



**GOVERNMENT  
POLICIES UNFAIR**  
SOCIAL PROBLEMS NOT BEING SOLVED

**HOMELESSNESS  
AND THE PUBLIC**  
SVP STUDENTS TAKE ACTION

**SUNSHINE FOR  
CHILDREN**  
PROVIDING HAPPINESS

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# OPINION

## Bringing Hope

New beginnings, a time of evaluation for us in SVP. It is useful for us to look back on our Christmas campaign, and how, if necessary we can improve on it. It may also be helpful to look at the state of our finances. We all know the next two months can be the coldest of the year and so we may have to finance oil or extra coal particularly for the elderly and families with young children in our care. It is important to check up on the elderly, who are living alone as many are, we know from experience that some are reluctant to seek assistance, therefore, in my opinion, the onus is on us.

In this New Year, I fervently urge you to renew your commitment to HOME visitation. I worry about the fact that home visits are becoming less frequent in many Conferences. We have been over this question before. Let us remind ourselves that Home Visitation is the bedrock of our ethos of support and friendship. We have committed ourselves to provide a listening ear, confidentiality, appropriate advice etc, etc., impossible to do in a clinic situation or while standing at the door of our meetings room. It is impossible to maintain the dignity and respect we owe to those in need who may be extremely distressed in many cases.

Change is all around us – not all of it welcome. However, we must adapt the service we offer to those who come to us for help particularly those who are 'new to need'. Imagine the state of mind of those who, in former times, were in a position to donate money to us. These unfortunate people are now suffering in many ways, - shame, low self esteem and even despair. It is our duty, as Vincentians, to make it as easy as possible to access the assistance that we are ready, willing and able to provide. The resources are available; it is up to us to take action. We must not stand back.

We are still digesting the recent Budget and studying the inevitable consequences on those we serve. The chasm in the mindset between those in power and those we serve is appalling. What happened to all the concern for those in need, all types of need, so often expressed by the same people during the election campaign less than a year ago???

People matter in all circumstances. We experience daily the mostly heroic people who week-by-week barely manage without complaint. It is incredible

**Mairéad Bushnell, SVP National President**



that these same people are affected year-after-year. Where is social justice??

Is it easier for those in administration to cut cut across the board? The perception is, in spite of statements by politicians, that the poor suffer and many on higher, secure, incomes remain untouched. It is indeed difficult to argue against this widely-held perception. We are fully aware of the difficulty the Dept of Finance and particularly Social Protection experience, but many commentators agree that those on low incomes generally suffer most where every 'cent' matters. We are concerned that a large number of families and individuals will be further disadvantaged by many elements of Budget 2012.

The groups which will be most adversely affected are families with school-going children, one-parent families, families on social welfare, those on low pay and those who are struggling to cope with energy bills. We do, however, welcome the fact that basic social welfare rates are begin maintained, we also welcome the changes to the universal social charge for low-paid and seasonal workers.

May I wish each and every one of you every good wish for 2012 and trust that we will have health and energy to maintain our commitment and service to all who come to us for assistance.



THE IRISH SVP

# OZANAM BULLETIN

SPRING 2012

## BULLETIN EDITORIAL ADDRESS

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



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*Not just about houses*



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SVP SUNSHINE HOUSE

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# SVP RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT'S 2012 BUDGET

## *Balanced on wrong side of fairness*

**T**he Society of St. Vincent de Paul is concerned that a large number of families who seek its support will be further disadvantaged by many elements of Budget 2012. The cumulative changes in areas of Rent Supplement, the winter Fuel Allowance, Drugs Payment Scheme, the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, the One-Parent Family Payment and changes in the cost of school transport and student maintenance grants, will have a huge impact on their ability to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

The groups which will be most adversely affected by Budget 2012 are families with school-going children, one parent families, families on social welfare or in work on low pay in private rented accommodation and households already struggling to pay energy bills.

The SVP is also concerned that the VAT increase

from 21% to 23% will further add to the financial difficulties experienced by these groups. VAT at this rate applies to everyday household goods and services including adult clothing and shoes; Household electrical appliances; telephone costs; petrol, diesel, LPG - the latter category will affect lower income rural dwellers especially.

While the retention of the universality of Child Benefit is welcome the reduction in the payment for the third and subsequent children will add to the cumulative income pressure on larger families.

The SVP welcomes the fact that basic social welfare rates are being maintained. It also welcomes the changes to the Universal Social Charge for low paid, part time and seasonal workers. Up to now those earning over €4,004 were subject to the charge. This will be increased to €10,036 in 2012, lifting 330,000 out of liability for this charge.

Other measures to be welcomed are the instalment facility available for the Household Charge and the fact that the following will be exempt from the Charge:

- Social housing, including voluntary and cooperative housing units;
- Stock owned by a Charity;
- Where a person is forced to leave their house due to long-term mental or physical infirmity (elderly person that has moved into a nursing home)
- Those on Mortgage Interest Supplement.

The delay in the implementation of the Carbon Tax increase for home heating until May 2012 and the exemption for solid fuels are also measures that are welcome.

Calls for help to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul have increased substantially in the past year and the SVP anticipates an even further increase in these calls as the full impact of Budget 2012 takes effect

This edition of the SVP Bulletin marks a new development for the magazine which goes on sale to the public for the first time through Eason's. It is also the largest edition of the magazine and includes a number of new features.

# The **BUDGET** - apparently it was both **FAIR** and **REFORMING!**

*But that is politically confusing the use of language*



**John Monaghan** SVP National Vice-President

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

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

Let's now look at the new and imaginative meaning of the word 'Reform'. I suspect that for most of us when we hear of reform in our innocence we assume that the outcome will result in some form of improvement, but apparently not. On day two of the Budget Minister Noonan was at pains to describe his efforts as being firmly focused on 'growth', particularly in respect of jobs. If that is so then somebody should have told Minister Howlin

because the previous day his 'cuts', sorry 'rebalancing', effectively killed off the use of Community Employment (CE) Schemes as a means of moving many single parents from welfare to work. Because from January first 2012 all new single parent entrants on CE schemes, who could be working up to 19 hours per week, will only get an extra €20 per week in addition to their normal welfare payments. This 'reform', amounting to €1.05 per hour, is apparently a sufficient incentive to encourage someone to take up a place on a CE scheme and will cover the cost of transport and childcare cost.

Am I missing something?

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

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

Don't they?



# UNIVERSALITY OF CHILD BENEFIT IS IMPORTANT

By Caroline Fahy, SVP Social Justice and Policy

## WHY DOESN'T SVP ADVOCATE FOR CHILD BENEFIT TO BE MEANS-TESTED?

Introducing a means-test for Child Benefit has been considered since the payment was first introduced in 1944. There are a number of problems with means-testing which would worsen the situation of families in poverty and on low incomes. Introducing another means-tested payment into a household already relying on other means-tested payments such as Jobseekers Allowance, Disability Allowance or the One Parent Family Payment creates poverty and unemployment traps which would make it difficult for parents to enter employment or to increase their income from employment once in a job. Budget 2012 introduced changes to the One Parent Family Payment which mean that by 2014 the One Parent Family Payment will only be payable to lone parents until their youngest child is 7 years of age, and lone parents will have to seek employment or enter education or training at this point. A universal payment which parents can be sure of and which does not decrease when income is received from employment will be a very important support to lone parents and children when this change is fully implemented.

## WHY DOESN'T SVP ADVOCATE FOR CHILD BENEFIT TO BE TAXED?

The SVP is not opposed to taxing Child Benefit in principle as long as different families on the same income level would be treated equitably. Taxing Child Benefit would mean a reduction in the payment of about €60 for someone paying tax at 41%. The problem with taxing Child Benefit is that due to the different types of family situations, e.g. married, cohabiting, in a civil partnership, shared parenting but living apart, dual or single earner, taxed individually or jointly, divorced/separated etc, taxing Child Benefit could result in families on the same levels of income receiving different levels of Child Benefit. This would be inequitable and as such the SVP does not advocate the taxing of Child Benefit.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

There has been much debate on the issue of scarce resources going to provide Child Benefit to the wealthy. There has been much less debate on how changes to the way Child Benefit is paid would impact on vulnerable families. The Social Justice and Policy team has considered the implications of taxing or means-testing Child Benefit for the people we assist and conclude that both of these options would cause further difficulties for children and families in poverty.

Child Benefit rates increased significantly between 1997 and 2008. Increasing the payment has been the response to tackling child poverty, helping parents with the cost of childcare, recognising the unpaid work of women caring for children in the home, and reducing financial disincentives to taking up employment for parents. SVP argues that we can achieve the best outcomes for children and families through the provision of universal services for families such as improved childcare and after-school care; supports for education and access to essential services such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy etc., in addition to child income support payments. As such, when the economy improves, one option we could consider would be advocating for the freezing of Child Benefit at current rates and asking for resources to be directed into services which all children and families would benefit from. In the meantime, we will continue to advocate for the protection of the incomes of the families we work with.

*Child Benefit is a universal payment which goes to most children in the State, regardless of their parent's income. In every decade since the Children's Allowance was introduced in the 1940s political leaders and policy commentators have questioned the universality of the payment, and whether it should be taxed or means-tested so that savings could be diverted to less well-off families. It is not surprising that these considerations have once again emerged, says Caroline Fahey, SVP Social Policy Development Officer.*

**B**udget 2012 maintained the universality of Child Benefit but reduced the amount payable to larger families. In our response to the Budget the SVP welcomed the fact that Child Benefit has been retained as a universal payment. This can be difficult for some to understand, as so many of the families we help are reliant on social welfare and have experienced numerous cuts to the incomes and services they rely on, while people on higher incomes retain the Child Benefit payment.

However, there are a number of reasons why the universality of Child Benefit is important to those low income families that we assist. The SVP's position is not to defend the access to Child Benefit of wealthier people who do not need it. Instead we defend the universality of Child Benefit because of the importance of Child Benefit as a universal payment to people on lower and middle incomes and in particular for those trying to move from welfare to work.

# Life is not lived without love and loss

How one man dealt with permanent loss, lingering grief and the growth of love

*“It’s a decade on from Olive’s death in 2001. At the end of 2011 I reached seventy years of age. Seven decades, a milestone at which to reflect,” says John. “The seed of love has blossomed so wonderfully and continues to do so. In doing so it has revealed to me a whole new perspective on life.”*

John Quinn, a well-known former broadcaster with RTE Radio, penned those words in a new edition of his amazing book composed of the story of his life, his marriage and, most of all, including the letters he wrote to his wife after her death, helping him make sense of his devastating loss. It is a new edition of his original book, ‘Sea of Love, Sea of Loss: Letters to Olive’ published in 2003 in which he weaved together a selection of letters, some written during their courtship, some written by John after Olive’s death, diary entries, anecdotes and poems to illustrate his account of their life together. He also produced and presented a radio programme, A Letter to Olive.

The book was acclaimed for its depiction of a relationship and the raw reality of grief and loss when a spouse dies. However, John Quinn is a man who believes that even while loss is permanent and grief lingers, love can grow. Ten years after the death of his wife he decided to reflect on those years, how he has coped with loss and adapted to grief and how his love for Olive deepened. Published by VERITAS the new book reissues the original, updating the story by adding ‘Seed of Love, Seed of Life,’ in which he continues to write letters to his dead wife and composes poetry about their relationship.

“It is a very special blessing to be loved,” he writes, “a blessing that with the passing years we can take for granted. It is only when we see its absence in the lives of others that we realise how grateful we should be.”

During 25 years with RTE John Quinn, who had also been a teacher and worked in educational publishing, won many prestigious radio awards and became a successful author of fiction, non-fiction and children’s books. Now retired and living in County Galway he has built his story of married life and loss on a number of themes, including – Time, Memory, Regret, Gratitude and Milestones.

*Leafing through my photo album  
It occurs to me there were so many  
Moments of delight in so many places  
Over so many years so despite our differences  
Our flare-ups and deep freezes  
There is so much to be thankful for.  
So thank you for the moments  
Thank you for the days.*



John and Olive

“Memory is, of course, a two-edged sword,” says John. “There are memories of bad days which can equally be dredged up from the unconscious by a photograph, a piece of music, a worthless trinket. Memories of lost opportunities. Things said, when silence would have been the wiser option. Hurt is caused and inevitably there follow counter-comments leading to a heated argument and ultimately what Olive described as the ‘deep freeze’, when no one talked for hours or days.

“And then there are the things unsaid. Opportunities not taken to say words of comfort, understanding, praise. To say those three little words – ‘I love you’ – that you couldn’t say often enough or passionately enough during courtship days.”

John’s wife died on Monday, June 25, 2001 at 5 p.m., when she went for a swim and he saw her begin to swim, then her head stayed face down in the water and he realised something was wrong, raced to pull her out, limp and unconscious. Despite immediate emergency attention from a lifeguard, a nurse and doctors who were on the beach and an ambulance crew, Olive was dead.

After the funeral, at 5 a.m. on Friday, June 29, 2001 John could not sleep: “Dawn has broken over and also stolen in from the Irish Sea and crept over Shanganagh Cemetery, just outside Bray, over a new flower-laden grave. My dozen red roses lie on the resting place of my darling Olive Rosemary McKeever, my wife of thirty-three years. It is the end of the most unimaginably traumatic week of my life – unreal, surreal, unbelievable; my beautiful one left me just eighty-four hours ago.”

Lines from another of John’s poems:

*And it was lovely then and you were lovely then  
And we were young and so in love  
And it was lovely then - and will be so again  
And will be so again...*

Human life can be defined by love, joy, loss, grief and a myriad of other inextricably linked emotions. Most of all love is an emotion shared, creating a feeling of being together, grief is experienced alone.

To overcome it is difficult. John Quinn’s story of the journey through his loss and grief is an experience which may help others to overcome that most difficult experience and follow his example of moving from despair to hope.

*John Quinn met his wife Olive in Blanchardstown Sanatorium in Dublin when he was being treated for tuberculosis. A shy, young teacher he fell in love. Letters were exchanged, love grew and they married. In later years Olive became ill and, to restore a Christmas missed through that illness, they went for a holiday break to Rosslare in County Wexford to celebrate her recovery. Olive went for a swim as John watched from the shore. It was the last time he would see her alive.*



*“Letters to Olive, Sea of Love, Sea of Loss, Seed of Life,” by John Quinn has been published by VERITAS, Dublin.*



# SVP Housing - It's not just about Houses!

By Albert Perris, SVP National Hostels & Homes Co-ordinator



The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is one of the largest voluntary housing providers in Ireland, providing over 1,000 units of long-term Social Housing in addition to 344 emergency beds in hostels throughout the country. An Approved Housing Body since 1975, the last 20 years has seen the Society's social housing provision more than quadruple. Rarely, when thinking of the Society, does anyone think of it in these terms.

**B**ut Albert Perris does and it's his job to do so as the SVP's National Hostels and Homes Co-ordinator. Behind him, as he sits at his office desk, files and folders bulge with information about the Society's housing projects all over the country. Alongside them lie books and manuals about housing law and about the implementation of housing regulations.

"The quantity of housing provided by the Society has increased exponentially over the past few decades, so too has the quality," he says and adds that recent SVP Social housing projects have been a most innovative, garnering awards and acknowledgements for excellence in design.

"The quality of much of the Society's housing is often reflected by the size of waiting lists for applicants wishing to live there. Indeed, in many of our schemes, the demand for SVP housing far outweighs supply. This may be testament to the fact that SVP Housing Conferences have not just built houses. They have built communities."

That reflects the special approach of the Society and of Conferences, Area and Regional Councils and Special Works Conferences.

"They continue to build relationships, connections with and between residents of our housing. Many of our schemes have community or day care centres attached providing Meals-on-Wheels, community development initiatives, child-care facilities and other services provided for and often, by residents of our housing."

Most SVP housing was developed under the Government's 'Capital Assistance Scheme' or 'CAS' scheme to provide accommodation for older people, people with a disability or people who had been homeless, while 'Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme' (CLSS) housing was developed in response to 'general needs' or family accommodation.

"The CLSS Scheme has now been discontinued and funding under CAS is greatly diminished and set to play only a marginal role in the future funding of social housing," says Albert who recalls that the past three years has been spent by many Housing Conferences upgrading their housing developments in response to new legislation and greater regulation of the sector. The 2008 Housing (Rental Standards) Act obliged many schemes to undertake remedial and structural changes to their accommodation. From next January 'Bedsits' will no longer be compliant with these regulations and cannot continue to be rented to tenants. One of the challenges for many schemes appears to be the lack of a statutory definition of a 'Bedsit'. However, essentially, 'self-contained' accommodation that requires the sharing of a WC or toilet facilities with other residents, may be deemed a 'bedsit'. This does not apply to hostel accommodation.

More legislation and further regulation is on the way and the coming year looks set to see the Voluntary Housing Sector being brought within the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act, Albert thinks. "Private rented tenancies have been subject to this legislation for a number of years now and the move to 'level the playing field' between voluntary housing and the private rented sector, will require all Voluntary Housing Tenancies to be registered with a Residential Tenancies Board and subjected to more prescriptive standards, monitoring and, in the case of tenant-landlord disputes, independent mediation or arbitration. This is a particularly welcome development and should provide Housing Conferences with an independent, cost-effective and timely mechanism to resolve those very occasional disputes which arise from time-to-time, between tenants and landlords."

The recent and unprecedented economic decline has impacted significantly on the level and type of government support available for future social housing developments. The traditional funding streams of Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) and

Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) have essentially been discontinued and all future 'new build' social housing will largely be dependent on private finance and financial support from the Housing Finance Agency.

However, many opportunities remain for the SVP to engage in partnership with Local Authorities in taking into management existing stock of housing, according to Albert.

"While the potential for developing new housing schemes has in recent years been greatly stymied by economic developments and increasing complex government policy, the potential to further develop our existing stock remains great. The need to renew, regenerate and refurbish existing SVP housing presents new opportunities and challenges.

"As a member of one housing Conference recently told me 'While the vision, planning, building and allocation of Social Housing requires an extraordinary effort, commitment and resilience on the part of volunteers, as many Housing Conferences have found, the really hard work only begins when the residents have settled in.'"

SVP Housing is located in the following Counties: Cavan, Cork, Clare, Westmeath, Dublin, Wicklow, Kerry, Limerick, Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Leitrim, Longford, Galway, Roscommon, Meath, Kildare, Waterford, Tipperary, Wexford.

There is more information about Social Housing on these websites:

[www.icsh.ie](http://www.icsh.ie) Irish Council for Social Housing;  
[www.hfa.ie](http://www.hfa.ie) Housing Finance Agency;  
[www.prtb.ie](http://www.prtb.ie) Private Residential Tenancies Board

- In the next quarterly edition of THE SVP BULLETIN, to be published in April, Albert Perris will deal with the day-to-day management of Social Housing.









CORK STUDENTS CONCERNED THAT THE PUBLIC DON'T UNDERSTAND

# HOMELESSNESS

*Report by Anna Louise Brunton*

The UCC St. Vincent de Paul Society runs 'Homeless Week' each year in the hope of raising awareness, funds and resources for those sleeping rough throughout the winter months.

Homelessness recruited from around campus, raised their fervent voices and a lot of money for SVP & the Simon Community. They were met with a great response from the students who donated generously. Many students were eager to get involved in volunteering and we were delighted to have over 150 new students sign up over the

streets we invited Paul Sheehan, the campaign manager for Cork Simon Community, to speak on campus on the Tuesday evening. There was a great turnout and the event was sponsored by Domino's Pizza which brought in all the pizza fanatics!

grips the lives of a growing number of Cork citizens and our concern grew primarily from the fact that we believed the public have become desensitised by the increasingly prevalent sight of a person living on the streets. This is supported by the number of those homeless who claim to feel invisible as throngs of citizens pass by them daily.



Finally, this year the Society is very proud to have brought back the SVP 24-hour 'Sleep Out'!

Members of the SVP camped out between 8am Wednesday morning and 8am Thursday morning with the result that sponsorships are still rolling in!

The success of the 'Homeless Week' has brought the issue of homelessness in Cork to the forefront of the minds of UCC students, raised

This year our committee was dedicated to enhancing the SVP presence on campus and teamed up with the UCC Simon Community Society for Homeless Week 2011, headed by the slogan "Help the Homeless be seen".

An information stand was erected outside the College library providing the campus with facts and figures on homelessness, information on how both charities help the homeless, and brochures outlining the activities the UCC SVP run and instructions on how one can volunteer to help. The stand was manned by members ready to interact at all times, with fun methods of donation incorporated in the form of a "Guess the Teddy's Name" competition where students paid €2 to guess the name of a giant teddy they hoped to win, kindly donated by Smyth's Toy Store. We also held a very successful food and clothes drive at the stand.

We ran 'Battle of the Buskers' between noon and 2 pm each day in the heart of the UCC campus where our buskers, whom we

week. Coinciding with the Thursday lunchtime busking, we designed a 'Euro Trail' in the form of a shooting star with the donated €1 and €2 coins from that day which encouraged many people to donate further in order to complete the design. On the Thursday night we hosted the finale in the Campus Bar giving the acts another chance to perform while we held a raffle supported by local Cork businesses such as Scoozi's, the Gate Cinema, Corona Cork Film Festival, the Opera House, and Welch Sport, as well as the UCC Shop and Students Union.

We furthered our presence by involving other UCC societies in the week. A member of the UCC Comedy Society, Dave Moloney, acted as MC for the Thursday night 'Battle of the Buskers' seizing the crowd's attention with his humorous charm. Furthermore, the UCC Choral Society held a 'Sing-along Cinema' viewing of the Disney classic Lady and the Tramp which was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended and all money raised was donated to Homeless Week. To raise awareness of the brutal realities of the

over €2,000 as well as food and clothing and increased the SVP's number of volunteers.

Three of Ireland's leading homeless charities, Focus Ireland, Threshold and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul have joined forces to call on the Government to set 2013 as the new deadline to end long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough. The previous target of 2010 was not met, mainly because of the failure to provide the housing vital to move people out of homelessness.

The three charities have made a joint submission to the Minister for Housing, Willie Penrose, to consider under his Department's current review of the national homeless strategy "A Way Home".

Without a clear timeframe, the charities said, people will remain stuck in emergency accommodation, which is both expensive and damaging to their long-term prospects.







# “There Is a Great Lunch in Rathmullan”

The SVP Rathmullan Social Centre as seen by Kathy Walsh



Kathy Walsh is an independent social researcher and was co-author of the SVP Commission Report on Older People to establish the situation and experience of being an older person in Ireland today. The results of the research study were reported in detail in the last edition of *The SVP Bulletin* – Autumn 2011. In this article she writes about visiting the SVP Centre at Rathmullan in County Donegal.

The SVP Social Activity Centre was one of the places I was lucky enough to visit as part of the Commission of Older People. For those of you who may not know where Rathmullan is, you head north as far as Letterkenny, then veer north east to Ramelton and onto Rathmullan.

The day I visited the Centre was a cold grey end-of-November kind of day with showers coming and going. The Centre if you are looking for it is, as I was told, easy to find. You go through the village and “turn the corner away from the water” and there it is, a low-slung white building on the right hand side of the road, built on a site I later learned was donated by Donegal County Council.

The morning I arrived the place was a hive of activity as people arrived at the Centre, which is staffed by a full-time Manager/Cook, assisted by a number of part-time FÁS and Rural Social Scheme participants as well as local SVP volunteers. It opens two days a week - Wednesday and Thursday. The HSE provide a grant to the St. Joseph's Special Works conference to assist with the running costs of the Centre.

After being welcomed and shedding all their various layers of clothing, people headed off in a variety of directions, many for the big sitting room where there was a fire, newspapers, magazines, books and lots of chatter, while others headed to the computer room for a beginners' computer class. There was great excitement. I was there when some of the trainees managed to send their very first Email ever!

There was tea, coffee and scones for all. Most of the

early arrivals were older. In conversations, as part of our research consultations, the people there told me how much they enjoyed their day at the Centre, what a difference it had made to their lives, how they loved to be able to catch up with neighbours and friends and how good the lunch was!

Other activities include very competitive Scrabble (!) art and card-playing and, more recently, armchair exercises (since two of the FÁS staff completed the necessary training).

As the morning and my consultations with the early arrivals progressed, I could not help but notice a steady stream of people continuing to arrive, some younger some older. By lunch time there were well over fifty people there, all of them looking forward to lunch. The sit-down lunch, which is provided for a very reasonable cost, is cooked on the premises and served by volunteers.

Lunch on the day I was there was delicious with plenty for all and 'seconds' for the very hungry! Some people sat on over a cup a tea chatting, while others quickly adjourned to the sitting room to get a good spot for the Bingo, or indeed to find a quiet spot to read and snooze after a good meal in what many consider a 'home-away-from-home'. For me though, it was the little touches that made the Centre

special. The flowers on the tables in the dining area, bought and provided by an SVP volunteer 'to brighten the place up', the birthday cake to celebrate an 80th birthday and the provision of an umbrella escort to and from the car; so no one got wet. It is also the fact that everyone goes to the Centre for lunch, from the local priest, to the GP, to the public health nurse.

It seems as if the local community has taken it to its heart.

So a word of advice if you ever find yourself in Rathmullan on a Wednesday or Thursday and the place looks a bit deserted - try the Activity Centre... you can tell them I sent you!

Angela Morrisson, Centre Manager



# WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL OBJECT OF THE SVP ?

*It was good to see Kieran Murphy raise the issue of the principal object of the Society. With all the pressures on members now it is understandable, if regrettable, that while there is a good deal of emphasis in the SVP in Ireland today on what we do and how we do it, there is little on why we do it. So a debate on our objects is to be welcomed, says Larry Tuomey, a long-time member in a response.*

I suggest that at the heart of what being a member of the SVP is about is a personal encounter with a person in need. It is through this two-way relationship in which we both give and receive (and I'm not thinking of material things!) that we discover why we do what we do. This is part of the connectedness of human beings to which Kieran referred but I believe that there is an additional dimension for us which distinguishes the SVP from a purely humanitarian organisation. Article 1.2 of the SVP's International Rule ( see [www.ssvpglobal.org](http://www.ssvpglobal.org) ) puts it this way:

*"The vocation of Society members, called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service of those in need and so bear witness to his compassionate and liberating love."*

There are two integrated elements here – love of Christ through service to our neighbour in need – rather than a single object focussing on self. This is not a

spirituality which puts our personal interests ahead of those of the person we are seeking to help. It is rather that, like all Christians, we are called to respond to the imperative to love our neighbour clearly set out in Matthew 25 and elsewhere in the Gospel and that we have chosen to do this in a community of lay people (the Conference ) with the same vocation and inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul, our patron, and Frederic Ozanam, our principal founder – a central value of which was that what we do for the person in need we do for Christ himself.

Kieran suggested that our principal object is to express, experience and explore the connectedness of human beings. It is this but it is more, I suggest. My own preferred definition of what the SVP is about comes from the first revision of our original 1835 Rule which came after Vatican 2. It states that:

*"The source of the Vincentian vocation is both human and divine. It is the anguish experienced in seeing the suffering of another human being; the spontaneous reaction of sympathy, even fury, which surges in the presence of injustices undergone by our brothers and sisters in humanity. It is also the attitude of the Christian, living in the hope of the Resurrection, the bearer of a message of hope to those who suffer"*

*In the Autumn quarterly edition of The Bulletin the Society's National Director, Kieran Murphy, addressed this topic (see Autumn 2011 edition). A long-serving member of the SVP in Dublin, Larry Tuomey, contributes further thoughts to the discussion.*

*Learning about computers in the Rathmullan SVP Centre*







# WALKING THE WALK *in Clonmel*

New Junior Conference Models and Sells Charity Shop Clothes

Report: Aoife Lonergan and Nafisa Millat  
Photos: John D Kelly



The newly formed Junior St. Vincent de Paul Conference in Loreto Secondary School, Clonmel, County Tipperary, is made up of fifty-one 15-16 year-olds who spent months of hard work and dedication putting a fashion show together to raise funding for the Society.

When the girls decided to do a fashion show as their first fundraiser for the charity, they had no idea of the huge amount of work involved. In the process, they overcome many obstacles and day after day, put in a lot of work organising all aspects.

It was held in the Clonmel Park Hotel, which was filled with lively music, excited spectators and nervous models backstage for what was a "night to remember".

The show started with a live performance from a local band, "Broken Glass on Broadway." After their lively performance the commentator, Zara King from the popular local radio station, Beat 102-103, introduced Kieran Stafford, South-East Regional President of SVP, to raise awareness of the organisation and a slideshow followed, highlighting the work done by the Society.

Then the modelling commenced, featuring 26 girls and boys from local secondary schools. The clothes featured were from well-known, local shops like Villa, ONLY, Fitzgerald's, Wurlitzer; DV8, Jack & Jones, Menary's and clothes from the SVP charity shop in Clonmel.

We used clothes from the charity shop to show people that you can get great pieces and stay trendy at affordable prices by rooting through charity shops. The SVP clothes were sold soon

after they were modelled!

We raised €3,000 and everyone involved was proud and delighted. The money was used to buy food hampers and toy vouchers for struggling families in the local area at Christmas. We had a huge amount of support, from the SVP in Clonmel and could not have done it without the help of everyone who supported us.

The Junior SVP Conference of Loreto Clonmel intends to continue raising awareness and funds for the Society of St. Vincent De Paul.

- Aoife Lonergan and Nafisa Millat are Loreto Junior Conference members

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# Youth is our Future

**Says South-East Regional President, Kieran Stafford**

The South East now has two Junior Conferences – St. Colman's in Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary, which marked its 40th anniversary with a Mayoral reception in the Town Hall and the newest one formed by the Transition Year girls from the Loreto Secondary School Clonmel and named St. Julia's.

St. Coleman's is well-established proving a valuable part of their community by hosting parties for elderly people and holding an annual toy mass at Christmas where Carrick people traditionally donate toys. The Conference's Mayoral reception is a fitting honour for the great work the young members have done over the past 40 years.

The newest junior Conference, at Clonmel, "hit the ground running" so to speak, organising a teenage fashion show which achieved three important things. Firstly, raising awareness amongst their peers of the work SVP does and the importance of this work in today's difficult times. Secondly, providing a great social night for the youth to enjoy as well as showcasing a talented local band and thirdly giving a platform for local shops to display their clothes including the SVP shop while raising €3,000 to buy toys and food for local families in need at Christmastime.

The work of both these Conferences displays that youth certainly has a role to play in the

Society of St. Vincent de Paul today. It is vital that we support and encourage youth within the Society. In doing this we help young people to develop a social conscience while doing something practical to alleviate the suffering of the families in their communities affected by the recession. Making young people welcome in the SVP will pay dividends when many go on to become full adult members and enrich the Society with fresh ideas and enthusiasm.

The founder of the SVP, Frederic Ozanam, was a young man when he started our Society.

*Clonmel Loreto Conference members with their teacher, Ms. Olive O'Donnell, Eimear Columby, Niamh Murphy, Aine Stafford, Niamh Whelan, Aoife Lonergan, Eimear Croke, Kate Lynch, Katie Hickey, Nafisa Millat.*



# “IT IS VITAL THAT WE LISTEN TO CHILDREN’S VOICES”

SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL AND BARNARDOS UNITE TO WARN THAT SOME FAMILIES CANNOT PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN FROM DEPRIVATION

Ireland’s method of measuring poverty does not adequately reflect children’s specific experience of poverty and deprivation.

Research conducted by the Children’s Research Centre at Trinity College, Dublin, undertaken in order to examine deprivation from a child’s perspective - what children need, what they have and what they have to go without due to a lack of money – has established a child-specific deprivation index, effectively a list of items identified by children as necessities for all children, regardless of their parents’ income.

The research report, “All You Need Is...” involved 262 children aged from 9-to-11 years and their parents.

The Director of the Children’s Research Centre, Professor Sheila Greene, said the survey indicated that “child and household deprivation are not one and the same phenomenon” and that the experiences of adults and children within a family can vary.

“It is crucial that both the measures we use and our responses to child poverty take into account the complexities that this implies.”

The Chief Executive of Barnardos, Fergus Finlay, said that children had spoken: “What they are clearly saying to us is that poverty and deprivation mean different things to children than they do to adults. It is vital that we listen to children’s voices. If we don’t hear what they say about their experiences of poverty, then we can’t find ways to limit the impact of poverty on young lives. Every day, both Barnardos and SVP see that impact erode childhoods and place big burdens on small shoulders. We must learn from this research and review how we measure and think about child poverty in Ireland.”

The report demonstrates that children clearly understand what is meant by necessities. There was strong consensus between children and parents about which items were essential for

children. The 12-item child-specific deprivation index is child-centred and has a focus on participation. The items in the index capture the voice of the child and highlight what children deem to be essential to guarantee an acceptable standard of living during childhood.

The indicators are:

- Three balanced meals each day with fruit / vegetables and meat / fish
- Enough of the right clothes for different seasons, e.g. a coat to keep warm and dry in winter
- Separate bed and bedding of their own
- Their own books for reading for fun
- Food and drinks for friends when they call over to play
- Own money for school activities or days out
- A family holiday once a year
- Day out with family at least twice a year (e.g. go to beach, fun fair, leisure centres)
- Visit to a restaurant for a family meal at least twice a year
- A bank, post office or Credit Union account to save money
- Shops close to home
- A trip to the library

The Head of Social Justice and Policy with the Society of St.Vincent de Paul, John-Mark McCafferty, described the report’s findings as showing that “deprivation and experiences of poverty can be highly complex” and that many factors can influence children’s experience of poverty.

“It may be that families at risk of poverty, for example those struggling on low incomes but not in receipt of State supports do not have any buffer to protect their children from the impact of deprivation. At the same time, other families may be making huge personal sacrifices

to ensure children don’t go without. Whatever the individual circumstances in a family, what is clear is that poverty needs a holistic response with a variety of elements including both service provision and income supports.

“Despite the recession there is no excuse for leaving thousands of children and families on the knife edge of existence, struggling to pay for basics such as food, heating and education costs.”

*“People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.”*

- Definition of poverty used in *m The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)* published by government in 1997, which is still used today

• See also Fergus Finlay, Chief Executive of Barnardos, article on pages 42-43







SVP volunteers at the launch of 'The Hidden Park': (l-r) Nuala Brady; Fionnula Freeny; Anne O'Byrne; President Mary McAleese; Rose McGowan, SVP Dublin Regional President; Yvonne McGivern; Pat Sheehy; Andy Russell; Carmen Sebastian-Pelez; Helen Smith and Phil Callan.

# *Magic Moments hidden in the park*

The Phoenix Park has been part of life not only in Ireland's capital but for the entire nation as so many people have passed through this part of Dublin en route to the Zoo for family outings. Now a day in the life of the Park is helping to raise funds for the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.

'The Hidden Park' is the result of a collaborative event on Midsummer's Day last year when staff of different organisations based in the Phoenix Park participated in a Photo Day arranged by the Ordnance Survey.

The result is a visual snapshot of life in the Park. The purpose was to capture what the Phoenix Park means to people who work and live there and to present a view that may be hidden to the casual visitor.

St Vincent De Paul volunteers and staff joined outgoing President Mary McAleese at the launch of the heartwarming collection of photos depicting life in the famous park. It features 150 photographs of life in the park, from exotic animals in the zoo to breathtaking landscapes. The photographs were taken with mobile phones and digital cameras and show a rich insight into the vast park.

Profits from 'The Hidden Park' will be donated to two charities - the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Phoenix Park Special School, a school for children with severe emotional and behavioral challenges.



# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*SVP National Director, Kieran Murphy discusses this volunteering phrase*

The phrase 'making a difference' is widely used these days in connection with volunteering: 'volunteer abroad – explore the world and make a difference', 'European Year of Volunteering – volunteer and make a difference!', 'Each volunteer nominated for an Ireland Involved Award is someone making a difference in their community'. This begs the question: 'what difference do SVP volunteers make and to whom?'

Over the last few years, since 2008, we have seen a steady increase in the calls for help. In some places there has been a doubling of calls in the last two years. In addition to the growth in the number of calls there is also a noted change in their complexity. People contact us when they have an immediate financial or material need e.g. a shortage of money for basic necessities such as food, for help needed with exceptional events such as Christmas, a large energy arrears bill. But the needs that our volunteers meet when doing home visitation are often much more numerous and complex than that. They meet people who often have a range of emotions which arise as a consequence of their material needs: stress, anxiety, isolation, shame, hopelessness, anger, and depression to name but a few. But it does not end there. The immediate financial and associated emotional needs often arise out of long term complex needs, e.g. living on a low and inadequate income, relationship breakdown, and bereavement. And finally, there is often a sense of social isolation because of people's inability to share their problems with family, neighbours and friends. It is into these peoples' lives that SVP's home visitation volunteers go to make a difference.

Volunteers bring financial assistance and offer emotional support in order to make a positive difference. This helps people deal with their immediate and long term problems. However

the positive difference of home visitation work is broader than the impact on the people who come to us for help, the people visited. The volunteers can also experience a positive difference in their lives; it can give meaning and a sense of purpose. They can experience a great sense of fulfilment and satisfaction at making a difference in the lives of other people and experience a sense of connectedness with some of the people they visit. One older volunteer described for me once that 'I would have given up home visitation years ago except for the small number of families I've gotten to know over the years and who are now like my extended family'.

One of the features common to many home visitation visits is the way they can generate energy. The person visited, in addition to getting financial and emotional support is often energised to engage with the problems they face. But the visitor too is energised. The experience of the visits sustains their commitment to the work but they also take that energy into other parts of their lives.

Typically we think about home visitation as providing a 'service for' people who come to us seeking our assistance. It seems to me that to describe the work of home visitation only in terms of the benefits it brings to the people who seek our help is too narrow a focus. It misses out on the range of other positive benefits, especially for the volunteers. An alternative way is to think of it as a 'service

between' both the volunteer visitor and the person visited. This places an emphasis on the quality of the relationship between the visitor and the person visited rather than simply on the material supports that are provided. It also recognises that there is something of a two-way relationship where both benefit.

As volunteers set out to 'make a difference', often the person to whom they are making a difference is themselves.







# ROY KEANE & CO. CLEAN-UP IN CORK!

Before the doors of the City Hall were opened there were long queues circling that famed Cork edifice on the morning when the Spring Clean for Charity was staged on Leaside.

Many thousands of people visited the event during the day to buy items which other members of the public no longer wanted and

had donated from their homes, attics, garages and offices.

Cork's own international soccer 'supremo' Roy Keane arrived, as he had promised to do and spent several hours signing autographs for young and old, all helping to raise around €30,000 for the Society's work in Cork.

The event was part of a series which have been organised at locations around the country by Norma Smurfit with the help of well-known names and celebrities, including Bill Cullen, Lorraine Keane, Jackie Lavin, Cecil Homan and others.









# WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE?

## AND WHY IS THE MEDIA FOLLOWING TINA?

*John-Mark McCafferty and Caroline Fahey of the SVP Social Justice Team have some answers*

It seems that most commentators, in the media, and particularly in economics, are faithful followers of TINA. The reference doesn't relate to Ms. Turner or some other female superstar. TINA is an acronym for a phrase that was used relentlessly in public debates during Margaret Thatcher's time in Britain. It is also re-emerging in the UK today and adequately summarises the response to the current crisis in contemporary Ireland. There Is "No Alternative", or TINA, has been used in the past, as it is being used today, to explain the cuts which were made in Budget 2012 and which will continue to be made over the coming years.

This is not to advocate that Government expenditure did not need to be reduced in the Budget – such a stance would not be realistic given the depth of the fiscal problems we face as a country or indeed as part of a struggling Europe. Neither are we opposed to reform. What is of concern is the scale of the cuts to the services and supports relied upon by those on the lowest incomes that have taken place as a result of Budget 2012 and the fact that the focus has been on cutting expenditure rather than increasing the tax take.

A poll conducted by Amarach research for RTE and the Daily Mail and made public in November shows that most people agree that there should be more cuts on spending than tax increases at the current time. Yet the majority of those surveyed did not want to see cuts in the following: social welfare rates including one parent family payment; child benefit or the State Pension and the vast majority oppose increases in charges for doctor visits or A&E.

If we believe that it is socially just to protect income supports and services for those we assist, then there needs to be resources to pay for this – resources which are largely gathered through the tax system. Budget 2012 demonstrated the consequences of not gathering enough revenue through taxation to fund essential public services - while cuts to the basic

rate of social welfare payments were avoided, many of the cuts to secondary payments and the increased charges for public services such as education and health will hit low income households hard. The incomes and assets of the wealthy were left relatively untouched in Budget 2012, while flat rate charges like the €100 Household Charge and the decision to increase VAT will impact disproportionately on those on lower incomes.

Frederic Ozanam is frequently lauded as a radical and social innovator of his time. What would Frederic make of our current situation, and what solutions would he develop and advocate? Above all else, Frederic thought and behaved in terms of social justice. In today's Ireland, two thirds cuts to only one third of tax increases is not socially just. It might be radical, but hardly in the way Frederic would envisage.

We promote the SVP as 'The voice of Social Justice in Ireland' (SVP Bulletin front cover, August 2011). Truly working for social justice means bringing a fundamental challenge to social and economic injustices and putting forth alternatives.

And yet we tend, as an organisation, to be somewhat quiet when it comes to developing and agreeing such alternatives. Looking through our submissions to Government, we ask for a lot in terms of income supports and the provision of services, such as education, health, homelessness, housing, and energy retrofitting schemes because we know that the people we assist need these supports. Implicit in these demands is a call for strong intervention and the provision of resources by Government. But how is that paid for in the current environment? And if the SVP 'brand' of Social Justice is not about the redistribution of wealth through the tax and welfare system, then what are we talking about when we talk about social justice?

Social Justice is 'big picture' stuff – and involves more than tax and welfare arguments. It encompasses principles of social connectedness

and solidarity, the things that allow us to jointly express our humanity and our vulnerabilities. But these ring hollow if they do not bring us closer towards a vision of economic justice. The media – and often, we ourselves – feel safe and seem content to blame sharp practice among utility companies, bankers, Government, EU partners or others. However, the injustices the SVP sees start long before someone is presented with an electricity bill they can't pay, and existed long before the current economic crisis. Injustices can come about due to our own attitudes and behaviour as well as the failures of Government and others.

So how do we move towards a vision of Social Justice for SVP? This requires a number of things. The development of a deeper sense of social solidarity is required, as is an understanding that equality and fairness matters. Charity is what we do and we are compelled to continue and to develop this. At the same time, we are gaining confidence in analysing problems and acting on the basis of rights as well as responsibilities.

This is the beginning of a conversation about social justice rather than any conclusion. But if social justice is to have any merit, it must be able to robustly challenge the conventional wisdom of TINA – There Is No Alternative. It needs to be allowed to develop and come up with alternatives at a time when they are so desperately needed. This means the SVP needs to engage with less comfortable, more contested and more conflictual areas of policy. It means addressing areas we have traditionally shied away from, principally taxation and the redistribution of wealth.

Perhaps Social Justice is where the principles of rights, equality, fairness, charity and social solidarity meet. And maybe this is a good enough departure point from which we can develop a more socially just Ireland.



# FIVE WEEKS TO FIND AND OPEN A SHOP!

## *Nenagh Does It in Time and on Budget*

*There were years spent thinking about it but when the Conference of St Mary of the Rosary in Nenagh, County Tipperary, decided to do it, they moved fast! They set up a shop in just five weeks.*

**U**nder the guidance of President Pat Carroll a Conference committee was formed to examine the possibility of renting a shop. The members chose a former bakery and tearooms for the project. It had double window space and a back kitchen area that they decided would be ideal for preparing items for sale and it was also in the centre of the town.

Within a short time a rent had been negotiated, the lease drawn up and a Shop Conference formed. St John's was composed of six members of the main Conference. Mollie Hyland became President; Michelle Keene Secretary; Nick Theato Treasurer; Harry Martin Senior Shop Supervisor and Pat Carroll with Joan Naughton as members. The Area President, Pat Pilkington, was also nominated a member.

Over the next few weeks Pat Carroll became Project Manager and Harry managed to procure shop fittings including backing boards, the services of a volunteer carpenter and sorted out the electrics with the electrical contractor of the original shop. He also persuaded the landlords to provide extra space at the back with no rent increase!

Leonard of 'The Design Shop', Newcastle in Co Wicklow, provided an outline of how to display goods, the main Conference gave start-up funding of €2,000 with the promise of more if needed. Birr SVP Shop Conference donated a large quantity of clothing and other items. Ennis SVP Shop gave clothing, books, shop fittings and valuable advice. Limerick SVP Shop came up with six outfits of very good quality clothing each for gents, ladies and children and more shop fittings. All of this generosity underlined Vincentian 'family support'. The lease went to the Ozanam Trust for signing and the project was ready to start.

Nick Theato volunteered to prepare and paint the outside of the shop, completed in the three days! The shop sign was designed, approved by the Town Council and ordered locally. In hectic preparation work, Harry and Pat were busy inside the shop with a volunteer carpenter and procuring much-needed bits and pieces. Michelle secured local funding donations and publicised the need for volunteers as well as donations of clothing. This resulted in twenty volunteers offering their services! A local painting contractor volunteered and provided two painters to paint the inside of the shop. This was a great example of local support for the project.

Another volunteer measured up, made and then fitted clothing rails to the back room and sorting area. The President's husband was pressed into service painting the back office. Nick put up shelving and made an extension to the display counter for the important for the cash register. Pat had a volunteer electrician install security cameras. It was a hectic time for everyone involved. More voluntary effort painted back room walls and the ceiling and those who had volunteered to help with shop merchandise sorted, cleaned and checked the merchandise. Windows were cleaned, brass work on outside doors polished, goods for sale were organised and, within five weeks of forming the Conference, the shop opened.

"People were wonderful to us locally in what was a hectic time," recalled Mollie Hyland. "Our costs have been a clothes steamer; a cash till, automatic note fraud detector, security cameras and their recording equipment, paint and cleaning materials, timber and electric fittings, the shop sign and a few incidentals and we did it all within our original budget. All excess income over expenditure in the shop will go to our main local Conference which funded the start-up and will help its services to those in need. Each volunteer and donor who helped us knows the good they have done. We have been blessed by their support."



*Paddy O'Gorman of RTE did the honours in officially opening the shop for the Nenagh Conference.*



*Nick Theato painting the premises*



*Michelle Keane and Harry Martin preparing the shop*

# INTERNATIONAL SPORTS STARS HELP SVP

## *Gordon D'Arcy Drives On*

International sports stars have turned out to help the SVP in Cork.

Roy Keane was at the City Hall and Ireland international and Leinster star, Gordon D'Arcy, was further downriver at the Mahon Shopping Centre in Blackrock.

Gordon arrived all the way from Dublin and

Leinster but diplomatically without his blue shirt in this 'Munster Red' stronghold!

He was on Leeside to help launch the Society of St.Vincent de Paul's annual Christmas draw for a car. This was at the Mahon, with the generous support of Johnson & Perrott. Appropriately, with Cork's renown for the annual Jazz Festival, the car was a Honda Jazz 2012.

Gordon spoke approvingly of the work of the Society and the help it is giving to those in need of assistance throughout the country.

The car draw took place at the SVP Cork Deerpark Hostel in Christmas Week and was won by JJ. O'Sullivan from Castletownbere in West Cork.





# *Government ‘Warmer Homes’ Strategy*

*should provide more help for low-income families*

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*Fuel allowance is not a panacea for energy poverty says John-Mark McCafferty, SVP Head of Social Justice and Policy, as he analyses the Governments ‘Warmer Homes’ Strategy*

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Launching their Affordable Energy Strategy, 'Warmer Homes', the Government's Energy Minister, Pat Rabbitte, described the plan as 'a clear framework for how we will measure, record and report on the numbers of households in difficulty and the actions necessary to improve the quality of life for such households.' The Strategy was launched some years later than planned and comes at a time when energy is becoming less and less affordable.

The Minister specifically names the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the foreword of the Strategy, where he says that the plan 'will require the on-going support of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Department of Social Protection, community based organisations, State energy companies and others, if we want to address this problem substantively'.

The SVP is the only organisation named which does not have a direct reporting or contractual arrangement with the Department of Energy or one of the relevant Government agencies, so our current and potential role in tackling energy or fuel poverty is recognised and highly regarded by Government. This is due in no small part to the on-the-ground work of local Conferences paying bills, negotiating deals with utilities and avoiding disconnections on behalf of vulnerable customers. But it is also due to our involvement on the Government-appointed Committee overseeing the development of the strategy and our co-ordination of other voluntary and community groups on the issue.

The vision underpinning the Strategy is stated as 'the achievement of a standard of living whereby households are able to afford all of their energy needs and where individuals and families live in a warm and comfortable home that enhances the quality of their lives and supports good physical and mental health'. The plan aims to more clearly define energy poverty and improve the energy efficiency of

low income homes using partnerships between Government departments, agencies, utilities, non-governmental organisations and others, including an area-based approach. Other elements include a review of the Department of Social Protection's Fuel Allowance and Free Household Units scheme and stronger co-ordination between all relevant parties in order to implement the plan in the most integrated way. Timeframes for specific measures are of three durations: up to 12 months, up to 18 months and longer than 18 months.

The SVP broadly welcomes the Strategy as it contains many things that have the potential to make a positive difference for the fuel-poor, in particular a number of things we have lobbied long and hard for, including new regulations to focus on removing properties with poor energy ratings (E, F and G) from the private rental market by 2020; the expansion of retrofit measures to include the voluntary housing sector; engagement with oil and solid fuel suppliers in the implementation of the strategy and a re-orientation of the energy-related income supports schemes with a view to better targeting toward energy-poor households. Priority households, those who will benefit from the measures of the strategy, will include, among others, households where there is a history of debt, disconnection, eviction over non-payment of bills or homelessness. These households are a key target group for the SVP and are key recipients of our local Conference work and resources.

All of the measures named are appropriate and need to be implemented. However there are a number of budgetary matters not included in, but related to the strategy. The first relates to the reduction in the number of weeks that fuel allowance is to be paid from 2012 onwards. This is being reduced from 32 weeks to 26 weeks, an effective reduction of almost 19%. Fuel allowance is not a panacea for energy poverty, and not everyone in fuel poverty is eligible for the benefit anyway. However, many on fuel poverty rely on the payment for their energy bills.

On top of the fuel allowance cut is the moderate increase to be applied to the carbon tax as announced in Budget 2012 (from €15 per tonne to €20 per tonne). There are valid arguments for carbon tax, both in terms of attempting to reduce our demand on carbon based fuels, as a means to reduce the causes of climate change and as a revenue raiser for Government. However, the tax could only be fair if there were measures designed to compensate low income households from increases in energy costs as a result. While the tax is mentioned in Chapter One of the strategy, there is no commitment to compensate poorer households and, coupled with the reduction in the weeks for which fuel allowance is paid, the combination of these measures do somewhat undermine the overall aims of the energy affordability strategy. That said, from an affordability point of view, the level of increase in the tax is less than was anticipated, the delay in the implementation of the Carbon Tax increase for home heating until May 2012 is to be welcomed, and the solid fuel exemption is also a positive.

The main longer term bulwark against rising energy prices is energy efficiency and retrofitting. The strategy has a variety of thermal efficiency measures and it is only through sustained and co-ordinated investment in these measures, in the owner occupier, local authority, voluntary housing and private rental sectors, that substantial improvements in domestic energy efficiency can take place. In addition, the role that income supports play need to be reshaped in order to meet the needs of those in most fuel poverty, not just those eligible for a particular payment. Lastly, the development of cheaper and greener sources of energy, which are less carbon dependant and less at the mercy of international suppliers, need to be invested in. Successful new technologies which are hopefully cheaper to use in the long run need to be made more available to lower income households and social-rented tenants, not just higher income home owners who can afford to install green energy measures.

# WE DO LOADS OF FUN THINGS

Tom MacMahon tells the story of SUNSHINE HOUSE, the SVP'S County Dublin Holiday Home for Children

If you could make a difference to a child's life, you would, wouldn't you? Especially if doing so involved just a week of your time and could be enjoyable as well as hugely rewarding.

That is probably why The Sunshine Fund has been so well supported by members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the wider public for over eighty years.

Living conditions in Dublin's slums of the 1920s and 30s were notoriously poor, overcrowded, unsanitary, dark and dangerous. Children were disproportionately affected, with infant mortality high, tuberculosis and measles rife and malnutrition common, so much so that the death rate resembled Calcutta's.

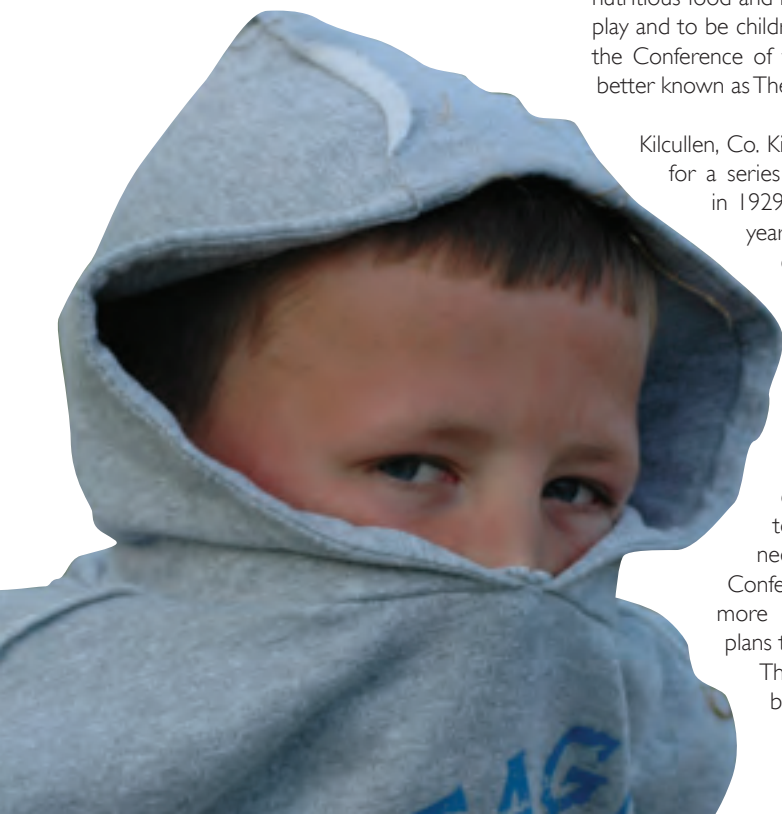
Then, as now, SVP Conferences were overwhelmed by the needs of families throughout the capital; simultaneously a number of local youth clubs tried to cater for the burgeoning population of children by organising activities, sports and educational programmes. However, in 1928 a group of dedicated SVP members recognised that providing holidays away from the city would be just as valuable, where young people could benefit from fresh air, sunshine, nutritious food and most importantly a time to play and to be children. Through their foresight, the Conference of the Infant Jesus of Prague, better known as The Sunshine Fund, was born.

issue of the Advocate Paper and accompanying church collection, which raised £300, a considerable sum at the time. Not keen to wait while searching for a suitable permanent venue, we hosted our first holiday that same year in a disused wing of Loughlinstown Hospital, South Dublin. This was a new experience for the boys who had the first week's holiday of their lives. Soon after, Rochfort House, a former Church of Ireland rectory in Balbriggan, North Dublin, was purchased, re-named Sunshine House and renovations began, allowing holidays at this dedicated facility to begin soon afterwards.

Kilcullen, Co. Kildare was the initial venue for a series of weekend picnics. Then in 1929 and for the following few years, we switched to bringing children on day trips to Gormanston Strand, Co. Meath, only twenty miles from Dublin, yet a world away from their everyday lives.

The scarcities of "the Emergency" of the World War Two years brought fresh challenges, as children had to bring their ration tickets with them to allow the SVP to buy the food that would be needed during the holiday. Recognition also spread, as our name cropped up in a 1945 Dáil debate on tuberculosis sanatoria and the benefits of fresh air.

Encouraged by these early successes and anxious to respond further to the need they saw around them, Conference members became more ambitious and developed plans to offer week-long holidays. The difficult task of fundraising began in 1935 with the first







### Sunshine Holiday

The years passed and the slums were slowly cleared, but the need for Sunshine House remained. With the 1970s and '80s came the spectres of drug addiction and mass unemployment, casting long shadows over many neighbourhoods. Sunshine House continued its unbroken service to young people across the city. Thanks to generous benefactors, we were able to keep pace with progress by upgrading our facilities, including adding a new dormitory wing in 1951, an indoor play centre in 1972, upgraded sports hall in the 1990s and extensive play centre refurbishments in 2003.

While smaller numbers of children were hosted in the early years of the twenty-first century, our current economic conditions have led to resurgence in demand, which is now as strong as ever:

Nevertheless, despite the changes each decade brings, our purpose hasn't altered: to organise eight-day long seaside breaks (Saturday-to-Saturday) for boys and girls living in areas of disadvantage who might otherwise

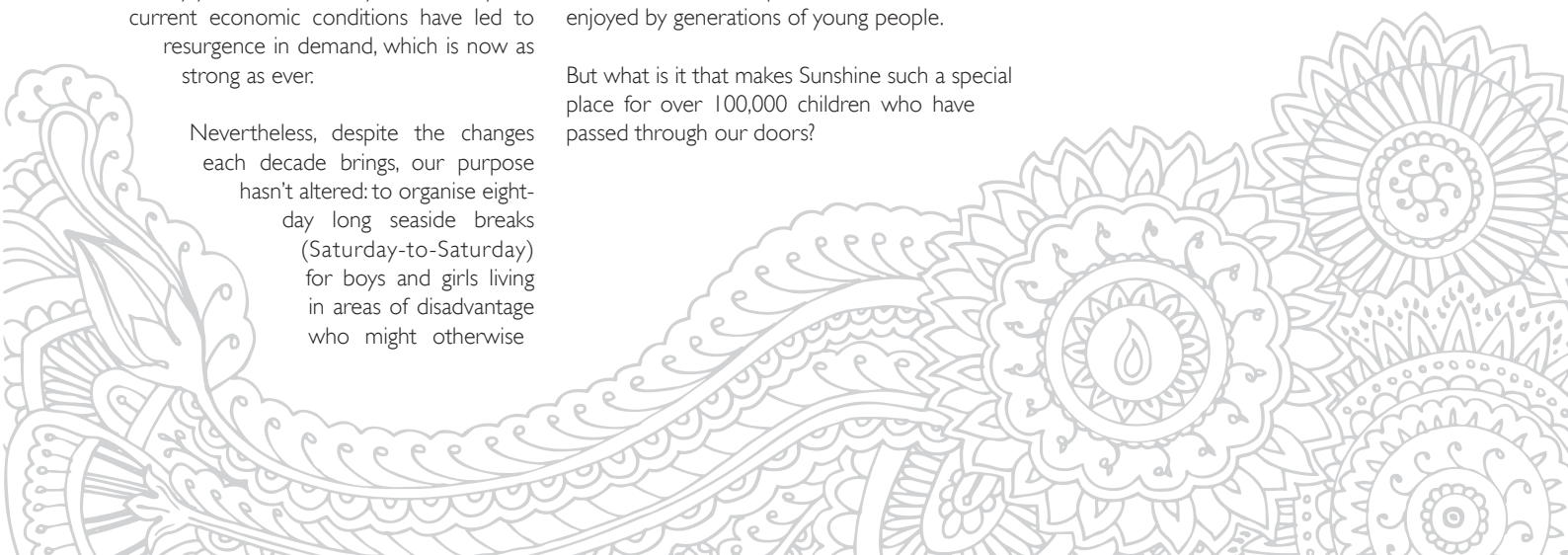
never get a holiday. Every summer, groups of up to 100 children aged between 7 and 11 travel with us each week for the duration of the holiday season, which normally runs from late May to late August each year.

Last year we entertained over 1,200 young people. Our team of about 150 SVP volunteers of all ages and walks of life make this possible. They give up a full week of their time to care for and play with our young guests, entertaining them from when they wake up until they go to bed by organising football and basketball leagues, sandcastle competitions, marathons, arts and crafts, treasure hunts and a whole range of other activities. A simple but successful formula, enjoyed by generations of young people.

But what is it that makes Sunshine such a special place for over 100,000 children who have passed through our doors?

*We believe it is our unique tradition of care that aims to provide each young guest with the holiday of a lifetime, care that equals if not exceeds that provided at home.*

However, in the face of increasing demand and reducing fundraising income, continuing to ensure that the youngest in our community don't miss out on what many of us take for granted is our major ongoing challenge, but one to which we intend to rise.



## COMMENTS ABOUT SUNSHINE HOUSE

### From Parents/Guardians:

- "I can tell you there is not only two things (good things) about Sunshine, there is a million; my kids wouldn't go with anybody for more than one night at home, but at Sunshine they would go a week without not even thinking of me."
- "I love that I really felt like my son was safe. I would also like to thank you so much for allowing my child to go. He loves every bit of it, so thanks once again."
- "It was a free holiday that gave me and my partner time together which we don't get; it was a chance for my child to take responsibility for herself without us there and to mix with other children."
- "My daughters get to stay for a week independent without me. There was no boring time for them, they were always engaged in different activities. They got to make friends."
- "My son got an opportunity to go and he had an absolutely brilliant time – he's still talking about it!"
- "Your children are in the best capable hands and you would be depriving the child of not only a holiday but a life changing experience (if you didn't let them go)."

### From the Children

- "The best bits are that we do loads of fun things."
- "I loved my holiday, can't wait to come back."
- "I liked the whole lot."
- "I love playing on the swings."



Contact The Sunshine Fund at SVP House,  
91-92 Seán MacDermott Street, Dublin 1.

website: [www.sunshinefund.ie](http://www.sunshinefund.ie)  
email: [sunshine@svpdublin.ie](mailto:sunshine@svpdublin.ie)  
Phone 01-8198430

Tuesday evenings 6:30pm - 8:30pm  
February to September





# *No one has an entitlement to Heaven*

A REFLECTION by Fr. Declan Shannon, C.C., Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Coosan, Athlone.

We all know of people who are generous to a fault as well as others who are known to be so mean, that they wouldn't spend Christmas! There are some people who would 'give you the shirt off their back' or 'the last bit in their mouth'. But then there are others who'd begrudge you even a glass of water for the sake of having to wash the glass!

Generosity, you might say, is a strange thing! Some people seem to possess it in abundance while others simply don't have it at all. Some people are only happy when they're giving, while others only know how to take.

But the strangest thing about generosity is that people who are generous; people who like to give things away always seem to have plenty. Despite all their giving, they never seem to go short or they never seem to want for anything! But the tight-fisted, on the other hand, never seem to have enough. No matter how much

they have in life, they are never content or happy with their lot. Some people are prisoners to their money while others have no value on it at all. Whatever it is about generosity, it seems to turn every principle of economics on its head. So maybe the old saying is right that "the moaners don't give and the givers don't moan".

Jesus pushes the concept of generosity to new limits. Our concept of God's generosity is limited by our calculated generosity. We give only from what we have left over. God gives without limitation or calculation.

We have no right or entitlement to heaven; instead heaven is God's generous gift to us. Regardless of whether we live long or short, Jesus does not keep score of our work or record of our hours. The kingdom of heaven is not something that we earn or that we deserve.

So instead of us looking back either in regret at what we have not done or in pride of what we have done, let us look forward and put heads down to work today for God, as only today matters!



# What is a Mother?

*“Flustered, reddening just a little, I told her I was engaged in continuous assessment and had “achieved four credits”. She didn’t know it but I was referring to my four daughters...”*



## What defines a Mother?

Dictionary references suggest:

- A female parent or
- A woman having, or regarded as having the status, function and/ or authority of a female parent

But these are somewhat clinical. Heading into a New Year, there are other, more pragmatic and widespread qualifications, interpretations, feelings and opinions to be taken into consideration.

A woman, renewing her driver’s licence, was asked at her Council offices, by a woman official behind the reception desk, to state her occupation.

Uncertain how to classify herself, she hesitated:

“What I mean,” said the official, “is do you have a job or are you just a ...?”

As the question tailed off the woman applicant replied: “I’m a Mum.”

“We don’t list ‘Mum’ as an occupation, ‘housewife’ will cover it,” the official announced.

Another ‘Mum’ or ‘Mother’ remembered this experience in a similar situation and adopted a change of ‘occupational approach’:

The clerk probing my occupation seemed to be a career woman. Unlike me, merely an applicant seeking assistance on the other side of her desk, she was poised, efficient and seemed to be the official interrogator.

Asked, rather haughtily it seemed to me, for my occupation, I don’t know what made me say it. The words came out of my mouth: “I’m in the field of child development and human relations.”

“Just what you do in that field?” The lady official probed.

Flustered, reddening just a little, I told her I was engaged in continuous assessment and had “achieved four credits”. She didn’t know it but I was referring to my four daughters who are quiet demanding in the sphere of humanities. Any mother care to disagree?

I said that I often work 14 hours-a-day, (24 is more like it but I didn’t want to go that far!) that it is not ordinary, run-of-the-mill work, but that the rewards are more than just a career and money.

I sensed an increasing note of respect in the lady clerk’s voice.

Back home my ‘career assistants’ awaited decisions about their input to my newly-adopted opinion of my career - ages 13, 7, 3 and a new model in the child development programme, a 6-month old baby who regularly tests out new vocal patterns, creates disposable problems and can be difficult over recycling issues, such as foods which she spits out!

Perhaps I have identified a new category which will challenge bureaucracy to deal with and maybe their appreciation of the role of ‘Mother’ from that of ‘housewife’.

Perhaps grandmothers could be classed as ‘senior associates in child development’ and aunts be known as ‘research assistants’?



Front row l-r: Brid Uí Ghairbhín, Bobbie MacDonnchadha, Mary Scahill, Val McNicholas.  
Back row l-r: Mary Breathnach, Brid Ní Liatháin, Treasa MacNiocáil, Mamie Kelly, & Mary Hynes.

# THE WEST'S AWAKE!

Report:  
Larry Hynes

## SVP Develops in Connemara – Irish Is the Working Language

*For many years the vast area of Connemara in the West of Ireland has been serviced by St. Anthony's SVP Conference from Galway City, a difficult and challenging task. It was necessary to develop the Society's presence so that more visitation work in particular could be carried out.*

"Something would have to be done," was the view in the Western Region and so it was when a new Conference was formed in Oughterard in County Galway and now a new one has been started in Carraroe – Comhdháil Mhic Dara – with its working language in Irish.

This Conference is singular in that approach, but it is perfectly natural for those involved, though it left some of us stretching for our memories to find whatever cúpla focal we had left! Area President Val McNichols was not phased however and did a very good interview on Radio na Gaeltachta in Irish to announce the inauguration of this new Conference.

Logistically it was a bit difficult getting Trainers to Carraroe but Kay Dowling, Dunmore; Wyn Joyce and Mary and Larry Hynes from Galway travelled to provide the modules of Training and subsequently two new members went to Galway for training. Our photograph shows those at the first training session.

Rev.Fr.Ciaral Blake was a prime mover in getting the Conference started. There is still a need for two or three more Conferences in Connemara and we have hopes in this regard.

A new Conference, St.James, has also been started in Claregalway through the work of the Area President and, due to increased demand in Galway City, the Conference of the Good

Sheperd has been started in Doughiska to relieve pressure on existing Conferences there and in Oranmore.

A meeting was held in Menlo Park Hotel in Galway for all members in the Area to help prepare plans for the future while new Regional President, Pat Kieilty, has been visiting Conferences and reviving some which had been dormant. A new Area Council has been established in South Galway comprising St.Brendan's of Loughrea; St.Coleman's in Gort and St.Brigid's in Portumna, who all met in Gort to discuss the on-going work of the SVP. National Membership Officer, Brendan Hennessy, was in attendance.



# THE PRESIDENT WHO WASHED DISHES FOR THE SVP!

## *Former SVP Volunteer Opens Dublin Homeless Hostel On Her Last Day In Office*

*After 14 years in office President Mary McAleese honoured the Society of St. Vincent de Paul by choosing to open the refurbished Back Lane Hostel in Dublin as her last public function.*

"We invited her and she named the day," Tommy O'Reilly and Larry Tuomey of the SVP told the large media gathering which recorded the President's final day and the way in which she had decided to mark it, in an SVP homeless hostel, a Society activity of which she had experience as a volunteer when she washed dishes!

President McAleese and her husband, Martin, were welcomed to the Back Lane by Larry Tuomey who recalled "meeting Mary McAleese when we were both young SVP volunteers and she talked about her time in the SVP washing dishes in a hostel for the homeless in Belfast very similar to Back Lane".

"I'm moving home today, as you know," the President began her address, using her own circumstances to talk about the importance of a home in people's lives. She said it was through places like the Back Lane Hostel that the homeless can "rediscover their sense of worth and rebuild their lives."

"While it is somewhere no parent imagines their child will ever be, there will always be those who, through circumstances, become 'frail people' and have to put their faith in the hands of those who start out as loving strangers, but become friends who make it their business to care for the homeless."

Listening to her in the hostel were men like Noel Fitzpatrick who presented the President with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the residents and Frank Brady who composed a poem for the occasion in which he drew from sources such as Star Trek and Simon and Garfunkel. The room hushed as he read it and exploded with applause as he finished.

Residents of the Back Lane Hostel, SVP volunteers, De Paul Ireland workers, hostel staff and other support workers were present while, when the President arrived outside the hostel there were local people and children

from nearby St. Audoen's Primary School as well as a battery of newspaper photographers, four television stations camera crews and a large contingent of reporters.

There are 18 long-term supported accommodation units in the refurbished wing of the hostel at Christ Church in the heart of Dublin City. The project was initiated and funded by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The new en suite units provide permanent accommodation and support for men who had previously experienced extended periods of homelessness and whose physical or health condition preclude them from living independently. The hostel is now managed by Depaul Ireland on behalf of the SVP.

Under the Society of St. Vincent de Paul it has been providing support to people experiencing homelessness for almost 100 years. The professional staff and volunteers at the hostel provide a welcoming environment supporting people in a positive way.

Tommy O'Reilly President of the SVP Back Lane Hostel Conference says the Society has been able to create homes for people in the refurbished building whilst maintaining its commitment, in another wing of the building, to support people who are homeless and in need of emergency response.

"This is a strong commitment. The building now has two types of accommodation on one site. One part will continue to provide an emergency response to homelessness whilst the other will be home for eighteen individuals."

The refurbishment of the building is also a response to the wider challenges of homelessness in Dublin, he said, pointing out that the 'Pathway to Home' document published by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive outlines options required to end long term-homelessness.

"While some people currently residing in emergency accommodation could move into independent living there are people who will need supports in place."

"The investment in the building by the SVP is very significant," said Kerry Anthony, CEO of Depaul Ireland. "It has enabled us to support some of the more vulnerable people who have experienced long term homelessness to have a place which they can refer to as home. This is essential if an end is to be brought to long-term homelessness in Ireland."

- *The SVP is among the largest providers of social housing in Ireland and operates hostels for homeless people in 14 centres throughout the country*
- *The Society has been supporting people experiencing homelessness in Back Lane since 1915. In 2002 The Society invited Depaul Ireland to manage the service on their behalf.*
- *Over the years Back Lane has been adapted to meet the changing needs of people who have been homeless*





*President McAleese on homelessness: 'Being denied a home is not only about being denied the basic requirement for a roof over our heads, it is also about being denied a sense of belonging, of safety and refuge, of an anchor point in life and of having a defined place in society. I have had that experience too when, back in 1972, my family were violently put out of our home and left to rely on the charity of family and friends for a very unhappy and terrifying period. The memory of losing almost instantly all the things that we had taken so much for granted has always stayed with me but we were fortunate that, although the emotional effects of the trauma were lifelong, we were able to put a home together again and to start all over.*

*'It can be difficult, sometimes, to adjust to the reality that life has not turned out as we would have wished. The story behind each person's homeless experience is very different - a complex mix that*

*can range across health problems, to family or relationship breakdown, failure of institutional care, abuse, financial problems, job loss, weak family support or emigration. The loss of a fixed abode is often the start of an estrangement from family, friends and community and an aloneness that can be deep, profound and paralysing. The joy in life drains away, the light of care for oneself switches off and the apparent indifference of the comfortable people who walk by compounds the sense of isolation. Sometimes families or communities have given up on the homeless and sometimes the homeless have given up on themselves.*

*\*This is an extract from the President's speech when she referred to what happened to her family during the troubled times in Northern Ireland.*

- Depaul Ireland started its services in Dublin in 2002 and in Northern Ireland in 2005.
- Depaul Ireland provides accommodation and key services to people who many others struggle to work with – street drinkers, women in prison, families who others have given up on, those with behavioural, self-harm and addiction problems.
- Depaul Ireland supports over 1,500 people each year and have supported 5,792 in the last ten.



Flowers for the President  
from Noel Fitzpatrick

# *I am an Individual*

*This poem was composed by Frank Brady, a resident of Back Lane and read for President McAleese on her visit to the hostel.*

*To boldly go where no one has gone before  
Is the introduction to Star Trek.  
It took them light years to try and achieve  
their goal It took only a mere 14 years for  
Mary and Martin McAleese to achieve  
their goals With dignity and courage.*

*In the beautiful words of Paul Simon;  
and I quote "When you're down and out  
When you're on the street, when evening falls so  
hard I will comfort you. I'll take your part  
when darkness comes, And pain is all around  
Like a bridge over troubled waters  
I will lay me down."*

*The thin line between genius and madness  
is the same between happiness and sadness.  
Opposites attracts. At a stage there is no way back.  
But time will heal all. Problems, both great and  
small. will disappear into the mist.  
Come out of the fog and shout out loud.  
I'm not a member of the crowd..  
I am an individual.*





# SVP NATIONWIDE

## **WATERFORD**

*Report and Photo: Joe Dalton*

### **PILOTING OF NEW IT SYSTEM**

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The new information technology system reported in the Summer edition of The SVP Bulletin ('Going Paperless...') has been piloted in the South-East Region dealing with updating and changing member information.

This is one of the five elements of the new system and the Conferences involved met in the regional office in Waterford to be briefed on the development.

At the meeting were - Maria Forde, St Mary's SVP Conference, Dungarvan; Louise Nash, Holy Family Conference, Clonmel; Maureen Veale, St. Mary's, Dungarvan; Cathy Nolan, Waterford Area President; Mary Dempsey, Wexford Area President; Mary Stafford, St. Peter & Paul's, Clonmel; Ger Enwright, Dungarvan; Kieran Stafford, Regional President; David O'Neill, Regional Administrator; Bill Nash, Regional Office; Jim Garry, Mentec and Helen O'Broin, SVP IT National Project Officer.

## **DUNDALK**

### **€33,000 IN THE BAG**

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Dundalk SVP Area Council netted €6,050 from the Autumn bag pack through the courtesy of Dunne's Stores. This brings the total earned in the Council Area through Dunne's bag packs in recent years to €33,000. The Council has thanked the company for its support.

## **NAVAN**

### **NAVAN'S MARY MOVES ON**

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One of the longest-serving members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Navan, County Meath, has ended her period in office as Secretary of the North-East Regional Council; which covers Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan. Mary had served in the post since 1990 and had previously been Regional President for six years. She had also represented the Navan Area Council of the Society at Regional level. As a member of St. Oliver's Conference in the town, of which

she is also a former President, Mary intends to continue her work as Regional Council Twinning Officer. She has given many years of national service to the Society's role in overseas assistance through the twinning programme.

## **KERRY**

### **RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS**

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The Kerry SVP Region has organised a number of meetings to recruit new members in order to develop and provide more services to those in need. Conferences throughout the Region are examining areas of activity which, in the present difficult economic times, may need more attention and development of SVP supports.



**LIMERICK**

**DEVELOPING CITY CENTRE SERVICE**

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A new city centre visitation Conference has been formed in Limerick – St.Teresa’s. This is part of the re-structuring of the Society in the city to increase its effectiveness in responding to those who need help. Recruitment of new members to the Society is underway in Limerick to increase the number of volunteers to deal with the problems faced by many families and individuals. A ‘Day of Renewal’ is being planned for the Society in Limerick this year.

**CLARE**

**NEW CONFERENCES ESTABLISHED IN MILTOWN MALBAY AND ENNIS**

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A new Conference has been formed in Milltown Malbay to service that area of the county and the Clare Area Council has also set up a new Conference to visit areas on the periphery of Ennis.

**DONEGAL**

**40 NEW MEMBERS**

---

Recruitment efforts in Ardara, Convooy and Letterkenny have attracted forty new members into the Society and is proceeding in other areas of the county. Training is on-going in the region and attention is being given particularly

to locations where the Society needs to establish new Conferences. Recruitment will be undertaken in the South Donegal area early this year.

**DROGHEDA**

**RE-ORGANISING SHOPS**

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Drogheda SVP Area Council is embarking on a major re-organisation of its shops to provide a better service to the public. Three premises are used at present and are to be renovated and upgraded.

# PROMISE OF NO DISCONNECTIONS WELCOMED BY SVP

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has welcomed the statement by Minister for Communications Energy and Natural Resources, Pat Rabbitte, that electricity and gas customers experiencing financial hardship will not be disconnected this winter provided they enter a pay plan or agree to the installation of a pay-as-you-go meter.

The SVP assists households across Ireland with the rising cost of energy and works with people experiencing fuel poverty to help them avoid gas and electricity disconnections by assisting in negotiations with the energy utilities.

“We have spent almost €6 million in keeping the lights on and the homes heated of people struggling with their bills,” said SVP National President, Mairead Bushnell. “For the last two winters we have all experienced periods of very low temperatures. This is a challenge for all of us, but for people on low income, in poor health or with limited mobility, as well as those in housing of low energy efficiency, such winters are particularly stressful and in certain cases life-

threatening. The spectre of disconnection has been an added burden on already pressurised households and has added to the desperation that many feel in trying to address mounting and often multiple debts.”

The SVP believes that people should have access to pre-payment meters as a budgeting tool rather than waiting for debts to accumulate. Up to now, people who needed and requested such meters were often denied them as they were instructed that their energy debt was still currently ‘too low’ so as to deem them ineligible for a pre-payment meter. Households need to be able to have meters installed before arrears mount to assist customers keep control over their income, according to the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.





# DUNDALK AND THE **X-FACTOR**

Mary Byrne's days at the supermarket checkout are behind her after her memorable performances on last year's television programme, The X-Factor, but she journeyed to Dundalk's Fairways Hotel to help the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at a fundraising concert as part of achieving the target of €100,000. This year she has released a debut album, 'Mine & Yours,' performed for Queen Elizabeth

II on her historic visit to Ireland and as part of the Neil Diamond concert tour. Five hundred people attended the concert at which the Setanta Choir was a major attraction. This mixed-voice choir, with 60 members, has nominated Dundalk SVP as their 'Charity of the Year' from August of 2011 to May of this year. This has been a considerable boost to the Society locally. The choir has flourished and is widely-recognised as an important contributor to the musical and cultural life

of this area. It has performed at many major venues including the National Concert Hall, Dublin and the Waterfront, Belfast. A non-profit organisation, it devotes money raised on public performances and events to benefit charities. They were joined by local tenor David Martin,

The event brought funds raised to €33,000 towards the target of €100,000.

Other events are planned.



LIAM REILLY, AREA PRESIDENT;  
MARY BYRNE; ANGELA McQUAID,  
SVP FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE.

# SVP VOLUNTEERS ARE SEEING “HEART-WRENCHING SITUATIONS”

## Food Parcels Provided As Mallow Reaches “Crisis Point”

“SVP volunteers regularly see bare food cupboards, empty fridges and children who are forced to go to bed with empty stomachs.”

That shocking description of life in a major county town in North Cork was described by the President of the town’s SVP Conference as “truly frightening”

“Heating is also a huge problem. In one house, the children had to go to bed at 7.30 p.m. as the parents could not afford to heat the house. Going to bed was the only way that they could keep warm,” according to the President of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in Mallow, Pat Murphy. It was once a town with busy factories, employment and a strong economy in an agricultural area, but in recent years has been hit by factory closures, including the ending of the sugar beet industry and consequent unemployment.

“Volunteers undertaking visits to households in the area have come across some heart-wrenching situations as the recession puts families under unbearable financial pressure. Things are reaching crisis point. People who would never have come to us in the past are

now seeking our help. They are literally coming to us hungry and we are giving them food



Mallow

parcels,” said Mr.Murphy who is President of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conference in Mallow and a long-time member of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.

With nearly twenty years’ experience of SVP work, he said there had been a “huge increase” in the number of people seeking help so far this winter and he expected that would continue to increase. Financial problems faced by families had also resulted in a 10% rise in the number of requests from parents seeking financial help with school and college expenses. These problems were also being experienced in communities across the rest of the North Cork region.

“There is no question but the situation has been getting worse over the past couple of years as the recession deepened. With the raft of cuts in the Budget, things are only likely to get worse. It is so sad and depressing to see families caught up in this grinding cycle of poverty;” he added.

“The people of Mallow have been wonderful over the years in the way they have supported our voluntary work. Now, more than ever, their help is invaluable to the families who need it most.”

## Magnificent Seven give 200 Years!

Seven members of St.Oliver’s Conference of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in County Louth have contributed over 200 years of service between them to the work of helping those in need on a voluntary basis.

Based in the parish of Blackrock/Haggardstown their contribution was marked by fellow members when they were presented with Long-Service Certificates. They have worked with the Society not just locally in Louth, but also in other locations when some of them were based in other parts of Ireland and even in Scotland.

The seven, pictured here are Carmel Mulvey, Brian Gormley and Anne McCooey in the front row and Maurice O’Neill, Jim Corr and Kevin Kavanagh in the back. Frank Mannion, another of the seven was unable to be present at the presentation.







*Is the Scale and Extent  
of Child Poverty in  
Ireland really known?*

THE QUESTION IS POSED BY FERGUS FINLAY,  
Chief Executive of Barnardos

## According to the Central Statistics Office, the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions found that one in five children were living at risk of poverty in Ireland in 2010.

The figures prove that more and more families are suffering from the recession with an increase in consistent poverty among the number of two-parent families with 1-3 children from 5.5% in 2009 to 7% in 2010. Consistent poverty rates for households with more than three children also rose significantly from 6.3% in 2009 to 9.6% in 2010.

From our experience in over 40 projects nationwide, we know many families who are struggling to pay essential bills such as electricity and gas while still putting food on the table. The situation is quickly becoming untenable for many. For many children this means living on poorer diets, missing their developmental milestones, suffering from more ill-health, struggling in school, living in poorer quality accommodation and increasing isolation because they are unable to participate in many activities such as going to friend's parties, swimming and other social activities.

Currently consistent poverty is calculated as the percentage of persons with an income of less than 60% of the national median income and deprived of at least two items from the material deprivation index. The deprivation index in use is very adult focused and this spurred Barnardos and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to explore the creation of child specific indicators which would capture more accurately deprivation from a child's perspective - what children need, what they have and what they have to go without due to a lack of money.

The research "All you Need Is..." carried out by the Children's Research Centre devised a 12-item child-specific deprivation index which highlighted what children deem to be essential to guarantee an acceptable standard of living during childhood. The items included three balanced meals a day, own books for reading for fun, food and drink for friends when they call over to play, own money for school activities

or days out and a day out with family at least twice a year.

The report highlighted clearly that poverty and deprivation mean different things to children than they do to adults and the experiences of adults and children within the household can vary. It is evident that while poverty is associated with low incomes making it more difficult for parents to protect children from going without, many parents are likely to be sacrificing their own needs so that their children do not have to go without.

Using child-specific indicators helps us to understand the longer-term effects of deprivation on children's life chances. It should also inform us of how to tackle child poverty and offset the impact of poverty on young lives. It is already evident that childhood is being compromised for many children during this recession and any further cuts to household income or public services will continue to have an adverse effect on them. Our children deserve to be listened to – we have an obligation to listen to their unique experiences and tailor our responses to ensure effective eradication of child poverty.



Fergus Finlay

### BARNARDOS APPROACH TO WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Barnardos is committed to a needs-led, outcomes focused approach in our delivery of services to children and families. At the heart of everything we do, we strive to achieve two outcomes for the children and young people. These are:

- Increased emotional well-being
- Improved learning and development

We believe that if a child's learning and development and his or her emotional well-being, is successfully and measurably improved through our work, then the child's ability to benefit from life opportunities and manage life challenges will be improved, and therefore the path of his or her life will be changed for the better.





# *How would you feel without* **TELEVISION**

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*This is the situation that may be faced by many older people, those with disabilities and low income households when the analogue television signal is switched off at the end of this year. The TV Access Coalition is calling on the Government to take action to ensure that everyone can afford to make the switch to digital and that the new service is accessible to all.*

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**T**elevision is vital for social inclusion. It is one of our main sources of information, education and entertainment and is a crucial communication link for older or disabled people who may be physically and socially isolated. It is especially important for people who are vision-impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, since they face difficulties accessing printed or spoken media.

The European Parliament has described access to television as a “fundamental right” and “of fundamental importance for democracy, freedom of expression and cultural pluralism”.

The enforced switch to digital is unaffordable for many people.

At the end of the year all television will be broadcast on digital only and analogue broadcasting will cease. While many consumers have already switched to digital services, figures from RTÉ show that 600,000 (37%) of Irish TV households receive some television services through an aerial, either for their primary television or other televisions and 335,000 (21%) receive only free analogue television through an aerial. This includes a high proportion of older and lower income households.

Anyone who wants to continue to watch TV after the digital switchover will need to buy new digital equipment, install it and learn how to use it. A new digital set-top box will cost approximately €50. Others may require a new or adjusted aerial costing in the region of €150. The Irish League of Credit Unions indicated

that one-in-five people have just €70 left each month after paying their bills. This means that many people may have to pay more than their monthly disposable income to be able to continue to watch TV.

Digital television may be difficult to understand, set up and use. Older people and people with disabilities may find Saorview equipment difficult or impossible to set up and use because digital television is more complex than analogue with more channels and functions. This will be confusing to some people and they will need assistance. People with manual dexterity difficulties may find it difficult to operate remote controls and people who are vision-impaired may have difficulties using on-screen programme guides and menus. Currently there are no ease-of-use or accessibility standards in

place for Saorview. Talking set-top boxes with easy-to-use remote controls and options to change the size and colour of screen text are available for UK Freeview, but not compatible with Saorview.

RTÉ is running an information campaign about Saorview but their TV ads and web videos have no sign language so they are inaccessible to some deaf viewers.

There is concern that some people may be taken advantage of by unscrupulous people offering incompatible equipment or fictional solutions such as 'digital aerials'.

According to the Minister for Communications, Pat Rabbitte, it is estimated that approximately 20,000 households may need a new aerial or aerial adjustment. He has said that he does not have any plan to introduce waivers for persons on social welfare payments to upgrade their television equipment. The Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, has reiterated

this position.

The TV Access Coalition is a coalition of major organisations from the disability, ageing and poverty sectors in Ireland concerned about continued access to television for older people, people with disabilities and people on low incomes after the analogue switch-off.

It has called on the government to provide some financial assistance to people on low incomes who cannot afford the new technology. This has been done in other EU countries.

Failure to do so can only result in further social isolation of those who are already among the most vulnerable in society.

• *Mark Magennis of the Centre for Inclusive Technology, NCBI, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, is Chairperson of the TV Access Coalition*

TV Access is a coalition of organisations from the disability, aging and poverty sectors in Ireland concerned about continued access to television for older people, people with disabilities and people on low incomes after the forthcoming analogue switch-off.

Members are: The Disability Federation of Ireland, Age Action, The Society of St Vincent de Paul, NCBI working for people with sight loss, the Visual Impaired Computer Society, Deaf-Hear, the Irish Deaf Society, the Irish Hard of Hearing Association, People with Disabilities in Ireland, the Central Remedial Clinic.



## WHAT YOU SEE

When you get what you want in your struggle for self  
 And the world makes you king for a day  
 Just go to the mirror and look at yourself  
 and see what it has to say

It isn't your father or mother or wife,  
 whose judgement upon you will pass  
 The person whose verdict counts most in your life  
 Is the one staring back from the glass

You may fool the whole world through the pathway of years  
 And get pats on the back as you pass  
 But your final reward will be heartache  
 and tears if you cheat the one in the glass



## SVP National Website

The SVP national website is at [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie) and carries national news about the Society's activities, links to all its regional offices and activities in the regions as well as SVP documents on social justice and other policies. The Society can also be contacted with requests for help and assistance through the website and donations to support the work of the SVP can be made via the website.



# BOYS TURNED TALK INTO ACTION – AND ATTRACTED THE GIRLS! *Independence Essential for Youth*

The schoolboys who started St. Colman's SVP Youth Conference have moved into more mature years in life, as have the girls they attracted to join them in the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as young Vincencians in Carrick-on-Suir, but what they started has survived, a tribute to their foresight as young people in the County Tipperary town forty years ago.

**S**t. Colman's Youth Conference was established in September 1971, in the context of a senior religious class in the Christian Brothers' Boys' School. It was a decision to "turn talk into doing." The Conference held its first SVP Conference meeting on November 26 of that year, close to the feast day of St. Colman, after which it was named. It very soon attracted pupils from the girls' school!

From the beginning, independence from the 'senior' SVP Conference in the town was considered a must! The youth Conference had its own committee and the freedom to collect and administer its own funds, as well as to decide on the type of work undertaken which includes today?

- Parties for senior citizens every five or six weeks
- An annual summer outing for senior citizens
- Christmas toy appeal for local families (perhaps the highlight of the year)

- A 'Toy Mass' arranged by the members and celebrated in one of the local churches on the Saturday before Christmas
- Distribution of meals on wheels once or twice a week including, for the last two years, on Christmas Day
- House painting, gardening and hospital visitation have been taken on from time-to-time.

Forty years later what was started is still going strong amongst present school pupils and assisted by older members who have remained with the Conference to provide support, help and advice. There are thirty-five members, girls and boys. They range in ages from sixteen to the late twenties. Meetings of the Conference are held once a week and are usually followed by a committee meeting.

What the Conference has achieved indicates what can be done by young people when they are allowed to work on their own initiative. Recognising and honouring the hard work of

the last 40 years, the Town Council of Carrick-on-Suir decided to hold a Mayoral Reception to honour the Conference.

"Reaching this milestone is indeed a great achievement," said the current Conference President, Brendan McCarthy.

The Conference held a 'Tea Day' on the streets of Carrick-on-Suir, to thank the people of the town for their help over the years, before the reception was held on the same evening in the Town Hall at which Town Mayor Patsy Fitzgerald presented a commemorative parchment to the Conference.

"The Youth Conference has, naturally, seen many members come and go over the years but all have left their mark in different ways," said Brendan. "They all deserve thanks for their efforts which have marked the contribution of the Conference to the town's community over the past 40 years."

*Celebrating youth for 40 years in Carrick!*





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*During the Presidential election campaign and in his acceptance speech President Michael D. Higgins placed emphasis on ‘active and inclusive citizenship.’ This aspirational vision of Ireland is laudable and comments on where we are as a nation, concluded Fr. Brian Moore, the Society of St. Vincent De Paul’s National Spiritual Advisor, in a reflection on citizenship, delivered to the SVP National Management Council. Fr. Brian died suddenly just before Christmas. His loss to the SVP and his Vincentian Community is deeply felt. This article is published in tribute to him.*

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There is a wide experience in Ireland today of isolation, both in terms of location and of age. There is a disconnect with the political leadership of the country, a growing dependency on statutory support rather than the opportunity of self-help and the reality of serious financial struggles for unemployed people and now for the working poor.

This is the environment where the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul both live and serve. We are an integral part of that current situation. We have chosen to respond to current needs which not only make a financial demand on the resources of the Society, but

a personal demand on each member. In responding to these emerging needs we are not alone, neither are we a mere statistic in a national and international organisation. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a way of life, beginning with our participation in the life of the local Conference which is the life-giving base of the Society.

The SVP local parish Conference offers:

**Belonging:** *belonging is worldwide but experienced primarily at local level*

**Transformation:** *engaging with emerging needs and entering into dialogue with different experiences of poverty.*

**Shared Vision:** *shared vision and shared experiences overcome personal isolation*

Each of the above is an integral element of the SVP Mission of listening, service and advocacy. The SVP local Conference is a model of “active citizenship and inclusion” to our locality and to our nation.





# A Fixed Star

From Committee Chairperson, Eileen Gernon

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE IS NOT AN ACADEMIC EXERCISE**

For many families Christmas may have been more stressful than joyful and now, in the New Year, financial uncertainty remains and household budgets have to be balanced. The SVP is keenly aware of the individual experiences of every household we visit. The work of the Society is focussed on taking practical steps to help. Locally this can be by way of friendship and listening, advice, or financial assistance. At a national level the Society is encouraging such measures by advocating for the wider use of pay-as-you-go energy meters – a simple solution to the age old problem of meeting bills. Improved measures have been put in place for SVP Conferences to be in contact with energy providers on customers' behalf. Sadly for many families an energy bill is but one of many bills they have to pay, or that is already

in arrears. It has been said that it was a lack of core values which got the country to where it is now. More than ever a set of clear values based on equity and fairness is needed. With other non-Governmental organisations we are promoting a number of principles which should underpin the way people's significant mortgage and personal debts are dealt with. It is in all our interests that a fair and sustainable way is found to deal with this financial crisis. Amongst our values must be compassion.

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES TO DEAL WITH PERSONAL DEBT CRISIS**

Along with a grouping of national housing, legal and debt organisations the SVP is advocating nine key principles to overcome the problems of personal debt and mortgage arrears. The group fears that the measures proposed in the recent Keane Report will not effectively tackle

the growing problem of personal debt as they did not encompass the full scale of the crisis. A comprehensive response to the debt crisis must address not just mortgage arrears but the totality of personal debt. The principles below should help a response to these issues in a just, fair and multi-dimensional way.

### **1. Over-indebtedness**

It is inability to pay rather than a lack of willingness to do so that is at the heart of the personal debt crisis. Over-indebtedness is a deep social and economic problem that requires a multi-dimensional strategic response from government.

### **2. The need for data**

Comprehensive information is urgently needed to quantify the extent of the debt problem. Policy initiatives undertaken must be constantly evaluated in light of such data.

### 3. Multiple debt

Proposed solutions must take all debt liabilities into account to be effective and workable.

### 4. Personal insolvency legislation

There is an immediate need for the introduction of personal insolvency legislation. A Debt Resolution Agency should be established to oversee the legislative scheme to ensure transparency and consistency.

### 5. Debt write-off

Insolvent debtors should pay to the best of their ability for a limited time period and remaining debt should then be written off.

### 6. Access to representation

Debtors must be entitled to have an advocate represent their interests in negotiations to agree or processes to contest debt repayments.

### 7. Minimum income

Debtors must be entitled to a minimum income to meet their basic needs while repaying debts.

### 8. Unsustainable mortgages

The fact that some mortgages are unsustainable must be recognised and where repossession results, appropriate social housing and social welfare rights must be provided to such households.

### 9. Retention of dwelling

State supports should aim to keep people in their homes where possible, whether in an on-going mortgage or as a tenant where appropriate.

- A national campaign highlighting these proposals to Oireachtas members has been launched. For further information see <http://www.flac.ie/publications/nine-key-principles-to-overcome-debt>.

## PRE-PAYMENT PAY-AS-YOU-GO ENERGY METERING

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) has made provision for pre-payment meters to be made available to customers in genuine financial hardship who are facing disconnection, free of charge in the electricity market and gas market. These are limited to 100,000 meters in the electricity market over the next 2-3 years as

it is expected that the technology will have to be replaced when smart metering is introduced for all customers. CER policy is that where a supplier considers a customer to be in genuine financial hardship that the supplier should provide a pre-payment meter, where possible, to the customer to avoid the customer being disconnected. These meters are much improved in technology and in appearance than previous 'token' meters. The meters themselves have digital displays and they come with separate 'pin pads' where customers can key in their credit, similar to 'topping-up' a mobile phone.

There will remain instances where pre-payment meters for technical, logistical or other reasons (permission of landlords, capacity of the customer, location of meters) may not be possible or appropriate. In such cases payment plans will remain the main way to negotiate an individual agreement.

SVP Conferences who have spent close to €7 million on energy costs in 2011 will be pleased with this development. SVP has been a long-term advocate of pre-payment metering for energy use. However, the SVP believes pre-payment metering is an essential aspect of budgeting and not just for debt reclamation. This is an important aspect of our advocacy work and SVP members could promote this position when negotiating with energy companies. The SVP welcomes many aspects of the Energy Affordability Strategy which seeks to address some of the root causes of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency.

## SVP EXPRESSES CONCERN FOR THE SELF EMPLOYED

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is concerned about the situation of self-employed persons who are no longer able to make a living from their business. The Society has told the Advisory Group on Tax and Welfare that its members are helping people who are experiencing long delays in waiting for their applications for Jobseekers' Allowance to be processed; as well as those who do not qualify for social welfare supports because they fail the means-test.

The SVP is aware of public perception that there are no social welfare supports available to those who are or have been self-employed.

We are trying to challenge this perception. It is important to encourage people who were self-employed to apply for social welfare supports if they are in need. This public perception could also be challenged if the Department of Social Protection was in a position to provide some information about the volume of applications for Jobseekers' Allowance from previously self-employed people; the reasons for refusal; the rate of successful applications and the numbers of applications that are withdrawn or not proceeded with and why they are withdrawn.

The SVP wants social insurance cover for the self-employed extended to allow them build up an entitlement to Jobseekers' Benefit. This would necessitate a greater PRSI contribution from those who are self-employed. We believe that this would serve to strengthen the link between social insurance contributions and the benefits to which they provide access.



# SEEING THE HORRORS OF THE IRISH FAMINE AT FIRST-HAND

By Paddy Ryan



*The life story of Archbishop Patrick John Ryan provides a fascinating insight into social conditions on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th century. The Tipperary emigrant, who developed a priestly vocation to the United States in the aftermath of the Famine, made a major contribution to the Catholic Church in America and became a widely-respected leader across religious divides. He was a public orator for Daniel O’Connell at the age of thirteen!*

Patrick John Ryan, born 1831, came from Cloneyharp near Clonoulty in County Tipperary. When his father died in 1840, his mother married Michael Gleeson and the family moved to Thurles Town. He attended the local CBS, spent three years at a classical school in Dublin and in 1847 entered St Patrick’s Seminary in Carlow. In 1852, aged 21, he went as a Deacon to St. Louis, Missouri, where he was ordained in the following year. He was appointed coadjutor bishop there in 1872 and Archbishop of Philadelphia in 1884.

Growing up he had encountered religious discrimination and the Penal Law mentality and as a teenager witnessed the horrors of the Great Famine. Even as a very young boy he had acquired a reputation as an orator and, at the very young aged of 13, was selected to prepare and deliver an address to Daniel O’Connell in Dublin. He was imprisoned at the Bridewell following the abandonment of the meeting, scheduled to have been held in Clontarf, after it was proscribed by the authorities of the time. Ryan went on to earn a reputation across America and beyond as one of the best orators of his time.

He became a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul as a sixteen-year-old student in Dublin in 1847. This Conference must have been one of the first to be established in Ireland. The first SVP Conference in America was established in St. Louis in 1845 and in 1858 Father Ryan proposed the formation of a Conference in every parish in the city. By 1860 St. Louis had thirteen Conferences.

In St. Louis, he also witnessed slavery at first hand and during the Civil War he was a

chaplain in a prison for Confederate soldiers. As Archbishop of Philadelphia, he took a leadership position nationally in supporting the interests of Native Americans and African Americans, at a time when such a stance would not have been popular. President Roosevelt appointed him to the Board of Indian Commissioners. He was the mentor of Mother Katharine Drexel, who used



her family fortune to establish an order of nuns which focused exclusively on the education and welfare of those two ethnic groups. She was canonised in 2000.

Patrick Ryan experienced the mass influx of European immigrants to America which presented major logistical and administrative challenges and this was compounded by anti-foreigner and particularly anti-Catholic prejudice and discrimination. Despite these difficulties, he

was ecumenical before his time and worked tirelessly and successfully to improve inter-church and church-state relations, proclaiming that to be a good Catholic was to be a good citizen. The power of his personality, his warmth and his wit, were used to great effect in influencing individuals and on great public platforms. The social standing and the level of influence currently enjoyed by the Irish in America is due in no small measure to the groundwork done by people like Archbishop Ryan.

During his almost sixty years in America, he returned to visit Ireland four times, on each occasion also taking advantage of official trips to Rome. In 1905, when he was seventy-four years old, he made his last visit home. On August 2 of that year he was met by Archbishop Fennelly at Thurles railway station and driven in a parade of bands and cheering people to a platform outside the cathedral for a public reception. In replying to his welcome Archbishop Ryan referred to the ‘big chapel’, which preceded the cathedral, as the place where, as a boy, he first saw the great Daniel O’Connell and where he took the pledge from Father Mathew, the Apostle of Temperance, both of whom had a profound influence on him.

He died on February 11, 1911 at his residence beside the Cathedral in Philadelphia, within nine days of what would have been his 80th birthday.

# In Tribute

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

### **EAMON McELHATTON**

**President, St Christopher's Conference, Crumlin, Dublin**

St Christopher's Conference greatly regrets the death of our esteemed President, Eamon McElhatton, who joined the Conference in 1979 and was a staunch advocate for families, particularly concerned to ensure funds were available to keep children in education and to assist them into jobs. Eamon was also involved in setting up the MABS organisation in Crumlin. He was a kind and gentle man, a good listener and is greatly missed.

### **CHARLIE BEGLEY**

**President, St. Francis of Assisi Conference, Derry City**

It was with great sadness that the Conference learnt of the death of Charlie Begley, after a period of illness, a true Vincentian in every way, with his easy manner and commitment. He had been a member of the Society for nearly 30 years.

### **BROTHER JOHN E. CARROLL, CFC**

**Spiritual Advisor St. Anne's Conference, Ballybricken, Waterford**

Brother Carroll was Spiritual Advisor to the Conference for many years, providing enlightening and valued contributions. A native of Dublin, he was also an accomplished author and poet and always willing to participate in all Conference activities where he showed true compassion in his commitment. He was highly regarded as one of the foremost authorities on the life of Brother Edmund Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers.

### **PADDY RYAN**

**Founder Member Cloughjordan and Shinrone Conference of the Annunciation**

The unexpected passing of Paddy Ryan brought great sadness to this Conference and to the North Tipperary and South Offaly Area Council where he served as President for many years. He was one of our founder members and gave dedicated service, especially in supporting students and educational needs and was a welcome visitor to many families. We miss his 'can-do' spirit.

### **BERTIE FINLAY**

**President Portumna Conference, County Galway**

The death of Bertie Finlay is deeply regretted in the SVP in Galway and particularly in Portumna where he led the local Conference as its President. A dedicated member of the Society, committed to its work for those in need in the area, his passing is deeply regretted.





# A LISTENING EAR IN THE COMMUNITY

## *New Family Resource Centre for Carrigtwohill*

*Tom Carey of St. Brigid & Anne's Conference in Carrigtwohill tells the story*

**W**ork has commenced on the demolition of the old Family Resource Centre at Carrigtwohill in East Cork which is to be replaced on the existing site by a new purpose-built building.

This building will replace the one which has been in existence since 1991 but has outlived its usefulness and required renovation to bring it up to modern day standards for the provision of childcare and related family support services.

It will include provision for a Community Pre-School. The estimated cost of the project is in the region of €400,000 which will be met in part by support from the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, grants from statutory bodies and fund raising.

The Family Resource Centre was set up by the local parish Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul in Carrigtwohill for the purposes of providing practical support to families facing significant challenges in the process of bringing up a family and trying to secure a positive future for them.

Amongst the services provided by the Resource

Centre are a Parent and Toddler Group, a Breakfast Club, an After-Schools Club, Youth Outreach and a range of adult education classes including IT, Child Care and English as a second language.

The work of the Family Resource Centre is inspired by the vision of Blessed Frederic Ozanam founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and is committed to seeking social justice in a caring nation.

It has a role in referring people to seek direct assistance from the Society or who may require the support of a more specialised social or other service. It also serves an important function as a listening post in the community and is in daily contact with the issues of the local people who call to seek information on various problems or to use the services of the SVP "VINCENT'S" Charity shops.

Important characteristics of the Family Resource Centre are its flexibility and adaptability to respond to perceived local needs, its ability to network effectively with other local voluntary community organisations and statutory bodies to provide supportive responsive measures to important

social issues such as suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and family support. It relies very much on the efforts of its volunteers.

The need for a new Family Resource Centre has also to be seen in the context of the significant social and other changes which have occurred in the community in recent years.

The village of Carrigtwohill has been deemed a significant site for development in national and local planning. In recent years the size and profile of its population has increased. What was once considered to be to a relatively homogenous area has become larger and more multicultural as a result of new immigration patterns. Between 2002 and 2006 there has been a 22% increase in the local population with a general lack of infrastructural supports to meet and cope with the type and number of new demands created by these changes.

The SVP Family Resource Centre would not have been able to provide its services without the support of bodies like the HSE (South), North Lee Community Work Department of FÁS, Cork County Council, Cork County VEC, SECAD and POBAL..

