

THE



BULLETIN

OF THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL

SPRING
2013



**IRELAND NEEDS
A NEW BEGINNING
IN SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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IRELAND'S MAGAZINE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

THE SVP IN IRELAND



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

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

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SVP NEWS LOG ONTO
www.svp.ie



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

THE IRISH SVP

OZANAM BULLETIN

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GOVERNMENT SHOULD LISTEN TO ALL OF THE PEOPLE

Being 'poor' is defined in dictionaries as: "In need and wanting of means to procure the comforts or the necessities of life... unfortunate... deficient in the means of self-support... having inadequate means to look after oneself... unable to provide a living or the means to support a family or a home..."

In today's Ireland, unfortunately, that description can be applied to the circumstances in which many families and individuals find themselves, because they are unable to meet the financial demands of daily living.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul, the biggest voluntary charitable organisation in Ireland, is in an unique position to speak about the social problems in Ireland. SVP volunteers visit families in their homes, where assistance is needed, when help is sought. The Society responds to the problems of the homeless and deals with many other problems arising from deprivation and poverty. With this experience, the SVP knows at first-hand the reality of the damage, the destruction, which the recession has caused. There are families and individuals who cannot afford to heat their homes, who struggle to keep the lights on in their houses, who ask for food parcels from the Society.

That is why the SVP has told the Government, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the Troika who are, effectively, running this nation that the social infrastructure of Ireland is being severely damaged by the policies of austerity. As well as those dependent on social welfare, low-income families, the middle income group, are being seriously affected. The Government's rhetoric about protecting the vulnerable has been false, in the Society's view.

Calls for help to the Society of St.Vincent de Paul exceeded 100,000 in 2012. Calls to four of the main SVP regional offices (Dublin, Cork, Galway and Mid-West reached 97,610. Add the calls to the other 9 SVP regional offices and 1,200 local Conferences (branches) around the country the number of calls for help are the highest ever in the Society's 169 years in Ireland. The numbers represent a 12% increase on 2011 and 104% increase since 2009. In the largest SVP regions, Dublin and Cork, the increases were 110% and 123% respectively.

In the pages of this edition of The Bulletin, Ireland's magazine of social justice, articles ask whether it is time for zero tolerance of poverty, contend that social justice which Ireland needs is not just an academic pursuit but vital for a nation to cherish all of its people and we report that Ireland has the highest rate in Europe of homes without a job.

There are also stories in our pages this Spring of the positive efforts of the SVP throughout Ireland in working for the betterment of life and about what other organisations are doing. A Lightkeeper gives his unusual view of life and religion, students tell of their experiences of homelessness, we hear of how a rural community in Wicklow became involved with the SVP and how sheds are being used to make life better for men who faced unemployment.


This is a time of grave social problems facing the nation which is a community of people, not just an economy, a fact which has not received enough attention.

It is time, as the National President of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in Ireland says in the following pages, to debate the social issues facing the nation.

"This is a time of grave social problems facing the nation..."



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

A scenic landscape featuring large, mature trees in the foreground, a golf course, and a lake in the distance. The sun is bright and low in the sky, creating a warm, golden light. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

*“The day the Lord created
hope was probably the same
day he created Spring”*

- Bern Williams

Springtime is Coming - the Land Awakening - Hope Beckons Anew

A NEW BEGINNING IN A NEW YEAR



Geoff Meagher
National President

As we start a New Year I would like to look forward with a sense of hope and optimism, despite the continuing challenges. In saying this I look to various stakeholders to play their part in making Ireland a better place for all of its citizens.

- I would like to see our Government set out a roadmap of recovery to give confidence to those who have shouldered the burden of austerity measures, particularly for those who are out of work and our young people seeking employment in this country. In addition we have called for an easing of the banking debt burden which to date has unfairly fallen on the ordinary citizens of our country.

- To our policy makers I suggest the need to start a national debate as to the type of society that we want for our country. It is generally accepted we lost something as a nation during the Celtic Tiger Years. Now is the opportunity to discuss the changes we would like to see as hopefully we begin to emerge from this difficult period. The debate is

difficult and, though there are no easy answers, that is no reason for us not to commence the discussion.

- For the countless thousands of people we are privileged to help and support - the SVP stands with you in your difficult time and will play our part in getting you back to self-sufficiency. In addition we appeal to those in need to come to us where you will find support and friendship.

- To our thousands of Members and Volunteers I urge you to continue the great work despite the many challenges, be open to new members and ideas to improve the quality of our visitation and in this Bicentenary year try to deliver what we do in the ethos of our Founder Frederic Ozanam.

- To our countless donors and benefactors, our thanks for the continuing generosity, without you we simply could not provide the range of support we currently provide.



FEDERIC OZANAM – HIS LEGACY The Inspiration For Our Future

OZANAM COMMEMORATION

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul in Ireland will commemorate the Bicentenary of the Founder of the Society, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, at a national meeting on Saturday, April 20, in the National Convention Centre at Spencer Dock, North Wall Quay in Dublin which will be addressed by President Michael D. Higgins. The event will begin at 11 a.m. The organising committee will be circulating full details to all SVP Conferences. This event will celebrate the life and work of Frederic Ozanam, the founding and history of the Society giving help to those in need which SVP members continue today, a tradition of offering support, friendship and hope which has been carried on in Ireland since 1844.

2012 was another year of severe difficulty for many of the people we support. The number of calls to the Society for assistance continues to increase, putting pressure on both our people and financial resources. We have spoken out strongly on the issues impacting on the most vulnerable in our communities. This has included a detailed pre Budget submission, making our case to the Troika and detailed discussions with various Government departments. We would hope that our intervention has at least got off the table some of the unhelpful proposals that were being floated.

We are also very conscious that those in need are now representing an ever increasing proportion of our population. Those include people in low paid employment who bear all the additional costs, self-employed who have seen their income decimated in many cases by the recession and middle class people where one or more in the household may have lost their job. We know that many people in these new categories are reluctant to contact the Society, for a variety of different reasons. We urge anyone who is in difficulty, irrespective of the scale or the complexity of the problems, to contact us. We will not be able to solve

CHALLENGES

In the Society St Vincent de Paul we will play our part in making Ireland a better place for all of our people and we look forward with renewed hope to continuing our work in 2013.

SPECIAL YEAR AHEAD - BICENTENARY 2013

This year is special for the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. It is the Bicentenary of our Founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam. In Ireland we are planning to celebrate this unique occasion with a day for all Members, Volunteers and Staff in Dublin on April 20. The ethos set out by Ozanam at the founding of the Society is the same one we try to follow in our weekly work. It is appropriate to remind ourselves in this special year of the key elements of our Founder's philosophy –

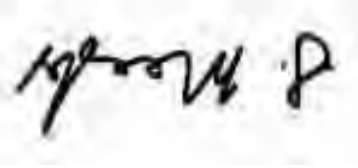
- Bring material help to those in need,
 - Bring hope and friendship to those we visit, give people of our time,
 - Do our work in a spirit of Christian charity
 - Try and resolve the underlying causes as to why people need our help, this includes speaking out on Social Justices issues
- We hope that we can further strengthen the ethos of Blessed Frederic during this year. Regional Presidents will be working with Area Presidents to give whatever supports

As we end 2012 and start a New Year I take this opportunity to thank our thousands of dedicated Members and Volunteers across the country, together with our Staff, and our so many generous donors for all of your efforts in making life a bit easier for those in difficult circumstances. Members and Volunteers face a variety of new challenges, be it the increase in the number of calls, complexity of cases and large debt issues, great credit is due to all in meeting the demand and being there for those in need of our support. As well as Visitation our many Special Works activities such as Hostels, Shops, Social Housing and the myriad of other activities we are involved in all had their own challenges but again, with much dedicated effort and goodwill, the challenges were managed and excellent services again provided. Despite the recession the generosity of the public remains very strong and we appreciate the ongoing support as we know that many of those giving to us are in many cases struggling themselves.

Thanks again to everyone for your support.

THANKS

are needed to our 1,000 + Conferences to improve the quality of our Visitation, this year is a tremendous opportunity for renewal.



MEN CAN MAKE CHANGE!

The motto of the Irish Men's Sheds Association is:
"Men don't talk face-to-face; they talk shoulder-to-shoulder."

The Men's Sheds idea was introduced from Australia in 2009 by John Evoy, the only son of a farmer from County Wexford, who heads the organisation in Ireland.

The aim was to act as a resource working towards a future where all men have the opportunity to improve and maintain their health and well-being by becoming participants in a concept which is not about sheds being a physical structure, but clubs of self-help and encouragement.



“Most men have learned from our culture that they don’t talk about feelings and emotions. There has been little encouragement for men to take an interest in their own health and well-being. Unlike women, most men are reluctant to talk about their emotions and that means that they usually don’t ask for help. Probably because of this many men are less healthy than women, they drink more, take more risks and they suffer more from isolation, loneliness and depression.”

Such is the view of John Evoy who brought the concept of the Men’s Sheds to Ireland.

“Good health is based on many factors including feeling good about yourself, being productive and valuable to your community, connecting to friends and maintaining an active body and an active mind. Becoming a member of a Community Men’s Shed gives a man that safe and busy environment where he can find many of these things in an atmosphere of friendship. And, importantly, there is no pressure. Men can just come and have a chat and a cuppa if that is all they’re looking for.”

The “shed” is really a euphemism for “club,” although there are groups who meet and work in sheds on the projects they undertake, but more important is that they are a meeting point, often providing for men who have fallen into unemployment, the place to go where they can continue to have a sense of well-being and become involved in projects which bring a sense of achievement.

“A Men’s Shed is any community-based, non-commercial organisation which is open to all men where the primary activity is the provision

of a safe, friendly and inclusive environment where the men are able to gather and/or work on meaningful projects at their own pace, in their own time and in the company of other men and where the primary objective is to advance the health and well-being of the participating men,” says the organisation. “Men’s sheds may look like a shed in your back yard, yet they innovatively share some characteristics of both community education and health promotion projects.”

The Irish Men’s Sheds Association (IMSA) was set up to act as a resource for Men’s Sheds in Ireland and to promote the idea of Independent Community Men’s Sheds.

The Netwell Centre in Dundalk Institute of Technology, in collaboration with the Irish Men’s Sheds Association and with the support of the Australian Men’s Shed Association has been carrying out a survey of men’s sheds intended to provide information on informal learning in the organisation’s work.

John Evoy says that more sheds are “popping up” all the time as more men get interested around the country. They engage in many different kinds of projects, but most of all they are empowering themselves. He gets two or three requests a week about information on starting a shed, particularly from small towns and says that they keep men from becoming demoralised or losing contacts after being made unemployed or retired. “Everyone can benefit from a sense of achievement, that’s what this movement is all about.”

A number of sheds are supported locally by the SVP.

IMSA’s Ethos:

1. We believe strongly in the dignity, uniqueness and equality of every human being.
2. We wish to promote the development of men in a society where many men fail to reach their potential.
3. The Irish Men’s Shed Association will work towards a future where all men have the opportunity to improve and maintain their health and well-being by participating in a community Men’s Shed.
4. We are impressed with the vision and work of the Australian Men’s Sheds Association. We want to learn from them and adapt their vision and methods to our Irish situation.
5. We believe each group of men should be encouraged and supported to realise their own potential and to take responsibility and ownership for their own project and its possibilities. As far as possible each group should retain its own autonomy.
6. We see the passing on of skills, traditional and new as a key aspect of the work. Each man should see himself as teacher and a learner in their group. Different men will possess varying degrees of skills professional and practical which will encourage the community learning possibilities. Each man will bring his own particular individuality, skills and limitations to the group and should be fully respected and acknowledged. There should be a clear anti – bullying policy.
7. There will be an emphasis on informal learning. An atmosphere of ‘doing stuff together’, having fun, creating a buzz should prevail.
8. We see groups emerging in urban and rural settings. We are very conscious of respecting the place a particular group of men come from, its uniqueness and possibilities.
9. We are not affiliated to any political or religious grouping, and are non – profit.

- The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Australia was very active in the founding of the Men’s Sheds organisation
- For more information about the Men’s Sheds Association Email: info@menssheds.ie or go to the website www.menssheds.ie





Colder.. or Poorer.. or Both?

By **Johnmark McCafferty**,
Head of Social Justice and Policy,
Society of St.Vincent de Paul

Coal will increase not only by €2 a bag next year, but that will double in Spring of next year, so the price of a bag of coal has been increased by €4 in the Budget... This is a bitter pill to swallow for those relying on solid fuels ...

We are in the midst of another Winter and another 'heating season' as it is known in fuel and energy circles. While there have been no fundamental shifts in the policies related to energy affordability, there are regular and on-going changes in this area.

Two changes affecting energy poverty have come into effect from the Budget. One is the inclusion of solid fuels being subject to the Carbon Tax. The other is the change to the benefits package for older people.

In relation to the carbon tax, this is being introduced in two stages, on May 1, 2013 and an additional increase in the tax exactly a year later. In 2013, the rate will be €10 per tonne with effect from May. This rate will be doubled the following year. As we understand it, this equates to an increase of over €2 for a standard bag of coal next year and a doubling of this (a further €2) the following year. In relation to briquettes, our estimate is that this amounts to a €1 increase for a bale from next May followed by a further €1 increase in Spring 2014. This is a bitter pill to swallow for those reliant on solid fuels - especially so given that the carbon tax revenues are not being ploughed back into energy saving measures for the fuel poor – many of whom are the people we assist.

The household benefits package includes an energy-related allowance for those who are eligible; an electricity allowance or a gas allowance. From the 1st of January 2013, the Electricity Allowance is changing from one based on units to a monthly cash credit of €35. Those who received a cash payment of €39.40 will see that amount reduce to €35. With regard to gas, the winter and summer rate is being replaced with a standardised rate of €35.00 credit from the same date – a reduction of €2.60 per month on the cash payment for those already receiving cash. At the time of writing it is unclear how the Government will deal with carry-forward of unused credit. This is a reduction in the allowance for those eligible and needs to be viewed in conjunction with a substantial Bord Gáis Gas price increase of



All of these increases – some essentially by stealth – are taking place a year after the launch of the Government’s own Strategy for Energy Affordability ...

Johnmark McCafferty,
SVP Head of Social Justice and Policy

8.5% which took place in October, alongside similar increases among other providers. These were sanctioned by the Regulator (Commission for Energy Regulation or CER), who also recently implemented increases to electricity network charges. According to The Irish Times (Wednesday, September 5, 2012) the charges may mean that the average household will pay more than €25 extra per year for their electricity use.

All of these increases – some essentially by stealth – are taking place a year after the launch of the Government’s own Strategy for Energy Affordability, whose aim was to enable

“More people are in arrears than they themselves believe and the use of PAYGO meters is an effective way to assist people...”

households to afford all of their energy needs. SVP has been involved with the Strategy but I genuinely struggle to see what positive achievements have been made under the plan, perhaps with the exception of some ‘regulatory protection’; specifically Pay As You Go (PAYGO) Meters. The numbers of PAYGO meters are increasing for both gas and electricity consumers and we welcome this development. We are pushing the Regulator and the utilities for greater availability of PAYGO meters for those who are struggling with their bills, and equally, we urge members and Conferences to encourage people in energy arrears to contact their supplier for a PAYGO meter, either for gas or electricity or both. Where a PAYGO meter is unsuitable in particular housing, we urge that customers enter into a realistic repayment / instalment plan with their energy supplier as early

in the debt process as possible. Intervention like this will save money and heartache for all parties - including SVP – in the longer run.

More people are in arrears than they themselves believe and the use of PAYGO meters is an effective way to assist people to become more aware of their energy consumption. In July 2012 the CER launched the findings of a domestic consumer survey which found that 5% of electricity and 3% of gas customers stated that they were, or had been, in arrears. A further one-fifth of respondents said they part-paid their energy bill but paid the bill in full before the following bill was issued. These customers (20% of those questioned) are technically in arrears, although they did not see themselves in this way. How does that match the reality? Finally, the Commission for Energy Regulation hosts a website with information on switching utility supplier which is a useful resource for all domestic energy consumers: energycustomers.ie

Aspects

of Developments in Social Justice

“The Budget was unfair on working families and did nothing to protect the vulnerable.....“

“The crisis that faces Ireland is not just economic, but also a crisis of the failure of ideas...”

- Those living in households with children are almost three times more likely to be in debt from ordinary living expenses compared to those without children. People in these circumstances were also unable to afford unexpected expenses. – Central Statistics Office survey finding.
- Families are choosing to go without heating their homes as they struggle to afford the basics. The Budget was unfair on working families and did nothing to protect the vulnerable. – Society of St. Vincent de Paul National President, Geoff Meagher.
- 700,000 people are living in poverty in Ireland and 200,000 of these are children. – Social Justice Ireland.
- While still rare, suicide rates among Irish children have increased, especially among 15-17 year-olds. – Finding by researchers from University College, Dublin and St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, published in the Irish Medical Journal.
- Only one in eight people in receipt of unemployment benefit is better-off staying on welfare than moving to paid employment. – Economic and Social Research Institute survey finding.
- Public figures should engage in debate about issues at the heart of Irish society and democracy. The crisis that Ireland currently faces is not just an economic crisis. It is also a crisis caused by the failure of ideas. – President Michael D. Higgins.
- The state of Irish consumers' finances continues to worsen, with half of all adults saying they struggle to pay bills on time. – Research by the Irish League of Credit Unions.
- Reductions in home help hours mean that there are older people who are left alone much longer without access to showers, toilets or meals. – Home Help Carer whose hours have been reduced by the HSE as part of Government-imposed cutbacks.
- About 1,000 unfinished housing estates are in a “seriously problematic condition and may face demolition. Some are entire estates, others small portions of lived-in estates. – Housing Minister Jan O'Sullivan.
- Before demolishing unfinished estates, a public debate on alternative uses for these botched developments is urgently required. Local communities and voluntary groups should be consulted on how they might be used for social housing, community centres and sheltered housing. – The Irish Times newspaper.

Challenging Questions for Charities

SVP National Director **Kieran Murphy** discusses the role and work of charitable organisations

There have been a number of articles in papers and magazines recently posing very challenging questions for charities. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Canada, in their magazine Vincenpaul – Canada, had an article 'Toxic Charity – Looking at poverty differently'. The article stated that 'charities have fallen into the bad habit of creating programmes to help the poor when in reality the only people they are helping are themselves, creating a toxic charity that needs to be re-examined and fixed'. Closer to home, an article in the Irish Times, by UCD lecturer Kathleen Lynch, before Christmas stated that 'charity is not justice; it is neither a robust nor an effective response to economic inequality. In fact, charity perpetuates inequality and legitimates it, creating in the process a truly careless society.'

These are strong and challenging views: charities which are toxic and creating a careless society. They raise two important questions which we in the SVP need to engage with: what are our motivations for doing the work and what is the long term impact of our work?

This is how I answer the question about the motivations which prompt the work. At the heart of the work of the Society is an impulse, from both our volunteer members and

staff members, to respond to the needs of other people because we are moved by their life stories and circumstances. This is a deeply human instinct and a form of love. The ancient Greeks called it Agape. Like all forms of love it is reciprocal: both parties experience a giving and receiving, but create something that is



what are the motivations that attract and sustain us?

greater than the sum of the two parts. Are all our volunteers and staff motivated by pure Agape? Of course not! We all bring a complex mixture of motivations and needs which shift and change over time: but at the heart of it all is an instinct to engage with the needs and circumstances of another human being.

term impact or our work for the individuals and families we work with?

Difficult, searching questions about the value and impact of our work have an important role to play in keeping us true to our Mission.

We do our work, not because we are filling in for the shortcomings of Government in their role in providing essential services, protecting the vulnerable and vindicating their rights. Our work is not to compensate for the inadequacies of the State although that is an inevitable part of the work. The Society and the 1,000's of other charities in Ireland are expressions of a community responding to its own needs. In this way they complement rather than compensate for the State.

2013 is the bicentenary of the birth of our principal founder Fredric Ozanam. This year is an opportunity to reconnect with his vision for the work of the Society; to be challenged and perhaps unsettled by his outspoken determination for a more equal society and to be nourished by the experience of being part of a worldwide organisation that can trace its simple origins back to actions of a 20-year-old student.

There can always be unintended consequences, a shadow side, to the work of organisations and SVP is no different. So, in this bicentenary year I suggest that each of us and our Conferences reflect on these two questions: what are the motivations that attract and sustain us in the work? And what is the long



2012

SVP ANNUAL APPEAL



The 2012 Annual Appeal was launched at Ozanam House, Mountjoy Square, on November 14 by RTE's Ryan Tubridy, now a long running SVP ambassador and SVP national President Geoff Meagher, with Dublin GAA star Ger Brennan. For the duration of the appeal, the SVP national website had a dedicated Appeals Section, which advertised our Giving Tree Appeal, Toy Appeal and Food Appeal as well as an on-line donation page.

The new SVP TV advertisement was broadcast throughout the Annual Appeal and aired on all Irish Television and Radio stations. The TV ad was supported by a nationwide poster campaign.

Now in its third successive year, the Toy Appeal once again proved to be a huge success. The SVP received huge support from RTE 2FM, in particular their dedicated staff who utilised the Social Media channels of Facebook and Twitter to help drive and promote the campaign.

One of our biggest supporters of this year's Toy Appeal was Dublin Bus. Inspired by the bus

driver "Angel" Gabriel, Dublin Bus transported thousands of toys across the county to be distributed by SVP volunteers. There were also Giving Trees and toy appeals, 60,000 toys were received with the support of SuperValu Stores nationwide and Toy Appeal Partners, Eason and Toy Master where gift vouchers could be bought to support the appeal.

At the time of going to press the Annual Appeal had received €1m. from online and postal donations and other donations were still being received.

Anne McCoy, SVP National Fundraising Co-ordinator, thanked all those who took part and sponsored and supported events.

"We have also made new celebrity friends. Most importantly though, are the individuals, families and Conference members who gave their time to help over the annual appeal. They are the backbone of the SVP and the success of the annual appeal is down to their hard work and dedication."

IT IS TIME FOR ZERO TOLERANCE OF POVERTY

says **Peg Hanafin**, M.Sc., in the aftermath of the Budget

Irish Governments down through the years have never come to terms with or developed a caring State whose primary concern should be making sure people have at least the basic commodities that they need to survive.

The Budget determines who suffers cuts and who gets away 'scot free' from ensuring Ireland has a just and fair society.

The vast majority of our politicians are kind and caring people but with the very flawed system that we operate in this country their hands are tied when they have no input into the annual Budget. This is left to a few well-heeled Ministers, who do not understand or even care how people will manage. The Budget outcomes do not impact on them or their families in the way they do on those who are vulnerable. If it did they would surely find another way.

There are so many families in trouble with huge debts in keeping a roof over their heads and insurmountable personal debts that the time has come to bring back the dreams of a Constitution that was intended to cherish all our children equally and with justice.

Poverty of citizens serves no useful benefit to any community and feeds into a rage that has far-reaching effects. No human being wants a daily struggle to stay alive and keep warm. When they are powerless they become angry at society at large. Charity is not the total response to the needs of the poor and can allow the Government and its agencies off the hook, so that they do

not face up to the fact that creating a divided society has devastating effects

A proper Welfare system which includes health and education for those who are weak should be the first priority and we will all have to challenge the empty rhetoric that continues to keep people on the margins.

Debt is recognised worldwide to be one of the greatest indicators of poverty and exclusion and at this juncture in our country we must put our citizens before commercial debt to restore or even begin to make a new start for those who are suffering.

It is time therefore for our leaders to develop zero tolerance on poverty and put our citizens first, as is clear in the Constitution.

People who must depend on charity and who struggle to make ends meet are being done a grave injustice, which if not rectified, will have ramifications for those implementing the methods by which our national income is spent. Being helpless and being treated as second-class citizens is not a position anyone wants for their family members, neighbours or friends. Those who govern have a moral responsibility to the weakest and vulnerable in society and the day of reckoning comes when we will have to answer to the Almighty of how we lived, but especially how we treat those with little of life's gifts and money.

Charity is not justice and is not a satisfactory response to those on the margins and who are vulnerable and dependent. It highlights the predicament of the recipients and those who



must seek charity especially when never in the position before they can find this demeaning which escalates the feeling of being unable to fend for themselves. We all accept that there are some who live by the charity of others to supplement their income all of the time, but charity is not justice. While giving generously to aid the Third World and other human tragedies around the world, Ireland appears to accept that people in our own communities continue to suffer the indignity of poverty and so this absolves the State from carrying out its duty of care to the poor.

Let us hope that justice will prevail at this juncture in our history and return to the Constitutional values that we all pursue.

Martin Luther King once said "We must all live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools".

** Peg Hanafin, M.Sc., in Rehabilitation Counselling/ Psychology, lives in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.*

FINDING CARDBOARD HARD TO SLEEP ON

As Student Brian Bolger discovers when he becomes homeless

It is a strange feeling not waking up in your own bed; it's even stranger waking up outside in the freezing cold.

For 120 UCD students this became the norm for a week in November, when they took part in the annual 'Homeless Week' organised by the students who form the Conference of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in University College, Dublin.

First held in 2008, 'Homeless Week' is a week-long campaign aimed at raising awareness and understanding of homelessness in Irish society as well as raising much-needed funds for UCD SVP's homeless services. Every year for the duration of Homeless Week, students participate in a nightly 'sleep-out' outside the James Joyce Library in UCD from Monday night through to Friday morning. As well as the 'sleep-out' itself, numerous social, fundraising and awareness events were held throughout the week.

The 'Homeless Week' began with Alice Leahy, Director and Co-Founder of TRUST, and John Mark McCafferty, SVP Head of Social Justice and Policy, speaking on the topic of homelessness and inequality in Ireland today. Around 25 students then proceeded to sleep-out for the first night.

A huge amount of cardboard was sourced

which was used by the students to sleep on, while sleeping bags and warm clothes were a must.

On the Tuesday, UCD Labour held a panel discussion on 'Homelessness and Housing in Ireland' with the speakers - Jan O'Sullivan, T.D., Senator Aideen Hayden and Brian Bolger. On Wednesday, a public debate co-organised by the UCD Law Society took place on the subject of the government's policy towards homelessness with speakers including Fr. Peter McVerry; Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, T.D.; Finian McGrath, T.D, and Wayne Stanley of Focus Ireland. On the Thursday, the 'Habitat for Humanity' group spoke at an event co-organised by UCD Volunteers Overseas on the issue of global homelessness. By Thursday night, the numbers sleeping-out had increased to over 65 students and in total, around 120 students slept out at least one night of the week.

As well as the awareness events, various social and fundraising events took place throughout the week namely busking, leg waxing and a 'Battle of the Buskers' competition. All these events were organised in order to raise funds for our homeless services. These include the soup run which we run four nights a week as well as volunteering in Depaul's Back Lane Hostel five nights a week. In total, we raised €4,700 over the course of the week with all funds going directly towards the soup run. Around

80 UCD students are actively involved in our soup runs which we run every Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday evening. Students distribute soup, sandwiches, tea, coffee, fruit and biscuits to people that are homeless around the city centre after preparing the food in the Teach Mhuire hostel on Gardiner Street.

Ultimately, 'Homeless Week' is concerned with creating awareness and promoting a better understanding of the problem of homelessness in Ireland.

The students that slept out understand that their experience is nothing compared to what it is actually like to be homeless on the streets in one of Ireland's cities.

In a number of years' time, it will be our generation, the generation of students that participated in 'Homeless Week,' that will be tackling social justice issues in Ireland, including the issue of homelessness. By creating awareness and promoting an understanding of the issues of homelessness, we hope to make students more aware and to get them to think further about the inequality that currently exists in Ireland.

For further information on Homeless Week or the work of the UCD SVP Conference, email Brian at auditor@ucdsvp.com.







SVP SHOPS IN NORTH-EAST TOT UP A SUCCESS

Report by *Bill Lawlor*

At the opening of the latest Dundalk SVP shop were (from left): Aisling Matthews, Retail Manager, Dundalk SVP;

Liam Reilly, Dundalk Area President and Michael O’Keeffe, North-East Regional Council President.

Navan Area Council's latest venture, Vincent's Furniture and Curiosity Shop, opened at the town's Balmoral Industrial Estate, complementing its existing clothes outlet at Brew's Hill.

St. McCartan's Conference in Monaghan have extended their leased premises, which now has an impressive and eye-catching double display window. Another shop is about to open in Ballyjamesduff, Co. Cavan.

And recent months have seen similar enterprises commence in Athboy and Kells, Co. Meath. A further two Meath shops - in Clonee and Laytown/Bettystown - are planned for early this year. The launch by Dundalk St. Vincent de Paul Society of its second shop in the Co. Louth town was another landmark in the continuing expansion of the SVP's retailing activity in the North-East. A total of 25 outlets – a significant increase of 12 in three years – currently earn

vital income for the society in Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan.

Launching the new store in Dundalk's Park St., Michael O’Keeffe said it would complement the local society's flagship Clanbrassil St. shop, and would enable them to display a lot more of the great range of clothes and household goods donated.

He paid tribute to the Society's growing number of members and volunteers who give huge commitment and substantial time to the region's shops.

Aisling Matthews, Retail Manager for the SVP in Dundalk, pointed out that they had 60 volunteers working between both the new store and the Clanbrassil St. shop. She urged the public to continue their generous donations of goods.

A clothing re-cycling project, involving the placing of bins in 215 locations around the North-East, is an additional source of regional income. The scheme complements the donation of garment items that are given directly to individual shops. Goods from the bins are brought to a depot in Drogheda where four people are employed in sorting them. Good quality clothes are then offered to all SVP shops in the region.

Stressing the success of the project, North-East Regional Council President Michael O’Keeffe says that the income from the re-cycling scheme, when combined with that of the shops, is expected to yield €1.4m. for people in need in the region in 2013.

The initiative was established by a Regional Council fundraising sub-committee.

Social Justice

Is Not Just An Academic Pursuit



by **Eileen Gernon** Chairperson, SVP National Social Justice and Policy Committee

Prior to joining the SVP's National Social Justice and Policy Committee I thought that social justice concerned itself only with the big four social policy areas – health, education, income adequacy and housing. A nice simple square with four corners - each of equal importance.

Now I realise that inconvenient issues keep arising that don't fit the nice neat squares – such as energy poverty, waste waivers, socially monitored alarms and post office closures..... Amongst many others!

These are bread-and-butter social justice issues.

Social justice is not merely an academic pursuit - it is a day-to-day reality for all of us, either as SVP Conference members or citizens.

Following on the Budget and the €50 reduction to the Back-to-School Allowance, I consider the costs of sending a child to school to be now amounting to a scandal which hits me in the face when visiting a home to meet parents who are simply in despair.

Though we are now at the start of a New Year and Spring beckons with its perennial encouragement as we see new life beginning all

around us as plants and wildlife begin to arise from their winter slumbers, back-to-school in summer may seem some time away, but for the Society of St.Vincent de Paul planning ahead is crucial to assist those who are in need..

“The costs of sending a child to school are now amounting to a scandal”

There are families who even now are faced with the difficulties of meeting day-to-day school-going costs which will increase when the new academic year beckons and though that seems many months away now, there will again be despair in families as they face inability to raise the funds to send their child to school or college in the prescribed uniform, with a bag full of books, a healthy lunch box and money for photocopying, gym or other various costly outgoings.

Parents can feel inadequate, believing that they are the only ones who cannot provide such essentials for their children. Being in this position is not necessarily the product of personal choice – it is also a result of successive Government policies. We will encounter more and more parents unable to cope with back-to-school expenses in the present economic climate and will need to respond to this, both practically and in terms of our advocacy work.

When a young person achieves in excess of 400 points in the Leaving Certificate - that is enough to gain entry to many of our Universities to do an Arts degree ... what is fair about their parents having to tell that young person that they cannot go to College after all their hard work, because the parents cannot afford it?

In a just society, students at all levels would have equality of participation which depends not simply on having the formal right to participate but on having the actual ability and resources to exercise that right.
Does the system need changing?

If you agree, then we as SVP members need to create awareness about the issues based on social justice and to raise public awareness to support our case and to help families to help themselves.

We need to inform those we visit that the difficulties they are experiencing are not necessarily of their own making, but a product of the society in which we live. A discussion on what social justice is and how it affects our work must be on our Conference agendas. It is essential that we work together sharing our 'on the ground' experiences of assisting people, some of whom are in very challenging circumstances. We must continue to inform each other, in our areas and regions, along with the National Social Justice staff team and the NSJPC of what we are encountering in our Conference work. This will help inform their policy work and enable them to advocate on our behalf to influence Government, and Energy Company policy and national debate.

Parents can be made to feel inadequate by the pressures placed on them

The SVP campaign about the cost of school books mobilised many interested people to petition Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills, about setting up a national book rental scheme. Regrettably this has not yet been put in place, though it is clearly needed. However publishers have agreed that they will not bring out new editions unnecessarily.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul created a huge level of awareness around this issue, with the public appreciating and supporting the commitment which the SVP puts into national representation on social justice issues of which the cost of school books is definitely one. We will be pursuing the concept of a national book rental scheme.

What is beneath the surface in the SVP?

David Lawlor, former President of the Society in the Pearse Street area of Dublin, provides some answers to the question

The esteem in which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is publicly held is demonstrated by an increase in donations in the recent years of recession, while many other deserving charities are struggling with declining revenue, as people simply have less to give. But the Society does suffer from some less positive perceptions, such as that our membership is largely composed of older people, like me, that we are a deeply conservative lot and that we are a distinctly Catholic organisation, at a time when that church is suffering serious decline for a number of reasons.

The Society came to Ireland in 1844, just before the Famine, and currently has over 10,000 members in 1,000 conferences. Overall, the Society spends more than €70m. a year on helping those in need.

Our aim as SVP members is, firstly, to make friends with anyone who is suffering any type of need. Those who seek help may be overwhelmed by debt to moneylenders, or just have to meet a one-off or unexpected

payment for education or health expenses, or due to moving home, or bereavement, or a variety of other reasons or perhaps they are just lonely, or having difficulty in their relationships and simply need someone to listen to their problems.

Whatever the difficulty is, our response is for two of us to visit that person in their home, to sit and listen to their story and to ask any questions necessary to assess their needs, before suggesting a solution to their predicament. This may involve us clarifying the social protection payments they are entitled to, or asking them to go to the Community Welfare Officer for a special needs payment, or giving them vouchers for food or clothing, or a cheque made out to An Post towards gas or electricity bills, or asking them to go to the free Money Advice & Budgeting Service. MABS can provide expert help in devising a realistic household budget tailored to their specific needs and/or they can re-negotiate debt repayments. If MABS come up with a financial plan to move someone out of debt

over a period, we will often contribute regular payments to speed up the process and encourage that person to become debt-free.

Of course the danger involved in assisting anyone in this way is that they become dependent on our help and continually come back to us, thereby making it more difficult for us to be available to others who may need our help more urgently. Our second aim therefore is to try to make those we are assisting self-sufficient, so that they can stand on their own feet and not have to call on us again – at least until the next emergency or disaster comes along. This can be a difficult message to get across in some cases and requires an accuracy of assessment and consistency of approach that can be as hard on the SVP member as it may be on the seeker of help. Saying “no” is never easy, but encouraging dependency is no real help to anyone.

Our third aim as a Society is to fight for social justice. It is well recognised that poverty and inequality are not mere accidents but that

these great evils arise from social injustice, which must be tackled at its root. SVP is non-political in the party sense, but that does not prevent us taking an active part, along with other voluntary and community groups, in advocating fairer social structures – particularly in terms of access to education, jobs, housing and health – and better anti-poverty measures aimed at all those, especially children, suffering disadvantage. We regularly criticise government policies in this regard and suggest improvements and alternatives.

The Conference is the local, parish-based, unit of the Society. In addition to visiting people in their homes, which is the main work of the Society, some Conferences devote themselves to visiting prisoners or hospital patients. There are also special Conferences providing hostels for homeless people or social housing, or running community resource centres, or taking in and selling good second-hand clothing in our many Vincents shops, or running pre-school creches or organising holiday breaks for children and older people who would not otherwise get to go away.

Everything we discuss at meetings and on visits is treated as strictly confidential, because if you had to seek help from the SVP you wouldn't like everyone to know about it either.

I have just stepped down as President of St Andrew's and St Mary's SVP Conference in Pearse Street after nearly six years, so I'd like to give you my personal account of what SVP membership means to me and what it entails.

While our "fuddy-duddy" image does not appear to have impeded donations, it may be reducing the number of young recruits we might otherwise gain. As existing members grow older, many recruits also comprise those who have retired and now have the time to "give something back." It is therefore crucial for all Conferences to be alert to the need to pass responsibility on to younger members.

A conservative, "respectable" image of the SVP has been associated with its older membership profile. But it is also an outcome of the the personality type of many who join SVP because they are responsible citizens, who are thoughtful about the problems they see around them, but naturally careful about applying other people's money to the solution of those problems. Of course these qualities are also what can lead to the type of radicalism which inspired the young, 21-year-old student Frederic Ozanam to set up the Society.

Scratch the surface of an SVP Conference today and you will find people who, unlike

the vast majority of their fellow citizens, have sat in many a Traveller's trailer, who count Muslim migrants among their friends or who go into jails to let prisoners know that they are not outcasts. In addition to these life-enhancing experiences, SVP members also have the satisfaction of lifting the weight of despair and worry from another's shoulders, often by pointing them in the right direction and sometimes by simply giving them the means to buy food or pay a bill.

You can feel like Santa Claus sometimes, but other times decisions are hard: Whether to fulfil a dying woman's wish to go to Lourdes – yes; whether to enable a mother to spend 500 euro on her daughter's first communion dress, because she believes she should have as good as anyone else – no; whether to replace an elderly Traveller man's caravan which was burned out – yes; whether to give vouchers to a mother who has surrendered her child benefit book to an illegal money-lender and who refuses to go to MABS – no. The acid test, especially where large amounts are concerned, is to ask whether our donors would approve of our decision.

Of course if you are in the business of giving away money you have to retain a healthy scepticism, as there are always people who will take advantage. Every Conference worries about making the mistake of giving to someone who does not really need help, but who has the hard neck, sense of entitlement or sheer dishonesty to seek it. We worry even more about the bigger mistake of missing out on people who may desperately need our help but who, through natural pride, unawareness or inability to cope, do not call on us. That is why we advertise our services locally and nationally and also maintain contacts with social workers, teachers, community welfare officers, MABS and others who are in a position to point people in our direction.

All of this brings me to our "Catholic ethos" – which I think has been moving in recent years more to a Christian one. Obviously the basic Christian precept of loving your neighbour, i.e. everyone, is at the root of everything we



(l to r) Nicki Kevin; Anne-Marie Brooks and Karen Joyce, members of St. Andrew's and St. Mary's SVP Conference, Pearse Street, Dublin, with a cheque for €765 raised by Refugee Applications staff to help families the SVP visits in Dublin's south inner city area.

do. But we are aware that charity is a basic component of all the great world religions and non-Christians are therefore not excluded from SVP membership. We are a lay organisation in structure and governance and prayers are said by the president at the beginning and end of each meeting as a psychological preparation for what follows.

While we do have prayers with a purpose at our Conference meetings, we are not all 'Holy Joes or Josephines,' but a sample of Irish people, some Mass-going, some not and most varying in-between. I would place myself somewhere in the no-man's-land between faith and hope, but I think that a relevant church should serve as a kind of power point, where the individual plugs in to be re-charged before going back into the world to continue trying to live up to the Christian ideal.

From Navan, David Lawlor is a former journalist and public relations manager. He gave a talk to Refugee Applications staff in their offices at Mount Street, Dublin, on this topic. David has degrees in social science and history. His book, 'Divine Right? The Parnell Split in Meath' was published in 2007 by Cork University Press.



TINAHELY

– THE MAKING OF A CONFERENCE

By *Eileen Flanagan*, President, St. Kevin's Conference, Tinahely, Co Wicklow.

Early in 2011 a call went out by the Society in South-West Wicklow for people interested in setting up a Conference, the local parish-based unit of the SVP, to come to a meeting in our local community hall. What this would involve no one knew and those who attended came along for a variety of reasons. My own, were simple enough. As a journalist I had reason to admire and respect the work of the Society throughout my career. My only personal involvement had been to donate on National Collection Days but it was through my professional life that I had drawn on the expertise of the Society when it came to assessing and writing about the impact of government budgetary changes on the less well-off.

Spokespeople for the SVP like Professor John Monahan who, through their public statements on behalf of the Society, were people you could rely on to obtain factual information on conditions for those living on minimum wages and families existing below the poverty line with no prospect of changing their lives.

Tinahely is not untypical of many rural areas. It is situated in South-West Wicklow just north of the Wexford border. A particularly scenic area it attracts many hill walkers each year. It is mainly an agricultural community, but some light industry and business developments have been established over the years. Whilst there is local employment, the majority of people have to commute to work. Rural transport links

are minimal and the nearest towns are some 15 miles away. During the early 90's six private housing developments were built in and around the village and homes were mostly acquired by people working in Dublin or by people who had retired. The population of the village and surrounding area has expanded 10 fold during the past decade.

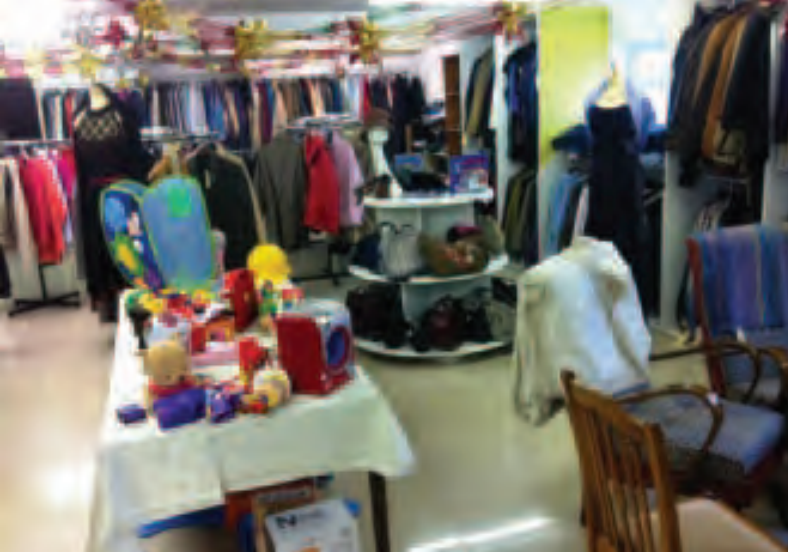
At the very first meeting David O'Neil, Regional Administrator for the South-East Region and Edmund Roche, Area President, introduced us to the work of the Society. By the end of the meeting, most of us were hooked. What was set out before us at that and at subsequent sessions, was a presentation of a modern organisation where not only were functions and roles clearly defined but comprehensive training was put in place to enable ordinary people like ourselves to act in a way that would support and help people to cope with difficult periods in their lives. Over the next 10 weeks various aspects of the work of the Society were covered at training sessions, culminating with a visit from Regional Trainer; Monica Hillery, who instilled a sense of confidence in us all when it came to dealing with visitation.

At our final training night, we met Regional President, Kieran Stafford and it was then that we formally made the commitment to set up our local Conference. We did so in the knowledge that the regional organisation would be there for us if we ran into any difficulty dealing with

problems that were beyond the scope of either our ability or expertise to address.

Within a few weeks of setting up the Conference a unique opportunity came our way when the manager of Wicklow Farm Relief Services, Joe O'Brien, offered us a large shop in the village centre on a trial basis for eight weeks to see if we could create a focus for the Conference in the area and an opportunity to become financially self-sufficient to fund our work. The idea of setting up a shop had already been suggested by some of the Conference Members but funding it would have been too big a drain on our resources and it was felt what money we had needed to be available to help people in need. To be offered a shop, free of rent, for eight weeks to see if it had the potential to generate income for the Conference long term was a wonderful opportunity and the Conference decided to run with it.

Two weeks later, on May 17, we opened for business. Volunteers were enlisted to work in the shop and remain at the heart of the success of the project as without them we could not have achieved what we have over the past 12 months. David O'Neill provided us with on-going support and advice as did Kitty Hynes of the South-East Regional Shops Committee; Maureen Murphy, President of the Bunclody Conference and Bridget Braham of the Gorey Conference, all of whom run highly successful shops. Without their help I doubt if we would



have succeeded. Sharing with us their insights and experience was invaluable and made the difference between success and failure.

Eight weeks later the shop was well established and we had negotiated with our new landlords a sustainable rent. Support for the project came from everywhere, from within the Society, from the local community and from villages and communities within a 15 mile radius of Tinahely itself. We were inundated with donations. Parallel to this we continued to learn on the job, with volunteers and Conference members attending a shops' training night in Gorey. And we haven't stopped learning. We know that at any time, if there is a difficulty we can't deal with, we can

pick up the phone and there is someone at Regional Office to help and advise us. The value of this type of back-up and support can never be underestimated.

Whilst Visitation remains at the heart of the work the Conference does, we have identified a range of needs in the community that are compounded by its isolated location and the harsh downturn in the economy. Following on from the SVP Older People's Commission, we have researched the needs of the elderly in the area and find that they are the group facing the greatest difficulties. We hope to focus in the coming months and years on developing services to meet their needs.

Would we do it all over again?

I think for all of us the answer would be "Yes".

Little did we know how events would unfold when we started out last year but like the opening words of that famous song, sung by Edith Piaf - "Je ne regrette rien" is a fair summary of how we feel now. The work is rewarding, challenging and it is great to be part of a modern, compassionate community organisation that strives to embody Christian values in a practical way on an everyday basis.

Long Service Medal Presentation



Members of St Cronan's Conference, Roscrea, County Tipperary, pictured on the occasion of the presentation of a 'Long Service Medal' to John Lupton, (second from left in front row).

John has been a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for 30 years.



SVP goes farming for volunteers!



SOUTH EAST REGION AT NATIONAL PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIPS

The National Ploughing Championships might not seem a place where the Society of St.Vincent de Paul would be active, but the event proved a successful location for the South-East Region to go farming for volunteers!

Regional Staff led by Administrator David O'Neill and William Bryan, with former Regional President Kieran Stafford decided that it would be an excellent place, despite

the mud and rain which might be visited upon them, to set up an exhibition and raise awareness of the work of the Society and its concern for and commitment to rural life as well as urban.

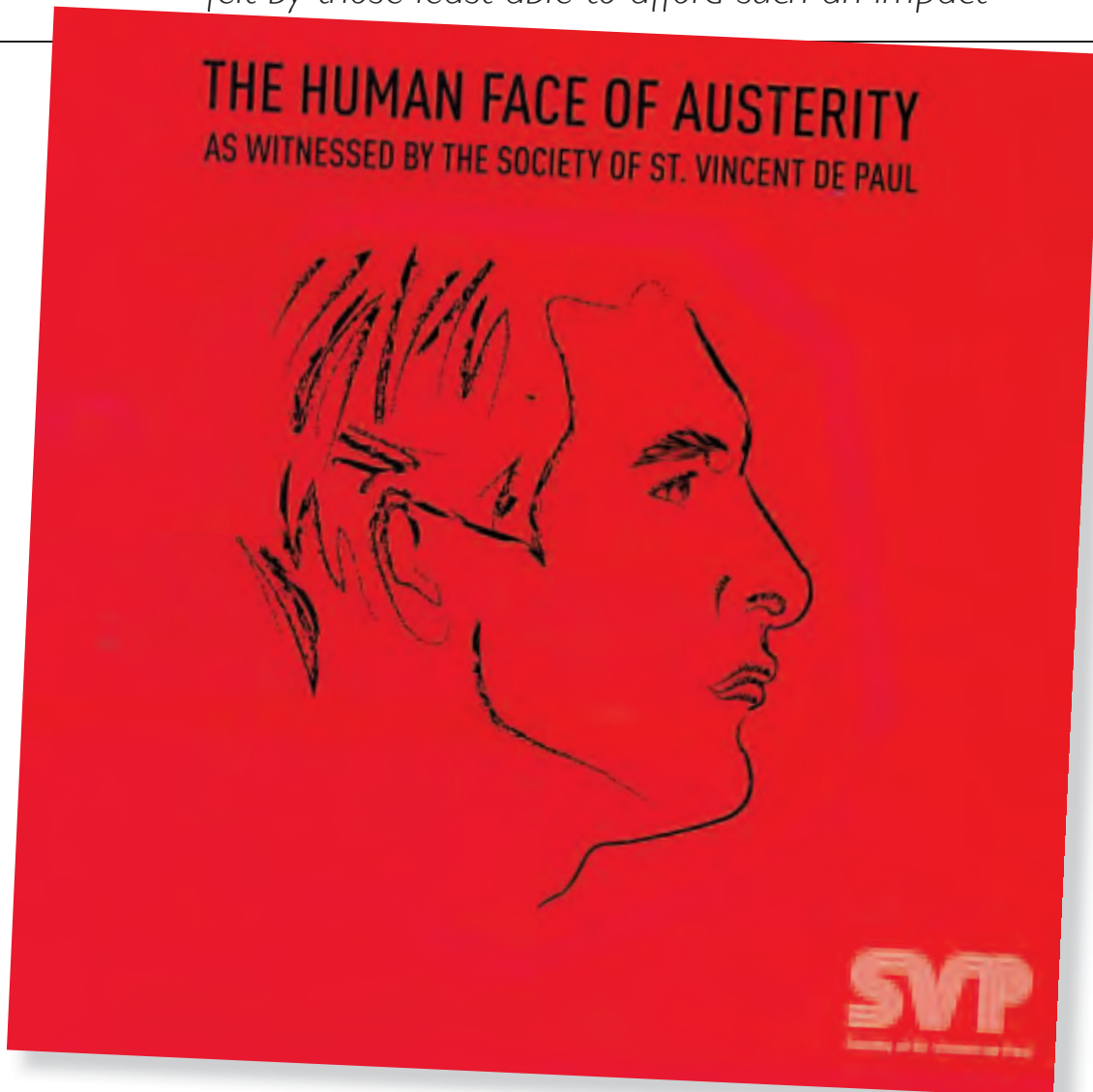
The SVP booth attracted a lot of visitors and potential new volunteer recruits.

"It was very successful," said new Regional President Rory McCauley "and proved an

excellent public relations exercise for the Society. Lyric FM interviewed us and that resulted in a donation made on-air to Society funds. As well as that there was other fundraising, which included a raffle for a pair of All-Ireland hurling final tickets, while younger members raised funds through a bucket collection which was very well-supported by those attending the championships."

BEFORE THE BUDGET

The impact of cutbacks to incomes and services has been most keenly felt by those least able to afford such an impact



Prior to the Budget the Society of St.Vincent de Paul published a booklet,'The Human Face of Austerity as witnessed by the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.'The Society called on the Government to protect those who had already borne the brunt of cutbacks and who would be "unable to take any more."

This call was made because the Society of St.Vincent de Paul, National President Geoff Meagher said, "sees at first-hand the impact that the economic crisis has had on struggling households."

The Society has made 400,000 home visitation calls in a year and has experienced an 80 per cent increase in the number of calls for

help from families and individuals since 2009.

"The impact of cutbacks to incomes and services has been most keenly felt by those least able to afford such an impact," said Mr.Meagher:

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul is spending in excess of €70 million a year giving help and assistance to individuals and families in need.

"On behalf of the people we assist and those who are struggling in Ireland today, the SVP is challenging the unfair burden which has been placed upon those least able to afford it," said Mr.Meagher:

AFTER THE BUDGET

Because of the Budget and other Budgets in recent years thousands of households across Ireland are faced with a very difficult future

When the Budget was announced the Society of St.Vincent de Paul criticised it in exceptionally strong language.

The reduction in child benefit, increases in the costs of solid fuel, such as €2.50 on average on a bag of coal, increases in prescription charges, in the drug payment scheme, along with the abolition of the PRSI credit, costing low



to middle income families on average €5 a week, exactly the same as the impact on the highest income earners in the country, "give a lie to the rhetoric about protecting the vulnerable", said the SVP.

The SVP described the Budget as regressive. "The recession is destroying families and

individuals in the way they are being treated by the Government in this Budget. Not only those dependent on social welfare and aspects of it are being affected, but the malaise of social deprivation is spreading to encompass low wage and middle income families. Those families who get no assistance with anything, who have to pay for everything, those who are self-employed they are all being badly affected. The SVP can see at first-hand, from our unique work of home visitation, invited into the homes of families when they seek our help, just how bad things are. Where are the people who have no money to get the money to pay the Government's demands?

We realise the Government is dealing with a serious recession, but they are not listening to what we are telling them – that there are many people, huge numbers of families, who do not have enough to live on and the Government is not doing enough to help them, in fact it has harmed them more in the Budget."

Acknowledging that there were some elements of the Budget that could be welcomed, such as the protection of basic social welfare rates and changes designed to generate employment, these did not compensate for the changes that imposed more hardship on those who are ill, struggling

on social welfare or low pay, said the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.

These would have a severe effect on social welfare recipients and those on low pay and this was to be deeply regretted, the Society said.



It also pointed out that the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, had not met with the Society about its concerns and its pre-Budget submission.



RELYING ON SOCIAL WELFARE

A SOLID FUEL STOVE IN THE LIVING ROOM, BUT NO FUEL

Sharon is a lone parent of three children on social welfare of €256 per week. After her relationship with her partner broke down, Sharon and her children left their local authority house and moved into private rented accommodation, where she receives rent supplement. The house is in good condition but Sharon cannot afford to pay for the oil heating. There is a solid fuel stove in the living room, but no fuel.

The breakdown of a relationship and household is a trigger for lone parents getting into debt.

Sharon was receiving maintenance of €50 per week from her ex-partner until recently, however his hours at work were reduced and the maintenance payments soon stopped.

Sharon has a number of debts with money lenders and a loan of over €7,000 from the Credit Union. The loans were taken out to cover funeral costs, to help with Christmas

expenses, clothing and the deposit for her rented accommodation. She simply cannot repay these loans. The Credit Union is bringing a court action against her, and she faces demands for €75 per week from

In 2010 over 12% of households were in arrears with at least one bill or loan.

money lenders. Sharon owes over €700 for electricity and owes the school €90 for the school book rental scheme. The family has now received a disconnection notice from their electricity supplier.

MABS are negotiating on Sharon's behalf with her creditors and some agreement has been reached on a reasonable weekly amount to be repaid. However a lump sum payment must also be made to clear

The National Consumer Agency reported that the average cost of 1,000 litres of home heating oil in September 2011 was €818.

The majority of MABS clients are women aged between 26 and 50, and 66% have children.

some of the debts. Her electricity is the immediate priority for payment in order for a "normal" functioning of her household.



SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL

ANALYSIS OF BUDGET 2013

Prepared by the SVP Social Justice and Policy Team

Households relying on social welfare, even though the basic rates were protected, will see further deep cuts to their incomes and a worsening of their circumstances from 2013. The situation of many individuals and families relying on social welfare was desperate before Budget 2013, as outlined in *The Human Face of Austerity*. These households were already struggling, partly due to the cumulative cuts to income supports and services they have experienced over the past number of years.

What do more cuts mean for these families?

There was no compensation for families on a low income to protect them from the cut to Child Benefit in Budget 2012 or 2013. This means that parents will find it harder to pay for their children's school books and uniforms; pay for their children's activities like music, dance and sport and will struggle to pay for curricular costs such as swimming lessons. School tours will be beyond many more students. Cuts to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance will make the start of a new school year even more stressful for families.

The reduction in the household benefits package means older people risk becoming more isolated as the telephone allowance has been reduced, or may cut down on energy usage due to fears of getting into debt.

Many families with caring responsibilities will be hit by a reduction in the respite care grant from €1700 to €1375, a cut of €325. This means that carers will get significantly less respite from their responsibilities in 2013.

The introduction of the carbon tax on solid fuel means that the only form of heating that people like Sharon, a lone parent of three children on social welfare of €256

per week, as outlined in the booklet 'The Human Face of Austerity', can afford will become more expensive. The property tax is an added stress for anyone in mortgage arrears, who may have already negotiated a break from the bank with their mortgage repayments. The increase in motor tax will affect those who must rely on a car. One family who spoke to the Society for the booklet explained they were already unable to afford to tax their car and are taking chances driving around with no tax, travelling back roads to avoid Gardaí. The increase in the charge for prescriptions for medical card holders will mean that parents who have children with serious

Ireland has now entered an era of explicit public health service rationing which impacts very much on people waiting for treatment

health problems will see the maximum amount they must pay for prescriptions double, at the same time as experiencing a cut in Child Benefit.

This rationing situation is exacerbated as the flight from private health insurance continues. 60,000 people have opted out of private health insurance for cost reasons in 2012 alone which adds more pressure to the already oversubscribed public waiting lists for community health services. This means longer waiting times before being seen, diagnosed and treated for those who cannot afford to pay for fast track access to specialist care. The increase in the ceiling for the Drug Payment Scheme means that prescriptions to the value of €144 per month must be paid for; an increase of €12

from last year and €54 since 2009.

The reduction in Jobseekers' Benefit from 12 months to 9 months for those with 260 social insurance contributions or over, and from 9 months to 6 months those with less than 260 contributions is especially difficult. This means less money for people recently unemployed and underestimates (or ignores) the psychological trauma of job loss. People have paid into an insurance fund, many for years, only to find that not only have they lost their job, but they have lost their safety net too.

Lone parents in employment will be affected by the reduction in the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment. This change was announced in Budget 2012 and means that from January 2013, once lone parents earn over €110 they will start to lose their One Parent Family Payment. The earnings disregard is due to be reduced to €60 by 2016. Of course this will be combined with the previous cuts to social welfare payments, Child Benefit and the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. People living in local authority housing and living in private rented accommodation both fear that their rent will go up due to the property tax if their landlords pass on the charge. A person looking for a second part-time job, to make ends meet, will be worried that if their earnings increase they will be liable for more PRSI.



Life Chances Affected By Serious Risk of Poverty

The SVP is particularly concerned for low skilled adults considering returning to education to improve their life chances and employability. The changes in the Budget will make it harder for these people, often in family settings, to decide to re-enter education as their household incomes will be substantially reduced. This is an enormous barrier which will prevent many from taking that critical first step back to further education and training. This decision will affect their life chances and will consign many to a life of non-participation and serious risk of poverty.

For families whose children have never progressed to Third-level the Budget will make it much harder to take that important first step. SVP has been encouraging and financially supporting these families for decades. Often it is the costs of participation, particularly if students travel to study, and daily living expenses which these families find impossible to fund over the longer term. Coupled with the on-going delays in grant administration many would-be students will no longer be able to countenance this life-changing step. We know that for the many thousands of families just over the newly-reduced income thresholds for the maintenance grant their hopes of progression to third level education have been dashed. The increase in the Student Contribution Charge to €2,500 for 2013 will continue to increase by €250 in 2014 and 2015 and will only deepen the difficulty they will experience as their incomes are being incrementally eroded by these cuts. The cut in allocation to the VECs by €13.2 million is worrying as this is the sector most focused on supplying further education opportunities to low skilled people on limited means, despite the statement that the level of service will not change. The Government failed to make provision to support young people from non-EU countries for whom Ireland is now home and who wish to progress to third level education on the same basis as their classmates.

The School Completion Programme, an innovative responsive programme operating in areas of disadvantage targeting early school leavers will spend 6.5% less in 2013 than last year. This will impact on the ability of this successful initiative to engage with a very vulnerable group to keep them in second level education. There will be reductions in various youth programmes of between 5% to

10% which means that disadvantaged young people, who already struggle in homes with insufficient income, have less access to projects and initiatives which allow them to participate and build their skills and confidence working with specialist staff.

Living Reality As Seen By The SVP

In households like those the SVP sees throughout Ireland - where a mother talks about moving tinned foods from the cupboard to the fridge to make it look full in front of the children; where a family has received a disconnection notice from their electricity supplier; where an older man is so isolated that he has no one there for him but the SVP visitors - the effects of Budget 2013 will be felt harshly. Those individuals and families who have made the move from welfare into employment, education or training will see the supports they need to help them improve their lives reduced further. These households have already cut back on food, heating and social interactions. Parents will find it more difficult to keep children in school; they will continue to worry about how to feed their families; they will struggle more with the cost of healthcare; they will continue to turn to

moneylenders and many will lose their sense of hope in the future.

Because of Budget 2013 and the Budgets in recent years these households and thousands more like them across Ireland are faced with a very difficult future.

• THE HUMAN FACE OF AUSTERITY AS WITNESSED BY THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL in Ireland is available free of charge on request from SVP offices throughout the country – see list of offices on Page 2 of this edition of The SVP Bulletin or from SVP National Office, SVP House, 92-93 Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1 or can be downloaded from the SVP website www.svp.ie



NO ONE THERE FOR HIM BUT US

Our volunteers visit Tony, an elderly man who recently lost his partner. He originally contacted us to get help paying for the funeral. This a major cost to anyone, but for someone living solely on social welfare, it is a huge burden. SVP helped Tony with the funeral and then organised an appointment for him to see MABS.

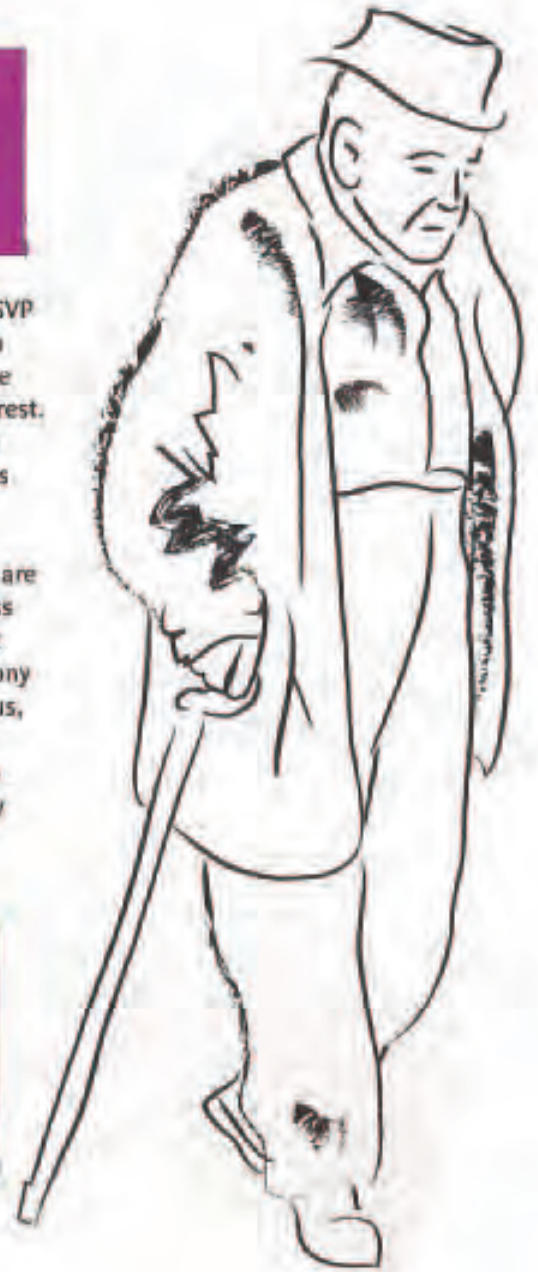
The costs of a funeral in Ireland can range from €4,000 and upwards.

Tony's partner had always managed the bills and when she passed away they started to mount up. Tony took out a loan of €700 with a moneylender to try and pay off his bills. Loan repayments were high and Tony struggled to meet the

Census 2011 revealed that 37,000 older women and 48,000 older men live alone in Ireland.

repayments and to make ends meet. SVP went guarantor on a Credit Union loan so that he could clear the loan from the money lender and avoid the huge interest. Tony is now on top of his bills but if an unexpected expense crops up he needs help.

We now visit Tony each month and we are trying to encourage him to become less isolated. What stands out most is that he had no one there for him but us. Tony has gotten the greatest comfort from us, not only by the monetary help, but by the fact that he has someone to talk to and someone who has shown that they actually care.



SVP research with older people found that loneliness was the biggest individual problem faced by older people living alone. Many older people spoke with great emotion about the gap that had been left in their lives after the death of a beloved spouse or partner, and noted the difficulties coping on one's own with practical things like banking, housekeeping and shopping.



Poverty, Old and New is stalking Ireland

The Irish Independent supported the SVP Christmas Appeal as a partner with editorial articles for an entire week, providing strong publicity support. This article is condensed from the series.

At first glance, it looks as though they have it all. The young married couple live with their two children in an attractive, modern home in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. A 2008 car sits in the driveway. The reality could hardly be more different. This couple - both in their early 30s - have reached the end of

their tether. The husband has just lost his job and they find themselves in severe arrears on repayments for their home and their car. Yet their immediate concerns are more prosaic - they are barely able to scrape together the money for the electricity and other bills. They have to ration out every last Euro for grocery shopping. When it comes to food, the children are looked after first while the parents often go hungry.

"We are helping more and more people like this couple," says Brian Mordaunt, President of the Society of St. Vincent De Paul Conference Clonmel. "These are people who would never have thought that they would have to seek the help of the SVP. But times have changed and there are more and more people from a middle-class background who need help. When we called to this couple we could see a sense of relief."

Brian Mordaunt's own brother, George, told the Irish Independent of his own problems encountered in the motor trade in Tipperary, about which experiences he wrote a book "Shepherd's Pie." He said he had been a volunteer with the SVP for six years, but his situation was such that he had been "just weeks away" from seeking help from the Society.

"It would have been quite a turnaround. It can be quite embarrassing and women tend to be more proactive than men about seeking help."

George Mordaunt has succeeded in turning his business around but is acutely aware of the hardships which people are suffering on a daily basis because of the current economic situation.

The Irish Independent reported that "even the most salubrious parts of Ireland have not gone unaffected" in these times. "A family in Foxrock, one of Dublin's wealthiest suburbs, had to seek help from the Society after being

unable to find the funds to pay for heat and electricity. When SVP volunteers arrived at their house they found the couple sitting together in a pitch-dark kitchen. Their house was icily cold and there was no food in the fridge."

"The thing that has changed significantly is that some of the people coming to us now once had it all," said Patricia Carey of the SVP Dublin Region. "That is underlined by the level of calls received by the Society in Dublin, estimated at probably reaching over 70,000 by the end of the year. This is compared with 17,000 in 2006 and there have been instances of social workers with the HSE suggesting to people that they were dealing with that they should contact the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for help.

In Ballincollig, a town a few miles west of Cork City, Gillian Buckley is a member of the Conference of St. John which is helping over 150 families. When she joined the Society in 2009 it would have been half that number. One case in which she was involved helping was a woman who had not enough food for the children's breakfast. When the SVP called the woman was watering down the milk in order to have enough to go around for the children.

Aged 41, married with three children of her own, Gillian is one of the Society's unsung 10,500 volunteers across Ireland who make house calls to help families who seek assistance. Calls are made discreetly and confidentiality is essential. "People can be embarrassed, because they don't want it known what desperate situation they may be in. They are people just like you and me who find themselves in difficulties," she said.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS with thanks to: IRISH INDEPENDENT writers Ciaran Byrne & John Meagher and IRISH INDEPENDENT WEEKEND REVIEW.



TAKING THE SOUP AT THE TIME OF THE FAMINE



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded in Ireland in December 1844. The White Cross Rooms, in Charles Street, West, off Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin, was the first home and as a result the first Conference was named after the 'White Cross'. The Society, although it soon expanded into many of the Dublin parishes, had its office in Charles Street, in the midst of one of the most crowded districts of the city, for several years.

Dr. Thomas Willis, who owned the building, was a founding member of the Society and lived around the corner on Ormond Quay. He leased the building to the Quakers for a 'soup kitchen' during 1847 – the worst year of the Great Famine. The Quakers – or to give them their correct name, the Religious Society of Friends – had been much disturbed by the state of Ireland during the horrific events of

the Famine and they set up a 'Central Relief Committee' amongst their members.

The formal agreement between Dr. Willis and the Quakers is still preserved in the National Archives, as is the recipe for the soup. In 1847 Charles Street, West, was mainly occupied by metal workers and metal merchants and the soup shops took their heat from the furnace in the adjacent premises of an iron worker!

Rob Goodbody, who writes on this subject, tells us:

"While Dublin was not so badly hit as the west, it had its share of hardship and had a definite need of relief measures. The other purpose of this soup kitchen was as a model for other establishments and the experience gained in the committee's own soup kitchen would be invaluable when they came to advise others who were establishing them elsewhere."

But the liquid diet, or the unwholesome food contained in it, resulted in dysentery and to prevent this the Charles Street kitchen introduced cooked rice into the recipe.

Thomas Willis's own house also had a remarkable history and was known by the

'Sign of the Black Lion' in the legal documents of the day.

We do not know the fate of the 'White Cross Rooms' in the years following, but we do know that Dr. Willis bought several houses in the street. Over the years, the founding house of the Society was in a rundown state and, in 1910, a new building was erected, with money donated by a former resident of the street. This was Peter F. Collier, a former neighbour who had become a successful publisher in the U.S.A. – producing 'Collier's Weekly' - and he was anxious to bring his good fortune back home. The new premises was given over to a tuberculosis clinic run by the Women's National Health Association of Ireland. TB was the scourge of the population of the time and the 'Rooms' had a new life and a new purpose. Development of medicine since has resulted in improved treatment and the building was subsequently used as a general dispensary.

- Dr. Thomas Willis, the father of the project, is not forgotten to-day and his 'Facts connected with the social and sanitary conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin' is a much admired work. His grave is in Glasnevin Cemetery.



Gerry Martin, author of this article is a former International Vice President SVP and wrote a doctoral thesis on the history of the SVP in Ireland.



L.to R.National Vice-President, Kieran Stafford; International Vice-President Brian O'Reilly; President General Michael Thio and National President, Geoff Meagher.



Area President in South-East Region, Margaret Conway of Sacred Heart Conference, Waterford.



New Area President Michael Boyle, Tallaght West



Attending the Area Presidents' Meeting Valentine Healy Cork and Gillian O'Rourke Meath West



Area Presidents Meeting in Kerdiffstown House.

Home Visits are the core of the Society's work

Visiting families in their homes is the core work of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul and puts it in a unique position in being aware of the real problems of poverty, of vulnerability amongst families and individuals in the economic recession in Ireland today. There is no other charitable organisation which has this level of trust, acceptance and dependence placed upon it by those whom it helps.

This was the message to Area Presidents of the Society and potential office holders who gathered in the SVP's Kerdiffstown House centre in County Kildare for a special meeting which was attended by the President General of the Society, Dr.Michael Thio.

The role of Area President is a crucial link in the structure of the Society and requires

considerable attention, development and commitment, by those who fill this officership, National President Geoff Meagher told the meeting which discussed a wide-range of issues involving the role of the Area Presidents.

Ireland has the highest rate of homes without a job

*By Caroline Fahey,
Social Policy Development Officer, Society of
St. Vincent de Paul*

The Economic and Social Research Institute has published a study on work and poverty, which looks at the relationship between employment and poverty, and describes the characteristics or profile of people who are more likely to be in a jobless household - a household where there is a very low level of participation in employment.

JOBLESS HOUSEHOLDS

The research found that Ireland has the highest rate of jobless households in the EU. This is related to the recession and associated unemployment, but is also related to the fact that many people in Ireland who do not have a job are less likely to live with other adults who are working and more likely to live with children. People are more likely to live in a jobless household if the householder never worked; has no educational qualifications; has a disability; lives alone or is a lone parent.

One in four children in Ireland live in a household where no adult has a job. This raises the prospect of intergenerational poverty and unemployment, and children living in a jobless household are also more likely to be exposed to poverty which will negatively impact on their opportunities later in life.



Jobless households have a high risk of poverty, economic stress and economic vulnerability. Social transfers including social welfare payments and Child Benefit are particularly important to protect these households from poverty, but have been reduced in successive budgets. The supports needed to help low income parents keep children in school and to help adults to return to education and training have also been reduced. The Back-to- Education Allowance, student grants, and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance have been cut, and the cost of education allowance has been abolished. Preventing and tackling poverty in jobless households in light of these cuts will be very difficult. The link between child poverty and growing up in a jobless household means that many children in Ireland are spending their childhoods in poverty and may find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and unemployment when they become adults.

IN-WORK POVERTY

Although being in employment is the most important factor in protecting an individual from poverty, having a job does not guarantee being free from poverty. The ESRI research looked at the profile and characteristics of people who are in employment and experiencing poverty. Those experiencing 'in work poverty' do not appear to be as disadvantaged in terms of their educational attainment and social class as those experiencing poverty who are outside the labour market. They tend to be better educated and more likely to be self-employed than adults who are outside the labour market. The research suggests that some of those experiencing 'in work poverty' may be working for a low return now in anticipation of improved income and reward in the future, and their income poverty may be of short duration. Those experiencing 'in work poverty' are less likely to be economically vulnerable or going without basic items than those experiencing poverty who do not have a job.

CONCLUSION

Many SVP members are working with jobless households, many of them families with children, and are helping to ease the effects of poverty that go hand in hand with being in a jobless household. One of the most important things for a jobless household is employment,

however a job is not a guarantee of an exit from poverty. Helping adults in a jobless household to access good quality employment often begins with improving their educational attainment and supporting them to access training opportunities in order to improve their employment and earnings potential. The availability of good quality, affordable and flexible childcare and after-school care services are essential to help parents in jobless households to enter employment. The SVP handbook 'WORKING WITH FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN' contains many suggestions on how to help families with children in terms of education, training, upskilling, and eventually accessing employment. SVP members working with jobless households where there is very little experience of employment are working with some of the most disadvantaged families in the country. For many such households there is no 'quick fix'. However, the SVP is committed to promoting self-sufficiency among the people we assist. This can take time, sometimes with the most visible effects and successes happening for the next generation. SVP members often identify helping someone to become self-sufficient as one of the most rewarding aspects of their work but it can be difficult. The SVP will continue to advocate for the protection of the supports and services needed by jobless households, including adequate incomes, support for childcare and other caring responsibilities, and good quality employment, education and training opportunities.

SVP MEETS THE TROIKA

A decision was taken by the National Management Council that the SVP should engage with the Troika – the European Central Bank, European Commission and the International Monetary Fund – to inform them of the impact of austerity on struggling households in Ireland as seen by SVP members on the ground. In a strongly worded letter sent in October 2012 as part of the Society's Pre Budget Campaign, the SVP told the Troika that the means being used to tackle the budget deficit will worsen Ireland's ability to recover from the economic crisis and is causing severe damage to the individuals and families we assist.

The Social Justice and Policy team has since met with the IMF's representative in Ireland and will meet with the European Commission



Caroline Fahey

during their next review mission in January. These meetings are an opportunity to highlight the SVP's opposition to the austerity measures which are being imposed on individuals and families who are struggling in Ireland, to share the experiences of SVP members working with people in need, to stress that Government should make choices to protect the vulnerable and to draw attention to the social crisis which Ireland is facing due to the impact of cuts in education, health and other supports and services. In our meeting we pointed out that the heaviest burden of the adjustment is being carried by those on the lowest incomes. Between 2008 and 2010 people on the lowest incomes in Ireland lost 29% of their disposable income. Those on the highest incomes only experienced a fall of 1% during this period. We also noted that far more money is going into servicing the debt than into essential services such as early-years education and care which is damaging for Ireland now and in the long term.

Our publication, The Human Face of Austerity, which contains case studies of some of the households being helped by SVP, as well as facts and statistics about the impact of cutbacks on vulnerable people, has been sent to the IMF in Washington, and the European Central Bank in Brussels. It is not clear what effect our meetings and communications with the Troika will have, however as the largest charity of social concern and action in Ireland, with a unique insight into the struggles faced by so many individuals and families, it is important that the Troika hear our concerns.



SVP Kerdiffstown Holiday House

Naas, Co. Kildare

Standing in 30 acres of leafy green County Kildare countryside, Kerdiffstown House is a magnificent 15th century country house hidden away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. With time for rest, relaxation, reflection and enjoyment it offers guests a very warm, individual welcome with a high level of personal service and a growing range of facilities.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, through the Conference of St. Corban's which operates the holiday home, has been providing guests with a week-long holiday every year since 1969. For many, this holiday may be the only one they get and it is an escape from isolation and loneliness.

Kerdiffstown House has a wide range of guest facilities. These include 86 Bedrooms. It has a modern guest lift, Coffee Shop, Games Room, Entertainment Hall, Vincent's Clothes/Gift Shop, Chapel, Hairdresser, TV room, Reading room and Dining room, Bingo, Drama, Crazy Golf, Snooker, Darts, Bowls, Croquet, Forest walks and lots more.

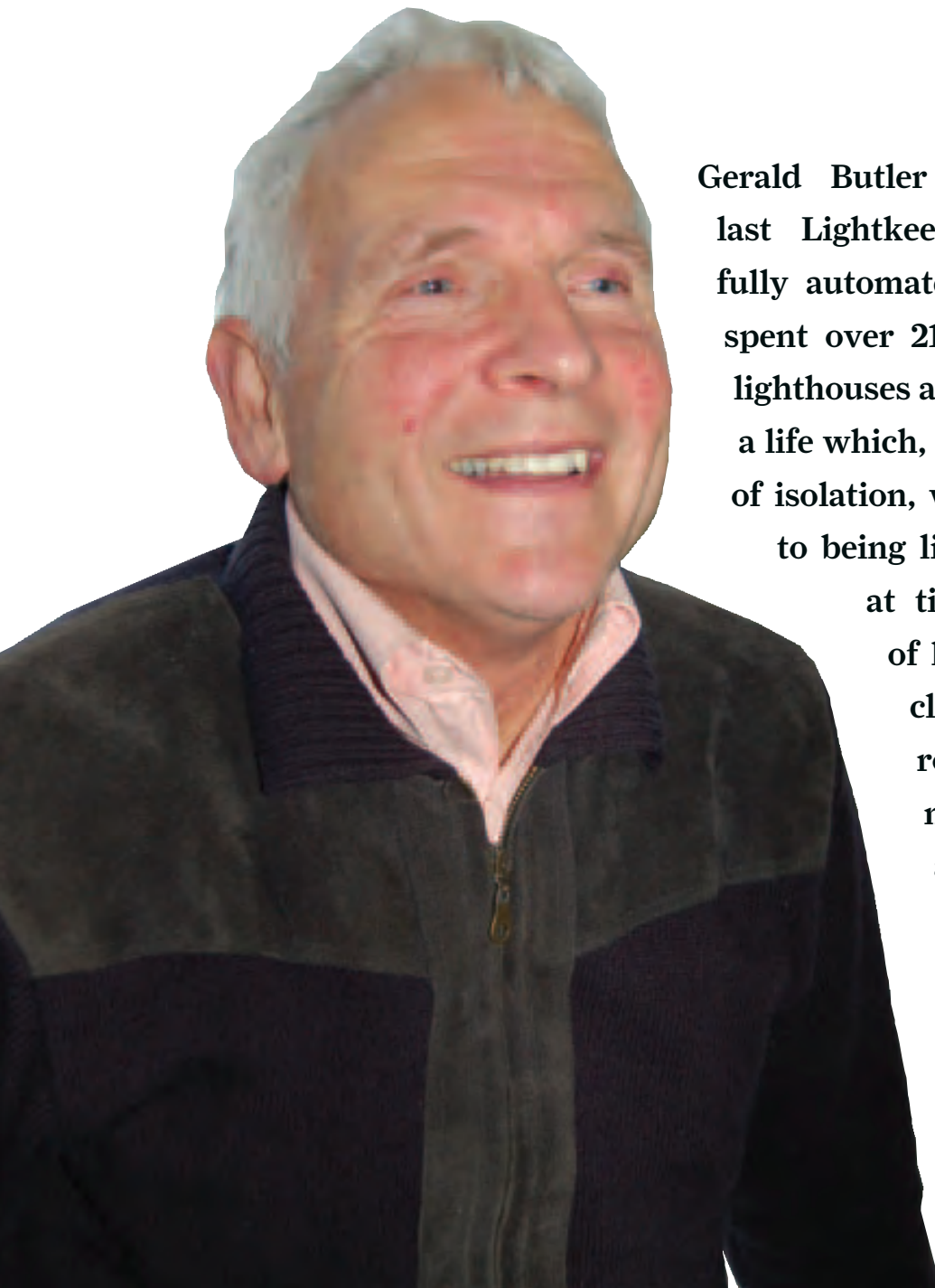
For more information :
Email: kerdiffsholcen@svpdublin.ie
Or Phone: 045 866337

The Springtime Quiz

This is a test of knowledge to exercise readers There are no prizes, other than the reward of getting the answers correct or, if you do not know them, finding out the answers which are on page 42. These are not trick questions. They are straight questions with straight answers..



- 1 Name the one sport in which neither the spectators nor the participants know the score or the leader until the contest ends.
- 2 What famous North American landmark is constantly moving backward?
- 3 Of all vegetables, only two can live to produce on their own for several growing seasons. All other vegetables must be replanted every year. What are the only two perennial vegetables?
- 4 What fruit has its seeds on the outside?
- 5 In many liquor stores, you can buy pear brandy, with a real pear inside the bottle. The pear is whole and ripe, and the bottle is genuine; it hasn't been cut in any way. How did the pear get inside the bottle?
- 6 Only three words in standard English begin with the letters 'dw' and they are all common words. Name two of them.
- 7 There are 14 punctuation marks in English grammar. Can you name at least half of them?
- 8 Name the only vegetable or fruit that is never sold frozen, canned, processed, cooked, or in any other form except fresh.
- 9 Name six or more things that you can wear on your feet beginning with the letter 'S'.



Gerald Butler was one of Ireland's last Lightkeepers. Until they were fully automated in the 1990s he had spent over 21 years serving at many lighthouses around the Irish coastline, a life which, he says, was at times one of isolation, which "you could equate to being like the life of a prisoner at times," because so much of his life was spent on the close confinement of a rocky offshore outpost. It made him very reflective about life as he tells in this interview with The Bulletin, following the publication of his life story.

"What I have learned in life is that religion is fantastic in that it has brought us to where we are but people are now becoming more educated and we look at life in a broader sense and, from the experience of the life I have had, I see religion in a positive way, but there is a lot of control and regulation in religion, in religions of all kinds and I think that education has changed a lot of life, particularly in the rural areas where I come from. People have had their lives opened up by television which has been a form of education and as they learned more about life, it makes more people challenge life today and everything in it and maybe that is not all bad either, because what we should do most is to enjoy life, open up every bit of it and hand none of it back closed at the end of our days."

Gerald Butler is a third-generation Lighthouse Keeper who spent his career at various stations around the coastline. Before becoming a Keeper himself, he moved with his mother and family from station to station as his father, a Lightkeeper, rotated between different lighthouses.

In his book, *The Lightkeeper*, he reflects on the long hours, days and weeks spent on lighthouse stations and the time they gave to think and reflect on life.

"Reading is a great help to steer the mind," he says. "You come to value life, to realise that it is a gift and that we should enjoy every bit of it and, at the end of our days, not regret that we handed back parts of it which we had never opened, which we kept closed."



A man still full of energy and life who spent ten years in the fishing industry where he owned a trawler after he left the Commissioners of Irish Lights when the lighthouses were automated, "fishing was a very tough life" he says. He now runs a company Butler Tarpaulins, which makes lorry and boat covers. "Life is there to be lived, to make what you can of it. The biggest mistake you can make is to waste your life, you must make the most of it and of what you have been given."

When he left the job as a Lightkeeper he says he lost "time." An unusual observation, because one of the aspects of life which Lighthouse Keepers had in their unique job was, surely, time.

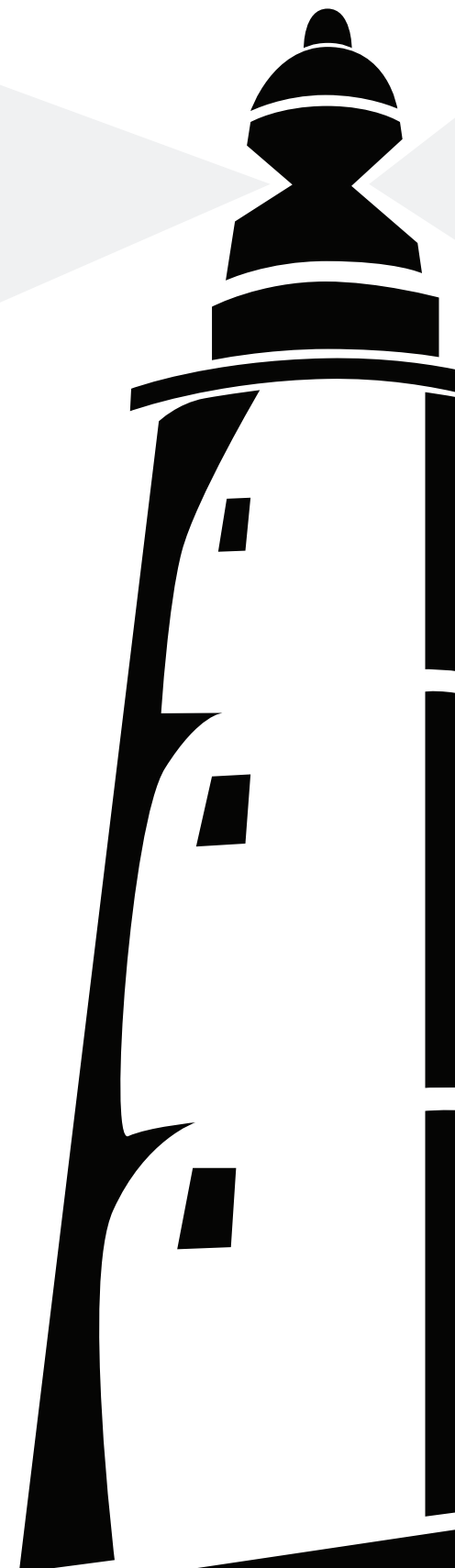
"Yes there was a lot of time, time to use, time to do things, but when I left the lighthouses, life outside of them was different, there was pressure on time, there was not time to reflect, to have time for yourself, to do things that you would like to do with your time. Lack of time is a very heavy pressure on people these days."

During his days with the Commissioners of Irish Lights he worked with many Lightkeepers, who had different pastimes to use their own time. Some became artists, others made model ships, some became good gardeners even on rocky outposts, there was one who became expert at chess, another at crochet and knitting.

"Lightkeepers learned to be self-dependent, self-supporting in life. It was an unusual occupation. When you were assigned to a station for three weeks at a time and then just one week at home and another three weeks back on the lighthouse, you had to change your frame of mind when you went onto the lighthouse, to move yourself away from the way life was lived at home.

"There was isolation, but I embraced it, I liked it and I learned to use it. Nowadays people have so much pressure on their lives that they do not have enough time to give to themselves very often.

"Having time for yourself is important, having time for your family, to talk to people, to meet friends, to have mutual interests, to realise that life is there for living, that's important."



Social Justice and Politics go hand-in-hand

“Finality is not the language of politics,” Benjamin Disraeli declared in the 19th century and Theodore Roosevelt added the view that “the most successful politician is he who says what everybody is thinking most often and in the loudest voice.”

Meeting for their annual 'Inter-varsity' gathering, students from four Irish universities who are members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul came to the view that “social justice and politics go hand-in-hand.”

However, whether politicians prioritise the views of their constituents, the public, or the political parties of which they are members is open to question. From their appearances and comments in the media, on newspapers, radio and television, it would appear that Irish politicians often adhere to the approach outlined by Theodore Roosevelt, but then vote on issues at the behest of their parties, even when they have expressed contrary views in public prior to such a vote. Whether or not that is in the interest of their constituents, the public, or whether the party 'Whip System' is conducive to democracy is also an open question.

There is also a major issue for debate about who and at what level of Irish society - business, economic, private or voluntary organisations - can get access to Government Ministers to outline and promote their policies.

While the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the biggest charitable organisation in Ireland and other voluntary organisations were not granted individual access to Government Ministers on budgetary policies, despite requests, prior to the announcement of the Budget, it has been revealed since its publication that powerful economic, industrial, financial and business interests were able to get such access to the Taoiseach and Ministers.

It has been revealed that:

- Pharmaceutical companies wrote to and dined with the Taoiseach as they lobbied to maintain pricing of medicines which in Ireland is one of the highest in the world. This followed a decision by the HSE not to pay for a number of newly-developed drugs. Twenty multinational drug firms complained that the HSE was portraying Ireland negatively.

But do politicians understand social justice?

Taoiseach Enda Kenny was warned this could have implications for 25,000 jobs and future investment. The prices paid for drugs in Ireland is of critical importance for pharmaceutical companies as it influences the price in many other countries, both within and outside the EU, as part of an international price-referencing system. In October the Government announced that it would save €400 million over three years in an agreement concluded as a result of discussions with the pharmaceutical industry. However, the reality, since revealed, is that the savings achieved are only €200m.

- The financial services industry successfully lobbied the Government to have international insurance companies based at the International Financial Services Centre in Dublin excluded from the 2 per cent insurance levy which is imposed on all Irish non-life insurance policy holders to cover the cost of the Quinn Insurance company which, it has been estimated, could reach €1.65 billion.

Contrasting with the lobbying success of the pharmaceutical and financial services industries, in the Budget:

- The Government said it saved €26m. by cutting the annual respite carers' grant.
- The Government abolished the weekly PRSI threshold for all workers so that even the lowest paid will lose up to €5 a week, suffering the same level of loss as the highest paid in the country.

On TV3's "Tonight with Vincent Browne," Fr. Sean Healy, Director of Social Justice Ireland, challenged the Government to explain why access to Ministers was denied to individual voluntary organisations, who were only granted general meetings in a group where

they could only make brief presentations of their views. "It is unjust," he said, "that corporations can maintain and receive tax reliefs while families continue to suffer."

On RTE Television the SVP's National Vice-President for Social Justice, Tom MacSweeney, said it appeared that there was still a "golden circle of influence" which had power and wealth to achieve what they wanted while the voluntary charitable organisations representing the people who were in need and being forced into very difficult personal and family situations by Government policies, were being denied the same level of access to the Government.

SVP Inter-Varsity Gathering

Forty-two students, representing SVP Conferences in University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, the National University of Ireland Maynooth and University College Cork, attended the SVP Interschool Week to discuss the topic: "Building Community and Inclusion in SVP and Beyond." They decided to establish an Interschool Social Justice Committee consisting of two representatives from each College to link-in with the SVP National Social Justice and Social Policy Team.

The SVP and other voluntary organisations seek to combine an insistence on social justice and equality with practical support for people who need immediate material help. Achieving equality and social justice would lead to a more just society in Ireland. The work of charitable organisations mitigates to some extent the effects of injustice in public policies.





I LEFT HALF MY HEART IN ZAMBIA

Rose McGowan has completed a five-year term as President of the Dublin Region of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a demanding role in a very big region which covers the capital city and spreads into counties surrounding Dublin. Now she has taken on a new role, as Chairperson of the SVP National Twinning Committee which gives assistance to the Society in Africa, underlining the worldwide work of the SVP.

"I left half my heart in Zambia," she says of a visit she made to that country with which the Dublin Region is twinned. Twinning became hugely important to her after hearing the former Chairman of the Twinning Committee, Kevin Cooley from Donegal, "speak with enthusiasm and passion" at a national SVP meeting.

"I left that meeting feeling a huge responsibility to Zambia".

National President Geoff Meagher appointed her to take responsibility for Twinning with the African countries, with which Ireland is twinned through the SVP internationally. In this she follows in the footsteps of Kevin Cooley and Mary Toole, who was Chairperson for many years of the National Twinning Group.

"They have both shown huge dedication and commitment to Twinning. We could do with more people and achieve more if we had them. Twinning is part of what we are as Vincentians, it is not an optional buy-in, this is what we do, it is part of us. I would like to spread that passion and enthusiasm around and involve more

Regions of the Society in Ireland and reach out to the countries we are Twinned with. Unfortunately, there seems to be only about half of the Regions involved and I would like to increase this level of involvement."

Rose McGowan was speaking to The Bulletin at National SVP Headquarters in Dublin after an initial meeting of regional members already involved in Twinning which was addressed by the National President, Geoff Meagher.

"He is very much in support of Twinning and both of us are very conscious that if we are sponsoring projects, then we must know more about them and be sure that money, provided by members and money from the public, is spent correctly. When I went to Zambia I was very conscious that Twinning visits can be expensive, but very worthwhile – meeting the members, seeing what a wonderful job they do in such difficult circumstances. Seeing how worthwhile our projects are made it a life-changing experience for me.

"Twinning seems to be in abeyance in some regions. There are a number of reasons for this, trouble in the country they are twinned with being one. The main one, however, is lack of communication - not on our side, but on the African side. So we need to look at how we can improve on this."

She says she would like Regions to appoint specific members who would be interested in Twinning, "not just send someone, anyone, to meetings, but to have specific involvement."



Rose McGowan

"We need to look at the projects we sponsor and assess if we can manage them or deal with them many thousands of miles away. If there is a big project to be proposed or done, perhaps then we could or should link in with other organisations such as Concern, to guarantee that our money is spent correctly. This would be a new departure for us but something we may have to look at."

The National Twinning Committee will hold its first formal meeting this month and Rose McGowan will be the Chairperson for three years.

** Photo shows Twinning Committee initial meeting with National President*

ANSWERS TO SPRINGTIME QUIZ ON PAGE 37



1. Boxing.
2. Niagara Falls. (The rim is being worn down by about two-and-a-half feet each year because of the millions of gallons of water that go over the falls every minute.
3. Asparagus and rhubarb.
4. Strawberry.
5. How did the pear get inside the brandy bottle? It grew inside the bottle. The bottles are placed over pear buds when they are small, wired in place on the tree. The bottle is left in place for the entire growing season. When the pears are ripe, they are snipped off at the stems.
6. Dwarf, dwell and dwindle...
7. Period, comma, colon, semicolon, dash, hyphen, apostrophe, question mark, exclamation point, quotation mark, brackets, parenthesis, braces, and ellipses.
8. Lettuce.
9. Shoes, socks, sandals, sneakers, slippers, skis, skates, snowshoes, stockings, stilts.

The Years Ahead Will Be Tough

SAYS NORTHERN REGION PRESIDENT, AIDAN CRAWFORD

In the past year the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has spent stg£3m. on providing direct assistance to those who have found the economic situation in Northern Ireland outstripping their personal financial resources.

"These are tough times," according to Aidan Crawford, President of the Northern Region of the SVP. "We can see at first-hand from the work our volunteers are doing and that is not restricted to just one side of the religious divide, as it is described, in the North."

The Society has, throughout the long years of the "Troubles" as they are called when civic strife dominated life in the North of Ireland, responded to calls for help from those in need no matter what their religion or class divide. "It is what we have done and will continue to do, that is what the Society of St. Vincent de Paul does, it helps those in need and need can be very widespread."

Looking to the future, Aidan Crawford believes that "the years ahead will be tough for everybody and there will be more demands and that means that we will need to look at new ways of

raising the money we need to provide help." He foresees a need to seek new avenues of sponsorship and to "bring other Churches as well as the Catholic Church into working together to help those in need."

The Society joins with the Salvation Army and BBC Northern Ireland in a joint Christmas Appeal which has been very successful over the years.

"There are a lot of positives to look at and a lot which we have achieved, so we should be conscious of that as well as being aware of the difficulties ahead. We have great Conferences, great people who are our volunteers in those Conferences in local areas throughout the North and great projects and those are the positive sides.

"However, there are indications that we will face tough years ahead and we have to be prepared for that situation."

There are 182 Conferences, the local parish-based unit of the SVP, in the Northern Region.

Hope comes through many thoughts

"Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for."

- Author Unknown

"Hope — Smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering 'it will be happier'..."

- Alfred Tennyson

"Others only see a hopeless end, but the Christian rejoices in an endless hope."

Hope is to desire with expectation of obtainment; to expect with confidence. Some words that mean the same as hope are trust, expectation, longing, dream, optimism, and desire.

The opposite of hope is despair.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul, through its 10,500 volunteers throughout Ireland seeks to bring a beacon of hope to those in difficulty.

If you need help, do contact us.



PEOPLE ARE FACED WITH 'IMMISERATION'

Not just poverty, but deprivation and misery

By Johnmark McCafferty

Many commentators are saying that this Budget will prove to be mildly regressive – that is, that the changes in Budget 2013 will mean that those with least resources will see more of their income reduced than those who have most. An example of this is the lowering of the income level at which pay related social insurance (PRSI) is now paid, with lower income earners paying the same percentage rate of their income as high-salaried workers. This decision was included in Budget 2013 and the Social Welfare Bill, yet the idea of imposing a higher rate of Universal Social Charge on incomes over €100,000 was ruled out. Much of this analysis is now well rehearsed - but what about aspects of the Budget that impact on wider society and local communities?

I recently attended a talk by Brian Harvey, a respected social researcher, on the impact of successive Budgets. The session was organised by The Wheel, a support and representative network for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland and hosted by Ulster Bank and was highly informative and revealing. Contrary to what we might assume, spending actually increased in 2009, when Ireland was solidly in recession. That is where the good news ends. Overall, Government spending has reduced by 4.3% since 2008. What is most striking is that funding for community and voluntary sector supports have been slashed by 8 to 10% each year since that time – a hugely disproportionate cut that directly affected already disadvantaged communities.

Budgets of the last five years have been very damaging to the 'social infrastructure' of Ireland –

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has publicly stressed the impact of cumulative cuts to families and households of successive budgets, such as cuts in supposedly 'non-core' elements of social welfare. Similarly, it is important to view the Budgets of the last

five years as being very damaging to the 'social infrastructure' of Ireland – with years of cuts to community and voluntary sector projects taking their toll. And yet Government has never given an explanation for such cuts. Indeed, Budget 2013 was the first Budget that did not provide a poverty impact assessment – a judgement of how Budget decisions influenced poverty levels.

The local and community development programme, which helps build the capacity of groups and supports among the poorest communities across the State, is down €6 million to €48.8million in Budget 2013. Spending on equality and integration measures is down by 20%, from €28 million to €23 million. At a time of great personal distress, publicly-funded counselling services have been cut by 12% in Budget 2013. And while the Department of Education's overall cut was only 0.4%, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) budget was reduced by 2% and FÁS training budget by 4%. The NEPS figure is of relevance to Conferences who have assisted families whose children were on waiting lists for psychological assessments. One silver lining in this budgetary cloud is that funding for labour market programmes such as Community Employment, TÚS, Jobbridge and Community Services are all up.

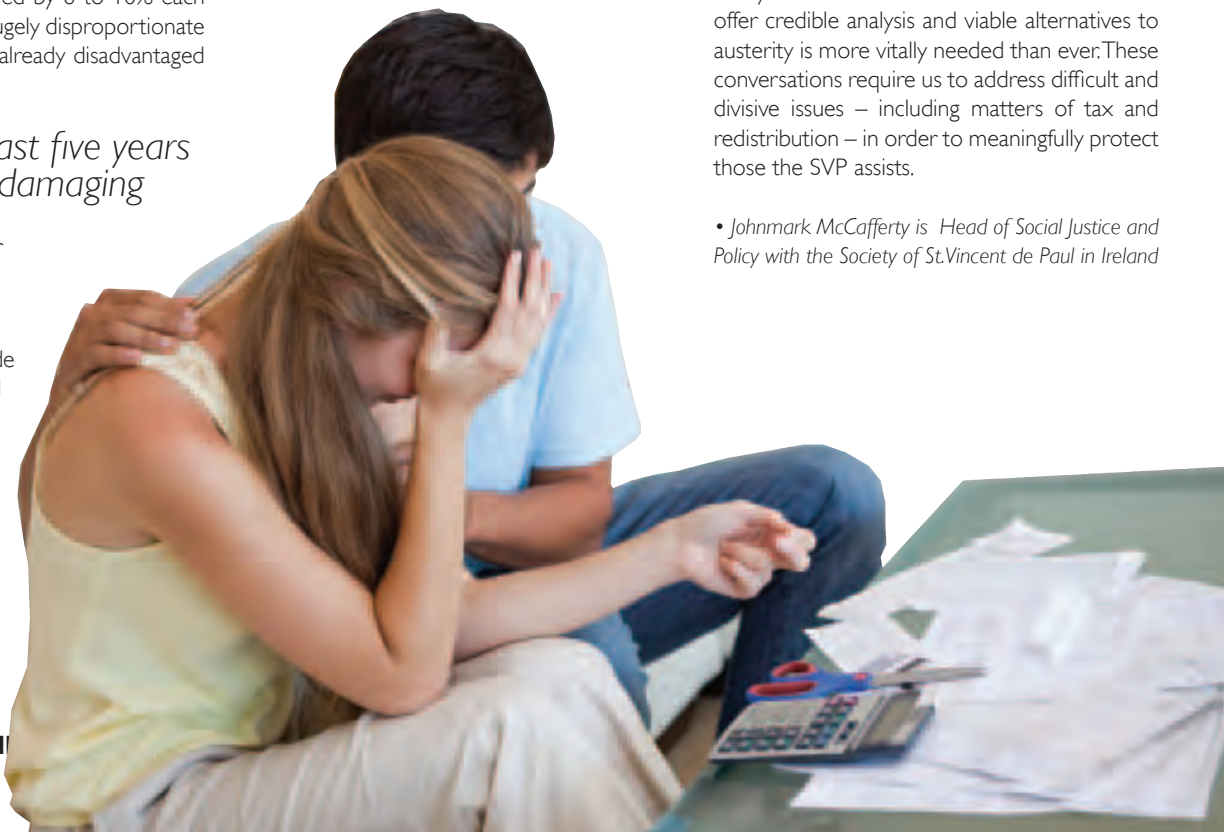
The consequences of the above cuts will mean that spatial poverty – that is, poverty in particular places, will probably be much higher as a result of the above decisions. We already know that parts of our towns, cities and rural areas are more deprived than others and budget decisions over the past 5 years will serve to reinforce this phenomenon.

'immiseration' – not just poverty, but deprivation and misery

Between the cuts to household incomes and the reduction in local community supports in successive Budgets, more of the people we assist are faced with the prospect of what Brian Harvey calls 'immiseration' – not just poverty, but deprivation and misery. The SVP has met the International Monetary Fund and conveyed to them the impact that the recession and austerity are having on the various people and household types the Society assists.

The Troika will hold their quarterly review of Ireland this Spring and the SVP is due to meet with them in February, around the time that the Finance Bill goes through the Oireachtas. As these meetings with the Troika and Government become more specific and challenging, our ability as a social commentator and advocate to offer credible analysis and viable alternatives to austerity is more vitally needed than ever. These conversations require us to address difficult and divisive issues – including matters of tax and redistribution – in order to meaningfully protect those the SVP assists.

• Johnmark McCafferty is Head of Social Justice and Policy with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland



President General **in Kildare**

The President General of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul, Dr.Michael Thio, spoke highly of the value of the Society's specialised work in Ireland in developing a system of shops throughout the country which act both as a service to the public in selling goods ranging from clothing to furniture and also in the resource they provide for people to make contact with the Society if they need help.

He was speaking at the new SVP shop in Kilcock, County Kildare, which accepts donations of good quality furniture and clothing for resale to the public after being recycled, cleaned and prepared for sale by the Society.

"The Society must use every method of making contact with those in need, but in doing so can also provide a vital service to the community through these shops which also sell goods at a reasonable cost and can provide them with no cost if needed to do so, when and where people need help. These are specialised services and the presence of the shops is an indication to the public of the presence of the Society throughout Ireland."

The Kilcock shop is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and can be contacted by phone on 01 6284269.

** Kildare members pictured
with the President General*



Follow that bus!

On average, car drivers in rush hour can spend over 15 minutes in every hour either stationary in traffic, in a queue of cars or moving at less than 5 m.p.h. And some of this time can be spent behind a bus. Marketing analysis showed the SVP Northern Region that 64 per cent of people responded to seeing an advertisement on a bus. So they decided to advertise on buses operating throughout Northern Ireland. This was done throughout October, November and December on a total of 210 buses and all at a very reasonable cost so that the advertising campaign benefited the Society's work.



BANSHEES ARE REAL In a Donegal Shirt in Derry!



The 'Banshees,' are an adult Irish dancing troupe from Coleraíne in Co.Derry which raises money for charity. In the past year they raised £5,000 for organisations dealing with Autism, Alzheimers and Dementia. At the University of Ulster they supported the annual Society of St Vincent de Paul / Salvation Army Joint Christmas Family Appeal. This partnership began in 1997. During the Appeal toys and gifts are collected for disadvantaged children, young people and families, distributing gifts to more than 11,500.

At the University of Ulster a 'dance-off' was held and Fr.Raymond McCullagh, a member of the Banshees, wanted to wear a Donegal football jersey during the jigs and reels! Local newspaper, The Derry Journal, put out a call to help and Donegal supporter James McCarron answered with a jersey which Fr.McCullagh wore at the fundraising night – and his efforts were rewarded!

"I was dancing to 'The Hills of Donegal' at the fundraising event and, in view of Donegal's tremendous success in this year's All Ireland Football Final, I thought a Donegal shirt might bring me good luck. I was proved right when the judges announced that my partner, Rossanna Morrelli and I had come first! I had chosen the song and wore the Donegal shirt in honour of my Ballybofey cousins."

Eight professional dancers and eight novices took part in the 'dance-off' which was won with the Donegal shirt and stg£2,500 was raised for the joint SVP/Salvation Army Appeal.

- Fr. Raymond McCullough and his dance partner, Rossanna Morrelli, are pictured after winning the Jigs and Reel Fundraiser. Fr. Raymond is wearing the shirt with Donegal manager Jim McGuinness's autograph on the back.

POSITIVE POWER

Report and Photo: Joe Dalton



Tony Power wrote a book "Insight to Positive Power" about his fight against cancer and presented it to the SVP in Waterford as an indication that self-understand and acceptance can help an individual's approach to life.

At the SVP South-East Regional Office at Henrietta Street in Waterford, as shown in the photo, he made the presentation to Margaret Conway, Waterford Area President and Mary O'Brien and Declan Carroll of St.Otteran's SVP Conference.

In 2004, Tony was diagnosed with biatrial clear cell carcinoma cancer on both kidneys and was given 30 days to live. He decided to refuse chemotherapy and is still alive today "as a witness that self-understanding and acceptance on the journey within, can be miraculous in its own way."

As a way of acknowledging this and sharing the good news, he decided to bring together the inspirations that helped him on this journey. The title of his book is "Insight to Positive Power" and he donated the book and its copyrights to the Society of the St. Vincent De Paul for the benefit of the people of Ireland.

SVP PUTS RETURNED EMIGRANTS IN THE DRIVING SEAT

A family who returned to Ireland in March after six years in Australia received a 'top gear' welcome home and an early Christmas present, courtesy of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The Cullen/Rolston family of Dundalk (Alex, Caroline and baby Oisin) were the winners of a Nissan Qashqai +2 in the SVP North-East Region's Car Draw. Caroline is a native of the Co. Louth town and the ticket was bought for them by her dad, Frank Cullen.



Photograph shows Alex, accompanied by Caroline and baby, Oisin, receiving the car keys from North-East Regional President, Michael O'Keeffe, who thanked the public for their support.

NEW SHOP IN PORTARLINGTON

Portarlington has its first SVP shop. The new charity store has been opened on the Main Street in the town as a support in raising funds for the Society and in providing assistance to those less fortunate in the community.

PLAN TO BUILD HOUSES IN BALLINASLOE

The SVP in Ballinasloe has applied to the Town Council for permission to build a housing scheme. The proposal under consideration is to build 17 single-storey terraced homes.

From Dublin ot Omagh

The Tyrone Association of Dublin contributed the proceeds of their fundraising activities to the Omagh Area Council of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. In County Tyrone there are SVP Conferences in Omagh, Drumquin, Killyclogher,

Dromore and Fintona, where the Society of St.Vincent de Paul provides help in many ways, such as food, heating and education to those in need of assistance in the community.



Photo shows Michael Donnelly, Area President SVP and Phil McKenna, St. Columba's Conference President Omagh, receiving £3,000 cheque from Donal Donnelly and Tony McGrath of the Tyrone Dublin Association.

NEWBRIDGE DAY CARE CENTRE

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul runs a Day Care Centre at Station Road in Newbridge, County Kildare on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, providing personal and recreation facilities, including a laundry service and also arranges occasional outings for older people, all intended to help them maintain an independent lifestyle in their community. It also provides a meals-on-wheels service in the area

and a mini-bus service. The President General of the SVP worldwide, Dr.Michael Thio and his wife called to the centre during a visit to Ireland. The President General praised the work of the centre as a "strong carer to the community, a great service."

- The SVP Newbridge Day Care Centre can be contacted on phone 045 433184



NEW NAVAN PRESIDENT



Annmarie Kennedy

The SVP in heavily-populated Navan has appointed a new Area President. She is Annmarie Kennedy, who has been a member of the Society since 2008 when she joined the local St. Oliver's Conference. Annmarie, now with the town's St. Clare's Conference, replaces Catherine O'Connor, whose term has expired. Her professional background embraces counselling and psychology and she is a Director/Administrator of the Dublin-based Aislinn Education and Support Centre for survivors of institutional abuse. Annmarie says she is looking forward to the challenge of assisting activities in Navan's five SVP Conferences and helping the progress of the Society's two busy local shops. She is currently involved in advancing plans to establish two new Conferences in the Navan area - Bohermeen and Kentstown/Yellow Furze.

TULLAMORE VINCENTIAN FOR 50 YEARS



Seamus O'Dea

Seamus O'Dea, a native of Templemore in County Tipperary, where he was born in 1924, has been honoured for his dedicated commitment to the Society of St.Vincent de Paul for over 50 years. A teacher by profession and a passionate sporting enthusiast, particularly for Tipperary hurling, he has been a staunch member of the Society in Tullamore, Co.Offaly, where he gave dedicated service to the community and built strong links to that end with other organisations including the Lions' Club, Rotary, the Housing Association and the Irish Wheelchair Association.

Young people show care



St. Louis Secondary School, Dundalk



Scoil Mhuire, Trim



Our Ladys Drogheda

Twenty-four Transition Year student groups from nine second level schools participated in the North-East Regional Council's Youth For Justice exhibition in the Nuremore Hotel, Carrickmacross in early summer. SVP Development Officer Attracta McNeice says that this third year of the event in a row was the most successful to date in terms of the number of entries. Once again the programme, which is about inspiring young people to understand and take action on social justice issues, provided the opportunity for the pupils to help others in a practical way.

The student enterprises included befriending the elderly and those with special needs, adopting a family for SVP; If You Don't Wear It Share It campaign; shared reading projects with primary schools; Christmas hampers and carol singing, as well as social research into cystic fibrosis, the cost of a baby and Autism assistance dogs.

In attendance were former SVP National President Mairead Bushnell, 440 secondary school students, as well as their teachers, SVP members and guests. The participating schools were: St. Louis Secondary School; St. Vincent's Secondary School and St. Mary's College, all from Dundalk; St. Louis Secondary School, Carrickmacross; St. Oliver's Community College, Drogheda; Our Lady's College, Greenhills, Drogheda; St. Aidan's Comprehensive School, Cootehill; Scoil Mhuire, Trim; St. Brickin's Vocational School and Ardee Community College. Each Transition Year class put together a display board about their project and all did an engaging three minute presentation.

SVP Organiser Attracta McNeice involvement in the SVP Youth For Justice project helps young people find the good in themselves and see the good in others.

WATERFORD STUDENTS LEND HELPING HANDS

Childcare and Social Care students from Waterford Institute of Technology, College Street Campus, Waterford and their lecturers

gave their help to the Vincent De Paul Annual Appeal in Waterford City centre.

Photo: Joe Dalton.



Tralee Opens New Furniture Shop in difficult economic climate



The Tralee Society of Saint Vincent De Paul have taken the bold step in the current economic climate of opening a state-of-the art furniture premises at Friary Lane, Tralee directly across from their current store. This project has been developed over two years and the initial response from the public has been very encouraging according to Christy Lynch, SVP Tralee Area President.

The store is accepting all donations of beds, furniture, tables, lockers, wardrobes basically anything that is classed as furniture within the family home once the donation is of a reasonably good quality. Collections and deliveries can be arranged within the Tralee area and the SVP will appreciate donations for the new furniture store as the proceeds raised are used to alleviate local poverty and help deserving families in need, as are donations of clothes.

In Tralee, Kerry's county capital, there is also a need for new volunteers who, Christy Lynch says, will be "greatly welcomed."

"Anyone that can spare a couple of hours a week and would like to get involved with the Society, do please contact us, we are always so grateful for any new volunteers, new blood is vital within any organisation".

The contact details for the current shop and furniture store are 066 7122706.

• Anyone in need of assistance from the Society should contact the Tralee office on phone 066 7128021 or emergency mobile on 087 7848825.

CHRISTMAS WISHES COME TRUE FOR NAVAN CHILDREN

Report: Bill Lawlor Photo: Peter Gallagher



Catherine O'Connor and Stephen Flattery of Navan St.Vincent de Paul Society get Christmas toys ready for distribution.

Christmas was different for little Johnny and Mary in Navan this year. They made a wish and got exactly what they wanted from Santa - thanks to the town's St.Vincent de Paul Society and local office workers. The children were among those of over 300 hard-pressed families who benefited from the SVP's "wish list" scheme. The members, with the help of the mums and dads, noted the youngsters' toy requests and then set about meeting their aspirations, with the generous assistance of staff in local commercial and public service workplaces.

It started with the office Christmas tree, decorated with tags, each one of which represented a toy voucher costing up to about €80 and which matched the stated desires of the youngsters, as expressed to Conference volunteers by their parents.

Staff members selected and paid for the individual tags which were subsequently collected by SVP members. Toys were bought and stored, handed

over to the parents to provide Christmas-morning joy. Toys donated through RTE 2FM's Annual Charity Toy Appeal were also included.

"We try to put the children first at Christmas," said Catherine O'Connor of the town's St. Oliver's Conference. "One member has the responsibility for compiling a comprehensive toy list from the information provided by our five Conferences. Just like Santa, it's very important that he or she has all the necessary details - boy/girl, age, interests, etc. We write the tags and give them to the various contact people in the local participating firms. It is very much an optional thing for staff. There is no pressure on anyone, but their response is magnificent. Tags are coded according to which Conference visits a particular family. No children's or family names are written on the tags."

Third level students helped the SVP volunteers in the project.

TAXING-TIME FOR CARRICK-ON-SUIR AREA PRESIDENT !



Barry Lonergan, Area President of the SVP in Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary, is pictured here having qualified as a Chartered Tax Consultant with The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland, being presented with his certificate of qualification by the Institute's President, Austin Slattery, at a conferring ceremony in Dublin. His father, Michael, is also a member of the SVP in Carrick-on-Suir where Barry works with O'Sullivan Malone & Co., Accountants and Registered Auditors.

CORK STUDENTS DEFY STEREOTYPE



Report by Katie Cornally Somers, UCC Conference President

Students in University College Cork like to defy the stereotype of students and get positively involved in their community. In November the UCC St.Vincent de Paul Society and UCC Simon Community Society ran their annual Homeless Week. With homelessness still a problem on the streets of Cork, the students run this week every year to raise money and awareness for the cause. The funds from the week go to the hostels that each society works with. With €4,795 raised it was a massive success. Events included a pub quiz, bake sales, a talk by former Minister of State for Integration, Equality and Human Rights, Mary White.

When a lecturer, Dr Lawrence Dooley, heard what the students were trying to achieve, he decided to donate the money raised from a commerce class assignment to Simon and SVP, giving €2,000 to the cause! One event that was run by the SVP Society was a 48-hour Sleep-Out which certainly made a few people stop and think on seeing students sleeping outside the university's Boole Library. The money raised will be used for work experience projects in the hostels and to help keep them operating.

SVP STUDENTS WON THE TOP COLLEGE SOCIETY AWARD AT UCC





A Fixed Star

At the beginning of the year it is usually nice to foresee some hope for the coming months. While we cannot leave last year without acknowledging the worsening financial situation and strain for many households, there are some hopeful themes which we should bring with us into the New Year. As a Christian charity SVP

is delighted with the solidarity shown by the public with our work and with those people we assist. The generosity of the public with their time, talents and resources gives the Society of St. Vincent de Paul great heart and trust for the future. Solidarity and generosity are best demonstrated with compassion, a

compassion that our own SVP members and staff bring to their everyday work. The Society will continue to espouse solidarity, generosity and compassion and it is our hope, as the Social Justice and Policy Committee of the SVP, to bring and encourage those values through our social policy work.

SVP IN TOP THREE OF 'FORCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE'

The Society was voted as the second greatest force for social change in Ireland in a survey by Social Entrepreneurs Ireland. Coming between the GAA and former President Mary McAleese the Society's work as both a charity and community organisation were identified with what 'Irish people are most proud of'. The GAA's sporting and cultural impact in every parish in Ireland led them to top honours with the 'bridge-building' work of the former president being acknowledged as her individual contribution. Political life and the health system scored highly in the 'least proud of in Ireland' section of the survey while NGO's and Charities were described as 'the best performing sector of Irish Society'. A significant aspect of this survey, however, is the finding that Irish people believe that individuals and communities are most responsible for social change – an encouraging message for us all!

CATHOLIC ORGANISATIONS CALL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Seven Catholic organisations working in the field of social justice, nationally and globally, have come together to appeal for a change of direction in Government policy, in and beyond Budget 2013. Drawing on their collective experience they highlighted the wide range of evidence that demonstrates the extremely damaging impact of the austerity policies pursued over the past few years. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, cuts in health, education and social services, reductions in social welfare payments, and increases in taxes and charges have had a devastating impact on the ability of many people in Ireland to maintain an acceptable standard of living and to gain access to needed services. The consequences of austerity measures have not been limited to Ireland, however, as the achievements of recent years in addressing global poverty are threatened by cuts to Overseas Development Aid. Meanwhile, the groups argue, for those sections of Irish society that remain better off, the economic crisis has had a proportionately less significant impact. The participating organisations are: Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference; Council for Research and Development of the Irish Episcopal Conference; Crosscare; Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice; Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Trócaire; Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

COMMUNIONS AND CONFIRMATIONS

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is also working presently with the Catholic Bishops on the issue of Communion and Confirmation costs. The costs of participating in the sacraments have become an increasing concern as expensive festivities become either a barrier or an enormous debt for households. While not wishing to deny families the tradition of marking these milestones for children, the Society is looking for examples and case-studies of practical solutions that Conferences, schools and communities have used to overcome the practice of families over-spending for the sacraments. Please contact Brendan Hennessy at 021-4270444 or Brendan@svpcork.ie with examples.

HEALTH SERVICES, MEDICAL CARDS AND HOME-HELP HOURS

The Society is further concerned about the level of Health Service rationing and the consequent impact on vulnerable households dependent on the public health system. The Society has opportunities through quarterly meetings with the Department of Health to bring issues to the attention of policy-makers. Recently SVP highlighted the difficulties experienced by people obtaining medical cards. SVP wishes to gather information on other health cuts faced by the public and in particular the process for reviewing home-help hours.

The Department of Health and HSE has outlined the following process for reviewing home help and home care supports:

- No one's hours should be taken away without a full assessment of their case.
- No one should be informed of a decision by voicemail. Direct contact is vital. Only in exceptional situations should this be carried out by letter
- A clear mechanism is to be put in place for the review of individual decisions. A designated individual is responsible for ensuring that such reviews are carried out in as timely a manner as possible.
- An escalation process to a senior manager is to be in place so that cases can be properly reviewed

* Anyone with examples of such cuts please contact Audry Deane at audry@svp.ie or 01-8386990.



“A Fixed Star’ takes its title from the words of SVP founder Frederic Ozanam... “Justice is a fixed star which human societies try to follow from their uncertain orbits. It can be seen from different points of view, but justice itself remains unchanged.”

Everyone needs a helping hand in life these days.

The SVP gives a helping hand to those in need. Contact the SVP in your local area, through our offices nationwide listed on page 2 of this magazine or through our national website: www.svp.ie



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