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MR. G. POLKINGHORNE

Today I have the privilege to speak about Gary Polkinghorne, who just received an OAM in Port Pirie. Gary is a very unassuming person who has dedicated a very large part of his life to helping less fortunate people not only Port Pirie but also the surrounding regions. Gary has volunteered with the St Vincent De Paul Society in Port Pirie region for many, many years. Gary has been the backbone of the society, serving in various positions, but in particular has held the position of treasurer for the past 17 years.

Gary's health has deteriorated over the past couple of years; however, this has never stopped him from being able to not only carry out its duties but also to assist those people who may require the services of St Vincent De Paul. These services may include obtaining groceries for people who are in such a predicament that they have no food in the house, and also helping people who may not have any accommodation not only for themselves but also for their children. Gary has been in an on-call position for emergency demands that are ever increasingly becoming the norm for the society. These demands come from people requiring medical services, assistance with clothing, plus meals and other activities.

Gary is the person that the priests within the organisation and people in the community go to for assistance, and Gary never fails to accommodate their requests. Gary is always seen in the community doing various activities, whether that is purchasing food stuffs or promoting the services of the society. Gary's journey with St Vincent de Paul Society began in the 1990s when, completely out of the blue, Gary suffered a heart attack and had to leave his full-time employment at the railways, for which he had been working for the last 37 years. He started volunteering at Meals on Wheels for one day per week delivering meals.

He was then approached to see if he would be interested in volunteering with St Vincent de Paul for a couple of days, and the rest is history. He has been actively involved for 17 years, carrying out numerous tasks, including cutting up clothing, general pick-ups, deliveries, and then finally, as I mentioned before, 16 years as treasurer. He joined the society because he likes to help people out, and as Gary has mentioned to everybody, he is one of those people who will help anyone who asks for his help.

Gary relates one of these instances being where a young man came in looking for a phone card to be able to call his mum in Western Australia. This gentleman was completely broke, but this man came

back after a couple of days after getting the phone card from Gary, and told Gary that, from his contact with his mother, he was delighted to be able to be reconciled and was going back home to live with his parents. As is Gary's philosophy, family is the foundation of our society.

Another occasion is when a person from Tasmania came into the society looking for assistance to get to Adelaide from Port Pirie and stated that his uncle was the Bishop of Hobart and would have no problems getting any money back. Gary was very sceptical about the truth of this statement. However, after a couple of days, a phone call was received from the Bishop of Hobart thanking Gary for his kindness and that a cheque was in the mail to reimburse the society and also a donation towards the society.

Gary has been well supported during his journey by his very dedicated and loving wife, Margaret, who Gary regards as the backbone of the whole show. He has also mentioned that, without the support of his wife and family, he would never have been able to do what he has done in the last 17 years. Gary and Margaret will celebrate their 47th wedding anniversary later this year, and I sincerely wish them well.

Again, congratulations to a very unassuming man who rightly deserves this great medal. These awards should go to people who are unassuming and are normal laypeople, not to the high-flying people who do not really understand some of the societies.