

Media Release

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St Vincent de Paul members keen to engage in Refounding

More than a hundred Vincentians from around the country gathered in Wellington to embark on a process of “Refounding” the Society of St Vincent de Paul in New Zealand.

“I was surprised and delighted by the large number of members that attended the Wellington workshop,” says the Society’s President, Gerry Stevens. “There was great enthusiasm among members and a strong commitment to Refounding the Society here in New Zealand.”

Gerry says Refounding involves a radical new beginning for the Society as it seeks to live out its mission.

“As Conferences and individuals, we have to recapture the inspiration and dynamism of those who founded the Society. Our goal is to re-awaken the spirit that inspired Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions in their radical service of others.”

The concept of Refounding has been explored and developed by New Zealand Marist and cultural anthropologist Fr Gerald Arbuckle SM.

Fr Arbuckle says that Refounding is more than mere reform or renewal. He says it is a profound re-engagement with the foundational narratives and values of an organisation. It requires communities to revisit their original charisms and find ways to apply this in today’s world.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul faces many contemporary challenges, says Gerry.

“Our numbers have reduced, leadership is stretched thin, and our structures and image no longer meet today’s needs. Now is the time for us to be bold, return to our roots and re-think how we live out our mission today. Seen through the eyes of faith, it is a moment of opportunity.”

The 2024 Annual Report says the Society has 105 active Conferences around the country and 1,157 members. In addition to that it has 352 associate members and 1,759 volunteers. Fifty-five shops are in operation and there are many active groups of Young Vinnies in Catholic schools.

It is still a very active and vital organisation doing wonderful work in many New Zealand communities, says Gerry.

Last year the Society furnished nearly 2,000 households and dispatched more than 60,000 food parcels.

“But we are not just a welfare organisation,” says Gerry. “We are called to be Gospel-centred communities of faith, nourishing our members spiritually and reaching out to those in need around us – sharing God’s love for us.”

“Our mission has not changed – to give an experience of God’s love to a person in need. But the means of carrying out our mission has to change in response to the needs of people today.”

The Refounding process will be rolled out across the country in the coming months. Conference Presidents will lead the process locally with support from the National Council.

“We must be prepared to do things differently to enliven our Conferences and make them more attractive,” says Gerry. “In the words of our founder, Frederic Ozanam: ‘Do not be afraid of new beginnings. Be creative. Be inventive.’”

Ends

Quote

“Now is the time for us to be bold, return to our roots and engage in a radical new beginning for the Society.” – Gerry Stevens, President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New Zealand

For further comment:

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