



# VINNIES NEWS

## AROUND WOLLONGONG DIOCESE

### WOLLONGONG CENTRAL COUNCIL DESK

#### Dear Brothers and Sisters

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian, best remembered for the supreme sacrifice he made when he opposed the ideology of Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party. His life of sacrifice is an example and inspiration to us all. We can glimpse something of his commitment to the Gospel and to the wellbeing of others in his own words: "If you ever get a chance to help another human being, do it. You may not get another chance."

Over the Christmas holidays, I read a biography by Eric Metaxas, 'Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy'. Metaxas writes that Bonhoeffer believed in the practicality of Christianity. He believed that for individuals to achieve their full humanity they must demonstrate, through their actions, God's practicality in their lives. Dietrich believed if one wants to live a full Christian life, spirituality without good works is not enough.

Dietrich wrote: 'To be an ethereal figure who merely talks about God, but somehow refuses to get his (her) hands dirty in the real world in which God has placed him (her) is bad theology. Through Christ, God had shown that He meant us to be in this world and to obey him with our actions in this world' (page 361).

St Vincent de Paul, Sr Rosalie Rendu, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and many other Vincentians were practical Christians. They were people of prayer and action. They got their hands dirty, did not leave works of charity to others and never stopped praying. Indeed, they never stopped trying. They continually advanced social justice issues, were practical in their responses to perceived need and, through their work and in their spirituality, changed societies for the better.

As Vincentians we are part of a tradition of practical Christianity. We can be very proud of our good works and how they help to improve lives in our communities. While our state-wide works in social housing and social justice advocacy may not always be fully understood at the conference level, it is because of the dedication of individual Vincentians in the conferences that our local and state-wide good works, special works and social justice activities can happen. Thank you all for your contribution to the practical Vincentian work and prayer of the Society.

Peter Houweling

On behalf of the Wollongong Central Council



"Christians become the bearers of burdens: 'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). ... Just as Christ bears our burdens, so also are we to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters. Discipleship is commitment to the suffering Christ."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

# Wollongong Central Council

**Peter Houweling** Central Council President 0423 339 353

**Tom Gersbach** Central Council Vice-President 0408 584 782

**Patrick O'Flynn** Camden Regional President 0417 463 979

**Patrick Jordan** Campbelltown Regional President 0425 208 769

**Tony Ward** Southern Highlands Regional President 0490 864 759

**Ray Thrift** Wollongong Regional President 0400 292 755

**Rhonda Maher** Central Illawarra Regional President 0408 540 213

**Paul Duncan** Shoalhaven Regional President 0414 718 609

**Peter Doris** Twinning Officer 0418 474 099

**Renee Cooper** Regional Director - South 0477 345 712

**Philip Riordan** Member & Community Engagement Coordinator - South 0428 924 133

**Kathy Ferrif** Operations Support Officer - South 0429 656 886

**Peter Gormly** Mission Spirituality & Pastoral Care Partner - South 0478 368 169

**Annette Combs** Work Health & Safety Partner - South 02 6923 1906

**Tony Panopoulos** Regional Property Manager - South 0418 613 069

**Marcus Richa** Facilities Coordinator - South 02 9358 8124

Finance TBA

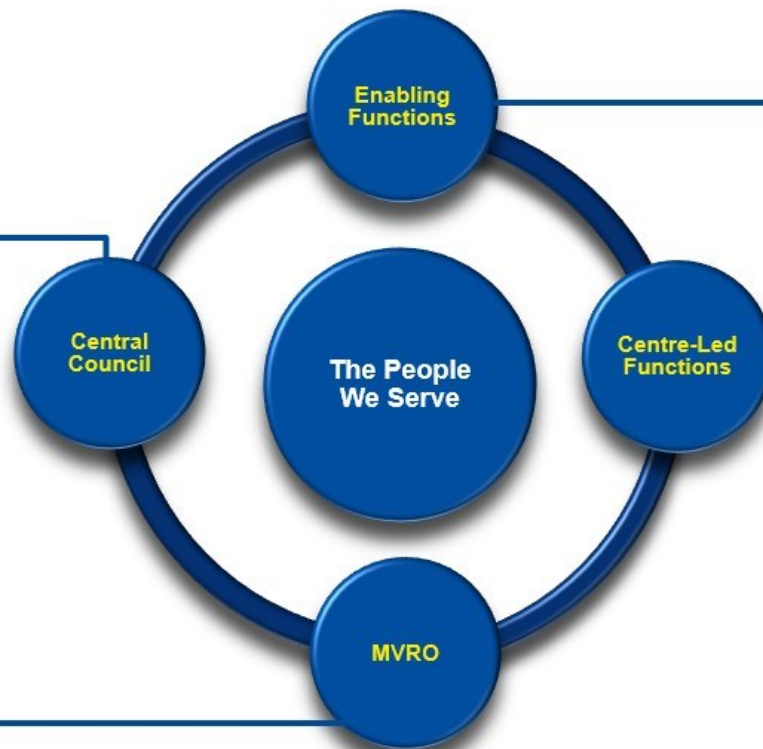
**Miranda Egner** Regional Retail Manager - South [Miranda.Egner@vinnies.org.au](mailto:Miranda.Egner@vinnies.org.au)

Housing & Homelessness Vinnies Services TBA

**Jen Dixon** Area Manager Housing & Homelessness (Macarthur-Southern Highlands) 02 5612 1358

**Lisa Rothque** Area Manager, Housing & Homelessness (Illawarra-Shoalhaven) 02 4428 6207

**Corinne Lindsell** Regional Manager, Community Inclusion - South 02 4620 8200

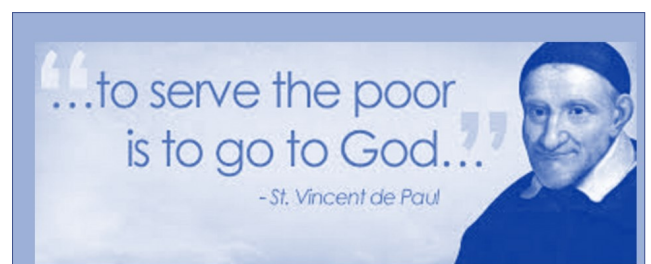


L to R: Ray Thrift (Wollongong Regional President), Tony Ward (Southern Highlands Regional President), Paul Duncan (Shoalhaven Regional President), Peter Houweling (Wollongong Central Council President), Brian Ritchie (former Shoalhaven Regional President), Patrick Jordan (Campbelltown Regional President), Rhonda Maher (Central Illawarra Regional President), Peter Gormly (Mission, Spirituality & Pastoral Care Partner), Peter Doris (Twinning Officer), Tom Gersbach (Social Justice Representative), Norm Roberts (former Twinning Officer), Patrick O'Flynn (Camden-Wollondilly Regional President)

## Join a Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul

Do you, or someone you know, have an interest in the work of the Society and the life of a Vincentian?

Contact your Regional President and find out more.

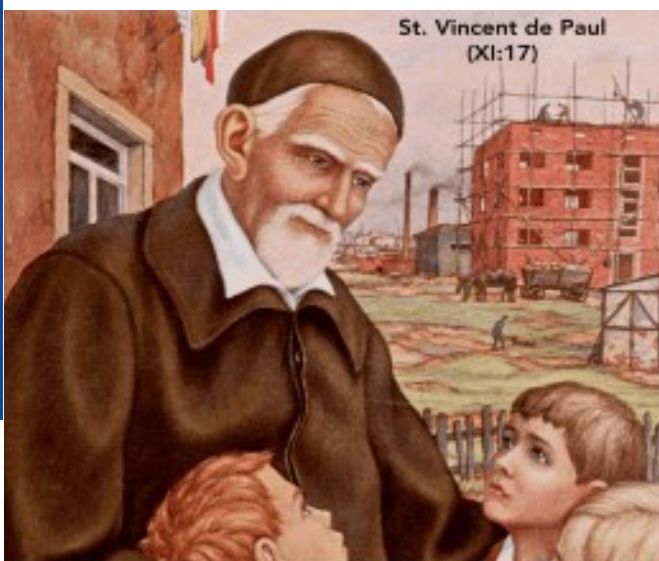


**What Does Masculinity Mean Today?**

In the encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis used the phrase ‘love without measure’. This phrase calls for deeper reflection. In recent times, we have heard about the impact of domestic violence on women, children, and some men. On average, a current or former partner kills one woman every nine days (Mission Australia). Jesuit Social Services (JSS) released two reports that show young Australian men hold traditional male values and have been told what type of behaviors they must demonstrate to be considered a man.

“Young men who personally endorse societal pressures to be a ‘real man’ report poor mental health, are twice as likely to suicide and more likely to commit acts of sexual harassment, and perform acts of violence and bullying”. (JSS) Violence perpetrated by men is an ongoing issue that affects everyone including our own Church. As a Vincentian community, we need to seriously think about what we can do to engage and support men. Many are screaming out for help. But there is often little support available.

Community and health services often do not adjust their approach when working with men. Men are socialized differently to women and, therefore, services need to develop different ways to engage and work with them. Men are raised and expected to be highly independent, to be doers and problem solvers.



St Vincent de Paul imitated the example of St Joseph the Worker. It is important to make the point that Australia needs to change culture around masculinity and femininity for the sake of everyone’s safety. One



Jesus, in His humanity, modelled a healthy masculinity

common perception is that we need to provide more education in schools about the importance of consent. This, I feel, is not the starting point. To change the culture, we need to change language and mindsets to develop greater understanding, compassion, respect and, crucially, love.

Recently, I read an article by Bishop Vincent Long, who said, “*There is also a need for committed people like yourselves to act like **critical yeast in critical time.***” Bishop Vincent was speaking of the changing culture of our Church. It is valuable to reflect on this statement given this is such a vital issue for the wellbeing of our society. Yeast is an ingredient that causes bread to rise and an action that is life-giving. And this sense of leavening or giving-life is what can call each of us to dig deeper and to work harder to build a place of excellence that shapes a more just and compassionate society.

We are all called to radical inclusivity, to accept and include all people. Throughout the gospels, Jesus’ message was that we should be willing to share a meal, a conversation, a time of healing with everyone, no matter how different. Jesus was willing to be in the presence of all people, whether it was the wealthy, those in poverty, the stranger, the outcast or the vulnerable. He accepted all people. He is a model of true love without measure.



Peter Gormly

Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner - South

# A Christmas 'God-send'



**ST. JOHN**  
THE EVANGELIST CHURCH

For several years now, the St John the Evangelist conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society at Campbelltown has worked tirelessly to distribute Christmas parcels to disadvantaged families in the Macarthur local government area. In December 2020, members found that generous parishioners and people from the local community who normally make donations to support the charitable works of the Society were unable to do so. This was a result of restrictions imposed on social movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the conference experienced a shortfall in the number of toys, other gifts, and food parcels they needed to assist families in the Macarthur region encountering financial hardship and social isolation.

But, miracles do happen and the local community overcame these obstacles. First, because Campbelltown City Council annual Christmas lunch was cancelled, toys and other gifts donated through local libraries and normally distributed at the

Council's Christmas lunch could not be passed on. Second, Macarthur Combined Churches Group, which had collected their own gifts for the needy through their member churches, were unable to distribute donations to families in need.

Knowing the good work done by the Campbelltown conference, the President of Macarthur Combined Churches Group contacted Father John Ho, Parish Priest of St John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Campbelltown. Father John then contacted Campbelltown conference members and asked if they could use donations held by Campbelltown City Council and the Macarthur Combined Churches Group.



The Society gives a hand-up to a family in need

Mr Joe Gill, President of the Campbelltown conference, says this offer of donations, "was a God-send." Members of the conference collected the goods donated to Council and Macarthur Combined Churches Group, sorted and assembled them, and delivered them to needy families before Christmas. Joe Gill, on behalf of members of the Campbelltown conference and the Society, wishes to thank Campbelltown City Council, Macarthur Combined Churches Group and generous members of the Macarthur community who made donations and made this charitable work possible.

Joseph Gill  
Campbelltown Conference President

Philip Riordan  
Member & Community Engagement Coordinator



Christmas at Campbelltown Retail Shop



"I hope we will be together at the foot of His crib, to ask Him to draw us with Him into His lowly state." St Vincent de Paul

The staff at the Vinnies Retail Shop in Campbelltown work tirelessly six days a week throughout the year to provide affordable items to those in need in the local community. As well as the Christmas hampers local conferences provide to families in the area, the Vinnies Retail Shop at Campbelltown provides further assistance. In 2020, the Retail Shop faced particular challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the ability of people seeking assistance to access goods and clothing at the store.



The Christmas window display at Vinnies Campbelltown Retail Shop with the nativity at the centre

The Christmas festive season was no exception to the generosity of staff at the Campbelltown Vinnies Retail Shop. They created a Christmas display which was a visual feast and that brought joy to those who visited the shop - young and old alike. The nativity scene at the centre of the display, in particular, reminded customers of the true meaning of Christmas - the mystery of the Incarnation - when Jesus Christ was born into the world for our salvation.

Throughout Christmas 2020, the team at the Retail Shop, coordinated by Mr Patrick Jordan, Campbelltown Regional President and member of Campbelltown conference, participated in the spirit of Christmas with this outstanding window display. A further feature of the display was an angel, reminding visitors to the shop of the chorales of angels that joyously greeted Christ's birth in a lowly manger.

Patrick Jordan  
Campbelltown Conference President

Philip Riordan  
Member & Community Engagement Coordinator



The Christmas window display at Vinnies Campbelltown Retail Shop with an angel heralding the birth of Christ

# Respect Relationships Opportunities

From at least the 1960s, the Society has been heavily involved in supporting members of the Aboriginal community in NSW by assisting them with food, rent, clothing, fares and obtaining employment.\* In February 2018 and continuing this tradition, the Society made a commitment to be guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations on the best way to support the process of reconciliation. The Society has now launched its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in which the Society has made clear commitments to reconciliation in three key areas: **Respect, Relationships** and **Opportunities**. The RAP identifies specific actions that will enable the Society to contribute to achieving the goal of reconciliation within these three key areas.

In line with this commitment, the Society will establish a South Region RAP Committee, which will promote the RAP in the Wollongong Central Council and the Wagga Wagga Central Council. The committee will engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and or-

ganisations, support reconciliation through events like NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week, promote good news stories about reconciliation and oversee the adoption of the Society's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Retention Strategy. And the committee will encourage members, volunteers and employees to use a RAP Toolkit.

The Society is now calling for expressions of interest from people to join the South Region RAP Committee and for office-holders. This call is extended specifically to members in the Wollongong Central Council and Wagga Wagga Central Council, volunteers engaged in Vinnies Services, and staff employed in the South Region MVRO Directorate or as Enabling Partners. Members who wish to express an interest in participating in the South Region RAP Committee can obtain further information from their regional president or conference president.

\*Anita Heiss, "Aboriginal Involvement with the Church"  
<https://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/aboriginal-involvement-with-the-church/>



## Contributions to the Vinnies Newsletter

Contributions from members are welcome and encouraged. If you have a short piece of news and photos to share with other members, or if you wish to share some information with other members, please send your contribution to:

Email: [philip.riordan@vinnies.org.au](mailto:philip.riordan@vinnies.org.au)

PLEASE NOTE: Those who submit photos need to have permission from those people who are in the photos for Vinnies to use those photos in the Vinnies Newsletter and other Vinnies publications. You can obtain a Media Consent Form using the same email address.



## Raise the Rate Campaign

The rate of the Newstart allowance has not increased in real terms for 25 years. Therefore, the Society of St Vincent de Paul is supporting a national campaign to permanently raise the rate of the social security net, so that vulnerable people in our communities have sufficient income to keep them out of poverty and meet their basic needs.

The Raise the Rate campaign proposes increasing the social safety net to \$500 per week. If the 1.6 million Australians who have been receiving the Job Seeker payment were to return to a payment of \$40 per day, it would be devastating. It would leave people on Job Seeker with \$280 per week and place them well below the poverty line.

Part of the campaign has involved challenging some of the myths that have been promoted to justify not providing vulnerable people in our communities the basic income they need to survive. One common myth is that increasing the amount of payments discourages people from looking for paid employment. In reality, even if payments were increased by \$95 per week, this would represent only 50% of the minimum wage. People are far better off in paid work, which gives them more income and more options for their lives.

A further argument against increasing the rate of payments is that the government cannot afford to increase them when balancing the national budget. The Raise the Rate campaign argues an increase in the payment of \$95 per week would cost an estimated \$3.8 billion per annum. This would



St Vincent consoles those who cannot meet their basic needs

represent a total amount that is less than the amount the government would lose in income if it were to implement its proposed high-end tax cuts.

The Raise the Rate campaign relies on modelling by the company Deloitte Economics. This modelling shows that, because people who receive Newstart have to spend most of their money on necessities, increasing the rate of the payment would have a flow-on effect. It would put millions of dollars into local businesses, stimulate local economies and create up to 12,000 new jobs. Modelling shows this would actually increase government income by around \$1 billion dollars.

The Raise the Rate campaign invites people who wish to get more involved in the campaign to explore campaign resources for ideas on what to do. Interested members can find these ideas and resources at the following web address:

<https://raisetherate.org.au/advocacy-tools/>

# RAISE

# THE RATE FOR GOOD

**Talk with a Vincentian**

**Tom Gersbach, Camden Conference**

*Where were you born?*

I was born in Orange, to Kate and Jim. We lived and worked on a 990 acre mixed farming property. The farm was six miles from the nearest village of Cargo and we were part of St. Edward's Catholic Parish, Canowindra.

*Tell me something about growing up with your family?*

I always felt loved and cherished. My mother always said that it was government policy "to populate or perish". She later said that if she had known about birth control half of her children would not be here. This was somewhat reassuring to me, since I was in the bottom half of the family.

When I was in junior high school, my father died unexpectedly. This meant we had to leave the farm and move into Orange proper, where most of my older siblings lived and worked. I completed my School Certificate in Form IV at De La Salle College, Orange. When I asked one of the Brothers what I should do about Form V and VI, he told me not to waste my mother's money.

Working on a farm was never really an option for me. I found it difficult and mundane, whether it was cropping or working with livestock. And there were endless other chores like milking the cow, separating the cream, churning for butter and sweeping the back yard (before we had a lawn).

*What school did you attend and what was it like?*

The first school I attended was St. Joseph's Convent School in Cargo. The nuns were "Black Joey's". Most of them were Irish. They taught us Celtic songs, hymns, and dance in preference to anything uniquely Australian. School was hard and fearful with poor accommodation and limited resources. Learning was primarily done by rote. I struggled with spelling. But I remembered fractions, as a bamboo cane was wielded freely.

We were taught to fear four things: God, dying, going to hell and communism. Students were implored to be ever-vigilant. It was not known when the communists would roll over the hills and commit unspeakable atrocities. This fear caused us to develop sleeping problems and occasional night-

mares. My mother would berate "those bloody nuns" as she tried to settle her children at night. I was at the school until Form II (year 8) when the secondary part closed. I then travelled to another school by bus, my older siblings by horse and sulky.



Tom Gersbach

*When did you join the St Vincent de Paul Society?*

Always looking and thinking about the most efficient way to save my soul, I entered a monastery to become a monk with the Pious Society of St Paul, an Italian religious order based at Homebush. As interesting as it was, it was not the life for me. I felt I could do more for people outside of the monastery, so I left after about 18 months. I have now been a member of Camden-Oran Park conference for seven years. In this time, I have also been the Social Justice Representative for the Wollongong Central Council.

*Tell me something of the works of the Society at that time?*

I see my work in the Society as an extension of my nursing career. We assist and support those in need in a non-judgmental way, work for improvements in their relationships, and advocate for changes in the structure and frameworks of society that cause injustice and keep people in poverty.

*What gives you the greatest satisfaction in your work as a Vincentian?*

As a member of the Social Justice Advisory Committee and the Wollongong Central Council, I am very keen to establish a network of Social Justice Representatives. I hope we can work on the Build Homes - Build Hope social and affordable housing campaign, and the national Raise the Rate campaign for those seeking employment.

Tom Gersbach

Social Justice Representative  
Wollongong Central Council



## Vinnies Bushfire Community Recovery Grants - Helping Local Communities

Recently, three senior representatives of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW visited Noah's Inclusion Services, Ulladulla, an agency that assists local children who have special needs. The Society, through its bushfire community recovery grants, supported by public donations, provided a grant to Noah's of \$20,000 to help upgrade its play area.



L-R, from rear: Peter Houweling (Wollongong Central Council President), Alice Lans (CEO, Noah's Inclusion Services), Leo Tucker (Executive Director, Mission & Spirituality), Nicki Kennedy (Team Leader, Noah's Inclusion Services Ulladulla) and Jack de Groot (CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW)

A range of organizations, including naval personnel from HMAS Albatross (816 Squadron) who volunteered, supported the project. Upgrades included a slide, timbered deck, climbing rope-frame and yarning circle popular with Aboriginal families.

The purpose of the Vinnies Bushfire Recover Grants Program has been to support agencies in communities recovering from the bushfires of 2019-2020. In the Shoalhaven, 320 houses were lost. Half this number alone submitted claims through the Ulladulla conference. After the fires, the smell of smoke, even from a barbecue, and sirens triggered distressing feelings for children and adults with disabilities. CEO, Jack de Groot, is impressed by Noah's work. "We're so pleased that Vinnies can make a practical contribution to both Noah's and several other local services, as well as household grants to families and individuals who need to rebuild their lives after this terrible event," he said.

Another local program funded by the Vinnies Bushfire Recover Grants Program has helped children aged 5-12 years, and young adults, express their feelings about the fire events in a safe and supportive environment. Based at the Ulladulla

Community Resource Centre, activities have drawn on the Stormbirds program developed by Mackillop Family Services. Children use craft work to express how they feel. One child drew a 'frog in the throat', to show smoke irritation. Another drew a picture indicating a 'fast heart'. Older participants have been involved in a program dubbed 'no scary cats'. Jack de Groot said the Society has long been active in welfare initiatives in the local community. In 2020 alone, the Society assisted 1500 people in need in the Shoalhaven, providing \$244,000 for food, clothing, household bills and other assistance.

"Sad to say, 72 per cent of folk sought assistance because of a shortage of food, and 64 per cent faced housing stress, meaning one-third or more of their income went on accommodation, usually rent. I can't speak highly enough of our conference members who volunteer their time to meeting with and helping people in need. Like those who volunteer in our Op shops, they are unsung heroes, and the community couldn't do without them."



L to R Rear: Visiting Holy Family Catholic Church, Ulladulla were Paul Duncan (Shoalhaven Regional President), Leo Tucker (Executive Director, Mission & Spirituality), Evelyn Hodges (Milton-Ulladulla Conference Secretary), Jack de Groot (CEO), Fr Michael Dyer (Parish Priest), Justin Stanwix (Deacon), Peter Houweling (Wollongong Central Council President). Front: Anne Hayward (Sussex Inlet Conference President), Monica Morrison (Milton-Ulladulla Conference President).

In the Shoalhaven there are 919 applicants waiting for housing, with one-in-ten needing it now. "Vinnies is urging the state government to urgently increase the stock of social and affordable housing, and the need in regional areas is just as crucial as in the metro areas. They understand what we're advocating, and are broadly supportive, but the budgetary commitment needs to be made."



**‘One Society’ and Vincentian Tradition**

The principle of ‘One Society’ in the Strategic Plan underscores the importance of members, volunteers and employees collaborating with each other and with the wider community to support the aims and objectives of the Society. St Vincent de Paul often called a group he founded a ‘confraternity’. This implied that people collaborated in a meeting of minds to pursue a shared ideal of Christian charity, while trusting in God’s loving providence in everything they said and did. Vincent found that collaboration made his works of charity more fruitful.\*

For example, St Vincent de Paul collaborated with St Louise de Marillac and founded the Daughters of Charity, the largest female religious congregation in the world today. He collaborated with the de Gondi family and founded the Congregation of the Mission for priests in 1625. Slightly over 200 years later, Frederic Ozanam and the other co-



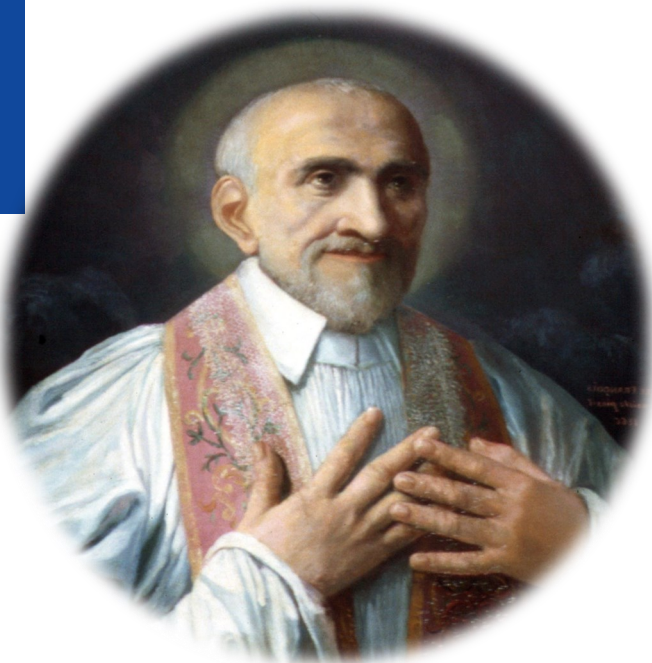
founders of the Society chose the word ‘conference’ to emphasise qualities they wished the Society to share in common with St Vincent de Paul:

- Collaboration
- The meeting of minds
- Pursuing a shared ideal of Christian charity
- Trusting in God’s loving Providence in all things.

The principle of ‘One Society’ affirms the importance that St Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and co-founders of the Society placed on collaboration as a way of making works of charity more fruitful. It is a principle of collaboration that preserves a uniquely Vincentian approach to charitable works, which will continue to increase the fruitfulness of the Society as it moves forward into the future and the 21st century.

\*Michael Ngoka, CM

<https://vincentians.com/en/collaboration-vincentian-family-needs-expectations-models/>



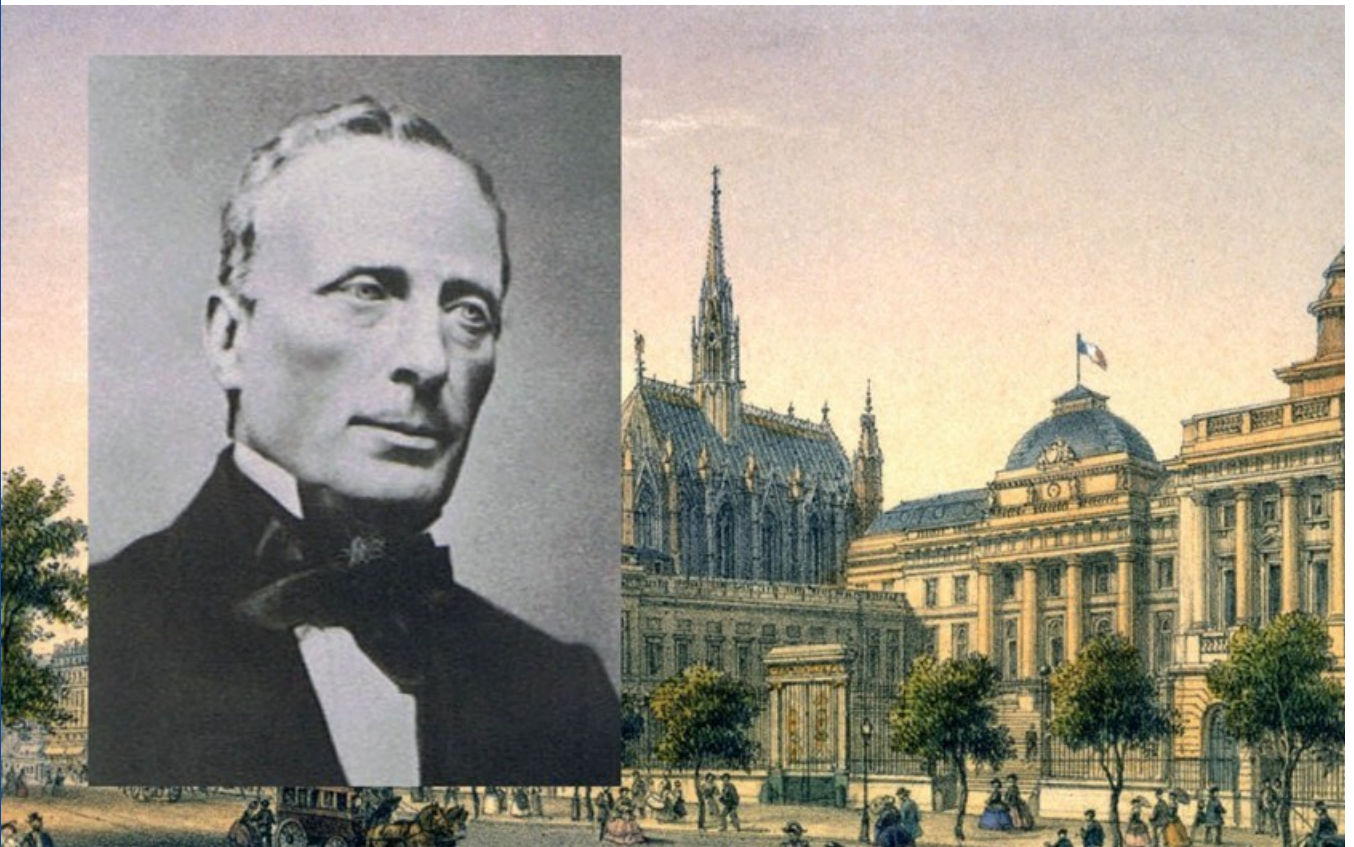
St Vincent de Paul, architect of Vincentian collaboration

## International Year of Jules Deveaux

Renato Lima de Oliveira, the 16th President International of the International Confederation of the St Vincent de Paul Society, has announced that 2021 is the international year of Jules Francois Louis Deveaux, one of the original founders of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Jules Deveaux was born in 1811 in the Normandy region of northwest France.

Two interesting facts about his life are that Jules was the Society's first treasurer and he was the

person who first placed Frederic Ozanam and Sr Rosalie Rendu, a Sister of Charity who supported and guided the early life and charitable works of the Society, in touch with each other. Little more is known of his life. He completed medical studies and conducted a medical practice in Normandy. He married and had two children. During his career he took time away from medical practice and travelled to Germany, where he worked to establish conferences of the Society there.



## Updates

[MAVS Website](https://mavs.vinnies.org.au/) <https://mavs.vinnies.org.au/>

The Society continues to develop the MAVS website as a resource to further support members in their conference life and work. Members are strongly encouraged to access the MAVS website as **their first port-of-call** for information on EAPA, NILS, bushfire assistance, COVID-19, We Care, social justice, spirituality and conference life. Members are also encouraged to contribute information to MAVS by forwarding your good news stories to:

Em: [philip.riordan@vinnies.org.au](mailto:philip.riordan@vinnies.org.au)

## Online Training for Members

The Society is currently organising to provide further training opportunities where members will be able to gather together, participate in a spiritual reflection, reconnect, enjoy collegiality with other members and enjoy mutual fraternal support while learning how to complete online training modules through the VLC. Members can obtain further information from their regional president or conference president.



**Prayer for Deceased Vincentians**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.

If You, O Lord, shall observe iniquities,

Lord, who shall endure it?

For with You there is merciful forgiveness,

And by reason of Your law I have waited for You, O Lord.

My soul has relied on His word, my soul has hoped in the Lord.

From the morning watch even unto the night let Israel hope in the Lord,

Because with the Lord there is mercy and with Him plentiful redemption,

And He will redeem Israel from all the iniquities.

**V. Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord**

R. And let perpetual light shine upon them.

**V. May they rest in peace**

R. Amen.



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