



Greetings Fellow Vincentians,

Pope Francis gave us clear instructions for prayer with his 2013 encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel*: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.”

At the start of a new year it is important for us to reflect on why we are involved in the great mission that is the St Vincent de Paul Society. Before we plunge into a new season of “good works” it is well worth our time to read and reflect on our Vision and Mission Statements.

Our Mission

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Our Vision

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering a ‘hand up’ to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

Take the time to stop and read them and get to understand what they are telling us.

- Do we “aspire to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor”
- Do we treat them with “love, respect, justice, hope and joy”
- And importantly do we work to “shape a more just and compassionate society.” This is a cry for Social Justice, a part of our calling we perhaps sometimes neglect.

This requires us to work as Christ called us to work when he said “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” Matthew 25:30

- Are we simply handing out food and other perishables while neglecting to help our clients to start a process of long term change?

- Are we respecting their dignity?
- Are we sharing the hope that sustains us in our lives so to help the needy to find hope in their lives?
- And most importantly: Are we encouraging them to take control of their own destiny?

A new year is always a time of reflection and perhaps renewal. In that vein I would like to start with a reflection.

Last year provided us with many challenges and a physical threat. As a Society I think you were magnificent. The determination of all of you to try to keep the centres open and servicing those most in need was outstanding. Some of us found the threat real and difficult to overcome and others found the conditions they were asked to work in totally inappropriate. There is no failure in this as we confronted a worldwide pandemic.

As conditions eased people returned to their posts and the broader community appreciated our efforts and the sacrifices we all made. The Holy Spirit was truly with us on this difficult journey.

Before we settled down to a Christmas break a number of us across the Diocese distributed Christmas hampers to our most needy clients. In Wagga Wagga this is a magnificent and overwhelming enterprise involving local schools – Catholic and State schools – and the broader community. It is exciting to be able to involve our local communities in our sacred work.

Frankly I'm content to do some of the physical work but the organisation and preparation of all of this takes months of planning. To those people who do all this work the Society thanks you and our community benefits from your long labours. May I also add my thanks and admiration for all you have done. Naming people is a dangerous pursuit but there are 8 or 10 people who put in pong hours to ensure it all runs smoothly. Our Youth Conference also became involved this year, which added a new dimension to the event.

Renewal is much more confronting as we are asked to come out of our comfort zone and meet new challenges. As our membership increasingly ages we must be determined to look to the future of the Society that we all love and have embraced. State Council is working closely with St Vincent de Paul NSW (the corporate body) to explore ways of rejuvenating the conferences and attracting new members. But ultimately it will get down to what we are prepared to do as conference and Society members and volunteers.

Central Council meets later this month and this will be at the top of our agenda – and all agendas for 2021. I believe that we are pretty good at what we do. We can improve as God made us imperfect. But our focus must be towards the future, not in the past. Christ implores that if I have wronged my brother or sister then drop everything and go and seek peace with them. So let us leave old differences aside and walk together prepared to build a better and stronger St Vincent de Paul Society that will stand in Wagga Diocese for another one hundred years, as it has for about a hundred years in the past.

We need to seek new areas of need in our community and build membership and conferences around them. We are called as Ozanam was to seek greater Social Justice in our community – improved welfare payments for our most needy and an assault on homelessness only come from the work of active groups like our Society.

The challenges ahead of us are great, but with the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can continue to build upon what we have achieved, grow our membership and reach out to more people in our community who most need our support.

May God bless you all

Peter Burgess
Central Council President
Wagga Diocese

But how can we have a “renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ” in our busy lives? And what does it mean to cultivate “an openness” to letting Jesus encounter us? The answer is simple, if not always easy: we encounter Jesus, and he encounters us, through prayer. Prayer changes everything in our relationship with the Lord.

God bless

Peter Burgess