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Media Release

### **Vinnies put the spotlight on the spiritual**

The future for the Society of St Vincent de Paul in New Zealand lies in developing faith communities with a strong spiritual focus, says National President Gerry Stevens.

“We are not a network of welfare groups getting together to run Op Shops and distribute some food parcels,” says Gerry.

“When Blessed Frédéric Ozanam founded our Society, it had a mission of growing, developing and sharing the Christian faith of its members. It was his intention that members should learn and grow their knowledge of God.

“He also taught that if you want to grow your love of God, you need to put it into practice by sharing your love with your neighbour in a practical and personal way. As Jesus put it so simply in the Gospels, love God and love your neighbour as yourself.”

The Society of St Vincent de Paul in New Zealand is currently in a nationwide process of Refounding to reawaken the spirit that inspired the founders of the Society in their radical service of others. More than 100 members from around the country attended a workshop on Refounding in August and a range of Refounding materials have been distributed to more than 100 Conferences around New Zealand.

“There has been a lot of enthusiasm for the Refounding process,” says Gerry. “Members realise that we are currently a society in decline and that if we want to be vibrant and attract new members, we must be prepared to do things differently. Our founder encouraged us to be bold and innovative and now is certainly a time for that.”

The Refounding message is being embraced by Conferences around the country, especially the focus on spirituality and developing Conferences into genuine faith communities.

“Prayer and reflection are at the heart of our Conference,” says Peter Ryan, President of the Our Lady of Kāpiti Conference which has flourished in recent years.

“We want to nurture a strong faith-sharing culture that extends beyond the time set for reflection. “

Peter says putting a stronger focus on prayer and reflection has been critical to strengthening the Conference which has grown from about 6 members to 30 members over the last five years.

The most valuable thing about the Refounding process is its emphasis on making Conferences intentional faith communities, says Peter.

“If our Conference is a genuine faith community, more and more people want to be there. Strong friendships develop and mutual respect among members. We’ve found that people are not rushing away from meetings. They like being here.”

A similar story of growth and vitality is evident in the St Peter Chanel Rangiora Conference in North Canterbury. Conference President Jenny Carter says the heart of Refounding is “your spiritual journey as a Vincentian.

“The message has changed. Now the message is join the Society and grow your spirituality. A Refounded Society is one which nurtures the spirituality of its members and motivates them to live out the Vincentian virtues. That comes first.”

Both the Our Lady of Kāpiti Conference and the St Peter Chanel Conference have grown in numbers and greatly extended their work with the vulnerable and disadvantaged in their areas.

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