

Greetings Fellow Vincentians,

I suppose I see the newsletter a way to keep in contact with all my fellow Vincentians in the Wagga Diocese, but also as an opportunity to challenge you. We all are busy in our lives but we are also called to service in the Lord.

“The vocation of the Society’s members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love.” The Rule 1.2

At the last State Council meeting in late August, we received a report from Vinnies Services. The Society is reviewing all its services, outside the Care and Support operations. There is a surprising array of services across the State, from Housing, Community Centres, Women Refuges, case management services and outreach into schools to name a few. More than \$43million is spent on these services with \$15million coming directly from the Society. Not all services were reviewed but five out of the twenty eight considered are to be discontinued. One of these is the Outreach Learning Centre run out of Edel Quinn in Wagga Wagga.

What has really shaken me is that outside of Care and Support there is little activity in the Wagga Diocese. Yet we all recognise that there is great need here. The Central Council, along with the support of the Regional Director and other interested bodies, plans to look at the needs of the people of the Diocese and how we might best support them. The Rule states (1.6) *“Faithful to the spirit of the founders, the Society constantly strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions.”* So we are also called to renewal.

So the challenge for us all is to consider what needs exist around us. How could Vinnies support these needs? What other groups could work with us to achieve our goals? There are many options. So what needs can you see as you move around serving our clients. Discuss this at Conferences or Regional meetings. We can not allow ourselves to become too narrow in our focus.

Season of Creation:

Last week I introduced the Season of Creation. In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis speaks to an “ecological conversion”. In doing this he is using the words of his predecessor St John Paul II. But why is this important to us as Vincentians?

It is important because the Season of Creation invites us to pray and reflect about the gifts God has given us. We are encouraged to embark on a journey of “ecological conversion”, to transform the way we relate to our Creator, all of Creation and our most vulnerable brothers and sisters. Because Pope Francis devoted an encyclical to this issue in *Laudato Si* it is thought to be a new issue in the Catholic Church. But the two previous Popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI spoke about the need to protect God’s Creation. But as far back as the 13th century St Francis of Assisi expressed his devotion to God through his love of ALL of God’s creation.

I have attached a further link that may assist you to explore this issue further.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-09/pope-francis-day-creation-jubilee-message.html>

I see this as a social issue and our Rule (7.5) says that we “must speak on behalf of those who are ignored”.

Strategic Plan 2020-2022

The Society has completed its first 12 months of implementing actions set out in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022.

The implementation of the Plan this year has been affected by a number of factors, including the organisational restructure, the bushfires and the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the visible results of the development of the Strategic Plan and the restructure is our continued response to the bushfires. This has brought together members, volunteers and staff to deliver positive outcomes for the people we serve.

Another positive development is bringing all fundraising and revenue-generating activities together. This has enabled us to streamline a more efficient state-wide approach to all commercial activity. Less waste, better service and improved stores.

However the external factors, bushfires, floods and pandemic have severely affected our revenue raising. All the stores were closed for at least 10 weeks and the last ones will open next week. Measured against the goals of the original plan the results for each goal are between 20% to 40% completed.

I will say that I am impressed with the progress given the strains that the whole organisation has been put under, especially with redundancies and lack of physical contact with the majority of staff working from home.

I wish to make one further observation and that is that the State Council has had its last three meetings by internet. For an organisation that is people centred this has reduced the companionship that Blessed Frederic Ozanam was so fond of. We know that the Holy Spirit guides us but we are keen as a group to gather again as One Society.

Prayer:

I am often asked as I travel around the different Conferences and Regions about why we meet so often and why we pray as regularly as we do. I offer to you the history of the Society.

A group of young men gathered together in the Sorbonne University in Paris to pray. They were challenged in this by others who questioned them in regards to what they actually did when there was so much need in the society that they lived in.

Because of this history we are a *Society that Prays and does Good Works*. Without this we are denying our heritage and history has always condemned those that forget where they come from – where their roots are. Our roots are firmly dug in the ethos and spirituality of the Catholic Church.

May God bless you all

Peter Burgess

Two attachments follow that may be of interest and are linked to this newsletter.

Frederic Ozanam and the Joy of the Gospel

There is so much which we could write of Blessed Frederic Ozanam's achievements in forming and developing social conscience and social reform which he accomplished in just a short life span. What is the significance of his spiritual legacy and story for the Society's work today?

Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) expresses his thoughts of the Mission of the Church, "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" Reflected in these words of the Pope is the Church which inspired Frederic Ozanam. It is a Church which redefines the signs of the times with a Gospel message which is practical, relational, engaging and responding in love.

In reflection on Frederic's life I believe it can be summed up by the theme; "Grounded in Faith, Growing in Love, Living in Hope". These thoughts express much of the life, work and legacy of Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Frederic was a man of faith. He understood the importance of his work within the guidance and nurturing of prayer and spiritual advice.

Frederic was a man of love. His love for God and Church was strengthened because of his relationships with the poor, his confreres and his family.

Frederic was a man of hope. He saw the importance of a legacy of justice and advocacy for the poor. Therefore, it is certainly fair to say that he developed and influenced some of the key principles of Social thought and reform in the Church and society today.

Frederic Ozanam's vision was for a Church inspired by Gospel imperatives and a model of unconditional compassion and love for the poor. This vision today is echoed in the words and actions of Pope Francis as he leads the church in living the joy of the Gospel. For Francis, as was for Frederic, to serve the poor we must be led by the voice of the poor. The Society must always see that the poor are at the heart of the decision-making, the heart of the agenda and that their voice is the one that speaks.

In this way the journey of the Society founded by Blessed Frederic will be "transforming (their) concern into action and (their) compassion into practical and effective love." (Society's The Rule #2.2)

Pope Francis is in many ways today's champion of the poor. His words and actions have captured not only a Church in difficult times but also the wider secular society. He, like minded to Frederic, expressed that; "Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor." (Pope Francis, Address to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 14/6/13)

May the intercessions of Blessed Frederic continue to guide, nurture and bless our actions, reflections, discernments and conversations as we live the gospel message serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, to shape a more just and compassionate society.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbUcYH2Sg2w&feature=emb_rel_end

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE
WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE CARE OF CREATION
1 SEPTEMBER 2020

*"You shall thus hallow the fiftieth year
and you shall proclaim a release throughout the land
to all its inhabitants.
It shall be a jubilee for you."
(Lev 25:10)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Each year, particularly since the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (*LS*, 24 May 2015), the first day of September is celebrated by the Christian family as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and the beginning of the Season of Creation, which concludes on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi on the fourth of October. During this period, Christians worldwide renew their faith in the God of creation and join in prayer and work for the care of our common home.

I am very pleased that the theme chosen by the ecumenical family for the celebration of the 2020 Season of Creation is *Jubilee for the Earth*, precisely in this year that marks the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day. In the Holy Scriptures, a Jubilee is a sacred time to remember, return, rest, restore, and rejoice.

1. A Time to Remember

We are invited to remember above all that creation's ultimate destiny is to enter into God's eternal Sabbath. This journey, however, takes place in time, spanning the seven-day rhythm of the week, the cycle of seven years, and the great Jubilee Year that comes at the end of the seven Sabbath years.

A Jubilee is indeed a time of grace to remember creation's original vocation to exist and flourish as a community of love. We exist only in relationships: with God the Creator, with our brothers and sisters as members of a common family, and with all of God's creatures within our common home. "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth" (*LS*, 92)

A Jubilee, then, is a time of remembrance, in which we cherish the memory of our inter-relational existence. We need constantly to remember that "everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others" (*LS*, 70).

2. A Time to Return

A Jubilee is a time to turn back in repentance. We have broken the bonds of our relationship with the Creator, with our fellow human beings, and with the rest of creation. We need to heal the damaged relationships that are essential to supporting us and the entire fabric of life.

A Jubilee is a time to return to God our loving Creator. We cannot live in harmony with creation if we are not at peace with the Creator who is the source and origin of all things. As Pope Benedict observed, "the brutal consumption of creation begins where God is missing, where matter has become simply material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate measure, where everything is simply our property" (*Meeting with Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone*, 6 August 2008).

The Jubilee season calls us to think once again of our fellow human beings, especially the poor and the most vulnerable. We are asked to re-appropriate God's original and loving plan of creation as a common heritage, a banquet which all of our brothers and sisters share in a spirit of conviviality, not in competitive scramble but in joyful fellowship, supporting and protecting one another. A Jubilee is a time for setting free the oppressed and all those shackled in the fetters of various forms of modern slavery, including trafficking in persons and child labour.

We also need once more to listen to the land itself, which Scripture calls *adamah*, the soil from which man, *Adam*, was made. Today we hear the voice of creation admonishing us to return to our rightful place in

the natural created order – to remember that we are part of this interconnected web of life, not its masters. The disintegration of biodiversity, spiralling climate disasters, and unjust impact of the current pandemic on the poor and vulnerable: all these are a wakeup call in the face of our rampant greed and consumption. Particularly during this Season of Creation, may we be attentive to the rhythms of this created world. For the world was made to communicate the glory of God, to help us to discover in its beauty the Lord of all, and to return to him (cf. SAINT BONAVENTURE, *In II Sent.*, I, 2, 2, q. 1, conclusion; *Breviloquium*, II, 5.11). The earth from which we were made is thus a place of prayer and meditation. “Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense” (*Querida Amazonia*, 56). The capacity to wonder and to contemplate is something that we can learn especially from our indigenous brothers and sisters, who live in harmony with the land and its multiple forms of life.

3. *A Time to Rest*

In his wisdom, God set aside the Sabbath so that the land and its inhabitants could rest and be renewed. These days, however, our way of life is pushing the planet beyond its limits. Our constant demand for growth and an endless cycle of production and consumption are exhausting the natural world. Forests are leached, topsoil erodes, fields fail, deserts advance, seas acidify and storms intensify. Creation is groaning!

During the Jubilee, God’s people were invited to rest from their usual labour and to let the land heal and the earth repair itself, as individuals consumed less than usual. Today we need to find just and sustainable ways of living that can give the Earth the rest it requires, ways that satisfy everyone with a sufficiency, without destroying the ecosystems that sustain us.

In some ways, the current pandemic has led us to rediscover simpler and sustainable lifestyles. The crisis, in a sense, has given us a chance to develop new ways of living. Already we can see how the earth can recover if we allow it to rest: the air becomes cleaner, the waters clearer, and animals have returned to many places from where they had previously disappeared. The pandemic has brought us to a crossroads. We must use this decisive moment to end our superfluous and destructive goals and activities, and to cultivate values, connections and activities that are life-giving. We must examine our habits of energy usage, consumption, transportation, and diet. We must eliminate the superfluous and destructive aspects of our economies, and nurture life-giving ways to trade, produce, and transport goods.

4. *A Time to Restore*

A Jubilee is a time to restore the original harmony of creation and to heal strained human relationships. It invites us to re-establish equitable societal relationships, restoring their freedom and goods to all and forgiving one another’s debts. We should not forget the historic exploitation of the global South that has created an enormous ecological debt, due mainly to resource plundering and excessive use of common environmental space for waste disposal. It is a time for restorative justice. In this context, I repeat my call for the cancellation of the debt of the most vulnerable countries, in recognition of the severe impacts of the medical, social and economic crises they face as a result of Covid-19. We also need to ensure that the recovery packages being developed and deployed at global, regional and national levels must be regeneration packages. Policy, legislation and investment must be focused on the common good and guarantee that global social and environmental goals are met.

We also need to restore the land. Climate restoration is of utmost importance, since we are in the midst of a climate emergency. We are running out of time, as our children and young people have reminded us. We need to do everything in our capacity to limit global average temperature rise under the threshold of 1.5°C enshrined in the Paris Climate Agreement, for going beyond that will prove catastrophic, especially for poor communities around the world. We need to stand up for intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity at this critical moment. I invite all nations to adopt more ambitious national targets to reduce emissions, in preparation for the important Climate Summit (COP 26) in Glasgow in the United Kingdom.

Biodiversity restoration is also crucially important in the context of unprecedented loss of species and degradation of ecosystems. We need to support the U.N. call to safeguard 30% of the earth as protected habitats by 2030 in order to stem the alarming rate of biodiversity loss. I urge the international community to work together to guarantee that the Summit on Biodiversity (COP 15) in Kunming, China becomes a turning point in restoring the earth to be a home of life in abundance, as willed by the Creator.

We must restore with justice in mind, ensuring that those who have lived on the land for generations can regain control over its usage. Indigenous communities must be protected from companies, particularly multinational companies, that “operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home” (*LS*, 51), through the destructive extraction of fossil fuels, minerals, timber and agroindustrial products. This corporate misconduct is a “new version of colonialism” (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001*, cited in *Querida Amazonia*, 14), one that shamefully exploits poorer countries and communities desperately seeking economic development. We need to strengthen national and international legislation to regulate the activities of extractive companies and ensure access to justice for those affected.

5. *A Time to Rejoice*

In the biblical tradition, a Jubilee was a joyous occasion, inaugurated by a trumpet blast resounding throughout the land. We are aware that the cries of the earth and of the poor have become even louder and more painful in recent years. At the same time, we also witness how the Holy Spirit is inspiring individuals and communities around the world to come together to rebuild our common home and defend the most vulnerable in our midst. We see the gradual emergence of a great mobilization of people from below and from the peripheries who are generously working for the protection of the land and of the poor. We rejoice to see how young people and communities, particularly indigenous communities, are on the frontlines in responding to the ecological crisis. They are calling for a Jubilee for the earth and a new beginning, aware that “things can change” (*LS*, 13).

We also rejoice to see how the *Laudato Si'* Special Anniversary Year is inspiring many initiatives at local and global levels for the care of our common home and the poor. This year should lead to long-term action plans to practise integral ecology in our families, parishes and dioceses, religious orders, our schools and universities, our healthcare, business and agricultural institutions, and many others as well.

We rejoice too that faith communities are coming together to create a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. We are particularly happy that the Season of Creation is becoming a truly ecumenical initiative. Let us continue to grow in the awareness that we all live in a common home as members of a single family. Let us all rejoice that our loving Creator sustains our humble efforts to care for the earth, which is also God’s home where his Word “became flesh and lived among us” (*Jn* 1:14) and which is constantly being renewed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

“Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth” (cf. *Ps* 104:30).

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 1 September 2020

FRANCISCUS