



# History of Youth Involvement in New Zealand

## 1900's

Since the early 1900's, young people have been involved with the work of the Society in New Zealand.

The Society in wanting to show its concern for the welfare of youth got the ball rolling when it established boys and girls guilds. These groups were under the patronage of an adult conference and focussed on the spiritual wellbeing of youth.

The first recorded boys' guild was successfully established in 1906 by the Cathedral Conference in Christchurch. By 1915, there were boys guilds under the patronage of Sacred Heart Thorndon in Wellington, St. Benedict's Newtown, St. Joseph's Grey Lynn and St. Mary's in Gisborne.

The first active youth conference on record in New Zealand doing Society works however was formed on the 8th May, 1910 at St. Patrick's College in Te Aro, Wellington by Rev. Dr Kennedy who was the Rector at the college. The conference was made up of boys who were boarders at the school. Their works included visiting Mary Aubert's Homes in the city and at Island Bay, as well as an old people's home. To increase the funds the members occasionally organised concerts and entertainments, charging a small sum for admission.

## 1920's

There were three youth conferences that were recorded as being active during the 1920's. These conferences were the St. Patrick's Silverstream Conference; a junior conference at St. Anthony's Aramoho in Wanganui (established in 1924) and a youth conference at St. Joseph's Dunedin (established in 1927).

These conferences were involved in a variety of activities including visitations; organising school concerts and sale of goods in order to provide food and donations to the Society; assisting with Sunday School and other church based activities and making clothes. Nine enthusiastic members of the junior conference at St. Anthony's also started a miniature waste product depot.

## 1930's

Concern regarding young people and the church, instigated the Society to form a Youth Welfare Committee in the 1930's. The Society was concerned about the growing number of young people leaving the Church. A plan was implemented in which conference members kept record of boys leaving school, and tried to support them and inform them of Catholic groups available. The aim was to keep these young men within a "Catholic atmosphere".

Three active youth conferences are on record during the period of the 1930's. These were based at St. Patrick's Silverstream; St. Joseph's in Dunedin and a new youth

conference was established by the Marist Brothers in Auckland in 1934 at Sacred Heart College. Visitation was a huge part of the work that these youth conferences were involved in. St. Patrick's Silverstream was also noted as providing assistance to the Missions of the Marist Fathers. While St. Joseph's (St. Dominic's) Guild continued to assist teaching Sunday School children and provided entertainment to 250 children at Christmas time.

## 1940's/1950's

In 1942 the Society's Annual Reports indicated that there were still youth conferences at St. Patrick's Silverstream, Wellington and St. Joseph's Dunedin (St. Dominic's Guild). There were also youth conferences at St. Mary's in Wanganui, Sacred Heart College in Auckland and a University Conference in Auckland.

Unfortunately by 1947 only one youth conference was on record, Sacred Heart College, Auckland. Similarly, during the 1950's, the post war years, Sacred Heart Conference continued to be the only active youth conference according to the Society's Annual Reports.

## 1960's

In response to a call by the President General in Paris for more young Vincentians, New Zealand reflected a worldwide trend focusing on encouraging young people to join the Society.

Three new youth conferences were established in 1960 - St. Joseph's Aramoho, St. John's College, Hastings and Xavier College, Christchurch. A Junior Conference was established at St. Mary's, Hamilton in 1961 and the St. Joseph's Junior conference, Palmerston North was formed in 1962. This was a flourishing start to a decade which saw the number of youth conferences go from strength to strength. By the end of the 1960's there were 28 youth conferences, one University conference and three Ozanam (parish based youth) conferences. Four hundred people were members of the Society and showed their commitment to the Vincentian spirit by helping people in need. A festival for youth was held at McAuley College in Auckland.

## 1970's

During the 1970's the subject of youth received wide coverage at both National and District levels. The Tablet (July 1971) reported about the formation of a Steering Committee for St. Vincent de Paul Conferences attached to Christchurch Secondary Schools.

Youth seminars were sponsored by the Society in 1972, under the direction of the National President, Mr Bernard Russell. Seminars were held to give young people the opportunity to discuss contemporary social problems. Another objective of the seminars was to encourage the youth to decide how they



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could contribute in a practical way towards solutions, within the framework of the Society. Each region later presented their findings in a paper at a National Youth Seminar in Wellington.

In 1973 the Society's Annual Report stated there were 32 youth conferences and six Ozanam conferences with a total of 540 young people - a high point for the Society in terms of youth membership. This was the result of many Vincentians voluntarily establishing and supporting youth conferences. Youth conferences were spread throughout the country in Auckland, Hamilton, Hastings, Wellington, Kapimana, Hutt Valley, Canterbury, Timaru, Dunedin and Southland.

By 1977, the numbers had dropped to 32 youth conferences and 4 Ozanam conferences with 400 young people actively involved in the Society.

### 1980's

Unfortunately the wonderful expansion of youth conferences in the 1970's was short lived. There was a steady decline in youth conferences in the 1980's. The Society's 1983/1984 Annual Report revealed there were 19 youth conferences and one Ozanam conference. The statistics were more disheartening when by 1987 there were only two youth conferences and two mini conferences (primary school level). The Society was concerned about the dramatic decrease in youth membership.

In 1988, Karen Sapwell was employed on a part-time basis, as National Youth Co-ordinator to set up a programme to increase the number of youth involved in the Society. At the 1989 Annual General Meeting, the National Council then made a firm commitment to youth by employing Karen Sapwell as full time Youth Co-ordinator after seeing the number of youth conferences grow from four to eight within a year.

Karen gathered around her a voluntary team of four youth representatives from throughout the country. Benefits quickly resulted from this initiative. Youth conferences started up throughout New Zealand, receiving personal support from young adults. A voluntary National Youth Team and structure was set up, with the goal to get the Society to employ Diocesan Youth Co-ordinators. Additionally, a National Youth Newsletter, "the Hotline" began. This provided information and news to all the youth members and District Councils.

Young people were again present and more visible, with some youth attending District Council Meetings.

### 1990's

In April 1990, Megan Reilly was employed in Christchurch as the first District Youth Co-ordinator and part time secretary.

By August 1990 there were 15 youth conferences and 149 members around the country. The National Youth Team

changed to comprise both volunteers and employed Youth Co-ordinators. It soon became apparent that employed Youth Co-ordinators were the most effective way to set up and properly support youth conferences.

During May 1991, the Auckland Central Council followed Christchurch's footsteps and employed Bebe Bourke as a full-time Youth Co-ordinator. By August 1991, the youth membership in New Zealand had increased significantly to 28 youth conferences and 353 members. Fifteen of these 28 youth conferences were in the two areas with Youth Co-ordinators, Christchurch and Auckland.

In July 1991, Karen Sapwell stepped down as National Youth Co-ordinator and was replaced by Megan Reilly. A full-time Youth Co-ordinator was employed for the Christchurch Diocese (Jacinta Trewern) and a part-time Youth Co-ordinator was employed by the Hutt Valley, Wellington and Kapi Mana District Councils (Ann D'Souza).

By August 1992, there were 36 youth conferences and 447 youth members around New Zealand. Youth membership accounted for 16% of the total Society membership. The benefits of having regional Youth Co-ordinators were reflected in the statistics, with 335 of these young people in areas supported by Youth Co-ordinators. Consequently, the National Youth Team's composition became the employed Youth Co-ordinators and National Youth Co-ordinator.

In 1992, upon the invitation of the Tongan National Youth Committee, Bebe Bourke and Megan Reilly visited Tonga to assist running the first camp for youth and meet with the Tongan Youth Committee. After visiting Tonga, they travelled with Nina Ahio, a member of the Tongan Youth Committee, to Samoa. In Samoa they spoke to four Catholic Colleges and formed youth conferences. Later that year Megan Reilly represented New Zealand with Margaret Warmington at the International Plenary Meeting in Paris and was able to meet up with the Tongan National Youth Representative and other Youth Representatives from around the world. As part of the Society in New Zealand's commitment to Samoa, Bebe returned again in 1993 to establish new conferences and re-establish old conferences, providing valuable support and advice to the young people.

Twinning was set up with the focus on prayerful support and written communication - sharing ideas, events and culture.

Samoa employed their own Youth Co-ordinator, Arkenese Teofilo and began operating independently. The New Zealand Overseas Committee, financed this position.

The Hamilton, Thermal lands and Western Bay of Plenty District Councils combined to employ a Youth Co-ordinator in April 1993 (Lacreice Petaera) and the Dunedin District Council employed Peter Sefo in a part-time capacity as Youth Co-ordinator. By the end of 1993, there were 5 District/Diocesan



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Youth Co-ordinators and 645 youth members in the Society, the highest youth membership in the Society's history.

However 1993, was a year of change with the full-time National Youth Co-ordinator position being temporarily discontinued. The national responsibilities were divided between the Auckland Youth Co-ordinator and the National Youth Representative (a voluntary position).

In July 1994, the role of National Youth Co-ordinator went to that of National Youth Development Officer. Essentially it was the same as the National Youth Co-ordinator position, but with a different focus. The change in title reflected the shift in emphasis to try and provide more national directives and initiatives, as well as supporting regional youth projects into new areas. Bebe Bourke was the first person to work in this new position.

Simultaneous to this was the introduction of Youth Representatives. Megan Pemberton (nee Reilly) acted as National Youth Representative responsible for reporting about youth to the National Council. The aim of this introduction to youth representatives was to have voluntary youth representatives in every district to support the youth co-ordinators and youth developments.

In 1996, the Timaru District Council decided to employ their own District Youth Co-ordinator (Delia Baird).

Statistics at the September 1996 Annual General Meeting showed that there were 59 youth conferences and approximately 850 youth members in the Society.

Youth contributed to approximately 23% of the Society's membership in New Zealand. There was also a team of seven District/Diocesan Youth Co-ordinators and a National Youth Development Officer to ensure the youth are well supported.

At the same time, the first University Conference in many years, was operating at Waikato.

### 2000's

The Vinnies Youth Programme has continued to go from strength to strength. In 2010 it was recorded that there are around 380 Vinnies groups (conferences) in New Zealand and a total of 3300 Vinnies. This number represents ...% of the Society's membership.

These conferences are set up in the regions of Auckland, Te Tai Tokerau, Hamilton, Bay of Plenty, Thermal Lands, Wanganui, Manawatu, Napier, Hastings, Nelson, South Mid Canterbury, Dunedin and Southland.

This is a great reflection of the support at both National and District level for youth, as well as the continual employment of Youth Co-ordinators. The Youth Co-ordinators continually recruit, support and train youth members, increasing both the quality and quantity of our members. Consequently more people in need in the community receive our assistance. It is marvellous to know that there are so many enthusiastic and energetic young people around New Zealand, putting their faith into unselfish action.

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The Society of St Vincent de Paul is an international Catholic lay organization inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Vincentians work to promote human dignity and Justice through personal contact with those in need.