A Word from the Coordinator

It is almost 6 months since I was appointed to the new part time position of Young Vinnies coordinator for the Christchurch City Area. Donna Mora also took up the volunteer role of assistant Coordinator at the same time.

I have been involved in ministry with young people in the Catholic Church in many different ways for almost 15 years & social justice has always been a core part of my faith and something I have always tried to include in any youth programme I have been involved in. So I feel privileged to have been entrusted with this position and am excited about helping our conferences and communities to engage young people more deeply in the life of the church and the wonderful spirituality of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Donna and I spent a couple of months establishing ourselves as a team, setting up our office and making ourselves known to the adult conferences and other key Catholic organisations in the city and working out what our priorities would be for establishing support for the Young Vinnies community in Christchurch.

Since that time we have been out visiting and making connections with our Catholic schools, Young Vinnies coordinators and groups in these communities and starting to work out what forms of support we can offer them. We have also been creating websites and resources for use by our local groups, helping plan and run faith in action events, leadership days and generally working to build up the profile of Young Vinnies in our region.

We hope you enjoy the details we have included for you in this first edition of our Young Vinnies update. Please keep the Young Vinnies Team in your thoughts and prayers as we strive to support our young people in this wonderful ministry. We look forward to hopefully meeting many more of you soon.

God bless,

James Bryant
Christchurch City Area
Young Vinnies Coordinator
Christian Leadership Day

Over the past couple of months James and Donna from the Young Vinnies Team have been working alongside the Principal of St Peters School in Beckenham, Pamela Arthurs, and the Diocesan Youth Team to plan a Christian Leaders Day for Year 7 and 8 students from our Local Catholic Schools.

On May 8th 2014 over 240 Young People from 12 of our local schools gathered to explore their role as leaders in their communities and also the concept of ‘Servant Leadership’ based on the teachings and example of Jesus. We started the day by putting the young people into small groups made up of students from different schools so that they could have some fun together, get to know people from other communities and also have opportunities to share their ideas. Early in the day we asked each group to come up with their thoughts on what good leadership looked like. We were quite impressed with the feedback we got from the group and their combined insights really summed up what the day was all about.

The Diocesan Mission team got the group thinking about Jesus as a “Super” leader with an entertaining skit. This lead into the day’s first talk by James from Young Vinnies who shared about Christian Leadership and revisited a lot of the points the small groups had come up with in their discussion. He reminded the group that as ‘Christian Leaders’ we are called to love God, love his people and his creation and that this love is a radical Love. James pointed out that it is a radical Love because Jesus calls us not to just serve those we like, but to do really challenging things like love even our enemies and to do good to those who persecute us. It is a love that calls us to action and service of all people, especially the weak and the vulnerable.

Later in the day the Students split into service or leadership groups that reflected their different roles or interests in their communities such as House/Whanau Captains, Cultural leaders, Young Vinnies, Social Justice groups, Library and IT, Sports Leaders, Environment and Liturgy Groups. In this group time the young people discussed how they might take some of what they had learnt from the day and be more effective leaders in their particular roles. The young people also shared some of the particular things they are already doing as part of their role and they were encouraged to come up with a few new ideas or concepts they could take back to share with their community.

There were a large number of Young Vinnies Leaders present on the day and our small groups discussed the usual fundraising ideas but also shared ideas about how to make their communities a more just and caring place. The Day finished with Mass celebrated by Fr John Adams. The Diocesan Youth Team led the music and the Students volunteered to do the readings, prayers and altar serving. It was a beautiful and powerful way to end the day. There has been a lot of positive feedback from the day and it is hoped that this will become an annual event with even more of our schools and young people having the opportunity to attend next year.
School & Community Visits

One of the important roles of the Young Vinnies team is to make connections with our Catholic Schools and support teachers and volunteers who are coordinating young Vinnies groups in their communities. We are slowly making our way around the schools as they respond to our request to meet with the interested parties in their communities. Most schools are quite keen to meet with us, once we establish who the right contact person is and make a connection with them.

Twelve of our local primary schools have some sort Young Vinnies group already established with about 200 members. Other schools have a generic social justice group who do occasional can drives and fundraisers to support St Vincent de Paul. This second option is also more common in our High Schools with most being very interested in supporting the local good works of the Society but not in establishing a Young Vinnies conference. Group sizes vary from school to school with most having at least ten members and ranging up to almost forty in some communities.

Our initial meeting with staff and students allows us to find out what they are doing in their community and how we can best support their ministry. We also share a little about the Society, its history and the positive impact its good works have on hundreds of people in our local community every week. We reinforce the vital role that young people play in the society and that Young Vinnies are full members of the society who are invited into a lifelong connection with the Vincentian family.

Over the following months the team will continue to support the communities we have made contact with by providing them with resources, news and event updates as well as follow-up visits. We will also be aiming to make contacts in remaining communities.

Resources

We are aware that for some time Young Vinnies Conferences in our region have been running their groups with limited support and resources. We are also aware that many of our Adult conferences are looking for ways that they might engage young people in their good works.

As we have been meeting with the different schools and communities around the city we have been gathering ideas from the activities that are already being run and also asking what sort of resources might be useful. The responses to these questions have varied quite a lot from community to community but they have also had quite a lot of common requests as well.

So far in response to this we have been looking to see what existing resources might be available online and creating links to these on our website. We have also started creating some of our own resources and made these available online for anyone that might find them useful.

A couple of the resources created include Young Vinnies prayer cards for opening and closing meetings, a commissioning ceremony for Young Vinnies groups and a discussion paper aimed at helping Adult conferences to consider some creative ways of getting young people involved in their communities. These are all available on our local Young Vinnies website or by contacting us at the Young Vinnies office. More resources will be created and made available in the following months.
Faith in Action Afternoon

It is recorded that one of the first good works carried out by the group of young friends who founded the Society of St Vincent de Paul was to take firewood to an elderly person living in the loft of a house in their town in France. This is one of the ways our Vinnies groups here in Christchurch continue to help those in need today, taking small loads of firewood to those with wood burners.

This year our Christchurch Young Vinnies team decided to help out with the provision of firewood by putting together some of the bags of timber for our volunteers and staff to deliver to people who need them. So on the 1st May 2014 about 25 Young people from Christchurch, Kaiapoi and Darfield and a few “older members” of the Vincentian community gathered for our first Faith in Action Afternoon. They worked together to bag up over 21 Cubic meters of firewood. This added up to over 300 big bags of firewood plus a number of other large delivery bin loads as well.

Our young people had a wonderful afternoon together building friendships with other Young Vincentians from across our Area and working together to make a positive difference in our communities, help those in need. We hope to hold more Faith in Action Afternoons in the near future. Young people can register to be kept up to date about upcoming events and news on our website.

New Christchurch Vinnies Websites

Our Youth Coordinator James has been using some of his experience to create a website for St Vincent de Paul in the Christchurch Region. He has also created another for the Young Vinnies of the area with links back to the main site to ensure the connection between the two is obvious. The websites allow us to promote the Society in our region and to put people in contact with our services and conference. There is information about our shops and online forms that allow people to apply to be volunteers in various ways. There is also the option to make a donation to our local good works through the Telecom give-a-little foundation.

The Young Vinnies Site has general information about the society but also blogs with our latest news and photos from events and the activities of young Vinnies groups from around our city and surrounding area. We also have links to Young Vinnies resources that we have created as well as resources from other regional offices in NZ and overseas.

The main website, [www.svdpchch.co.nz](http://www.svdpchch.co.nz) had over 1000 visits in the 4 months after it went online and the newer Young Vinnies site [www.youngvinnieschch.org.nz](http://www.youngvinnieschch.org.nz) has also had hundreds of visits in the past couple of months. We can also be found on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/young.vinnieschch](http://www.facebook.com/young.vinnieschch)