

THE

AUTUMN 2013



BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL



MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

AUSTERITY ABUSES PEOPLE

Support SVP campaign to
**MAKE
#YOUR
VOICE
HEARD**
end austerity in Budget 2014

FACTS AND FICTION

ABOUT SOCIAL WELFARE

NORTHERN IRELAND

*TROUBLED TIMES FOR
VOLUNTARY WORK*

PLUS

DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT

CARING FOR PRISONERS

100 REVOLUTIONARY BOOKS

IRISH WATER MUST NOT BE PRIVATISED

THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

€2.95

CHALLENGING DEMOCRACY

The Government has a duty to provide hope to its people, even in the worst of times. It has already begun planning to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising of 1916 when the core of what was then proclaimed as the future for Ireland pledged equality for all citizens. That is not the reality of today where hope has been removed from many citizens by Government action - disabled people have suffered withdrawal of services and cuts in grants, the health service is not fit for purpose, it is becoming horrendously expensive for families to educate their children, to meet daily living costs, people may lose their homes to banks which caused the problems from which this nation suffers.

Where then stand the ideals of the Republic of Ireland in which we live?

This has been highlighted by the National President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul by raising the question – How Stands the Republic on Justice and Equality? – which you can read on pages 4 and 5 of this edition of The SVP Bulletin. There is a common thread which links those who advocate more austerity – they are all well-off, in influential positions and have insufficient concern for those suffering from the policies of austerity. They are unlikely to have to seek help from charities to buy food, to pay energy, utility, mortgage and other bills. They do not live in the reality of suffering about which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul knows more than any other organisation in this country.

The SVP has called for a national debate on social justice in the Ireland of the future which should be at the centre of a nation caring for all of its people. There are no easy answers but it is time for the Government, politicians, employers, trade unions, NGOs, charities, other social partners and individual citizens to respond to the SVP call.

In this edition the Vincentian Partnership, which consists of the Society of St. Vincent De Paul, the Vincentian Congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters

of the Holy Faith, exposes the myths used by those who advocate austerity to reduce social welfare payments. 'The Facts And Fiction Of Living In Poverty' are much different to what is said by the austerity advocates. The difficulties of working across the religious divide in Northern Ireland for a charitable organisation are outlined by SVP Northern Regional President Aidan Crawford. There are articles about growing old in Rural Ireland, the costs of sending children to school – parents should not be considered to be cash registers for supports which the State has withdrawn says the SVP's Social Justice and Policy Officer, Audry Deane, who has led the debate on education costs; the SVP prison support service is outlined, the organisation's plans for youth development and how the SVP once ran a bank to help those in need and there is much more.

This edition particularly highlights the SVP campaign for an end to austerity, the cause of so much suffering and for this we urge you to support us and MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.

Tom MacSweeney,
Editor.

THE NEXT EDITION OF THE SVP BULLETIN WILL BE PUBLISHED IN EARLY DECEMBER – THE WINTER EDITION. THE BULLETIN IS ON SALE TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH EASON'S OUTLETS NATIONWIDE.



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

THE IRISH SVP OZANAM BULLETIN

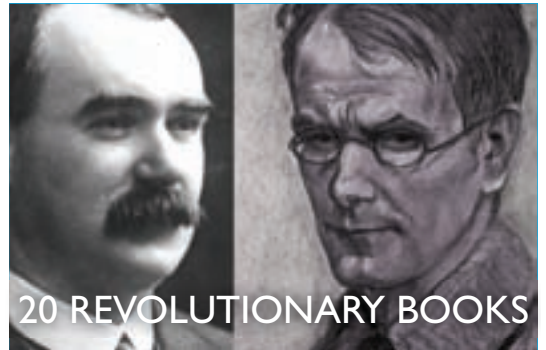
AUTUMN 2013
Published Quarterly

BULLETIN EDITORIAL ADDRESS

SVP National Office, SVP House,
91-92 Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1
Phone: 01 8386990,
Editorial Email: editorsvpbulletin@gmail.com



14 ACCEPTING PRISONERS



20 REVOLUTIONARY BOOKS



35 OZANAM POSTCARDS



36 BELFAST DIFFERENCE

EDITOR:
TOM MacSWEENEY

EDITORIAL ADVISORS:
KIERAN MURPHY
JOHNMARK MCCAFFERTY
JIM WALSH

COVER PHOTO:
SVP CAMPAIGN AGAINST
AUSTERITY BY SHANE O'NEILL,
FENNELL PHOTOGRAPHY

DESIGN: PICA DESIGN, CORK
PRINTED BY: W&G BAIRD LTD
GREYSTONE PRESS, ANTRIM

CIRCULATION: 12,000

ADVERTISING RATES ON
REQUEST TO THE EDITOR

RELEVANT ARTICLES ARE
WELCOME. SEND TO THE EDITOR.



www.facebook.com/SVPireland



www.twitter.com/SVP_Ireland

Contents

- 4 HOW STANDS THE REPUBLIC?
SVP National President
- 6 MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD
End Austerity
- 9 SCHOOL COSTS TOO MUCH
Minister must act
- 10 SOCIAL WELFARE
Fiction and fact
- 12 TRUST & TRUTH
Social advocacy
- 14 ACCEPTING PRISONERS
SVP Centres
- 16 GROWING OLD IN RURAL IRELAND
Can be harsh
- 18 IRISH WATER
Must not be privatised
- 19 MORE JOBS
But not at any price
- 20 BOOKS WHICH INSPIRED REVOLUTION
100 titles
- 23 ASPECTS
Of social concern
- 24 PROFITS OR THE COMMON GOOD
Vincentine challenge
- 30 IRISH PEOPLE MUST TAKE ACTION
No change unless they do
- 32 DARK DAYS
Working across the religious divide in Northern Ireland
- 33 THE SVP BANKS
Saving pennies
- 34 BULLETIN INTERVIEW
National youth development
- 35 POSTCARDS FROM OZANAM
A Wexford scheme
- 36 MOUNTAINVIEW
A different Northern Ireland
- 40 ARE PEOPLE REALLY HUNGRY?
The SVP facts
- 41 SVP NATIONWIDE
News from around the country
- 50 A FIXED STAR
Social Justice news
- 51 THE LAST WORD
Letters to The Editor

A REPUBLIC OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY – HOW STANDS THE REPUBLIC?

National President Geoff Meagher spoke on this topic to the MacGill Summer School in Glenties, Co.Donegal.

Our lives are being controlled and managed by an increasingly smaller number of people. That cannot be good for democracy.

It is sobering to recall the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam first spoken in 1842 when he said:

'I am asking the volunteers of the SVP to look after people who have too many needs and not enough rights, people who demand with reason a fuller share in public affairs, security in work and safeguards against poverty.'

Sadly those words are as relevant today in the Ireland of 2013 as they were back in 1842 - so everything changes – and yet nothing changes. So finally as we approach 2016 what are the lessons to be learned and what do we need to do?

I believe that during the Celtic Tiger years we lost a sense of our deeper values and that sense of looking after each other. The pursuit of wealth, the second house, the overseas apartment became our values. We hear regular comments that we will get back to where we were, but there are many aspects of where we were that are best forgotten. At the SVP we are aware of the great sense of generosity from the Irish people. I think that, deep down, people know that they have lost something and want to look after people. Hopefully we will recapture and retain that sense of values for the future.

Government Failure

There is the failure of Governments to provide the leadership and management of the economy that is required. Our political system needs an overhaul. The expectations of the public and the various pressure groups mean that politicians can easily be persuaded to make promises that they really know they cannot deliver. We then end up in the blame game. It is time we looked at a system of elected representatives to manage local Councils and we need only four or five of them. Separately we elect a much smaller number of politicians to manage the affairs of the country, they can make decisions based on the reality of the overall economic situation and not be influenced by local short-term issues. If we do not change there is no doubt we will repeat the same mistakes and it is the citizens again that will carry the burden.

The Eurozone needs to be more radically integrated or disbanded

In the past every country had to manage its own affairs. If they made a mess of it they had to resort to interest rate changes or devaluations to get them sorted, those are no longer available. Individual countries now have a raft of excuses when something goes wrong – it's Europe, it's the ECB, its other countries needing a bailout, and the list goes on. This cannot continue, Governments in individual countries must manage their affairs, not get elected on spurious promises and blame everyone else when it all goes wrong. The tragic part of this is that it is the poor and vulnerable that will always suffer the most when the

problems arise. Europe is lurching from one crisis to another. It is only a matter of time when one crisis suffers too many hits and is too big for another temporary solution. So let's get it right or accept that it is not working and act accordingly.

Stop Forced Emigration

We continue to export our youngest and best talent in the country. We must find ways to stop this; it will be a shame on all of us if in 2016 our young people are still forced to emigrate. We need more radical approaches to job creation and stimulating growth. Government has to do more to create the environment for job creation. Calculated risks will need to be taken, it is better to take those risks than continue with mass emigration and unemployment.

The thousands of families the SVP helps cannot take anymore

These families now include people in low-paid employment, the self-employed, people in good employment with debts that they cannot handle, the profile of those seeking SVP assistance has radically changed. More charges or tax increases simply will drive more and more people to poverty, again not something that we want to see as we approach 2016. Let's stop austerity at this point for these people, give them a fighting chance and their dignity. I accept the national finances have to be balanced, but look at other options, stimulate growth, get rid of the mountain of debt which has been unjustly landed at the door of ordinary people.

Respond to the SVP call for a national debate on social justice

In February of this year the Society of St. Vincent de Paul called for a national debate on social justice:

"Social Justice must be at the centre of a nation which cares for all of its people equally. That has been largely ignored while political and economic issues have been concentrated on. Now is the time to discuss what matters most to a nation - its people and the situation in which they live, work or, in too many cases, try to exist without work. It is generally accepted we lost something as a nation during the Celtic Tiger years. Now is the time to discuss the changes needed and to prepare for when, hopefully, the nation begins to emerge from this difficult period. There are no easy answers, but that is no reason not to commence the debate. We must learn the lessons from the economic disaster caused by an unequal society."

Everyone should be involved in this debate – Government, politicians, employers, trade unions, NGOs, charities other social partners and individual citizens. A by-product of the economic downturn we have suffered is that our lives are being controlled and managed by an increasingly smaller number of people. That cannot be good for democracy.

As we approach 2016 what better way to celebrate our 100 years as an independent nation than to commence that debate now?



Geoff Meagher, **National President SVP Ireland.**

NORTH-EAST REGIONAL PRESIDENT DIES IN FARM ACCIDENT

Report: Bill Lawlor



Widespread shock and grief has been occasioned by the tragic death of Michael O'Keeffe, Creevagh, Crossakiel, Kells, Co. Meath, one of the best-known figures nationally and locally in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He died in an accident on his farm at Creevagh on August 9.

Michael was a member of the SVP National Management Council and was about to conclude a five-year term as President of the SVP's North-East Regional Council (Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan). He was a member of the SVP's Kilskyre Conference which he had joined at an early stage in his life and was a former President of the Society's Meath West Area Council. A farmer, he made an immense contribution towards assisting the needy in the community through the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He will be particularly remembered for his drive and initiative in encouraging the establishment of new SVP "Vincent's" shops throughout the North-East. A total of 25 such outlets now exist in the Region.

The expansion and development of a clothing re-cycling project, involving the placing of SVP bins in 215 locations throughout Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan, is another indication of how the late Mr. O'Keeffe harnessed commercial expertise for the benefit of the Society. In a report earlier this year he had reckoned that the combined income from the shops and re-cycling scheme would yield €1.4m. for people in need in the North-East. Another hallmark of his stewardship was a successful campaign to boost SVP membership growth. There are currently 90 Conferences spread throughout the four counties, up to 20 of which have been formed since 2008.

He saw Visitation as the single most important activity for SVP members, believing that it defined what the Society is all about. He was also Chairman of the SVP committee dealing with staff and employment recruitment.

A devoted husband and father; he is survived by his widow Ann-Marie; son, James; daughters, Karen and Ruth and sister Mary, to all of whom the deepest sympathy of the SVP is extended in their bereavement.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

The voices most often heard on national radio and the faces most often seen on national television urging more austerity and more suffering for the hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been decimated by greedy bankers, speculators, property developers and incompetent politicians, are those of the well-off, well-positioned and influential-wielding whose common factor is lack of concern for the most vulnerable caused by the policies which they recommend.

The national media gives little comparable coverage to those who are struggling to survive as a result of the economic collapse caused by the rich and wealthy. So the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is providing an opportunity for the public to express their views about the suffering of those who are not well-off, are not influential and have suffered from the uncontrolled greed of others and from Government failure to consider adequately their plight.

Government policies have failed to address the issue of punishment for those who caused the economic collapse, while continuing to impose nasty, sneaky changes to entitlements and delays in processing claims for assistance to which they are entitled for struggling families.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul launched a national campaign to end austerity Budgets and give people hope for the future.

"The people we assist and those who are struggling throughout Ireland have suffered enough. All people in Ireland deserve a living income in and out of work but the level of austerity imposed over the last six budgets has made this aspiration impossible for thousands of individuals and families," said SVP National President, Geoff Meagher. "We acknowledge that our public finances must be placed on a sustainable path. But we believe that Government can choose to close the gap between Ireland's revenue and expenditure while protecting vulnerable people and the services they rely on.

Mr. Meagher said that the Government should "seriously examine the alternative options available in the areas of stimulating growth, improving efficiencies and generating revenue from corporations and individuals with higher incomes and assets that can afford to make a greater contribution to Ireland's recovery. It is the responsibility of the Government to lead and make choices which will tackle Ireland's budget deficit in a fair and equitable way.

"But to date there appears to be a single-minded approach that austerity is the solution. Clearly that approach is not working for thousands of people in Ireland. Our key message for Budget 2014 is that further cuts to the budgets of Government departments which impact negatively on the services needed by individuals, families and communities in Ireland are unacceptable.

"Stimulating growth through employment creation is essential for our economic recovery. As a people we also need hope and a continuous adherence



to austerity measures does nothing to offer hope; to the unemployed, the families struggling to make ends meet or the young people who believe that their only opportunity to earn a decent living is to emigrate.

"The Troika consistently tell us that the size of the cuts and tax changes are the choice of the Irish Government, as long as the overall adjustments agreed with the Troika are made. So austerity measures which reduce social protection spending and axe services are the Government's choices," said Mr Meagher.

SNEAKY CHANGES

In addition to the cuts in benefits and services there have been sneaky changes to entitlements and delays in processing claims for educational, health and social welfare supports, Mr. Meagher said and these have added to the burden of people struggling on low incomes.

"Delays in processing Family Income Supplement, Student Grants, Invalidity Pensions and the Carers' Allowance and lengthy waiting times for appeals are unacceptable. But there are more insidious changes taking place that are also unfair on the most vulnerable, the disabled, carers and low income families.

"Increases in student charges and cuts to school capitation grants, exceptional needs payments and the fuel allowance, all happened outside the glare of publicity. Changes to the One-Parent Family Payment and Jobseekers' Benefit, the PRSI Allowance and the household benefits package deepened the struggles of low income households. Each change may only affect a relatively small number of people. But they are often the most vulnerable and the cumulative impact adds to their worry.

"More and more SVP members visiting homes throughout the country are finding themselves spending as much time providing comfort and reassurance to families as they do providing tangible support." he said.

ONETRACK MIND OF CENTRAL BANK

Responding to the Central Bank admonishing the Government to continue austerity, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul said this demonstrated "a one-track mind-set" and would cause "even further hardship for thousands of Irish people".

"The people we assist and those who are struggling throughout Ireland have suffered enough," the charity said in a statement. "All people in Ireland deserve a living income in and out of work but the level of austerity imposed over the last six budgets has made this aspiration impossible for thousands of individuals and families.

A FATE WORSE THAN DEBT?

*By John-Mark McCafferty,
Head of Social Justice, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul*

"Austerity isn't working."

Don't take my word for it; according to the State's own Central Statistics Office Ireland's economic growth is back in negative figures. And one of Ireland's Troika partners, the IMF, has admitted that they failed to realise the damage austerity would do in the case of Greece. Yet the deficit facing Government coffers is still huge - €12 billion is one estimate.

Finance Minister Micheal Noonan has stated his intention to cut – and that means income supports, public services and more hardship. Austerity is set to deepen at a time when many household budgets are at breaking point and many struggle with debt – unless we say clearly to him and other politicians that we need an end to austerity in Budget 2014 – and that's where your voice comes in.

It's not just Ireland that is in debt. Our SVP members tell us that as austerity deepens, the use of licenced moneylenders in their communities is growing, and this is a worrying development. The poorest pay more for these loans than those of us who can access credit union loans or similar. The interest rates associated with moneylenders are high and what appears as easy money up front turns into a significant financial burden in the longer term.

It now emerges that One for All vouchers, an arm of An Post – a trusted service to the community – has an agreement with Provident moneylenders. People who buy these vouchers from Provident pay high rates of interest for a product they cannot use in all shops or services. We're concerned that agents will push the vouchers instead of cash, limiting choice to the customer who then may sell on the voucher to a third party for much less than the face value. The Provident customer will be left to repay the full face value of the voucher plus interest.

At a time of real financial pressure for many, we do not believe An Post should be involved in such an unsavoury arrangement with a moneylender.





HOLIDAY CENTRES

Offering you a warm welcome and life-long friendships

The Towers Holiday Centre, Sandhill Road, Ballybunion, Co. Kerry.
T: 068-27371 or 087-7983688 Email: towersballyb@gmail.com

Bundoran Holiday Centre, Main Street, Bundoran, Co. Donegal.
T: 087 2434528 Email: bhcsvp@yahoo.com

Carne Holiday and Training Centre, Carne, Co. Wexford.
Emily at 087 2222418 or Suzanne at 087 8336792
Email: carneholidaycentre@yahoo.ie

Clare Lodge, Newcastle, Co. Down.
T: 028-43723127 (0044 if dialing from outside Northern Ireland)
Email: clarelodge12@gmail.com

Kerdiffstown House, Naas, Co. Kildare
T: 045-866337 Email: kerdiffsholcen@svpdublin.ie

Ozanam Holiday Centre, Ozanam Holiday Centre, Mornington, Co. Meath.
T: 041-9827808 or 086-3285736 Email: ozanamhome@eircom.net



IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE – SCHOOL COSTS TOO MUCH.

By Audry Deane - SVP Social Justice and Policy Officer

This is the simple message the SVP Social Justice team has been trying to get across to those in a position to do something about it. Our most recent target was the Joint Oireachtas Committee which has just placed a report on the 'Costs of School' in the Minister for Education's in-tray. To be fair, the Minister for Education himself has been receptive and enthusiastic about our campaigning. But how many mandarins in a Government Department does it take to work out that we have the solutions to the various problems which cause hardship to parents - more on that in a moment - what we need now is action and accountability.

We need to stop seeing schools as autonomous unaccountable self regulating units where we deposit our children at both ends of the school day.

We need to stop seeing parents as cash registers to be hit whenever a new injection of cash, for whatever justifiable and genuine need, is required.

We need to start realising that schools are in receipt of a large chunk of tax payers' money. We want to be confident that they are doing all they can to be as cost conscious as possible and keep the many costs of education down. For example, the costs of crested uniforms, unnecessary school book changes, the emergence of digital aids which in some instances has fuelled a rush to high end tablets, school trips, voluntary contributions, curricular activities, the list goes on.

While SVP welcomes the recent Joint Oireachtas report on the costs of education we are impatient to get real results on the ground and see a reduction in the parental stress when faced with yet another note home in the schoolbag. So back to solutions but first some questions.

Why do we continue to have no set books? this leaves a vacuum to be filled by publishers competing in a profit -driven sector, which leaves the field open for survival of the fittest with parents at the bottom of an expensive pile of discarded, un reusable school books. SVP ran a successful online petition on stopping frequent school book edition changes which rang a chord with the public, over 10,000 of you thought we were talking sense. Where has this

got us? A set of guidelines for schools and parents (SVP insisted on a guide for parents too) but no compulsion, so sanctioning of sharp publisher practice, just an unenforceable commitment from publishers to limit edition changes. SVP is still getting calls from angry frustrated parents paying out hundreds of euro for children at different stages in the education cycle while they consign out-of-date books to the green bin even though there have been few changes to the school curriculum bar Project Maths and the changes to Junior Cert which will begin shortly.....

How can it be that schools are not obliged to ensure that they take practical steps to keep the cost of school uniforms at a minimum? SVP worked with Barnardos, National Parents' Council and all the education management and representative bodies to ensure that a short list of options on making uniforms more affordable got to all Boards of Management to help them make the right choices. Are we confident that this will lead to a dramatic drop in uniform costs? hmmm not as long as patronage bodies and school Board of Managements continue to have the degree of discretion they currently have.

And oh yes the digital divide.....how come VAT at 23% is charged on ebooks? How come companies can access schools to get access to an impressionable target group (it's a bit like banking you are inclined to stay with a bank out of inertia if nothing else) and ply either their tablets and software at people who may not have the insider knowledge to decide on what is good quality and value? Why is this not regulated? Why is there not a Task Force of experts overseeing how digital learning is developed and delivered to our students? SVP has deep concerns that even now a digital divide is developing with better off pupils accessing the latest technology while many families struggle to afford these overpriced and as yet unresearched new tools of learning. We expect nothing less than a strong lead from this Minister to ensure that equity and value for money are the drivers in this new area.

SVP has engaged fully with the political system and has had its voice heard. Now it is time for solutions. While we welcome the fact that the recent report to the Minister mentions many of our recommendations we are disappointed that the critical issue of accountability in schools has been left vague. We all need to know who is responsible for policy at individual school level. While the Board of Managements are often tasked with decision-making, in reality it is the Patronage Bodies which set the agenda. We go further and say that the Minister for Education is the ultimate leader and must achieve the changes outlined in this report. We know that parents want to be partners in their children's education and to do that there must be a different dynamic between all the actors.

Austerity has cut deep into the lives of many families and short-term solutions will only damage the next generation. Education can play a pivotal part in our recovery. An accountable and effective system which obliges schools to show that they are doing their best to keep costs down is just one weapon in a much-needed armoury which can help Ireland exit this crisis without inflicting unnecessary damage to families who cannot afford the education costs currently demanded of them.

Maybe it's time to ask the hard questions and this Minister has not shied away, so far, from some prickly issues, so let's answer the question who is really in charge of our schools?

• This article by Audry Deane was also published in the Irish Examiner

Social Welfare Myths

Fiction and Facts – VINCENTIAN VIEW

The VINCENTIAN PARTNERSHIP consists of the SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL, THE VINCENTIAN CONGREGATION, THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY AND THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAITH. THIS IS THEIR VIEW OF THE FACTS AND FICTION OF LIVING IN POVERTY .

MYTH

People on Social Welfare are not poor. They just can't manage their money

The VPSJ's experience of working with people in poverty and its research on the cost of living has shown that most people in receipt of social welfare are good money managers but the amount of money they receive does not allow for a minimum essential standard of living (MESL):

- An unemployed two parent household with two children age 10 & 15 receive a total €438.17 per week in social welfare payments. The cost of a MESL for this household is €566.42, leaving them with a shortfall of €128.25 a week, or over €6,600 for the year.
- A one parent household with a baby receives €257.80 per week in social welfare payments. The cost of a MESL for this household is €315.34, leaving a shortfall of €57.54, which is almost €3,000 over the year.
- Mothers in focus groups spoke of being able to account for every penny they spent and trying to stretch a finite amount as far as possible.
- Many people receiving social welfare experience poverty and social exclusion, not because they cannot manage their money, but simply because it does not allow them a standard of living that meets their physical, psychological and social needs.

MYTH

People on Social Welfare have it easy

In almost all cases examined in our research, social welfare is inadequate. The research of the VPSJ shows that having to live on social welfare is not an easy life, nor does it allow for luxury. In fact, in the majority of cases it does not even allow for a minimum essential standard of living:

- A single person living alone receives €188 a week in social welfare, the cost of living for this individual without rent is €226, leaving a deficit of almost €40 per week.
- Not having enough to live on means going without; avoiding friends because you can't afford a cup of coffee. It can sometimes mean making difficult choices between paying the electricity bill or putting food on the table.
- The myth that living on social welfare is an easy life is not the experience of those who have no choice but to do so.



MYTH

They pay for nothing, but get everything

There is a perception that everyone receiving social welfare automatically qualifies for a council house, a medical card, fuel allowance and cots and prams for their children. This is simply not the case. To qualify for any additional benefits above the basic social welfare payments, rigorous means-testing is applied. For example:

- There is a misconception that those in receipt of social welfare automatically get a local authority house which they live in free-of-charge. This is simply not true. Firstly, local authority tenants pay rent. Secondly, to qualify for local authority accommodation the applicant has to satisfy a means test and prove that they do not have suitable alternative accommodation.
- If the applicant is then deemed eligible for housing they are put on a waiting list and have to wait until a house becomes available, which can often take years. The reality is that people receiving social welfare do not get everything for free. They must satisfy stringent means tests to qualify for benefits and often due to long waiting lists have to wait months or even years before they can actually avail of a service.

MYTH

Most people getting Social Welfare don't need it, they are welfare cheats

It is often alleged that there is a high level of fraud and dishonesty among people claiming social welfare; that people are lying to get payments they are not entitled to.

- The Department of Social Protection (DSP) publishes reports claiming large savings thanks to measures taken to prevent social welfare fraud. These claims are reported in the media as Government saving hundreds of millions of euro due to tackling fraud, the figure reported for 2012 was €669 million.
- However, these figures are not a true reflection of either the level of social welfare fraud that exists or the money saved by stopping fraud.
- The Government's own auditor, the Comptroller and Auditor General, has been very critical of the DSP's use of these figures calling them highly questionable and constructed. This is because the headline figure is an estimate of what the level of mistaken payments due to error and fraudulent claims could cost, over several years, if no measures were ever taken to address it.
- The Department's own figures show that the actual level of social welfare fraud is far lower. In 2012 fraud was only found in a small fraction of cases, approximately 6% of Job Seekers claimants and 5% of One Parent Family Payment claimants.
- This equated to 0.1% of the total Social Protection budget, this is far smaller than the €669 million figure headlined by the Department of Social Protection.

MYTH

People on Social Welfare are lazy and just don't want to work

Comments suggesting people who are unemployed are lazy, don't want to work and are making a 'lifestyle choice' are often made. However, some simple facts can show how untrue these ideas are.

Unemployment Rate



- The unemployment statistics from the CSO show that throughout the 'Celtic Tiger' years unemployment remained very low, and Ireland experienced what was technically 'full employment'.
- Since 2008 unemployment has risen greatly, hitting highs of over 14.5% (approx 440,000 people) in 2011 and 2012. The unemployment rate has fallen slightly to 13.7%, as of May this year:
- Redundancies have also risen greatly over the last five years. From 2008 to 2012 there were 259,173 official redundancies. This is more than all the cumulative redundancies from 1995 to 2007.
- There are also barriers for people returning to employment. If the salary does not allow for at least a Minimum Essential Standard of Living costs such as childcare can make taking low paid work unfeasible for households with young children. The VPSJ's research has found that childcare for a pre-school age child can cost over €9,000 a year.
- The VPSJ's research shows how much of a struggle living on social welfare is. For the vast majority of recipients social welfare does not provide enough for their household to live at a minimum standard. This is not a lifestyle people are likely to choose for themselves or their families.
- So when confronted with this myth ask where are the jobs for people to get, what is their alternative to social welfare or emigration?

Myths can be dangerous. They misrepresent the situation of people struggling to exist, ignore the complex nature of poverty and make it possible to blame people for their poverty and make it easy for the better-off, the media, politicians and economic commentators to be self-righteous and justify cuts in State supports to people struggling to survive.

TRUST & TRUTH

By Kieran Murphy, National Director, SVP

Kieran Murphy has 15 years' experience with a number of community voluntary organisations in the sphere of social justice advocacy. He is also Chair of the Advocacy Initiative, which is a three-year community and voluntary sector project that promotes understanding, awareness and effectiveness of social justice advocacy in Ireland. By creating the conditions for stronger social justice advocacy, the Initiative strengthens policy responses to existing and emerging challenges in addressing poverty and social exclusion, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. He writes here of the importance of trust in achieving change when seeking social justice for all citizens and contends that 'where there is trust, truth can be spoken to power'.

The one thing I will never do when engaged in advocating social change with those who have the power to make change is to take the view - 'Do I trust the policy-makers I am meeting, or do they trust my organisation and me?' I concentrate on 'speaking to power'..... what I want from the policy makers... how I want them to agree with me, to take on board my views, or do something.

I rarely, if ever, think about the levels of trust between us. The statement 'Where there is trust, truth can be spoken to power' assumes that the power is that of policy-makers and structures and institutions of which we are not a part. However, another important dimension is that each of us has power - the power to decide to listen, to be open to the views of the speaker, to decide to change the way we think and feel and then perhaps to act differently. What this illustrates for me is that trust is an important and powerful dynamic

Trust is something that has taken a battering in Ireland over the last decade or more. Late last year there was a very funny Martyn Turner cartoon in one of the papers. It showed four figures and each of them saying in turn 'Trust me I am a politician', 'Trust me I am a banker', 'Trust me I am a lawyer', 'Trust me I am a priest'. I know there are lots of trustworthy politicians, bankers, lawyers and priests, but I got the joke. The point was that the four figures represented four of our national institutions in which people have lost trust.

The cartoon could have had a lot more characters. A public opinion poll conducted last November for a consortium of Irish Charities asked people which of the following national institutions do you trust? And the following had low levels of trust: banks, the government, the church, the media, insurance companies, city and county councils, the EU and Trade Unions. There were three institutions which scored highest - the Gardai, Charities and Schools. 74% of respondents to the poll said they trusted charities either 'somewhat' or a 'great deal'. That is very impressive. When we begin to look at trust and advocacy work the picture becomes more complex.



To what extent do policy makers trust community and voluntary organisations and their leaders?

Are there good levels of trust from the public for social justice advocacy?

Do colleagues from within different community and voluntary organisations trust each other?

POLICY MAKERS

In a recent study, the results of which were published in 'In Other Words – Policy Makers Perceptions of Social Justice Advocacy,' the Advocacy Initiative interviewed people involved in the policy-making process: elected representatives, key public and civil servants, State/semi State agencies and organisations, experts, advisors, academics, researchers for political parties. The Initiative wanted to get a better understanding of policy makers' perceptions of social justice advocacy. We wanted to know more about what it is like to be on the receiving end of social justice advocacy efforts.

A lack of trust came up in a number of significant and different ways.

The legitimacy of some of the community/voluntary organisations and the people doing the advocacy work came up. Policy-makers had questions: 'What is the mandate of these groups to advocate on particular issues?' 'Where do they get their mandate from?' 'Are they genuinely connected to the 'ground' to the 'real voices' of the people whom they claim to represent? Not only did policy-makers have these questions in their mind but also they were answering them to themselves in the negative, taking the view that they didn't think the organisations had a mandate.

Policy makers spoke of seeing self-interest. That some organisations were more interested in sustaining themselves and their jobs, rather than the interests of the groups/individuals they set out to represent.

“Trust is a key and powerful resource in social justice advocacy work ,

There was a perception too of an absence of critique and self-reflection within the voluntary sector. Particularly in relation to organisations not being able to recognise the tension that exists between being both a service provider, some when funded by the State and being an advocate for the people who are receiving the service.

These are challenging views.

When policy-makers are thinking like this, then at some level they don't trust the community and voluntary organisations with which they are dealing and are not as receptive as they might be to the truth the organisations are speaking to them.

PUBLIC ATTITUDE

The general public are very positive about the role of charities in policy formation. They see a gap between how influential charities are and how influential they would like them to be. The public's view of charities is in contrast to other sectors where the public thought that trade unions, business, farmers, religious bodies were more influential than they would like them to be. This suggests that the public trusts community and voluntary organisations to be more influential.

DIFFICULTIES

One of the things we are experiencing difficulty with in the Advocacy Initiative is finding ways of having dialogue about sensitive issues among the voluntary and community organisations who make up the Initiative. Some of the issues we are finding challenging to explore are:

How do we deal with competition between organisations for resources, access to policy-makers and public profile?

There are a variety of different frameworks and approaches to the work: human rights, equality and community development to name just three. How do we deal with the tensions between these approaches so that the tension is creative rather than destructive? How do we have a conversation about perceived bad practice? There is an appetite to explore these issues and we are making progress but key to any success will be higher levels of trust between organisations .

I can imagine a number of possible reactions to what I am saying which might seek to diminish the importance of trust in advocacy work.

Some of those reactions might be:

Policy-makers are never going to trust you because as advocates you bring a different perspective; they are challenged by it and come up with excuses for not engaging with the 'truth'; There are lots of other sectors who appear to get what they want without there necessarily being high levels of trust: for example farmers, business interests, trade unions. The implication being that trust is not the issue, but how to mobilise power to force policy makers to listen to our truth.

Another possible reaction is: 'that's just typical of the community/voluntary sector to be talking about soft issues like 'trust''. So, does trust matter? I believe it does. It has to do with maximising the potential of social justice advocacy. Lack of trust has two impacts on me:

If I am working with people where I experience low levels of trust then I am more cautious, less likely to take a risk, less imaginative, spend more time defending my perspective and at times will even become aggressive if I feel threatened, ridiculed or undermined. I will spend time talking with like-minded people who will share my view and whom I feel I can trust about the people whom I don't trust and their perspectives.

More importantly, a lack of trust in other people and organisations appears to simplify the complexity of the world. If I don't trust someone, I'm unlikely to engage with them and I will tend to dismiss their perspective. An appearance of a lack of trust can have the effect of simplifying complexity and diminishing a diversity of perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Trust is a key and powerful resource in social justice advocacy work; trust between social justice advocates and between social justice advocates and policy makers. My own experience and the work of the Advocacy Initiative point to the fact that there is further work to be done to build trust and in building trust we are maximising the potential of social justice advocacy.



PRISON VISITOR CENTRES SVP & THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

By Teresa Clarke, Manager,
Dublin Region Prison Visitor's Centre

"People should not be judged or discriminated against because they have a loved one in prison. Prison Visitor Centres are places where people can come to and receive the compassionate support and listening ear they need to help them cope."

This is the Mission Statement under which the Society of St.Vincent De Paul believes in operating the Prison Visitor Centres and it also stresses:

"We accept people as they are and try to create a caring non-threatening environment, respecting the dignity of those who use the Visitor Centres. We do so by treating people with respect, while endeavouring to build a relationship of friendship, trust and confidentiality"

The Prison Visitor Centres Committee is a collaboration between the Society of St.Vincent De Paul and the Dublin Quakers' (Society of Friends) Services Committee. With the support of the Department of Justice certain designated Centres were provided in 1999 and the Prison Visitors' Centre Committee was financially assisted to provide a basic hospitality service in Cloverhill Remand



Prison, Mountjoy Prison and the Dochas Centre.

The development of Visitor Centres in Dublin has been of huge benefit for families and friends visiting loved ones in prison. Prior to the establishment of Visitor Centres provision was minimal and the absence of an adequate place for visitors to go before and after

their prison visit added greatly to the emotional distress of having to visit a loved one in prison.

Since their establishment in 1999 Visitor Centres have developed and now in addition to providing a hospitality service they operate a free tea, coffee and snack bar service to visitors before and after their visit. They also provide fully-equipped play areas which are staffed by qualified childcare workers and children can avail of play and arts/crafts activities before and after their visit. They also offer parenting advice and support, family support and an information and advocacy service to all those affected by the imprisonment of a loved one.



SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS USE THE CENTRES

The number of people using our Centres is significant with the average number of visitors per month this year, to the time of writing this article - 5,000 in Mountjoy Prison, 550 in the Dochas Centre and 2,300 in Cloverhill Remand Prison.

We aim to provide an essential, safe, pleasant, caring and supportive environment to each and everyone prior to and after their prison visit. There are 13 SVP staff, two full-time and 11 part-time working alongside a large number of volunteers. Work placements are also offered to mature students studying in the area of social care, counselling and psychotherapy. The overall direction of the Centres is managed by the Prison Visitor Centres Management Committee and members include representatives from SVP, the Society of Friends and the Irish Prison Service.

The success of what we do here is through our staff and volunteers. All are highly committed in working with the families that use our service. Commitment enables friendship and friendship enables trust which is crucial when working with vulnerable and distressed people. We are also very lucky to have an excellent working relationship with prison staff.

IMPACT OF PRISON ON FAMILIES

We also run a number of Children's Arts and Crafts Projects over the year as it is our experience that many children who avail of our services have very little contact if any with projects in their local areas. Income can be affected significantly when a family member is sent to prison and as a result extra-curricular activities become a luxury that many can no longer afford. Our most recent project was a fun week that ran from the 12th – 17th August and children were able to avail of a range of activities including Fabric Painting, Clay Art, Stone Painting and Wool Art. Children also received 'goody' bags, had their faces painted and were able to participate in a number of raffles and art competitions.

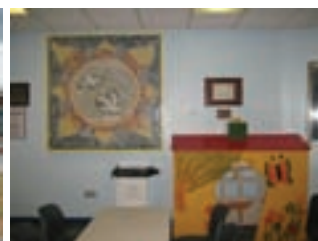
The impact of imprisonment on families and children was most recently highlighted in a report published by the Irish Penal Reform Trust called "Picking up the Pieces, The rights and Needs of Children and Families Affected by Imprisonment." The report made a number of recommendations including the need to improve visits for families and children and as part of that recommendation asked that all prisons have a Visitors Centre.

A LISTENING EAR – A FRIENDLY FACE

"We see daily the benefits for those using our Centres, many of whom are often in a vulnerable state. We have proposed, so far without success, having a Visitors' Centre in Wheatfield Prison which we believe could have been done as an outreach service from Cloverhill Visitors Centre at low cost so would fully support this recommendation" states Larry Toumey, Chairperson, Prison Visitor Centres Committee. "What we are about here is providing a listening ear and a friendly face to help people cope with the reality of having a loved one in prison. We strive to make the visiting experience a positive one and even hope to create some happy memories along the way."

Mountjoy Prison Visitors Centre, C/O Dochas Centre, North Circular Road, D.7 Phone (01) 8858932 Email: mountjoyvisitorscentre1@hotmail.com

Cloverhill Prison Visitors Centre, Cloverhill Remand Prison, Cloverhill Road, D.22 Phone (01) 6304646 Email: cloverhillcentre@eircom.net



GROWING OLD IN RURAL IRELAND

By Peg Hanafin

Rural areas are often portrayed as idyllic, green spaces where people live lives of peace and tranquillity among the green fields animals wild life and nature. They are credited with knowing all their neighbours and have close contact with them over possibly generations. But the reality is different especially in the recent past where many people built houses and commuted to their work. Recently a man who farms told me he does not know anyone in the eleven houses built around him, even though his family have resided there for generations. These are the mammoth changes that have taken place that have damaged neighbourhoods and the support that was there in years gone by. Even though a few fields may have separated them they knew and “cuardaoicte” were in touch and visited regularly with each other. That was an important support system.

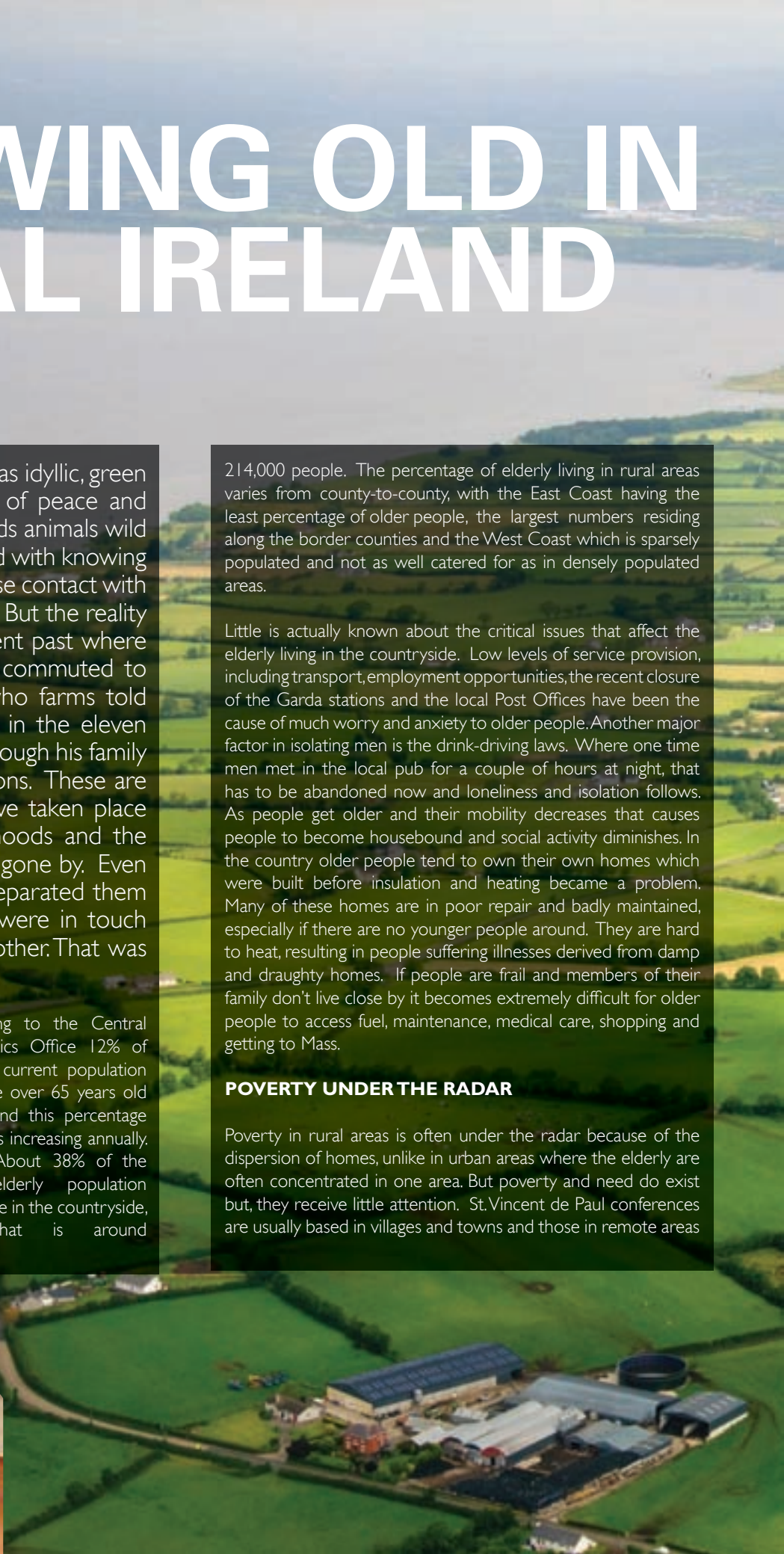
According to the Central Statistics Office 12% of our current population are over 65 years old and this percentage is increasing annually. About 38% of the elderly population live in the countryside, that is around

214,000 people. The percentage of elderly living in rural areas varies from county-to-county, with the East Coast having the least percentage of older people, the largest numbers residing along the border counties and the West Coast which is sparsely populated and not as well catered for as in densely populated areas.

Little is actually known about the critical issues that affect the elderly living in the countryside. Low levels of service provision, including transport, employment opportunities, the recent closure of the Garda stations and the local Post Offices have been the cause of much worry and anxiety to older people. Another major factor in isolating men is the drink-driving laws. Where one time men met in the local pub for a couple of hours at night, that has to be abandoned now and loneliness and isolation follows. As people get older and their mobility decreases that causes people to become housebound and social activity diminishes. In the country older people tend to own their own homes which were built before insulation and heating became a problem. Many of these homes are in poor repair and badly maintained, especially if there are no younger people around. They are hard to heat, resulting in people suffering illnesses derived from damp and draughty homes. If people are frail and members of their family don't live close by it becomes extremely difficult for older people to access fuel, maintenance, medical care, shopping and getting to Mass.

POVERTY UNDER THE RADAR

Poverty in rural areas is often under the radar because of the dispersion of homes, unlike in urban areas where the elderly are often concentrated in one area. But poverty and need do exist but, they receive little attention. St. Vincent de Paul conferences are usually based in villages and towns and those in remote areas



have little access to the services that the members provide. Being alone as their families have grown up or having lived alone since parents died leaves loneliness and isolation, as part of the rest of their lives. The befriending that St. Vincent de Paul members offer and the security of knowing that someone cares is the bonus that older people enjoy when members call and acknowledge their needs and sit and listen to their problems. Unfortunately isolated rural older people do not generally have that privilege. Perhaps for the very remote areas where SVP members do not have access to, a partnership between the National Rural Network (NRN) or Leader Programme and the Society would be very beneficial to those in need of assistance from either the statutory or voluntary sectors. The knowledge shared between the NRN and the SVP could change people's life for the better and give them a caring service.

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The importance of public transport cannot be overstated and should be a priority for any government department to address. Public transport is often the only lifeline when people are unable to drive or have no car and has detrimental effects, whereas being mobile and being able to drive adds to the wellbeing and the independence of people. The Rural Transport Scheme, especially those that collect elderly people at their homes and bring them back there safely do much more than provide transport. The drivers and friends they meet on buses provide older people with a lifeline, friendship and a caring eye as well as making sure they get to the doctor, get their prescription and get the food they need to keep themselves healthy. Another aspect of rural living is security and feeling safe from perceived crime. Feeling unsafe and being afraid impact negatively on older people and not feeling safe and comfortable leaving their homes for a few hours adds to social exclusion and fear. Lack of access to the health centre, the doctor, the pharmacist and other emergency services all have an impact and damage the wellbeing of the elderly who live in remote rural areas. Many older people must move out of their area to access these basic services and those on low incomes are at risk of exclusion and isolation adding unnecessary hardships for those with mobility and income problems.

Having an adequate source of income that is secure and stable play an important role in a greater sense of security among the elderly. Current economic difficulties cause worry to those dependent on state pensions or private incomes which are both reducing. Increasing the age of retirement is on the cards where people will have to work more years to get the same amount. The input of older people into voluntary organisations and other community activity and projects adds much to their success. Older and retired people also offer much help to the

younger generations offering assistance with school runs and child-minding. Modern technology also brings a new dimension to lives and researchers have found that having the ability to learn new things is a stimulating exercise that is good for the brain. Things like Shopping On-Line, E-Mail Contact, Skype and the unquantifiable amount of information available on the Internet is a useful and productive way of enjoying time. However, those most in need living in remoteness may have no way of up-skilling and are being left behind to endure the end of their days in abject poverty and loneliness.

PERHAPS THE SVP CAN DO MORE?

Looking at organisations like the SVP and their members, perhaps a new strategy could be put in place for services to be delivered to those who live down long boreens, laneways and live many miles from a centre and are losing out on what their urban counterparts are enjoying. Even getting to Mass is a major effort for many in remote and inaccessible areas. The more you become housebound the more you lose touch with neighbours and friends. Keeping up an interest in playing cards, music, sport, arts and crafts, and generally socialising are all good to remove the sense of disconnect that people feel. Older people prefer to be left in their own homes. But with all the cuts to health packages that may have made that possible, people are being forced into residential care because of lack of vision on the part of Government agencies. It is indeed short-sighted and penurious to inflict such upheaval on elderly people when the resultant change is far more expensive. A forward planning strategy would be far more beneficial in looking after our elderly and keeping them in their own homes and leaving people to end their days as they want to. Services that urban counterparts accept as normal should not be deprived to the rural community and equity of need and distribution should apply.

Perhaps the members of the SVP could put in place out-reach trained people who live closer to isolated homes and give them the opportunity of sharing the facilities and the support that Conference members bring to so many older people who are more accessible to support and visitation.

Peg Hanafin, M.Sc. Psy. Rehab.Couns, Dip Psych., is a Counsellor with 35 years' experience and writes from personal knowledge of life in Rural Ireland

IRISH WATER MUST MAKE ITS POLICIES CLEAR TO AVOID WATER POVERTY!

It would be reassuring if legislation in relation to Irish Water included wording which prevents the privatisation of the water agency as this may lead to the weakening of consumer protection policies.

**By Johnmark McCafferty,
Head of Social Justice, SVP**

By the time you read this, Irish Water will have already started installing water meters outside of peoples' homes in County Kildare and this will expand to homes in Kerry, Meath, Wexford, Dublin City, Limerick, Mayo and Fingal in the near future. Irish Water is the new State agency responsible for the delivery of water to and from homes, taking over from the 34 county and city councils currently maintaining the country's public water system. Irish Water is a subsidiary of Bord Gais, a State company that many SVP members are familiar with in their Conference work as they assist people in energy arrears. Similarly, Irish Water will be regulated by the Commission for Energy Regulation, the same as all utility companies in Ireland.

Although the meters are currently being rolled out, billing for water won't commence until January 2015 for all domestic customers. SVP attended a meeting with Irish Water in early July on development. The agency pointed out that from 2015, some households will be billed according to the meter outside their house, while some will be assessed – for example people living in apartments. It is their intention, over time, to move more households to a metered basis. For those who will be assessed rather than metered, this charge will be based on what similar homes with meters pay. What if you're a single person in a large house – will you pay more than a large family in a small house? Also, given that metering is based on payment by use, there is no incentive to reduce your use of water where it is not metered. And for the people in apartments, the prospect is that they will never have a meter and will always pay an assessed charge while they live there.

How much will the average water bill cost every year? This is still uncertain, but figures of between €100 and €300 annually are mentioned in the media. Many jobs will be created through the metering programme, and about 400 posts will be given to people on the Live Register, to small and medium sized companies, and to school-leavers and graduates. While the jobs are welcome, this will come at a cost - the consumer will ultimately pay for this scheme and many will be paying for water for the first time. This will be an added burden on many households already struggling financially, so the way in which

lower income households are treated is crucial from an SVP point of view. At the same time, Ireland is unusual among richer countries for not having water charges in place, and the system proposed – at least for metered customers - appears to be fairer than the flat fee in place before the abolition of water charges in 1997.

Unlike energy, disconnections of water will not take place, however the pressure of domestic water supply can be reduced in the event of sustained non-payment of water charges. We believe that there may be free allowances for certain groups, perhaps low income, and for those whose medical needs require higher levels of water consumption. The Think Tank TASC has suggested that water pricing policies should be augmented with income supports of various levels, to reflect aspects such as the income of the household, the number of people and any health related need for additional water; and that this 'Differentiated Water Allowance' would be allocated to a minority of households. This approach is something SVP will consider as we develop our stance on the water-pricing issue.

At any rate, it would be reassuring if legislation in relation to Irish Water included wording which prevents the privatisation of the water agency as this may lead to the weakening of consumer protection policies and approaches. Like the waste charges that we have advocated on before, water charges policy needs to reconcile the 'user pays' principle with the ability to pay. This could well be a challenge for larger families on a low income using a meter; but also for households on a low income, who are not metered and who therefore have no way of reducing their water charges through reduced use. Low income households cannot be further disadvantaged by poorly designed policy. Appropriate, balanced and proportionate allowances or income supports need to be developed to avoid further hardship and the emergence of 'water poverty'.



MORE JOBS – BUT NOT AT ANY PRICE

By Dr. Mary Murphy
Lecturer in Irish Politics and
Society, NUI Maynooth



While Summer 2013 has seen the welcome beginning of a downward movement in the Live Register, groups like ‘Claiming Our Future’ and the Nevin Institute rightly call for urgent and sustained investment in job creation. There has been less focus or debate about the type and quality of jobs in the Irish labour market. While few from any political spectrum would deny the importance of jobs it is worth reflecting that different political ideologies lie behind seemingly common calls for jobs.

A social democratic approach champions the right-to-work and requires high levels of participation and full employment to fund high levels of social investment. This means obligations to participate in reasonable and regulated employment. The neo-liberal approach argues a relatively unregulated market should be allowed create jobs and the State should incentivise (through make-work-pay) or force (through workfare) the low-paid to take such jobs. There is little focus on the human cost of low-paid employment and how it impacts on quality of life and capacity to care or parent. A third conservative approach is more likely to focus on the moral imperative to work and problematise the behaviour of the poor. It stress the need to avoid inter-generational joblessness or creation of a dependency culture and promotes work obligations and sanctions, sometimes ignoring the reality of care obligations and real barriers to employment.

In practice policy in most countries is an amalgam of such ideologies and certainly we hear all strains of all three intermeshed in Irish debate and political discourse. It is worth, therefore, standing back, reflecting and perhaps clarifying what we mean by more jobs. Do we mean more jobs but jobs that are created solely

to meet the needs of the market, low-paid, unregulated and part-time? Do we mean it is okay to relax employment, environmental and health

regulations to create new jobs? Do we mean more low-paid jobs and tough rules to force the low-skilled to take up those jobs? Do we mean compulsory work for low-skilled parents so their children will grow up in a culture of work? Do we mean high-quality jobs with progression routes to a better quality of life?

ONE THIRD OF EUROPE’S JOBS ARE LOW-QUALITY AND POORLY PAID

Whatever we might personally mean by ‘more jobs’ it does seem that globally recession has occasioned intensification of the restructuring of the labour market towards more precarious employment. One third of Europe’s jobs are of low-quality and poorly-paid. Nearer home, over half of all new UK jobs are now part-time. There is growing concern with the decline in the quality of employment at a global level and growing de-regulation at the margin of the labour market. The trend has been the creation of segmented labour markets in which employees with atypical contracts carry the burden of adjustment to economic shocks. All of this comes with increased social, economic and psychological consequences, increased fear, a growth in work-related stress and a weakening of collective bargaining power.

In Ireland, Government policy (intentionally or unintentionally) has both enabled labour market precarity, but also reduced social protection and made the precarious more vulnerable. Our labour market is very flexible. We have the fifth most relaxed employment regulation framework in the OECD and we have a light-touch approach to implementing and monitoring employment standards. Various social welfare cuts mean precarious workers are increasingly unlikely be able to access social protection to top up low pay. A combined pincer movement means insecurity in the labour market occurs at the same time as a tightening of obligations to enter the labour market or ‘activation’.

‘DECENT’ – NOT JUST ‘MORE’ - JOBS

All this adds up to a scenario where 20% of our workforce is low-paid (many of them men). In 2000, just over one-in-six people employed in Ireland worked part-time. By the last quarter of 2012, close to a quarter (24.3%) of all those employed, or more than 450,000 employees, worked part-time. The number of men in part-time employment has doubled from 6% to 12% and much of this is involuntary part-time employment. The in-work poverty rate for part-time workers is more than twice that for full-time workers. In 2011, one-in-every-seven individuals at-risk-of-poverty was at work and one in ten of those was in consistent poverty. The Irish League of Credit Unions ‘What’s Left’ Tracker 2012 suggests that rising debt, borrowing and financial stress effects both the working and non-working adult population. The volunteers in the Society of St Vincent de Paul observe similar trends amongst Ireland’s working poor.

Is this what we mean when we say ‘more jobs’? Do we need to say ‘more decent jobs’?

Dr. Mary Murphy is a Lecturer in Irish Politics and Society in the Department of Sociology in NUI Maynooth. She was formerly National Social Policy Officer with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Assistant General Secretary of the National Organisation of the Unemployed and has represented anti-poverty interests on the National Economic and Social Council, the National Economic and Social Forum and other national social partnership policy processes.





100 BOOKS WHICH INSPIRED A REVOLUTION

By Thomas McCarthy, Librarian and Poet



A group of Cork City Library staff, from every part of the service, Lending, e-Libraries, Special Collections and Local Studies, Reference and the branch network, were asked by the Cork City Librarian to consider how best Cork City Libraries might mark the decade of national centenaries that begin in 2013. They decided to choose Ireland's 100 Crucial Books. This article explains how the Librarians made their choice.

We are not historians. We cannot arbitrate upon competing visions of history in the manner of highly-trained University teachers, but being Librarians does insert us into a pivotal role as keepers of documents and books.

‘one hundred publications that show the depth and breadth of public debate in Ireland’

Guiding people to sources of information is our daily task and in the public library we've all been trained, one way or another, to take this matter very seriously. After much discussion and debate, it was decided that we would look at what we have. Along with all the new digital material, we still have a marvellous collection of books, and many of these books belong to the era that Ireland is now ready to commemorate. In our keeping, they remain for



every library user as the raw witnesses of great national conflagrations. This 'Cabinet of Librarians' drew up a list of one hundred publications that show the depth and breadth of public debate in Ireland in the emergent years of 1900 to 1923.

Books as they settle over decades in their library shelves become powerful and silent witnesses of history. In this way such books fulfil a dual function that gets to the very core of the meaning of a public library service – when first published they are full of the heat and controversy of their age, but over time they accumulate for us as a gift of more than one possible reading of the past. There are many versions of the past and books bear witness to the multiplicity of viewpoints our forebears carried.

Opinions we take for granted today were not the opinions of yesterday. Irish history is still an unsettled and disputed territory. The immense power of John Redmond and his Parliamentary regime was swept away by the trauma of Easter 1916 and the War of Independence. The slaughter on the Somme was far more extensive and brutal than anything that happened in Ireland, yet the near fulfilment of our National Struggle has pushed the Somme to the margins of national remembrance.

How we choose to remember each event is coded with our own political view of the future. In the manner of the books as they arrived at the Edwardian Librarian's desk, we still try to advance our points of view with historic emblems, the Poppy, the Easter Lily. In Ireland, tragically, we do not share a common dead, but we share all their books. Public library shelves will always contain more than the partial, contended memory; they will, rather, contain the awkward, dissenting versions of events as well as the revered volumes that reflected the widest political consensus. Books have always been used as tools of political action, to state policy rhetorically and gather public support, but books arrive in the library in a simple search for readers. Eventually, by trial and error; a book creates its own powerful advocates, its first enthusiastic readership.

There is a wide range of books for the early 1900s was a new era of great soul-searching among readers of the old Carnegie Libraries as well as the private clubs and subscription libraries. Key cultural works such as Douglas Hyde's hugely influential 'Religious Songs of Connaught' or

Brooke and Rolleston's 'Treasury of Irish Poetry' were part of a massive strengthening of the national cultural point of view. Culturally, they seemed to prepare the reader's mind for the even more purposeful 'The Framework of Home Rule' by Erskine Childers or Hobson's 'The Creed of the Republic'. Father Dineen's 'Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla' and Peadar O Laoghaire's 'Séadna' were foundation stones for the new edifice of Irish reading and learning.

Yet, there was a political and cultural dissonance also at work in the world of books. William O'Brien's decently honest account of the issues at hand can be seen in his 'The Irish Revolution' and how it came about. His is one of the best descriptions of the fracture among Irish parliamentarians at Westminster; a Unionist-Nationalist split that reached its nadir under Balfour's Premiership. As early as 1904 Horace Plunkett in his 'Ireland in the New Century' expressed reservations about a rural Irish society that might lose its sense of purpose under the moral influence of an overly politicised clergy.

Plunkett's book sold in enormous quantities, as did the much more scathing attack on Church influence, 'Priests and People in Ireland' by the Catholic barrister, Michael J.F. McCarthy – the book sold nearly 10,000 copies within two months of publication. McCarthy revelled in contrasting the prosperity of Protestant Ulster with the decline of the Catholic South; his chapter contrasting the industry of Belfast with the silence of Cork Harbour may have got its reply in Corkery's preface to his 'The Threshold of Quiet', though the Joycean social paralysis mapped by Corkery might have clinched McCarthy's tendentious arguments.

Whatever their influence, these books had a wide readership and their ultimate political manifestations can be seen in the two foundation documents of our divided island, the Proclamation of 1916 and the Ulster Solemn Covenant.

For the list of 100 CRUCIAL BOOKS go to the Cork City Libraries website: www.historyoblame.ie
Article courtesy of Cork City Libraries.

THE SVP IN IRELAND



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the biggest charitable organisation in Ireland, where it was first established in 1844. It has offices throughout the country which are listed here and on the national website www.svp.ie. If you need assistance, do not hesitate to contact the SVP. In many regions there are also SVP shops. Parish-based

Conferences operate locally all over Ireland and their contact details are posted in church doors, at community centres, medical clinics and other locations. Contact can also be made with the Society through our national website www.svp.ie. If you need assistance, do not hesitate to contact the SVP.

OFFICES

SVP NATIONAL OFFICE

SVP House, 91-92 Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1
t 01 8386990 f 01 8387355

ATHLONE

18 O'Connell Street, Athlone
t 09064 44041 f 09064 44040
e athlonesvp@eircom.net

BALLINA

Teeling Street, Ballina, Co. Mayo
t 096 72905

BELFAST

196-200 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 2AJ
t 048 90 351561 f 048 90 740522

CORK

Ozanam House, 2 Tuckey Street, Cork
t 021 4270444 f 021 4270644

CASTLEBAR

Tennis Pavilion Road, Castlebar
t 094 23207

DERRY

Ozanam House, 22 Bridge Street, Derry, BT48 6JZ
t 028 7126 5489

DONEGAL

The Diamond, Raphoe, Co. Donegal.
t 074 9173933; mobile 086 8051910
Email: svpnorthwest@gmail.com

DUBLIN

SVP House 91/92 Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1 t 01 8550022
f 01 8559168 Email info@svpdublin.ie

DROGHEDA

53/54 Trinity Street, Drogheda, Co. Louth
t 041 9873331

GALWAY

Ozanam House, Augustine Street, Galway
t 091 563233 f 091 567591

KILLARNEY

Ozanam House, Greenlawn, New Street, Killarney, Co. Kerry
t 064 22668 Email svdpkillarney@eircom.net

KILDARE

South Midlands Regional Office, Unit 4, Swans on the Green, The Fairgreen, Naas, Co. Kildare.
t 045 888925
e patricia@svpsouthmidlands.com

LIMERICK

Hartstonge Street, Limerick
t 061 317327 f 061 310320

MULLINGAR

Ozanam House, Bishopsgate Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
t 044 9343868

THURLES

Parnell Park, Parnell Street, Thurles, Co. Tipperary
t 0504 90683

TUAM

Ozanam House, Bishop Street, Tuam, Co. Galway
t/f 093 26293 Email svpwestregion@eircom.net

SLIGO

Regional Office
Stephen Mews, Stephen Street, Sligo
t 071 9142420
Area Office, 35 Wolfe Tone Street, Sligo
t 071 9160713

WATERFORD

Ozanam Centre, Henrietta Street, Waterford
t 051 873128 f 051 841341

FOR ALL THE LATEST
SVP NEWS LOG ONTO
www.svp.ie

Abstracts

Of Developments in Social Justice

HALF IRISH HOUSEHOLDS BATTLING DEBT

More than 40 per cent of Irish people questioned in a survey by the Government agency, the Central Statistics Office, said they had difficulty in keeping up with bills and debts. A similar proportion were worried about their level of personal debt. Ninety per cent cited utility bills as the greatest cause of strain. 51 per cent of people said they were cutting back on grocery spending.

AUSTERITY VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE

Austerity is a form of violence against the people, "a brutal recalibration of economics to suit the Euro. It is the Americanisation of Europe." – Siptu President Jack O'Connor speaking at the MacGill Summer School in Donegal.



A CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

A succession of tax amnesties and light-touch regulation helped to create a culture of impunity in the upper echelons of Irish society. The Courts were – and still are – used as mechanisms to delay and frustrate the application of justice. Powerful individuals have consistently used the Courts to establish and expand their privileges even as the balancing rights of "the common good," contained in the 1937 document (Constitution) have languished by default. – Editorial in The Irish Times.

DAIL TOLD 700 NEW PLACES NEEDED FOR DISABLED TEENAGERS BUT SERVICES WITHDRAWN IN DUBLIN

The Carers' Association described as "totally unfair and really unthinkable" the discontinuation of day services at Stewarts Hospital in West Dublin for eleven teenagers with profound disabilities. The young adults had turned 18 years when the HSE informed parents that they would not receive day services from September. The Dail was told earlier in the Summer by Minister of State for Disability Kathleen Lynch that demand for services for young people with disabilities completing their education or lifeskills training continued to grow and that the HSE anticipated that more than 700 new places would be required this year.

ILLEGAL DRUG SEIZURES AT PEAK LEVELS

The Gardai seized illegal drugs to the value of €115.4m. last year according to the annual Garda Síochána report. This figure increased from €28m. in 2010. This indicated that drugs gangs were again bringing in very large quantities of drugs, added to an increase in the number of 'grow houses' for cannabis and an increase in the use of ecstasy.

TAXING CHILD BENEFIT

The Revenue Commissioners have questioned whether child benefit can be taxed if children are the legal owners of the payment. A group established by the Department of Social Welfare to look at child benefit suggested taxing the benefit or two-tier payments. The Commissioners responded that the legal issue of who owned the payment – parent/guardian or child – needed clarification.

WORST USE OF ILLICIT CIGARETTES

Tallaght in Dublin and Drogheda have the highest level of "illicit" cigarette consumption in Ireland according to a survey by the National Federation of Retail Newsagents in Ireland. 5,000 discarded cigarette packets were collected from streets and bins a total of 22 tons in the research carried out by a marketing company.

Over a quarter of discarded packets were non-domestic and not subject to tax in Ireland.



The Challenges of Being a Vincentian

The founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam, set the organisation very heavy challenges in its work towards achieving social justice for all. At the bicentenary celebration of his birth, held in Dublin members of the Society, drawn from various aspects of its work, answered some of those challenges.

EXPLOITATION, PROFITS OR THE COMMON GOOD

THE CHALLENGE, as expressed in the words of Ozanam:

“It remains to be seen where society will develop, whether into a means of exploitation for the strongest members to make huge profits, or will everyone devote themselves to the common good and the protection of the weak.”

The response, by Conor Gannon, a member of the National Social Justice Policy Group:

“Those words of Blessed Frédéric are truly inspirational. I mean this in the sense that they have the capacity to propose a harmonious way of living together which excludes any activity which would seek to make profit at the expense of another. But, I wonder how many people actually believe that that they should devote themselves to the common good and the protection of the weak?

“Let’s take a look at Ireland today. One bank appointed over a thousand rent receivers to collect rent from struggling landlords and, even though it made a loss of €2.1 billion, it awarded its chief executive an annual salary of €843,000.

“I don’t wish to have a go at those who work hard and deserve a fair wage. But I would like to ask, did I miss the debate about the abolition of the maximum wage? I certainly remember debates about the minimum wage! When you hear of certain members of the medical profession receiving pension packages of €9.7 million you have to wonder: is it fair that this is allowed to happen while 21% of all children are going to school hungry in the morning?

“Approximately 733,000 people are now living in poverty in Ireland. More than 232,000 children are now at risk of poverty. I’m quite sure Frédéric Ozanam would be moved to action if he heard this. One has to ask how much do we really care about the common good and the protection of the weak?

“Many members of the SVP will have encountered people they assist who have had dealings with moneylenders. One moneylending company operating in Ireland reported a profit of €1.3 billion from its European operation. This is profit at the expense of the disadvantaged. But how do we prevent exploitation of the weakest and prevent the strongest from making vast profits at their expense? By laws? By campaigns?

“Many would say that it’s the job of the State to intervene in the operation of the free market. And there are those who respond by saying that the capitalist system is the most efficient manner of doing business because it’s based upon human nature. But is natural state the fairest way of interacting? I would say that there is no such thing as equality of opportunity in nature. A snail is not equal to an eagle. Some are born faster, stronger and more intelligent than others and in the natural world that is used to their advantage.

“But we don’t live in a jungle. We live in a SOCIETY! This is the point that I believe Ozanam wished to make in the nineteenth century and this is the point I believe he would still make today. He would argue that the job of helping the weakest in society doesn’t fall to this abstract entity known as the State – it’s everybody’s responsibility!

We have an obligation to respect each and every human being irrespective of their earning potential. We have an obligation to ensure that society develops NOT into a means of exploitation for the strongest members to make huge profits. But rather, we have an obligation to devote ourselves to the common good and the protection of the weak.”

**THE CHALLENGE:
CHARITY MUST NEVER LOOK BACKWARDS**

“Charity must never look backwards, but always to the front, because the number of good deeds already accomplished is very small while present and future hardships remain infinite. Another reason for trying continually to make some progress is that it is certain that if we are no better today than we were yesterday – then we are worse.”

Margot Hartnett of the Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre in East County Cork responded to this challenge:

“My story is about a Conference making progress by finding a new way to help a particular group who were dependent on its support. The Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre was established 22 years ago under the aegis of the local St Vincent de Paul Conference. Through its visitation work members realised that there was a sizeable cohort of people who were heavy users of the Society’s services and resources. This group also had a range of other characteristics and needs that contributed to their dependence on the Society. There was a growing realisation within the Conference that while its motivations were honourable the way it was providing assistance could be compounding the situation as many of the problems were intergenerational. More importantly the Conference felt that the processes through which they sought to help people were in effect patronising and taking away from the dignity of the people they were trying to assist. The Conference sought to find ways in which it could support people to develop their sense of self confidence and self-esteem and to tackle the problem of dependency through a process of empowerment.

“At that time the Conference had been left some property on a site on the Main Street in Carrigtwohill. It decided to renovate the building as meeting place and as a location for the provision of practical supports to families in a delicate

unobtrusive but inclusive way and at the same time respecting the dignity of the service users irrespective of class, creed or background. The services were targeted at individuals and families who were deemed vulnerable and who were in the most cases already known to the Society. These services included childcare, adult educational programmes and courses, a 'Breakfast Club' which local teachers said improved the children's participation in school activities, shared reading programme and an after-schools club. The Centre also became a supplier of school uniforms for the two primary schools in the village. Hitherto families were purchasing uniforms of poor quality and high prices.

"What was once a small rural village in East Cork Carrigtwohill has now become a peri-urban one as its population increased as a result of inwards migration from other places in Ireland and abroad. This has brought benefits but has also created challenges, particularly as there was no development of the social infrastructure. Not only have the Society and other voluntary organisations to provide the services to cope with the problems and distress facing by many individuals and families as a result of the economic down turn, they have also to cope with the cultural and linguistic problems surrounding assisting the new communities.

"A new major challenge for us lies in the area of governance. We know the value and effectiveness of the Family Resource Centre and its benefit to the community. The next stage in our progress is to record and quantify our work so that we can review and learn from it to help develop improved ways of delivering services."

THE CHALLENGE: DEFEND YOUR BELIEFS, DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED

"Let us principally learn to defend our convictions without hating our adversaries, to love those who think differently from us, to recognise that there are Christians in all camps and that God can be served today as always. Let us complain less about our era and more about ourselves. Let us be less discouraged, but let us be better."

Shane Rice, a young member who is a volunteer in the Shops section in the North East Region gave this response:

"As Vincentians our everyday work for the Society is to portray the message of compassion, of empathy, the act of friendship, the offer of the hand up and not the hand out. As Christians we embrace these values in our own faith as well as in other faiths. When I joined St Vincent de Paul I was told that a volunteer was 'a person who performs or offers to perform a service voluntarily without prejudice but with a strong conviction.

"As a Vincentian I hold the values of Christianity, of God's teaching, in the true sense of which they were expressed but never at expense of those who are not of our faith our belief. I wish to refer to the Gospel according to Matthew in which Jesus is described as "a truthful man who teaches the way of God in accordance with the truth and who is not concerned with anyone's opinion, for he does not regard a person's status.

"As a Vincentian, Jesus's teaching puts things into perspective. Christian living is being comfortable in all walks of life - being non-judgemental is truly the centre of our lives. Personally in my experiences as an SVP volunteer, I have encountered people of all faiths. I have come across these people in my work in the Vincent shops, during the Christmas food appeal and while working on fundraising activities. As a Vincentian I did not judge these people on the grounds we are all one in God's eyes. Each person is unique and has a place of value and importance in the world in which we live.

"Indeed our work is challenging. It is always easy to be critical, to denounce as too difficult, to put aside what needs to be done but a Vincentian must rise above all this and never forget the real meaning of our work, to offer a hand of friendship to those in need and in offering that hand to make sure it's a hand up and not a hand out, that we are striving to create a more equal society of allowing people dignity, through fulfilling the principle of self-sufficiency. Let us remember that even when times are difficult for ourselves we are making a difference. WE ARE making a difference."

THE CHALLENGE: FOLLOW THE PATH OF JUSTICE

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

Patricia Darling, SVP Conference Support Worker in Tallaght, Dublin, responded:

"Yours must be a work of love, of kindness, you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning with an inalienable right to respect. You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis: you must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long term improvement."

"Two things immediately struck me – firstly, Oh, it's so familiar and secondly it is so challenging! It is also so relevant for our work - it was penned by Frederic Ozanam in Paris in the 1880's but it is no less relevant today than it was then. These words of Ozanam are a call to us all to be a voice for social justice and that seems like a very big call! But for me working at a local level in West Tallaght it has become an everyday kind of call. The demands on the society have never been greater and the issues we face ever more complex. We find ourselves meeting second and third generations of the same family – so we must in justice ask 'WHY?'

"There is a human face behind every justice issue and we see these faces night in night out as we go about our work. In my own work, I am daily faced with what I see as social justice issues at a very local and often individual level for families – for me it's about supporting people to access services, resolve housing issues, finding suitable pre-school places so that young mothers can return to education, to encourage isolated people to be a part of their own community.

"Often I come across issues affecting the wider community, at the moment there is a serious problem with damp in a number

of houses revamped in recent years by the local authority – in this situation I'm supporting the families to make a collective complaint/submission to the council. In doing this I hope that I am giving them their voice - a sense that they are not powerless and that they can have this situation put right.

"For me social justice is about trying to be faithful to this great teaching of Ozanam it is not about being militant or confrontational, it's about being strong in our support for those who seek our assistance, it's about being alert to the little things, trying to bring about changes that make life easier and fairer for people, it's about communicating with my fellow Vincentians – telling the story, seeking advice, raising the issue and finding a way forward."

THE CHALLENGE: YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD UNITE IN CHARITABLE WORK

"I would further wish that all young people might unite in head and heart in some charitable work."

‘ Approximately 733,000 people are now living in poverty in Ireland. More than 232,000 children are now at risk of poverty. ’

Attracta McNeice, SVP Youth for Justice officer in the North East Region offered this response:

"We live in harsh times, but we must always remember ours is a message of hope, and a little hope goes a long way.

"In my work with SVP over the years I have seen first-hand the enormous benefits of involving young people in head and heart in our work. We know we must engage with young people if we are to continue the work. We all recognise and acknowledge the skills, talents, energy, enthusiasm and most importantly the optimism of our young people. I have seen the amazing results and benefits of when these qualities are harnessed and channelled into Action Projects on behalf of SVP.

"Young people's participation with the SVP gives them the opportunity to volunteer; raises awareness of our work and helps them to understand and take action on social justice issues. Their involvement develops their caring and compassionate side and helps them to walk in the light, in that it helps them to find the good in themselves and in others. I believe the capacity to care for and help others is written into every human heart; we just need to nurture it.

"It is our hope that their experiences will be both informative and formative and that the young people will volunteer in the future, either as third level conference members or in

their adult life as conference members, but they will volunteer for something and be active contributing members of their community. In this sense part of our work is about planting seeds.

"When I talk to the young people about our work I explain that in Ireland we have 10,500 volunteers who give up their time freely to help people in need and that this is a most encouraging thought and gives us great hope. You, as volunteers, are leading by example, something in short supply in Ireland today. In this sense you are our inspiration and our hope. Intergenerational projects are great, as observed by a young person involved in a Befriending Project, and I quote "older people are the strength in our arms, the holders of our dreams for they show us the way."

"Today is an amazing day as we celebrate the work we do and take time to reflect on why we do it. Today we can draw strength, inspiration and encouragement from our founder. Our youth need someone to look to and need to draw inspiration and encouragement from us. In the same way that we try to pass on our Faith to our children and our grandchildren, involving young people in our work allows us the opportunity to hand on the baton to them, for they are the volunteers of the future. Together we can embrace change, together we can embrace diversity and together we can meet the needs of the people we serve. That way we can make a chain of love linking the past and the future and ensure that while the chain may lengthen, it will never break."

THE CHALLENGE: STUDY THE INJUSTICE OF POVERTY

"Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by poring over books or in discussions with politicians, but by visiting where they live, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the cause of their woes. You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis. You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of long-term improvement. The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning with an inalienable right to respect."

Hazel O'Bryne, an SVP Visitation Conference volunteer member in Dublin responded:

"I would like to say a few words about what the Society of St Vincent de Paul means to me as a relatively recently joined member, and what the experience of those we visit has to say to the wider landscape. Being a member of SVP is something that, once you get involved in, is very difficult to walk away from. Although we all know about poverty and disadvantage and exclusion and isolation in an abstract sense, very many of us aren't faced with such need directly or aren't personally impacted upon. But, once you do come into contact with that need up close, when you engage with people who experience that need deeply every day in their lives, it's something that you can't un-see, you can't forget and you can't remain unmoved. You are compelled to act. When you begin to hear people's stories and identify with the injustices that they have invariably

suffered, you can't help but respond.

"That means responding in a very direct way with help with food or clothes or energy bills but it also means responding to the underlying reasons for that need being experienced in the first place. It means voicing concerns about the structural causes for poverty and inequality that mean that

- The financial stresses of illness or disability can cripple a family more than the physical problems themselves;
- Employment is not a viable option for so many families because of inaccessible, unaffordable or complete absence of quality child care;
- Children go to school hungry and cold and without the materials they need for learning because free education is a myth;
- Older people are left isolated and vulnerable because of inadequate home care and transport services

"There are some things that we can do and some things that we can't. We can help families with the costs of school books and uniforms but we can't reform the education or social welfare systems. We need some help with that. The collective voice of the organisation has a role critical in shaping decision making and the stories that represent the real needs of struggling families and individuals must be heard at policy and political level. In the meantime, we continue to do what we can do. Being a member of SVP goes to the heart of that fundamental and existential questions of what it's all about and why we're here at all. For most people the answer to that question is to have a positive impact in the world and leave things better than you found them, a little fairer, a little more just. And often, in lots of small ways, and sometimes in very big ways, SVP contributes to that."

THE CHALLENGE: DOING LITTLE IS NOT ENOUGH

"It is not enough to do the little which we have been accustomed to do. When the hardships of the time are inventing new forms of suffering, can we rest satisfied?" - Frederic Ozanam

Sarah Dunne, a member of the Carrick-on-Suir Youth Conference in County Tipperary, responded:

On a daily basis we are put to the challenge of defending our beliefs. As times change people become more cynical and not all beliefs are popular in modern life, therefore it also becomes harder to not hate our adversaries and yet as members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul we manage to do what Frederic Ozanam wanted. We do not pick who we help based on how we feel about them. We do not let our adversaries stop us; we simply help those who need help in order to be good and effective members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

There are many factors that can hinder us in our quest to help others. We are living through a recession here it is getting more difficult to meet the needs of the people we help. A constant worry for many is how will they pay for TV, electricity and food amongst other things for their families and this is a battle we have which is uphill and there is no overnight fix for this problem. An important thing to remember about people's problems is that sometimes just to talk can help for some, the relief can come from knowing they can speak freely and not have to worry about what they say. People often see us

as giving out handouts without dealing with the problems in society and so it comes back to having our convictions.

As eras change and technology improves we have constant access to those in need. We are now living in a time where there is no excuse for not knowing what problems people face. In the 200 years of the St. Vincent de Paul Society the way in which we communicate has never been more advanced and yet people live with the same problems era-to-ear. We have no magic app that will fix the world and so we cannot blame the technological era we live in but only ourselves for these problems not being elevated. We are all good at complaining about the ways of the world and are aware of faults around us but we also have to remember our own faults. Yes, there is only so much we can do but we need to put our differences aside and use what resources we have to do the work we agreed to do. We need to work together to find a new way to approach our work as the times change.

And do let the lasting thought today not be how to validate ourselves to others, nor to try and show what our purpose is to the outside world, but merely help those who ask. Do not be put off by our adversaries or our situation in the current climate, but embrace these factors and continue the work started 200 years ago by Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

DUBLIN REGION CELEBRATING OZANAM

To Celebrate the Bicentenary of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, a group has been formed to organise events for members in this special Bicentenary year. These will include a Members' Mass on November 28 in Clarendon Street Church at 7 pm and 'OZANAM WALKS' in Glendalough which will be centred around the spiritual beauty of the Glendalough Lakes. These days of prayer and reflection and the celebration of the Eucharist will be led by Fr. Michael Rodgers SPS of the Tearmann Spirituality Centre Glendalough. He will draw on themes from our Celtic Christian heritage, integrating themes from our own Vincentian tradition.



Pilgrimage to Glendalough - for Dublin School Conferences

- 17th September 2013 - contact Deirdre Walsh at 8198451 deirdre.walsh@svpdublin.ie

Dublin Conferences Pilgrimages

- 21st September 2013
- 28th September 2013

To book a place please contact Bernie at 8198415 or bernadette.hughes@svpdublin.ie

Celebratory Bi-Centenary Concert

8th September 7.00pm National Concert Hall

With Mary Byrne, Howard Crosby, Dublin Gospel Choir and other talented performers. Book NCH directly 01-4170000 www.nch.ie



Charities band together to make school uniforms more affordable

- Who We Are
- What We Do
- Latest
- Need Help?
- Want to Help?

Donate Now

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul exists to fight poverty

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the largest, voluntary, charitable organisation in Ireland. Its membership of 10,000 volunteers throughout the country are supported by professional staff, working for social justice and the creation of a more just, caring nation. This unique network of social concern also gives practical support to those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, by providing a wide range of services to people in need.

St Vincent de Paul in Action

Charities band together to make school uniforms more affordable

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) branches and national groups across Ireland know how the cost of school uniforms can put financial pressure on many families.



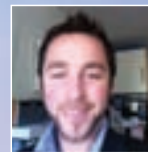
Where to find our Offices

Locations
To contact our regional offices or to see what the Society is doing in your area.



Contact can be made with the SVP through our website www.svp.ie or our offices listed on page 22 of this magazine

IT IS UNLIKELY THINGS WILL CHANGE UNTIL IRISH PEOPLE START TAKING ACTION TO DEMAND CHANGE



Dr Rory Hearne,
Claiming Our Future

There are credible alternatives to austerity in the coming Budget

The current government 'austerity' plans for October's Budget include €1.9bn in spending cuts and €1.1bn in revenue (tax) increases. We have already had eight austerity budgets since the crisis began in 2008 of a total of €31 billion, €18.5bn of which was cuts. Anyone walking through our villages, towns and cities can see that austerity has failed economically and socially. Economists, social justice advocates and politicians in Ireland and, indeed across Europe, are now making the case that we have reached the limits of the effectiveness of austerity. The Irish economy shrank in the first three months of this year, pushing the country back into recession. Even the IMF's former mission chief to Ireland, Ashoka Mody, said recently that the Irish approach in the bailout was a mistake and that it was time to stop the austerity budgets. Within the Irish Government, the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, said she believed "we have reached the limits of austerity", adding that ordinary people "are shouldering too much of the burden".

Austerity has benefited some sections

Corporate profits have bounced back, the stock markets are rallying, and the wealthiest 1% are certainly not feeling the cold winds of retrenchment. There has been a massive inequality in the way in which austerity has been implemented. The burden of adjustment has been on low and middle income households as is seen from the following list of just some of the cuts in recent budgets. These include the PRSI changes which hit lowest income households the hardest, the property tax, reduction in social welfare (notably for those under 21 reduced by 51%), fuel allowance, child benefit, back to School Clothing and footwear by 25%, home help hours, reduced disability allowance and carers allowance, capitation grants for schools, lone parents, public sector wages, rent supplement, increases in school transport charges, prescription charges, A&E costs, charges for chemotherapy and third level student fees. Two particular examples of the cuts hitting our most disadvantaged communities are the reduction in the regeneration (plans for new social housing and community facilities) plans for social housing estates and the cuts to the community development projects that work with disadvantaged communities;

National Regeneration Budget for Most Disadvantaged communities 2008-2013

| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2012 | 2013 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total (million) | 121 | 97 | 116 | 90 | 80 |

Government funding reductions for voluntary and community sector 2008-2012

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Local Community Development Programme | - 35% |
| Initiatives against drugs | - 29% |
| Family support projects | - 17% |

We are in the middle of a social emergency

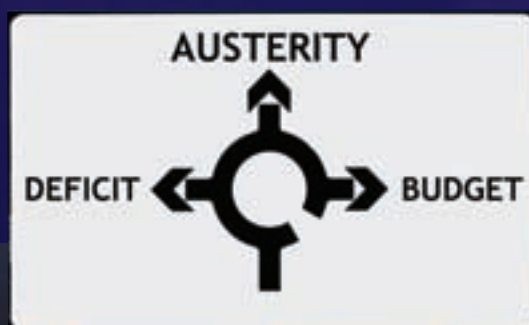
The level of social devastation is shown by the fact that over 1.5 million people have €50 or less left over at the end of the month after their essential bills have been paid, there are 100,000 households in need of social housing, the deprivation rate is 22.5% (an increase of 5.5% in one year), there are 730,000 living in poverty with 1 in 5 children in poverty and without social welfare payments 51% of Ireland's population would be at risk of poverty (up from 43% in 2008). On top of this you have the huge family and community impacts of emigration and mortgage arrears. There is a two year waiting list for children who need Child and adolescent mental health services in Dublin. Austerity is causing the long term devastation of already weak public and community services.

The significant development is that there are now credible alternatives to austerity. Contrary to how Minister Noonan is presenting it, there is in fact another way of approaching the Budget that could avoid further cuts to essential social and public spending and avoid further tax increases for low and middle income earners.

Various organisations such as Claiming Our Future, Social Justice Ireland, ICTU, TASC and the NEVIN Economic Research Institute have outlined alternative 'growth-friendly' and 'jobs-rich' approaches. These include the full use of the proceeds of the 'Promissory Note' deal to reduce austerity by €1 billion, an investment stimulus from the National Pension Reserve Fund, and increases in taxation targeted at households in the top 10% income bracket as well as capital assets of those who can afford to pay more than they are doing now. This is backed up by CSO SILC Data which shows that the top 10% of households only pay an effective average tax rate of 25.6% while many corporations are only playing an effective tax rate of 4 to 6%.

The Nevin Institute outline in their detailed analysis that this approach is more likely than the current government budgetary strategy to raise output and employment, avoid further damage to public services and welfare supports, reinforce market confidence in Ireland through a policy founded on growth, investment and fiscal prudence, address some of the key social and economic infrastructural short-comings and, significantly reduce the government deficit to 3% in 2015.

Despite government claims that we have done '85% of the heavy lifting', and that there are 'only' two austerity budgets to come, the



Department of Finance projections in the Governments recent Irish Stability Programme Update tell a different story. That document outlines the fiscal plans to consistently reduce public spending into the future beyond 2015.

Challenging the Political System

The challenge we face is how to get the political system to change direction away from austerity. Many people say that this is a hopeless task as the Irish don't protest. But there were large demonstrations when ICTU organised them in the last number of years, hospital protests and the initial almost 50% non-payment rate of the household charge. There have also been some successful protests including the over 70s, the special education needs cuts campaign, state forestry and the Dolphin House regeneration. Claiming Our Future recently held a conference on Budget Alternatives to austerity and is organising public meetings and actions in the run up to the budget. But trying to mobilise people against austerity does face challenges. People feel overwhelmed by the scale of austerity the crisis, the big organisations such as the unions and NGOs that have the resources to mobilise appear reluctant to do so and appear divided between themselves. In this way the government and elite in Ireland have been successful in convincing the majority that there are no alternatives and people are better off struggling alone as solidarity is pointless. There is insufficient leadership and articulation of alternatives by Irish civil society, charity organisations and NGOs. Leadership requires radical action through the mobilisation of people power. Where is this?

It is unlikely things will change until Irish people start taking action to demand change from the government and take action themselves in their community and workplaces. The important charity work done by St Vincent De Paul and others is essential to support people through their crises and difficult times. However, from a 'big picture' perspective it is like a sticking plaster being put on a wound -and that is the structural inequality in our society. Transforming Ireland into a country based on equality, solidarity, sustainability and community is the fundamental change that all Irish people must demand, struggle for and make a reality. The St Vincent De Paul Budget Campaign against Austerity is an important area for action that should be supported. Also in Claiming Our Future, we are encouraging the public to get involved in the budget campaign of local public information meetings and action. To find out more see www.claimingourfuture.ie

• *Dr. Rory Hearne is a Community Regeneration Project Co-Ordinator, researcher, author, policy & politics analyst, lecturer.*

Early in 2010 Is Feidir Linn, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, environmental groups, the Community Platform, Social Justice Ireland and TASC began a series of meetings to explore how best to cooperate and coordinate endeavours for a more equal, inclusive and sustainable Ireland. From this beginning, Claiming Our Future evolved. It has gone on to include many different organisations such as trade unions, environmental groups, community groups, migrant worker organisations, youth groups, older people's organisations, cultural groups, student groups, developing world groups, rural networks, women's organisations, disability groups, social media and social justice organisations. It says that it is not a political party and does not intend to be.

UNEMPLOYED AND UNSUPPORTED?

By **Caroline Fahey,**
SVP Social Justice Team



Unemployment is one of the most personally and socially devastating consequences of the economic crisis, with 292,000 people now out of work and over 420,000 on the Live Register. The social welfare payments and employment supports provided by the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills are a lifeline for those who have lost jobs, or who are searching for their first job. However, the system is under pressure due to increased demand and reducing resources. This means that people who are unemployed are also under pressure – social welfare rates are below the poverty line; people can only claim Jobseekers Benefit for a maximum of 9 months even though they may have been paying PRSI for many years; and at the end of 2011 it was estimated that there were 29 unemployed people for every job vacancy. With one in four children living in a jobless household the effects of poverty and unemployment can carry on into the next generation.

While the unemployment figures are improving, many of the jobs that people are taking up are part-time rather than full-time, emigration is on the rise and rates of unemployment remain highest among those with a lower level of education. The unemployment rate for young people with only a primary education is 70%. Supporting young people and adults who have been failed by the education system in the past to access second chance education and/or training is essential. The cost of education at all levels can place a huge financial burden on families, both in and out of work, and can be a factor resulting in early school leaving. Deep cuts to training and education supports have made it harder for people who are out of work to take up education and training opportunities, and for parents to keep their children in school.

Access to education is vitally important if we are to tackle the situation where too many people face a future of long term unemployment or insecure, low paid work and poverty. We need you to support our campaign and Make Your Voice Heard so that instead of more cuts we see job creation, investment in our education system and hope for a positive future.

Northern Regional President Aidan Crawford tells how the Society of St.Vincent de Paul worked across the religious divide during the “Troubled Times’ in Northern Ireland and continues to do so today, earning the respect of all communities.



Working through dark days

“During the dark days of the troubles we continued our work visiting and helping, reaching out to all....”

The first Conference of the Society of St.Vincent De Paul in Northern Ireland was established in 1848 at Enniskillen in County Fermanagh and it has been working for those in need in the North since, embracing the entire community right across the divide. No distinction is made between communities (which is known as the orange and the green). We visit and are welcomed in all areas because we do not discriminate and we are just there to help in whatever way we can,

A few weeks ago I attended a meeting in Stormont and met with quite a few MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) from all political parties. One MLA, a from a Unionist party told me he had great respect for the work of the SVP. He explained that he himself visited prisoners and was impressed by the way that SVP members treated all prisoners, making no differences, treating all as equals.

This is as it should be where the Society is concerned and during the dark days of the Troubles we continued our work visiting and helping- reaching out to all. People were being put out of their homes, either by intimidation or by homes being burned or destroyed. The Society of St.Vincent de Paul helped to re-house people, supplying beds, cookers and all types of furniture to all communities, from Nationalist areas to Loyalist areas. The Society focused on working to alleviate the hardship being suffered.

Our work continues to-day and although the North has “turned the corner” from that troubled period and the sad, dark days are almost a thing of the past, we now have high unemployment, social injustice, benefit cuts, moneylending, fuel poverty and even food poverty. Our work continues and no matter what community people are from, hardship and suffering is still the same.

That is why the SVP takes up the slack and makes no distinction.

Our ethos is to help regardless of colour, race, or creed. The only criteria for help is need. Although most of our donations come from Church door collections, we have to find ways of generating money from other areas, as times are tough for everyone in this economic climate.

The SVP Northern Ireland Region has 19 Areas which consists of 180 Conferences, the parish units, with 2,000 senior members and we have 200 youth members in 16 Conferences. We also have 30 shops.

Over 3,000 visits per week are carried out. This includes visits to hospitals, residential homes and prisons. On-going projects include breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, summer schemes,

computer training, educational projects for foreign nationals, holiday homes and youth work.

How many times have I heard the expression “ they need a good talking to” indeed this is something we can all be guilty of at times, but as we move the SVP forward, our aim is to make the Society stronger and fitter for purpose, just as those who have gone before us did their part in this regard, leaving us a strong legacy. The human side of our work where we give of our time to visit people in need and offer our help and support putting aside our own worries for the sake of others as we do this, is exactly what we have been called to do. There is no need for fanfares or pious words, instead the quiet gesture, the consoling word and taking time to listen is just what being Vincentians is all about.

In his first Homily as Pope, Pope Francis spoke of the importance of protecting one another and preserving the environment. That sort of protection is even more important for those who are in pain or marginalised so perhaps instead of ... “they need a good talking to” it should be that we should be prepared to ... have a “good listen.. to what they have to say!”

I would ask this of those in positions of power and influence church leaders and politicians amongst them: Please take time to have a “good listen” to those in need, We also need those in positions of power to listen to the SVP. We are, without being arrogant, ‘experts in poverty’. We know what is going on behind the doors of our poor and marginalized, because they invite us into their homes and they tell us.

Being the largest charity in Northern Ireland we carry out more visits to homes throughout the Six Counties than any other organisation, either Government or voluntary,

The visits we do are requested by those requiring our help. It is a privilege to be invited into their homes to listen and give support. As a result, we know about homelessness, fuel poverty, starvation, alcoholism, drug problems, and moneylending – the extortionate rates of pay-day loans for example.

We also help families trying to cope with a range of problems such as school uniforms’ costs, sickness and unemployment.

Our volunteers encounter daily the problems of our marginalised, often meaning that the people who can least afford are forced to pay the most, Where people can afford to fill a tank with oil those in poverty pay double or more for cans and the same happens for clothing and other necessities, often because they have to use and depend on expensive credit.

Everything we do is geared to aiding those who seek our help,

One of our members, who sadly passed away a short time ago, had a saying: “You can never put the poor on hold “

If someone needs help we respond. It is our duty as Vincentians and thankfully our members on the ground are dedicated to the work of the Society,

We have a duty to listen, just as those in authority have a responsibility to listen to us,

We have to be the voice of those in need.

WHEN THE SVP RAN BANKS

The Penny Saving Banks

By Gerry Martin,
SVP Historian

“Why, then, did you not put my money on loan so that when I got back I could have collected it with interest.” Luke 19:23

The ‘Bulletin’ for November 1884 was quite emphatic: ‘The Society does not undertake to do the work for which Government institutions exist’. We are told the following month, ‘that no form of charity is foreign to the spirit of the Society, but it chiefly employs itself in succouring the poor and especially the bashful poor, and persons overwhelmed with sudden misfortune, whose cases require immediate and temporary relief’.

So why did the Society take on the work of bankers? We are reminded that, as an organisation, we do not GIVE loans. Dr. Thomas Willis, one of our founders, was very exact – we should teach them to ‘husband their little means’. But did this protection of possessions necessarily lead to the opening of ‘Penny Saving Banks’?

The first such Bank is recorded in Ruthwell, Scotland, in 1810. Rev. Henry Duncan, a Presbyterian Minister, had set up the initial model, and by 1860 there were thirty six ‘Penny Saving Banks’ in Glasgow. The idea was taken up by our Society in 1862. Eoin McLaughlin, in his major work on Savings Banks, has commented that ‘the continued weakness in the Irish TSB [Trustee Saving Bank] system and contemporary difficulties in the UK led to the establishment of the POSB [Post Office Saving Bank] in 1861’. But were these monies, accumulated by the SVP, used for the immediate needs of the poor and for the charitable work of the Society, or was cash merely deposited with the POSB and like agencies? In the original Scottish ideal, when the depositor had accumulated one Pound that sum was transferred from the Penny Bank to an account in his or her own name in the principal or prime Savings Bank.

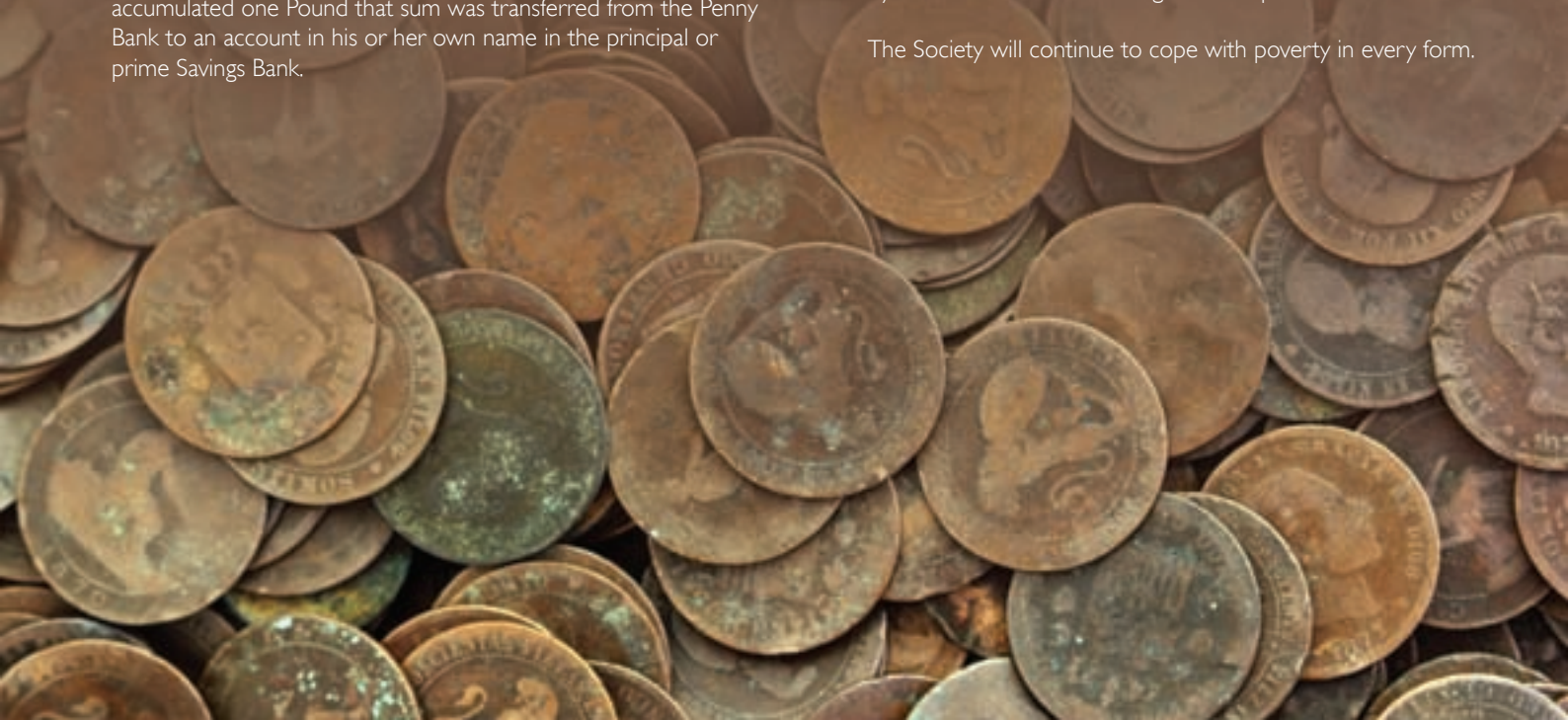
That the SVP’s ‘Penny Savings Bank’ was a success is illustrated in the South Parish, in Cork, by 3,784 deposits in the six months ended 20 May 1884. The idea became nation-wide and the Belfast Penny Savings Bank was originated in 1884 by St. Peter’s Conference. The international SVP had, ‘in order to inculcate habits of economy’ amongst children, started the special work in Australia in 1881. The Society had its Irish headquarters in the Cornmarket, in Dublin, from 1862 to 1905. Along with its main title, was tagged the title ‘Penny Saving Bank’, so it was seen to be the main special work of the organisation, but the new century brought new values. Joseph Glynn, who was President in 1929 said that:

“The thrift movement, which at one time was almost our only special work, developed so largely as to outrun the original idea of providing merely a means of saving the pennies of the poor: The fall in the value of money and the consequent increase in wages created a new situation which necessitated the curtailment of the Society’s work in that direction.”

“Special works” were introduced as early as 1851. That year the ‘Emigrant Protection Society’ was set up by the SVP, and the organisation regularly paid for the migrant’s passage. The general exodus from Ireland that was to continue for many years after the Great Famine was still taking a toll on people and, until the involvement of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the needs of emigrants, seen as a palliative for many social problems, was ignored by clergy and government alike.

With the ‘Penny Saving Bank’, ‘Emigrant Protection Society’ and the later garden-allotment special works, the SVP was to bring an early and an immediate meaning to such Special Works.

The Society will continue to cope with poverty in every form.





BECCA GALLAGHER NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CO-ORDINATOR, SVP

SVP National President Geoff Meagher has placed emphasis on the development of the role of young people within the Society, of enhancing their involvement and of recruiting more young members. National Vice-President Kieran Stafford was assigned this area as part of his role and the first steps of implementing a new youth policy were taken when the National Management Council approved the appointment of a National Youth Development Co-ordinator, with Regional Youth Officers.

Developing youth involvement in the Society is vital to its future, the age structure of the majority of SVP members indicates this and the National Council and senior members of the Society have been proactive in this area.

The appointment of Becca Gallagher to the new post of National Youth Development Co-ordinator requires her primarily to lead the development of youth programmes in the Society, to co-ordinate and promote the development of School Conferences and Youth for Justice programmes, while also working with College Conferences and actively encouraging the participation of young people in SVP.

Becca joins the Society with a wealth of experience. Having originally studied and worked in Recreation and Leisure for about 10 years, as she tells me when we meet in the Society's Head Office at Sean McDermott Street in the heart of Dublin City where she will be based, Becca felt that she did not want to work any longer in the recreation and leisure sphere, but wanted a more challenging role. Following this course, she took up the stand-alone position of Youth Development Officer with CYC, the Columbanus Youth Project in South Dublin where, for almost two years, she designed, implemented and evaluated youth programmes.

"At the time there were no courses available for Youth Work and so much of what I learned was hands on experience at the ground level and this was a good basis, a strong foundation in my work in this area from the very beginning."

After that, like many younger people, Becca decided "to do some travelling" and this was throughout Australia, where she worked for a short period of time with a Youth Centre.

"There was a huge difference between working with the Youth Centres there, compared with in Ireland, as they were a lot more advanced and everything was set up a lot better."

Back in Ireland she spent two years working as a Traveller Youth Project Coordinator on the Northside of Dublin, with the focus of trying to integrate young Travellers into the community. While working in that role she completed a Certificate in Counselling Skills. She left this position and then worked as an SCP Local Coordinator in the inner city with students who were at risk of leaving school early.

"I was sad to leave this project but, unfortunately, the funding was transferred to a Regional Youth Service project" and so she worked for a time in the School Completion Project in inner city Dublin, run by the Department of Education for early school leavers or those at risk of early school leaving.

Her next experience was working in the Liberties Club, a Garda Youth Diversion Project as Manager; "delivering the service's activities and programme and I was particularly interested in developed assistance and help to young people at risk." On an academic level, she continued to improve her skills by completing a Certificate in Youth Justice and she is currently finishing her Masters' in Community and Voluntary Services.

In her SVP role she will work in collaboration with a team of Regional Youth Development Officers, local SVP Areas and Conferences "to engage with young people in Secondary Schools through offering Youth for Justice Programmes and providing support in establishing SVP School Conferences."

"I will also be designing, developing and co-ordinating the delivery of a programme of Youth Development activities to engage and motivate young people to become active in volunteering and to develop awareness of social justice issues in Ireland and of the work of the SVP."

Becca is looking forward to what is a big challenge – developing, growing and building awareness among young people both in the community and within the Society.

POSTCARDS FROM OZANAM

In a special project in Wexford, a photographer and member of Wexford County Council's Artists' Panel worked with the residents of SVP's Ozanam House.

Artist Mary Furlong outlines the work:

"It was my first 'Artist-In-The-Community' project and it was a very enjoyable and special occasion. After a twelve-week project we produced a limited edition of 100 sets of postcards with 15 images in each set."

The postcards reproduced here are a selection of some of the images produced in the project.



"Don't follow me, I'm lost too," is a study of wildlife by Colm



The starfish in the hand is titled "Alien Being" and is by Anthony.



A cloud formation over the sea is "Untitled" by Robbie.



The horse, titled "Jess," is by David.

MOUNTAINVIEW SHOWS A DIFFERENT NORTHERN IRELAND

Television screens and newspaper photographs during the Summer highlighted once again the troubled image of Northern Ireland, but there is a different Northern Ireland, one in which the Society of St.Vincent de Paul is working and which in this article shows a different, more positive perspective, concentrating on the future generation through the children of today.

"Children and young people living in West Belfast and in particular Upper Springfield and Whiterock areas are the future of our communities," says Kay Shortt, who manages the Mountainview Centre run by the Northern Region of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. "Investment in service and provision that impacts their lives is critical to allowing them to have access to and avail of opportunities that will allow them to grow and develop."

The aim of the Society in the North is to attempt to help families to be free from poverty and disadvantage, have maximum opportunities to realise their full potential, to be treated equally and respectfully and given the chance to have a role in influencing and shaping interventions which directly impact on their lives.

"We seek to respond to the call that every Christian receives to bring the love of Christ to those we serve. That is what we are about in the Mountainview Centre. Our strategy has been developed through consultation with centre users and has been influenced by 12 years of working with children and families in the local community and by the work undertaken by the Society of St.Vincent de Paul throughout its history. This strategy focuses on all members of the community, but in particular children, young people and their families."

The Summer Playscheme run by Mountainview is intended to strengthen and improve positive outcomes for families and communities. It is applied by implementing six key points, with high-level outcomes for the children:

- Experiencing Economic and Environmental Well-Being
- Being Healthy
- Enjoying Learning and Achieving
- Living in Safety and with stability
- Contributing Positively to Community and Society
- That they are happy and have fun

Activities provided at Mountainview include:-

- Out-of-School Hours Childcare
- Breakfast Club
- After Schools Programme
- Adult Courses in Essential Skills
- Irish Language
- Confident Families
- Parenting
- Cook it
- Arts & Crafts
- 50+ Group
- Summer Playscheme

The Summer Scheme was registered for 32 children of primary school age per day, ranging from 4 to 11 years. It was open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., providing breakfast and lunch as well as mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks. Two trips per week were provided to relevant places of interest and fun, providing lunch for the children, while other trips included barbeques.

To give them a feeling of involvement, the children took part in planning sessions prior to the start of the scheme and put forward ideas for activities and trips.

"This was a good learning experience for them as we have had in previous years to explain to the children that we could not go to New York on a bus as it was so far away. This approach even led into a geography discussion," said Kay. "When the children go back to school and everyone is speaking about their holidays, the children who attended the scheme can tell them about the many places they have visited, what they have learnt and how much fun they have had at and with the SVP."



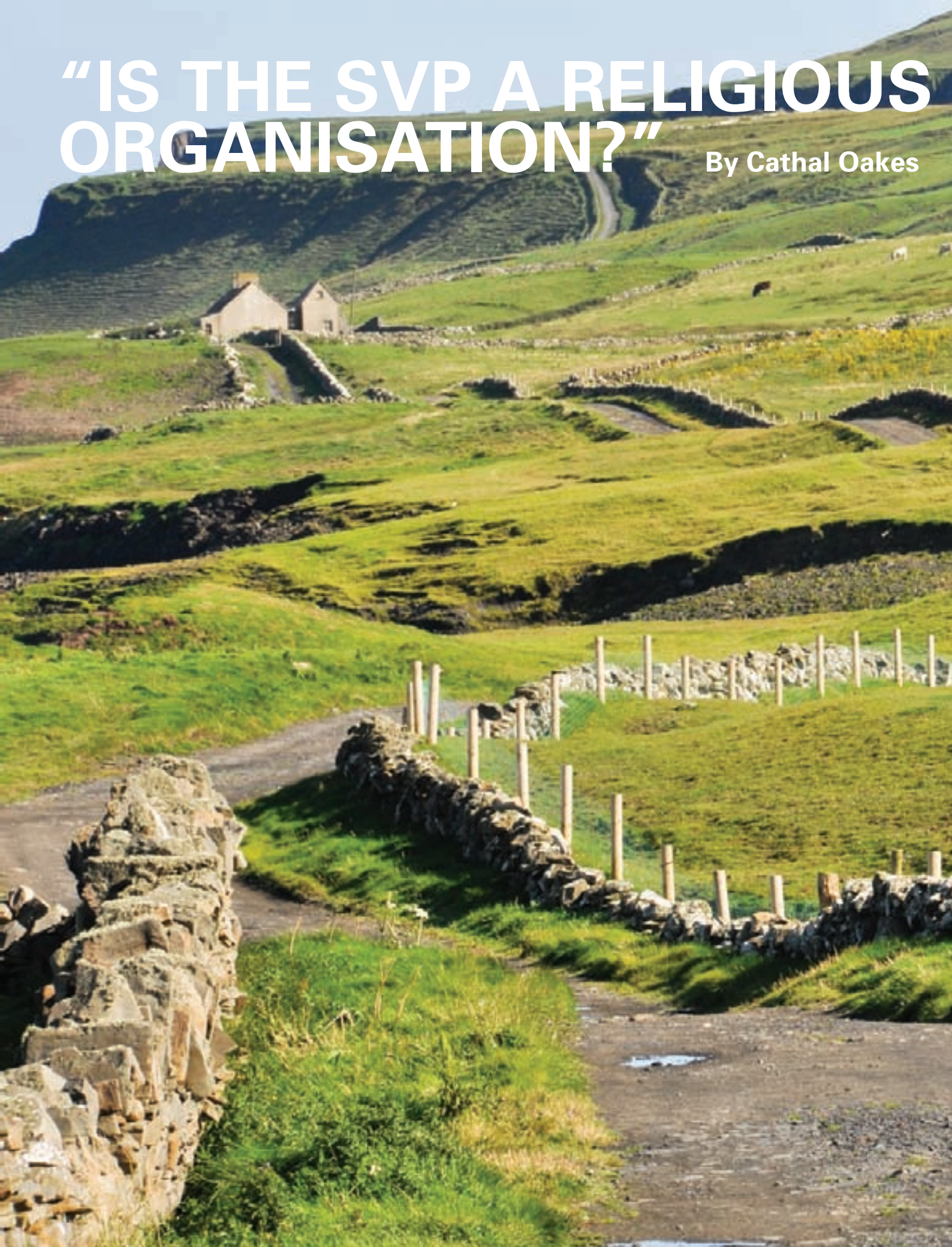


Aidan Crawford, Northern Ireland Regional President;
Cormac Wilson, Vice-President and Kay Shortt, Manager



“IS THE SVP A RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION?”

By Cathal Oakes



One key issue we had was how to best serve the rural populations and those living in small towns in the vicinity of Ennis. Ennis is a good-sized town of approximately 20,000 people and even though it is doing relatively well you only have to go 5-10 miles outside the town to find serious rural poverty and isolation. There are also many small towns and villages which need support but couldn't really support a Conference. So we decided to create a "donut team"! In the past number of years we have set up five new teams with three of these being in visitation.

The 'donut' team is based in Ennis and meets on a Monday night like the three other Ennis-based teams and it covers the Ennis surrounds from the town boundary out to about 15 miles. The team requires members who have time off during the day as most of the visitation is done during the day and each call takes a good bit longer due to travel and you often have to spend a bit of extra time with the people, so it is most suited to retired people or those on shift work. SVP would obviously have to cover mileage as necessary but in practice members haven't asked for the expenses and so we don't have a secret bag. The team works really well and as an example, last year we visited a lady 15 miles west of Ennis on December 23 and when we called to her again in the first week in January we were the last people she had seen. We were conscious of the fact that many members did not have a great insight or experience in dealing with for example

‘ We managed to set up three teams in smaller towns that were beyond the range of the ‘donut’ team ’

social welfare, mortgages etc. So we created a panel of experts who are all members and these members are the 'go to' people with any questions. It's a 'win-win' because the "expert" will build knowledge by dealing with many cases and the individual members don't have to spend as much time figuring things out. Following on from this we created an education specific team for dealing with all requests from Junior Cert upwards. If I visit a home and there is an education- related request I refer it on to the team. The education team deal with it, meet the person, interview them have their own budget for responding and most importantly follow up. Subsequent assistance is linked to performance/attendance. Again expertise has been built and it meant individual visitation team members are dealing with all these requests from scratch.

We managed to set up three teams in smaller towns that were beyond the range of the 'donut' team. In setting these up we found that a town hall- type meeting worked well. Unsuitable persons tended to drift away during the training/paperwork process but one key element is that the new team needs the Area President or their designate to sit and manage the Conference for approx. 3-6 months. This takes a lot of time but in my view is the only way to success.

In the context of visitation teams and new members, one of the questions I am often asked is: "Is the SVP a religious organisation?" It's a good question and I answer that 'yes we are a Catholic organisation, with a Christian ethos and yes we do say prayers at the beginning and end of meetings but we do also

have Protestant members, Muslim members'. I must say I often found it quite ironic that I was answering the question as an Area President of a religious organisation who is not a religious person and a not a church go-er and I suspect there are many others in SVP who are in the same boat and I also imagine that many future members will be in the same position.

But the question asked is actually the easy question and the answer given is actually the easy answer.

Because in truth the fact we are a Christian organisation actually raises many more difficult questions which aren't easy to answer and is really at the core to our work. In the context of visitation and new members here are some of the questions I think it asks of me:

Is my work in the SVP my vocation? And if so what priority does it get in my life and what level of commitment should I give? In Clare we have an Area Treasurer who is 30 years in the society and still will swop shifts at work so he can make his Monday meeting. Pretty impressive. If we are called to the home of a known criminal or drug dealer or abuser what do we do? If we have a hostel which is part-funded by the HSE is it acceptable to turn away people at the door while there is a cross on the wall in the hallway because they don't qualify to stay? And very specifically when I walk in the door of a home do I really see the people as brothers, sisters and friends or do I see them as clients? As one member said to me it's fine that all people are equal in God's eyes but that's not much use if they're not equal in mine. And I can honestly say that I have gone into homes with my visitation partner full of my own solution and judgements and made a mess of it...and I am also glad to say there have been times when I have entered a home with my partner and threw myself on the couch as I would in my sister's house and chatted to the person as a friend and I think we made a difference to them. And on a day when we are we are looking for inspiration from an iconic figure from the past I have to say I was very inspired by the events in Rome on Holy Thursday when the new Pope washed the feet of a young lady who happened to have a different colour skin, who happened to be Muslim and I ask myself do I really have that level of humility and would I be prepared to do the same for those whom I visit?

Cathal Oakes is a former Area President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in County Clare. In this article he reviews the work of the Society such as – what should Society members do if they are called to the home of a known criminal? This is an edited version of the address he made to the Ozanam 200th anniversary meeting in Dublin .



ARE PEOPLE REALLY GOING HUNGRY ?



By Kieran Stafford, National Vice-President,
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

“The sad fact is that many people, including children, go to bed hungry”

For most of us the words food poverty conjure up images of gaunt, emaciated people. So is that what food poverty in 2013 really is?

We Vincentians know well that this is not the case but we certainly know that many people we visit regularly skip meals and often can only purchase cheap processed foods.

We also know that children are going to school with no breakfast or inadequate lunches. Teachers have told us that children are coming to them complaining that they are hungry. Minister Joan Burton T.D. launched a Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs. As part of the Pilot Programme grants were made available to four primary schools in north Dublin to support the set-up of a new breakfast club in each school.

The Breakfast Clubs were set up during January and February 2013 and the Pilot Programme will continue to run until June 2014. We would like to see the breakfast club scheme extended to as many schools as is possible. SVP run and support many breakfast clubs. It is a fact that children concentrate better in school when well-nourished.

According to research carried out on behalf of the Department of Social Protection in 2012, 10% of our population 450,000 people were in food poverty, the definition of food poverty used was:

- Inability to afford a roast or vegetarian equivalent once a week
- Inability to afford a meal with meat (or vegetarian equivalent) every 2nd day
- Inability to afford a substantial meal on one day in the past two weeks due to lack of money.

The households most likely to be affected are:

1. Households on low incomes.
2. Households with 3 or more children under 18.
3. Households where the head of the household is ill or disabled.

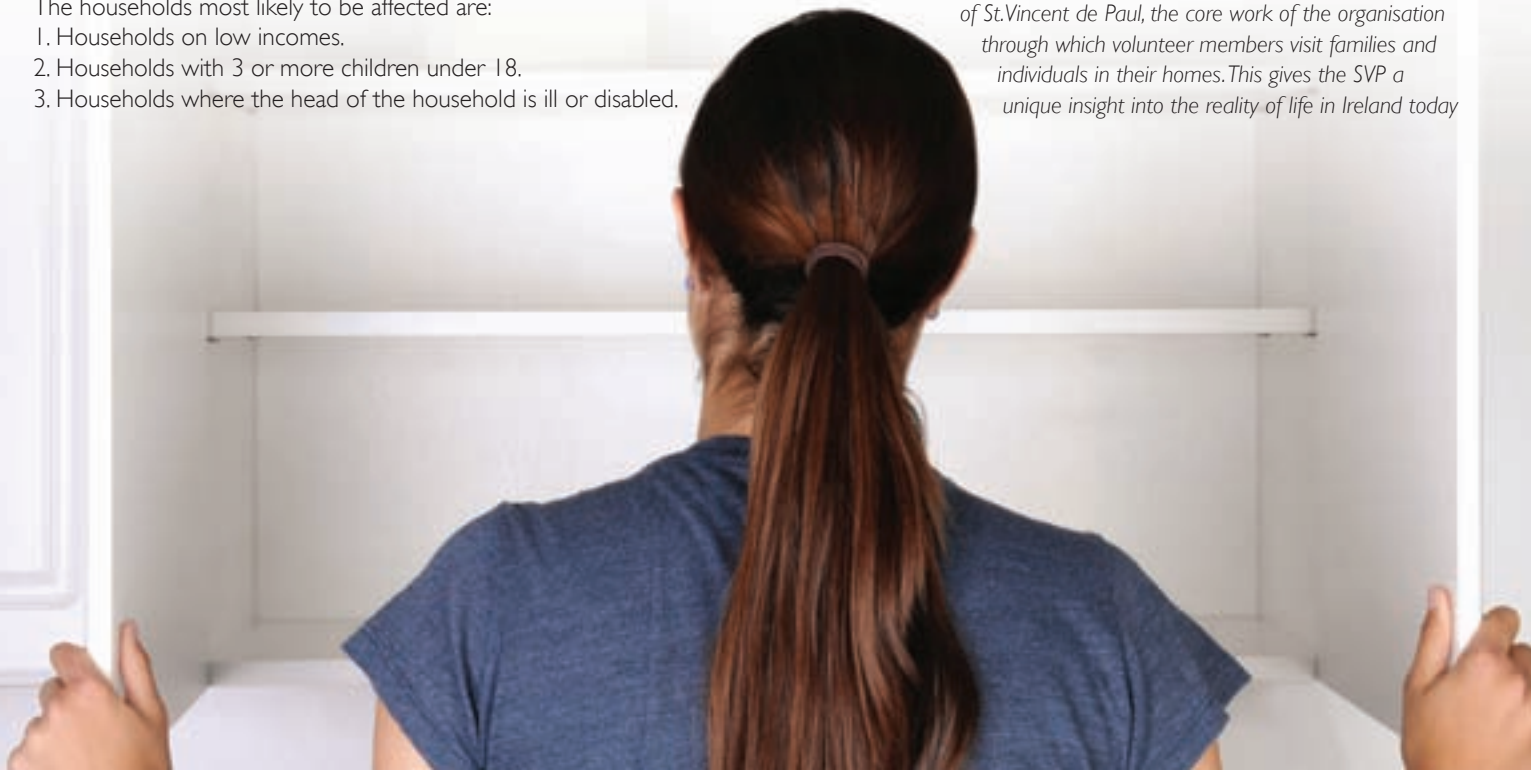
4. Lone parent households.

5. Households headed by a person who is unemployed.

These shocking statistics are no surprise to those of us who visit these households every week, we know that distributing vouchers and money is no long-term solution to this problem. The simple fact is that the people in these households simply do not have enough money to pay for everything and sometimes paying bills or buying school stuff or paying for medical items, etc. takes precedence over the purchase of food. We all remember the story that a few years ago shocked the nation about a family in Tralee that were practically starving so that the mortgage could be paid. As Vincentians visiting families at risk we continue to ensure that the 3 basic human needs are looked after - Shelter, Heat and most importantly Food. We can also help with advice and mentoring in households where the head male or female lacks basic budgeting or cooking skills. Some people we encounter are overweight not because they are eating too much but because they often eat the wrong types of unhealthy convenient foods. We should be directing people to local healthy cookery classes and we should pay for their courses when necessary. In areas where no courses are being run Publications like “How to feed a family on less than €10 a day” by Elizabeth Bollard can be obtained from National Office and distributed to families who need help on how to eat healthy on a budget.

The sad fact is that many people, including children, will go to bed hungry tonight, this is unacceptable in the Ireland of 2013.

- *Kieran Stafford is in charge of Visitation for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the core work of the organisation through which volunteer members visit families and individuals in their homes. This gives the SVP a unique insight into the reality of life in Ireland today*



YOUTHFUL PASSION VITAL FOR FUTURE VOLUNTEERS

MONAGHAN

By Bill Lawlor

Igniting the passions of the young to inspire them to help others is the aim of the SVP Youth for Justice programme and is now more important than ever as the organisation faces the challenge of attracting future volunteers in today's climate of crippling austerity. As these stringent times produce an ever widening circle of victims, it is vital that the upcoming generation is made aware of and sees at first-hand the needs of the less well-off and sometimes the near destitute in the community.

SVP's North-East Youth Development Officer Attracta McNeice, is amongst those who have seen at first-hand the enormous benefits of involving young people "in head and heart" in the work of the Society.

"Over the years I have seen the amazing results of when the qualities of youthful skill, talent, energy, enthusiasm and optimism are harnessed and channelled into action projects on behalf of the SVP," she says. Since the inauguration of the programme in 2002, these hands-on engagements by Transition Year students have covered a wide range of social justice activity, including befriending the elderly and those with special needs, reaching out to immigrant groups, research into the cost of a baby, cyber bullying, adopting a family for SVP, shared reading schemes with primary schools and the provision of Christmas hampers.

At the Youth For Justice Exhibition in Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, she told the attendance of more than a thousand that the participation of young people in the 'Youth For Justice' programme gave them the opportunity to volunteer, raised their awareness of the work of the SVP and helped them to understand and take action on social justice issues. "Their participation nurtures their caring and compassionate side and helps them to walk in the light, in that it assists them to find the good in themselves and in others. It is our hope that this experience will be both informative and formative and that the young people will volunteer in the future, either as Third Level institution Conference members, or in their adult life as SVP Conference members.

"This programme is about planting seeds," she added. Acknowledging the "harsh times" at present, she recalled that the SVP message was one of hope. She complimented the audience for their work as volunteers and "leading by example – something in short supply in Ireland today."

"The Youth for Justice programme allows us the opportunity to hand on the baton to our young people who are the volunteers of the future. Together we can embrace change and diversity and together we can meet the needs of the people we serve. That way we can make a chain of love linking the past and the future and ensure that the chain may lengthen, but it will never break."

- In addition to the North-East, the Youth For Justice programme also operates in the SVP's Breffni Region (Sligo, North Mayo, Achonry and Leitrim), where it commenced 11 years ago, as well as Cork and in the SVP's North-West region.

See also THE BULLETIN INTERVIEW with new SVP National Youth Development Co-ordinator on page 34



Pupils of St. Vincent's Secondary School, Dundalk, Co. Louth with their project.



Attracta McNeice addresses the attendance at Carrickmacross in Co. Monaghan.



SVP Regional President Pat Kielty
at the Tuam building

TUAM

The Maureen O'Connell Fund was made available through the generosity of Miss Maureen O'Connell, the former owner of O'Connell's public house in Eyre Square, Galway. Miss O'Connell left the residual proceeds of her estate to the SVP and as a result of this legacy the SVP has been able to support over sixty developmental projects in Galway city and county.'

YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTRE

Report: Annalisa Murphy, Project Manager, SVP

Camera: Ray Ryan, Tuam Herald

The SVP in Tuam is developing the former Mercy Junior School at Dublin Road, Tuam, into a Youth and Family Resource. Work is expected to take approximately six months, with the new building opening early next month.

Announcing the redevelopment, SVP West Region President Pat Kielty said, "We are delighted to see work starting on the new Centre. The development is an opportunity to provide a venue for young people to participate in youth programmes and for families to access much-needed services.

Approximately half of the new centre will be used to provide offices, meeting and therapeutic rooms for the work of HSE Tuam Family Services and HSE Social Work Services. "The work of HSE Tuam Family Services involves supporting parents, advocating for parents and children, group work, individual work and other home-based services", explained Michelle Moran, Project Leader, Tuam Family Services. These HSE services will become part of the new Child and Family Support Agency from 2014.

The refurbished building will also once again host the Tuam-based services of Youth Work Ireland Galway.

"Youth Work Ireland Galway works from an integrated model of youth service, providing different levels of support to young people in response to their evolving needs, from social and recreational opportunities right up to intensive supports when needed", explained Irene Murphy, Regional Director of Youth Work Ireland Galway. "The organisation's activities in Tuam were based in the Junior School building up to the severe winter of 2011, when they had to be relocated. Services that will be provided from the new Tuam Youth and Family Centre

include Tuam Youth Services, which provides a whole range of groups and activities for 10-21 year olds; Tuam Youth Café; Tuam Youth Club; Teen Between, a listening support service for teens experiencing difficulty as a result of parental separation; and Tuam Comhairle na nÓg, the local youth democracy group. All of these services are open to all young people in Tuam and surrounding areas.

Other Youth Work Ireland Galway programmes relocating back to the renovated building are Tuam Youth Bank and Treo Nua Youth Diversion Project. Tuam Youth Bank is a totally youth-led grant-making committee. According to Irene Murphy: "Youth Bank is an international model and Tuam is the only Youth Bank in the West of Ireland. Young people raise money and offer and process grants to local youth groups and clubs for activities. Since it began Tuam Youth Bank has raised and distributed over €19,000 locally." Treo Nua provides one-to-one and group work for young people. A free Youth Counselling Service will also be available at Tuam Youth and Family Centre for young people between the ages of 14 and 21.

"The redesigned building will be more comfortable, more orientated to the needs of young people and more family-friendly", said Mr Kielty. "It will include shared spaces that we aim to make available to local community organisations for activities and meetings," he added.

The Sisters of Mercy donated the Mercy Junior School building to the St Vincent de Paul Society in 2012, to be used for the benefit of the community in Tuam. A grant from the SVP Maureen O'Connell Fund has been provided to complete the renovation works.



WATERFORD

Pictured at the SVP Integration BBQ were, back row from left: Garda Mary Murphy, Afnan, Garda Bernard Dowling, Fartoon, Garda Ollie O'Flynn, Fardosa and Garda Kyra Collins. Middle row from left: Queml, Leensa, Eptihag and Nasteexa. Front: Murco Murka Mercury.

ANNUAL INTEGRATION BARBEQUE Report and Camera: Joe Dalton

The Waterford Area Council of the St.Vincent De Paul Society held their 6th Annual 'Integration BBQ' in the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre, Barrack Street, Waterford. In glorious sunshine more than 350 people from many countries of the world along with locals, gathered and enjoyed a variety of food including the favourite - burgers and sausages - alongside halal chicken and vegetarian meals

A variety of music from guitars and djembe drums created a relaxed

and tranquil atmosphere as people chatted and partook of choices such as Ethiopian coffee.

All the children were treated to face painting.

As in previous years members of the local Garda Síochána from Waterford Station were present and this was appreciated by the new community members from overseas who were eager to have their photos taken with them.



END OF THE TREK - YOUNG SVP SUPPORTERS ARRIVE AT THE SUMMIT.

NAVAN

ONTARA: Catherine O'Connor of Navan SVP's St. Oliver's Conference strides onto the historic Hill of Tara.



FOUR HUNDRED WALK TO TARA

Report: Bill Lawlor Camera: Grace Kelly

It was one of early Summer's rare dry and balmy days as 400 or so people, young and old, walked and ran from Navan to the legendary Hill of Tara in support of Navan St.Vincent de Paul Society. The fundraising event, in aid of urgently-needed finance for the local SVP, raised €5,000 and proved a splendid community occasion as the participants strolled or jogged 9 km from the town's Ardboyne Hotel, through beautiful pasture land, to gather a short time later on the historic site.

The fun event, aimed at families and individuals, was led at the start by Navan Mayor Caoimhe Ni Shluain and the local Foresters' Band. Walkers received a medal at the finish where there were free refreshments. Shuttle buses brought them back to the hotel.

Navan SVP, which aims to make the walk an annual event, has expressed its gratitude to the participants and all those whose assistance made the event a major success.



Joe Sweeney, New Drogheda Area President

DROGHEDA

NEW AREA PRESIDENT

Report: Bill Lawlor Camera: Eric O'Neill

The new Drogheda Area president Joe Sweeney aims to ensure the SVP continues meeting the needs of local people who call upon it, while at the same time developing new streams of revenue to cope with the demands of the ever growing numbers who require help.

Maths and physics teacher Joe has done the sums and reckons that it is vital that they source increased finance to fulfil their commitments. He is also hoping to encourage more people, including youngsters, to become involved in the work of the Society. With this in view he plans a membership drive through the schools, more of which he would like to see participating in the SVP's Youth For Justice project, the purpose of which is to inspire youth to understand and take action on social justice issues. In an interview with *The Bulletin*, referring to the effects of current austerity, he pointed out that people who once had secure livelihoods are now relying on social welfare benefits to survive and are often among those who call upon the SVP for assistance.

Joe succeeds outgoing Area President Michael Grogan. He is currently Treasurer of Drogheda's St. Martin de Porres Conference, of which he has been a member since 1980. Married with two children, the Drogheda native is attached to the staff of the town's St. Mary's Diocesan School.

SVP BICENTENNIAL PILGRIMAGES TO GLENDALOUGH

Report and Camera: Monica O'Reilly and Martin O'Malley



DUBLIN

Marking this year's Bicentennial of the birth of SVP Founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the Dublin Region is organising, among other initiatives, Day Pilgrimage Walks in Glendalough. Forty-five volunteers from all parts of the Region too part in the first, visiting the Interpretative Centre and Museum and viewed a DVD on the beginnings and growth of Monasticism in Ireland. Fr. Michael Rodgers, who lives in Glendalough at An Tearmann Spirituality Centre was Guide to the group and, leading us around the well-worn paths of this sacred place, invited us to be open to see, hear and experience something different on the pilgrimage. We began walking in silent meditation through the Labyrinth. This is a narrow, winding path, full of twists and turns – just like life. One member remarked that as the group walked in a circle towards the centre, he felt that we were all connected to each other just like a daisy chain. As we walked around the lake, Fr. Rodgers talked to us about the search of our ancestors in faith for meaning and helped us reflect on what it means to be a Christian in these times. He offered us questions for personal reflection on our lives and our work in SVP and enthralled us with poetry, story and Scripture readings. Following lunch al fresco we headed off again, meeting each other in conversation as we walked, towards the ancient Monastic city where we lingered to take in the wonder of it all, to spend time among the ruins of the Cathedral, to gaze at the famous Round Tower and to have time for personal prayer. We then walked the short journey back up the hill to An Tearmann. The bright late afternoon sun shone on us under a crisp blue sky as we gathered in a circle in the shelter of the Centre's little garden overlooking the Valley of Glendalough. Heartfelt, joyful singing resounded during a wonderful Pentecost celebration of the Eucharist together which brought a perfect day to conclusion. Some of the themes for reflection during the day were of - journey, the Missionary spirit, our interior and exterior worlds, our experience of suffering and our desire to help alleviate the burdens of others as Vincentians. A calming and soothing day, leaving behind the hustle and bustle of ordinary living. Two further days for members have been planned for Saturdays September 21 and 28. Early booking advised!

Martin O'Malley is a member of the SVP Conference of the Apostles Loughlinstown/Ballybrack, Co.Dublin.

SHOPS DEVELOPMENT

Report: William Bryan Cameras: Joe Dalton & Miroslav Cada

WATERFORD



Waterford is developing its shops with the rebranding of the well-known Henrietta Street shop as "Vincent's" and two more "Vincent's" shops to be opened in the city, with the intention to open others throughout the South East Region. The shops form a core component of SVP fundraising activity and are essential to its work.

A fashion show to mark the rebranding of the Henrietta Street store was attended by 200 people including the new Mayor of Waterford, John Cummins, where he acknowledged the tremendous work carried out by the SVP in the city. The night was hugely successful and resulted in many members of the public coming forward to volunteer to help with the SVP mission. The clothes, up-cycled by students and graduates from the Fashion and Accessories Design Course at the Waterford College of Further Education, Parnell street Waterford, caused a stir, with many people calling to the shop the following day wishing to buy

what they had seen the previous night. They included casual clothing to evening wear for Ladies and up-cycled suits for men, which can be seen in the photos. The show featured in its second half Debs Dresses up-cycled by Transition Year students from the Ursuline School under the mentoring of graduates from the Fashion and Accessories design Course and were given free modelling lessons from Karen Morrissey, Pink House, Kells. This was followed by wedding dresses. The night finished with the Lucia Domoradova Collection. Lucia is a graduate from the Fashion and design course at the WAEC. And again this range was produced from up-cycled clothing. The event would not have been possible without the support from the WAEC and the lecturer there, Joan Brennan and all the volunteers with in SVP that give so much of their time to the Society. It was a successful event which may launch young designers' careers!"



Members of Swinford SVP receiving the Katina Armstrong Medal from Darragh Campbell, Chairperson of the Student Council, Scoil Muire and Padraig, Swinford, Co. Mayo, with school teachers.

MAYO

STUDENTS RECOGNISE SVP

For the past number of years the Student Council in Scoil Muire and Padraig, Swinford, Co. Mayo, has awarded the Katrina Armstrong Medal to a member of the local community whom they feel deserves to be recognised for the voluntary work and commitment to the community. The Award is named in memory of Katrina Armstrong, a much-loved and respected past pupil who became ill in second year and displayed bravery and dignity in the last months of her life. Each year the Student Council seeks nominations from the people of Swinford and then they select the awardee whom they feel deserves to be acknowledged and thanked. This year the Student Council selected St Vincent de Paul as recipient of the award.

HONOURED FOR WORK IN ENNIS

CLARE

A "tireless and effective organiser and practical activist on behalf of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul over the past 55 years," was how SVP Area President, John Cullinane, described a man who joined the Society in Ennis in 1958 when members honoured the service of John Costelloe.

He joined St. Peter and Paul's Visitation Conference and became a very active visitation member as it was the only Conference in Ennis at the time and all-male. Having been elected Conference President in 1980 he introduced a number of changes to the SVP's operating practices, established three Conferences in Ennis to cover the ever-increasing population in the town and arranged the admission of women for the first time as Conference members. John has served as Clare Area President, as a member of the Mid-West Region Area Board and also a member of SVP's National Council's Committee of Training. He was a founder/member of the Shop and Special Works Conferences and has held dual membership of both Conferences for many years and still attends meetings.

He has been a tireless and effective organiser and practical activist on behalf of the Society over the past 55 years," said Area President John Cullinane at a function held in Ennis to honour John Costelloe. "If ever a man personified the essence of service to others it is John. We thank him for his truly unselfish attitude on behalf of others and for his remarkable contribution to the Society."



NEW SVP PRESIDENT BAILIEBORO

John McMahan has been appointed President of St. Ann's SVP Conference, Bailieboro, Co. Cavan. He replaces Pat Fitzpatrick, whose term has expired.

LONG SERVICE LARNE

St.Comgall's Conference in Larne, Co.Antrim, celebrated the long service of its member, Norman Fergie, who received the SVP Long Service Medal on his retirement after over 40 years with the Society. The Conference expressed gratitude to him for his "unstinting work" and wished him well for the future.

JAILBREAK DUBLIN

Report: John Lorigan, Vice-President SVP Trinity College



36 hours. No money. How far will you go?

A simple premise; in teams of two, get as far away from Dublin as you can in 36 hours, without spending any money.

What started as one girls' idea grew into easily the biggest charity event in Ireland.

I was lucky enough to do Jailbreak 2013. Starting 6 hours late, without a plan, wearing shorts, I ended up 30 hours later in Aberdeen, Scotland. It was undoubtedly the best weekend of my life! With my travelling companion Dan, we took trains, taxis, ferries, lorries and buses to wind up in the silver city. Along the way we met all kinds of weird and wonderful people, who really got behind the idea and helped us on our way. We managed to persuade people to give us a free lift. Staff at the various ticket desks were generally fairly reluctant, but the conductors and drivers were fairly open to the idea. Not everyone was willing to let us on board, but it made you cherish those times all the more! Other, more organized teams had arranged sponsorship from airlines or travel companies beforehand and so were not required to beg and plead quite as much as ourselves.

So how does it raise money for charity? For a start, every team had to raise €100 to enter. As there were around 30 teams competing, you already have quite a tidy sum. Furthermore, during the race itself people would often donate when you explained what you were doing. The total amount raised was over €15,000, a figure which shows how much people got behind it.

Jailbreak in the future? With such a successful event, we could never do it just once! This coming March, wherever you are in the world, Jailbreak 2014 will be coming to you!

• Full stories at: <http://trinityvdp.com/vdpjailbreak/>



IN TRIBUTE

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

ANN EARLS Wicklow

The members of St. Patrick's Conference in Wicklow Town feel the loss of one of their closest and most dedicated members following the death Ann Earls. Wicklow born and bred, she spent her life deeply involved in helping the local community. She joined the Conference twelve years ago, after the rearing of the last of her five children was safely completed and with her local knowledge and warm, engaging personality she was able to bring a valuable and sympathetic insight into the lives of those she visited. The packed church on the day of her funeral was an eloquent and moving testimony to the affection and esteem which she and her husband Aidan and their family evoked throughout the community.

- Denis McWatt

THOMAS (TOM) FINNEGAN Navan

Navan SVP has lost one of its most diligent volunteers with the death of Thomas (Tom) Finnegan, aged 81. A regular attender at weekly Conference meetings, Tom gave exemplary service, especially in the area of visitation where his compassion and understanding – attributes which he strived to pass on to younger members – were greatly valued. He was also a willing fundraiser when called upon. He was a member of the local St. Patrick's Conference before joining St. Paul's Conference with which he was active up to a few months before his last illness. He is survived by his widow, Carmel, sister-in-law, nieces and nephews, to all of whom deep sympathy is extended.

- Bill Lawlor

ST. CONGALL'S CONFERENCE LARNE

It has been a mixed year for our Conference with the passing of three of our longest-serving members – John Kelly, Igna Reynolds and Bobby Kemp. We are grateful for their contribution to our Conference where they are sadly missed.

- Catherine Kelly

PADDY NOLAN Bray

The Vincentian community in Bray Co. Wicklow has lost one of its most outstanding and longest-serving members in Paddy Nolan who died after a brief spell in hospital following a fall at home. A proud Kerryman by birth, he was a truly committed Vincentian, having served as a member in Charleville, Ballina and Bray where his career with Ianrod Eireann took him over the course of his working life. In St Peter's Conference in Little Bray he was Treasurer for many years and he also served as Area Council Treasurer for five years. He was a familiar figure for decades with the collecting box, both outside the church, in the town and at the local supermarket, ensuring a generous response even in the most difficult times. He also served as Conference President for five years until failing sight eventually forced a diminished involvement in the Society which was such an integral part of his life for so many decades. Even in his 91st year his interest in and devotion to the Society's work still remained intact at the end of a long life lived as a true Vincentian.

- Denis McWatt

KATHLEEN O'NEILL Mornington

St Joseph's Conference, Mornington, has lost a much loved and valued member with the death of Kathleen O'Neill aged 89. She came to live in Mornington in 1983, and joined St Joseph's Conference soon afterwards which is responsible for running the Ozanam Holiday Centre. She went on to become one of its longest-serving members and served as Conference President, retiring in 2011. During that time, the Centre went through many changes including the upgrading of the bedrooms into twin-bedded en-suite rooms and in 2008 the building of a new 8-bedroom wing which incorporates a library/sunroom. Kathleen's dedication to the running of the Centre was well known and much appreciated by both visitors and staff. She will be remembered for her kind, courteous and friendly manner and her ability to make the Centre a place of friendship and relaxation. For over 30 years she played the organ for the local parish church which included playing for the First Holy Communion and Confirmation for Donacarney Primary School. As a fitting tribute to Kathleen, the children from Donacarney Primary School sang at her funeral mass. Two of her own grandsons also performed on tin whistle and mandolin, which made for a very moving ceremony. Kathleen is survived by her daughter Mairead, nephew John, sister Nellie, grandchildren, relatives and friends. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

- Denis McWatt

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY WORKING TOGETHER

Irish SVP member Liam Fitzpatrick who is the International Treasurer has been assigned by the Society's President General, Michael Thio, the role of developing involvement of the Society worldwide with the Vincentian Family of organisations. This is an aspect of the Society's worldwide strategic plan.

At World Leadership level, the four main branches of the Vincentian Family (Congregation of the Missions (CM); Daughters of Charity (DC); Association of International Charities (AIC) and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP), which make up the Executive Committee of FAMVIN which has regular meetings to decide on future plans, direction and programmes involving the Vincentian Family.

Programmes in which FamVin are currently engaged include:-

- A Systemic Change project, mainly focussing on Haiti.
- Promoting dialogue by way of forums and symposiums to develop theological and spiritual reflection, working with people from other faiths, mainly with Muslims.
- Offering training, formation and development programmes for FamVin members to work together in joint projects to ensure optimum uses of resources in undertaking, managing and delivering effective results in the joint programmes.
- A joint prayer card has been produced by DC and SSVP for the cause of canonisation of Blessed Sr. Rosalie Rendu and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

Further evidence of close collaboration between SSVP and DC was the recent appointment of Sr. Maureen McGuire as Spiritual Advisor to the CGI Board – the first time in the 180 year history of our Society that a DC has been appointed to the Board.

Throughout the world, the CM, DC and SSVP have co-operated in many countries on joint disaster programmes, on projects benefitting the poor on education, housing, medical rehabilitation and counselling programmes. Many CM's and DC's are Spiritual Advisors to Councils and Conferences and have worked jointly with SSVP in establishing new Conferences and in training and formation.

We encourage other countries to become more involved with our Vincentian Brothers and Sisters and, if there is collaborative activity which is not mentioned below, we would be very glad to be informed of it. We also ask all countries to keep us informed on further collaboration which may occur.

CURRENT COLLABORATION INCLUDES:

AFRICA

ETHIOPIA - SSVP work with Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Missions. The Daughters continue to provide relief to people who have been affected by drought with financial aid of €50,000 provided by SSVP through CIAD.

NIGERIA - Six arms of the Vincentian family had a very comprehensive meeting in March 2012, with 47 participants, with the theme of LEADERSHIP IN THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY. A number of recommendations were agreed covering aspects



such as training, amicable interaction within the Family and best practice. A further meeting was held in March 2013 when elections for various offices were held.

KENYA - SSVP helps the Daughters of Charity, by way of substantial funding, for the DREAM aids project.

MOZAMBIQUE - The Daughters of Charity assisted greatly the SSVP in setting up a training and sensitization programme for AIDS patients, called "LIFE NETWORK" and some agricultural projects aimed at funding the AIDS programme. In addition, the Vincentian Fathers offer spiritual direction to the SSVP.

NORTH AFRICA AND MIDDLE EAST

EGYPT - Excellent relations with Lazarist Fathers and Daughters of Charity, mainly in spirituality, plus social and educational help. The Daughters provide premises for SSVP shelters and the Fathers provide clothes, shoes and schoolbags.

LEBANON - SSVP has excellent relationship with the Vincentian Family, particularly with Lazarist Fathers, who provide chaplaincies and in Beirut the SSVP use the Lazarists' premises.

AMERICAS

USA/CANADA. Vincentian Family held a group meeting in October 2011 and considered 4 future joint actions:

- 1: Engage in advocacy and actions to address the root causes of poverty.
- 2: Meet at least once a year to promote collaborative efforts.
- 3: Prepare a proposal for the formation and operation of a new collaborative group.
- 4: Document the origin, history and accomplishments of the group.

In addition, the meeting made a commitment to the ongoing education of members, including an analysis of current ministries.

HAITI - Vincentian Family held a two day meeting in October last to approve a three-year strategic plan, setting out four objectives and specific projects, with a view to helping a significant number of Haitians to lift themselves out of poverty. A Management Committee, headed by the CM is endeavouring to generate employment in small and medium enterprises and SSVP, through CIAD, has donated €50,000 and has a further €50,000 available.

BOLIVIA- Excellent relationship through FAMVIN which assisted greatly a mission done through VINPAZ in January 2012. The Mission comprised 6 volunteers whose brief was to organise, stimulate and set up Vincentian Conferences in parishes and schools as a result of which SSVF Conferences were increased from 1 to 11.

CHILE

COLOMBIA

ECUADOR

PERU

Very good relationships in these countries through FAMVIN, working on joint projects where feasible.

BRAZIL - Close connection through FAMVIN which has a special section in the SSVF bulletin. Vincentian family help each other in many projects

PARAGUAY - FAMVIN, through its National Council, helps SSVF which has only a few conferences throughout the country.

URUGUAY

ARGENTINA

VENEZUELA

Good relationship and it is hoped to develop the partnership with special projects.



ASIA

CAMBODIA - SSVF and Daughters of Charity have a good relationship. The Daughters provide spiritual training and also act as Spiritual Advisors to National Council and two Conferences.

MYANMAR - Daughters of Charity from Thailand have helped an SSVF Conference to rebuild houses following a typhoon in 2008 and have also supplied student uniforms to the Conference in 2012. Prospects of further collaboration are regarded as good.

INDIA - Families meet in February each year and submit reports on their activities. In February 2013, 120 Vincentians attended including all the National Heads. A committee was formed to facilitate the Vincentian family working to a common theme for one year.

PHILIPPINES - Vincentian family have regular meetings and work together in Housing projects. Also, the Daughters of Charity have helped SSVF in giving emergency relief by way of distribution of rice to people living in temporary shelters after a typhoon in Iligan City

THAILAND - Famvin Thailand, comprised of 5 Branches of the Vincentian Family, has been operating since 2002. Quarterly meetings are held where working experiences are shared. Resources and manpower are shared, feast days are celebrated together and some SSVF Conferences work hand-in-hand with the Daughters of Charity.

JAPAN TAIWAN

SSVF collaborates with the Congregation of the Missions and they hope to re-energise the Vincentian family.

INDONESIA

Excellent co-operation, with the Vincentian Fathers acting as Spiritual Advisors to the SSVF.

CHINA- The SSVF collaborates with the Congregation of the Missions and with the Daughters of Charity.



EUROPE

ENGLAND & WALES - VIP (Vincentians in Partnership) are active, led by the Daughters of Charity. All family members contribute financially, work on joint projects and are looking for further areas where they could work together.

SCOTLAND

Partners in VIP, including Vincentian Volunteers- a joint project for young people from all over the world who live in a Vincentian community and undertake person-to-person service for those with needs for one year.

Have a goal in a 5 year strategic plan to develop partnerships with other organisations.

IRELAND

Good working relationship with Vincentian Family members – common spiritual advisors, joint pilgrimages, collaboration in management projects including the management of SSVF Hostels by De Paul International.

Since 1966, SSVF have collaborated with Vincentian Fathers and Daughters in "Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice" which is very active in promoting a Vincentian response to social justice issues. Activities include some well-respected research on income adequacy for social welfare recipients, a voter education programme, awareness-raising events and publications on justice issues.

BELGIUM - Vincentian Family have a working group, chaired by a Vincentian Father, meeting every two months. Training Days have been organised and the Daughters of Charity have helped to develop the SSVF where it has been having difficulty in becoming established.

ITALY - 33 of the 81 SSVF Councils have relationship with other Vincentians.

SPAIN - Good co-operation within the Vincentian family, with the Daughters of Charity working alongside the SSVF.

SLOVENIA - SSVF works regularly with the Daughters of Charity.

MACEDONIA - SSVF works regularly with Daughters of Charity and Lazarist Fathers.

A Fixed Star



Making Sure We're Heard – SVP briefs Deputies, Senators and Troika

Campaigning and advocacy takes different forms. The SVP 'Make Your Voice Heard' campaign highlighted in this edition of The SVP Bulletin is a good example of using social media to harness the public mood and ensure that individuals can speak as a group.

Advocacy also takes place discretely allowing for freer exchanges of opinions and debate. In recent months SVP members have been meeting with political parties and TD's as well as officials from the Troika such as the ECB and IMF. These meetings give politicians and their officials an opportunity to hear of the experience and research of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Sometimes the discussion boils down to numbers, low incomes and the high cost of living and debt. However, our emphasis is to give a picture of our members' visits to struggling households. We speak to politicians and officials about the fear we encounter. We emphasise that the continuation of austerity represents a psychological as well as financial blow. In the homes SVP visits there is often not food, but even more rarely is there hope. Perhaps this reflects the common mood; the fear of further cuts and cutbacks, fear of unexpected expense, fear of unemployment, fear for children and fear of ill-health. The question often put to us is 'how do people cope?' our response is that they cannot cope with any further cuts. Our question to TD's and officials is 'are you listening to us?'

Does it really become cheaper to send a child to school at 18?

Ever since the automatic cut-off to child benefit when a child turns 18 SVP has questioned the arbitrary nature of this threshold. Surely a system designed to assist parents with the cost of childhood should be able to acknowledge that school expenses represent the most predictable expense of childhood.

Presently child benefit (€130 per month) is paid to the parents of children up to the age of 16. As children reach that age threshold they must get a form signed by their school to show their child is in full-time education. Children will only continue to receive child benefit as long as they are in full-time education, the cut-off point being completion of exams or turning 18, whichever comes first.

The scenario that the system seems to have missed is that as childcare options improve and with the introduction of transition

year there are many children who will be in full-time second level education well after their 18th birthday. It is this anomaly that SVP seeks the Department of Social Protection to address by restoring child benefit to children in full-time second level education. Indeed, according to the Department nearly 50% of those who are aged 18 are, in fact, in secondary school.

We are making this request on behalf of families in need and our members who are concerned that the result of this cut will be lower rates of school completion and educational progression among disadvantaged children and young people, and increased levels of stress and hardship for families.

It's not rocket science – school costs too much

It's not rocket science – school costs too much. This was the simple message SVP Social Justice and Policy brought to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on education. Our members know at first-hand how the on-going costs of education grind many families down. For example, the costs of crested uniforms, unnecessary school book changes, the emergence of digital aids which in some instances has fuelled a rush to high end tablets, school trips, voluntary contributions, extra-curricular activities, the list goes on.

While happy to see that the Oireachtas Committee's final report mentions many of our recommendations we are disappointed that the critical issue of accountability in schools has been left vague. We all need to know who is responsible for policy at individual school level. While the Boards of Managements are often tasked with decision making, in reality it is the Patronage Bodies which set the agenda. This needs to be clarified and changed, given that schools are in receipt of a large chunk of tax payers' money we need to be confident that they are doing all they can to be as cost conscious as possible to avoid extra expense for parents. We go further and say that the Minister for Education is the ultimate leader and must achieve the changes outlined in this report. He knows what he must do, let's get on with the work now.



THE LAST WORD

Letters to the Editor

“Avoiding Political Advocacy”

I look forward to and I always enjoy reading the excellent SVP Bulletin. In my opinion, it is not appropriate for a voluntary organisation to be reproducing in its Bulletin political advocacy opinion articles from national newspapers. Dr.Fergus O’Ferrall’s ‘The Common Good’ outlined TASC’s publication titled ‘Towards a Flourishing Society’ is correctly suitable for a newspaper but not for a non-political voluntary organisation’s Bulletin. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the contents of the article, the SVP should scrupulously avoid the perception of favouring one political perspective over others and remain non-aligned to all political parties including so-called independent ‘think-tanks’. Of course this concern to avoid becoming politicised doesn’t preclude the SVP itself continuing to advocate on behalf of the people we assist and work with.

John Hamilton, County Tipperary.

Catholic Or Christian ?

I have read the Spring edition of the SVP Bulletin and find two articles very disturbing. The first is by Kieran Murphy, SVP National Director. In it he discusses the motivations which prompt our [SVP] work. As a long-time member of the Society I have always believed that our work is motivated by a love of God and love of our neighbour. Mr. Murphy writes of love of our neighbour but does not mention love of God. How can this be? The second article is ‘What is beneath the surface of the SVP?’ based on his experience as a former Conference President by David Lawlor. He says that he Society does suffer from less positive perceptions such as we are a distinctly Catholic organisation. So? Is that not something to be proud of? He thinks our “Catholic ethos” has been moving more to a Christian one in recent years. What does that mean? Surely, to be a Catholic is to be a Christian, a follower of Christ?

Are these straws in the wind? What is to become of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul named after a Catholic saint? Is our beloved Society to become not only non-Catholic but Godless as well?

Des Taylor, Templeogue, Dublin.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Send your letters to the Editor by post to: SVP Bulletin at SVP House, 91-92 Sean McDermott Street, Dublin, 1 or by Email to: editorsvpbulletin@gmail.com

Cork Regional Office Was Police Barracks



Attached is a picture from a new book out called “Revolution”. It is a pictorial history of the so-called troubled times. The picture shows the old Tuckey Street police barracks in Cork City, shortly after it was destroyed by the anti-treaty republicans during the Civil War. The present SVP Cork Regional Office is on Tuckey Street, the same street that the police barracks was located at the time of the Famine. The Tuckey Street SVP Office is actually in the same building as the old Tuckey Street Police Barracks, or Guard House, as it was then known. This was one of the main police barracks in the city back then and was in use until the Civil War, when the anti-treaty forces burned the building when they were retreating from the city.

Ronnie Herlihy, Cork.



1 in 6 people in Ireland are at risk of poverty



**MAKE
#YOUR
VOICE
HEARD**

**Say no to further austerity.
Support our campaign.
svp.ie/yourvoice**



Society of St Vincent de Paul

ISSN 2009-4396



9 772009 439006 75