

THE



BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL

AUTUMN
2012

**EVERYONE NEEDS
A HELPING HAND**

**SVP FLAGSHIP STORE
IN DUNDALK**

**WHAT POWER HAS
THE MINISTER FOR
EDUCATION?**



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THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

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Editorial

Austerity, Solidarity and Truth

the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is dealing with many social problems this Autumn and knows there are even worse to be faced ahead as the fall of the year heads towards Winter and the problems of increasing fuel poverty for many families and individuals, more taxes to be faced, less income, more pressure and stress, many more people seeking assistance from the SVP and all because of the greed of those who have destroyed the Irish economy and the lives of many, many families. High unemployment and stagnant domestic growth are the greatest challenges which the Government has described as facing them, but there is also the question of what politicians say and what they mean. In 1994 Enda Kenny, now Taoiseach said that it was "morally unjust and unfair to tax a person's home and by so doing grind him into the ground." Now such a tax has been imposed in one guise and is forecast in another, more severe form, on the family home to satisfy those described as the Troika, who control the nation from afar.

There are also examples of State bodies and regulation which ignore the personal affects of proposals and favour commercial criteria. One such is the demand by Bord Gais for a further 7.2 per cent increase in its charges this October on top of 21.7 per cent which it imposed last year. While commercial survival is important, so is the survival of families and individuals. The SVP social justice team has pointed out that Bord Gais is using a drop in demand as part of the justification for its increase. This is unacceptable. Part of the reason for that drop is the economic crisis, where people cannot afford energy and where fuel poverty is now a serious problem. But it is also Government policy to reduce energy consumption, so how can a State company be allowed challenge and contradict Government policy while also endangering families who may suffer from the deprivation of cold during the winter because they cannot afford the cost of gas?

Added to this the SVP has revealed that Bord Gais achieved extra unplanned additional revenue earlier this year but that the Energy Regulator chose not to pass this onto consumers in reductions, due to the administrative costs of implementing such a change. This is also not acceptable.

In this edition of our quarterly magazine of social concern, expressing the voice of social justice in Ireland, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul reports on the wide work of the SVP in combatting the social evil of deprivation and records the increasing gap between the State and the individual who cannot make ends meet, many of whom the SVP is meeting every day of every week.

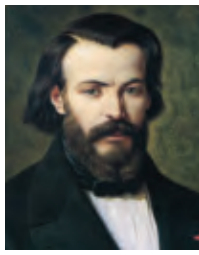
How did Ireland fall so low that the well-being of financial investors in failed banks has been placed at a higher priority than the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, children at school, the elderly?

The poorest in Ireland are dependent for disposable income on social welfare transfers, while well-placed commentators direct their attacks on those supports. Government says it cannot challenge the contracts of some of the highest-paid people, but finds no problem in cutting the wages of the lowest.

In these times of intense economic pressure, social solidarity should be a vital aspect of Irish life. Social solidarity will be focussed upon in our national appeal advertising this year. The story of this is told in our article - "Now more than ever, everyone needs a helping hand." This and other articles, including those from other voluntary organisations whose contributions are welcome in our pages, including the stories of Clonakilty Favours Scheme and in SVP Nationwide, report just some of the activities of the Society. The overall purpose is to underline that the SVP is clear that the poorest people must not be made to suffer more. Those who can pay more should, that is social solidarity.

THE SVP BULLETIN IS NOW ON SALE NATIONWIDE TO THE PUBLIC IN EASON'S SHOPS AND OTHER RETAIL OUTLETS





THE IRISH SVP

OZANAM BULLETIN

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This magazine is named in honour of the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, **Frederic Ozanam**



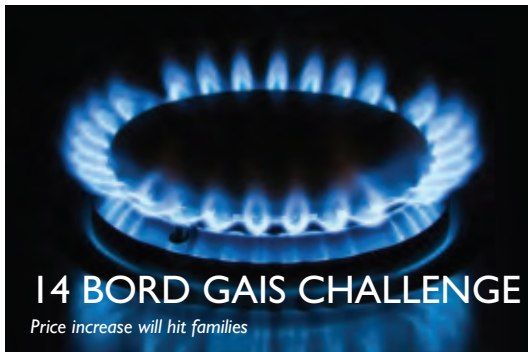
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Everyone needs a helping hand



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Biggest in Ireland



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Price increase will hit families



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Vincentian study

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EDITOR:
TOM MacSWEENEY

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NEW SVP TV ADVERTISEMENT

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CIRCULATION: 12,000

ADVERTISING RATES ON
REQUEST TO THE EDITOR

RELEVANT ARTICLES ARE
WELCOME. SEND TO THE EDITOR.



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Geoff Meagher
National President

As the Society of St.Vincent de Paul starts into another busy period with back-to-school, increasing household charges including energy and ever-increasing complex cases it is appropriate to reflect on the challenges that face us as members of the SVP.

Every week our ten thousand-plus Members do trojan work in helping the needy and making the best judgement calls they can.

We hear continuously that our Members in many parts of the country are finding it difficult to meet the demands being placed on them, both in terms of the number of cases and their complexity. This is understandable given the economic challenges of the past few years. However, Home Visitation is the core of our work and if we allow our standards to fall in this area, for any reason, we are not putting into practice the example of our founder Frederic Ozanam. Not alone do we need to ensure we do our visitation, we also need to give it time and do it in a context of Christian charity, otherwise we could be any charity.

In the context of a Conference facing challenges could I suggest a number of ways the burden could be eased,

- Try to have two members per every three active cases
- Have a good mix of members between male and female
- Aim to have one-third of membership under forty
- Have one or two Members from families where children are in the educational system
- Identify specific skills needed e.g. Education, Social Welfare, IT., etc
- Make certain the change of Officers in the SVP happens every five years

The above list is not exhaustive or prescriptive! However if we want to have vibrant Conferences who are making a difference in the quality of their Visitation then the mix of skills, experience and backgrounds is essential. In the Spring Edition of the SVP Bulletin the outgoing National President, Mairead Bushnell, expressed her concerns about HOMEVisitation, in my first Opinion comment I want to continue the same theme. Without quality home visitation we fail

in our key objective.

To be fair to our dedicated Members they need leadership from their Conference, Area and Regional Presidents to push for change on the lines set out above, to ease their burden and enable them to do the type of visitation they want to do. Change is never easy and at times it is easier to accept things the way they are. I think we owe it to the people we are privileged to serve that we deliver the best service we can. We cannot solve the many financial problems that come our way but we can, with effort, improve the quality of the service we give, the time we give to people, the hope that we bring, these are all within our control.

Could I suggest that Conferences take a look at their activities and membership in this context? We must support our Members in every way possible and not get to a point where they leave or become simply too weary to provide the type of service to which we all aspire. In particular our Conference, Area and Regional Presidents need to lead the change. With a concerted effort we could make major improvements in the quality of our service and visitation within the next twelve months.

President General Calls for support for canonisation of SVP founder

The President General of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Dr. Michael Thio, has urged all SVP Conferences and Councils to take every opportunity to make the founder of the SVP, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, better known.

Following the international meeting of Presidents from around the world in Bangkok in June at which the work being undertaken for the Cause of the Canonisation of Blessed Frederic was reviewed, it has been suggested that special events should be undertaken to foster deeper knowledge and understanding of the Society's principal founder.

A new Canonisation Prayer for Blessed Ozanam, composed by the Commission for the Cause of Canonisation, was approved. This Commission is presided over by Amin A. de Tarrazi, the former

12th President General. Special appreciation was expressed to him at the meeting for the work undertaken and to Msgr. Renauld de Dinechin, Auxiliary Bishop of Paris; Dr. Austin Fagan and David Williams.

To enhance the cause, the Canonisation Commission has suggested that all Conferences and Councils should:

- Make Blessed Frederic Ozanam better known, through the Church as well as through the media -press, radio, television, internet etc.
- Encourage the publication of works dedicated to Blessed Frederic in all fields and for all categories of readers.
- Organise religious celebrations, retreats, conferences, symposia, discussion groups.

- Produce special events, plays, films, fostering a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Society's principal founder's figure and image.
- Pray for a miracle through Blessed Frederic Ozanam's intercession.

"To reach our goal, prayer is essential but we must add value to it bound by our efforts to take any initiative, seize any opportunity, helping to enhance Blessed Frederic's radiance and to draw in his life, his virtues, his achievements and his courage of carrying on serenely his earthly pilgrimage," said Dr. Thio.



PRAYER FOR THE CANONISATION OF BLESSED FREDERIC OZANAM

In the hope of obtaining a miracle through his intercession

Lord,

You made Blessed Frederic Ozanam a witness of the Gospel, full of wonder at the mystery of the Church.

You inspired him to alleviate poverty and injustice and endowed him with untiring generosity in the service of all who were suffering.

In family life, he revealed a most genuine love as a son, brother, husband and father.

In secular life, his ardent passion for the truth enlightened his thought, writing and teaching.

His vision for our society was a network of charity encircling the world and he instilled St. Vincent de Paul's spirit of love, boldness and humility.

His prophetic social vision appears in every aspect of his short life, together with the radiance of his virtues.

We thank you Lord, for those many gifts and we ask, if it is your will, the grace of a miracle through the intercession of Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

May the Church proclaim his holiness, as a saint, a providential light for today's world!

We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.



On the set of the new National television advert



**‘NOW MORE THAN
EVER, EVERYONE NEEDS
A HELPING HAND.’**

**HELPING EACH OTHER
WHEN IN TROUBLE**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul completed the third year of our 'Give Hope' TV campaign last Christmas with the most successful Annual Appeal of recent years. While we were

delighted at the success of this campaign the National Management Council felt that it was time for the SVP to look at developing a new TV campaign showing the broader work of the Society and giving viewers a new perspective on the SVP and the help it gives.

Following a tendering process three companies were asked to pitch for the opportunity to make the new SVP TV ad. Each company had its own vision of how it would interpret the ad brief and how they would show viewers the value SVP brings not only to the people we help but also to the wider community and its members.

The winning tender was from internationally renowned McCann Erickson. They offered to make their ad 'The Hill' under the direction of award winning director Lenny Abrahamson.

Lenny is famous in Ireland and throughout Europe for his films Adam & Paul (Best Director Irish Film & Television Awards 2004) and Garage starring Pat Shortt which won the CICAIE Art and Essai Cinema Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008.

The concept of the advertisement was to depict not only the struggles of life in Ireland for young and old but also the value of community and how through working together we can all contribute something worthwhile.

We began to film the advertisement at 6am on a chilly morning in

to the elderly and we are deeply grateful for the time and effort everyone put in. It was a long day and recording didn't finish till 7pm that night but everyone took part with the same generous, patient Vincentian spirit which drives this organisation and its volunteers.

CLIMBING THE HILL OF CHALLENGE AND DIFFICULTY

The advertisement begins with an elderly lady standing at the foot of a mountain. She looks up and sees the challenge before her. It is a step too far, an unassailable object but nonetheless she begins on her journey to conquer the mountain.

As she walks she stumbles, a young pregnant woman is on hand and she helps to steady her. A young boy in school uniform takes her hand. His father takes his other hand and together the four of them carry on the journey emboldened by each other's support.

Slowly people from all parts of the community join them - a whole crowd of people of every age, race, colour and creed working together against the seemingly insurmountable challenge.

United, through helping each other they reach the top. The older lady, the one who is helped at the beginning is the one now providing the help as she leads the pregnant lady to the summit. Together the whole community stands at the crest of the mountain. They have beaten the obstacle before them and stand proud on top of the world as a voiceover says;

"Now more than ever, everyone needs a helping hand. The SVP Annual Appeal.

got through so well to someone so young.

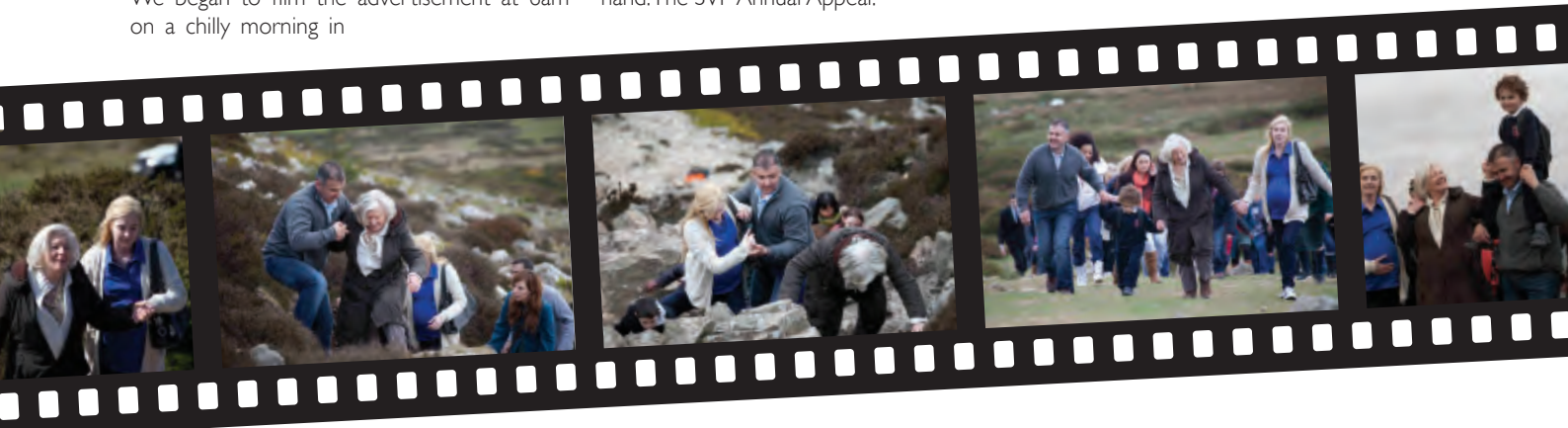
The NMC and the National Communications Committee were equally impressed as were others with whom the advertisement has been tested, professionals and general members of the public.

We hope that this year's TV ad will not only have a successful impact on our fundraising but will also help drive our volunteer recruitment and show the part everyone can play in making Ireland a better, fairer, more supportive society.

The ad will be shown in November and December as part of our Annual Appeal campaign which will run throughout the Society and across all of the usual media channels. The National Fundraising Team will be sending out more information on the Annual Appeal in the coming months. In the meantime please put the week of December 3rd in your diary which will be the beginning of SVP Week culminating on December 9th with SVP Sunday.

Thanks again to all in the SVP and to the public for your wonderful fundraising efforts and support during these challenging times.

- Please contact your local regional or area office for help with your fundraising projects.



May at the foot of the Sugarloaf Mountain in Wicklow. A small team of six professional actors were employed while almost 30 volunteers and service users gave their time for the day saving thousands of euros in fees.

Volunteers ranged from a one-year-old baby

Donate locally or online. Thank you."

THE RESPONSE

When one of the fundraising committee showed the ad to his 12 year old daughter she turned to him and said, 'It's great Dad, it's a metaphor isn't it?' 'Yes', he said delighted that the message had



WHERE JUSTICE IS DENIED AND POVERTY ENFORCED

Violence is a worry to many people; to older people in isolated areas; to parents fearful of their children going into cities for a night's entertainment. Drink-fuelled rage has led to serious injuries in night-time assaults in our city centres. Road rage has even become a feature of modern life.



Back in 1886 Frederick Douglass, in a speech on the 24th anniversary of American Emancipation in Washington, DC, told his audience that communities which denied justice and enforced poverty on people should be afraid of the future because of what they had done.

Those words are relevant to the social situation and the level of violence in Ireland today

Young men living in areas of high unemployment, communities with high-levels of lone-parenthood, areas where there is perceived to be no future because of lack of employment opportunities, run-down suburbs, areas built with lack of recreational facilities, have all been identified by social researchers as areas breeding potential violence.

The common social denominator is inequality.

Social research on the subject is not clear in Ireland but generally within European countries there are indicators in data from the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s that up to 36 per cent of children whose parents were classed in the bottom fifth of the social ladder wound up in their lives in the same position while, by contrast, children whose parents were in the top fifth for wealth remained in that position in their lifetimes.

Redistribution of income, the creation of social justice and equality appears to be some way off still and today many SVP Conferences are finding that poverty is reaching generationally through families. They are finding themselves dealing with grandchildren of parents they had helped many years ago, so that it would appear poverty is returning to inflict itself on families who had, in one generation, succeeded in wresting themselves from its awful grasp, but in the current economic situation have again been dragged down.

At a national, primary-level school in an inner city location, a teacher told a social researcher that social inequality had a corrosive effect on children:

"Who tells them that they are working-class, or lower-class or will have less chance in life. We try to encourage educational opportunity and that they can hope, dream of a good future, to nurture that through their school lives. It is when they come to leave that society confronts them with the effects of their social background. If they cannot get a job, because of where they come from, because of their background, that is a blow to their belief in themselves, to their confidence, to their status in life. Is it any surprise then that some will rebel, that they will engage in violence? It doesn't surprise me."

Social researchers have been focusing on whether some levels of violence, though not all, may reflect a psychological struggle for status.

UNICEF, the United Nations children's agency in a 2007 report measured how children in different countries who were involved in physical fighting, had been victims of bullying, or believed they were not being treated with kindness or a helpful attitude. It found that children in more unequal societies were more prone to bullying by those exerting physical violence to dominate them, thus leading to more conflict and violence amongst themselves or against others which was likely to be carried on into later life.

Sociologist Robert Sampson and research staff at Harvard University in the USA studied communal attitudes and social circumstances and found that violent crime rates were lower in communities which had achieved social cohesion. These were neighbourhoods where residents had good relations with each other and were willing to act in support of what they saw as the common good, even where those communities experienced poverty, deprivation, some violence, the impacts of immigration and unemployment. Where communities were enabled, encouraged to see that there was a 'common good' factor, social problems could be overcome.

In Western Europe Sweden has been identified as a country where social stability has been largely achieved through redistributive taxes and benefits and a large welfare state. Sweden has a high proportion of births outside of marriage. Women are as equally well represented in politics at governmental level as men.

Scandinavian countries, Norway is another, have social stability, not through the total equality of everyone being at the same level, but of opportunity of a sense of equality, of absorbing other cultures while keeping its own as the level to which those arriving within it must aspire to, including language, pride in custom, appreciation of the opportunities offered.

SOCIAL JUSTICE CAN BE DENIED AND POVERTY ENFORCED BY GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ireland today is dominated by State policies which prioritise the repayment of debt to overseas financial investors, the refunding of banks and property development speculators whose common collateral was greed and self-interest aimed at driving themselves to social superiority, fuelled by arrogance.

The community at large is suffering, either because individuals responded to inducements

to engage in financial expenditure which they could not afford or they were cast aside by the power of financial aggression.

Social research shows that greater equality in society can be gained by government in two ways - using taxes and benefits to redistribute unequal incomes or by greater equality in gross incomes before taxes and benefits, thus leaving less need for redistribution

In their seminal study 'The Spirit Level,' Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett wrote, "You can predict a country's performance on one outcome from a knowledge of others. If - for instance - a country does badly on health, you can predict with some confidence that it will also imprison a large proportion of its population, have more teenage pregnancies, lower literary scores, more obesity, worse mental health and so on. Inequality seems to make countries socially dysfunctional across a wide range of outcomes."

Poverty is a social status. That contention was made by Marshall Salins in 'Stone Age Economics'.

"Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relationship between means and ends," he wrote. "Above all it is a relationship between people. Poverty is a social status, it has grown as an invidious distinction between classes."

In nations around the world, health and social problems remain strongly associated with incomes.

Inequality is indicative of the broad structure of society, its effects structure how individuals are affected within that societal structure.

What is the purpose of government if not to reduce inequity for its people?

Has the government moved away from 'the people' in this regard and become too focused on satisfying international financiers in preference to the priority of the welfare of its own people?

"Inequality gets under my skin....."

That viewpoint from an unemployed man in the queue outside a social welfare office, a labour exchange as it used to be called, is worth remembering.

INCREDIBLE FLAGSHIP SVP STORE' OPENED IN DUNDALK



Opening the new store - Aisling Mathews - Manager: Liam Reilly - Area President: Mairead Bushnell - Former National President: Niall O'Farrell and Michael O'Keeffe - North-East Regional President

An "incredible new store" has been opened by the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in the main street and shopping area of Dundalk.

The impressive shop was described as "a flagship store" and "an incredible commitment" by the retailer with a national reputation who performed the official opening - Niall O'Farrell of RTE Television "Dragon's Den" programme.

"As a retailer myself, I know that those of us

in business must all recognise the challenging economic times and the challenge that empty shops present. These are challenges which the Society in Dundalk has faced in deciding to open this incredible flagship store in Dundalk".

The TV star and retailer himself bought a few gifts from the new store before he left, indicating his belief in the quality of the products on offer and contributing to the Society's funds, following the contribution he had made as a student member

of the SVP in the CUS Marist College in Dublin.

He urged people to "trawl" through their attics and donate items to the SVP to support the "fantastic work members do in Irish society" and he appealed to shoppers to support SVP charity shops."

The new store is the largest of the 153 which the SVP has in Ireland. It is on Clanbrassil Street, Dundalk's main thoroughfare. It was prepared

for opening within five weeks of the keys being acquired for what had been a vacant premises.

Liam Reilly, Dundalk SVP Area President, said members had worked tirelessly to get the store ready:

“We spent endless hours here over the past few weeks transforming this building to what has to be a flagship for the Society nationally”

Shop Manager is Ashling Mathews, who he praised for her diligence, perseverance and leadership.

There was an ecumenical blessing at the opening ceremony which was also attended by former SVP National President, Mairead Bushnell who said that the Society's shops were “the face of the SVP nationally.”

“We endeavour to make a difference to the lives of people and would like to think that anyone with any difficulty would come to us for help”.

It is a considerable achievement to have 153 shops nationwide, which puts the SVP at the top of retail outlets, according to North-East Regional President, Michael O’Keeffe, who said that it was not the challenge for the Society to be the biggest, because it had a different role, which was to be the best in serving the requirements of those whom it helped, who are those in need of help and assistance in these difficult times, while also welcoming anyone who wished to use the stores.

- A charcoal drawing of SVP Founder Frederic Ozanam, drawn by a local member of Boyband 'Boulevard' - Andrew Rice- was presented to Mairead Bushnell to mark the occasion.



SVP National President Mairead Bushnell accepting Ozanam charcoal drawing from Andrew Rice with Ashling Mathews SVP Shop Manager



Inside of the flagship store



What Power Has the
Minister for Education?



Having campaigned for a better and less costly system of providing school books and for less costly school uniforms, SVP Social Justice and Policy Officer Audry Deane asks why the Minister for Education does not have the power to make changes that would help hard-pressed parents?

Over the summer the SVP Social Justice and Policy team has been working closely with the Minister and staff of the Department of Education to make sure they get the message - that the cost of sending children to school is causing hardship and stress to a growing number of families.

We have been hammering home this message to them for over a year now and at this point a degree of frustration is setting in as it is clear that there are times that the Minister for Education has not always got the power to create the outcomes we want - a reduction in costs for parents of school-going children.

The SVP team has been busy identifying trigger points which create financial stress for parents and have been bringing solutions to these directly to the Minister and his staff.

First up was the school book campaign which created great support and awareness around the fact that school book rental schemes save

parents money and should be in all schools. There have been too many unnecessary school book edition changes. The campaign caught the public's attention, with 9,000 signing our online petition and was successful in highlighting unsatisfactory school book publishing practices, the hands-off approach from the Department of Education and Skills and the various practices at individual school level which can impact on whether a school sets up a book rental scheme or not.

SO WHAT HAPPENED.....?

Well, the Minister responded to our demands by conducting a survey in all schools to find out what is going on with regard to book rental schemes - we await the final details on what he intends to do. The Department also produced a guideline document for schools on how to set up book rental schemes and invited us to collaborate with them on this which the SVP duly did. The guide has lots of useful information and we hope to see it pro-actively circulated in all schools. The school book budget has been ring-fenced at €15 million for this school year and lastly the publishers agreed to a six- year moratorium on new editions.

SHOULD WE BE HAPPY WITH THE RESULTS OF OUR LOBBYING?

Well, maybe, although lots of issues remain unresolved which need decisiveness and leadership and this is what we expect from this reforming Minister.

- **Why are we, then, still hearing of new edition being published and parents forced to buy new books?**
- **Can we be guaranteed that the Junior Certificate curricular reform, while very welcome in the positive learning outcomes it should deliver for our teenagers, won't trigger even more edition changes to meet the new curriculum?**
- **Why is the Department not making stronger moves to regulate the licencing and pricing structure of the emerging eBook era?**

The SVP is concerned that a digital divide will open up where less well -off families will be unable to afford both tablets and digital

content. The Society does not want this to be allowed to happen. Publishers and hardware providers should not be setting the agenda in this important arena.

The second trigger point the SVP identified as causing undue financial and at times psychological distress to families is the cost of some school uniforms. While the Minister has signalled his desire to end the practice of schools insisting on parents buying expensive uniforms from designated providers, this has not resulted in any change of practice with schools remaining very autonomous, setting their own agendas. The SVP believes a change in how decisions are made at school level can solve this problem if parents know who to lobby to get the changes they want. Parents can ask for change to punitive end expensive uniform policies only if they know who to approach.

Many parents are unaware that it is the Board of Management, working with the School Principal, which makes many decisions regarding what happens in schools. That is why the SVP, working with Barnardos and the National Parents' Councils, has produced a 'Tool Kit For Parents'. This guide explains school-decision making structures clearly and urges parents to get involved and tell school managements what they want. This has been launched this month by the Minister.

But we are left asking the question why does the Minister simply not have the power to make the changes which we have shown can make a difference to hard pressed parents?

- **Why can he not simply instruct schools to adopt cost-saving measures such as generic uniforms, onto which school crests could be sewn and to establish book rental schemes?**
- **And how come he can't rein in publishers from driving the demand for new book editions and expensive digital content which has the potential to cause severe problems for struggling families and thus safeguard children from a profit- making approach to basic educational materials?**

Why indeed?

SVP CHALLENGES BORD GAIS AND ENERGY REGULATOR ON LATEST PRICE INCREASE

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has told the Commission for Energy Regulation that the proposed increase in prices by Bord Gais of 7.54% in October will seriously affect many households already struggling to meet living costs and warned that it will increase energy poverty and could leave families without adequate heat in their homes in the winter.



"We oppose any additional tariff increases on Bord Gáis domestic gas rates in 2012. In the context of increasing evidence of the scale of households running into arrears in the domestic energy market, every effort has to be made to assist rather than exacerbate the problem of energy affordability for such a large proportion of the population," the Society has told the CER adding criticism of the use by energy companies of reduced demand as a reason for increasing prices and challenged whether this is in line with Government policy to reduce energy usage.

The Society has also challenged the Commission on why it used "administrative costs" as a reason not to pass on reductions in charges to consumers which could have been done by Bord Gais when it achieved additional revenue this year. The SVP has told the Commission that it should equally consult public opinion on potential reductions as it does on potential increases:

"In its consultation document CER highlights that

during the course of 2012, its quarterly reviews of Bord Gáis showed over-recovery of funds (unplanned additional revenue). This implied the possibility of modest tariff reductions by Bord Gáis. CER chose not to pass on these reductions due to the administrative costs of implementing such change and due to the seasonal aspect of the gas market. However, if in the course of 2013 quarterly reviews find potential tariff reductions it behoves CER to equally consult on potential viable reductions as it does on potential increases.

"The staggering number of people falling into arrears with their energy bills is an unfolding crisis in the household energy market. We are convinced that increases in electricity and gas prices will exacerbate this problem," the SVP has told the Commission for Energy Regulation.

In its submission to the Commissioner for Energy Regulation, Stuart Coleman, the SVP Social Justice Team said that he requested increase in the non-daily metered gas tariff of Bord Gáis by

7.54% follows a 21.72% increase in 2011.

"Our response aims to highlight the increase of SVP expenditure on energy in recent years, the significant number of households in energy arrears and our concern about existing repayment options including low-take up and availability of meters. We acknowledge the external forces on costs facing Bord Gáis with regard to Gas procurement but also note the potential for tariff reductions identified by CER, suggested in the quarterly reviews of Bord Gáis tariffs in 2012."

The SVP submission is entitled :A Looming Crisis in Household Energy Market

Since 2007, SVP has seen a significant increase in expenditure on assisting households with their energy costs. An increasing aspect of our local Conference (local branch) work involves not only the financial assistance required but also direct negotiation with energy companies

– at local and national level. SVP members find themselves spending more and more time in liaison with companies and their customers. This local work on the ground is alarmingly evident in our financial accounts and has reached the extent to which we are questioning the sustainability of SVP operating in this area to this extent.

SVP Expenditure on Energy 2008-2010

2007	€3,378,000
2008	€3,786,000
2009	€5,755,000
2010	€8,848,000

While we do not have final figures, it is widely believed within SVP that a similar increase will pertain in our 2011 accounts. The dramatic increase in expenditure relates not only to the increased cost of energy but also with the increased volume of people in need approaching our organisation. In the period 2009-2011, calls for assistance to SVP's busiest regional offices increased by over 80% and the majority of the people calling us for help were reliant on a social welfare payment. Energy costs were identified as the second most requested area of assistance after food.

Recently the SVP requested energy suppliers to provide us with available information on the number of households that have entered into payment plans or have had a prepayment / Pay-As-You-Go meter due to arrears. Latest industry figures suggest that a significant proportion of households in Ireland entered into three different types of re-payment arrangements. Approximately 400,000 households had entered into a Payment Plan with their provider; around 38,000 households were using a prepayment / Pay-As-You-Go meter and a further 22,000 Token Meters were in circulation among domestic energy users. The information relates to electricity and gas customers combined and does not disaggregate for either.

Proposed Increase in Bord Gáis Gas Tariff

Bord Gáis have requested a 7.54% rise in its residential gas tariffs to CER from October 2012. The reasons given include increased Gas commodity costs because the value of the Euro has decreased considerably against Sterling over the last year; higher financing costs for Bord Gáis Networks and a reduction in gas demand.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is concerned that the proposed tariff increase will negatively affect the many households identified in this

submission who are struggling to make ends meet in the current economic climate. There are 11% of Bord Gáis customers who are presently in arrears for over 60 days (source: Bord Gáis). With a market share of 70%, Bord Gáis may be better placed to absorb the above costs due to economies of scale.

In its consultation document CER highlights that during the course of 2012, its quarterly reviews of Bord Gáis showed over-recovery of funds (unplanned additional revenue). This implied the possibility of modest tariff reductions by Bord Gáis. CER chose not to pass on these reductions due to the administrative costs of implementing such change and due to the seasonal aspect of the gas market. However, if in the course of 2013 quarterly reviews find potential tariff reductions it behoves CER to equally consult on potential viable reductions as it does on potential increases.

Reductions in use must be decoupled from tariff increases

CER in its consultation document suggests that the main upward cost drivers, namely sterling and network costs, are beyond the control of Bord Gáis. However, we have an issue with the third cost driver caused by the reduction of gas volumes as a result of the recession. If a critical volume of homes become very energy efficient, which is a policy objective of Government, this should result in a reduction in demand – also a policy objective of Government. Yet the third reason for the price increase sought relates directly to such demand reduction, albeit caused by recession as opposed to efficiency. Reduced demand should not be used as a reason for a price increase for any utility approaching the Commission. CER must send a message to utilities to promote energy efficiency, protect unnecessary over-consumption of natural resources and to support the aims and objectives of the Government's own Warmer Homes Strategy for Affordable Energy in Ireland.

Timing of the Tariff Review

The timing of these reviews falls ahead of the winter season when most gas is consumed in the year. SVP questions whether households will have enough time to budget accordingly in order to absorb the proposed substantial energy price increases. It is our experience that households who are struggling due to inadequate incomes live on very tight budgets and sudden fluctuations in outgoings can seriously undermine the capacity for those households to manage their budgets effectively.

Repayment Options – payment plans versus pre or pay-as-you go meters.

The staggering number of people falling into arrears with their energy bills is an unfolding crisis in the household energy market. We are convinced that increases in electricity and gas prices will exacerbate this problem. Where they can be installed, prepayment or Pay-As-You Go meters are preferable to payment plans. Payment plans are usually negotiated at the behest of the supplier and are not a secure or sustainable way to dealing with on-going arrears. The experience of SVP and others is that customers are inclined to overcommit on payment plans and are therefore more likely to either renege on agreements with other creditors or leave inadequate resources for normal household expenses, particularly food and health related costs.

SVP is aware that there is reluctance in the market (among domestic users) to engage with pre-payment options, although this appears to be improving. The roll-out of Smart metering has been delayed until much later in the decade. As a result, investment in existing technology is not only required to expand its availability but also to promote and normalise its use among the growing target population.

Conclusion

We oppose any additional tariff increases on Bord Gáis domestic gas rates in 2012. In the context of increasing evidence of the scale of households running into arrears in the domestic energy market, every effort has to be made to assist rather than exacerbate the problem of energy affordability for such a large proportion of the population. Even at present rates of arrears there are insufficient options for households in need, particularly in relation to prepayment or Pay-As-You Go meters. In the possible event that CER grants a price increase now or in the near future, the Commission needs to mitigate the negative impact of the rise by thoroughly examining tariff reductions on a quarterly basis and ensuring that prepayment or Pay-As-You Go meters are available for those struggling with bills and that their use is seen as a normal, non-stigmatising way to pay for such a service.

TELLING THE REAL STORY TO THE GOVERNMENT



SVP Social Policy Development Officer, Caroline Fahey, says that this year the Society will adopt a new approach to its pre-Budget submission

Calls for help received in the SVP regional offices in Dublin, Galway, Cork and the Mid West increased by 83% between 2009 and 2011. SVP offices in Dublin, Galway, Cork and the Mid West alone received over 88,000 calls for help in 2011, compared with just over 48,000 two years earlier. SVP continues to receive thousands of calls for help every month across Ireland.

It is no surprise that SVP members are supporting so many more people who are struggling to make ends meet. The incomes of people reliant on social welfare and in low-paid work have been reduced substantially since 2009, with the personal rate of social welfare reduced from €204.30 to €188 per week, plus the introduction of the Universal Social Charge which brought the low-paid back into the tax net and cuts to supports such as Rent Supplement, Child Benefit and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. The unemployment rate is now over 14%, compared with 4.5% in 2007.

Ireland has already endured five austerity budgets, and the Government has committed

to taking over €3 billion more out of the economy in Budget 2013, cutting expenditure in areas such as social protection, housing, education and health. SVP members see people whose lives are affected by low income and poor health, educational disadvantage, relationship breakdown, bereavement, addiction, violence, loneliness, disability, overwhelming responsibilities to care for others, debt, unemployment and other challenges. The SVP must communicate this message to decision-makers and the general public and develop alternatives to cutting the income supports and services which people experiencing poverty and economic stress rely on.

To this end, the SVP will launch a publication in October 2012 containing case studies of some of the individuals and families that members throughout Ireland are working with. Quotes from the publication give a taste of this aspect of SVP's pre-Budget campaign for 2013. The SVP will also highlight the areas for protection which are a priority for the people we assist by making written submissions to public representatives and policy makers, informed by the National Social Justice and Policy Committee. As always,

the Social Justice and Policy team will provide an analysis of Budget 2013 after it is announced in December and we will protest against government choices which worsen the situation of the people we assist.

Examples of those the SVP is helping

A woman's hours at work were cut back and her Family Income Payment was also stopped.

There is a solid fuel stove in the living room of the house, but the family have no fuel.

A mother asked that SVP volunteers would only call to her home when her son is out of the house so that he doesn't know how desperate their situation is

"My children have learned not to ask 'cos Mam doesn't have the money."

"What stood out most to SVP visitors was that the man had no one else to help him but the Society."

What is Social Justice?

“Social justice is not merely an academic pursuit”



Eileen Gernon is Chair of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's National Social Justice and Policy Committee

I don't know if you are like me but I am becoming increasingly confused about the apparently new meaning now being applied to familiar and simple words and concepts such as, 'fairness', 'reforming' and even 'luxury'. This process started some years ago in the business and financial sectors, for example, words like 'downsizing' and 'relocation' are now commonly used to describe people losing their jobs and the company moving out of Ireland. As of now 'cuts', or even the imposition of extra costs, are charmingly described as 'rebalancing'.

“We will encounter more and more parents unable to cope”

Following the last Budget Government politicians were at pains to describe the 'cuts, made in Social Protection, Education and Health as being both fair and reforming. So apparently the reductions in benefits such as, the Fuel Allowance; the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance; Child Benefit for 3rd and subsequent children and the increased rent contribution required, as a result, from those receiving Rent Supplement, are all fair and reforming! Under this new definition of fairness there is apparently nothing wrong with asking a couple with three children on social welfare to accept a cut of €1,080 per year while a double income couple with three children on a combined income of €150,000 per year to take only a cut of €1,050. It would appear that 'fairness' now means that those with least to give should contribute most! However, we do have to remember they kept their promise that basic welfare rates would not be cut. Instead they just snuck up from behind and took more from people by cutting benefits and imposing extra charges than they could have got away with by a simple cut in the basic rate!

Let's now look at the new and imaginative meaning of the word 'Reform'. I suspect that for most of us when we hear of reform in

our innocence we assume that the outcome will result in some form of improvement, but apparently not. On day two of the Budget Minister Noonan was at pains to describe his efforts as being firmly focused on 'growth', particularly in respect of jobs. If that is so then somebody should have told Minister Howlin because the previous day his 'cuts, sorry 'rebalancing', effectively killed off the use of Community Employment (CE) Schemes as a means of moving many single parents from welfare to work. Because from January first 2012 all new single parent entrants on CE schemes, who could be working up to 19 hours per week, will only get an extra €20 per week in addition to their normal welfare payments. This 'reform', amounting to €1.05 per hour, is apparently a sufficient incentive to encourage someone to take up a place on a CE scheme and cover the cost of transport and childcare cost.

AM I MISSING SOMETHING?

The other word that has been redefined is 'Luxury' because when introducing the increase in VAT from 21% to 23% Government repeatedly stressed that this applied to luxury goods. So now you know. When an SVP Conference buys a cooker or washing machine for a family you are providing them with a 'luxury' item. Furthermore when you buy new clothes or footwear for one of your adult clients, maybe so that they can look presentable for a job interview' you have just purchased luxury items.

I could have gone on for pages providing more examples of how our politicians have imaginatively redefined simple words and concepts such as 'fairness', 'reform' and 'luxury'. But then maybe I have got this all wrong because our politicians surely know what they are talking about.

Don't they?

Challenging inequality by comparing disadvantage and affluence

SVP Social Policy Development Officer Caroline Fahey outlines how the Genus can provide vital local information for SVP Conferences.

For the first time ever, SVP Conferences can get detailed information about the profile of all of the people living in areas their Conference covers. The Central Statistics Office has released Small Area Population Statistics from Census 2011.

Each Small Area consists of around 80-100 households and information on levels of education, unemployment, the age profile and information about health and caring is provided. This information should be very valuable to SVP Conferences.

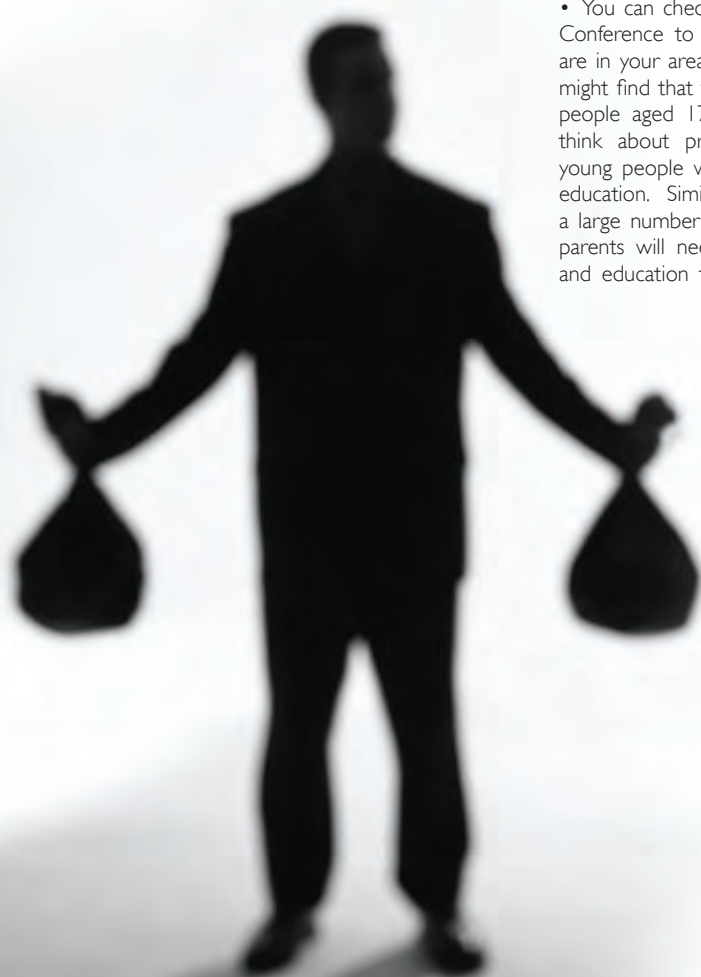
- You can check out the areas covered by your Conference to get a sense of what the needs are in your area. For example, your Conference might find that there is a large number of young people aged 17-19 in your area so you might think about providing additional supports for young people who would like to continue their education. Similarly, you might find that there is a large number of pre-school children locally so parents will need supports for pre-school care and education to help them enter employment

or training. You might see that many adults have low levels of education and think about setting up local initiatives encouraging them to enter further education or training.

The table is an example of some of the information Conferences can get about their local area. It looks at two different areas of Dublin, the north inner city area around SVP House, the national office in Sean McDermott Street and the area around Newtown Park Avenue in an affluent South County Dublin area.

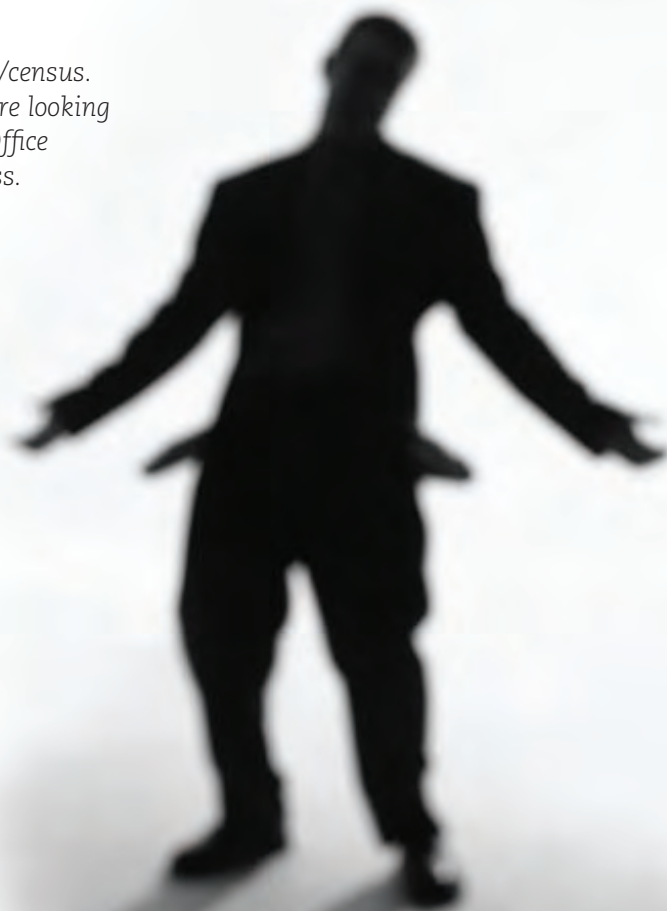
Comparing the two areas demonstrates the concentration of lone parenthood, low levels of educational-attainment and poor health in a disadvantaged area in comparison to a more affluent area.

Our social justice work asks why this is the case and works to challenge these inequalities. SVP Conferences working on the ground can use the information to build up a picture of local need.



	Area surrounding SVP House, north inner city Dublin with high levels of disadvantage	Newtown Park Avenue, Blackrock – affluent part of South County Dublin	What's happening in your Conference or Area?
Nationality of residents	53% Irish nationals	80% Irish nationals	
Rates of lone parenthood	65% of families with children are headed by lone mothers	21% of families with children are headed by lone mothers	
Age profile of children in the area	40% aged 0-4 years	41% aged 0-4 years	
People aged over 65	4%	9%	
Owner occupied housing	0%	63%	
Housing rented from local authority	43%	0%	
Privately rented housing	44%	28%	
Primary level education only	17%	6%	
Second level education only	28%	15%	
Degree or professional qualification	7%	19%	
Postgraduate qualification	10%	16%	
Main fuel used for central heating	Electricity (46%)	Natural Gas (67%)	
Unemployed or looking for first job	18%	10%	
People reporting fair, bad or very bad health	12%	6%	
Internet access	58%	79%	

To get the information relevant to your local area visit www.cso.ie/census. Choose the interactive mapping tool and type in the address you are looking for. If you need any help just contact Caroline Fahey in National Office (01 829 9025) who would be happy to talk you through the process.



LET'S HELP EACH OTHER



“ ‘Community’ is an aspect of life now accessed mostly via a computer instead of going next door to a neighbour. It is time to go back to being neighbourly.”



That approach is enshrined in the West Cork town of Clonakilty where a man offers as one of his commitments to the community to be “a drinking buddy,” because people need friendship! That is one of the more unusual ‘favours’ which people in the town and surrounding area are offering to do for each other, ranging from darning and knitting to baking, painting, making homes neat and tidy and gardening, amongst others – and for no money, just the exchange of their own skills.

This is the basis of the ‘CLONAKILTLY FAVOUR EXCHANGE’ which was started earlier this year as a “skills and labour exchange” to develop “an economy of goodwill.”

The town hit the national news headlines in the Summer when flooding seriously damaged homes and businesses and the CFE was there to help as it has been amongst the community since March.

CFE has its origins in LETS, which stands for Local Exchange Trading System and Time Banks which are a way of tallying time spent on giving and receiving help from friends and neighbours. LETS are now well-established in Ireland, with active communities in Cork, Kinsale, East Cork and Clare. CFE is a Time Bank which does not involve the exchange of money. It defines all work as of equal value and also features community and group projects. Like LETS, it aims to include any skills and work offers as ‘tradeable’ exchanges and to build an alternative,

Origins of Time Banks and LETS

Time Banks grew out of a desire to build neighbourliness as a way of providing care in a community where services were inadequate. They developed in America in the late

80s, at about the same time that LETS began in Canada.

A LETS is a community whose members agree to exchange their skills, labour and goods with each other without the use of money. LETS enables people to work for each other, to share skills and services to mutual benefit and to enrich each other’s lives without the need for hierarchy or profit. Its real benefits are not economic but social.

‘The social benefits of such a system are enormous: interaction between isolated social groups is made possible and small enterprises can be launched. It is of value to any community in that participation is rewarded, and self-esteem is thus increased, says the organisation.

LETS HISTORY

LETS began in 1979 on Vancouver Island, Canada during a severe economic depression and has flourished best at times of economic hardship. It was a community response to an economic downturn which threatened livelihoods and self-esteem. In 1983 Michael Linton of British Columbia coined the name ‘LET’ System and since then the idea has spread to every European country in one form or another: It is particularly popular in New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the UK. By 1994 there were over 300 systems operating in the UK alone.



ARRIVAL IN IRELAND

LETS came to Ireland in 1993 and soon there were seven LETS in operation in West Cork, Cork, Dublin, East Clare, Galway, Mayo and Westport. A study of LETS in Ireland in 2004 found that the social value was the chief benefit.

"LETS intends to create a community being in touch with one another and gaining self confidence through the discovered demand for individual performance or services by the participants, therefore raising the region's life quality on the whole," according to the group.

COMPUTER ADAPTED

While computers may have affected community life, LETS has adapted technology to make its system work.

At the outset of the organisation directories of offers and exchanges had to be updated by hand, printed and delivered to members now records can be updated centrally and read by all members on their own computer or in a library or internet cafe.

THERE IS NO COMPULSION TO TRADE

All activities within LETS are based on consent, freely given by all participants to each other as a condition of holding an account and recognising that the individual may choose not to do something. There is never any obligation to trade, nor is there any obligation upon anyone to join. Information is available to all members for the users to have control over the system and to trust it. Nobody profits financially.

The scheme allows local people to exchange favours using their particular skills. For every 15 minutes worked, one credit is earned.

There are over 30 people involved in Clonakilty with a wide range of skills available to do 'favours' for one another including painting, childminding, carpentry and psychology, to name a few. The 'Clon Favour Exchange' also runs the helping hands scheme whereby volunteers will go and help an elderly person who need some work done in their home or need their shopping collected.

"You get a better sense of community. It's a great way to meet people and it can be good fun too," one of the West Cork founders said.

The CFE Coordinating Group meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 7.30 pm at the Clonakilty Lodge

- There is more information about the Clonakilty development on the website www.clonfavour.com

Irish Independent

Ireland's National Quality Daily.

Time, not cash, is the new currency By Mark Keenan

Tuesday May 15 2012

THE country's newest bank -- which actively encourages new members to get into debt -- is going nationwide. However, no money will change hands. Instead, time will be the currency used. The Clonakilty Favour Exchange in west Cork -- which describes itself as the country's first ever 'time bank' -- includes the well-known Trinity College Dublin economist Constantin Gurdgiev among its members.

It was launched earlier this month so that locals in the town and its surrounds could trade skills, services and favours without money changing hands. The scheme has proven so successful that two other exchanges are now in the process of getting on to their feet -- in Killarney and in Stillorgan, Co Dublin -- and three more are now on the cards for Kilkenny, Mayo and Sligo. The local initiative had expected to build up to 50 members after a year -- but instead it has almost doubled that to 90 in just over a week after its official launch on May 4.

The concept allows commerce and interaction to take place at a local level on a cashless basis with members simply giving each other their time.



MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN CHILD COSTS ACROSS AGE GROUPS

CHILD BENEFIT CONTRIBUTES STRONGLY TO MEETING COSTS



The cost of a child are high in infancy, before falling at pre-school age, and then gradually rising as children grow older; according to a study carried out by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ)

“The Cost of a Child” shows that expenditure fluctuates because of the needs of children at particular ages. Location, parental employment, family status and the subsequent need for childcare are all factors.

A child at second level education has the highest weekly costs (€144.92 in an urban household and €140.20 in a rural household) and a pre-school child has the lowest (€48.29 urban and €50.03 rural). When a child enters adolescence, costs increase for a number of categories including food, education, social inclusion and participation and communications.

With childcare included, an infant has the highest cost per week (€296.13 urban and €260.31 rural) and a child at primary age the lowest (€130.30 urban and €134.72 rural).

While Child Benefit accounts for 11% of the cost of an infant in an urban household where there are childcare costs, this rises to 67% for a Primary school child in an urban household where there are no childcare costs. The respective percentages for a rural household are 12% and 65%

“It can be argued that child benefit and current social welfare rates are arbitrary, in that they have been decided by Government officials and other policy-makers without any sense of what it actually costs to raise a child. This study attempts to overcome this information deficit by providing data on the direct cost of raising a child from infancy to mid-second level school age”, said Dr. Bernadette MacMahon Director, VPSJ.

The study examined the direct cost of a child at four stages of childhood - Infant, Pre-school, Primary School and Second level, across urban and rural households. It shows the fluctuation in costs across 13 areas of expenditure directly related to a child, e.g. food, clothing, childcare. It excludes costs shared in common with parents, such as heating or the use of a family car.

It also considers the contribution that child income support payments make at Infant, Pre-school, Primary and Secondary school levels.

“This is particularly relevant to policy-makers and to all individuals and organisations concerned with the well-being of children. At a time of economic recession it is important to support those on low incomes and ensure child income supports make a realistic contribution to the cost of raising a child.” said Dr. Mac Mahon.

Summary of weekly cost of a child

URBAN

With Full-time Childcare:

Infant	€296.13,
Pre-School	€223.87,
Primary	€130.30,
Secondary	€144.92

No Childcare:

Infant	€91.13,
Pre-School	€48.29,
Primary	€78.66,
Secondary	€144.92

Add food costs for lone parent families:

Infant	Nil,
Pre-School	€3.68,
Primary	€5.59,
Secondary	€6.97

Child benefit contribution

No childcare:

Infant	35%,
Pre-School	67%,
Primary	41%,
Secondary	22%

With childcare:

Infant	11%,
Pre-School	14%,
Primary	25%,
Secondary	22%

RURAL

With Full-time Childcare:

Infant	€260.31,
Pre-School	€183.44,
Primary	€134.72,
Secondary	€140.20

No Childcare:

Infant	€92.98,
Pre-School	€50.03,
Primary	€83.04,
Secondary	€140.20

Add food costs for lone parent families:

Infant	Nil,
Pre-School	€4.68,
Primary	€7.12,
Secondary	€8.88

Child benefit contribution

No childcare:

Infant	35%,
Pre-School	65%,
Primary	39%,
Secondary	23%

With childcare:

Infant	12%,
Pre-School	18%,
Primary	24%,
Secondary	23%



Mairead leaves office

After leading the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as National President for five years, the first woman to do so in the history of the SVP in Ireland, Mairead Bushnell completed her period in office in May when she presided over her last meeting of the National Management Council.

The Council met in SVP Kerdiffstown House near Naas in County Kildare where tributes were paid to Mairead for her dedicated service as National President.

At a function after the meeting which was attended by members of Mairead's family a presentation was made to her of Waterford glass, engraved with a portrait of Mairead, by the Council on behalf of the entire membership of the Society in Ireland.

Making the presentation the Society's new National President Geoff Meagher said that Mairead had made not one, but many headlines in her role as the first lady to become National President of the Society. She had travelled throughout the country to meet members and to take part in their events and had led the Society strongly and with dedication in its commitment to social justice and bringing help to those in need. Throughout her time in office she had also not forgotten about the work of her own Visitation Conference in Cork where she had remained active and would be so in the years ahead.



Learning For Free At Home



by Inez Bailey
Director NALA

For the last few years, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has been running a free distance education course, aimed at people with low or no qualifications who would like to learn at their own pace, in their own home. Through online and telephone tutor support, this innovative course brings education to the individual and allows them to gain a national qualification in the privacy of their own home. It is completely free and perfect for anyone who left school early or would like to get a qualification. The aim of the course is to break down barriers to education, such as time, travel and expense, so that anyone without a basic qualification can access further education.

If you left school a long time ago or without getting good marks, talk of up-skilling and the smart economy can seem very far removed from your life. In fact, research shows that the less education you got, the less likely you are to avail of further education or training as you probably had a negative experience first time around. That's why this course is so great – we set you up with a tutor who will help you over the phone or online. They ring you so there are no hidden costs.

Equally, there is none of the usual time or travel pressures. You can learn at your own pace at home through subjects in which you are interested. It is also confidential and when you are finished, you get a nationally recognised FETAC qualification at Level 2 or 3 which is often the minimum requirement to access other education and training courses. NALA's distance education programme offers accreditation in a number of subjects, including communications, maths, computers, internet, career preparation and health and safety. It is aimed at anyone who left education without a formal qualification such as Junior Cert or anyone who would like to improve their basic skills or learn new ones. Participants can take as long as they want to do the course. NALA specifically developed the course so that it recognises and builds on participants' existing knowledge and supports new learning. For example, a participant who is good at maths will receive accreditation for that subject after

an initial assessment. However if they are weak at maths they will be assisted to learn this subject.

There are many barriers to people returning to learning, such as the fear of not being able to keep up with a class, falling behind or a previous bad experience of education. This course is different. There are no pressures and it's completely confidential.

All you have to do is log onto www.writeon.ie or call us for free on 1800 20 20 65 or free text 'LEARN' to 50050 for more information. One of our operators will explain how the course works and all the options available to you. If you choose to do the course, we will set you up with a tutor who will get you started and help you choose your subjects and level. It is that easy.

Is this course for you?

This course is for you if you don't have a formal qualification (such as Junior Cert) and would like to get one, or if you would just like to improve your skills.

You can learn at your own pace at home. We will set you up with a tutor who will help you over the phone.

There are lots of subjects to choose from, for example:

- Communications
- Mathematics
- Application of Numbers
- Functional Mathematics
- Personal Effectiveness
- Personal and Interpersonal Skills
- Computer Literacy
- Internet Skills
- Digital Media
- Career Preparation
- Health and Safety Awareness

It is completely free and confidential. When you finish, you get a nationally recognised FETAC Level 2 or 3 qualification – a great stepping stone to further education and training.



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Log onto www.writeon.ie and start learning today!

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SVP NATIONWIDE



Aldi make SVP 'Charity of the Year'

Aldi Stores' have designated the Society of St.Vincent de Paul as their 'Charity of the Year'.The SVP has been working in partnership with Aldi for several months having been granted permission to place clothing bins in many of their sites around Ireland.

"Aldi Stores are proud to support the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul", said Corporate Managing Director Mandy Stretton. Aldi began their 'Charity of the Year' partnership with a gift of €25,000 to be focused on the education of young children.

The SVP responded:"We thank Aldi and all their staff and look forward to a successful and fruitful partnership.The Society is delighted to have another of Ireland's major retailers giving their help SVP through these difficult times."

Cookstown First Fashion Show

Report Oliver McGuckin
Photos Eileen McCausland



Cookstown SVP's first-ever fashion show was hailed a tremendous success as a grand total of £5,000 was raised towards helping the most needy and vulnerable in our local area.The Greenvale Hotel was the venue for the event and several hundred people enjoyed a very entertaining night of high fashion and lots, lots more when the supermodels of Cookstown and surrounding districts took to the catwalk.

With an inimitable introduction and commentary by local comic Carol Doey, the ladies and men paraded a classy and colourful collection of top labels and cutting-edge couture. This was a fashion show with a difference and the emphasis was on fun as the models encouraged by families and friends, played to the gallery. In the finest traditions of this most glamorous industry.

New Family Resource Centre for Carrigtwohill



A major piece of work undertaken by the Family Resource Centre, Carrigtwohill in east County Cork during the winter and early spring was the reconstruction of its original location. This was necessary as the older building had outlived its usefulness and become unsuitable as a location for the provision of services in the context of changing social needs and the requirements of prevailing legislation in relation to the provision of child care services and building standards.

The original building had been opened in 1991 had given sterling service to the community as a base for a "Parent & Toddler" Group, Breakfast Club, After Schools Club, Shared Reading Club and for a time as a location for Public Health Nurses. It also served as a venue for a range of adult education courses and activities including FETAC courses in Childcare, Healthcare, Computers, ESOL learners, Personal Development, Community Integration, Children's Art and related programmes.

The decision to rebuild the former premises was taken following a strategic review by an independent consultant. With the new building it will now be possible to centralise services and provide new ones including a Community Pre-School. It will also provide better staff accommodation and facilities.



The money raised by this function, boosted in no small part by the donations from local traders, the great assistance of Greenvale Hotel proprietor Michael McElhatton and the generosity of the audience through door and ballot-ticket sales, will go a long way to easing the burden faced by the SVP helping people in need from all sections of the local community regardless of race, class or creed.

Dublin Youth recognise dedication



The Dublin Youth Club's Council gathered in SVP House, the national headquarters in Dublin, to show their appreciation for the selfless dedication of their longest-serving member - Jack Farrell of Bru Mhuire Youth Club, based in North Great George's Street in the city which he joined in in 1945 as a young boy.

Six years later he was welcomed into the Conference by then President Matt Kirwin. Since then Jack has dedicated himself to the work of the Society and has without doubt helped many hundreds, if not thousands of people of all ages, who he has met through nearly seventy years' of dedicated service.

The work of the volunteer cannot happen without the help and support of the family and Jack has always had the great support of his wife Rita who has also dedicated many years to the Society and his family, daughters Hilary and Ellen and son Brian who now lives and works in Sydney.

Mass was celebrated by SVP Spiritual Adviser and friend Fr: Jim Noonan and a number of presentations were made to Jack and Rita. Close friend and President of the Dublin Region, Rose McGowan, welcomed all present to the event and paid tribute to Jack and indeed Rita who have worked with Rose for many years in the Berkeley Road area, Rose also made a presentation on behalf of the Dublin Region to Jack to mark the occasion.

The President of the Youth Club Council Seamus Pender made a presentation on behalf of all the youth clubs to Jack to celebrate his outstanding service to young people.

Four members of St. Julia's Youth Conference at the SVP stand at the Young Social Innovators event at City West in Dublin. Nafisa Millet, Kate Lynch, Emer Croke, Niamh Whelan.

Cork Region Annual Meeting



A big attendance at the Cork SVP Region annual meeting discussed a wide range of issues and underlined the deep commitment of members to helping the disadvantaged, with a big expression of concern about the impact of Government policies on those in need.

The Cork Region has taken communication initiatives in publishing a two-page monthly insert in the city and county's evening newspaper, the Cork Evening Echo, which is timed to coincide with the monthly church gate collections and raise the Society's profile.

Presentations were made to the outgoing Regional President, Brendan Dempsey, who had been courageous in speaking publicly on a wide variety of social issues.



St. Julia's Conference Young Innovators



New Dublin Deacons Are SVP Members



Three of the first permanent deacons in the Irish Catholic Church are members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. They were ordained by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin. They are Gerard Reilly, from Donaghmede who works in financial services, as does Eric Cooney from Monkstown while Steve Maher from Malahide is semi-retired, a former Aer Lingus worker. All are married. The new permanent deacons completed a four-year course of academic study and spiritual, human and pastoral formation. Their ministry will be voluntary and part-time. They can assist priests at the celebration of the Eucharist and celebrate Baptisms, as well as officiate at marriages and preside at funerals. They will also visit the sick, prisoners and the bereaved and promote awareness of the social teaching of the Church.

Seven other dioceses around the State have permanent deacons in formation. Permanent deacons are reasonably common in other parts of Catholic Europe. The deacons will work in parish teams alongside priests and lay parish pastoral workers.

- Four years ago, Dublin was the first diocese in Ireland to train and appoint pastoral workers. Today there are 12 men and 20 women in such roles throughout the archdiocese.

New Cork Regional President



The new SVP Cork Regional President David Holden had a pleasant task shortly after he took office - receiving a cheque for over €8,000 from the Southern Region of the Marketing Institute of Ireland. The money was raised during a raffle at their "Magical Moonlight Ball".

David, on the left of the photo, is a long-time member of the Society and has been involved in various sectors of SVP work over the years. He has been a Conference member in Ballincollig, a suburban town of Cork City.

Another new President in Cork is Donal Whooley who has been elected North City Area Council President.



Dundalk SVP Fashion Show with a difference



There was a strong audience of 300 present at the SVP Fashion Show, different in that almost all the clothes on display were donated items to the Society's new shop in Dundalk. RTE Presenter Brian Ormond compered the night's proceedings and said he was "amazed at the high quality of donations" and praised the good work that the St. Vincent de Paul Society carries out on a daily basis.

The range of clothes varied from ladies and men's casual, children's wear, ladies and men's formal wear and a wide variety of new and almost- new brides' dresses.

SVP volunteers and Society supporters were the models.

SVP National President visits 150-year-old school



Marking its 150th anniversary, former SVP National President Mairead Bushnell visited the Marist School in Dundalk as part of its celebrations. She received a very warm welcome from 3C CSPE Class on her visit as part of the Junior Certificate Action Project. The students had invited the SVP President to inform them on the work of the Society and her role as head of the largest charity in Ireland. Mairead was greeted by Principal Mr. Mc Ginley and 3C class representatives Niall Valentine and Martyna Maselskyte

Niall welcomed Mairead and talked about the rich heritage the School has and spoke about how students have volunteers for bag packs, how they brought in food for Christmas hampers and supported various fundraising activities for the SVP.

The National President outlined her thoughts on the future of the Society and the problems caused by the country's economic and financial crisis with which it is helping those who are disadvantaged and forgotten.

There followed a question and answer session in which Mairead spoke about difficult experiences she had encountered in her time as National President and the value young people can contribute to the Society, encouraging them to start up an SVP Conference in the school and to lead by example.

New Regional President in North-East



Dundalk Area President Liam Reilly has been appointed North-East Regional President, succeeding Michael O'Keeffe on the conclusion of his term-of-office this month. Liam, who teaches history in St. Mary's College, Dundalk, says he is looking forward to his new post. He joined his local SVP Conference, St. Ronan's, seven years ago and was selected Dundalk Area President in 2008.

A very active fund-raiser for Dundalk SVP he, has brought some of Ireland's top entertainers to the north Louth town, including Jedward and X-Factor star Mary Byrne, whose sell-out shows proved of huge assistance in raising funds to help in battling against the ever-growing problem of poverty in Dundalk.

The opening of Dundalk SVP's spacious new town centre shop in Clanbrassil Street marked another milestone in the progress of the local SVP under his stewardship. When it comes to promoting events and ensuring their success, his "all shoulders to the wheel" approach has brought a willing response from members in the area, where ambitious fund raising targets invariably reach their goal.

Liam, who says he "understands and appreciates the difficulties the society has faced over the last number of years," brings a wealth of administrative and problem-solving experience to his new role in which members throughout the North-East Region and further afield will wish him success and fulfilment.



Pictured at Dundalk SVP fashion show were (from left): Ashling Matthews, Dundalk SVP Shop Manager; Brian Ormond, RTE presenter and compere for the night; Bernie from Butterflyz and Angelz, who decorated the stage, and Liam Reilly, Dundalk SVP Area President.

Cork Youths inspired by the SVP to make a difference

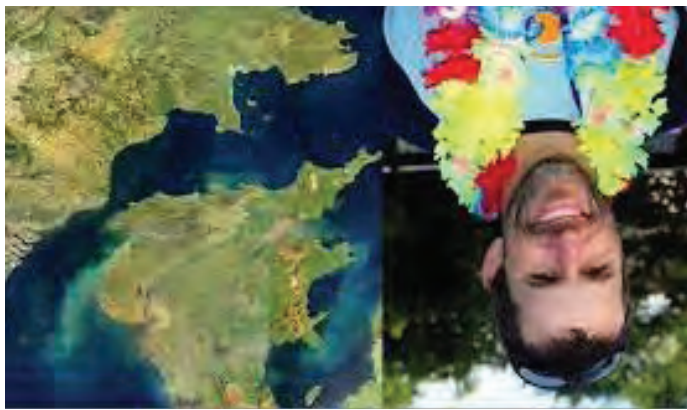


Young people proved that they have much to offer the SVP in developing new solutions to problems in an ever-changing world at the Cork Youth for Justice Project.

"It helps to develop a social conscience within our student population," said SVP Regional Youth for Justice Coordinator Susan Fearmain at the exhibition of projects in the Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Tivoli. Students from around the region presented their social justice projects and shared their views, hopes and concerns for their communities.

The exhibition was opened by former SVP National President Mairead Busnell, Outgoing Cork Regional President Brendan Dempsey presented certificates to each school.

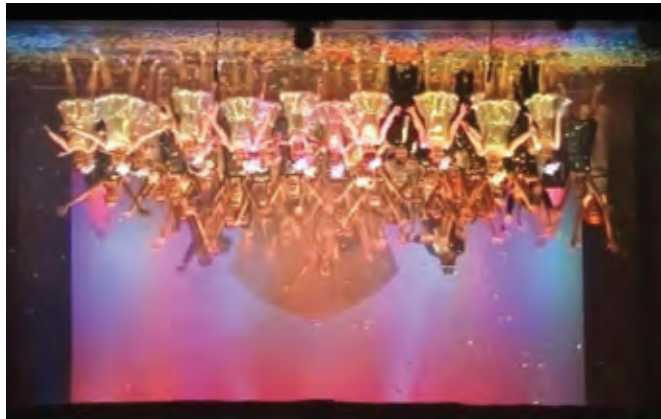
Event Volunteer Paraic Casey's Final Wish Comes True



St.Mary's Youth Club at Claddagh Green, Ballyfermot in Dublin was founded in 1956 and has provided a great service to the youth of the area. The club was set up as part of the SVP Visitation Conference where members saw the need for a youth club and set about organising one.

Club activities include pool, table tennis, darts, drama, soccer trips and annual holidays, as well as other events. Fourteen years ago the club started a drama group which has made great progress and gained much success and gave members the opportunity to take to the stage no matter what level of talent they possessed. Through hard work and dedication they have put on great performances in many venues around Dublin, including the Olympia, the Helix and the Guinness Theatre where it all began for the group.

This year the drama group achieved major success in winning the prestigious 'Minotops' variety show competition which was held in St.Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The dedicated cast of 75 children aged between 5 and 18 had to qualify through heats and semi-finals. The final was of a very high standard. The judges decided to award first place to St.Mary's Youth Club, an achievement possible through the dedication of the cast and crew. The leaders who manage the drama group are, like all club leaders, voluntary and work as a Conference of the Society of St Vincent De Paul Youth Clubs; Council.



The Society of Saint Vincent De Paul in Cork sent its sincere condolences to Rana Parsons and the Casey family following the tragic and untimely death of Paraic towards the end of his solo swimming crossing of the English Channel in aid of the SVP and Marymount Hospice.

Paraic had contacted the SVP in Cork offering his support for the work of the Society by organising fundraising events, which began with a number of very successful table quiz events. He then offered to undertake further fundraising for the SVP as an Event Volunteer and set up a fundraising page on the SVP website to help raise funds by swimming the English Channel.

The SVP in Cork said it was thankful for the continuing support being received from the public in honour of Paraic's wishes.

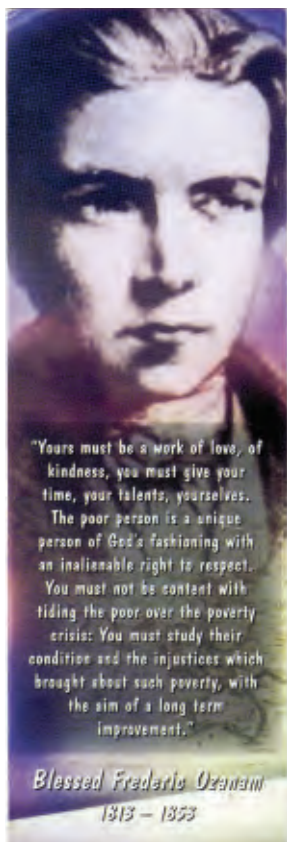
Frederic Ozanam: Early Childhood

This article is written by Sr. Claire Sweeney, one of the Daughters of Charity attached to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

Sr. Claire is just back from a year-long course in Vincentian spirituality in the USA. This is part of a series of biographical notes she has prepared about Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Though his baptismal certificate registers him as French, Frederic Antoine Ozanam was both born and baptised in Milan in the north of Italy on the 23rd April 1813. The Ozanams moved to Lyons, France, in 1816, when Frederic was three.

Faith in God was the bedrock of the Ozanam family and Frederic grew up in a home where



the values of caring for the sick, education, dedication and truth were paramount and practised with enthusiasm. Jean Antoine Ozanam, Frederic's father, was a medical doctor and he spent long hours attending those who were poor. Frederic's mother, Marie, also devoted herself to the care of poor people in need. A couple of incidents

illustrate this. The first tells of an occasion when Dr. Ozanam had spent a whole night at the bedside of a poor man who was dying, even though his own little son, Frederic, was close to death from fever. As he was leaving the sick man he asked the woman to pray for his little boy. Antoine went to early Mass in the Church of St. Pierre on his way home. And he thought about his son – 'Frederic the lovable, the tender-hearted, whose will was so strong, who could be so insistently demanding, but who was so honest, so sweet, so winning' – and he, the doctor, could do nothing to save his boy's life. But he trusted in God. On arriving home, he was met by his wife, full of joy; the fever had left him; he was not going to die.

The second incident refers to a time when Frederic's parents were both in poor health. Through mutual persuasion, they had each given a commitment to the other that they would climb no higher than four flights of stairs on their visits to people in need. One evening at the door of a sixth floor room they met face-to-face, their embarrassment mingling with amusement at being caught out by the other. It shows that their dedication to those who were sick or poor was so strong, that on this occasion, it outstripped even their commitment to each other's wishes. Frederic imbibed this spirit of caring for people who were poor from them.

The parents held firmly to the conviction that their first and greatest responsibility was to nourish their children spiritually and mentally; to enable them to know and love their Creator and to develop their talents to the full that they might serve Him well. Before going to school at the age of nine, Frederic, like his siblings, had been taught at home. His father taught him some Latin; his mother took charge of religious education. But his favourite teacher was his sister Elisa, who thoroughly understood his fine and sensitive nature. The atmosphere in their home was conducive to learning, the house being frequented by learned guests, with conversation as their main entertainment.

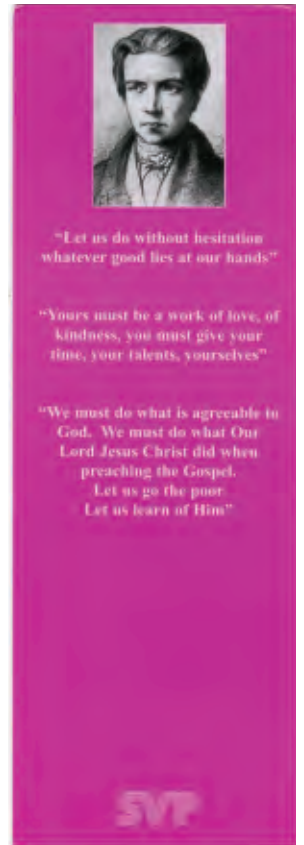
When Elisa was 19 she was stricken with meningitis. Her father called in his fellow practitioners, but none of them could do anything. Their beautiful daughter and sister died. Frederic, who was seven years old, had some

experience of death before this, as only four of eleven children born to Jean Antoine and Marie had survived in infancy, and, besides, his father was

constantly being called to the bedside of a dying person. However, the loss of Elisa, the sister he adored, left him utterly desolate and numb - 'it was as if a veil had been drawn between him and the outside world; life was distant and unreal.' His life changed utterly. He fell into a pattern of refusing to do his study, being sent to his room, apologising to his mother before bedtime and being reconciled.

But Frederic had lost his interest in learning and did not apply himself properly again until, at the age of nine, the need to get a place in the Royal College was strong enough to motivate him. His ability to learn quickly enabled him within a few months to gain entrance to the Royal College with very good results in his test.

*Quoted phrases are from *Apostle in a Top Hat* by James Patrick Derum.



A series of information leaflets have been produced about the SVP's voluntary work and inviting volunteers

They include:

WANT TO VOLUNTEER ? Join us today and help make a difference

NEED HELP FROM US? We can offer you practical help, advice and the hand of friendship

OUR WORK IS ABOUT Connecting people, Supporting People, Serving People.

These leaflets are available from SVP Regional Offices or SVP National Office, see list on Page 2.

Steps in Becoming a Volunteer member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul

Contact your local Society of St Vincent de Paul office for more information or contact us on-line. Identify the area of work that might best suit your time and talents. Complete and return the Application Pack and the Guide Writing form issued to you. You will be contacted by the local Society office and invited to join a Conference or to contribute in other ways as agreed with you and to begin work with your new colleagues. You will be provided with Induction Training.

How to get involved

There are many ways you can get involved with the work of the Society. Any person who has some spare time, enjoys working with others and who shares our values and approach is welcome to contribute to our work. Volunteer members generally join a homech, called a members Conference, normally a group of 8-12 people based in a local area. The Conference usually meets weekly, and, as a group, decide on the work that needs to be done to help families or individuals in need. Volunteers are asked to give a commitment of 1-2 hours per week to this work.

Home Visitation – our core work

One of the main ways that we provide help to families is through Home Visitation. When people in need contact the Society, two volunteer members will call to their home. They get to know the people they visit, offering a listening ear as well as practical help and a non-judgemental manner to try and resolve the difficulties they are experiencing. They may provide some help towards the costs of essential items such as food, clothing, household goods and utility bills. They may provide help towards the cost of education for children and adults. They often link people to local social services, which can provide further help for the longer term.

Becoming a volunteer member with the Society of St Vincent de Paul

As a first step, simply contact the local Society office or contact us on-line. Contact details are given overleaf. You will get more information on the work we do, and be brought through an application process. This helps us to match your talents and availability to the work we do. All applicants must also go through a Garda Vetting procedure to the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults in our top priority.

Once the process is complete, you will be invited to join a local Conference or to contribute in other ways that match your talents and time. You may have specific expertise that you would like to bring to the Society on a short-term or one-off basis. Or you may decide that your talents lie in fund-raising for the Society or working as a volunteer in one of our SVP shops.

You will be provided with induction training to ensure that you are familiar with our approach and understand what is expected of you as a volunteer member.

Want to volunteer? Join us today and help make a difference

Our origin and inspiration

We take our inspiration from blessed Frederic Ozanam, one of our principal founders. As a young university student in Paris, he and his companions set up a Conference of Charity to bring food, clothing and friendship to the poor. They sought out and visited poor people, bringing food, clothing and friendship. They adopted St Vincent de Paul, a 17th century French priest, as their patron.

Local branches of the Society of St Vincent de Paul are called Conferences. The first Conference was established in Ireland in 1844. Today, there are over 2000 Conferences and over 9000 volunteers working in Ireland.

Our approach and values

Direct person-to-person contact with people who request help is a core feature of our approach of the Society of St Vincent de Paul volunteers. We provide help to people, wherever they are, wherever they are from, wherever their religion or beliefs. The range of activities has greatly expanded over the years and is based on:

- Providing support and friendship, with relationships based on trust and respect
- promoting of self-sufficiency, with short term help designed to create greater self-sufficiency in the longer term
- Working for social justice and advocating for the changes needed to create a more just and caring society for all

Our work

We are involved in providing a wide range of services including:

- Visiting people at home, in hospitals and in prisons
- Providing practical support and information to people who contact us
- Helping people link with a range of statutory social services and voluntary agencies
- Running SVP shops, offering great value clothing and household goods
- Providing support towards the costs of education
- Running Family Resource Centres, Youth Clubs and Holiday Centres
- Providing about summer activities for young people, families and other people
- Social housing
- Home accommodation for people who are homeless

Volunteer members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul are people from all walks of life who want to make a difference to the lives of people in need. As people engage in the work of helping other people, many find that their own lives are enriched through making deeper connections with fellow members and the people they serve.

Who we are

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) is a Christian, voluntary, membership organisation. We believe that everyone should have the means to live life with dignity. We are one of Ireland's best known and most widely supported organisations of social concern and action.

There are many ways you can get involved with the work of the Society. As a first step, simply contact the local Society office (overleaf) or contact us on-line. You will get more information on the work we do, and be brought through an application process that helps us to match your talents and availability to our work with people in need.

www.svp.ie

What we can provide

We may be able to give some help towards the costs of essential items such as food, clothing, household goods and utility bills for a short period of time. We may be able to provide some help towards the costs of education for children and adults.

In general, the Society is not in a position to provide assistance with regular payments of household bills. Volunteer members can provide information on how to deal with bills that may be causing serious difficulties. When they understand the problems facing you, they can link you to state or voluntary services that may be able to provide you going longer-term support and assistance.

Our main areas of work

Our main work is person-to-person contact with people who need support and assistance – wherever they are, wherever they live from, whatever their religion or beliefs. Our main funding comes from donations we receive from the public. We are involved in providing a wide range of activities and services:

- Visiting people at home, in hospitals and in prisons
- Providing practical support and information to people who contact us
- Helping people link with a range of statutory social services and voluntary agencies
- Running SVP Shops, offering great value clothing and household goods to local communities
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- Social housing
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Need help from us?
We can offer you practical help, advice and the hand of friendship



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When you contact us with a request for help, you can expect to get a visit from two friendly SVP volunteers who are there to offer you whatever help and advice they can.

We may be able to give you some help towards the costs of essential household items or the costs of education.

Local contacts are at the back of this leaflet.

www.svp.ie

How we work

First and foremost, our volunteer members offer you the hand of friendship. They are there to listen to you and to support you at a time of difficulty in your life. When you contact us (one contact or several), you can expect to get a visit from two SVP volunteer members, generally within ten days from the time we receive your request for help.

You will have the opportunity to discuss your particular problems with friendly people who make no judgement on your situation. When they have a better understanding of the issues facing you, they will consider how best they can assist you. They will return to you as soon as possible with practical help or advice.

They will be able to deal with a completely confidential matter and information you provide is not shared with anyone else without your express permission. All our volunteer members have a background check.

It is our policy to ensure that the Society of St Vincent de Paul is a safe and secure environment for all our members, staff and volunteers. We will not accept any person who is not a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul as a volunteer.

What you can expect from the Society of St Vincent de Paul

All our members are volunteers, people from all walks of life, who do the work of the Society in their own time. When requested, and only when requested, they visit you where you are living to provide you with support, friendship and contact with you. You can expect:

Kindness and courtesy
Respect and acceptance of you as a person
Confidentiality



The Society of St Vincent de Paul is a Christian, voluntary, membership organisation. Working directly with people, our volunteer members provide help to people, wherever they are, wherever they are from, whatever their religion or beliefs.

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Our approach and values

Direct person-to-person contact with people who need help is a core feature of the approach of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. We work with other volunteer members to provide help to people, wherever they are, wherever they are from, whatever their religion or beliefs. The range of activities has greatly expanded over the years and is based on:

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Our work in Ireland today

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Moving the State towards the Common Good

By Dr. Fergus O’Ferrall

“Irish society is being challenged to remould itself.”

This was stated by President Michael D.Higgins when launching a book of essays entitled ‘Towards a Flourishing Society,’ published by independent think-tank Tasc.



This challenging address on this occasion provided confirmation that his Presidency will indeed be a "Presidency of ideas." Given the Republic's deep-seated crisis it is critical that we build a new public consensus through what the President has termed "an emancipatory discourse." This involves fresh thinking and a national conversation to develop a widespread consensus about the future direction of Irish society.

It will not be an easy process to "remould" society. We need to move from a dysfunctional neo-liberal state where self-interest predominates, towards an effective civic republican state where the common good prevails.

However, given the loss of economic sovereignty and succession of public policy failures that have characterised our Republic to date we cannot afford to succumb to a view that there is no alternative.

The late Tony Judt spoke of "captive minds" in his 'The Memory Chalet' (London, 2011) and said that "... the thrall in which an ideology holds a people is best measured by their collective inability to imagine alternatives."

Contributors in 'Towards a Flourishing Society' have dared to imagine a new civic republic. This would represent a great experiment in human well-being. We have outlined the vision this requires, examining in some detail the political, institutional, economic and social structures required to realise this vision over the next decade.

These are worrying times for our people. Enquiries have analysed how we descended into

the dismal economic situation now confronting us. There have been judicial tribunals into the pervasive corruption that scarred our public realm. The Tasc vision of the flourishing society addresses the erosion of our democratic public life by providing a new framework: as a people we need, in the words of political philosopher Michael Sandel, "a new politics of the common good."

The Government is proposing a constitutional convention to review the 1937 Constitution. It is timely, therefore, to set out proposals for public engagement and deliberation about the values and norms that should shape society in the future.

It is clear that we need a new Constitution for a civic republic, one that will provide the underpinning for norms and values and public institutions of a 21st century Republic. We have to define in our Constitution equality of citizenship and freedom as "freedom from domination". Social solidarity has to be set out as the bedrock of a genuinely republican society. The convention ought to comprise civil society representatives, legal and political expertise. It should involve deliberation across the State on a wider scale than that used by the Forum on Europe.

The convention ought to be convened under an international chairperson of the calibre we had in Senator George Mitchell in Northern Ireland. We might consider the contribution that Irish political philosopher Philip Pettit, author of the seminal work *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* and now based at Princeton, might make to such a convention. We need to learn from the innovative constitution-making adopted in South Africa. The Government's apparently limited and modest proposals for a convention form

an insufficient response to the crisis in public governance. We need a more radical approach.

The flourishing society essays are about reclaiming the rich concept of republicanism from the misuse and abuse it has received in the Irish context as a consequence of militant separatist or sectarian and xenophobic movements.

Movements like Sinn Féin are more comparable to those of the far right that have arisen in the EU. Republicanism in the western tradition of political thought centres on human development and solidarity,

As Abraham Lincoln put it in the Gettysburg Address: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."

Human flourishing of all people is the proper end of political, social, economic and political activity. This end must be kept in view in the reconstitution of Irish civic and political culture. We need to recover a more accurate and rounded concept of the human person than the one that prevails in neo-liberal ideology.

Our problem might be summed up by that great exponent of equality RH Tawney. "The continuance of social evils is not due to the fact that we do not know what is right, but to the fact that we prefer to continue doing what is wrong... Those who have the power to remove them have not the will and those who have the will have not, as yet, the power."

Now, surely, it is the time for all who desire to build a flourishing society from the ashes of the failure of our nominal Republic of Ireland.

• *This article is reprinted with permission from THE IRISH TIMES.*

• Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall is Adelaide Lecturer in Health Policy, Trinity College, Dublin, a member of the TASC Council and author of books and articles relating to health policy and Irish history. He is a member of the board of The Irish Times Trust





WORKING TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY IN IRELAND



By Caroline Fahey
SVP Social Policy
Development Officer

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland and advocating and working for the changes required to create a more just and caring society. The SVP engages in social justice advocacy work, overseen by the National Social Justice and Policy Committee, in order to meet this aim. Social justice advocacy is about influencing public policy outcomes in areas such as social protection education, health and housing and lobbying for action against poverty and disadvantage.

The environment for carrying out social justice advocacy in Ireland is changing in many ways. In a context of severely reduced resources and a lack of public support for some vulnerable groups it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure better outcomes for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. The social partnership process, which was used by SVP and other organisations to influence policy making in Ireland is no longer in place. In the current economic climate a successful social justice campaign might protect

a particular service or social welfare payment for one vulnerable group, but at the expense of cuts to supports and services relied on by other vulnerable groups. The SVP is being asked to develop and propose workable solutions to some of the problems that our members see every day, in a context where fewer resources than ever are available to tackle poverty and implement new programmes.

The Advocacy Initiative, a three-year Community and Voluntary sector project that promotes social justice advocacy in Ireland is looking at how social justice advocacy can be most effective in this changing environment. At the end of the Advocacy Initiative's three years, it is hoped that the relationship between the State and social justice advocates will have shifted, so that there will be a greater understanding and awareness of the importance of social justice advocacy in Ireland. This should enable the SVP and other social justice advocates to be as effective as possible in working to create a more just society.

Some of the challenges faced by social justice advocates in the current context were acknowledged by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins at an Advocacy Initiative event in February. A serious challenge is the cut in funding from government sources experienced by some organisations in the community and voluntary sector. The SVP is fortunate to have the support of donations from the public which enable us to continue to provide help directly to people in need and to work for changes in

public policy to tackle poverty in the longer term. However, other organisations may be forced to scale back their social justice advocacy work due to a lack of resources. This may mean that fewer voices for social justice can participate in advocacy and policy development, which could worsen public policy outcomes for people in need. It is hoped that the work of the Advocacy Initiative will help to ensure that the voice of social justice advocates will continue to influence policy development in Ireland.

- The Advocacy Initiative is overseen by a Steering Committee on which organisations such as Barnardos, the Wheel, the Irish Cancer Society, Trócaire and the SVP among many others are represented. The Advocacy Initiative is chaired by the SVP's National Director, Kieran Murphy and is funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies.

Caroline Fahey is a member of the Advocacy Initiative Steering Committee

Government Grade?

SVP National Director, Kieran Murphy, analyses the Government's performance and concludes that it is now clear that it can't meet reasonable expectations to protect the most vulnerable and is unlikely to be in a position to do so for the foreseeable future

LATE SUMMMER is a time for lots of talk about exam results - when students, parents and teachers are pouring over Junior and Leaving Cert results, thinking about their future and the choices they have to make. This prompted me to imagine what kind of results the Government would get if it were to be examined on its performance?

Honours, pass, fail?

Recent opinion polls are one way in which the public get to have their say. Results here are not good: the trend is falling levels of satisfaction with the government parties. Another way of rating Government's performance is to look at key statistics. Here too, the results are not good: the numbers unemployed are at an unprecedented high; income to Ireland's poorest households is falling; and more children are living in poverty.

I am being selective in the figures I am quoting and it paints a dismal picture. This raises the question about who is the examiner. From the perspective of the SVP the examiner is the tens of thousands of people who struggle to make ends meet and are fearful for the future. What kind of grade would they give?

As is the case with exam results some subjects are more important than others. Depending on what your future plans are, you may want a higher grade in French, maths, science, or technical graphics. Same too seems to apply to Government. Is their priority to balance the books; stimulating the economy or protecting the most vulnerable?

These are tough choices.

This continuing downturn has implications for the SVP. A critically important piece of our work is advocacy: making our case to government about the impact that the downturn is having on the people we work with and challenging Government to protect them. Sometimes you would get the impression that Government has no choice - that the imperative is to reduce public expenditure, comply with the demands of our international funders: the Troika. But it is critically important to recognise that Government has choices.

A recent example is the announcement that the government are looking at means-testing child benefit. This is a choice which could have a significant impact on children and families unless they are protected from the risk of poverty. Government is also making choices between the cuts they are making to public services and the amount of tax to raise. These are difficult choices for any government to have to make but the choices are clearly having a devastating impact on the thousands of people who are living in or at risk of poverty.

Something else is also happening. The last few years have challenged our understanding of the role of government.

It is now clear that government can't meet reasonable expectations to protect the most vulnerable and are unlikely to be in a position to do so for the foreseeable future. This is not an argument to let them off the hook.

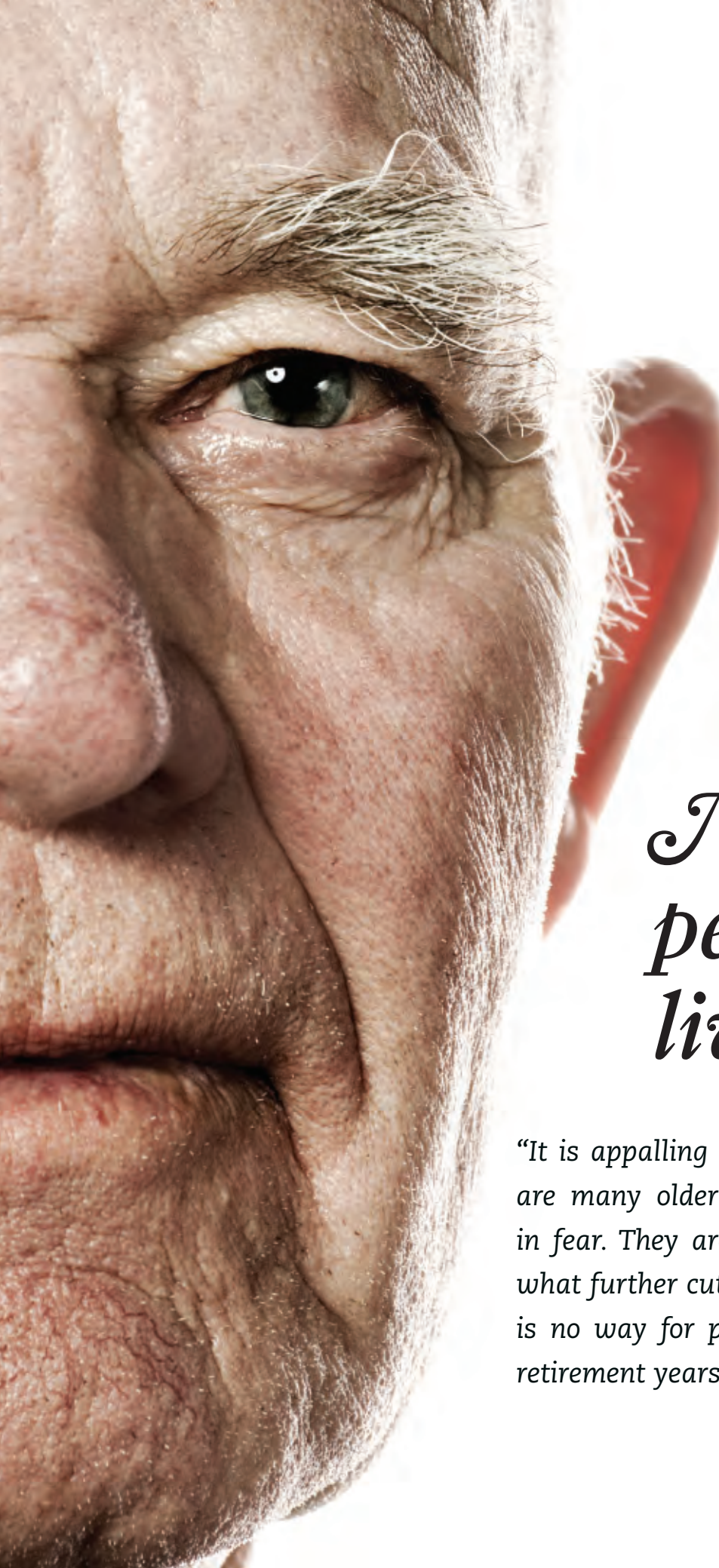


So what do we do?

We in the SVP will be doing two things. We will persist in our advocacy: telling the story of the impact that the Government's austerity programme is having on people's lives and challenging them to prioritise the interests of people in need. But also we will continue to play our part in providing and developing services to thousands of people throughout Ireland who need material support. The typical SVP volunteer is someone who sees the needs of people in their local community, is moved by what they see and the stories they hear, wants to respond and chooses to get involved in helping others.

Over the coming years we are likely to see a resurgence of voluntary activity, where communities respond to these needs.

The SVP will be playing our part.

A close-up, profile view of an elderly man's face, showing his eye, nose, and mouth. He has a serious, somewhat somber expression. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of his skin and the intensity of his gaze.

*Many older
people are
living in fear*

“It is appalling to have to say that in 2012 there are many older people in our community living in fear. They are worried on a daily basis about what further cuts are coming down the track. This is no way for people to spend their hard-earned retirement years.”

Paddy O'Brien from Cork is a well-known voluntary worker and campaigner on behalf of the elderly. He founded and developed the Over-60s Talent Competition which became a major annual social event for older people, to combat loneliness, a concept which has been emulated elsewhere. He spent many years directing the work of the Heart Foundation in the South and says the Government should be doing a lot more for senior citizens. He is aged 72.



Elderly people in Ireland are now finding it exceptionally difficult to exist on the basic old age pension. We should be very clear that any civilised society should strive for better than mere existence for its senior citizens.

There are almost 500,000 people over 66 years of age in Ireland — 75% of these do not have any private pension and so are trying to sustain themselves solely on the State pension. I have been involved with older people for about 55 years.

Right now in 2012, with all the advancements we can see around us, I am hearing regular stories from people in unprecedented hardship. I am hearing stories I can only describe as pathetic.

I am hearing from people who are quite literally living from day-to-day. I am not suggesting that life today for older people is not significantly better on a number of fronts than in previous years; there have been incredible advancements in technology and medicine and Irish people are now living longer.

It is because our older citizens are living longer that we need to ensure that resources are allocated fairly. It is now three years since our senior citizens were in receipt of an increase in the weekly pension. By arrangement with the IMF there will not be an increase until 2015. In addition, there has been no 'Christmas Bonus' for the past three years. This payment had become an integral part of many senior citizens' income and, when removed, represented an immediate cut of almost 8% when annualised. Another area in which older people have been hit is in the reduction of the Free Fuel Scheme, from 32 weeks down to 26. This difference of six weeks might not seem important to young and middle-aged people but medical practitioners have always stressed the importance of warmth for older people. We have had one of the worst summers on record which has forced many older people into heating their homes at a time of year when they should not need to. In parallel, the ESB 'free units' have also been reduced leading to significantly higher energy costs.

The concept of 'fuel poverty' is now a very harsh reality for a lot of older people in modern-day Ireland.

Government apologists will point to examples of well-to-do older people receiving assistance from the State. I am speaking about the ordinary older person in Ireland today. It seems, no matter where you look in terms of services for elderly people, there have been savage cuts.

The 'Home Help Scheme' has been reduced to the point where I would respectfully suggest it barely exists any more, with some house-bound older people receiving one single hour of support in the week.

Retirement is a time when people should be enjoying their lives, not living with the constant worry of what tomorrow will bring.

I have been speaking about the impact of loneliness on older people for over 50 years. The medical community now agree that loneliness impacts like any of the conventional diseases. I regularly see people who have, quite literally, been abandoned by their families. It is nothing short of heart-breaking. The additional hardships being imposed by the Government through these savage service cuts only adds to the pain.

The way in which many of our senior citizens are being forced to live makes a complete mockery of Enda Kenny's promises in the run-up to the last General Election. It seemed then that every time Enda was asked anything he trotted out the same few lines — "I firmly believe that by 2016, Ireland can become the best small country in which to grow old with dignity and respect."

If this wasn't so chillingly serious it would be laughable how far off-target this government is.

It also seems this is no country for carers, people with special needs, back-to-school children or any of the myriad other groups who are being targeted in order to solve a problem not of their making.

Ireland has become an increasingly polarised society. There are the 'haves and have nots' and, quite simply, under the status quo, the 'have nots' do not matter.

• This article is reprinted in digest form from an article in the Cork Evening Echo newspaper





**TREOIR - Informing unmarried parents
and those working with them**

The Challenges of Parenting Alone

Do you know that more than one-third of all births in Ireland today are to unmarried parents? Many parents are unaware that the legal situation of unmarried parents is different to that of married parents, with significant implications for the parents and children.

There has been a steady increase in the number of families that seek and receive assistance of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP). The largest group requesting assistance through contacting SVP regional offices are households with children, in particular those headed by a person parenting alone. One-parent families are the family type most likely to be poor and socially excluded in Ireland. Generally people contact the SVP when they have an immediate financial or material need but increasingly the needs that volunteers meet are more numerous and complex than that. For SVP volunteers, who provide an invaluable service to a wide variety of families, it is useful to know where they can access information on the legal rights of unmarried parents as the issues can be quite complex.

The main role of Treoir (the Irish word for direction or guidance) is in delivering a National Specialist Information Service for unmarried parents and those involved with them. Treoir provides information on a wide variety of topics including legal information (guardianship, access, custody, paternity testing, birth registration, passport applications etc.) and information on social welfare entitlements (One-Parent Family Payment, welfare-to-work, Rent Supplement etc.)

Information Myths

In Treoir's Information Service the most frequently asked questions are on the issue of guardianship. It is important that unmarried parents and those involved with them are aware of the significance of guardianship. It means having a say in the major decisions of a child's life, such as consent to medical treatment, choice of school and religion or whether the child can be taken out of the country. Many unmarried parents mistakenly believe that if the father's name is on the child's birth certificate, this gives him guardianship rights to his child.

In fact an unmarried father needs to take action to acquire guardianship rights. A father may get guardianship of his child by signing a statutory instrument form with the mother (S.I. No 5 of 1998) in the presence of a Peace Commissioner or Commissioner for Oaths. If the mother is not willing to sign the document, the father can apply to the local District Court to be appointed a guardian of his child. Over 90% of fathers who apply for guardianship get it.

Many unmarried couples living together do not realise that the father has no automatic guardianship rights to his child. It is only when the relationship breaks down that this comes to light. It can be difficult at that point for the father to acquire guardianship rights with the mother's consent and he will have to go through a court process to get these rights.

Requests for legal information, for example access, are often in reality queries about parenting in an unmarried family. Some parents share the parenting whether they are living together or not, mainly because they want to, but also because they recognise the importance of both parents in the lives of children. However, many parents are not clear about this – some fathers do not want to be involved with their children while some mothers do not want the fathers involved. In Treoir we strongly believe that both parents are very important to their children and we promote the ideal of parents being involved with their children as much as possible.

Treoir encourages fathers to pay maintenance for their children and also mothers to accept maintenance from fathers. Some mothers are reluctant to do this for fear of having to grant the father access to the children. This is another information myth as access and maintenance are separate, though related, issues. In an ideal world all children would be fully maintained by and in touch with both parents. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world.

In addition, Treoir National Specialist Information Service receives many questions in relation to passport applications. It is often assumed that where a father's name is on his child's birth certificate he must sign the application form for a passport for a child. However, it is only if the father is a guardian that his signature is required.

Unmarried Families and Poverty

Treoir has a role advocating for changes to improve the lives of unmarried parents. This policy is significantly influenced by what we hear from our clients. Treoir works with many groups with a view to improving the position of unmarried parents and we are part of the group which Caroline Fahey, of the SVP Social Justice Team, has brought together. This group works with lone parent families to discuss common issues and, when possible, to make joint responses to issues affecting lone parent families.

Treoir is extremely concerned that unmarried families will be pushed further into poverty by the measures contained in the Budget which was enacted during 2012. Firstly, the amount of money that a parent on One-parent Family Payment (OFP) can earn before the Payment is affected is gradually being reduced over the coming years to €60. This seems a ludicrously small amount to receive given the costs of going to work, including childcare. In 2012 the gradual reduction was commenced with the amount being reduced from €146.50 to €130.

Secondly, the decision to introduce an age limit of seven for the youngest child of a parent getting OFP was completely unexpected. While Treoir broadly supports the policy of encouraging and supporting parents to return to work/education, we have reservations based on the fact that there are insufficient supports in place e.g. affordable and suitable childcare, educational opportunities for lone parents to enable them to earn an adequate living, together with a serious lack of job opportunities. More significantly the preferred choice of many lone parents, to work part-time while their children are young, is effectively being denied to them, given that they will be ineligible for One-parent Family Payment and will have to move on to Jobseekers' Allowance when their youngest child is seven.

Treoir Services

Treoir provides a comprehensive, free and confidential information service to unmarried parents and those working with them. Treoir's

confidential phone service (LoCall 1890 252 084) is extremely popular, providing a unique opportunity for clients to receive up-to-date information on a one-to-one basis from highly experienced and empathetic information officers.

Treoir also produces a number of useful and free publications including the Information Pack for Unmarried Parents, Young Parents Survival Guide, Being There for Them (for grandparents) and a series of information leaflets on specialised topics such as maintenance, guardianship, access and custody, birth registration, shared parenting and cohabiting parents. All Treoir publications can be ordered through the LoCall number above or may be downloaded from www.treoir.ie, an informative website containing all relevant information for unmarried parents and those working with them. Legal information for unmarried parents is also available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Polish, Romanian and Russia.



Treoir circulates a regular E-mail Bulletin containing all the latest news on issues affecting unmarried parents to over 1,000 subscribers. Email info@treoir.ie if you would like to receive this regulation information bulletin.

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You can follow Treoir on Facebook and Twitter.



The Wheel is a support and representative body connecting community and voluntary organisations and charities across Ireland of which the SVP is a member. Established in 1999, The Wheel has evolved to become a resource centre and forum for the community and voluntary sector.

THE DIGITAL SWITCHOVER

Make Sure that Nobody is Left Behind on October 24th

Do you work with people who have limited mobility, are older, live in rural areas, are socially disadvantaged or who have small social circles? If so, you should be aware that they may be affected by the switchover from analogue to digital television on 24th October.

Anyone who is using an aerial to receive their television signal will have to take action before this date to continue receiving TV broadcasts. While most people will make the switch themselves, some people may need a helping hand from those who understand their needs. We encourage you to get involved by making sure that the people that use your services are informed of their options. A team of 26 Digital Outreach Champions have been deployed across the country to assist you in this effort.

The 'Champions' are responsible for implementing the Community Outreach Digital Switchover Programme, a national initiative coordinated by The Wheel, in conjunction with Irish Rural Link, with funding from the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

Your local Digital Outreach Champion will provide you with impartial information on the Digital Switchover, how it may affect the people you work with and what their options are.

Your 'Champion' can help you to build a 'digital switchover' dimension into your events from now to October.

You will find your local 'Champion's' contact details online at www.google.com/oaBfS or contact Dónall Geoghegan at donallg@wheel.ie. For more on the Community Outreach Digital Switchover Programme visit www.wheel.ie/digitalswitchover.

FROM THE WHEEL





Charity Expo – 2012

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CHARITIES AND BUSINESSES WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE FIRST IRISH CHARITIES EXPO HELD IN THE RDS, DUBLIN.

DEBORAH COSTELLO, SVP FUNDRAISING ADMINISTRATOR GIVES HER VIEW OF THE EVENT.

The Irish Charities Expo 2012 was a one-day, first- of-its-kind exhibition giving an opportunity for partnerships to be developed between charities and businesses.

The purpose was to have these groups and members of the public come together in the same venue. As well as looking at possible 'partnerships' there was an opportunity to encourage more volunteers to come forward. It was also a wonderful opportunity for the Society to showcase the many different activities that we offer to the public. This heightened public

awareness of the help the Society offers to all members of our community, through our work.

Over 5,000 company representatives were invited to attend the event. Many Corporate Social Responsibility Managers, who are part of the decision-making for choosing a charity partner where there.

It was disappointing, though we decided to take part, that the day did not attract as many visitors as hoped. However, it was still an excellent opportunity for the Society to network with

other charities and to promote our position within the charity sector. We received a lot of attention from Transition Year students, looking for ideas on how they could fundraise for us. It was great to see so many young people taking an interest in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

It also gave us the opportunity to meet many suppliers to the non-profit industry and as a result we negotiated lower rates for supplies of fundraising promotional material.

Overall, the experience was very positive for the Society. We received many wonderful and encouraging comments throughout the day and it seemed that everybody who visited our stand, either was involved with the SVP or knew someone who was. It was very rewarding to know how well respected the SVP is and the value that is placed on our work.



Newsletter of the SVP Social
Justice and Policy Committee
Autumn 2012

A Fixed Star

This edition of A Fixed Star marks the new term of office of the National Social Justice and Policy Committee. It also marks the end of an era as long-term former Chairperson and National Vice-President John Monaghan moves to pastures new with responsibility for the Society's special works. At National Council level Tom MacSweeney takes over responsibility for social justice, media and communications and Eileen Gernon stays on as the Chair of the National Social Justice and Policy Committee. We thank John (and his family) for his time, effort, and significant contribution in promoting social justice in Ireland. John's persistent efforts for social justice remind one of the Frederic Ozanam quote from which this newsletter takes its title:

"Justice is a fixed star" wrote our founder "which human societies try to follow from their uncertain orbits. It can be seen from different points of view, but justice itself remains unchanged".

SVP forecasts significant costs for energy assistance.

Since 2007 the SVP has seen a significant increase in expenditure on energy costs. An increasing aspect of SVP local Conference work involves not only the financial assistance required but also direct negotiation with energy companies. SVP members find themselves spending more and more time in liaison with companies and their customers. This local work on the ground is alarmingly evident in our financial accounts and has reached the extent to which the sustainability of SVP operating in this area to this extent has to be questioned.

SVP Expenditure on Energy 2007-2010

2007	€3,378,000
2008	€3,786,000
2009	€5,755,000
2010	€8,848,000

It is widely believed that we will see a similar increase in our 2011 accounts. The dramatic increase in expenditure relates not only to the increased cost of energy but also with the increased volume of people in need approaching our organisation. In the period 2009-2011 calls for assistance to SVP centres have increased by over 80% and the majority of the people calling us for help are reliant on social welfare payments. Energy costs were identified as the second most requested area of assistance after food.

SVP is actively lobbying the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) to keep tariff increases to a minimum based not only on the Society's experience of energy arrears but also on growing evidence of the number of households who are falling into arrears and are required to enter into payment plans to manage their debts. Nearly 400,000 such agreements were entered into in 2011. SVP is also promoting wider availability and marketing of pre-payment technology which promotes budgeting, deals

with arrears and is, for example, a commonly accepted payment option in households in Northern Ireland.

• See also page 44

National Economic and Social Council (NESC)

As a result of requests from the community and voluntary members of the National Economic and Social Council, the Council has agreed to pursue work on the social impact of the economic crisis facing Ireland. Four years into the crisis NESC will look at the impact on incomes, poverty rates, deprivation, unemployment, public services, community and society. NESC will also look at developing ways to identify and support those who are struggling to get by. The Council's preliminary work suggests that since 2009, those on the lowest incomes have seen their income fall by 26%, while those with the highest incomes have seen their income increase by 8%. Poverty, deprivation, financial stress and debt have all increased. However, while so much has changed in Ireland, at the same time much remains the same. SVP members will be aware that the population groups who have always had the highest risk of poverty have not changed. The long term unemployed, children, people who are ill or have disabilities and people who are parenting alone continue to have the greatest risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Community and voluntary organisations, employers, trade unions, farmers and environmental organisations are all represented on the National Economic and Social Council. The challenge for NESC will be to develop a shared analysis of the social crisis and agreement as to the measures that must be taken to address the crisis across this broad range of stakeholders.

The Scourge of Money Lending

The growing number of people turning to legal money lenders is of great concern to the SVP. It comes as quite a shock to see that 100,000 customers are with one firm alone and that the overall figure of customers has been estimated between 200,000 or even 300,000 customers. SVP met with the Central Bank to clarify these numbers but they were considered to be too business-sensitive to release. In our discussion with Central bank officials we expressed SVP members' frustration at the prevalence of such high-cost lending and brought some cases to light 'from the ground-up' in which Central Bank were most interested. The Bank have stressed the need for actual cases, if not testimony, of sharp practices which we could then bring to

the Financial Ombudsman. The Central Bank advised SVP on action if members become aware of money lending which may be breaking the code of conduct for money lending. More information available on request.

SVP Meeting with Dept. of Social Protection

After the SVP expressed concern in relation to the Society's spend on energy in comparison to that spent in Exceptional Needs Payments, the Department announced it would form a working group together on dealing with energy issues.

Rent Supplement, private rented housing and top-ups

We had a wide ranging discussion on the issue of rent supplement (RS) and the Department's continued desire for the rent supplement scheme to be replaced with a more sustainable scheme by the Dept. of the Environment. The Dept. wishes SVP to advocate the Rental Accommodation Scheme with both tenants and landlords and SVP noted that the Dept. has all the contacts of the landlords who could be persuaded to sign up to the scheme. The Dept. is aware of concerns about illegal top-ups but with 93,000 households on RS there is only 1 case on their books in relation to a top-up. 16 of our 28 respondents mentioned the issue but, as we are seeing elsewhere with our advocacy work, the Department requires actual cases.

Appeals Delays

Delays in social welfare appeals remain high with summary appeals taking 25 weeks and oral appeals 40 weeks. This puts pressure on both the Department and also SVP. 11 more appeals officers have been employed. It is the experience of the Dept. that often at appeals stage information is supplied by the customer which has not been produced earlier which leads to successful appeals. This is their explanation for the large number of successful appeals. SVP members should encourage people who have grounds for an appeal to make one with 21 days of written notice about a negative decision. More information in 'Facts are Friendly' booklet.

Habitual Residence Condition (HRC)

There was a brief discussion in relation to the HRC and SVP outlined our member's concerns in relation to the condition and the plight of those who are receiving negative decisions. In light of the lengthy appeals process and its

high success rate SVP Conferences are finding decision-making in these cases extremely difficult. The use of Exceptional or Urgent Needs payments by CWO's was given as an example of a payment which does not require HRC compliance.

SVP and Local CWO's

CWO's, now known as Dept. of Social Protection Officials, play an important role in the community and our relationship with them can be of great assistance to people in need. It is very helpful at local level for SVP members and either CWO's or Superintendent CWO's to maintain contact and occasionally meet to set out their understanding of each other's service. The Dept. has broken down the service into 13 regions and we are to receive information on this structure in due course.

Advertisement

SEAI Warmer Home Scheme

The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme, administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), funds energy efficiency improvements in the homes of the elderly and vulnerable, making their homes more comfortable, healthier and more cost effective to run. The measures installed (depending on current home construction) include attic insulation, wall insulation, lagging jacket, draught proofing and energy efficient light bulbs. Eligibility criteria for the scheme have recently been revised to ensure assistance is available to those in most need. SEAI believes that many households assisted by SVP may be eligible for scheme and would be grateful for the support of SVP in attracting new applications. More information is available within SVP from Brendan Hennessy 021-4943540 or brendan@svpcork.ie or by contacting SEAI directly on Freephone 1800 250204 or at www.seai.ie/warmerhomes.

do you know about the SVP



- That the first Secretary of the first youth Conference in Dublin was the then young Eamon de Valera, later President of Ireland? Dublin's first Youth Conference of the Holy Ghost was established in Blackrock College in 1900. It was not for secondary school students but for those preparing for university examinations, its first secretary was the young Eamon de Valera who later became President of the Conference from 1901 to 1904. During



Eamon de Valera

charge. The animals were sold on maturity and the proceeds were used for Conference funds. This was a novel scheme to raise money during the Second World War in the rural north County Dublin parish which, interestingly, claims through local legend that St. Patrick left his footprint on a rock on an island in the area and became annoyed with locals over the alleged theft of his goat! According to the story, when he was expelled from Wicklow by Pagan natives he sailed northwards and landed on a small

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Skerries

The Society then organised all its members in Dublin in dealing with the coal emergency and paid for 1,500 bags of coal it organised to be distributed free to those in great need. SVP members then visited the houses of the working people in their localities and distributed 8,000 vouchers that enabled families to buy a bag of coal for 3s.6d. Electricity and gas were unknown in the tenements of the time in Dublin. The Society also set up a 'coal fund' through which people could pay a few pence a week towards the cost of fuel for Christmas.

- In Skerries in the 1940s the local Conference bought young calves and arranged with local farmers to provide grazing for them without

island off Skerries, now known as St. Patrick's Island. "When the saint arrived on this island he had with him a goat, which was his companion and source of milk. From this island St. Patrick came to the mainland to convert the local people," says the legend. "While St. Patrick was ashore on one of these visits some people from Skerries went out to the island and stole his goat. They killed the goat, cooked it and feasted on it. When St. Patrick went to the island he

'Skerries Goats' was applied to local people for centuries because of this deed.

- St. Patrick's footprint is claimed to be on the rocks near the Springboards, the tidal bathing place on Red Island. There is supposed to be another impression of the saint's foot on the rocks at the rear of Colt Island, where he took his first giant stride on his way to the mainland.

In Tribute

To Deceased Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

PADDY KENNEDY

Leixlip

It was with deep sadness that we heard of the death of our esteemed member Paddy Kennedy who originally joined our Conference of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin in Leixlip in County Kildare in 1964. Paddy was a native of West Limerick. He served the people of our parish with dedication and care. Paddy was a person of prayer and strong faith. He is deeply missed. Paddy is survived by his wife, Catherine and family.

- Yvonne McGivern, Conference President.

SR. THERESA BREEN

Cork

Sr. Theresa was President of Our Lady of the Wayside Conference, Cork, a teacher at Scoil Aiserí Chríost, Farranree and Choirmaster at the Church of the Ascension, Gurranabraher, all on the northside of Cork City. She was a truly wonderful inspiration to all who knew her; her Conference brethren, her religious order; her pupils, her choir members and the many wonderful friends she made within the Traveller community. She reached out to all people on life's wayside, working in solidarity with Traveller women, particularly the mothers she got to know in the Society's Traveller Education Project. She lived on a halting site on a sabbatical twenty years ago in order to experience the everyday lives of the travelling people. Her presence in the Conference and Choir is sorely missed.

- Patricia Twomey

AMBROSE HODGINS

Dublin

Ambrose Hodgins was a member of the SVP since the 1950s. Having book-keeping experience in a Dublin stockbroking firm, he was a natural choice as Treasurer for many years of the Conference of Paschal Baylon, visiting patients in St. James's Hospital, Dublin, where he remembered the Chaplain being driven in a horse-drawn carriage. The annual reports of the Conference were prepared with utter accuracy. His inner calm and peace pervaded those with whom he came in contact. His view of others was always of the most charitable. His life was a shining example to all who had the pleasure of meeting him. May he Rest in Peace.

JIM FLYNN

Ballyshannon

Ballyshannon lost an inspirational community leader with the passing of Jim Flynn of Lisahully in his 87th year. He was a member of St. Columba's SVP Conference for more than 30 years and had held most offices in the Conference. His opinion was always valued for his considerate, compassionate viewpoint and his business experience gave him a great insight into dealing with the public and especially the less well-off. To his wife Mary, sons and daughters, a wide family circle, relatives and very many friends, deepest sympathy is expressed.

MOLLIE HYLAND

Nenagh

Mollie Hyland from Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, had a long association with Twinning in the SVP and worked tirelessly to help develop the Society in her Region's Twinned African country Sierra Leone. In her role of Regional Twinning Officer she travelled to Sierra Leone and set up a project that would address the humanitarian needs there. The Paupers Alive Survival Support project was and still is a major legacy that Mollie leaves behind. The project is now a drop-in centre for recreational and basic skills development and is also the SVP National Headquarters in Sierra Leone. Mollie was the mother figure of our National Twinning group and never missed a meeting at National Office. Mollie will be sorely missed.

- SVP National Twinning Group

PAT BOURKE

Tipperary

The sudden death of Pat Bourke, a long-time member of St. Kevin's Conference (Littleton/Moycarkey/Two-Mile-Borris) Ormond Region was a great shock to all who knew him. Pat had given 40 years' service to the Conference of which he had been a founder member and Treasurer for many years. He raised funds for the Conference by organising car parking in Thurles on big match days and secured supplies of vegetables free-of-charge for distribution to those in most need at Christmastime. He was a gentle and reassuring presence for the SVP and is greatly missed. To his wife Mary, daughter Mairead and sons Michael and Henry heartfelt sympathy goes.





Author and SVP
Member Paddy Ryan

A renowned Preacher and Orator



Patrick John Ryan (1831-1911), Archbishop of Philadelphia, had a lifelong association with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He became a member of the Society as a sixteen-year-old student in Dublin in 1847. This Conference was one of the first to be established in Ireland. The first SVP Conference in America was established in St. Louis in 1845, seven years before Patrick arrived there. As SVP local director, he developed the formation of a unit in every parish in the city. By 1860, St. Louis had thirteen Conferences.

In the Spring edition of The SVP Bulletin Paddy Ryan wrote about another Patrick Ryan, Archbishop Patrick John Ryan, who made a major contribution to the Catholic Church in America, having encountered religious discrimination and the Penal Law mentality and as a teenager seeing the horrors of the Great Famine. He became a widely-respected leader across religious divides. In response to readers who requested a follow-up article, he adds more detail to the story of the Archbishop who was involved in the social conditions of the time at both sides of the Atlantic. The story of his life provides an insight to social conditions on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th century and how a Tipperary emigrant, who developed a priestly vocation to the United States in the aftermath of the Famine, was involved in the growth of the Catholic Church in America.

"My grandfather, Hugh Ryan, West Gate, Thurles, was a cousin and a contemporary of Archbishop Ryan," writes Paddy. "When I researched the life of the archbishop for our family tree I was surprised that his biography had not been written. I decided to remedy that situation because I felt that he deserved to be remembered and acknowledged for the contribution he had made to the Catholic Church and the wider society in America.

Patrick Ryan earned a reputation across America and beyond as one of the best orators of his time which enabled him to attract large numbers to his public lectures to raise funds for charitable causes, including the SVP.

From a very early age, Patrick John Ryan recognised the power to influence that a good orator possessed and sought to develop and perfect his talents in this discipline. When he was a boarder in Mr. Naughton's classical school in South Richmond Street in Dublin, a visitor was alarmed to see him talking to the walls and waving his arms about in a most excitable manner. Years later the visitor realised he had been practising the combination of words and gestures.

In 1844, when he was thirteen years old, his fellow students selected him to compose and deliver an address to Daniel O'Connell who was imprisoned in the Richmond Bridewell, a short distance from the school. He had been gaoled following the abandonment of a 'monster meeting' in Clontarf which had been prescribed by the authorities. Later, O'Connell was scheduled to address a gathering at a ticket-only event. When Patrick, who did not have a ticket, was refused admission, he demanded to meet

the speaker. When this was granted, O'Connell immediately recognised him as the little red-haired boy who greeted him so splendidly and insisted that he be given one of the best seats.

In his time in St. Patrick's Seminary in Carlow, Patrick was chosen to speak at important college events and his contributions to the public press under assumed names were also noted.

He arrived in St. Louis, USA, in 1852 as a deacon, considered too young, aged only twenty-one, to be ordained a priest. Despite this, he was invited by his Archbishop, Peter Richard Kenrick, a Dublin man, to preach in the cathedral on alternate Sundays and on major Church festivals. News of his burgeoning fame as a preacher had reached St. Louis before him and the leading citizens and visitors, of all religious denominations, flocked to hear his sermons.

Later in his life, as Coadjutor Bishop of St. Louis and Archbishop of Philadelphia he was in great demand to preach at a dedication, centenary, consecration, jubilee or funeral. One such example was his sermon at the dedication of St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue in New York on May 25, 1879. He also spoke at public events including an address to the State of Missouri Senate Chamber; the State Legislature of Illinois and the Republican National Convention, held in Philadelphia in June 1900. His drawing power was such that the Metropolitan Opera House in New York was the chosen venue for a fundraiser for destitute coloured children under the auspices of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Given the degree of bigotry and discrimination against Catholics, his speeches and sermons focused on 'to be a good Catholic was to be a good citizen' and on appeals for Christian unity. In this latter respect he was much ahead of his time.

He was equally adept at the after-dinner speech and on all occasions used humour to great effect and had no difficulty in making the well-prepared quip sound spontaneous. His contemporary Cardinal Gibbons said of him that "his sweet powerful words have enlightened the intellect,

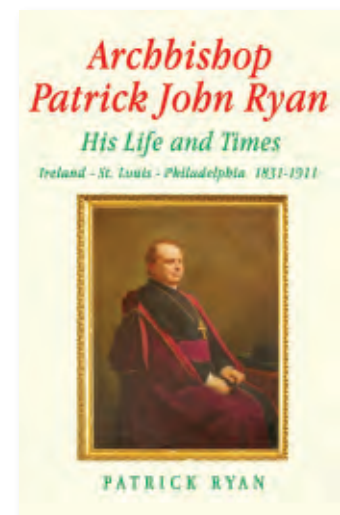


1902 Liberty Square, Thurles.
Arrow indicates Archbishop Ryan's birthplace

warmed the heart, aroused the enthusiasm and delighted the fancy of hundreds of thousands of hearers in the United States."

He was a very efficient administrator; successfully reached across the religious divide, supported minorities, especially Native Americans and African Americans, but it was as a preacher and public speaker that he will be best remembered.

- Paddy Ryan is a member of the Sallynoggin Conference of SVP and the author of the biography of Archbishop Patrick John Ryan. More information at www.thurlesbooks.com





High Mass in Sunday's Well c.1960

History and Heritage

The Vincentian Fathers in Sunday's Well

In 1856, through the vision and drive of Fr. Michael O'Sullivan, a native of Bantry in West Cork, the Vincentian Church of Sunday's Well was opened on the northside of Cork City. Since then it has been central to the lives of those who lived in an area which covered the exclusive location of Sunday's Well, but where the priests who formed the clergy

also ministered to people from the older and more deprived parts of the northside. It has been a proud distinction of the church that it brought together communities from places like Sunday's Well and Blarney Street, part of the heart of old Cork in a community of worship and mutual help.s.

Two of the parishioners, husband-and-wife Antóin and Sandra O'Callaghan, have written the story of the history and heritage of St.Vincent's Church Sunday's Well.

"St.Vincent's is a legacy that has been passed down through many generations. It is a repository of history and tradition," they said. "It is not just a building, but part of the community which still continues to have a vibrant place in the lives of the people who live around the church."

Early in the 17th century, they recall, a number of Irishmen became followers of Vincent de Paul and a mission was undertaken from the mother house in Paris to the poor and destitute that lived under Penal Laws in Ireland. Between 1639 and 1646, fourteen Irishmen, some ordained priests, others youths seeking education and ordination abroad, joined the Vincentians.

The first Irish Vincentian, the book recalls, was John Skyddie of Cork who went to Saint Lazare, the mother house in Paris in 1638 and was ordained two years later. Before he could lead an Irish mission he died and it was not until late 1646 that nine men left France for Ireland – five Irish, three French and one Jersey Islander. The Irishmen were Gerard Brin of Cashel, Edmund Barry of Cloyne in County Cork, George White of Limerick, Dermot Duggan of Emly and student Dermot O'Brien also of Emly. They settled near Cashel from where they began a ministry throughout Munster.

"These were turbulent times. In 1647 the Protestant Lord Inchiquin, or Murrough O'Brien, decimated the south of Ireland, killing any Catholic clergy he encountered. Within a short time of their arrival in Ireland, the Vincentians were forced to flee before the persecutions. Five returned to France, Fr. Brin was left in charge of the remaining four in Ireland. A year later two more returned to France due to ill-health while the remaining Vincentians continue with their missionary work in the Limerick area. Fr. Brin returned to France in 1652 and asked Vincent if he could publish an account of the mission to Ireland, but Vincent refused permission, saying that what they had done was "known to God."

Vincent de Paul died in 1660 and three years later Fr. Brin returned to Ireland with a Fr. Waters, but nothing more was heard of the Vincentian mission after 1664, the book says and goes on to record the future evolution of the order after the Penal Laws were relaxed.

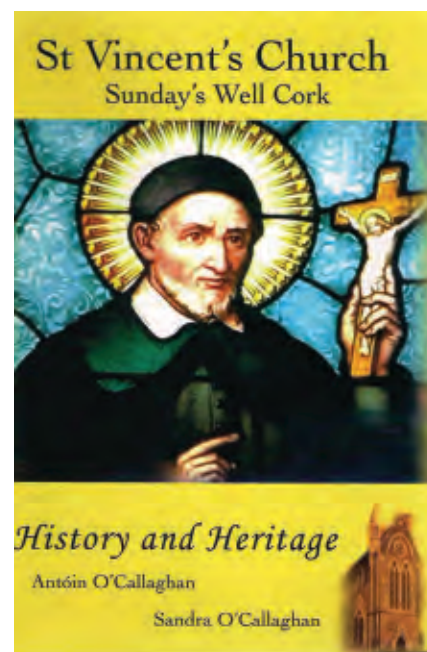
It charts the history of the Church and the Vincentians a beautifully-produced book which

records the involvement of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul and the close relationship with the Vincentians as part of the Vincentian family up to today.

And what does the future hold?

The authors say: "At the time of writing, where once there were twenty or more priests serving, just two remain – Jack Harris and Aidan McGing. The Confraternities are no more; neither does the Children of Mary meet. Other changes however, are laying foundations for a different type of Church in the future. Increased lay involvement in a variety of pastoral activities has been embraced by the community. St.Vincent's is seen as a model to which other churches could well look for inspiration."

• More information from Sandra O'Callaghan, Digital Art & Design Email: info@sandraocallaghan.com or www.sandraocallaghan.com



Fr. Michael O'Sullivan

Life is all about engaging interest

