

Young and Old: We're in it Together



By Claire Victory

Clare is National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.

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VONNIE VICTORY, Claire's grandmother, was a foundation member of **Broken Hill Lay Carmelite community**, and with the other members of this community were active members in the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Broken Hill.

*Their acts of service were motivated by a very strong faith and we believe nourished by their Lay Carmelite life of prayer, community and in the service of justice for all. In the last decade on moving to Adelaide with husband Pat, Vonnie became an active member of the **Adelaide Lay Carmelite community**.*

In this climate of decreased church participation, it is common for elderly Catholics in our midst to worry and wonder how they can hand on their faith to family members. Sometimes we live long enough to see the fruits of our parenting as this story relates, but often we also glimpse the work of the Holy Spirit as we see in this scenario expressing the infinite wisdom our seniors pass on through their actions, to younger generations.

Just before Christmas, my Nan, Vonnie Victory, passed away. Five weeks later, my Granddad, Pat, also passed away. Both were aged 89, and had recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. I was close to Nan and Granddad, and while their passing was obviously sad, it gave our big, geographically diverse yet tightknit extended family multiple opportunities over the summer to gather, share memories, celebrate, and make plans for future family celebrations to ensure that we would continue to gather even in the absence of our matriarch and patriarch.

Nan and Granddad were also my primary Vincentian role models. Having lived their lives in Broken Hill until moving to Adelaide for health reasons in 2012, they were heavily involved in the life and works of the Society in that town and the

Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese. blessed to receive, from Vincentians in that part of the world and beyond, messages of condolence relaying stories and observations about Nan and Granddad's works, character and impact. It was a privilege and a comfort to me, and to my family, to hear about the role that Pat and Vonnie played in the lives of so many people beyond their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

One of the things that struck me about the emails I received from my grandparents' Vincentian friends and colleagues was the extent to which the stories they shared – about their memories of working with my grandparents, or how my grandparents had recruited, trained and formed them – was that all of these things had happened when Nan



Vonnie & Patrick
Victory

and Grandad were well and truly past retirement age. These were not memories from the distant past, when our community and the Society were vastly different; they were recollections from when my grandparents were already in their 70s and 80s, taking on new challenges, accepting new roles and responsibilities, and learning new things as they did so. In her eulogy for Nan, my sister listed a number of encounters and attributes that made Nan great, but then noted “And if this was it, she would have been an excellent Nan and a nice little old lady. But that would be to underestimate her entirely... I remember how, into her 80s, she was telling me about a conference she’d been to about mental health issues, particularly Bipolar and the interplay between disadvantage, mental health and homelessness and how it would impact her role with Vinnies.”

These reflections served as a reminder of the active and essential role played by St Vincent de Paul members in their senior years. It often concerns me that in our efforts to recruit and retain more young members, we too readily dismiss the identities and contributions of members who do not fit within the ‘youth’ definition. We all know that we need to constantly attract new members from across the age, gender

and cultural spectrum; but I feel that too much negative talk about ageing membership or our membership ‘dying off’ can actually be counter-productive, and risks causing our older members to feel devalued or dismissed. Some senior Vincentians have been members of the Society for decades (like Granddad, who started in a youth conference at age 15), whereas others have joined once the pressures of paid employment and family care responsibilities eased a little; each has their own Vincentian journey and story from which we’d do well to learn, and it would be a mistake to consider any Vincentian’s age their only (or most interesting) feature. Just as we should value younger Vincentians for the skills, wisdom and experience they can bring to our conference and works (not simply their youth), so too should we recognise that older Vincentians – whether they’re new to the Society or are life members, or somewhere in between – have a lot of energy and new ideas to contribute, and that they too can learn new things and develop further in their own skills and spirituality through their participation in the Society.

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Social Justice Statement 2020-21

Social Justice Sunday Is now celebrated on Sunday 30th August



To Live Life to the Full: Mental health in Australia today

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the mental health of many members of our parishes, schools and communities. In fact, most of us will experience a mental health problem at some point over the course of our lives. Understanding mental health will help us to be aware of those who need our support. Our parishes, organisations and communities can be places of acceptance care and healing, not places of rejection, judgment or stigma.

In the Social Justice Statement *To Live Life to the Full: Mental health in Australia today*, the Bishops welcome the deinstitutionalisation of mental health care in Australia. However, without adequately funded community mental health services, there is a gap in the system through which people continue to fall. Social determinants including poverty, living conditions, and personal security are significant contributors to mental ill-health. The Statement highlights the experience of First Nations people and communities, asylum seekers and refugees, people who are homeless and those who are in prison.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CARMELITE JPIC TEAM

This year we celebrate 10 years of the Carmelite JPIC Commission in its present form. Justice, peace and Integrity of Creation is at the basis of our faith and is the source from where our commitment and action on social justice and environmental issues are energised. By way of introducing you to the current Carmelite Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Team fundamental questions were asked of each of them. Over the next few months, we will acquaint you with the team consisting of Peter Thomas, Agedo Bento OCarm, Paul Sireh OCarm, Joshua Vujcich and Gabrielle Fogarty.



“Why do I believe in social justice?

What is my motivation for being involved with social justice?



PETER THOMAS, Parishioner Middle Park, Melbourne

‘Societal integrity is basic to my understanding of how to live the Christian life. **As a television** producer travelling to impoverished countries and making documentaries in Australia on all manner of social justice issues I cannot hide from the inequality and discrimination that surrounds me both here at home and around the world. In a documentary we shot in India I remember a poignant comment about poverty from an Australian Jesuit missionary, Tony Herbert...”Who are the poor?” “said Tony, “they are not only the unfortunate ones without goods or money. They are the powerless ones in a set of social structures and ideologies. They are so enslaved that they can imagine no other identity.”

I hope I believe that just as Jesus came to set us free, that we have a baptismal obligation to set others free. Or in the words of the prophet Micah, “to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

A major influence has and is my life-partner, Marcella who reaches out courageously and without any self-interest to those most in need.

Compassion for the other becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity. On occasion I fail miserably but prophets such as the Trappist, Thomas Merton haunt me with writings such as, “the biggest temptation is to settle for too little.”

In my weakness I take heart from people such as Dag Hammarskjöld who was appointed Secretary General of the United Nations in 1953 with these words, “I am the vessel. The draft is God’s. And God is the thirsty one.” I hope I can sincerely live in the belief that happiness is not made by what I own but rather by what I share.’ *Peter*

JOIN US IN PRAYER ...

At this time (Cafod)

Dear Lord,

At this time of pandemic,

Let us foster respect and solidarity with others, especially those who are weak or poor.

Let us remain calm and ignore unsubstantiated rumours.

Let us take advantage of living together as a family.

Let us attend to moments of prayer.

Let us cultivate responsibility, patience and hope.

Amen.

6th August 2020 will mark 75 years since the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Gracious God,
on the anniversary of Hiroshima Day, we
renew our commitment to peace
individually, collectively and globally:
To “peace within” which calms our
anxieties and fears,
To “peace between” which overcomes
differences, animosities and conflict,
And, to “the great peace,” beyond even
our understanding, that is Your gift and
which we attempt to be stewards of for
the world. Amen.