is having on the communities we support. Buy now pay later loans are currently unregulated and we look try to get it covered under the CCCFA like all other lending is.

Scholarships for 3 Catholic Secondary Schools to help year 12 & 13 students continue their education

Student interviews have been completed and we are ready to support the Scholarship winners with the full school fees at McAuley High School, De la Salle College and Sancta Maria College – payable this month – budget \$26,000 (less received \$7,500 from Hugo Charitable Trust)

A truck on the road to assist with food and furniture movements / Food support for those in immediate need.

Our truck is now busy moving furniture to support the flood affected clients

During November / December we provided 585 food parcels which provided help for:

NOVEMBER

650 adults supported and 613 children.

DECEMBER

644 adults and 742 children helping with food for Christmas.

This kept our Otahuhu team of 4 to 5 very busy each Mon / Wed / Fri with preparing and coordinating the clients picking up the parcels. The appreciation from our clients make it all very worthwhile.

Conference Support

Our acting President has been working in support of regeneration of Conferences with visits and meetings. As readers will know, Conferences have struggled after the Covid hiatus, and we are working to support their recovery.

John Packham – *Treasurer, Society of St Vincent de Paul, South Auckland Council*

HARMONY IN THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL

By Renato Lima de Oliveira - 16th General President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in all parts of the world, has the face of its local presidents. If the president is democratic, open to dialogue and conciliatory, so will the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. If the leader is closed, stern and centralizing, so will our beloved Society. Therefore, we must have the appropriate profile of president for our Councils and Conferences; otherwise, the harmony that governs our organization will end.

A good Council or Conference President is one who is truly democratic, exercising three great virtues: knowing how to listen, how to listen and how to listen. If you are open to dialogue and criticism, there will be unity in your management and you will be able to implement projects and initiatives, winning the support of all. Detachment to personal opinion is one of the qualities of the good Vincentian. However, if the leader makes decisions without listening to the bases, he is doomed to failure. An authoritarian president kills the hopes and expectations of the Vincentians.

A good SSVP president is the one who delegates tasks and assignments and, with charity and responsibility, gets results. If he or she is centralizer, it will not do too much. In addition, we are a work team that, in the Conference or in the Councils, adds up our individual talents and, thus, in the name of the poor, seeks to transform reality. We are like a "soccer team," in which all players are important.

A good SSVP president is the one who gives the example, faithfully fulfilling the Rule without making concessions or seeking "quick solutions," showing

everyone that our secular existence happens precisely because of the hierarchy of love and regulation that we keeps united and strong. The leader must be transparent, not only with financial and patrimonial matters, but also in his actions and words. He must be frank, kind, conciliatory.

A good leader is one who does not attend to gossip and respects each member, especially by providing support in the most difficult moments of their lives. A vocational leader is one who avoids distractions and noises in communication and, if they occur, is always willing to undo the knots and contribute to the growth of the Vincentian group.

The SSVP leader is one whose documents are open, they are public. There are no confidential or reserved documents in our beloved Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. I'm surprised to hear this kind of justification in the mouth of some Council presidents. If something is confidential it is because, at a minimum, it is problematic. We have to deal with our problems with balance and with reasons, without letting the heart impede a truly independent analysis.

If the leaders of our Conferences or Councils act like this, I am sure that harmony will reign within the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We have to rescue the spirit of concord between us. The beautiful work done in favour of assisted families runs the risk of being stained by unprepared leaders contaminated by the vanity virus. Let us pray a lot in the presidential elections that take place, so that God will give us responsible, modern leaders and in line with the thought of Ozanam.

A DEDICATED MEMBER RETIRES

Frank Wutzler of St Joseph's Conference Picton has recently retired after over twenty-two years as a member and most of that time as Treasurer. His wisdom and financial skills were outstanding and he is very much missed at our meetings

Frank is one of Picton's colourful characters and turned ninety years old last June. We were able to celebrate with him by hosting an afternoon tea including a special birthday cake.



SISTER CLOTHIHILDE

Brididine Sister and an active member of the Opotoki Conference for over 20 years (nee Verna Lorraine MacDonnell).

Verna was born in Cook Hospital Gisborne, on the shortest day: June 21st in 1934, the second child of seven to parents John & Elma, sharemilkers of Tolaga Bay. Verna's mother's family had come from Finland.

At age 5, Verna spent 18 months back in Cook Hospital in a full body plaster cast to rectify a dislocated hip, that she had dealt with since birth. This lengthy hospital stay delayed the start of her schooling, until she was back on the coast where she attended school in Tolaga Bay, and recalls walking to school barefoot, quite some distance, along gravel roads, wearing oversized oil-skin capes in wet weather. Despite a high Maori population in the school, no Te Reo was taught or spoken. Verna could always be found settled with a book, quietly, away from the hustle and bustle, likely due to the difficulty she had getting about as a youngster. Verna was raised as a Catholic, and remembers well when the family went to mass, with all of the children on the back tray of 'Old faithful' the family truck, no restraints, just told to hang-on at the corners.

At age 10, Verna and her family relocated to the small Northland settlement of Ruawai. Old Faithful didn't make it, so a newer truck 'Silas Marnier' (so named after the George Elliot novel) became the family's modus operandi. Verna recalls a flat deck, with old tyres, and definitely no health and safety!

The four girls in the family were sent away to St Brides Convent in Masterton. Due to her late start, Verna was still attending school at age 20, and had her heart set on training as a librarian. At the end of her secondary schooling, the Nun's at St Brides asked Verna to consider a vocation in the convent. Travelling back home at the end of the school year on the train, Verna had time to think about her future, and made her decision. Her mother took her to the Auckland Library for an internship as a librarian, and it was then she found the courage to tell her parents about her decision to join the convent. Her father was especially pleased and supported her decision.

Verna travelled to Randwick in Sydney to begin her faith based journey with the Brigidine Sisters, and to learn what was required in her role within the order. Verna recalls this was an almost silent order, and was very strict. Her journey began as a *postulant*, for her first year and then a *novice* for the next three years, her introduction to the life of living in a spiritual community. Verna took her *first profession* and then her *final vows* three years later. Verna recalls her novitiate years as being 'the great silence', filled with chores, religious teaching and learning, singing and chanting and everyday pardon and penance before meals. The young novices were actively discouraged from forming friendships within the order, so it was a fairly solitary life of introspection.

Verna was then sent to Papua New Guinea and served as a teacher in Hohola, a suburb of Port Moresby for 3 years. She absolutely loved this, and was sent home on a lengthy furlough, which led to a deep and desperate depression. It was six years before Verna could return to the place she loved.

Following a further three years of service in Papua New Guinea, Verna was moved to a convent in Scarborough in Queensland, and began her formal training as a librarian, travelling each day on two trains and a bus to get into Brisbane, having a heavy schedule of assignments to complete as well as her duties within the convent.

"Let's make it great in '88" was the catch cry of the World Expo in Brisbane, which provided Verna with an opportunity to become a part of the Maori Concert Party, greeting and entertaining all who ventured into the New Zealand Pavilion from May to the end of October. An unforgettable experience, and one that is fondly recalled today.

Returning to New Zealand, Verna spent time in Wellington, before heading up to Opotiki to look after her ageing father. During this time Verna studied Te Reo and Japanese to School Certificate level by correspondence, and continued to support the work of the church in Opotiki.

In November each year Verna looked forward to re-connecting with the remaining Brigidine Sisters in Masterton, with whom she has a close connection of shared experiences and similar values, despite the strict silence of those early years.

Verna has been true to the motto of her order 'Fortiter et Suaviter' - 'With Strength and Gentleness', and has overcome physical and mental health challenges on her life's journey. She has lived a life of frugality and has answered the call to live simply and sustainably, so that the whole community can flourish.

Verna took her responsibilities seriously as a steward within the Opotiki community. Her face and voice, along with her busy hands are active in concerns that affect Opotiki. She regularly attends conference meetings and her intent on preserving the taonga-treasures of Opotiki, have been borne out in an endowment fund she set up for this purpose. Verna has been highly motivated to make a difference with the savings she has carefully accrued due to her economic diligence, and she loves that her fund will continue to support this community long into the future.



Obituary



Norma Veale – Shop Volunteer Hokitika

Norma Veale was a dedicated, loyal member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Vinnies.

Norma lived the virtues of the Society:

Simplicity - living a life free of pretense or guile.

Humility - a sense of down - to - earthness

Gentleness - the grace of mildness of manners

Selflessness - a tendency to regard the well-being of others as more important than her own

Zeal - showing a strong feeling of interest and enthusiasm.

All of the above virtues came to the fore when Norma worked in the Vinnies Shop. A place which was dear to her heart, and one which she served for 30+ years.

Ever punctual, she would always greet all with her beaming smile when arriving to relieve her fellow Vincentians. She was always very concerned about the homeless and lonely, and would press a warm piece of clothing on them if the day was cold. It was always evident when it had been Norma's day at the shop, for she and Jan couldn't abide any untidiness, and so everything would be in its place, trim and tidy. It mattered not that some of the workers knew where things were in the mess, it needed to be tidied!

In her work as a Vincentian Norma was supported by her husband, Barry. Many a weekend would see them down at the shop emptying the bags, sorting and taking the unwanted, unusable items to the Dump.

The St. Mary's Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul owes Norma a great debt for all the work she has done. She has left a huge hole in our lives, we thank her family for supporting her in the time she spent in the shop, and ask Our Lord to Grant her Eternal Rest.

NEWS IN BRIEF

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We'd love to read your stories:

If you have any news items that you would like us to put in our next 'News in Brief' e-newsletter, please send us a short article and a photo (if you have one) to Anne-Marie McCarten:

national@sudp.org.nz

Rest in Peace

Barney O'Connor

(former Area President Manawatu/Whanganui)

Pat Hannan

(St Joseph's Conference Levin)

Harry-Lampen Smith

(former Manawatu Area President)

Michael Walsh

(St Joseph's Conference Dannevirke)

Peter Courtney

(Former AC President of Auckland and St Benedict's Conference)

Michael Coghlan

(Newlands Conference Wellington)

A PIECE WRITTEN BY A VINCENTIAN

While there is one person who cannot live a dignified life

While there is a single hungry child

While there is one person without work

While there is one person who thinks suicide is their only choice

While there is only one lonely, elderly person

Whenever there is a single patient without medical care

While there is a single person who is a victim of injustice

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, with its Conferences and members, has reason for being – for us, poverty has many faces!