



St Vincent de Paul Society

good works



...Peace Out...

A Spiritual Reflection Guide for Young People
Issue 2

WARNING

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by or on behalf of the Youth and Young Adults Department State Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society pursuant to Part VB of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act). The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further reproduction or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act. Do not remove this notice.

*...Peace Out ...
A Spiritual Reflection Guide for Young People
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW/ACT
Youth & Young Adults
youth@vinnies.org.au
www.vinnies.org.au*

First printed September 2008



CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Take some time out.....	5
Face in a Night Shelter.....	6
Cracked Pots.....	7
How can we make a stand?.....	8, 9
Freedom.....	10
The Next 24 Hours.....	11
Invisible Charity.....	12
Would you mind if I washed your feet?.....	13
Our Generation.....	14,15
Sorry Day.....	16,17
Bono speaks out.....	18,19
True Reconciliation?.....	20,21
The Living Bible.....	22,23
God is Dead.....	24
Walk 4 One.....	25
Opening Prayers.....	26
Closing Prayers.....	27
Oscar Romero.....	28

The spiritual reflections were written or compiled by the following Vinnies youth volunteers and employees: Michelle Kot, Peter Figg, Nikki James, Rebecca Loquet, Paul Chigwidden, Jeannine Ashton and Jessica Pollard.

...Peace Out...

A Spiritual Reflection Guide for Young People

This Spiritual Reflection guide is a resource for teachers to share with members of St Vincent de Paul Conferences, Social Justice Groups or Religious Education classes within their schools.

These reflections have been prepared by young people for young people to take some time out to reflect on different areas of life and look at them from a Christian and particularly, a Vincentian viewpoint. Each reflection is based around a theme and contains a reading and some discussion questions or activities based around that theme.

We hope you find this Spiritual Reflection Guide a useful resource and that you take the opportunity to allow yourself and your students some 'time out'.

Take some time out...



Often we don't take time out of our day just to sit and reflect. It could be reflecting on the work we do in Vinnies, on something significant that has happened in our lives, or simply the day that has just been.

Take some time out on your own or with your Vinnies group and use some of the resources on this page to reflect on the right here and now.

Sheila Cassidy was working as a doctor in Chile during the violence and human rights violations of the Pinochet regime. She gave medical care to political opponents of the regime. She was arrested by the Chilean Police and was kept in custody without trial where she was tortured for information about her patients. When she was released she brought much attention to the human rights abuses that were occurring at the time in Chile. She drew much of her courage and strength from prayer. Here she writes about prayer.

"One of the break-throughs that I have experienced in the understanding of prayer is the significance of 'wasting' time. One day I was working at a boring job and a friend came to join me. He loitered about for nearly an hour, perched on the edge of the table and talked occasionally of nothing in particular. When he had gone I was filled with a special joy because I realised that he had deliberately wasted an hour with me; it was not that we were discussing something of importance or that I needed consoling: it was a pure and unsolicited gift of time. If we think about it, for busy people time is often the most precious thing they have to give. Doctors, priests, those who counsel, will always 'spend' time with those in need. They may sit up all night with someone who is distressed; they may pass long hours in listening to problems, or in giving advice; but this is all time deliberately spent. We only deliberately waste time with those we love - it is the purest sign that we love someone if we choose to spend time idly in their presence when we could be doing something more 'constructive'. And so it is with prayer; there is a very real sense in which prayer is a waste of time ... it is the purest sign of our love for God that we are prepared to 'waste' our time with him".

From *Prayer for Pilgrims* by Sheila Cassidy

"Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." Luke 6:12



A conversation with God ... Find a place where you can be still. Use whatever will help you to prepare for your prayer time. If you like, play some music or if you prefer sit in silence. In the presence of your loving Creator, look honestly at your feelings over the last day, the highs, the lows and the level ground. Can you see where the Lord has been present? What are the reasons you have to give thanks? Which situations are you aware of that need God's care and protection? Offer all these to God who accepts our thanksgiving and hears our prayers. Talk to God ... about what is in your heart right now.

FACE IN A NIGHT SHELTER

She sat still as a rock,
While the noise and bustle of the room
Foamed and broke around her.
The real stillness was in her face,
Carved black ebony, beautiful;
Not just still, not just impassive
Frozen, stone.
We had tossed tentative smiles at her,
Middle class bridge makers
And they broke against that stone.
I thought of the mobility of faces and the
words we use:
Crumbling into tears;
Breaking into laughter;
Crinkling into smiles;
And saw again that black, stone face
And thought of Novocain
Face frozen against pain,
Unnatural, rocklike, uncomfortable
But not hurting.
And I knew her fear of the end of numbness;
The agony of memory probing into nerves;
Remembering being a street person
Moved and moved and moved again,
Garbage before authority's broom.
Bone weary—without a corner or step or seat,
Wanting to stay, to stop, to sleep.
Remembering being prey,
To those who had been made animals;
The rapes, the beatings,
The pain and pain and pain;
Unthinkables, the un-remarkables,
Now even the crinkle of a smile
Would crack the frozen numbness
And everything, all of life,
Would hurt, like hell.



“The mystery of the poor is that they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for Him. It is the only way of knowing and believing in our love. The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge of and belief in love.” **Dorothy Day**

Reflection Questions:

How do we see Jesus in the poor?

How do we see beyond their poverty and see them for who they are?

How do we love without need for return?

Cracked Pots

A water bearer in India had two large pots, hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made for.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, the pot spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream.

"I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologise to you.

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it somewhat. But at

the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologised to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."



REFLECTION

The moral of this story: Each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all cracked pots. In this world, nothing goes to waste. You may think like the cracked pot that you are inefficient or useless in certain areas of your life, but somehow these flaws can turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Kind of makes you proud of being a cracked pot. Look around and you will see all the lives that you have touched/watered.



How can we make a stand for what we believe in?



Reflection Questions

What are the people in each of the photos making a stand for?

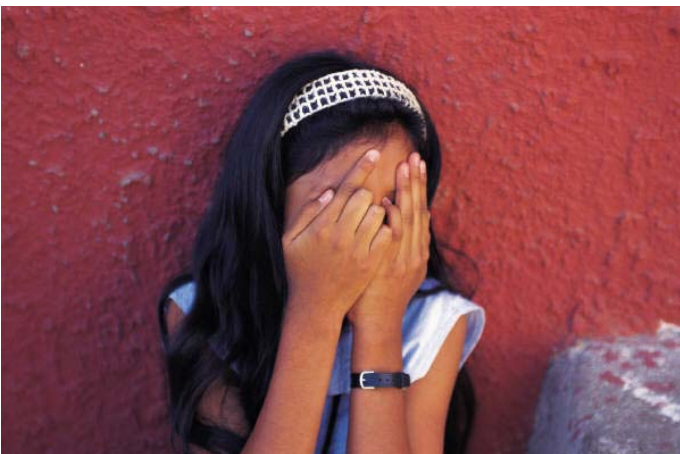
What are justice issues in your life that you currently stand up for?

What are justice issues you want/need to take action on?

Read the excerpt from Isaiah. How does it make you feel?

Do you think that justice issues have improved in the 2000 plus years since Isaiah was alive? Why/Why not?

Is it necessary for us to be as direct and blunt as Isaiah was? Why/Why not?



Your hands are full of blood.
Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!
Seek justice, encourage the
oppressed.
Defend the cause of the orphan,
plead the case of the widow.

Isaiah 1:15—17

FREEDOM

What is Freedom...

1. The condition of being free of restraints.
2. Liberty of the person from slavery, detention, or oppression.
3. The capacity to exercise choice; free will.

The Bible on Freedom...

Colossians 1: 14 God has purchased our **freedom** with his blood and has forgiven all our sins.

Luke 4:17–19 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Nelson Mandela – Freedom Fighter, imprisoned for 27 years; a man who knows the meaning of freedom.

"We are not yet free, we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step in our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

"I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way.

But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."



Nelson Mandela in his cell on Robben Island (Revisit). Jürgen Schadeberg. 1994

Your Thoughts on Freedom... Take a moment to consider your thoughts on Freedom

1. What does it mean to you?
2. How do you walk in the freedom that has been given to you?
3. Are there things you think have you bound?
4. How would you go about freeing yourself from these things?
5. How are you using your freedom to fight for the freedom of others?
6. In what practical way could you put your freedom into action and fight for another's freedom today?

THE NEXT 24 HOURS

Life is either a daring adventure or nothing
Helen Keller

The next 24 hours are guaranteed to excite us, to lift us to new levels of understanding, to move us into situations with others where we can offer our unique contributions. All that is asked of us is a willingness to trust that we will be given just what we need at each moment.

We can dare to live, fully, just for today. We can appreciate the extraordinariness of every breath we take, every challenge we encounter. Within each experience is the invitation for us to grow, to reach out to others in caring ways, to discover more fully the people we are capable of being. We must not let a single moment go by unnoticed.

When we withdraw from life, we stunt our growth. We need involvement with others, involvement that perturbs us, humours us, even stresses us. We tap our internal resources only when we have been pushed to our limits, and our participation in life gifts us, daily, with that push. How necessary the push!

None of us will pass this way again. What we see and feel and say today are gone forever.

We have so much to regret when we let things slip away, unnoticed or unappreciated.

A special series of events has been planned for me today. I shall not miss it.



How can I improve my next 24 hours?

Think of 4 things you would remove from your last 24 hours if you could.

Think of 3 people you want to give something of yourself to in the next 24 hours. (This could simply be a smile or a hello)

Think of something special to do for yourself in the next 24 hours. Something that you'd like to do regularly but never have time.

If you are doing a Vinnies activity in the next 24 hours imagine that this is the last time you'll do one.

Smile at strangers during the next 24 hours.

Watch the sunset or sunrise in the next 24 hours.

Take some time to think, reflect and pray in the next 24 hours. Ask God to be with you in all your 24 hours you have left.

Invisible Charity

Quite often we may wonder where our donations of charity go; how do the people receiving our gifts feel? Were our blankets warm enough and our food plenty?

We may not always have the opportunity to see our good works in action and making a difference in the lives of people in need. However, this does not mean our actions go unappreciated.

Or that we will not be rewarded by God.

“Let us love God, let us love God. But let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow”

-St Vincent de Paul

But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

-Matthew 6:3

Read Matthew 6:1-4 and consider a time when you did a charitable deed that the receiver did not know about or you were not fully recognized for. It may just be saying “hi” to someone who needs a friend or donating clothes you have outgrown to your local Vinnies Centre.

- How did this make you feel? Did you wonder what it would be like to see another young person receiving that warm jacket in the middle of winter?
- Can you think of ways that you may feel rewarded in your own life by God for doing these good deeds? Make your own list of some “invisible charity” that you have done in your life. Then make another list of all the things and people in your life that you are grateful for and that God has rewarded you with. Reflect on how “rewarded” you feel by God for having this.
- Now take time to think of someone you know or do not know who may be in need of a charitable deed such as friendship, clothing, guidance or helping hand in a difficult time.

How can you reach out to this person in your own time quietly, as the Bible calls us to?

What steps are needed to achieve this charitable deed?



Matthew 6: 1-4

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. That your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

WOULD YOU MIND IF I WASHED YOUR FEET?

If Christ should suddenly stand before me with a towel thrown over his shoulder and a pan of water in his hands, would I have the humility to take off my shoes and really let him wash my feet? Or like Peter, would I say : “Wash my feet, Lord? Never!”

Christ has stood in front of me on many a day. It hasn't always been a pan of water that he's held in front of me, for water is only one symbol of a way to be cleansed and healed. Sometimes he holds a Bible, or sends a letter, or calls me on the telephone. Sometimes she holds a loaf of bread, or a cup of tea, or gives me her shoulder to cry on. Christ comes in so many ways, in so many people, always holding out that basin of water and asking that same embarrassing question: “Would you mind if I wash your feet?”

The beautiful thing about that burning, persistent, footwashing question is that eventually it calls forth that same question from your heart. Then you discover that your basin is full of water and your heart is full of a call: a call to wash feet.



John 13:2-15

The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set

you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.



Think about how each person's feet are unique. Each have their own story. We talk about walking in another's shoes, respecting where they are coming from and trying to see things from their point of view.

I want you to look at your feet. Think about where your feet have been lately and about how they have walked (quickly or slowly, eagerly or trudging). What would your feet say if they could talk?

How am I called to wash others' feet, to serve them, in my Vinnies work?

OUR GENERATION

What do we want our generation to be known for? In this, the age of technology do we want to be known for being the generation that spends all our time watching movies, playing video games, walking around with Ipods blasting and being totally oblivious of the world around us? Or, do we want to be known as the generation that made a DIFFERENCE that changed the course of History... for the better? Every generation has their turn to make their mark on HISTORY and it is our choice whether we make a positive one or a negative one and if we choose to be ignorant of this choice we will make a negative mark by default.

In his homily at the Final Mass at World Youth Day 2008 Pope Benedict XVI asked the same question as above.

“Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. What will you leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the “power” which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?”

Being in the age of technology we have more tools and education available to us than any generation before. Although this is a privilege it is also a responsibility to use these tools for the common good of humanity and not ONLY for our own entertainment and gain. The thought of one person impacting the world was unheard of up until a few hundred years ago. People such as Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill and Mother Teresa impacted significantly on the world, but they did not have the technology. We have an advantage, if we use technology wisely, it can enable our generation to make a substantial mark on history.

Although technology is not THE ANSWER it is a very powerful tool and if used for the purpose it was designed it will enable this generation to UNIFY not just as communities, states, and nations but also as HUMANITY creating ONE VOICE.

UNITY & ONE VOICE

What is UNITY for? What is ONE VOICE proclaiming...

The Oxford dictionary defines UNITY as the state of being united or forming a whole and in mathematical terms the number ONE. Unity and oneness has power and as we unify more people, resources and finance to a cause, it gains momentum, strength and profile. Like technology, unity is not the answer, it is a tool and can be applied to any cause or vision, good or bad.

Our Generation has the power of CHOICE and we can choose:

1. Whether we want to mobilise this ONE VOICE, and
2. What is the proclamation of this ONE VOICE?

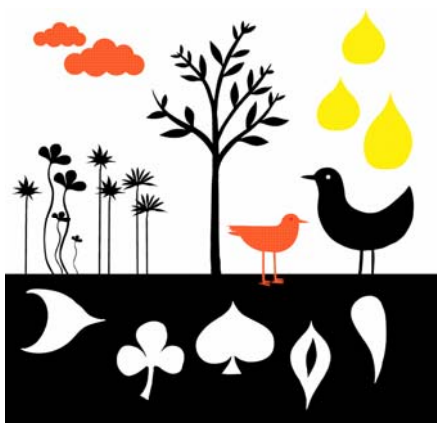
We, HUMANITY, have been given one COMMISSION [Instruction, command or duty]...

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28: 19 - 20

I believe that UNITY is for the good of humanity and that we should use ONE VOICE to make a difference in situations where humanity is suffering. Being a voice for the voiceless, being a freedom fighter for those who do not even know what freedom looks like.

Why do we need to fight for freedom? Or for people who have them in oppression? Are they oppressed as a result of their choices and if so can we blame them if HUMANITY has not provided them with the education to make an informed decision? Or are they being forced into oppression by a part of humanity and if this is the case are they not both in oppression? Do we need to free the captives by force? Or do we need to free the oppressor from his or her bondage so that they in turn can free the people they have held in captivity? Is captivity merely people that are physically chained or is it people who are captive to the effects of HIV and AIDS, or people who are ruled by the fear of being kidnapped and forced to kill? If someone is a killer do they deserve death no questions asked? What if the reason they killed was because they were desensitised to death and brainwashed to believe that killing was not bad? What if they killed due to their own oppression and the hurt inflicted on them?

I believe that there is a circle of life but there is also a circle of death. Some people are in the circle of death as a result of their own choices, some because of the choices of others and still some due to the indifference of others. But regardless of why they are there and how far they are in the circle, it is humanity's responsibility to rescue them from this circle of death and position them on the circle of life.



Where are there places, issues or problems we are being called to MAKE A DIFFERENCE to? Where are there hurting people in this world? Why are they hurting? What can we do about it? Where are there injustices in this world, what are they and how can we bring about change? How do we go about making this difference?

Wednesday 13 February 2008—a day to remember

On the day before Australia Day 1988 (the two-hundredth anniversary of Australia becoming a British colony), my predecessor, Fr A Smith SJ flew the Aboriginal flag high on the College flagpole. It was, he said, a symbolic gesture going back to 25th January 1788 – the last day on which the Indigenous people of Australia could proudly call Australia their own. The Aboriginal flag came down at the end of the day. And on the 26th, Australia Day the Australian flag was raised. The ceremony began with a small religious ceremony attended by Fr Frank Brennan SJ (long time advocate of Aboriginal land rights) and Senator Michael Tate, now Fr Michael Tate of the Archdiocese of Hobart but then Justice Minister in the Hawke Government.

The gesture was not to be without consequence. First was a visit from the local police to a report that hooligans had taken possession of the College flagpole and had raised the Aboriginal flag! Then a concerned parent came to the office to cancel his subscription to the Foundation as a result of his displeasure. There followed a piece in the *Bulletin* by David McNichol about a rogue Headmaster who was pulled into line by an upset parent and made to take the flag down. (An apology ensued in the following edition.)



www.pacificislander.postkiwi.com

Peace Out: A Spiritual Reflection Guide for Young People 16

This week we had cause again to fly the Aboriginal Flag once more, this time in support of the apology offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by the Parliament on behalf of the Australian people.

But Tuesday, the day before that apology was offered, also marked the forty-third anniversary of the “Freedom Ride” when thirty or so university students led by the late Charles Perkins (first Aboriginal to graduate from an Australian university) traveled by bus through towns of western New South Wales confronting institutionalised racism. They entered restaurants, hotels and RSL Clubs that prohibited Aboriginal patrons. In Moree they unsuccessfully tried to take Aboriginal children into the town swimming pool which banned “blacks”. A riot ensued and a young Jim Spigelman, (now Lieutenant Governor of NSW and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of NSW) was punched to the ground while a 500 strong crowd roared its approval.

This week members of our school community took another bus trip, this time to Canberra for an historic step along the path to reconciliation.

Thankfully this has not been a time of recriminations or finger pointing, or asking why this political leader chose not to apologise in the past. It is a moment of grace and gratitude that, in reflecting upon what it is to be human, our values can be honed. Attitudes change and we grow. “Growth is the only sign of life,” once remarked the great Cardinal Newman. So let us acknowledge this sign of life in our

nation. That the Leader of the Opposition seconded the motion is also a sign of hope and encouragement. One of our noted scripture scholars, Fr Brendan Byrne SJ, reflected on this apology in the very appropriate context of this season of Lent which is celebrated as a time of repentance and a change of heart. He writes, *This can make Wednesday's ceremony for us, not simply another political occasion or a purely civic affair, but a moment when in our nation we can truly feel the touch of God's healing grace and an impulse to take up more generously the uncompleted tasks and costs of reconciliation.*

The importance of saying "sorry" is part of the moral fabric and formation most parents would offer their children. One of the most common pieces of advice I hear from long-married couples is that they never go to sleep with an unresolved hurt and without saying sorry. Sacramentally, "saying sorry" to God concludes our Rite of Reconciliation. It clears the ground for a new start. Last year in the election campaign, Mr Rudd elaborated on that phrase: *Simply saying that you're sorry is such a powerful symbol. Powerful not because it represents some expiation of guilt. Powerful not because it represents any form of legal requirement. But powerful simply because it restores respect.*

This week, as Prime Minister, he affirmed, *We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.*

Yes, this is indeed a matter of the Spirit. A matter of healing and of the heart.

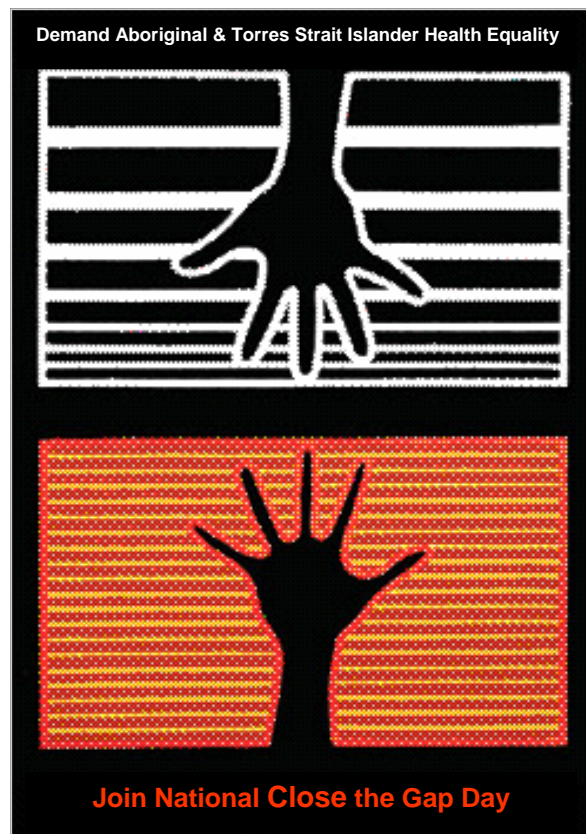
Ross Jones, SJ (from *The Gonzagan*—Newsletter of St Aloysius's College)

Leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother and then come present your offering.

Matthew 5:24

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Lilla Watson (Artist, former University of Queensland academic, and Indigenous activist)



Reflection Questions:

Has someone ever deeply hurt you and then apologised? How did you feel?

Is there someone you have unresolved issues with? Can you take steps towards reconciliation with them?

Jesus was the ultimate forgiver, he forgave his killers as he was dying. Ask Him for grace in forgiving and asking forgiveness.

How will you as a group and as individuals contribute to further reconciliation in our country?

BONO SPEAKS OUT ON RELIGION, POVERTY AND JUSTICE

Excerpt from a speech given at the 2006 Washington Prayer Breakfast.

Look, whatever thoughts you have about God, who He is or if He exists, most will agree that if there is a God, He has a special place for the poor. In fact, the poor are where God lives.

God may well be with us in our mansions on the hill. I hope so. He may well be with us in all manner of controversial stuff. Maybe, maybe not. But the one thing we can all agree, all faiths and ideologies, is that God is with the vulnerable and poor. God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them. "If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday and the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places." Isaiah 58:9

It's not a coincidence that in the scriptures, poverty is mentioned more than 2,100 times. It's not an accident. That's a lot of air time, 2,100 mentions. (You know, the only time Christ is judgmental is on the subject of the

poor.) 'As you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me' (Matthew 25:40). As I say, good news to the poor.

And finally, it's not about charity after all, is it? It's about justice. Let me repeat that: It's not about charity, it's about justice. And that's too bad. Because you're good at charity.

Americans, like the Irish, are good at it. We like to give, and we give a lot, even those who can't afford it. But justice is a higher standard. Africa makes a fool of our idea of justice; it makes a farce of our idea of equality. It mocks our pieties, it doubts our concern, it questions our commitment.



Sixty-five hundred Africans are still dying every day of a preventable, treatable disease, for lack of drugs we can buy at any drug store. This is not about charity, this is about justice and equality. Because there's no way we can look at what's happening in Africa and, if we're honest, conclude that deep down, we really

accept that Africans are equal to us. Anywhere else in the world, we wouldn't accept it. Look at what happened in South East Asia with the tsunami. 150,000 lives lost to that misnomer of all misnomers, "mother nature." In Africa, 150,000 lives are lost every month. A tsunami every month. And it's a completely avoidable catastrophe. It's annoying but justice and equality are mates. Aren't they? Justice always wants to hang out with equality. And equality is a real pain.

You know, think of those Jewish sheep-herders going to meet the Pharaoh, mud on their shoes, and the Pharaoh says, "Equal?" A preposterous idea: rich and poor are equal? And they say, "Yeah, 'equal,' that's what it says here in this book. We're all made in the image of God." And eventually the Pharaoh says, "OK, I can accept that. I can accept the Jews - but not the blacks." "Not the women. Not the gays. Not the Irish. No way, man." So on we go with our journey of equality.

Preventing the poorest of the poor from selling their products while we sing the virtues of the free market...that's a justice issue. Holding children to ransom for the debts of their grandparents...that's a justice issue. Withholding life-saving medicines out of deference to the Office of Patents...that's a justice issue. And while the law is what we say it is, God is not silent on the subject. That's why I say there's the law of the land. And then there is a higher standard. There's the law of the land, and we can hire experts to write them so they benefit us, so the laws say it's OK to protect our agriculture but it's not OK for African farmers to do the



<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1799103.stm>

same, to earn a living? As the laws of man are written, that's what they say. God will not accept that. Mine won't, at least. Will yours?

<http://www.ausprayernet.org.au>

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What has stood out for you from this article?

How can we work to build equality?

As Christians we are told to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.

In what ways can we act more justly in our communities?

“to embrace the whole world in a network of love”

Frederic Ozanam

(Founder of Vinnies)

True Reconciliation in our lifetime?

“True reconciliation between the Australian nation and its Indigenous peoples is not achievable in the absence of acknowledgement by the nation of the wrongfulness of the past dispossession, oppression and degradation of the Aboriginal peoples.” - Sir William Deane

When Sir William Deane stated that, “...to the best of my knowledge, no one in my family ever directly did anything to harm an Aborigine” (*The Things that matter, Tony Stephens*) he hit a raw nerve within the greater Australian population. Little did he know at the time, that his statement would later be used as a precursor by the Howard government in their campaign of fear around ‘practical reconciliation’. Many Australians still hold firm that they personally never directly harmed an Aborigine, and so why should they/we apologise for past wrongs? Perhaps, a fair question? What Deane did feel however, was not guilt, but a profound sense of shame. Deane stated:

“I’m quite unable to understand how any fair-minded person cannot see that the whole structure of our society reflects Australia’s history...a few things which are matters of national shame. In a national sense, everybody would admit that the system failed and that that was a shameful thing.”

On February 13 this year Australians breathed a collective sigh of relief, as Kevin Rudd uttered those profound – and long overdue – words, “...as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry.” Australia is witnessing the dawn of new political leadership, and with it comes the opportunity for serious national dialogue about the future of Indigenous peoples in our nation’s present. Patrick Dodson – Father of reconciliation in this country – has proposed a process of holistic national dialogue begins in each state and territory exploring, “...a policy and philosophical framework that supports the rebuilding of Indigenous communities and honours Indigenous peoples’ place in Australia” (*Dear Mr Rudd, Robert Manne*). What will this process look like, feel like? What should it look like?

A large part of the perpetuation of ‘black versus white’ in our short history, has been the result of national ignorance. The result of inferior and incorrect education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of our education system. Within a crowded curriculum, history can struggle to find place. NSW is the only state where History is compulsory until Year 10.

Whilst learning about Indigenous history is critical, many teachers can face difficulties, and Indigenous history is only taught well in “pockets” of the system. Australia generally lacks direction when it comes to teaching in this area (A telling history, Cathy Weaver). What is your school/university teaching or telling you about the history of Indigenous Australians? Are you satisfied?

What can I do to achieve True Reconciliation in my community?

- Learn about Indigenous history within a local context – as a school/university embrace your local Indigenous communities as teachers and experts
- Initiate a local dialogue around true reconciliation, and in doing so, become an active participant in the greater national discourse
- Celebrate and acknowledge the positivity of our Indigenous past, there are myriad positive stories to share
- Acknowledge our Indigenous heroes with equal respect we pay the Anzacs and those in the Eureka Stockade – they deserve equality in affirmation

Ask the questions that need to be voiced: Why is Indigenous history not a compulsory subject at my school/university? What am I doing about achieving true reconciliation in my lifetime?

A Final thought...

“Teaching about...the Stolen Generations is not about making students feel guilty or sorry for Aboriginal people. It’s about understanding how Aboriginal history has unfolded and how it has contributed to where Aboriginal people are today. It is only with understanding that we can move together towards a positive future.”

- Chris Sarra

“The spiritual desolation of the Aboriginal people is completely interwoven with the physical disadvantage. We must address these things together...”

- Sir William Deane



Building relationships for
change between Indigenous
and non-Indigenous Australians
www.reconciliation.org.au

THE LIVING BIBLE

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a t-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. He is brilliant. Kind of profound and very, very bright. He became a Christian while attending college.

Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry for the students but are not sure how to go about it.



One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his t-shirt and wild hair. The service has already started and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet.

By now the people are really uptight and the tension in the air is thick. About this time the minister realizes that from the back of the church a deacon is making his way toward Bill. Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair and a three piece suit. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he is about to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.

And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone.

Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control, he says "What I am about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible people will ever read!"

Personal Reflection:

Think about your life. Have you ever seen another person sitting on their own at lunch or just not socialising like everyone else? You may or may not know them. Have you ever gone to them and offered the hand of friendship? How do you think they would have felt if you had sat down with them and had a chat? Have you ever been the one sitting on your own? How would you have felt if someone had come to sit with you?

Reflection Questions:

Can you think of a time or a significant moment when you have witnessed someone act in a way that reflects the teachings in the bible? How did you feel? Did it have an impact on your life?

How important do you think it is to act in a way that reflects the things you preach?

Reflect on your own life in relation to this story. Is this how you live your life? What things could you change to be more like the old man in this story?



Humans alone,
of all the creatures of the earth,
can change their own pattern.
Humans alone are the architects
of their destiny.
The greatest discovery in our generation
is that human beings,
by changing the inner attitudes
of their minds,
can change the outer aspects
of their lives.

William James

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.” (1)

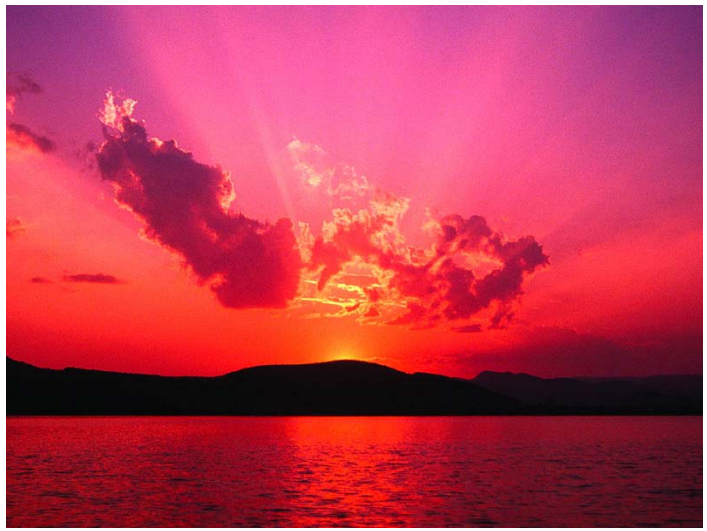
It is often taken for granted in modern times that God is no longer a genuine reality. In many parts of our culture God has been relegated to the level of a myth or a beautiful lie (2) that provides some form of consolation from the cold reality into which we are born. Religion seems to have been replaced by Science as the sole bastion of certain truth and everything else has been downgraded to the empty level of subjective opinion. So is it true? Is God just an archaic idea that attempts to provide a hopeful diversion from the problems of death and suffering?

Before Benedict XVI was the Pope, he spoke about this very problem during a lecture in Paris given in 1999, “The theory of evolution has increasingly emerged as the way to make metaphysics (3) disappear, to make ... God superfluous, and to formulate a strictly “scientific” explanation of the world.” (4) Cardinal Schönborn who spoke at Sydney University during WYD described this growing trend as science becoming ideology. He pointed out that there is no such thing as “Einsteinism”, but there is such a thing as Darwinism because Darwin’s theories have come to include ideology rather than being concerned purely with science.

Evolution is usually presented as being the incontrovertible answer to faith in God but it has no right to do this. Now this is not to say that the entire theory of evolution is false and that the book of Genesis is a scientific text that gives a literal explanation for the origins of life. Rather, whilst science, particularly micro biology, has proven the reality of bodily evolution, it has not proven evolution of the human soul. Science is equally incapable of explaining the origins of a Creatorless creation. Darwinism has not explained creation, it has explained it away.

It is helpful at this point to listen to the words of Pope John Paul II “Human Intelligence is surely already capable of finding a response to the questions of origins. The existence of God the Creator can be known with certainty through his works, by the light of human reason. ... We believe that God created the world according to his wisdom. It is not the product of

any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance.” (5) The sheer complexity and astoundingly harmonious coexistence of life on our planet demands a belief in design, even physical evolution is itself an incredible system that is clearly the product of design. We must bear in mind that “the normality of our universe is not at all a calm sea teeming with life; rather it is a boundless desert of still spaces or the unleashing of irresistible forces.” (6) The staggering abundance of life on earth is an exception to the rule, it is clearly designed and it is clearly purposeful. We are not the result of some random biological mechanism, we are not an accident of physics, rather, as Pope Benedict XVI said at his installation mass as Pope, “Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”



(1) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, published in 1882

(2) Louis Althusser 1970, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* in “*Lenin and Philosophy*” and *Other Essays*

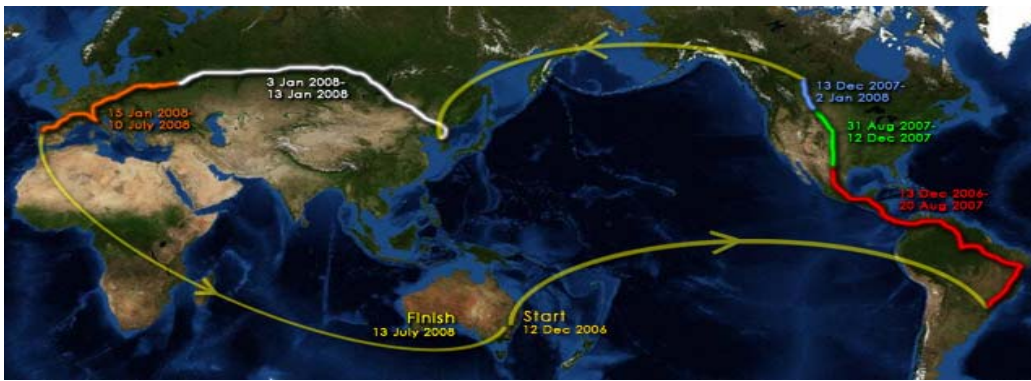
(3) The philosophical study of being and knowing (<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=metaphysics>)

(4) Reprinted in Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, pp. 178 - 179

(5) Cited in Cardinal Schönborn’s, *Finding Design in Nature* published in the *New York Times* July 7th 2005

(6) 5th Catechesis by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn on Sunday, February 12th, 2006, St. Stephen’s Cathedral. Translated by Prof. John F. Crosby

Walk 4 One Christian Unity



Sam Clear is a young guy from Melbourne who walked around the world in 564 days. In total he travelled over 29 000km, walking approximately 18 000km.

Why would anyone walk around the world?

Sam has a strong desire to follow God's will and purpose in his life. In 2005 he felt a strong calling to pray for Christian unity, but felt that the splits in the Christian family were too great to be healed by one person praying. He began asking other people to join him each day at 4:01pm to pray for Christian unity. Through prayer and guidance he gradually discerned that he was to walk around the world praying for Christian unity and inviting others to join him in his prayer.

Sam left Australia on the 12th December 2006 and returned just in time for WYD in Sydney on 13th July 2008. He was on pilgrimage for 18 months, praying for Christian unity, speaking to people about Christian unity and inviting them to join him in prayer for one. He was on a mission to mobilise an army of prayer and people around the globe joined him in praying for Christian unity at 4:01pm everyday. Sam knew the importance of his journey and walked on through cracked feet and other physical ailments brought on by the constant walking. The journey almost took his life on a couple of occasions. He was stalked by a puma while walking through Venezuela, he was mugged in Costa Rica, attacked by drunk men in Russia, caught Typhoid Fever eating under cooked rooster and was held at gunpoint by a farmer who mistook him for a robber. He was also racially abused and had rocks and beer cans thrown at him. Sam knew that Jesus also prayed for unity *"that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* John 17:21.

Now back in Australia, Sam has taken on a new mission working with Youth Mission Team in Perth. He encourages Christians to continue to pray for Christian unity everyday at 4:01pm. He will be continuing to pray for unity for the rest of his life or until we are unified, whatever comes first. Below is a unity prayer Sam wrote:

Father, we come together to surrender our entire selves to your vision of unity. Lead us to truth and speak gently into the very depths of our hearts. Help us to cast all bitterness and pride to the foot of the cross so that we may fully embrace the truth of Christ, our Saviour. Please unite all Christians as one body, Father, as your son, Jesus, is one in you and you are in him. Send your Holy Spirit, Lord, to draw us together that we may become, as one, apostles of love to the entire world. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: If you honestly look at your own beliefs can you identify any religious or ethnic groups that you have a prejudice against? If yes, which groups and why? Identifying ingrained prejudices is a painful but worthy process. We're challenged to purposefully think and act with love if we hold prejudices. In God's eyes we are **all** His children.





The following opening prayers are prayed at the beginning of every St Vincent de Paul Society conference meeting. Pray the opening prayers together as a conference with a leader saying the parts in italics. Straight after, lead into a Spiritual Reflection, maybe one from this guide.

Opening Prayers

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.
Let us reflect for some time to put ourselves in the presence of God.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, by the light of the Holy Spirit, teach the hearts of the faithful and grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolation. Through Christ Our Lord

For the Holy Father and all members of the Vincentian Family

Lord we pray for the special intentions of our Holy Father, for Bishops, Priests, Religious and all members of the Vincentian family throughout the world, especially in those countries with which we are twinned.

We remember particularly our benefactors and those whom we assist.

For ourselves

Lord, You gave St Vincent de Paul a heart overflowing with love for You. Grant us the same fervour of charity, that we too may see Your image in those whom we assist and gladly give them a share of our time and possessions .

Prayer for the society spirit

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in the faith and courage of our founders, especially Blessed Frederic Ozamam. May their spirit be renewed in the Society today that we may be open to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged and receptive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, etc...



Closing Prayers

Our Father, etc...

Prayers for Christian unity

Lord Jesus Christ, at Your Last supper, You prayed to the Father that all should be one. Send Your Holy Spirit upon all who bear Your name and seek to serve You. Strengthen our faith in You and make us love one another in humility. May we who have been reborn in one baptism, all be united in one faith under one shepherd.

Canonisation of Blessed Frederick Ozanam

God our Father, we pray that Your will be done one earth as it is in Heaven. Through the intercession of Blessed Frederick Ozanam we ask You to consider those for whom we now pray.

Mention those who are sick for whom you wish to pray

May we all become a living sign of Your love. We ask for Your help and guidance as we attempt to pattern our faith and lives on that of Blessed Frederic Ozanam. We pray that he be canonized by the Church.

We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
Queen conceived without sin
Saint Joseph
Saint Vincent de Paul
Saint Louise de Marillac
Blessed Frederic Ozanam
Blessed Mary Mackillop
Blessed Rosalie Rendu

Have mercy on us
Pray for us
Pray for us
Pray for us
Pray for us
Pray for us
Pray for us

And may the souls of our departed members and of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God rest in peace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.



This logo represents the hand of Christ that blesses the cup, the hand of love that offers the cup and the hand of suffering that receives the cup.

A voice for the oppressed

Archbishop Oscar Romero was the only Bishop in El Salvador that spoke out for the oppressed lower class and victims of the Civil War. He was assassinated whilst celebrating mass in 1980. The case for his beatification began in 1997. He is remembered as an advocate for the voiceless, who literally put himself in the firing line so the plight of the poor could be heard. Oscar Romero answered the question asked to Isaiah “whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Isaiah 6:8. Oscar Romero was not seen as a threat to the Church when he was ordained a Bishop, he was a quiet intellectual, but the plight of those in his country touched him so deeply it changed the course of his life and of El Salvador.



We are called to go be the voice for the oppressed in our local areas. This call is deep and can call us to extreme advocacy like Oscar Romero or simple self sacrifice. Through your Vinnies work you respond to the question of the Lord “who will go for us?” Are there ways you can respond to this call on a deeper level which would require giving more of yourself? Oscar Romero was a bright light during a dark time in El Salvador’s history, how are we called to be lights and prophets today? Can you draw comparisons between St Vincent de Paul and Oscar Romero? They both had a heart for the poor they encountered in their daily lives. Can you think of someone you consider to be a modern day prophet? They could be a teacher, friend, parent, sibling or someone you know from history or current events.

“If at any time they stop the radio, ban the paper, deny us the possibility of speaking, kill all the priests and bishops too; and they leave you a people without a priest, every one of you must become a microphone of God – everyone must be a messenger, a prophet; the Church will always exist in the world for as long as there remains one baptised person and that last baptised person who remains in the world is he who has the responsibility before the entire world to maintain the flag of our Lord’s truth and divine justice flying high.”

Archbishop Oscar Romero from *A Word in Season*

"God needs the people themselves... to save the world . . . The world of the poor teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of hand-outs from governments or from the churches, but when they themselves are the masters and protagonists of their own struggle for liberation."