

Over Christmas I will be volunteering at Mt Eden Prison with the Vinnies team to assist in the running of Sunday liturgies. Over the last year through this mahi and face-to-face encounters I feel I have changed for the better. It used to be about “what” I was visiting, now it has become more about “who” I am visiting. They are people first and foremost, and the more I chose to connect with this realisation the more I grew. How we related to one another gave me insight into who I was as a person. I had a lot to learn and I am grateful for how this place has gifted me. With questions about where I have come from and who I am called to be, our paths became intertwined through the sharing of narrative.

I've found there's much to be gained from a simple conversation – it makes the difference between a bad day and one filled with meaning. Connection thus elevates yet grounds me, raising my awareness of self while keeping me rooted in the realities faced by those who are incarcerated.

Gene, Youthworker and AU Graduate

I go to Marist College in Auckland and at the moment all of us juniors are helping assemble 500 care packs of toiletries together during our Religious Education classes. These contain deodorant, soap, conditioner, toilet paper and so forth. The bulk supplies were dropped off at school by the St Vinnies team. All of the ready-assembled care packs will go into Christmas food boxes that will be given out to families who can't make ends meet.

I am doing this because I feel it is really important. It is unfair that other people struggle while I have extra to give. Doing this really made me think and makes me appreciate what I have and who I have. It also makes me aware that I can make a difference.

Kate, Year 9

During the Christmas Season I will be working right through so that my family doesn't go without and so I can share what I have with those I love. Christmas can be quite expensive, lol! And as well, I will be volunteering right through too. I will be helping out with the Young Adult Vinnies at the Auckland City Mission Drop In and in prison. At the Drop In I will be making hot drinks and food for all the whānau who come in. It is a real eye-opener and makes me really appreciate what I have. I would struggle if I lived on the streets or if I was disconnected from my loved ones. The thought of not having a family to spend Christmas with really saddens me.

The conversations I have had with my fellow volunteers and with those who are “homeless” have really impacted me. I won't be the same again. I feel they belong to me and I to them and that I have a responsibility to them as they have to me. We are all whānau, whether we are rough sleepers in the CBD or sleeping in a cell in one of our prisons – we are all whānau. Christmas is about family, it's about looking after one another, it's about love.

Yvonne, Youthworker and Early Childhood Teacher

Over Christmas I am coordinating music at Wesley Rest Home for the elderly. I will also be assisting in the coordination of St Vinnies Family Fun Day hosted at a local prison for the mothers and children during visits. Doing this mahi brings me so much joy and a sense of fulfillment. I feel quite at home working among these whānau and feel a deep sense of call to do so. I am learning more and more that my yearning and movement towards serving the most vulnerable in our communities actually is about me and my own healing and personal wellbeing.

It is in the mere sharing of time, presence and of deep listening with others, that I am reminded that I am connected to the human race and that we all belong to one another. Therefore I, and we, have a responsibility to one another, to lessen the other's suffering. It is in helping to lessen the other's suffering that we lessen our own.

Ria, Uni student and Youthworker

During the Christmas Season I will be enjoying the summer sun surrounded by my friends, family, good food, smooth jams, stunning views and memories that I will cherish forever. After another busy year of completing internals, planning charity events, sporting seasons and sitting a number of external examinations, I look forward to simply relaxing and enjoying the company of my family during the Christmas season.

But before doing this I will be volunteering with my school Vinnies to co-host a “family funday” for those in our local caravan park. The housing crisis in Auckland is serious. We have over 300 people living in this particular caravan park. It is really hard to come to terms with how unfair and unjust some people's realities are. It saddens me deeply.

My friends and I will be helping prepare the gifts, supervise the activities and serve the food. Doing this gives me a sense of purpose and allows me to really connect with people especially the children – I love the children! This also allows me a way to put my faith into action.

Christmas is all about togetherness and unity. It's about being there for each other and being grateful for the year we have been blessed with, the people we have met along the way and our Heavenly Father who never left our side.

Jasmine, Year 13

Hi I'm Craig and I'm helping with packing the the food parcels. These food parcels feed people who cannot afford to put food on the table. I understand the need comes from many factors and many different issues which affect their finances and lives, such as unexpected bills, a family crisis, etc. It is sad because Christmas is supposed to be a festive time of joy and celebration.

Personally, I feel that making up these food parcels gives me a way to give back. I know the parcels are a real blessing for others but I benefit also. This involvement allows me to connect with my faith on a deeper level. It gives me a tangible means to actually put my faith into action. My faith calls me to be an imitator of Christ. I feel that by doing these little things I can share the love of Christ.

Craig, University Student

My name is Ty and during the Christmas Season I am volunteering at the Society of St Vincent de Paul Centre to make up Christmas foodboxes. I have been doing this every year for the last four years. It has become a part of me and I really feel drawn to doing it each year. This is partly because I have seen first-hand the difference that it makes for people. I have also had the honour of meeting some of the families and learning a little about their stories. It is sad to hear what some people have to put up with and how many don't have many choices. That meeting really impacted and changed me.

Coming to the Centre makes me feel as if I can make a difference. It also makes me feel connected. Working alongside like-minded people is really awesome. It is such a cool buzz and creates a real sense of belonging.

Ty, Year 13

Why I'm Involved with Vinnies this Christmas