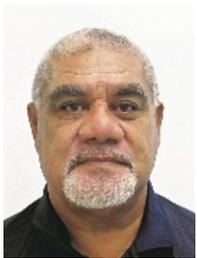


The National Council of Tonga



- Established 1973
- Instituted 25th May 1992
- Conferences aggregated 22/5/1989 – 22/5/1992



Welcome from the National President of Tonga Tevita Moengangongo Lolohea (Sakopo)

I am humbled at the opportunity to address you all knowing that I stand on the shoulders of Bishops and Priest, men, and women both past and present, who have built up the SSVP in Tonga since 1973. The SSVP was introduced to Tonga by the late Bishop Patelisio Finau and Priests.

Since 1973 the SSVP have grown to 17 conferences, 4 youth conferences and 1 National Council covering Tongatapu, Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u and the Niuas. A National Youth Committee has been established this year to help the growing interest in establishing Young Vincentians in parishes.

Our appreciation to SSVP New Zealand for all the assistance to Tonga over the years and in the last 5 years I have worked very closely with Arthur Schultze and Anne Marie McCarten on various projects during natural disasters, tropical cyclones, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and during the COVID19 pandemic. The recent established Oceania Territory under Brother Frank Brassil will provide additional avenues to strengthen the SSVP and to address the poor and marginalized people in the Oceania.

The SSVP Tonga is grateful to His Eminence and Parish Priests for the opportunity to cooperate, assist and work in solidarity towards our mission in Tonga. We are mindful always of the Gospel message by Jesus "that which you do to the least of my brothers you do it for me".

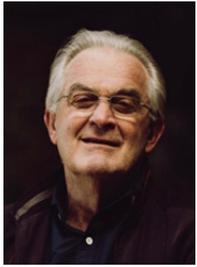
May I take a moment to acknowledge the presence of our important fraternal guests from New Zealand and Australia. I would like to acknowledge and thank most sincerely to Arthur Schultze, Anne-Marie McCarten, Frank Brassil and Mark Gaetani for joining our brothers and sisters in Tonga and to witness the work of SSVP reaching its milestone Golden Jubilee today. We pray for Terry Jordan and Arthur's wife who are both ill and we wish them a speedy recovery.

As you all may be aware the SSVP is over 150 years old in New Zealand and Australia and very well established, acting as a beacon carrying out the works of charity. Over the last five years I have been well schooled in SSVP in many areas such as governance, Twinning, reports (especially financial ones) as well as partaking as a member of the SSVP international family. I was honored to be asked to join the IEC International Executive Committee of SSVP a year ago.

Tonga is one of the countries that New Zealand is closely associated with in its Twinning programme and I am grateful for the support and positive response I have received since I became President. Australia on the other hand, in collaboration with New Zealand, supports new initiatives for the Oceania region and in the next few years we will see progress in several areas of important SSVP work.



Tonga 50th Celebration



President Sakopo, National Council members and Vincentians

On my first visit to Tonga, which was in 2016, it was apparent there was a very strong and unified presence of the Society demonstrated by the work that was being carried out. On subsequent

visits I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the strength of the society. You can all be proud of what you are achieving in the name of our founder Frederick Ozanam.

Prior to my appointment predecessors Keith Norton and Peter Courtney were involved along with the National Office in New Zealand and its team which included Anne-Marie McCarten who is representing New Zealand at this celebration today.

As members you have risen to challenges which have included tsunamis, cyclones, especially Gita and Covid. There are of course those everyday issues which include education, health and welfare. You can be proud of what you have achieved during those trying times.

The release of funding for the first stage of the establishment of a shop on Vuna Road will happen soon. It has taken time, but the result will be a centre that intimate will offer other services that will assist the needy in Tonga. We need to also recognise the agreement from Cardinal Mafi Diocese of Tonga, a license to occupy for 20 years a site in the Parish facing Vuna Road.

I have spoken with President Sakopo of other possible projects that will need further investigation.

I am sorry I cannot be present today to celebrate this wonderful occasion but hope to be able to visit later in the year. May you all be blessed for the work you do.

The Society in NZ congratulates all members of the Society in Tonga, past and present, on what they have achieved in the past 50 years. You have in so many ways demonstrated the Mission that Frederick Ozanam and his fellow founders wanted for the Society.

God bless.

Arthur Schultze

Twining Coordinator

Society of St Vincent de Paul in New Zealand

Malo e lelei



President Sakopo, National Council members and Vincentians

It is an honour and a privilege to be here to celebrate with you the 50-year anniversary of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Tonga. On behalf of the New Zealand Society, I offer you warmest

congratulations on achieving this impressive milestone.

Unfortunately, our National president Terry Jordan is unwell and can't be with us today however, I bring warm greetings from our Acting National President Gerard Stevens and our Twining Coordinator Arthur Schultze.

The Society in New Zealand has been delighted to be your Twining partner over many years. It has been wonderful to see the Society flourish here since it was established in 1973. The vision that inspired the Frederick Ozanam in Paris in 1833 has taken root in Tonga and is now firmly embedded in your community. For over half a century, countless Tongan members of the Society have lived as Jesus Christ, working quietly and humbly to care for others in need. So many of your people have been helped, cared for and listened to by Vincentians here.

When Pope Francis talks about the kind of church he would like to see, he describes it as a 'field hospital'. He wants a Church that is at the service of the needy and disadvantaged. He says:

"I prefer a church that is bruised, hurting and dirty," he said, "because it has been out on the streets,..... rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and clinging to its own security."

What Pope Francis is describing here is the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society all over the world. It is our work in New Zealand and your work in Tonga. I congratulate you all on 50 years of living out that vision, 50 years of generosity, service and compassion. The best traditions of the Society are vibrantly alive here.

Anne-Marie McCarten

National Executive Officer

Society of St Vincent de Paul in New Zealand



Visit to Tonga 29th September – 2nd October 2023

By Frank Brassil, *ITVP Oceania* and Mark Gaetani, *National President, Australia*

BACKGROUND

The Society of St Vincent de Paul has reached the milestone of 50 years of active presence in Tonga. The Kingdom of Tonga is an island country in Polynesia, part of the Oceania Zone of the Society. The country comprises 171 islands of which 45 are inhabited. Its total surface area is about 750 km², scattered over 700,000 km² in the southern Pacific Ocean. Tonga has a population of a little over 100,000, 70% of whom reside on the main island, Tongatapu. The country stretches approximately 800 km from north to south.

The Society in Tonga has been very active and is greatly respected by the Church and the people of Tonga. There are about 19 Conferences spread over the main islands of Tonga. The National President is Br Tevita Moengangongo Lolohea, who is universally known as Sakopo who has participated in the Oceania Meetings in 2019 and 2023. The principal twinning partner for Tonga is New Zealand and the relationship is strong and has been sustained over decades.

This milestone is an important celebration for the Vincentians of Tonga, and they invited the ITVP for Oceania and the National Presidents of Australia and New Zealand to join them in the celebration. The National President of New Zealand is seriously ill and was represented by its National Executive Officer, Anne-Marie McCarten. Frank Brassil attended as International Territorial Vice President representing the International President General and the International Council General, and Mark Gaetani attended as Australian National President, and their visit was funded by the National Council of Australia.

TONGA: 29 MARCH – 2 OCTOBER

We arrived in Nuku'alofa at 20:00 on 29 March and were kindly welcomed by two Tonga members of the Society. The festivities were on 30 September and commenced at St Mary's Cathedral at 10:00 am with mass celebrated by His Eminence Soane Patita Paini Cardinal Mafi, of the Diocese of Tonga and Niue. The mass was very well attended - there would have been over 200 people present. The mass was largely said in Tongan and singing



St Mary's Cathedral, Nuku'alofa

spoke for over 30 minutes in Tongan and English and praised the work of the Society and the importance of St Vincent de Paul and the saints as “heroes of the church”.

We retired to the hall near the cathedral for the celebration dinner which had most of the people from mass and a very large number of the Vincentians in Tonga. The gathering included Tongan cultural festivities including dancing and singing and a wonderful meal in Polynesian style. Speeches were given by Sakopo Anne-Marie McCarten, Frank Brassil and Cardinal Mafi and all were listened to attentively. The speeches focused on the importance of the event as marking a significant milestone for the Society in Tonga and in Oceania, but that this was only one step along the journey of the Society. Frank emphasised the importance of Conferences as the essential element of the Society and the strength of the trust that the Society places in Conferences to manage and respond to need in their own communities. He mentioned the connection between the work of the Society and living the gospel as part of a Christian life. He described the “bottom up” structure of the Society and the role of service of those in leadership.



Continued...

The gathering was a valuable opportunity to discuss the Society as part of the Tongan and wider Church community with Cardinal Mafi. He strongly supports the work of the Society and his energetic participation in the event showed the members present that they were valued by the Church.

On Sunday we attended Mass at the Basilica of St Anthony of Padua, which had a Mass in English. The church was full, and the singing was extraordinary. In the evening we met at the home of the National President and his wife Joanne for a wonderful meal with members of the National Council. Tongan hospitality is most welcoming and generous. On the way we visited the site at the Cathedral where the Diocesan Administration has agreed to lease an area of ground for establishing a St

Vincent de Paul Shop. This will be built on a framework of retired shipping containers and will sell both second hand clothing supplied from New Zealand and religious objects. New Zealand is supporting Tonga in this development.

We took the opportunity to discuss with Sakopo a range of questions including restoring the Regional Council structure of the Society in Tonga and opportunities to expand support through formation and training using the Oceania structure.

Sakopo presented two copies of The Rule translated into Tongan. Frank will send one of these to Paris to be included in the official archives of the Society.

We departed Tonga on 2 October.



Young Vinnies report for the 50th Anniversary of SSVP Tonga

By Suliano Kaitapu

Kole keu hufanga he ngaahi tala fakatapu kuo 'osi hono aofaki he kamata'anga 'o e katoanga ni, kae 'ataa moau keu fakahoko atu ha ki'i lipooti nounou mei he tafa'aki 'o e Young Vinnies pe koe Visesio Paulo 'etau fanau moe to'utupu. 'Omi mu'a ha ngofua ke fakahoko 'eku lipooti 'i he lea fakapapalangi koe'uhi pe ko'etau kau a'ahi mei muli.

My name is Suliano Kaitapu, I am the Vice President for the National Council of our Young Vinnies here in Tonga. Today as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary the established of Society Saint Vincent de Paul here in Tonga from 1973-2023. It is indeed my honor to speak and give a short report for the Young Vinnie Council.

For the past 2 to 3 years although we had not quite established the National Young Vinnie Council yet, we had two active conferences which are the Young Vinnies of Lapaha and the Young Vinnies of 'Apifo'ou College. Each conference carried out various activities of charity, such as visiting the elderly, cleaning up their homes, distributing food parcels as well as many spiritual programs.

At the beginning of this year, there was an invitation from our National President of Vincent de Paul Mr Sakopo Lolohea and executive committee to bring two youth representatives from each parish here in Tonga to participate in a learning session about the life of Frederic Ozanam who received the first inspiration and the history for the work of Vincent de Paul. This is the day that we established our very first executive committee and held a meeting to plan the Young Vinnies National Committee work. We elected our president, Ms Anamalia Falemaka. (She sent her apologies for not being here with us today, she is travelling for other work, but she gives her best wishes for this celebration of our important milestone.) And I'm the Vice President, the secretary is Ms Malia Kaihea, she is the head prefect of 'Apifo'ou College.

From our first meeting earlier this year, our essential agenda that we had discussed the work into establishing Young Vinnies conference in the parish for which is now underway. We also have representative from each conference/parish to our executive committee, and we encouraged them to go back to their conferences, invite the youth and called those interested to come as

a volunteer to do the work to serve our elderly and poor. We started our visiting in July this year to the Young Vinnies of the Lapaha parish. And for the last Sunday of this month September 2023, we had a invitation from the Young Vinnies of Hihifo, and that marked the start of the Vincent de Paul week for us from Sunday 24th of September, visiting and encouraging them to continue the good work. Then we celebrated the feast day of Saint Vincent de Paul on 27th of September in every parish, and today we are lucky to be a part of the 50th Anniversary. We are happy and blessed that our third conference of Young Vinnies has been established in Tongatapu for now.

We anticipate that by the end of the year we will have reached most, not only for Tongatapu parish but looking forward to reaching out to the outer islands. We are truly grateful for all the support for the Young Vinnies and hopefully in due course, we would able to have an exchange program between our National Committee and conferences with the Young Vinnie's of New Zealand or Australia, to share and work together as a Young Vinnie to loved and set an example for all who followed.

To conclude our report, we have 50+ members who are currently active and we hope we have more younger kids and teenagers inspired to follow Christ through service to those in need, elderly and poor. We are Vincentians.

'Ofa atu.



Suliano Kaitapu



Gallery



Gallery

