



## *HAPPY EASTER!*

Help us spread the joy and hope of Easter around the world!

Give the gift of hope by supporting our international work! Join us as we reach out to our neighbours throughout the world to share the Easter message of hope, renewal and new life.

May the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord fill your home and family with love and blessings, and inspire your solidarity towards those who, all over the world, are in deep need of a new start for their lives!

## *ASIA and OCEANIA*

### *Dynamism and Solidarity serving the poor*

#### *Hong-Kong: Birth of a Youth Conference!*



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has established a Youth Conference to address the needs of children and young people. Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, patron of the Society's central council, said he is happy that the conference was established. He celebrated a thanksgiving Mass at the Holy Redeemer church on February 15 where there was also a commissioning ceremony for conference members. Set up in December last year, the Youth Conference consists of seven people who meet regularly at Holy Cross church, Shaukiwan. Anyone under 40 years old who is willing to help and show concern for young people can apply to join.

The 31-year-old President, Patrick Lai Chun-bun said that the Youth Conference will concentrate resources to care for young people and can be an avenue of diversification for the society. He observed that "some of the members are getting on in years and are passing the baton to the younger generation." Brenda Yuen Wai-wah, vice president of the conference, said many young people are willing to work with those in need, but they have not found the right channels. She believes some are not active enough and do not know how to help, and that the conference provides an avenue for them to do so. She noted that "both the volunteers and the beneficiaries are young people. They can develop a rapport through games and recreation. Some young people become depressed when they encounter setbacks. They need the care and concern of others."

The Youth Conference has already visited young people at a hostel run by Youth Outreach. The young volunteers cooked the food for them. The expenses were met by the Society. They hope this can happen on a more regular basis. Many children, who are newly-arrived or come from low-income families, seldom have opportunities for recreation as their parents have to work. The conference plans to organise one-day tours so they can familiarise themselves with Hong Kong.

The members hope that youth conferences can be set up in parishes throughout the diocese. At present, the conference is looking for a spiritual director. She added said that "the Youth Conference can develop and sustain the spirit of the society and attract new blood."

## *China... Spirit of St Vincent de Paul blazing bright!*

As you know, achieving the establishment of the SSVP legally in continental China (see Confeder@tioNews 10), is one of President General José-Ramón Díaz Torremocha's major objectives. 2008, in that respect, was notable for two important undertakings, both recognized by the local authorities: the renovation of a school and construction of a classroom in Mei Zhou, and the rehabilitation and construction of 120 houses after the tragic Sichuan earthquake last year.

Besides, although it is still impossible to set up "Conferences" for legal reasons, the Society in Hong Kong has been working with the "Tienjin Xikai Wenshang Charity Community Group" for the past few years. It is a lay Catholic association that follows the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. They bear witness to their faith through charitable services, act according to the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul and offer their services to the underprivileged in the community. With an ever-grateful heart and bearing in mind the legacy of Christ's teaching to serve the poor, they devote themselves to the service of the poor and the Church, so that more people who are in need will feel the comfort of Christ's love.



They assist Catholics who are old, weak, sick and disabled to receive the holy sacraments and attend Mass, in particular at Christmas time; those who benefit from this are deeply moved and touched. Indeed, the Group, through their service, actually imparts the love of Christ to the heart of everyone who needs help. This year, because of the international economic recession, more and more people need help. The underprivileged in the community form the target group that needs special care and concern. The Group actively mobilises all members to pay person-to-person visits to every family and old person who needs care and concern, to understand their needs and to give the appropriate assistance. Older and middle-aged members frequently visit three Homes for the Aged and other

service points in various districts. At Christmas, they brought them candies and foodstuff which older people are usually like to eat and shared the joy of Christmas with them. Their intimate and comfortable conversation gave the old people the feeling of being with their family, thus encouraging them to talk delightfully about their family affairs. Similar activities are going on for Easter!

These are only examples of their current activities, as they have many others: Wang Ping is a psychiatric patient, unable to communicate normally with others and has difficulty taking care of herself. In the past, because she was not too familiar with members of the Group, she often stared at them with hostile eyes. Now, because of their regular friendly visits during which they communicated and exchanged views with her, she occasionally wears a smile that has been hidden for years, and from her look, the members could see a friendliness that has never been revealed before. This has helped her recover gradually both physically and mentally. The members themselves feel comforted and happy to see how her condition has improved.

The services the Group needs to offer in the coming days are heavy. At the beginning of this New Year, the Group appeals to and welcomes all people of faith with a loving heart to participate actively in their work, so that more and more needy families and individuals will be better served. We also hope more people will join our team, so that we can experience the presence of God in our life, and to bear witness to our trust in God through charitable services.

## *Australia: Solidarity in the Face of Natural disasters Fire and Floods...*

In early 2009, bushfires swept across Victoria, devastating 78 communities and 400,000 hectares of land. As of the beginning of March, 210 people had lost their lives. A total of 2029 homes were destroyed along with 61 businesses, 5 schools and kindergartens, 3 sporting clubs and numerous other buildings. Black Saturday, 7 February 2009, was classified as Australia's worst Natural Disaster. The losses are growing, the devastation is evident and yet, the human spirit will survive. Out of the ashes the determination of people will re-emerge to rebuild lives, livelihoods and their communities. The St Vincent de Paul Society will be there for the long haul, putting the pieces back together, helping people to rebuild their lives after having lost family members, friends and all their possessions.

Following Black Saturday, the Society launched the St Vincent de Paul Society Victorian Disaster Appeal and has been inundated with material aid which has been transported locally, nationally and even internationally to the 10,000 square metre warehouse located in Rowville specifically secured for the purpose of managing the receipt and distribution of material aid.



Needless to say goods began pouring into the warehouse the moment its doors were opened. The Society's Victorian State President, Jim Grealish said, "We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of Australians, ex-patriot Aussies and indeed people all over the world. We have received financial donations from across Australia and even Europe and North America. Likewise we have received material aid for large and small items from individuals and businesses of all types. This disaster has united us all in one effort and that is to assist the survivors of the bushfires in whatever capacity we are able." "We also acknowledge the support from Society members, staff and volunteers in all

States for financial, material aid and moral support during this difficult time."

"People have given what they can and we are so grateful for their support," continued Jim. "Our role will be as one of the lead recovery agents. Our members and volunteers are and will remain in the areas affected, helping to re-establish people in their communities. At present, their needs are for material items but the Society will be offering housing support, counselling and, of course, friendship into the long term."

Across Victoria, the Society has 99 Vinnies Centres, 45 of these are located in the fire affected regions. All centres are stocked and equipped to supply bushfire survivors with goods to help them begin to recover from this disaster. "The immediate need now is housing which is being co-ordinated by the Department of Human Services. Once that is organised, the Society will provide survivors with household furnishings, linen and kitchenware to help re-establish their homes.

"Initially the needs ranged from clothing and underwear to personal toiletries. Other immediate needs down the track will be providing children with school uniforms, books and stationery as well as assisting people with the other myriad items they will require," said Jim.





Donations of material aid have been arriving at the Rowville warehouse from our State counterparts as well. Vinnies in every State have given us unprecedented support with facilitating and organising shipments of goods that have been transported into Victoria.



“ People’s basic needs are met as we receive and distribute goods but there are two other ways people have supported us: through financial donations and then, indeed the greatest gift, people’s time. “Volunteers have appeared out of nowhere to help us. Each day the warehouse has had between 200-350 volunteers, all there to help us do the best we can and move the goods back out to where they are most needed,” said Jim. The Society’s continuing role will be to support, counsel and help rebuild. In Victoria, the Society has provided practical support and friendship to people throughout its 155 year history. “Our mandate is clear and we will continue to provide assistance to bushfire survivors for

as long as it is needed.

### *Floods in Queensland*

Unfortunately, over the same period, while the Victoria State was devastated by the fire, the State of Queensland was badly hit by tremendous floods. In some areas the rain started on New Year's Day, and as the clean continued through to March, tropical cyclone Hamish taunted the coast. But the effect of the floods in Queensland doesn't stop when the water goes down. It will take time for lives in flooded areas of Queensland to return to normal. Here, also, Vinnies have been, are, and will be there, doing their best to assist and comfort the victims!

### *CGI solidarity*

Now, the needs are more financial than material: financial donations enable SSVP to ensure that the specific needs of victims can be met. Answering to SSVP Australia’s website appeal for both disasters, CGI’s Technical Commission decided to release a solidarity donation, as it always does in case of natural disasters, and to acknowledge Australia’s everlasting and tremendous support and generosity towards Council General, and towards the Society all over the world. This kind of emergency assistance from CGI is only possible with the continuous support of the Vincentians all over the world!

Picture Credits: Peter Casamento and Georgia Metaxas: Thank you to both of them!

#### **Help us to support the Society**

You can send your cheques to the Confederation's offices  
or your bank transfers to:  
Banque CIC- Paris Bac  
2 Bd Raspail 75007 Paris, France  
IBAN: **FR76 3006 6100 4100 0105 8120 129**  
**SWIFT : CMCIFRPP**

In the name of: Confédération Internationale - Société de St Vincent de Paul

### ***LAST MINUTE : EARTHQUAKE IN ITALY***

As we go to press, the centre of Italy has just been struck by a violent earthquake. Early figures report 240 dead, 34 missing, 1500 injured, 10,000 homes destroyed and more than 50,000 people homeless. The country fears further aftershocks. There will certainly be a need for support in the coming days and weeks from the Vincentian world. Please be generous!