

News in Brief

E-news July 2024 | Issue 34

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

A MESSAGE FROM OUR NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Dear Fellow Vincentians,

Today's Gospel reading (Mark 4: 35-41), the calming of the storm at sea, reminded me just how important our belief and trust in Jesus is to our Vincentian work. Indeed, I could go further and say that if we don't have that belief and trust, then as a Society we are nothing. We would be reduced to a mere welfare agency.

However, there is more to that story than just a belief in miracles. After reading it there is a sense of calm, control and peace.

The event took place at the end of a day of preaching and Jesus decided to go to the other side of the lake with his

closest disciples. It was dark and as they proceeded on the water of the Sea of Galilee a windstorm breaks out and the waves begin to swamp the boat. It was like a tornado and such events were not uncommon in those days and today they still occur. Something to do with the geography of the area. The strong winds that funnel through the hills can whip up the waves in the fairly shallow water of the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples would have been terrified. It was dark and water for them was not just a symbol of life



In a Storm with Jesus, 1926. By Eero Järnefelt (1863–1937)

and cleansing, but it also held the potential for danger and death. Raging winds and howling gales would have represented chaos and disaster. The atmosphere would have been fear and panic, made worse by the dark.

In the face of all this, Jesus remained calm. Even more than calm, "He was asleep in the stern, his head on a cushion"; In an untroubled sleep signalling a complete trust and belief in God's protection, even in the most serious circumstances.

But the disciples did not understand how he could sleep in such a storm and woke him, asking "do you not care we are going to drown". So, Jesus woke and rebuked the wind and the sea. "Quiet now. Be calm." And the wind dropped and the sea became calm. He then said to the disciples, "why are you so frightened? Have you no faith". They are frightened not just by the miracle but by what it meant. The control of nature was the prerogative of God alone and they began to fear a great fear. Maybe they were starting to understand that God was with them.

So what does that mean for all of us in Vinnies?

At present, it seems the boat of St Vincent de Paul is in dark, stormy times. Like many other religious organisations, we have an aging and declining membership. Conferences are struggling and many

face closure. We are overloaded with legal obligations, Government regulations and increasing leadership vacancies.

At the same time requests for assistance are increasing as the social fabric of our world is torn apart. "ME has become more important than US". The trickle down theories of long ago have dried up.

At the same time, we are having to make repairs and changes to our boat to cope with the dark stormy times. This too can be unsettling, but unlike the disciples we now know the Jesus is awake and exercising his calming power – he does really care!

So let us today, continue to have faith and be not afraid. Your faith is displayed in the work you do, bringing the experience of the calming love of Jesus to all those you help.

Stay calm; Jesus is with us for the long voyage.

Thank you again for all your support and love for our people.

With every blessing and my best wishes

Gerry Stevens
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Michael (Mike) Hanham

– What an amazing example of a Vincentian life well lived.

Mike was a founding member of the Ashburton SVDP conference at just 18 years old. Whilst he had some years in between that were focused on raising a family, running a business and playing rugby, he remained connected with SVDP, and resumed active membership over the past decade up until his passing on 8th June at age 83.

In recent years Mike was Conference President for Ashburton, and at the time of his death, was midway through a term as Area President for Mid-South Canterbury. Mike belonged to one of the most active and vibrant Conferences in New Zealand, the Ashburton Holy Name Conference. In recent years Mike was asked to speak at National Council meetings about his Conference and what made Ashburton so successful and so vibrant with a large active membership, and resilience over such a long period. Mike's involvement in the conference, his organisational skills, ability to get the job done, his amazing negotiation skills at getting deals, sponsorship and freebies have contributed to the long term success of the conference.

Mike was a talented Rugby player having a long and successful playing and coaching career with Ashburton Celtic, and the Mid Canterbury Rugby Union with over 100 games for the Union, and he went as far as being selected

for the South Island in 1970. Mike was made a life member of both the Celtic Rugby Club, and the Mid Canterbury Rugby Union, and at the time of passing was the current Chairman of the Mid Canterbury Union. Mike's rugby legacy continues to this day with two Grandsons playing in the Super Rugby competition, brothers James and Will Tucker (Blues and Highlanders).

Mike was also a long-time member of Ashburton Lions. And there is a great connection with Ashburton County Lions and Ashburton SVDP in the food donation collection project called "Toot for Tucker". This has become an amazing source of donated food for helping those in need in the Ashburton District.

Mike seldom missed Mass on Sunday, and was a strong supporter of the Tinwald church community advocating for retaining the Mass centre in Tinwald.

He will be remembered for his generosity in giving his time, his dedication to the cause, his incredible work ethic and his faithfulness to the Church, Community and Society.

Mike is survived by his wife Diana, 6 children, 17 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren.



Robert (Bob) Goodyear

– RIP June 2024

Bob was an exceptional human being. You didn't need to be in his company for very long to see the qualities which made him unforgettable.



He was smart, very well read, never afraid to share his opinions, even if he knew that some around him would disagree. He was a leader, never short of a good idea, and able to engage others to help him realise a plan - usually a plan to right an injustice.

He was calm when those around him were not calm. He loved people and they loved him back - particularly people in want or need of any sort. He seemed fearless. His generosity knew no bounds - early mornings, late nights, weekends or weekdays, rain hail or shine, he served people - old and young, and gave them the best of himself - which often involved hours and days of work for himself and Christ.



Nora O'Sullivan

– RIP June 2024

Nora was a member of Our Lady Help of Christians in Fitzroy New Plymouth since 1982. In her 90's Nora was still attending Conference meetings and helping at the Vinnies shop. She would sit behind the counter assisting customers.

May Nora RIP.

Christopher George Simpson

30 June 1952 to 31 March 2024

Chris (Christopher George) Simpson was received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil 1992, in Maria Assumpta Parish, Beach Haven, some thirty two years ago and died on Easter Day 2024.



Shortly after entering the life of Baptism, Chris sought practical expression for his faith and joined the local Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. He remained an active Vincentian to the day of his death. When asked by his family during his last few days in hospice care what he was missing most, his response was "Delivering food parcels and bread".

Chris was serving the Conference as President when he died and had served as Treasurer as well. He had also been a member of the Parish Council and the Regional Pastoral Council. Chris frequently reminded us that God will not praise us for spotting deception and not assisting someone who didn't need it but would rather ask us why we had been too afraid to give assistance to someone who was in need.

Chris worked for New World Supermarket and then as an aerial photographer. He then moved to working in dementia care. He was a member of the Devonport band for many years and played the last post and reveille at the ANZAC Day Dawn Parades. Fellow Vincentians remember Chris as never suggesting that you did not do something that he did not agree with. Instead he would say "what if" and provide you with an alternative, leaving you saying "think about it", with the final decision being left up to you.

Chris never missed an opportunity to assist those in need and if someone in need was unable to go shopping, Chris would volunteer to do it for them. Chris also worked in the Vinnies shop in Beach Haven for over seven years, and briefly at the new Barry's Point Road store in Takapuna.

May Chris rest in peace, and arise in Glory.

WESTPORT CONFERENCE

The Westport Conference of St. Vincent de Paul were recently awarded gift vouchers for Fresh Choice and New World Supermarkets from Martins Mitre 10 Westport as part of their 50 years celebration as Mitre 10.

During the year we also received donations for our Food Bank so we were able to donate to "Who Cares", the Reefton Community Food Bank.

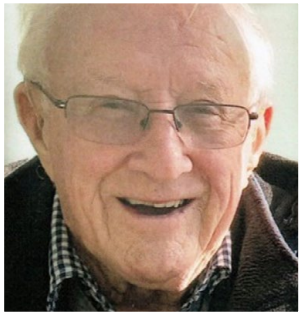
The Salvation Army in Westport has ceased running a Food Bank so we are now the only agency in Westport doing so. They generously donated all their food to us.



From left: Troy Scanlon (Mitre 10), Nikki Diskin (Homebuilders), Julie Hands (St Vincent de Paul), Heidi Allen (St Vincent de Paul) and Casey Scanlon (Mitre 10).

Rest in Peace

Holy Trinity Eastern Suburbs Conference in Wellington has recently farewelled these three outstanding Vincentian servants whom they formally remember here in acknowledgement of their length of tenure and inspirational legacy.



Jack Dobbs

Jack Dobbs was committed to serving his community. Jack joined Vinnies around 1980 and in 2018 he was awarded formal recognition of long and devoted service to St Vincent de Paul, alongside Brian and John. Jack worked humbly, tirelessly, with good cheer, and without judgement. He could laugh at himself, and with others, and he stayed true to his faith, friendships, and focus on service until his end. Jack passed in December, 2023.



Brian Ward

Brian Ward was an energetic, compassionate, often humorous, and dedicated member of our conference from the early 1970s. Brian spent over four decades working with the poor and isolated in our community, making himself available at any time, and in any way, that he was needed; he also fulfilled a wide range of formal roles within Vinnies over time, including president, secretary and treasurer of our Conference and in so doing played a significant role in its continuation and development. All who worked with Brian felt it a privilege, never a chore, and learned a great deal along the way. Brian passed in May, 2024.



John Woods

John Woods' faith was the cornerstone of his Vinnies service. He lived the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor and marginalised with love, respect, justice, and hope, and by putting his faith into practical action. John was a natural Vinnie – loved banter and enjoyed people. He was humble, non-threatening and courageous to enter all manner of situations. Clients easily warmed to John. He too took on the post of Conference president at one time. He was loved and appreciated for his encouraging support and sensible guidance to the next generation of Vincentians right up to a week before his death in June 2024 marking over 40 years of service.

Together these gentlemen have been pivotal to the existence, spirit and focus of our conference
– John used to joke that when they first started, they could have met in a telephone box! They served willingly and constantly, and in their lives strove only to

“become better and do a little good”

*We will always remember and be grateful
for knowing each one.*

VINNIES PALMERSTON NORTH

We are especially grateful to the students and staff of St Peter's College who have recently organised and held two separate collections.

The first was a food drive which resulted in approximately 1000 cans of food for replenishing our much depleted food store. The second was a winter clothing drive which significantly contributed to the stocks of our Vinnies Shop which has been experiencing a big increase in needy people getting warmer clothing as the colder months have their impact.

Last month was a special time when, at a Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, we installed Kevin Frost as new Conference President taking over from Rose Semmens. Two new members, Rick Field and James Kissell, were also commissioned. Kevin took the opportunity at the end of Mass to thank Rose for her ever positive leadership and unstinting example of helping people over the three years of her presidency. He also thanked parishioners for their food and monetary contributions that enable us to continue our service to those in need.

Our Conference is experiencing a significant increase in the number of requests for food and other help. In the month of May we delivered 108 food parcels (normally some 70 parcels) which fed around 400 adults and children.



Installation at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. Left to right: Rose Semmens, Kevin Frost, Monsignor Dave Bell, James Kissell, Rick Field.



At back of Vinnies truck (with loaded winter clothing) – SVDP members and St Peter's students.

HUTT VALLEY AND WAIRARAPA AREA COUNCIL

Bernice Smith (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kahungunu), is the Area Council President for Hutt Valley and Wairarapa.

In her full-time role as a Senior Solicitor in the Legal Services team at Te Puni Kōkiri | Ministry for Māori Development, Bernice was recently nominated for an In-house lawyers of New Zealand (ILANZ) Award.

ILANZ is a section of the New Zealand Law Society, established to create a space for practice-sharing and networking, and to encourage professional development for in-house lawyers.

With around 3,400 members working in the private and public sectors, not-for-profit and other organisations, ILANZ makes up 28% of the legal profession in Aotearoa.

Bernice was one of two finalists for the ComplyWith Community Contribution Award, which recognises an in-house lawyer or legal team who has made an outstanding contribution to the profession or to the community beyond their day job. \$5,000 in funding is awarded to a community organisation of the winner's choice.

Bernice was nominated for her voluntary charity work with the Society of St Vincent de Paul. As the Area Council President for the Hutt Valley and Wairarapa, Bernice supervises three Vinnies charity shops, in Carterton, Petone and Wainuiomata. She is also responsible for the area's ten conference groups, which manage the support and assistance for those in need in our communities – the poor, the vulnerable and the lonely.

"Everyone needs help at some point in their lives. It's about providing whānau with a hand up, not a handout. It's all about manaakitanga (kindness and respect)," says Bernice.



Bernice's voluntary mahi (work) demonstrates her selflessness and commitment to helping others and connecting with local communities. Although Bernice did not take home the win, she was happy to promote the Society of St Vincent de Paul and all the great work and positive impact the volunteers, Vincentians and staff do to help those in need and make a difference in the world.

Without Judgement

The Nelson Weekly recently featured a story (below) about locals struggling with rent payments. Our Nelson Vinnies was quoted as noticing increased requests for help. An anonymous client was quoted in the article:

"... her family would be lost.....if we didn't have SVDP in our community, a lot of people would struggle."



MORE NELSONIANS STRUGGLING TO PAY RENT

By Kate Russell, Nelson Weekly,
Wednesday 12th June 2024

A Nelson family says they would be "lost" without the assistance they received from the Society of St Vincent de Paul to pay their rent - and they are not the only ones.

Despite the median rent in Nelson Tasman falling by 3.4 per cent to \$570, according to TradeMe's rental price index for April 2024, the society has seen an increase in those needing help to pay it as the cost of living continues to bite.

St Vincent de Paul has seen a 60 per cent jump in those seeking rent assistance in the past year across the region. In the 2023/24 financial year, they have given out \$42,000 in rent assistance, compared to \$15,500 in 2022/23.

President of SVDP Nelson, Elizabeth Owens, says this is a "significant" increase.

"We are careful in considering each request for assistance. Sometimes we offer a portion towards a debt, and they find the rest.

"We speak to the landlord too and establish if it is an ongoing issue. Sometimes people have an unexpected expense or a reduction in their work hours."

One lady spoken to by the Nelson Weekly, who wants to be known as Denise, says her family would be "lost" without rent assistance from SVDP.

She, her partner, and her two teenage children, have been living in the same rental property for 11 years but, like many families, are struggling to juggle the rising cost of living.

She and her partner are both in paid work and pay more than \$500 per week for their three-bedroom home in the Nelson region, but they have had to ask for rent assistance from SVDP more than once.

"We've had to ask a few times, and they have paid half and we've paid the other half. You've still got to pay rent, otherwise you'd be living in your car," she says.

"It's pretty tough out there at the moment, sometimes we have to put the rent above food, the cost of everything is just so high. It can be stressful, especially when you have two incomes and you're still struggling."

Denise says she had heard from a friend that SVDP offered rent assistance.

"We just had to pick up the old pride and go and see them, but they made us feel welcome, they made us feel human – not like a number or a statistic."

Denise says they have applied for an accommodation supplement from Work and Income but have been told their income is too high to qualify.

"They have unrealistic guidelines... whereas SVDP helps working-class families without judgment.

"If we didn't have SVDP in our community, a lot of people would struggle."

SVDP has been helping people in New Zealand for over 155 years. In this region, they have branches in Nelson, Stoke, Richmond, Motueka, and Tākaka.

"We receive donations, and bequests, and our Vinnies shops make money from selling second-hand goods," Elizabeth explains.

These funds can help people with a variety of things, including school expenses, budget advice, vehicle costs, food, phone, power, medical and dental expenses – as well as rent bills.

Elizabeth says people needing help can come and have a discrete chat about their situation and what they can do to help them get back on their feet.

"We cannot predict accurately what the levels of each type of need will be from year to year; we just try and be ready and able to help people."

Manager at the Victory Community Centre, Laura Fear, says they are also seeing people in employment struggling to pay rent, as well as people servicing higher mortgage costs who are left with less money to buy essentials and requesting support.

"We are also seeing more people in housing need, and it is challenging to find homes for whānau in this expensive and competitive rental market."

You can support St Vincent de Paul by shopping or donating goods at any of their stores in the region or you can donate to them online.



donate.svdp.org.nz

Twining Report

July 2024

By Arthur Schultze, NZ Twining



ASSIST A STUDENT

We are in the process of distributing funding for the Assist A Student programme. Assistance will be provided to 100 in Sri Lanka, 50 in Tonga and 50 in Samoa. As per the commitment we will receive reports from a selected number of students, from all countries, which will be circulated.

I will be launching in July the funding requests to support the process next year.

Thank you for your generosity.

Your response to our three twinning projects was wonderful. It has allowed us to fully support these projects.

TONGA

The following update has been received from President Sakopo on the shop project:

Good Progress in SSVP Shop Tonga

After several weeks of delay in March/April due to flooding caused by some unusual weather conditions Phase 1 was duly completed in early May with completion of the new foundation and the two 40' containers lifted into place a week later. The two 40' containers were purchased locally as part of the financial assistance from SSVP NZ.



SSVP President said 'it has not been easy waiting for a break in weather so that we can start the project, now that Phase 1 is completed our attention is now turned to Phase 2 and this has started last week and should be completed in 2 to 3 weeks' time. I am thankful for the patience shown by all concern especially our conference members, parishioners and parish priest.

We continued to be grateful for the continued funding assistance and support from Arthur Schultze and Anne-Marie McCarten of SSVP New Zealand. A budget for Phase 2 was agreed upon and funds transferred last week to our shop account. Timber and roofing have been ordered and delivered to the site as required for the contractor to begin the work. Phase 2 should be completed in 2-3 week maximum if current good weather continues.

We have reported the work in progress to the National Council and SSVP New Zealand with detailed expenses and report. During several key construction phases Conferences have provided refreshments and lunch for the construction workers as show of support and partnership for the project. The local Conferences also play their part by contributing some funds for the project.

Blessing of the new shop is being planned for the SVDP Feast Day on 27th September 2024.

There will be a note coming out requesting clothing and household goods for the shop. Further detail will be provided.

SAMOA

Funds for the housing projects have been forward. We look forward to reports on the projects.

SRI LANKA

The Water project in Alligambay and the village of Thevakiramam is due to start. This will supply safe drinking water to 58 families. Once completed it will provide in total water to 329 families.

Medical Equipment to Samoa and Tonga:

We have started collating equipment donated from within the Auckland area. I will be putting out a note advising on what we need and where it can be forwarded to.

What is Twinning?



THE RULE PART 1:

4. Relationships Within the Vincentian & Catholic Network of Charity

Conferences and Councils help others in need, both at the National and International levels. This is one of the activities most cherished by the Society. The awareness of acute poverty in a great number of countries and the Vincentian preferential option for the poor spurs Conferences and Councils to assist others with less resources or in particular situations.

This direct link between two Conferences or Councils, consisting of: sharing prayers, a profound friendship and material resources, is called "Twinning". The activity of Twinning contributes to world peace through understanding and cultural exchanges amongst peoples.

THE RULE PART 3:

5.2 Twinning

Twinning is an established way of extending a network of Society charity around the world.

Every Conference or Council is expected to fully participate in the International Twinning Programme.

All Twinning arrangements must be coordinated through the National Twinning Officer and shall be in accordance with the Society's International Twinning Manual.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of mutual assistance dates back to the beginning of the Society in 1833. The Council General International (CGI) officially launched Twinning, as a formal program, in 1954. In 1979, Twinning was reinforced at the International level when those present at the 'Plenary Meeting' of the CGI declared that "all monies collected in the name of the Society anywhere, belong in principle, to the poor of the world."

New Zealand's Twinning History

In 1961 we started our twinning relationship with Sri Lanka. Sixty-three years later we are now the sole twinning donor country supporting them. Over the years the aid we have provided has taken many paths, housing assistance, land purchase and education. In recent times there have been bombings, tsunamis, internal cultural unrest and economic crises to name a few. We currently support in Sri Lanka 25 councils and 180+ conferences.

We also were twinned with South Korea and Pakistan in the 60's. South Korea went on to become a donor country. Pakistan is currently not twinned.

Our relationships with Samoa and Tonga have been for about 40 years. Assistance to these 2 twins has been mainly around supporting needs where they have been affected by climatic events such as cyclones and tsunamis. Twinning projects have been the most effective way in providing assistance to these communities. Material aid has been provided to both countries on a regular basis. This has included medical equipment, school furniture, computers, buildings, household goods and clothing.

These twinned countries will continue to need our support and I am confident we will meet our Mission.

SOUTHLAND AREA COUNCIL

Three thirty on a Friday afternoon and the Pomona Street Vinnies shop is looking very tired and depleted.

With ten volunteers needed each day to process the donations and sell items and a number of items free each week, we are the hub of the community which is doing it particularly tough this year.

The shop has operated on the site for around 40 years and can no longer meet the demands made on it. Having looked at renovation, we are now excited to be planning and building something that will be able to support this generation and those to come.



To Joy and the wonderful volunteers in the South, we acknowledge you as the modern incarnation of St Vincent de Paul.

Bernadette Ford - Area President, Southland St Vincent de Paul

KAPI MANA AREA COUNCIL

Our Lady of Kāpiti Conference has had a whirlwind start to 2024 and the pace seems to keep growing. We began with a barbeque for all members and families. We then extended manaakitanga to the Area with a Festival Meeting for about 50 members on Feb 23rd, at which we were all commissioned in a moving Mass celebrated by our National Chaplain, Fr Alan Roberts .



The spiritual and fellowship basis of our Conference is key to our work. We continue to attract new members. We have 25 active members, all of whom are retired. On Sunday 30 June we are meeting with 5 adults whose work commitments prevent them from attending regular meetings together with 5 teenagers who want to get involved with Vinnies. These teenagers are "graduates" of the Young Vinnies programme that runs at Our Lady of Kāpiti school, normally involving over 20 Year 7 students.

We are searching for a way to connect with younger people and ensure they have vibrant connections with our existing, older members.

This internal strength, built on Vincentian spirituality and fellowship, has been essential as we have become more and more involved in helping the poor and vulnerable in our society. This year we have noticed an increase in the number of people coming to us for help after being turned away from other agencies. Some of these "companions", as we call them, ask for help once or twice, but several now receive ongoing help and companionship. This companionship is reflected in our visitation records where the average time spent with a companion is 24 minutes - this is average across food drop-offs and time spent in conversation to help with gardening or relationships with other agencies.

Since the first Covid lockdown, we have become more and more involved in constructive relationships with other agencies as we strive to help our companions to negotiate a difficult life. The reputation of the Society goes before and we find that other agencies are very happy to work with us. In particular we have strong relationships with Birthright, Kāpiti Coast District Council, L'Arche, Kāpiti Coast Community Mental Health, Kāpiti Family Budgeting Service and others.

Most important, however, is the enormous generous support we receive from the parishioners of Our Lady of Kāpiti Church with donations of food, goods and money. We really appreciate this support.

NELSON AREA COUNCIL

Nelson Tasman was delighted to have a visit from National President and Executive in June for their Area meeting.

It was lively and interesting with 30 Vincentians present from Takaka, Motueka, Stoke, Richmond and Nelson. Guest speaker, historian Hilary Mitchell gave a fascinating speech about the early Maori settlements and their mahi in horticulture and argillite trading. With 3 busy shops, over 60 members and around 120 volunteers the Nelson Tasman SVDP is thriving.



Left to right: Nelson Shop Manager - Vanessa Donald, National President - Gerry Stevens, National Executive - Anne-Marie McCarten and the values tree.



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

Email: national@svdp.org.nz