

**Young Victorian Anti-Poverty Awards at St David's – Welcome: Adrian Pyle -
17 October 2004**

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Good afternoon to you all and welcome to St David's. My name is Adrian Pyle, The Community Interaction Coordinator at St David's and I want to open this afternoon's event with a reasonably fundamental question, "Why has St David's organised and run an Anti-Poverty Awards event?" The answer requires some background. You are of course in a very traditional church building. It is a beautiful space with wood and stone and dappled light through stained glass. It offers tremendous, at times spine tingling acoustics. If you get married here and the light shines through that window just as you say your vows, your wedding photographer might say "I'm not a spiritual person but that was spooky!" These are special bricks and mortar with a strong resonance for those who've made St David's their spiritual home. But that is not church.

Hardly a week goes by where I don't read something about the church as perceived by those outside of the church. And it's all about rigour and structure and rules and religion and property committees and whether I bow at this door or that door. And that's not to knock tradition, it's just to say that people see only the procedure and tradition and don't see the path to the spiritual. I've heard it said that people are inspired by Jesus but have little time for the Christian church. Jesus inspired by connecting with community, being involved with people in their moment of need, helping (not nagging – helping) people disconnect from destructive behaviour and revel in the possibilities around them. Even in 2004 he gets really good press. In 2004 the church gets press for making women deacons but not bishops, for infighting about sexuality and for having to express sorrow about past injustice.

So what can a little church in Canterbury do about it? Well, where we feel a concern in our community, we can think about our own capacity to connect, to be involved, to help. We can see millions of dollars being spent on personal development in the corporate sector (which is not necessarily a bad thing) and we can ask, how much are we spending on building community capacity and personal capability in the community sector? How much are we spending to equip people – the people fighting poverty on the street - with improved skills? These are the questions we've asked which have led us to the concept of the Anti-Poverty Prize. We are attempting to support, uphold and celebrate the means towards eradication of poverty – young anti-poverty workers – by reaching out to them and having them come into our midst to educate us.

The prize project involved us looking at the work of fourteen young people doing extraordinary, diverse and interesting things to tackle poverty. We considered factors including but not limited to direct impact on poverty, creation of self sufficiency amongst those in poverty, advocacy and personal reflection on impacts of poverty. By considering such factors we got a sense of the spark that got these young people motivated to tackle poverty, the strength of reaction to that spark and the strength of future intentions. The

project was not a competition and we saw all work of all applicants as valuable and as potential prize recipients if, for example, the awards were held in 2005.

The overall St David's Anti-Poverty Prize consists of a \$3500 self development package which will be tailored by the recipient and St David's to expand their knowledge and experience in anti-poverty work. The recipient will also receive the Mason Statuette. Donated by St David's members Bruce and Helen Mason she is a statuette from the Soul Journeys Maasai Tribe Collection. Standing on a red gum base expertly turned by our own Mr George Ray, the whole statuette represents the work of local youth in support of all the tribes of the World. Those represented here this afternoon who do not receive the major prize will receive encouragement award in the form of ANZ savings accounts.

In terms of special mentions of thanks we are grateful to various media outlets and agencies that helped us spread the message of the awards. Several *Leader* newspapers featured the event including our local *Progress Leader* and the Uniting Church *Crosslight* newspaper promoted the project extensively. Local community radio stations, like Inner FM, Eastern FM and Light FM also carried information about the event and allowed interviews about the event as did several others around the state. Agencies such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Connections sent news of the event through their networks. The City of Boroondara spread the message to municipalities around the state and our own Uniting Church Justice and International Mission Unit also provided extensive promotion.

Review panel members Megan Dunn, Bill Ford, Ian Walker, Margaret Ray, John Roskam and Yassin Mahmoud gave generously of their time or their comments or both to facilitate the selection of award recipients.

Helen and Bruce Mason contributed the statuette and George Ray turned and fastened the red gum base. Margaret and George Ray also handled large amounts of administrative work to facilitate the event.

Of course the major note of thanks must be extended to the ANZ's Camberwell Local Market Unit and its CEO Ian Walker. When we've said that we are carrying out this project and that the ANZ has been a partner in it, some people have looked at me and said "You used to work for the ANZ didn't you." That may be true, but to suggest it had anything to do with this project is to unduly discount Ian's can-do spirit. The fact is that Ian didn't know us and we didn't know Ian. We put a written plan together for the event, we found out the name of the local CEO and I rang him to sound him out on the idea. I didn't tell him I had had any connection with the ANZ. "Sounds like a great idea" said Ian. "Let's start planning." So in talking through and developing the concept, in publicising it, in reviewing applications and in making the awards, Ian and the organisation that is behind him have been wonderful partners to have.

Finally before we meet our award finalists I must make mention of our oration today. We are very thankful to Dr Stephen Ziguras for joining us and I will say more about Stephen when we introduce the oration. The oration is of course named after Mr Will Thomas, a late member of the church. You'll find a short

version of Will's wonderful life story on the back of the program today and I'll let you read that in your own time. However from a personal perspective I want to express my appreciation to the Church Council for agreeing that this Oration be named in Will's honour. In the time our membership of St David's coincided I didn't know Will extremely well. But I didn't have to know him well to see him striving to help those less fortunate than himself. It's an enduring St David's image for me – of Will Thomas drumming up support for the food collection for Broadmeadows and carting heavy food boxes to ensure the goods got where they needed to go. Will Thomas struck me as being less about the institution of the church and more about rolling your sleeves up to connect and to help out. That was his effort to somehow mirror the inspiration of Christ.

We are now going to hear a short musical reflection from St David's Organist and Musical Director Geoff Newton. During this time I invite you to think of those who, through poverty, are not participating in the fullness of life and to be thankful for contributions from people like Will and our finalists today in fighting poverty.

Musical Item

And now it is time to meet our finalists. The first is Ms Genevieve Sheehan. Genevieve coordinates microfinance options and programs for the Brotherhood of St Laurence here in Melbourne. After study in commercial and economic disciplines and time spent with a major bank, she drew on previous community volunteering experience and cultural interests to make a move into the community sector. Her work involves providing opportunities for low income individuals to access finance options for domestic purposes (and to help them with the process of paying off the loans) and helping people finance the start-up of businesses, to create a sustainable income stream. Much of her work has been pioneering in this country. Let's make Genevieve welcome.

- Now Genevieve you've come into the micro-finance area along a path of study, travel, community volunteer work and corporate work which makes for an interesting story. Tell us a bit about that path.

- Give us a hypothetical but realistic snapshot of somebody who would seek one of the personal finance programs, how they would come to you and what would be done to either make a loan (or not make a loan)?

- How prevalent is this financing option both here and overseas? What work is being done to advance knowledge in this area and where is that being done?

Thank you Genevieve.

Next we welcome Mr Christopher Turton. Chris is a Bachelor of Social Science Student at RMIT University. He has travelled extensively (and he'll tell us a little bit more about that in a moment) but it has instilled in him a deep desire to work with people to develop their own communities and fight poverty in their local context. All such work has been done in an International context.

His main area of work is with a small non-government organisation in India. He works on multiple small projects towards developing the rights and freedoms and empowering some of the most oppressed people in Indian society. These people often live in unsanitary conditions with no access to safe drinking water. Many are forced to search through garbage to make a living. Women are regularly beaten by their husbands, and have no community recognition of their suffering, and children are frequently forced to labour in places with fatal working conditions. Would you please welcome Christopher to the microphone.

- Chris, the word peripatetic in a positive way means "itinerant" or "a tendency to be often travelling" and until I met you couldn't think of anyone who should really be described with such a grand term. However you have travelled extensively and it has impacted your thoughts on poverty. Just give us a very brief overview of where you have been and how those places have shaped your thoughts about eradicating poverty.

- Some of your most recent work in fighting poverty has been with the Centre for Communication and Development in Kolkata in India. Tell us a little bit more about the CCD, how they were formed and the sort of work they are doing.

- Now your undergraduate studies are in the area of International Community Development. During the discussions you had with us over the last few weeks, you told the review panel a story which has both a comical and a deadly serious aspect to it, and that is your own experience of seeing slum housing in a developing country - where a large proportion of the slum housing had satellite dishes for pay TV on their makeshift roofs. That opens up questions about how economic development should be appropriately enmeshed in community development, without imposing value judgments from a western perspective, providing choice but not stifling culture. How do you want to couch your work to ensure communities develop sensitively?

Chris Turton - Thank You.

It's time now to meet Ms Sophie Kovic.

Sophie is a junior solicitor at the major law firm Mallesons Stephen Jaques. Active in community life from an early age, Sophie's recent contributions in a local context have been through Mallesons' community social responsibility programs, including agency programs such as Good Start Breakfast Club and Learning for Life. It is customary for junior solicitors to be involved in Pro-Bono work. Sophie has relished the opportunities this has given her in dealing with legal issues for the homeless and refugees. She has worked to expand Mallesons' offerings in the latter area by encouraging pro-bono associates into migration agent training. Sophie's particular passion with respect to the eradication of poverty is in the area of international humanitarian services and human rights. She sought and was offered an internship with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. This took her to Quito in Ecuador where she worked with local officers of the UNHCR to provide immediate life

necessities and longer term resettlement options for displaced persons from Colombia. Sophie debt financed a significant portion of this experience herself and in 2005 will undertake another program with the UNHCR, this time in Baku, Azerbaijan. Let's welcome Sophie:

- You've worked through secondary school and university making a significant community contribution along the way and as you earn your legal qualifications you might consider rewarding yourself as many students do. Now to reward yourself you seek and are granted an Internship with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees - and to add to the reward you debt finance part of the cost of the internship yourself. Where does an experience like that take you in terms of developing your own career and fighting poverty?

- Of course that internship, took you to Quito in Ecuador. How was poverty made manifest for you in that situation amongst the refugees and how did you find yourself practically contributing in that situation?

- Experiences like Quito, and of course another one coming up soon for you in Azerbaijan, must impact on your legal work in Australia, both pro-bono and generally. How has that been the case?
Thank you Sophie.

We now come to the Will Thomas Oration and the inaugural delivery of that by Dr Stephen Ziguras. Stephen has been at the Brotherhood of St Laurence since 2000 working in the research and policy unit, currently as Social Policy Coordinator. He is also a Research Fellow at the Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne. His current work is in the areas of social security policy, employment and labour market programs, welfare reform and assets policy. He is currently working on a collaborative Australian Research Council project on transitional labour market policy with the Centre for Public Policy, Committee of Economic Development of Australia, National Institute for Economic and Industry Research and Deakin University.

Stephen has degrees in physics and social work, a MA in social policy and PhD in mental health service evaluation. He has worked in the government and community sectors for the last 15 years; including the Department of Social Security, and NGOs in community health, disability advocacy and transcultural psychiatry. His work has included casework, service development, policy analysis, advocacy and research roles. Ladies and Gentlemen, would you please welcome Dr Stephen Ziguras.

Thank you Stephen.

We return to meeting our finalists and next meet Mr Tam Nguyen. Tam is a Biomedical Engineer with Royal Children's Hospital and a research student in the department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering at The University of Melbourne. He was a founding member of the organisation Hands for Hope which works particularly to encourage educational development of children in rural Vietnam. His extensive interest in issues of poverty in South

East Asia also sees him involved in fundraising and Australian advocacy for the Cambodia Rehabilitation Organisation. And if thinking about all of that wearies you Tam is also a project committee member of Engineers Without Borders Australia, coordinating the planning and implementation of sustainable engineering projects for disadvantaged communities. Let's welcome Tam Nguyen.

- You've grown up largely in South Australia, you've taken degrees in Science and Biomedical Engineering and now a research masters at Melbourne University looking at walking patterns of children with cerebral palsy - an interesting area of specialisation and one which I imagine could be all consuming - so tell us a little about the passion for tackling poverty in South East Asia - a very different focus area - when did you notice the interest in that area and how did it develop?

- One of the programs you are involved in is a cattle raising program to give families a sustainable income. This method towards sustainability is starting to gain some focus. Tell us a little bit about how it works.

- People almost universally know of [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) and that it has a focus beyond medicine into advocacy, but Engineers Without Borders is something of a new beast for many of us. Tell us a little bit about where it operates and its charter.

Thank you Tam.

Next we meet Ms Katherine Marshall. Katherine is a social worker with the Hotham Mission Asylum Seekers Project in Melbourne. The Asylum Seeker Project at Hotham Mission has been the leading provider in Victoria of housing and emergency relief for groups of asylum seekers, in poverty because of their situation. Katherine role has been as the first full-time social worker to provide assistance for these groups. She has worked consistently in the past two years developing a range of solid and sustainable responses to the needs of this vulnerable group. Katherine, has created a structure of support to address the devastating impact of poverty upon them. Please extend a warm welcome to Katherine Marshall.

- Your application told us that you have one of the largest caseloads of any social worker in Victoria. Tell us a little about the volume of issues and the breadth of issues that you might deal with in a day of case work.

- Of course you haven't just been attending to case work, because there weren't a lot of structures for the work you do. So you've developed some of that structure. What did that involve?

- One of your specific interest areas is in the area of relief for Sri Lankan Asylum seekers. What are some of the specific issues we are seeing in that area?

Thank you Katherine.

The final finalist we meet is Ms Ildi Amon. Ildi is a year twelve student at Methodist Ladies College and we know those final exams aren't too far away. Ildi has shown herself to be an exceptionally community oriented student and has been innovative in identifying initiatives which draw fellow students into social service activities. Many of these initiatives have had a direct or inter-related impact on poverty including projects to assist with education in East Timor. But Ildi's keynote contribution has undoubtedly been through her significant involvement with Opportunity International so let's invite her up to tell us a little bit more about that. Welcome Ildi.

- People are starting to become more aware of Opportunity International but for the benefit of our audience tell us a little bit more about the organisation and its philosophy.

- Of course in providing finance for entrepreneurial initiatives, the capital has to be sourced from somewhere initially. The story of where the money came from to fund the Philippines initiative (that your involved with) is an interesting one. Tell us a little more about that.

- You've been named a Youth Ambassador for Opportunity International and that's a role that will develop with thought and time, but tell us how you think that might evolve.

Thank you Ildi.

Well what remains to be done is to announce the recipient of the overall award and to do that I'd like to ask the CEO of the ANZ Bank Camberwell Local Market Unit to come forward. Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Mr Ian Walker.