

# News in Brief

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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](mailto:national@svdp.org.nz)



MEMBRE DE LA SOCIETE DE SAINT-VINCENT DE PAUL



## NEWS FROM TONGA

From President Tevita M Lolohea



### Assisting the poor

The Maufanga SVDP Conference over the last 3 months have assisted 3 family's homes with general tidying, upgrade the bathroom and showers, clearing of overgrown trees and plans to upgrade the cooking area and floor in one of the family shacks like home. Members put in half a day with a total of four working days in total for these families. We also seek assistance from the Ministry of Internal Affairs for building materials worth \$4,000 for one of the homes and the rest was donation by members of equipment and assorted building materials to help made their life a little easier. The Conference was led by the President and the SVDP Spiritual Director, Monsgr Lutoviko Finau.

a long way to lessen the burden to schools and families of the diocese who have been affected very badly since 2018. Other assistance to schools especially Apifoou College came from the World Bank and the Government of Tonga worth about \$4 million to rebuild classrooms and replace essential equipment.

SSVP have played a leading role in these recovery programs and thanks to NZ SSVP for responding both in kind and funds to help these efforts in a timely manner.

### Government Partnership

The SSVP National Council of Tonga is represented at the National Committee for Disabilities under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Previously Caritas Tonga was a member, but they have passed this function to SSVP and we have appointed one of our members to this Committee. The National Committee for Disabilities covers many areas and is based mainly on communities in collaboration with many National NGOs, church organization, district women groups, community nursing etc.

All districts are represented and the SSVP Rep double up as our representative as well as our constituent in Tongatapu. She helped undertake surveys and reports on living conditions of disabled people, poor families, care givers, and general information that may receive help from the Government.

This collaboration allows SSVP to apply for small funds to help families whose living conditions are unhealthy, susceptible to natural disaster and with little assistance from their close families.



### Containers from New Zealand

As has been the case over the last three years a close collaboration with the NZ SSVP to assist the schools affected by TC Gita since 2018 have seen desks, chairs, tables, whiteboards, books and reading material from kindergarten to college, and use clothes donated to Tonga SSVP and then distributed to schools and parishes throughout Tonga. In addition, chemicals desperately needed by our main college (Apifoou College) for science classes was also donated by NZ SSVP in 2019. These have gone



## COVID-19 UPDATE - TONGA

Although no cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Tonga the worldwide impact in economic, social, spiritual, and political development have been felt in Tonga. Our border has been closed except shipping and recently flights (once a week) mainly for cargo and repatriation. These are strictly regulated at the border. Our tourism sector has been closed rendering many job losses in accommodation sector mainly thus relying on the meagre domestic travel available. Our agriculture sector is thriving as more people are taking the opportunity to plant food for their families and surplus sold for cash.

The social impact is probably underestimated with families cut off from overseas family funerals and other social events of great importance to the family well being and health issues. While money continues to flow electronically to every sector of the economy but is not everything to many families who long to meet face to face with loved ones, families especially the elderly and the young ones being cut off from families supporting group.

While our target to open our borders in March 2022 the impact of the 'Delta Variant' globally would properly push this back further. However, more than 40,000 Tongans have been vaccinated to date with still more to come especially in outer islands.

Spiritually Tonga is lucky that we can go to church every day, a luxury not available to a lot of people overseas. This important activity has helped soften the mental health problems being encountered overseas because of lockdown.

Our own monthly National program is also affected rendering our efforts to support our Conferences more at their own communities. As expected, all visit to prison, hospital, disabilities centre on group basis can be done on individual or small group basis only.

Schools continue to open throughout the Kingdom.

**Unite  
against  
COVID-19**

## Proposed Tonga Shop Project

### *How will it work and what will it achieve?*

The Tonga SVDP Shop project is an integral part of our 3-year strategic Plan aim to establish a permanent shop to generate some income for the society to help with its work and support of the needy, as well as its operation to support and assists its conferences throughout Tonga. We have been temporarily relying on parish property in the past and they have taken it back due to kindergarten expansion and we have left with no shop space for over 4 years now.

We desperately need a shop located in Nukualofa (capital) preferably at a key location to generate traffic and easy to access by the public and our clients. The shop will be run by the National Council on part time volunteer basis on a rotation basis by conferences based in Tongatapu the main island. Discussion with the main parish for land has been initiated and land has been identified for this purpose.

The shop will be the main life blood in terms of a consistent income to support our programs to the needy whether families or individual. It will help us respond better to emergency situation e.g. domestic fire, natural disaster etc.

The shop will aim to sell used clothes, used small furniture, cutlery, with assistance from New Zealand.

### *The benefits of this project*

- It will give the SVDP Tonga a stable and reliable source of income to fund its operation and programs.
- Lift the SVDP profile in Tonga as a serious and international affiliate of an Internationally acclaimed Charity Organization.
- Build a more self-reliant Society and a cornerstone of SVDP future in Tonga
- Store, distribute and sell goods from our twinning partner.



*Above: Photo of proposed site opposite major market.*



## Budding Young Vinnies

Patler Martin Finau and Meletatafu 'Eikimeimu'a jr Finau

Caroline Muller Finau and her daughter with the broker who helped the container of goods at the local wharf. The container was sent from St Vincent de Paul New Zealand.

Thank you



## AUCKLAND CONFERENCE NEWS

### Auckland Vinnies

For the workers at Auckland Vinnies food bank, the current lockdown can be summed up in one word.

“Hectic. Yeah, really crazy,” says Lupesina Koro.

For the past three weeks they’ve been distributing food packages to families in need. Youth Coordinator Reuben To’a says the need is much greater than previous lockdowns.

“This lockdown definitely I think came out of nowhere. So because of that, the workload has picked up heaps,” he says.

General Manager Del Soti heads the operation. She says numbers have catapulted from a weekly average of 900 to 2000 over the last three weeks.

“A lot of us get emotional about it, seeing the people that are coming through,” she says.

*“Our people are not good with lockdown; lockdown is counter-cultural to Pasifika, so when this happens, people reach out for support because they don’t know how to do it without connecting with another person or their communities.”*

Back at Vinnies, the younger members of the team continue to work after the food bank closes, managing a daily virtual chat with high school students to help them through lockdown.

“That’s really heavy, because a lot of students are struggling with mental health in lockdown,” says Lupesina.

“In their eyes just because the teachers think that just because we’re in lockdown, they have all the time in the world to do the work, but for a lot of our students they also have an obligation

to their families — to look after siblings, do the feaus, you know, and that can be overwhelming.”

“We’re catering to about 700 to 800 students each week. But it’s just definitely there for them to have a place to feel supported, feel connected knowing that just because they’re not in our space, they are still a part of us, and we’re able to help them in any way we can,” Reuben says.

It’s a lot to take on for this small team of staff and volunteers. Their determination to look after their community never fades.

“You see these girls. They’ve barely slept, and they’re not part of our staff, but they’re here at the crack of dawn, and they leave when it’s dark, you know. And they’re still going. So just really proud of them and quite moved by just who they are,” Del says.



# Auckland West Ready to Rebuild

Change is good and despite the pressures of this lockdown and the dreaded Delta variant, we've managed to tick along nicely in the West. On the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, 15th August, I was the sole nominee for the Auckland West Area President role. Two days later we're in Alert Level 4 Lockdown! Hopefully not a sign of things to come.

Over the past 7 years we've dwindled from 13 Conferences to 4, but what a Fantastic Four! Scrambling with a huge demand on food parcels throughout the West, we managed to cater to all and now most of our foodbanks are near empty. A lot of Parishes have taken over the foodbanks and that's ok. We've been working with a few of them to cover parcels we couldn't get to and it's always good to maintain relationships with them in the hope of building our membership. We worked on some new external relationships and partnerships that have seen us get through the worst of it. Everyone chipped in to help each other out and it was truly a blessing to be part of. Some of these relationships will lead us to important networking and outreach avenues once the lockdown is over.

We have a lot of work ahead in rebuilding our Council Area, but I'm confident with the amazing group of people we have already, we'll be back to full strength again soon.

God bless you all.

- Paula Betham



## Whangarei Conference

Thank you St Francis Xavier School for all the wonderful food that you donated. Our youngest member 2yr old Benjamin Williams and his Mother helped to bring it to the foodbank and then unload the container.



## ST JOSEPH'S CONFERENCE

### New Plymouth



#### Community Meals

Lockdown struck suddenly this time, taking us by surprise and causing the immediate cessation of our weekly Community Meals.

Within days, requests for food parcels ramped up. We work hand in glove with our local Foodbank. Thus there have been numerous trips to Foodbank to pick up and deliver parcels for families who have asked for our help.

In the first lockdown, Civil Defence was helping with the delivery of food parcels. Not so this time around. Masked and contactless delivery by St Vincent de Paul volunteers has been standard and we have seen some new clients this time round. A day or so after lockdown commenced we went down the church hall to clear out goods from our freezer / refrigerator and on leaving we were spotted by one of our regulars, who immediately requested help. It was good to be able to respond on the spot.

We are now back on the job, serving the meals in take away boxes, remaining carefully distanced and masked up as we hand out hot boxed meals from the kitchen door.

#### Whare Kai

Whare Kai involves weekly cooking sessions in a church hall kitchen, where we provide the ingredients and recipes, then cook healthy meals alongside the Mums of young families. The meals are taken home to eat - and the families build up a folder of recipes which become their "go to" meal solutions.

Currently there are eight families involved - with 42 children between them. That's a lot of ingredients and a lot of cooking.

During lockdown the meal ingredients and the recipes have been dropped off at their homes every week. - A bit like *My Food Bag* - only better. The women have become friends, they all live in the same area and there is a lot of mutual support given and received. We have received texts and photos of successfully cooked meals.

Next week we start back at the hall, and everyone is looking forward to meeting up and getting and giving masked face to face support as they try a new recipe again.

#### Furniture Pick-up and Delivery

Our 'Dad's Army' furniture delivery team uses the St Vincent de Paul van to pick up donated second hand furniture. They store it and re-deliver it to families in need.

The team was recognised by New Plymouth District Council for their selfless and committed efforts, at a Ceremony held in the New Plymouth District Council Chambers in the last weekend of June. Each team member received a certificate of appreciation and there was a Group Award, which now sits in our archives.

It is very satisfying to find ways to continue the work of St Vincent de Paul in lock down conditions.

- Gabrielle Carman

# Western Bay Area Council - Lockdown Report

## 18th of August - 7th of September 2021 (15 Days)

On the 17th of August we were once again told we would be in lockdown at midnight. This time would prove to be far harder on the community in WBOP than last year. Thanks to last year we were more organised and prepared for anything this time.

15 days showed us families live week to week and don't have reserves to cope with day to day expenses in the event of a nation-wide emergency, rents averaging at \$560 per week cripple families with 90% of income directly paying rent.

Migrants lost work and do not qualify for any WINZ assistance, most hospitality workers are casual with no set hours and many lost their jobs and the middle income earners struggled to meet immediate needs.

91.5% of Clients coming to SVDP for help were new clients compared to last year's 55%.

Twenty social agencies were referring to us as we were one of the only Social Agencies still working. Our name has substantially grown in the past year with our "Good Works" being more recognised.

We helped over 10 families caught out by Covid with unexpected babies coming and not being able to afford the necessities needed.

We delivered twice a week as well as arranged appointed times for food parcel pickups. A big increase in food needed this time was evident. We are lucky enough to be recipients of "Good Neighbours" and in the two weeks we received over 3.5 Tonnes of food from them, this helped our own stores from being depleted too quickly.

Noticeably this year far more social agencies came to us compared to last time. We were the only agency delivering food and essential items to families in need.

We have an amazing team here in WBOP; we all worked seamlessly together, 100% supported by our Area President Des Mulhern.

**Waihi Conference:** was also highly active, over 30 parcels in 3 weeks, a larger demand for food parcels this year, larger families with 3 to 4 children, firewood was also distributed, and "Phone Visitations" became the new normal. Waihi have an incredible Parish and after a notice in the newsletter a number of financial donations came in.

### **St Josephs, St Thomas More and St Marys Conferences:**

All Tauranga conferences were kept busy with Phone visitations, and financial request, members of the conferences were also active in the Support Centre preparing food parcels, manning the phones and helping all in need.



## NAPIER / HASTINGS

### Young Vinnies

SVdP St Patricks Conference team with the help of our Sacred heart Young Vinnies provided food through lockdown to many families from our local School communities of St Patricks Primary, Sacred Heart and St Johns College. Our Young Vinnie girls alongside Paola Minehan and Victoria Vo packed and delivered the parcels to our families. We noticed a higher demand for food this lockdown compared to the last one, maybe because alot of families were simply not prepared. Our Schools and Whānau's were so greatful.



# Nelson Area Update

The Nelson Area Council is in the process of employing a retail operations manager, across our three shops for an 18 month fixed term, 30 hour per week role. The appointment process has been interrupted by the recent lockdowns but we are forging ahead with it, albeit with a somewhat altered timeline. This role was the initiative of Nelson Conference president Elizabeth Owens and Shop Manager and Vice President Trish Benven, and was approved unanimously by our five presidents at our most recent area meeting.

Our 5 conferences have recently been canvassed to gauge their support for the CORS (Community Organisation Refugee Support) programme. Expressions of interest, from community organisations are being sought by the government from October. CORS team members from our previous contract are wishing to continue this mahi.

It is hoped another application by our Area Council would be successful.

During lockdown, Nelson Conference was able to continue with food parcels via their link with the Nelson Community Food Bank. Stoke Conference was approached for food, on the day the lockdown was announced, by Te Piki Oranga, a local Maori health provider. Their response was to empty their larder for this need. They also conducted phone interviews and referred people to the Nelson Community Food Bank. Richmond, whose food bank is in very pokey premises, operated via an answer phone, but the traffic thereon was surprisingly sparse. This may be due to there now being a large and active Kai With Love food bank in Richmond. Conference members maintained phone contact with some recent clients and were able to meet some one off needs.

Nelson Conference via its strategic plan, has this year, focused on communications, as one of its three priorities. The conference, as a result is better connected with the parish and broader community organisations. There is a weekly shop news, and parishioner notice, some Facebook posts, as well as paid print advertisements and advertorial and a 1000 strong letter box drop. The Nelson Shop reopened last Tuesday September 14th with a \$2 sale on clothing.

The Stoke Conference has a new president, Diane Renwick, who is learning the ropes and heads a small, committed team. The Stoke Shop opened its doors the day after the Prime Minister moved the South Island to level two. This shop is doing extremely well with manager Sue Hewetson at the helm. It also reopened with a sale.

The Richmond Conference was blessed, in June, by a generous donation from a local, charitable trust, which enabled the purchase of a new, appropriately specced truck/van for pick ups and deliveries. This conference currently has a team, who, in an effort to “seek and find” are systematically approaching schools and preschools in the area with a view to identifying whānau in need. This initiative has been very well received by the places already visited. It is ongoing. Richmond is reopening its shop on September 20th, possibly the last op shop in the region to do so. A lot of things have been dropped off during lockdown and a dedicated group of people have worked this past week meticulously sorting this.

Motueka Conference operates out of a community house/ social service hub. They are a very well networked conference, attending monthly whanau meetings which include members of local volunteer groups and NGOs. Motueka is a service town for a large horticultural hinterland and its economy is heavily dependent on seasonal workers. A consistent theme for this conference is assisting the “working poor”. Food support to these folk, which includes many RSE workers from the Pacific Islands, constitutes a lot of their work. Supplying firewood is another form of outreach, for this conference.

Takaka Conference is a small but well networked one and works alongside other community agencies from the community house in Golden Bay. Assisting with food and travel costs are regular parts of their mahi, along with supporting sick and bereaved whānau. Their work also includes helping with the delivery of meals on wheels.

*Nga manaakitanga,*  
**Nelson Area Council**



*Nelson Conference was delighted to receive two pallets of groceries recently from long-time supporters New World, and their generous customers. There are 270 individuals and families receiving visits, support and groceries from this busy little Conference. The team manages about 50 meetings per month with clients and 60 visits.*



*Chris White on the left and Jim Hill (drivers) in front of the new van at the Richmond shop.*



# COVID-19 update

When level 4 lockdown was declared it caught many people by surprise, with a very small window to prepare. For some people they hadn't been paid, or for some they were put off work, and for others, contracts were cancelled or suspended.

For people not having food on their table to feed their loved ones can be very stressful. With the lockdown, we made a decision to immediately centralise most of our welfare operations at our Stanmore Road headquarters- part of that decision was to protect our volunteers and our staff - those with age, health, and family vulnerabilities. Food parcels were able to be delivered to people's gate following requests from our welfare line. For those delivering these parcels, the feedback and calls back to our line, has been humbling - the general appreciation and joy at someone receiving a parcel was felt and witnessed.

In the middle of Level 4, I also started receiving emails from school students from 5 or 6 Catholic Schools throughout Christchurch, the West Coast and Timaru. These students were learning about St Vincent de Paul and his work. There were multiple emails thanking us, praying for us in our mission and for our client's wellbeing. At a time when it was so busy, these were refreshing and a delight to receive.

Part of being able to operate a foodbank is the need to have resources that you can call on when needed. At the start of Lockdown, I put out an appeal to parishioners throughout the Diocese and the response was overwhelming. Not only were we able to get fresh food from a central foodbank but the donations meant we could stock the shelves of product to hand out in parcels. Not all the figures are in yet but over 14 days we delivered 515 food parcels with a supermarket retail value of \$49,800.

A big thank you to our staff, our volunteers for all the work that went on, for the prayers offered and for the financial support of donors - we are indeed extremely grateful.

Finally, if you know of anyone requiring assistance, please contact Vinnies by texting **027 358 9400** or emailing [welfare@svdpchch.co.nz](mailto:welfare@svdpchch.co.nz)

*God Bless and thank you again.*

**Robyn Casey** - General Manager



## Guide for the creation of Youth Conferences at Universities

The **Youth Conference Guide** has been created as a resource to assist you in starting a Youth Conference at your university.

<https://tinyurl.com/8ay4phat>



There are many benefits of starting a Youth Conference. As a student, you have an amazing opportunity to:

- make a real difference to the lives of people in your community;
- meet like-minded people wanting to make a difference in your community;
- put your faith into action;
- participate in fun activities;
- be a role model for others;
- develop leadership skills which will prepare you for life;
- expand your comfort zone.

Our founders were young university students.

SSVP was born through conferences (of various themes) formed within universities and which spread throughout the community.

We understand that young people at the university are open to new horizons, and that their search for knowledge and innovation combines with aspects such as solidarity, social justice, organized charity, fraternity.

And a conference formed by young university students, will be a group of students, who will make a difference in their communities, working on social justice issues and putting their faith into action.

**Paola Minehan**

- National Youth Advisor





## Living more sustainably

Vinnies Youth are using education in environmental responsibility to encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.

There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions. Along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a 'culture of care' which permeates all of society.

### Pope Francis puts it very powerfully:

"The earth itself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor."

"It is not an option to sit on the sidelines and do nothing while the overwhelming scientific consensus is that humankind is having a devastating impact on the environment in which we live."

LAUDATO SI'  
CARE OF OUR COMMON HOME

Paola Minehan  
- National Youth Advisor



# THANK YOU

FROM YOUNG VINNIES

"This week with my lockdown homework, I am learning about Saint Vincent De Paul and today I learnt about your organisation. I would like to say thank you for all that you do! I am a 10 year old girl living in Invercargill and we have a Saint Vincent De Paul shop right around the corner that we donate to often. This week we're putting food items in a box for our Saint Vinnies group. Thank you and my family will pray for the organisation! "



"I am a student from a school in Auckland. We are sending emails to St Vincent De Paul Society for the love, care, and support that they have shown towards others in the past centuries.

I love how you provide food parcels to those who really need it. It shows generosity which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Especially the hungry are dying out here but some people refuse to help them out so you do really change the world! You've also helped with clothing and furniture that have been sold for free. I am sure that people come in and tell you how wonderful your community is in your stores. You visit the sick and those who are almost about to pass and make sure that they are blessed. Maybe I will get lucky sometime. And all who are in prison have got you guys to that they aren't all bad and they have got a lot of faith in them. Thanks for providing transport for those who need it you really change the world!! Around the country different schools are part of the Vinnie society. It is incredible seeing how you impact our lives and you're so inspiring. Your logo has got one of the best quotes "HELPS PEOPLE."



"I am in room 3 at Sacred Heart school. I am very happy and thankful for the amazing work you do for others. I want to tell you that I will pray every single day for you and for others."





by Bishop Peter Cullinane, Bishop Emeritus of Palmerston North diocese

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An image has been occurring to me of boats that have become unmoored. They end up on the rocks, or colliding with one another. There are features of our Western world's culture that seem to fit the image. Important aspects of our lives seem to have become disconnected from what gives them meaning. If this is true, it is hardly healthy. I offer the following examples:

## 1

### **“Me” disconnected from “we”; and “my” from “our”.**

To say modern culture suffers from acute individualism is by now a truism. Clamours for “my rights” often involve little or no sense of “my responsibilities”. It seems incredible that some would regard public health requirements as infringements of their rights – it’s as silly as regarding the road rules as violations of their freedom. During the pandemic, some have been willing to put other people’s lives at risk for no better reason than to enjoy themselves. Obviously, legal restrictions are no substitute for moral formation.

But all is not lost: catastrophes can still bring out the best in people. It is still easy to admire individuals who are generous, even risking their own lives for others. It is still

easy to dislike gross forms of self-centredness and self-aggrandisement. People still give generously to charitable causes. And it is still easy to pity individuals caught up in over-anxious self-concern.

But there are also subtler forms of disconnect that we can become used to; they become ‘normalised’. E.g. in most if not all cultures, marriage has been a moment of celebration for whole communities. Now, “what we do is nobody else’s business”. Within an individualist culture, it isn’t easy to see anything wrong with this. It’s the culture that has become reductionist.

Work used to be regarded as an expression one’s person and relationships with others. Now, within the culture we are regarding as ‘normal’, it is reduced to a commodity and business transaction. Commercial value attaches to the work, not the person doing it, so work becomes unmoored from its own deepest meaning.

The common denominator to all forms of self-centredness is failure to realise that we can become our own true selves only through being “for others”. This paradox is at the centre of Jesus’ teaching. The drift away from his Gospel has become a drift away from what we need to become our own true selves. This will show up in the uglier kinds of self-centredness.





## 2

### **'Facts' unmoored from truth.**

When truth is reduced to whatever we say to get whatever we want – whether it is true or not – we are targets for manipulation. We become vulnerable to every kind of spin – commercial spin, political spin, and agenda-driven ideologies.

Scientists work hard to establish facts. They know we need to act on what is objectively true. Solving crimes, the judicial system, and research in every field are all based on the premise that truth matters. All these, and most of life, would be turned up-side-down if it were enough to say: “truth is whatever the individual thinks it is – it is true for her/him” and “right is whatever the individual chooses – it is right for him/her”. How could we even say rape or sexual abuse are wrong if it might be “right” for the person doing it? So, we cannot escape the need to acknowledge an objective difference between true and false, and right and wrong.

Conspiracy theories during the pandemic duped some people into believing claims that were far more bizarre than anything the sciences ever present us with. What kind of culture is it when they are so gullibly believed?

Parroting clichés is a lazy alternative to serious thinking. For example: lazy thinkers don't distinguish between judging a person's actions (which we may do, and sometimes must), and judging their conscience (which we may not – because we cannot know whether or how much they are guilty before God.) That is the meaning of the saying: “who am I to judge?” It doesn't mean we can't judge their actions!

But even when we rightly judge that another's actions are wrong, it is often necessary to look further. Their offending can have deep roots in early experience of abuse or deprivation or cultural alienation. If we are personally attached to truth, we will look more deeply, and avoid superficial judgments and demonising.

Lazy thinking also buys the slogan used to justify abortion: “it's my body,” even though the sciences leave no doubt that the embryo is actually someone else's body.

## 3

### **Sexual activity unmoored from sexuality's meaning.**

I recently heard some young people say they felt it was wrong to send sexual imagery on line, but they didn't know why. They will not come any closer to knowing through “consent education”. “Consent education” is right to teach the need to avoid activities that are not legal or consensual or safe. But that is as far as it can go because it is unconcerned with sexuality's meaning – other than it being a source of pleasure. That kind of ‘education’ allows, if it doesn't promote, the idea that anything goes provided it is legal, consensual and safe. But is it?

A more holistic education would allow young people to learn about virtue. Modesty is the virtue that protects chastity. Of course, if society has given away the virtue of chastity, then it won't feel any need for modesty. Chastity is the virtue that applies self-respect, restraint and respect for others, to sexuality. Unchastity involves a lack of self-respect, restraint and respect for others. The Department of Internal Affairs' statistics regarding the extent of attempts in NZ to access child sex sites, and the increasing demand for younger children, and more violent forms of abuse, show where we go when the meaning of sexuality is ignored, or reduced to pleasure.

There have been strong, organized and determined cultural movements whose agenda has been to “liberate” sexuality from all previous restraints. We look back incredulously to the 1960's through 1990's when some activists described themselves as ‘victims’ of harsh laws aimed at preventing “man-boy love”; and children as ‘victims’ because harsh parents didn't want them to have that kind of loving care!! “Inter-generational sex” and “man-boy love” were euphemisms intended to promote the acceptability of what society calls pederasty. For some, the aim was to shed categories such as ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ in favour of more fluid and non-binary language. Even though by the 1990's those movements had mostly lost their credibility, the underlying ideologies have a way of re-surfacing.

So sooner or later, we do need to come to the question: what is sexuality's meaning? What is its purpose? Yes, it is for pleasure. But so is unchastity. So, there must be some meaning beyond that. Honest reflection recognises two purposes that are entwined and come together uniquely in marriage: they are sexuality's potential for deeply nurturing the love of two people, and in a way that is also designed to generate new life as the fruit of their love. And because new life needs to be protected and nurtured, the child's parents need to be in a relationship that is stable, committed and faithful.

Whatever allowances we rightly make for people of various orientations or preferences (see below), ultimately it is marriage that can fulfil sexuality's deepest meanings. Detached from marriage, sexual activities are detached from sexuality's meaning.

## 4

### **Gender identity unmoored from sexual identity.**

Gender identity is not a label that is put on us, by ourselves or by others. It is given by nature long before we start making our own decisions. But what about the tensions between biological reality and psychological/emotional reality that some people experience? We move closer to an answer when we allow both faith and the sciences to be part of our thinking: the world is a work in progress, and we are part of this evolving world. This means that none of us is a



finished product. We are all at one stage or another of being unfinished.

We can be born with deficiencies, or incur disabilities, some of which last through life. In fact, we are never finished while death is still in front of us. When there is something that cannot be resolved or fulfilled within our present span of life, it helps to remember that our life was not something we had a right to in the first place; it is simply gift. And our present life is not the whole of it.

In that kind of world, personal development does not always take place at the same pace, or even follow the usual pattern. Those who are caught in any of the dilemmas resulting from different stages of, or lines of, development have a right to the same respect and unconditional love as everyone else. Still, as Professor Kathleen Stock, herself a lesbian, writing about “Why Reality Matters for Feminism,” reminds us, there are only two biological sexes and no amount of hormonal or surgical treatment can change that. She is aware that by seeking surgical or hormonal treatment to support gender change, people are implicitly acknowledging the link between gender identity and sexual identity.

But she is also aware, and critical of, the more recent claim that they should not need to; it should be enough simply to declare that you are male or female, regardless of biological reality. Is that where the separation of gender identity and sexual identity can take us?

If reality matters, then it matters to acknowledge that, both socially and biologically, male and female find a certain completion in each other, precisely by being each other’s ‘opposite’ – which is what the ancient Genesis story has been saying all along.

## 5

### **Politics unmoored from the common good.**

Politics unmoored from the common good is politics unmoored from its own purpose. The purpose of political involvement is to create a social and economic environment in which everyone has the opportunity to progress towards achieving their own potential and a fulfilling life. In a true democracy, political parties differ over how to do this, while being united in a common pursuit of the common good.

Partisan self-interest placed above the common good is a throw-back to tribalism, and like ancient forms of tribalism, it undermines the unity that is needed for achieving the common good. The alternative to the common good is mere partisan power. This gives rise to all kinds of inequalities and absurdities (e.g. being duped by misinformation and lies that have been discredited by the courts; basing decisions about masks and social distancing not on science but on which political party you belong to!)

We might be surprised at such fickleness, though perhaps less surprised that it happens in a country where States can still pass anti-democratic laws, and that does not yet a proper separation of powers. But the lesson for ourselves is how foolish and self-destructive we too could become through unmooring rights from responsibilities. ‘facts’ from truth, and politics from pursuit of the common good.

## 6

### **“Religion” unmoored from ordinary life:**

Early in the Christian tradition, St Irenaeus said the glory of God is human beings coming alive through seeing God in all that God has made and all that God is doing in human lives. We are being drawn to God through the experience of created beauty, goodness and truth. Popes St John Paul II and Benedict XVI have picked up Irenaeus’ theme, emphasising that since human beings becoming fully alive is God’s agenda in creating and redeeming us, it is also “the route the Church must take.”

So, religion is not somehow running alongside our ordinary lives; it IS our ordinary lives being made extraordinary, being sanctified, graced – family life, civic life, industrial and commercial life, political life... Of course, this is unfinished work, and so it will be until God is “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). In the meantime, people for whom life’s shortfalls create a sense of insecurity are the ones more likely to seek escape into “religion” perceived as some kind of separate sphere, or construct built on to life, or, worse, a kind of bubble (even having its own separate language).

This perception of ‘religion’ being alongside ordinary life is the assumption of some bloggers, and it seems, even some bishops (in Britain, Ireland, France and USA) who resent government restrictions affecting church gatherings even during a pandemic. It is as if the sciences and good government don’t apply to “religion’s” separate sphere. A concept of religion unmoored from the needs of the common good is unmoored from the ordinary processes of becoming more truly human and fully alive, which is what gives glory to God.

### **Conclusion:**

A culture in which so many aspects of life have become unmoored from what gives them meaning is a culture that is reductionist, superficial, utilitarian... The question is: within in that kind of culture, how well equipped can we be to deal with the epic issues of our time – those that degrade human life, human dignity, human rights and the planet itself?

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.



\**Jeitinhos*, in the original. This typical expression of Brazil indicates an informal way of reacting based on improvisation in unexpected, difficult or complex situations, not based on rules, nor on procedures or rules stipulated previously [translator’s note].

## The Great Depression & the War Years

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

Prepared by Anne-Marie McCarten – National Executive Officer

The Women’s Auxiliary at the parish of St Francis de Sales Island Bay, Wellington provided an example of what would have been the case in many parishes throughout the country in those years.

The parish history records that ‘a women’s Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society began in 1931 to fill an urgent need due to the impact the Great Depression was having on the community’.

The parish history continues: ‘The St Vincent de Paul ladies met in the parish hall every Tuesday afternoon. Their first President, Mrs Marianne Hughes, a fine and gracious lady, would be available in the hall to greet those who came for assistance. Tact and compassion were the order of the day and all requests for help were treated in confidence. So, while Mrs Hughes welcomed and interviewed people in the hall, a group of women would be busy in the supper room, some treadling busily at the sewing machines, others standing at a large table preparing work for the

needle women. New material was used whenever it was available. At other times good used clothing would be ‘made over’.

As the economic situation improved the requests for help gradually declined but World War II brought new demands as outlined ‘the women, with the help of other parishioners and the Men’s Conference, endeavoured to send at least one food parcel to each young man from the parish who was away on active service.’

Then in 1944 when the young Polish children arrived in New Zealand (Pahiatua) there was an urgent appeal for boy’s shirts for these young refugees. ‘The women willingly agreed to participate in the work and were sent a quantity of new material for the purpose’.

The work above of the Auxiliary of St Francis de Sales are quoted as typical of the needs of the times and how they would have been met by the women Auxiliaries of the Society.

## The Vincentian Foundation for the Elderly

On behalf of the Trustees I sincerely thank Area Councils and Conferences for their recent financial support of the Vincentian Foundation for the Elderly.

Unfortunately some deposits to the Foundation's bank account contained insufficient information to identify the location of the SVDP depositor so please accept this general acknowledgement.

Since April 2021 the total amount received from SVDP Area Councils and Conferences has been \$14,500. In the same period 29 hearing aid grants have been made at a total cost of \$7,950.

These grants along with available Government subsidies, enable pensioners on low incomes to buy suitable hearing aids which dramatically improve their quality of life.

Regrettably the increasing demand for financial assistance has resulted in the amount of the average hearing aid grant being reduced. In the year to 31 May 2021 the average grant was \$301 and currently the amount is \$274.

Hearing aid grants are provided to people over 65 who hold a Super Gold Card with Community Services endorsement. Their hearing loss has to be assessed by a qualified audiologist. Should someone in your area require financial assistance to obtain a hearing aid they can contact the Foundation – [info@vincentianfoundation.co.nz](mailto:info@vincentianfoundation.co.nz) or **(04) 496 1732** to obtain an application form.

Once again thank you to those Area Councils and Conferences who contributed to the Foundation in the past five months.

Grateful thanks

**Pat Sheehan** – Chairperson



If other Area Councils and Conferences would like to make a donation please forward the funds to the Foundation's BNZ bank account:

**02-0528-0234390-00**

Please show your Area Council or Conference name as a reference.

*"After being fitted with hearing aids I was once again able to experience the familiarity of every day normal sounds. I could now participate in conversations, hear music, listen to the birdsong in the garden. I no longer felt isolated at meetings or social and family functions – I now feel able to remain an active member of our community"*

**- Marion**

## Obituaries

### Jim Small - Holy Name Conference Ashburton

When Holy Name Conference was founded on October 18, 1961, among the small group of men who became members was 27-year-old Jim Small. A few years later the organisation became open to women members and Jim's wife Nita joined, becoming the volunteer shop manager when the conference opened its first shop in 1985.

Jim died on August 16 this year after 40 years of continuous work with the same conference, Nita having died in 2013.



In the early years of the conference there was not much money available, and the work involved mostly visiting the sick, elderly, and single mothers, bringing what help they could afford from church donation boxes and the occasional grant.

Jim and Nita were quiet workers, preferring to be in the background although Jim made the Society well known through appeals in the parish bulletin whenever items such as furniture were needed. He became Mr SVdP in the parish. Through his work as an electrician he was able to organise vouchers from the local power board which could be used for people in need. He also arranged a Society voucher system with two suburban grocery shops. As conference president he was instrumental in the settling of Vietnamese refugees in Ashburton in the late 1970s.

He and Nita were people of great faith. Although in recent years Jim's deteriorating hearing meant he was unable to attend meetings but he still attended festival meetings and the Conference annual Mass.

Due to level four lockdown conference members were unable to attend Jim's funeral. May he and Nita rest in peace.

### Bill Newson - Nelson

A valued and long standing and dedicated member and Treasurer of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Conference in Richmond, Nelson.

May he rest in Peace.



## 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@svdp.org.nz](mailto:national@svdp.org.nz)