

Stannies Family VINCENTIAN VOICE

In the foyer of the Slattery Wing entrance of the College, where students pass through each day, hang two portraits. One is an icon of St Stanislaus Kostka and the other is an icon of St Vincent de Paul.

The Vincentian Order is a member of the Society of Priests and Brothers founded in Paris in 1625 by St Vincent de Paul and this order have been the custodians of the College for the past 154 years.

The St Vincent de Paul icon was commissioned by Fr Gerard Wilkinson and given to the College to honour 130 years of the Vincentian presence at Stannies.

The painting commemorates St Vincent the Teacher. Vincent was the teacher of Pierre, Henri and Jean Francois Paul, three children of the Florentine banking and noble Gondi family. They are pictured in the Icon on the left of St Vincent. The three adult figures at the bottom of the painting are the parents of the children, Monsieur Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi and Madame de Gondi, Françoise Marguérite de Silly along with Jean François Paul de Gondi, Cardinal of Retz and Archbishop of Paris who also was a member of the Gondi family.

It was prior to and during Vincent de Paul's lifetime that the Gondi were at the peak of their influence and power in France. The Church in the Icon is from Folleville near Amiens

in northern France. This Church is a very short distance from la Maison de Gondi, the ruins of which are still able to be seen today. It was in this Church that Vincent preached his mission sermon in 1617 which eventually led to the formation of the Congregation of the Mission (The Vincentians) in 1625.

Madame de Gondi was influential in the formation of the Congregation inspiring Vincent to continue his work of preaching the Mission as well as providing the finance to enable Vincent to gather other priests to help in the work. This icon was painted by Sr Mary Burke, iconographer at Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Australia whose work is known for its beauty and attention to detail.



Gerard Wilkinson, a Vincentian from Sydney, contacted me regarding the commission of an icon of St Vincent de Paul. He specified that he wanted six members of the de Gondi family included. Given this challenge of including six other figures apart from Vincent, I set

to work to design something that would not distract the viewer from the central figure of Vincent while at the same time respecting Gerard's specific requests. Hence you will see the children in the background and at the bottom I have included the three adults surrounded by a decorative version of the fleur de lis - a stylized lily composed of three petals bound together. It was often used by the French aristocracy and appeared on the former royal arms of France.

Icons are different from Western art. They are purposeful in that they aim at drawing the viewer 'into relationship' with the one being depicted. To achieve this, the icon has basically two dimensions in its drawing and layout, with the third dimension being in the eye of the viewer.

The most important part of an icon is the face - especially the eyes. So to facilitate the purpose of 'creating relationship' between the person being depicted and the viewer, the

main figure will always have both eyes visible, sometimes looking directly at the viewer.

I have presented Vincent in this way, looking towards the viewer, inviting a response to his gaze. I have also depicted Vincent holding a copy of the Gospels. It is decorated to indicate its importance. I added this as a symbol of Vincent's life as he sought to live according to the Gospel and in the footsteps of Jesus, especially in his care for the poor. His right hand is held in the form of blessing, symbolising his desire for the wellbeing of others, including the viewer.

In our world where the divide between the rich and the poor is widening in an alarming manner, it was a pleasure to work on this icon of a man who cared about that difference in his time and sought to bring about change for those left behind. I found that spending time with him, letting his gaze invite me 'into relationship' with him and with the God whose kindness, mercy and care for the vulnerable inspired and directed his life, was time well spent!

I am grateful to Gerard Wilkinson for giving me the opportunity to work on this icon and to get to know Vincent. Writing icons is a real passion for me. The icon as a symbol holds great depth both artistically and theologically and the colours are so rich!

Sr Mary Burke, Iconographer