



St Vincent de Paul Youth Conference

Blessed Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam was a French author, lawyer, journalist and equal rights advocate who founded, with fellow students, the Conference of Charity, later known as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The Society was founded in 1833 to help impoverished people living in what were challenging circumstances in the slums of Paris, France. At this time, France had no social welfare system and the poor were left to fend for themselves. One night in a discussion group, a critic of the Church challenged Frederick to live out his beliefs and not just talk about them, to do something for the people of their time. There and then he and six others decided to put their words into action.

The little group began to meet weekly. They contributed to a secret collection and would then visit the poor in their homes to distribute what they had collected. They visited the sick, gave out financial assistance, food, firewood, candles and did counselling. These students of 1833 wished to help one another to remain faithful to their baptismal commitment and to carry out, supported by their mutual friendship, one of the essential duties of the Christian life – love one another as God loves you.

Since these modest ideas were in keeping with the tradition of St Vincent de Paul, the little conference chose him as their

Patron at an early stage. They called themselves the Conference of Charity. To their astonishment, their work grew rapidly and by 1850 their movement had spread throughout France and to 14 other countries including Australia.

A St Vincent de Paul youth conference is a self-run group of young volunteers, often from the same local area, who meet regularly to plan community outreach programs. These are dynamic groups with a clear aim to help make the world a better place. Young adults run activity days for kids, assist on the Vinnies Soup Vans, conduct home visits, tutor, run and participate in many other works of social justice, as well as social events.

In 1910 Father Maurice O'Reilly, President of St Stanislaus' College, had a vision for a senior youth conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society at the College. He is quoted as saying to the young men of the College at the time, that the formation of a College Conference "would aid in their personal sanctification; wean them from their natural selfishness; broaden their sympathies; super naturalise their motives in alms-giving and personal service; and in general, prepare them to become in later life, in their own parishes, practical Catholics and good parishioners."

Father O'Reilly's vision saw the first SVDP Conference established west of the Blue Mountains and this year the St Stanislaus' College SDVP conference celebrated 110 years of continuous service to our Community. Throughout the

decades the SVDP Society at the College has inspired many young men to support causes both locally and internationally. During WWII the young men of the society collected reading material and care packages for our armed forces serving overseas.

Our connection with the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo started in the early 1940s when the Hostel was in its infancy stages having been established in 1938. Over the last 80 years, the members have provided practical help to the Hostel through donations of money, reading materials, used clothing, non-perishable food, personal care items and at Christmas, the College band and choirs would travel down to perform carols for the men.

During the 50s and 60s the SVDP members visited St Vincent's Hospital, the newly established Aged Care Facility in Bathurst, St Joseph's Orphanage and also started home visitations for the elderly who needed lawns mowed, gardens weeded and any odd jobs done around the house. It is quoted in an old *Echoes* from the 1960s that the boys completed these activities with "zeal and good humour and looked forward to the cup of tea and chat with the recipients after a morning's hard work."

It was also during the 1950s, under the direction of Father E. Trzeciak CM, that the SVDP members were involved in publishing a Polish Catholic Weekly (approximately 1500 copies per week) for both the Polish migrants at the Bathurst Migrant Hostel and for distribution

Stannies Family

VINCENTIAN VOICE

*"Charity is the cement which binds
Communities to God and persons to one
another..." St Vincent de Paul*

further afield. It is interesting to note that in 1973, under the guidance of Father Pat Finn CM, the boys undertook the collection of aluminum cans to be sold at the local scrap metal business. This fundraising activity has again been revitalised at the College in recent years and continues to this day.

One of the most significant achievements of our College Society was in 1984 when, under the guidance of Father Stan Barry CM, our relationship was established with the Nausori Conference in Fiji. This relationship with Fiji has flourished and now 36 years on, has expanded to include Natovi.

In 2004 when I commenced at the College, I had the privilege of working with the late Father James Maloney CM and the College Day and Boarding Conferences for the next 10 years.

Father Jim had been a member of

the SVDP as a student in 1942. He was also a former President of the College. His recollections of his involvement in the activities were entertaining and insightful into the workings of the Conference over a period which spanned 70 years. This included delivering soap to inmates at the Bathurst Gaol once a month, having boys slaughtering and plucking chickens for local widows for Christmas Dinner, walking to the Homeless Men's Shelter on Gormans Hill Road to play an intellectually stimulating game of Chess on the weekend, playing games with the local children at the orphanage and of course running the annual Melbourne Cup sweep in the 1960s to help raise revenue!

Father Jim had wise words for the boys who wished to join our ranks and to paraphrase it was, "we are the doers boys, we have the thinkers who think about what needs to be done, we have the talkers who talk about helping, but

boys - we are the doers, we give our time and our services, we see a need and we act upon that need". This, to me, epitomizes the spirit of the Conference at the College.

Over the past 110 years, the members of the SVDP have thought of ingenious ways to raise money and donate items for numerous worthy causes but they have given the most precious of resources - their time. Time to mow lawns, weed gardens, sell raffle tickets, pack food hampers, sell hot chips, collect aluminium cans, wash cars and to visit, sit and chat with someone at St Catherine's Nursing Home. The list goes on and on.

If Father O'Reilly was to see our Stannies Conference now I'm sure he would be proud of the values that have been instilled in so many young men who have taken up the challenge to put their Catholic faith into action.

Mrs Roslyn King

The Key Values of the SDVP Society are

Commitment: loyalty in service.

Compassion: welcoming and serving all with understanding and without judgement.

Respect: service to all regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions.

Integrity: promoting, maintaining and adhering to our Christian values.

Empathy: establishing relationships based on respect, trust, friendship and perception.

Advocacy: working to transform the causes of poverty and challenging the causes of human injustice.

Courage: encouraging spiritual growth, welcoming innovation and giving hope for the future