

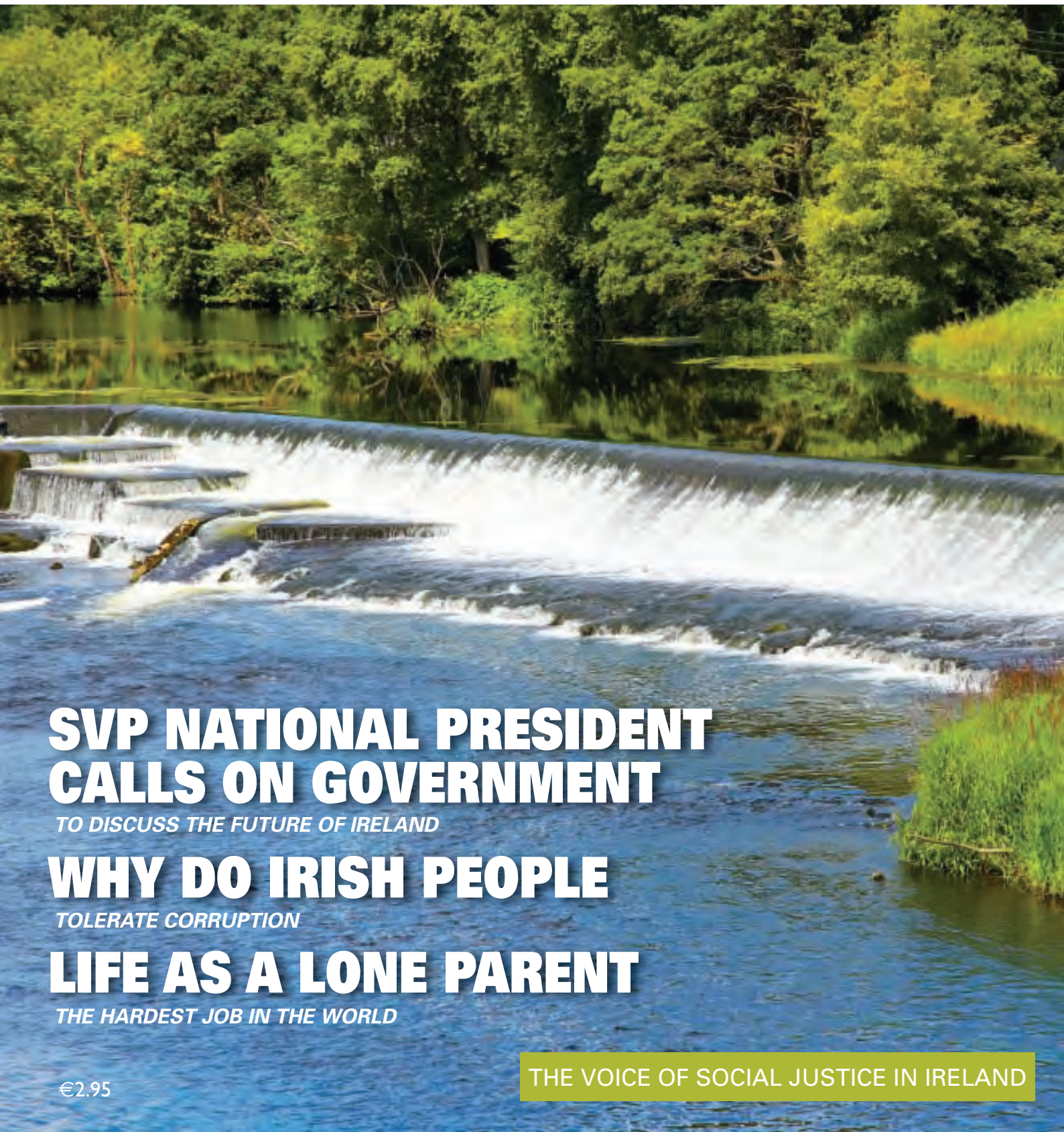
THE

SPRING 2014



BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



SVP NATIONAL PRESIDENT CALLS ON GOVERNMENT

TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF IRELAND

WHY DO IRISH PEOPLE

TOLERATE CORRUPTION

LIFE AS A LONE PARENT

THE HARDEST JOB IN THE WORLD

€2.95

THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

“God Had Other Ideas For Me”

Life can bring many changes, some radical and very unexpected. This story of a pilot from World War II who saw the horrors of the Nazi concentration camp at Belsen and became a Franciscan, because ‘God had other ideas’ for him, is taken from the book ‘THE TIMES & THE JOYS’ by Clonmel Photographer, Donal Wylde.



The concentration camp at Belsen had a life-changing effect on Bro. Columbanus Deegan, a former Royal Air Force pilot. He joined up aged 17, in search of adventure and was trained as a Navigator and later promoted to Flight Lieutenant. Just before the D-Day landing in Normandy, June 1994, he was given a mission to find and examine crashed aircraft with an eye to making them airworthy or stripping them down for parts and despatching them back to Britain.

It was while doing this that he heard of the horrors at Belsen and went to investigate, to find he was among the first Allied personnel to enter the camp. He never forgot the picture of hell he saw that day: “I couldn’t shake off the smell of death,” he recalled years later and even then, he had “flashbacks and the smell returns as if it was yesterday.”

He had intended to marry, settle down in his native Dublin but, “God had other ideas for me. I had a few jobs here and there but I missed the comradeship and brotherhood of the services. That was what attracted me to the Franciscans. Saint Francis himself had been a soldier.”

Bro. Columbanus was Honorary Secretary of The British Legion in South East Ireland for many years and regularly returned to pay his respects to the dead at the War Memorial graves in Normandy.

- Script written by John O’Connor of The Munster Express

‘THE TIMES & THE JOYS’ composed of Images of Clonmel & Tipperary is distributed by Wylde Publishing, Inisheer, Prior Park Road, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.



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

THE IRISH SVP

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EDITORIAL

This is a time of change – with-in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland as it positions itself to deal with future challenges; a change hopefully also in the weather climate from a wet, cold, dark, dismal winter during which bad weather ravaged areas of the country, to the bright hope of Spring. It is also, the Government has declared, a time of improving economic fortunes for the nation. While economic 'spin doctors' and sections of the national media support this view, members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul who are active in home visitation, the basic voluntary work of the SVP, report a different view. People are still struggling to make ends meet and have a different view of national life. On low to middle incomes, without hope of salary increases, they face increasing Government taxes reducing whatever disposable income they have. This challenges economic 'spin doctoring' but policy-makers should take heed as it is the reality of life, underlining the importance of an independent voice for social justice which is the role of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, as expressed in this edition of THE SVP BULLETIN in which we report an SVP research study indicating how difficult it is to be a lone parent in Ireland. The National President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Geoff Meagher, calls on policy makers to start a national debate about the future type of nation which Ireland should become. The debate is difficult and there are no easy answers but that is no reason not to commence the discussion, he says. We have articles on corruption in Ireland, contrasting the delays in Government inquiries, compared with the suffering and anger experienced by thousands of people whose lives have been blighted by the actions of the greedy, corrupt and self-seeking who caused the economic crisis. We question why the national media appears to restrict opinion on national issues to a select number of people, while the voice of the majority is less heard. In a link-up with the Vincentian Partnership for Justice we carry their regular newsletter which stresses the importance of people casting their votes in the forthcoming Local and European Elections, as a means of achieving social justice. We report the voluntary work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul throughout Ireland, which is supported by the people of Ireland, giving community strength to the aim of achieving social justice

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A Time of Change

Challenges in the Charity Sector

We have all seen considerable adverse publicity for the charity sector over the past number of months. I do not wish to comment on any individual case but the reaction of the public to the revelations is understandable. Many of our donors are struggling themselves, the least they should expect is proper use of their funds. The Society welcomes the appointment of the Charity Regulator and having full transparency of information, currently we publish a fully audited set of annual accounts covering all of our 1,200 Conferences including setting out where our generous donors money is spent, details of employees, salaries etc. We also believe that as an organisation we need to continually review and strengthen our practices. That is a process that is currently in progress across the Society.

A New Beginning

This time last year I outlined a number of matters I would like to see the various stakeholders in our country do to make Ireland a better place for all of our citizens. I think it appropriate to restate those again as unfortunately they are still as relevant today as a year ago. My message was –

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.

- To our policy makers the need to start a national debate as to the type of society 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 there are no easy answers, but that is no reason not to commence the discussion,

- For the countless thousands of people we are privileged to help and support we stand 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,

Appreciation

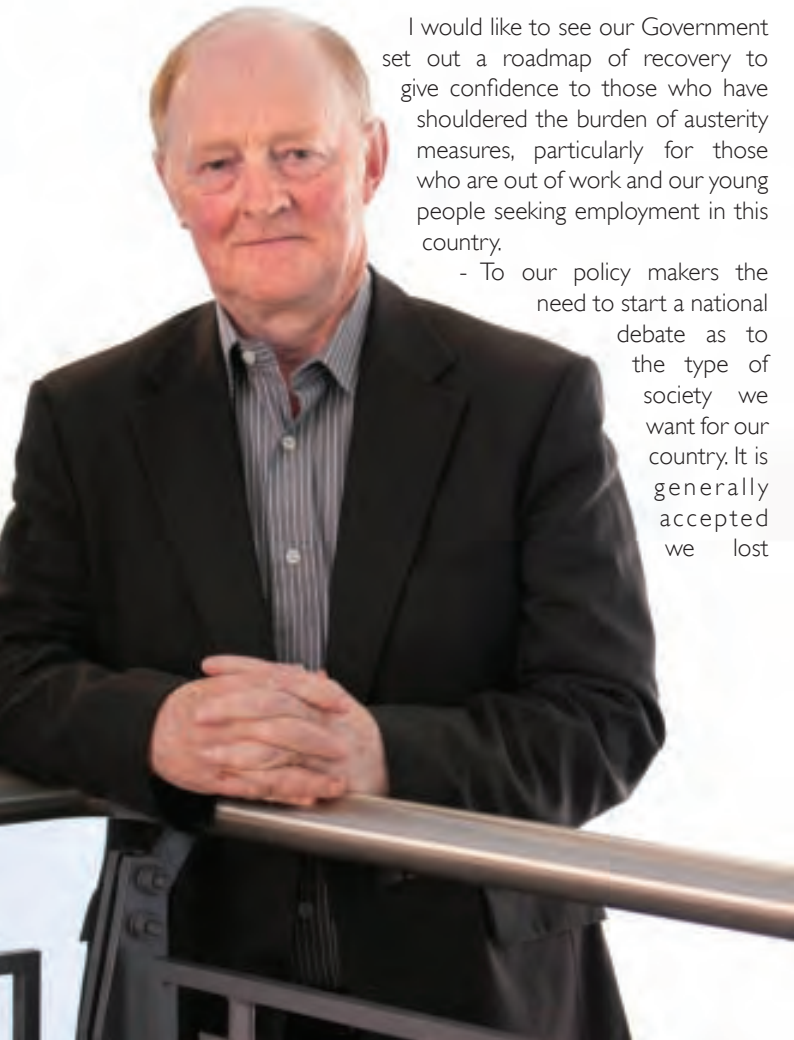
I would like to thank all our hard working Members across the country for all of their commitment and enthusiasm in their work. The challenges are many and varied, we do not have all the answers but we continue to bring support, hope and friendship to those we are privileged to serve. Home visitation remains the key work of the Society and it is important that we keep the emphasis on 'Home'. Whilst I am aware of the pressures some SVP Conferences are under in meeting increasing demands, any compromising on the way we deliver our work, other than through home visitation would be a backward step and to be avoided.

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,

The Society is currently embarking on considerable internal change with the intention of supporting better our 10,000 + Members on the ground, support our Area Presidents to help their Conferences, ensure our staff that are so essential to our work have a good working environment, make sure that the maximum possible of every Euro goes to those in need and finally, give confidence to our Trustees that we have good governance standards. Change is never easy and the tendency is to see it from a local perspective. It is important to remember that the SVP in Ireland is one Society, North and South and that no Conference exists on its own, but all are part of an overall Trust. We all play our part in making sure the Trust remains in good shape. The changes that are proposed will help in that regard. Thanks to all Regional Councils for their ongoing support and understanding in having the changes implemented.

Thank You

To our countless donors and benefactors thanks for the continuing generosity, without you we simply could not provide the range of support we currently give. As we progress through 2014 hopefully we can commence making progress on some of the issues that will make a difference in the lives of those we serve. Thanks again to everyone for your ongoing support.



Geoff Meagher,
**National President SVP Ireland,
SPRING 2014**



LIFE IS AN OPPORTUNITY

LIFE is an opportunity, benefit from it.

LIFE is beauty, admire it.

LIFE is bliss, taste it.

LIFE is a dream, realise it.

LIFE is a challenge, meet it.

LIFE is a duty, complete it.

LIFE is a game, play it.

LIFE is a promise, fulfil it.

LIFE is sorrow, overcome it.

LIFE is a song, sing it.

LIFE is a struggle, accept it.

LIFE is a tragedy, confront it.

LIFE is an adventure, dare it.

LIFE is luck, make it.

LIFE is too precious, do not destroy it.

LIFE is life, fight for it.

- Mother Teresa

A national SVP initiative to examine the experiences of one-parent families on low incomes

PARENTING ALONE ON A LOW INCOME

“It’s the hardest job in the world”

**By Caroline Fahey,
SVP Social Policy Development Officer**

One-in-four of all families are one-parent

In May the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will release publicly the results of exploratory research with one-parent families on low incomes who are being assisted by the SVP under the title: “It’s the hardest job in the world.”

The research was conducted by OCS Consulting on behalf of the SVP last year and earlier this year and involved interviewing 61 lone parents who are being assisted by the SVP around Ireland, as well as carrying out focus groups with SVP members and conducting two on-line surveys.

This research makes an important contribution in a number of ways. It highlights the experience of some of the most vulnerable families in Ireland at a time when they have been subject to cuts in incomes and supports of a greater magnitude than those experienced by any other group. It also adds to the body of research which has been conducted with one parent families and low income households in recent years. It demonstrates the resilience and resourcefulness of the families we assist. However the research also shows that the daily challenges, stresses and strains of constantly struggling to make ends meet on a low income have a very detrimental effect on parents and children and cannot be ignored.

Sincere thanks are due to the SVP members who facilitated the research process by taking part in focus groups and/or by approaching some of the families they are assisting and asking them to consider taking part in the research. Because of the work of our members and staff in the Dublin, Cork, West, Mid West, Kerry and South East Regions, we were able to carry out a unique piece of research with some of the families we assist. The research was overseen by a Research Steering Committee comprised of SVP members and a number of individuals from outside the SVP, which greatly enhanced the process.

In particular we owe a debt of gratitude to the parents who took part in the research and shared their experiences of parenting alone on a low income and being helped by the SVP. Without their honesty, openness and generosity this research would not have been possible.

Why the SVP undertook this research

One-parent families are not a homogenous group and not all one parent families experience poverty and social exclusion. This piece of research is about a very specific group of one parent families who are being assisted by the SVP. However, findings from other research with low income households support the conclusions we have drawn from our research. One-parent families have the highest risk of poverty rate and

consistent poverty rate of any group in Ireland. This was also the case during the years of economic growth. 56% of one parent families in Ireland are going without basic necessities because they cannot afford them. It is not surprising that one parent families are the largest group requesting help from the SVP.

Recent Budgets have affected one-parent families very significantly. In spite of the fact that one-parent families have the highest rates of poverty and deprivation in Ireland, they have experienced the worst cuts in recent years. For example, the cumulative cuts and tax increases that have been introduced over the past number of years mean that a lone parent with one child who is out of work has lost the biggest percentage of their income – at over 11% - of any household type, including those with much higher incomes. The household type to take the next biggest hit is a couple with two earners at €200,000 per annum (Social Justice Ireland, 2013:10).

The SVP believes that the one parent families we help are doing one of the most difficult jobs of all – that of raising children on a low income on their own. The Society is determined to overcome the root causes of poverty and social exclusion. It is in this context that we commissioned the research to further our knowledge and understanding of the one-parent families we assist.

One-parent families in Ireland

Census 2011 identified 215,315 one-parent families living in Ireland. Just under 30,000 of these one parent families are headed by a father parenting alone. One-in-four families in Ireland is a one-parent family. The majority of one-parent families (58%) had just one child. 40% of lone fathers are widowed, compared to 20% of lone mothers. 44% of lone mothers are single women and 30% are divorced or separated. 42.5% of lone parents are at work, compared with 69.3% of the heads of two parent households.

One-parent families are the household type with the highest poverty and deprivation rates in Ireland. In 2011 28.4% of one parent families were at risk of poverty, with 16.4% experiencing consistent poverty and 56% experiencing deprivation (CSO, 2012). Even during the years of successive economic growth, poverty rates remained high for one-parent families.

In 2012 there were 87,918 recipients of the One Parent Family Payment, at a cost of €1.05 billion. 16% of those receiving the One-Parent Family Payment are also receiving Rent Supplement. The shortage of social housing means that 30% of those assessed as in need of social housing support in 2013 were one-parent families.

Development of supports for lone parents in Ireland

This section is based on McCashin, A. (2004) Social Security in Ireland which provides an overview of the development of supports for lone parents in Ireland.

Lone parenthood in Ireland is not a new phenomenon. The Census of 1926 recorded that 12% of children under 15 years of age had lost one or both parents – this is close to the proportion of children living in one-parent households in the mid 1990s. However, the routes into lone parenthood have changed over time, and premature death of a parent has been replaced as the main route into lone parenthood by an increase in non-marital births and marital breakdown. The fall

in widowhood, the rise in non-marital births and the increase in marital breakdown have resulted in an increase in the number of one parent families.

In the past, lone mothers were divided into three categories, and treated differently by the social welfare system. The specific needs of lone fathers were not considered by the social welfare system at the time. Lone mothers were categorised as widows, deserted wives or unmarried mothers. Social welfare payments were first introduced for widows in the 1930s, and then for deserted wives in 1970. The first social welfare payment for unmarried mothers (the Unmarried Mother's Allowance) was not introduced until 1973.

Prior to this, a policy of institutionalisation characterised responses to the needs of unmarried mothers, with Mother and Baby homes established by religious orders. In the late 1920s there were about 1,000 unmarried mothers in such institutions. The preference at the time was for punitive institutionalisation of unmarried mothers, and unmarried motherhood was separated from wider debates about poverty and the development of income supports. The children of women in these institutions were boarded out or adopted.

Many women emigrated to avoid the Mother and Baby home, and in London the scale of the arrival of young pregnant women from Ireland was such that the London immigration authorities constructed a special category of PFI (Pregnant from Ireland) in their annual reports. The media began to highlight the issue of unmarried mothers in the 1960s which made them more visible. When abortion became legal in England in 1967, voluntary and statutory services in Ireland sought to expand the options available to a pregnant unmarried mother – beyond the Mother and Baby home, emigration or abortion – to include support for the mother to keep her baby and live independently. The introduction of the Unmarried Mother's Allowance followed in 1973. The One-Parent Family Payment was introduced in 1997, and consolidated income supports for lone parents.

Changing policy priorities in regard to supporting one-parent families

One of the most significant developments affecting one-parent families in recent years has been the move towards ending long term receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment. This payment could previously be claimed until the youngest child in the family was aged up to 22 years if in full time education. A series of changes which have been made to the One-Parent Family Payment now mean that after July 2015 the payment will no longer be payable to recipients once their youngest child turns 7 years of age (subject to certain exceptions). If the parent is still in need of income support, they may apply for a Jobseekers Allowance Transition Payment. The conditions for receipt of the Jobseekers Allowance Transition payment are less onerous than for Jobseekers Allowance, and allow recipients to seek part time rather than full time employment. The maximum rate of Jobseekers Allowance Transition is the same as the maximum rate of the One-Parent Family Payment.

Many of the supports which are necessary for a successful transition from reliance on social welfare into education, training or employment are not yet in place (childcare and afterschool care being the main examples) while other essential supports have been abolished. The earnings disregard for the One-Parent Family Payment has been reduced significantly; those taking up

low paid employment no longer retain the full medical card for a period of time; the Cost of Education Allowance has been abolished; and the practice of paying the One-Parent Family Payment in addition to Community Employment and other training allowances has been discontinued. These changes are likely to make it more difficult for lone parents to take up education, training or employment opportunities.

Routes into lone parenthood experienced by research participants

For the purpose of this research study a head of a one-parent family was defined as: a person who is parenting without the support of a partner; or with the support of a partner only from time-to-time. The routes into parenting alone can be many and varied and can include relationship breakdown, separation, divorce, desertion or the death, imprisonment or other institutionalisation of a partner. One-parent families can also arise for reasons such as escaping domestic violence or making a decision to become a parent during a crisis pregnancy.

As reported by the research participants the motivations and factors that had brought about this status of parenting alone varied considerably. Marriage break up, be it through separation or divorce, was a common feature amongst those interviewed; many, however, had never been married.

Alcohol and drug misuse and to a lesser extent gambling by a partner were very frequent factors that had prompted a move to parenting alone. Some of the interviewees identified that they needed to move away from a co-habiting relationship so as to treat their own problems with addiction. Domestic violence had also prompted several of the participants to move away from the original family home. A child's disability was also put forward as a factor which had contributed to a relationship break up.

Whatever their route into lone parenthood, the parents who took part in our study had experienced a range of social and economic challenges which had to be overcome.

The full research report: "It's the hardest job in the world": An exploratory research study with one-parent families on low incomes being assisted by the Society of St Vincent de Paul" tells their stories. The report will be published in May.



YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE WHAT POPE FRANCIS IS SAYING!

Johnmark McCafferty, Head of Social Justice and Policy at the SVP, writes a regular blog on the SVP website www.svp.ie. This article is reprinted from the website, reflecting on the relevance of the social gospel of Pope Francis and the basis of his own social justice advocacy work in the SVP. To read his regular blogs go to www.svp.ie

There's a picture of a young boy bawling his eyes out in the face of Pope Francis on The Irish Times front cover. Complete with miniature papal garb, the young 'mini me' pope cries at being somewhat star struck while being presented to Francis. The image has the Pope as a warm character; authentically connecting with people – and his credentials on issues affecting people are now well established.

He's by no means the only Bishop of Rome to talk about social teaching, but perhaps the most effective since Paul VI to resonate with audiences about social justice – at a time when the Church badly needs something to engage people about; to show its relevance in our world. Whatever your own beliefs are, and despite the myriad unacceptable scandals surrounding the Church, the social message of Pope Francis is worthy of attention and, if we really think about what he says, challenges the very structures at the heart of our social and economic systems.

I was a Guinea-pig for one of the first 'livestream' of the Catholic.ie website. The live online broadcast, also involving Trocaire, Social Justice Ireland and the theologian Sarah Mulligan, took place in the old, parquetted floored halls of St. Patrick's College Maynooth. We discussed the relevance of the 'social gospel' of Pope Francis – *Evangelii Gaudium*, and on the basis of my advocacy work with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, I selected the following quote from it:

"It is irksome when the question of ethics is raised, when global solidarity is invoked, when the distribution of goods is mentioned, when reference is made to protecting labour and defending the dignity of the powerless..."

President Higgins has commenced a broad public discussion on ethics at a time of great scepticism in institutions in Ireland, with both the charity sector recently and police system currently under fire. We'll interact with the heart of this debate, from the perspective of people assisting and speaking up for many of those being left behind by Irish society, and by the austerity measures in past and future budgets. Yet if we're not careful, ethics appear so theoretical, making it easier to dismiss in the face of economic factors, vested interests or just more salacious stories in public conversation.

Similarly, 'solidarity' is regarded by some commentators as worthy but dull - and ultimately hackneyed and irrelevant. Yet the compelling message of the book 'The Spirit Level' is that societies with greater social solidarity tend to be more prosperous, safer and more sustainable for everyone. Pope Francis talks about very radical, challenging things – the sharing (put another way, redistribution) of wealth in societies for the benefit of poorer, less powerful people; safeguarding of workers' rights; and 'rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation'. These actions are the very things that make up social solidarity, yet the very things elusively out of reach of Irish Society...for now. If our senior politicians really adopted the principles of *Evangelii Gaudium*, there could be a fundamental shift towards fairness – but of course not everyone would like that.



SECOND TIME AROUND FOR GERRY

**Dundalk Area President
Gerry O’Keeffe is interviewed
by Bill Lawlor**

It is the ‘second time around’ for new Dundalk Area President Gerry O’Keeffe, who has given and continues to give tremendous dedication to the work of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.

He also served in the demanding post for six years from 2000 to 2006 and, in addition to that, having left the Area President role served as Area Treasurer from 2006 until December 2013, though he does have particular experience in the financial sphere.

The now retired bank official joined the Co. Louth town’s St. Oliver Plunkett Conference in 2000 and, as a seasoned community worker with another voluntary group, was immediately appointed SVP Area President. He now succeeds former Area President Liam O’Reilly, who is the North-East Regional Council’s new President.

Looking ahead, Gerry is especially targeting membership, education and fundraising as particular spheres for attention.

He says: “Fundraising has always been a priority for Dundalk SVP and they have succeeded excellently in that in recent years. The Area Council has also traditionally focussed on education - primary, secondary and third level – and I will be working to ensure that that support is maintained.”

With regard to the recruitment of new volunteers, he is concerned that in the past many of these have left the local society within a relatively short time of joining. He wants to arrest this trend by “earmarking” the 40-to-50 year age group.

“While young and old are welcome, in my opinion we are unlikely to get the 20 or 30-year-olds because at that stage they are usually caught up in sports or other interests. In addition, they may be married with children, so family matters occupy a great deal of their time.

“However, if we attract people a little bit older they are likely to have more opportunities to devote a few hours to organisations like the St.Vincent de Paul Society. Usually, their sports careers and other activities will then have ended and their responsibilities to family will not be as heavy.”

He is aware that renewal is very important for Conferences, but says that the Council has yet to devise a policy on how to attract and retain new members. He emphasises that these must be allowed to be “active” from the start.

Gerry, who was a member of Dundalk Lions Club from 1986 to 2000, comments:

“I find that some people in the SVP like to take control and tend to want to do nearly everything themselves. There is nothing really wrong with this. It is just a mentality whereby they don’t want to let go of the reins.

“People who join an organisation expect to do something worthwhile, and I am aware that some who have left did so because ‘there was nothing to do. I would much prefer to see more work and responsibilities being delegated.”

He feels that members should be encouraged to operate in areas that suit their particular talents – whether it be fundraising, promotion or organising Christmas hampers.



**By Audry Deane,
SVP Social Justice
and Policy Officer**

What's on that plate?

Food poverty is complicated and complex.

As a term it stirs up strong reactions and feelings...disbelief, discomfort, shame, defensiveness, denial. Not that long ago, in 2010, the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey found that 21% of school aged children, an increase from 16.6% in 2006, reported going to school or bed hungry because there was not enough food in the house. More recently, the Growing Up in Ireland longitudinal study revealed that 29% of nine year old boys from lower income groups (compared to 19% from professional classes) and 38% of girls of the same age from lower earning groups (compared to 18% of girls from professional social classes) are either overweight or obese.

How can it be true that ten percent of the Irish population experience food poverty while 2-out-of-3 adults and a quarter of nine year olds are either overweight or obese? Why is it that children from unskilled or semi-skilled social class families are more likely to be overweight or obese and less likely to eat fruit and vegetables?

How come our children's diets are so high in salt, fat and sugar? Why aren't we getting the message about healthy eating? It may seem counter-intuitive but food poverty and obesity are two faces of the same toxic coin.

When we look beyond the sound bites the reasons for food poverty and its counterpart unhealthy eating, start to become

apparent. Four factors interact to make food poverty a reality for many families in Ireland:

Accessibility - It's no good knowing what the healthy choices should be if you cannot actually get to where it's on sale. If you live where there is poor, or in some rural cases, no public transport getting to cheaper multiples with good supplies of fruit and vegetables is difficult and can be costly.

Availability: Local shops cannot carry an extensive range of foods and are often curtailed by storage space issues which mean that households which cannot get to the larger multiples are at a disadvantage and have less choice. Throw in disability, manoeuvring buggies and it becomes quite a challenge. Many households are forced to rely on nearby access to local shops, which may be convenience stores. These stores often carry expensive ranges and offer processed foods high in fat, sugar and salt. This situation can severely limit a family's food choices. It can also end up costing more.

Affordability: Lower income families spend proportionately more of their limited income on food yet eat less healthily. Feeding a family on calorie dense foods bought in a local take away or convenience store can make children feel full but has a negative effect on their health leading to poorer health outcomes as these foods contain more fats, salt and sugar. It is a fact that lower income households have less nutritionally balanced diets and have higher levels of diet related health problems. Evidence shows that children from poorer families eat less fruit and vegetables.

Awareness: Some people lack the skills and knowledge to know how to make healthy food choices and prepare nutritious meals for themselves and their families. Low levels of literacy and numeracy, often associated with early school leaving, makes it harder for some parents to navigate the confusing world of food labelling and to understand healthy eating messages. Coupled with less access to family patterns of meal preparation it is true to say that some children don't have access to healthy homemade meals.

To get the statistics out of the waythe technical measurement of poverty now contains a food poverty indicator which was developed from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data conducted by the Central Statistics Office. We now know that certain households are more likely to be at risk of food poverty and to share common characteristics:

- Have three or more children under 18
- Not have a job
- Be parenting alone
- Have a disability
- Live on a low income
- Educated to Junior Certificate level of education or lower
- Live in social housing
- Aged under 40 years
- Report having bad health or a chronic illness

This list could be used to describe many of the households that SVP members meet every week; these are the families and people experiencing food poverty. This means that they cannot afford a meal with meat or vegetarian equivalent every second day, can't afford a weekly roast dinner or vegetarian equivalent or have missed a meal in the last two weeks due to lack of money.

This is all very bad news, for the health of our nation and for how we use scarce resources – namely taxpayers money. Given how clearly food poverty impacts on health status and outcomes it is surprising that to date there has been no co-ordinated approach to ensuring that Government places it high on the agenda.

The SVP has been very active in the food policy and advocacy sphere since 2004. SVP Social Justice was a founding member of Healthy Food for All, an all-island initiative which seeks to make healthy food accessible, affordable and available to low income groups. While it is no longer an active member of this group it continues to lobby for adequate social welfare rates and in particular for more effective and better resourced school food programmes for low income school children. We know that schools are a perfect location in which to both deliver healthy eating messages and to influence the eating habits. We have had a success in this area with the increases in the School Meals Programme's budget allocated by Minister Burton in the last two budgets, and we will continue to press for more.

In a twin-tracked way the SVP continues to help low income households have enough to eat. Offering practical help to low income households through visitation and lobbying for better access by vulnerable groups to a living income will continue to be a priority activity for both members and staff of the SVP.

Sharing and consuming food is an essential activity. We take it for granted. It humanises and connects us in an ordinary yet very authentic way. It is not acceptable to the St Vincent de Paul Society that Ireland's most vulnerable households face barriers which stop them accessing and affording healthy food. We will continue our work to reduce the stark inequality of access to healthy food and the long shadow this casts on the state of health of our poorest citizens.

VILLAGES AND TOWNS OUTSIDE OF THE PALE WILL DIE WITHOUT URGENT ACTION

By Fergus Finlay



Do you know Ballydehob? It's a beautiful village, way down in the South West of our country. Roaringwater Bay is around the corner; there's archaeology and history all over the place; the actor Jeremy Irons has restored a beautiful castle nearby. The people are warm and welcoming and totally committed to their community.

And it's dying. Picture this for a moment. Last Friday night, at 9.30 p.m., three pubs were open in the town. In one of them a traditional Irish *seisún* was under way. Apart from the five or six local musicians who gather every Friday night to share their tunes, there were maybe ten customers. They rotate the *seisún* around the pubs on a Friday night to try to attract a bit of business. Up near the top of the main street a small pizzeria was doing a modest business – maybe eight diners. Two teenagers walked slowly up the street.

And that was it. Nothing else was open at half-past nine on a Friday night. And nothing much could be open, by day or by night. There's no supermarket in the town now (the one petrol station has some basic groceries and it closes at eight). There's no butcher, no greengrocer, no pharmacy, no bank. Restaurants which were once part of the pride of West Cork, with legendary reputations, have all shut.

Everything is gone. The community is trying to buy the AIB building to turn it into a community amenity. But the community itself is dwindling. Young people can't wait to emigrate, even though they are broken-hearted doing it.

I love Ballydehob. I love its people and its character and its charm. And nothing had made me feel bleaker and sadder in years than to see it facing this desperate struggle for its very existence.

Over the weekend, I saw Baltimore, Glandore, Union Hall, Schull, Castletownshend. All the same. Shops closed. Streets dark. Communities struggling for hope and a future.

And I've seen it all over Ireland – right up the West Coast into the North West, right up through the Midlands. I drive a lot up and down to Cork and often I leave the motorway on the way home and drive up the old Cork-Dublin Road just for the relief from the boring monotony of motorway driving.

A couple of weeks ago I stopped for petrol in one of those little towns on that road – it might have been Urlingford, or maybe Abbeyleix. When I was paying for my petrol I remarked to the woman behind the counter that it had been more than a year since I had stopped in the village.





“Aren't you lucky,” she said. “Some of us have to live here.” The thing about this is, I remember all those places from before. Not just from the years of the Celtic Tiger, when all the estates and hotels were built – that are now all barricaded and empty and in some cases ugly and derelict. But from the 70s and 80s and 90s.

Times were tough then too, but there was a sense of hope and community. People were proud of their own place and proud to raise their families there. Now they're increasingly resigned to saying goodbye to their families, one-by-one.

Why is it worse now than it was in the really tough years of the 1980s when emigration was just as high? Why does it feel so much as if these communities are having to live through the economic outlook of the 1950s all over again?

I'm guessing one of the reasons is disparity. I live in the suburbs of Dublin. We shop around for the best broadband packages – whole swathes of West Cork and the West of Ireland don't even have mobile coverage (and that's astonishing in this day and age). We see property prices beginning to rise again – in the places I visited over the weekend there seems no possibility of the ghost estates ever fulfilling a useful function. Even the awful weather of the past couple of months has been kinder to us in the East, by comparison with the terrible battering the West Coast has had, setting them back even further.

There's a commission looking into all this – CEDRA, it's called, or the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas. Pat Spillane is its Chairman and it has a number of members who are all working on a voluntary basis. Looking at its website, it seems clear that up to the middle of last year it held a number of public meetings and gathered and presented a lot of evidence about what was happening in different parts of rural Ireland. In all the presentations, the picture is the same – declining unemployment, significant barriers to job creation, communities struggling to survive.

The Commission seems to have gone quiet since its period of public meetings ended, perhaps because they are concentrating on preparing their report. They have a difficult brief. They're supposed to recommend a strategy to ensure that rural areas, to the maximum extent, will contribute to and benefit from economic

recovery and to inform Government priorities in implementing future actions.

Mind you, they were constrained right from the start by one of their terms of reference, which also requires them to “be cognisant of pressures on the public finances in making recommendations.”

I'd certainly wish CEDRA well and hope that they will be listened to when they do issue their report. But what's intriguing and infuriating about all this is a different point.

It is possible to stir up community action about issues. The current debate about pylons is a case in point – it is one area where local action has certainly stimulated Government responses (and they're the right Government responses in my view). The rebirth of rural Ireland depends on decent infrastructure and decent infrastructure is more likely to happen with community support than in the teeth of community opposition.



But where is the community anger about the death of communities? How are banks, for instance, allowed to walk away from towns and then offer their property for sale to the local community? Why isn't it some kind of condition of our support for them that they are forced to leave a community gain behind? As we slowly emerge from recession, we have to recognise that a two-speed Ireland is in no one's interest. Ballydehob, Castlerea and Urlingford are every bit as crucial to our national development as Sandymount or Glasthule. The last thing Ireland needs is a return to the days when it is possible to look forward to a brighter future inside the Pale and another generation of hopelessness if you live in Ireland.

Forty-five years ago, journalist John Healy published a book called 'No one shouted Stop,' about the death of his home town in County Mayo. It caused a major rethink of public policy at the time and led to a fresh emphasis on regional development.

It's time, surely, for such a rethink again. Only this time, unless someone shouts stop, it's not a town or two that will die but a great deal of our history and character as a country.

Reprinted by courtesy from Irish Examiner.

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- Ballydesmond photos: Teresa McCarthy

HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD IN TWELVE MONTHS

Johnmark McCafferty, Head of Social Justice Policy at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, reflects on the challenges of implementing social justice policies, inter-generational poverty and ethics.

A bold title I know, but let's aim high. Why? Well, because there are generations of Irish families who have never escaped poverty, were never offered the possibilities to succeed in the ways some of us take for granted, and where dependence on the state and, in some cases, reliance on the SVP are the only constants. Despite the best efforts of many families, of SVP members or other organisations, many people are caught in a cycle of disadvantage, becoming more dislocated from work and from society, with the problem replicated in subsequent generations.

Budgeting tools or money saving tips aren't changing people's incomes, life chances or future prospects. Intergenerational poverty is not isolated to Ireland, but nor is there reason to believe this cannot be tackled, with SVP using a variety of means in 2014 and beyond, both practical and advocacy-based. Contrary to the title, we know it'll take longer than twelve months – but let's lay strong foundations for this work this year.

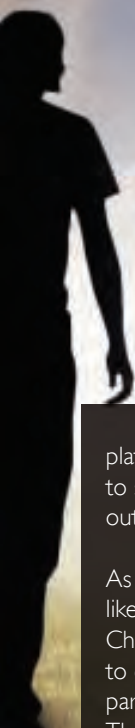
Looking at our work broadly, I guess we're in the business of trying to tackle intergenerational poverty. Using SVP Conference members' practical experience on the ground the social justice and policy team, we are being asked by our National President Geoff Meagher to create strategies to shape policy and ethical debate nationally and internationally, to advocate for equality of opportunity that creates real chances for many and breaks the cycle of dependence. We aim, for example, to fully input to President Higgins' Ethics Debate this year, articulating a fair and socially just society.

We'll seek to end intergenerational poverty through supporting practical initiatives, and via our advocacy work. Practically, we have a new Guide for Visitation and Family Support Conferences

including current social welfare rates. In terms of our social justice work, and reflecting Conference work, there are at least three key ways to tackle the root causes of poverty. These are through: - a social protection system that ensures minimum levels of social welfare for those out of work, facilitates access to work through supporting people into jobs and appropriate, quality labour market programmes, and provides information and in-work payments to help low wage people and families to stay in work long term - adequate and quality services for children at pre-school level, alongside school going education that does not pose undue costs in relation to books, uniforms, service charges or related activities and the provision of child and family income supports that help lift children out of poverty - concerted Government and Regulator action to ensure that energy costs are made more affordable through the provision of payment and budgeting arrangements, fair pricing, ambitious energy efficiency programmes and, when introduced, water policies protecting the poorest households with waivers and charges reflecting peoples' ability to pay.

Probably most of our work will continue to relate to these three existing areas of work.

This edition of THE BULLETIN features articles by my colleague Caroline about our research into the experiences of parents in one parent families who have been assisted by SVP. This research, being finalised at the time of writing, will be launched and disseminated in April and we will also liaise with policy makers on the report's recommendations. It will also help inform SVP Conference work, and its findings will form part of our pre-budget submission for 2015. We also hope that our budget work will feature a strong publically facing campaign later in the year, using our new website and social media as key



platforms for communicating our messages and engaging people to support our work; the bones of which have yet to be worked out.

As we've done for many years, SVP will continue to work with like-minded organisations such as in groupings like the End Child Poverty Coalition to promote child wellbeing, and access to childcare services and education that doesn't have to cost parents the earth. SVP will work jointly with organisations like Threshold, the Private Rented Sector charity, on issues such as better energy efficiency in private rented housing, and also the affordability crisis in this sector which is pushing lower income tenants out of their rented homes and preventing others from moving into the sector. Thirdly, both organisations are seeking a resolution to the current plight of homeless families in hotel accommodation on the outskirts of Dublin. The issue of homeless families in hotels is very distressing: these families are inappropriately housed in hotel rooms without food storage or preparation facilities, living in very transient settings alongside other passing hotel occupants. Parents struggle to bring their children to school, often travelling from isolated hotels, having to negotiate busy roads with no pavements on the edge of the city to get to get to their children's school. In the short term, we'll lobby with Threshold to seek sustainable solutions to the problem of homeless families being placed in hotels.

We'll strengthen our work with other organisations from the same 'family', such as the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, promoting adequate incomes for families and single people in a variety of circumstances. This work complements our own advocacy, seeking a living income for people both in work and out of work.

On the basis of our 'Twinning' work, supporting SVP in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, SVP Ireland is a global player in terms of poverty alleviation. We also work with Trocaire on a number of advocacy events, such as election hustings with political party candidates about how best to tackle poverty at home and globally. This year we'll co-host an EU Parliament Debate on this issue with Trocaire and Social Justice Ireland prior to the European Parliamentary elections. But longer term, we'll assess how we can use our profile and international networks to leverage influence in a more international level with which to advocate for better opportunities for those we assist, not least as an NGO to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We all operate in an increasingly globalised world, where social problems transcend national boundaries. To tackle intergenerational poverty we also need to act and advocate beyond the national systems and engage with wider structural inequality. On this note, I end with a quote from "Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)" by Pope Francis in 2013:

"Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely temporary responses. As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills."



Johnmark McCafferty

Irish Examiner tells Taoiseach he “will be old one day”

A Pensioner tells why he is Frightened

Senior Help Line, the country's only national peer-to-peer listening service for older people received more than 28,500 calls last year, almost twice as many as it can answer and up 5,000 in two years. Cuts to services, loneliness, fear of crime and losing loved ones to emigration has led to a huge surge in calls to the helpline.

According to the Irish Examiner loneliness, brought about by a lack of social contact, is the main reason callers contact the help line.

“Callers have also raised concerns about the rising cost of living, property tax and water charges, cuts to services for the elderly and feelings of suicide,” the Irish Examiner reported.

“I AM FRIGHTENED”

This article was submitted by an ‘old age pensioner’ – the self-description of the author – of 73 years of age, “a former professional worker” who lives in “semi-rural Ireland” to describe the reality of his living conditions.

I am 73 years of age and I am frightened because of living in Ireland today.

I am on a fixed income, the old age pension which does not increase. What does increase is the costs which the Government has been imposing and taking more and more money from the weekly payment I get. €230 does not go far. I can see it being eaten away every week. My wife gets a payment also, so some people think we must be pretty ok, but every day it seems that more costs are being imposed and I don't know who I can turn to. I can't tell my wife that the 'nest egg' we had tried to save when I was working and to put together which we often did not take holidays and denied ourselves what others regarded as 'treats', has dwindled to a frighteningly low level. We have tried to help our children with their costs and they needed help, many parents did this. But the lump sum nest egg doesn't get renewed and so there is less and less.

Property tax, a couple of hundred Euros a year, add to that water charges at another couple of hundred a year; I don't think that Michael Noonan the Minister for Finance is living in the same world as I am. He made it dearer to have health insurance my wife and I both need. We had to cut it down this year and that worries me too because I don't know what we will do if we face a situation where the cover we have is no longer enough.

The car we use as we live outside the nearest village and have no transport other than this needs replacement, but there is little hope of doing that. The insurance for the car is also a pretty heavy cost to us in our current circumstances and because I'm over 70 I can't even get the same length of licence as other people, just another discrimination the elderly must suffer.

My wife and I could both do with a break, but there won't be a holiday this year. The house needs some repairs and we are trying to put money together to do those.

I thought Ireland would be a good place when I got old. I worked and paid taxes and contributed for 40 years. Then the Government turns on me and savages the elderly in the Budget and there are media commentators and young people baying for more harsh treatment of the older people, apparently because they consider that we are just benefiting from social welfare. What do they think we did in our lifetime?

We are ordinary people. We never bought a holiday home or speculated on property, we didn't have exotic holidays, we volunteered to help in various organisations, we always did our bit, we suffered in other recessions, we paid 20 per cent interest at one stage on our mortgage and there was no easing of our burden.

I am frightened and worried and then I hear that bankers want their bonuses back and the people in Irish Water who have their jobs because we are being taxed and that is what it is for the essential of living, water, are promised bonuses even before they start work.

It is well for those who can get extra money for doing the jobs they should be doing anyway and the banks aren't as nice as they were to older people. If you can't handle computers, on-line or listen to interminable recorded voices before getting to a human being on the phone line, they don't seem to want you.

Why are older people treated so badly in this State?

Why have I to live my life, what is left of it to me, being so frightened?

Government Ministers are removed from reality. The people who caused the economic problems are not suffering like my wife and I are. Many of them have good pensions, sums of money that amaze me. If only I had half of what they get I would consider myself rich.

I am so worried. There is no one to help me.

I am frightened....

- The European Committee of Social Rights in a report to the Council of Europe said that Ireland's austerity programme has reduced the provisions for the poor; the elderly and those at lower paid wage rates. It raised questions about Ireland's social welfare system, health services and the care of the elderly.

The Irish Examiner newspaper in a strongly-worded editorial in January declared “WE NEED A GOVERNMENT THAT CARES” and said:

“You won’t hear too many robust Dail debates on the plight of the elderly. They have become the forgotten people of Ireland – ignored and all but abandoned. It doesn’t have to be like this. We need a government that cares and politicians who can think beyond the next election. Show us that you give a damn, Taoiseach. You will be old one day, too.”



MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE!

Award for SVP Hostel for the Homeless in Wexford

AONTAS STAR Award recognises outstanding achievements



Though less publicly appreciated than other works of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul, the SVP is the biggest provider of accommodation for homeless men in Ireland. The Society's hostel in Wexford worked with the adult literacy services of the Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board in assisting to develop adult education for 'men out of home.' This partnership, with SVP Ozanam House, Wexford, has been awarded an AONTAS STAR for outstanding achievements in adult education.

'Making a Difference Everywhere' (M.A.D.E.), an education initiative targeting homeless men in Ozanam House Men's Hostel in Wexford won the award in the Leinster category. It was given in recognition of "outstanding work in supporting men who have 'fallen through the cracks' to regain their confidence and live independent lives."

Ozanam House Men's Hostel in Wexford worked with the adult literacy services within Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board in assisting to develop the programme. The main aim and focus of the programme is to encourage the men to return to education, improve self-confidence, self-esteem and equip them with the skills and motivation to take their place in normal society, to enable them to achieve independent living and to ultimately return to the workforce. The programme combines literacy with general life skills. Learning activities took place within the hostel itself. A key part of the programme has been the involvement of the local Adult Guidance Service, which helped each learner to decide on personal action plans. They were encouraged to pursue personal interests in art, horticulture and cooking which helped sustain their participation and to identify opportunities for progression.

Many of those who participated on the programme are living independently of the hostel and are now more engaged with their own communities.

Paul O'Toole, CEO of the new Further Education and Training Authority, SOLAS, presented the winners with their awards at a

ceremony in Dublin. Over 200 people attended to recognise the achievements of the winning projects.

"The range of projects submitted for the awards this year once again highlights that learning isn't just in the classroom," said Mr.O'Toole. "Both the providers and learners have shown that tailored, high-quality learning can occur in many different formats across many different facets of life."

This was the eighth year of the AONTAS-organised awards.

"We wanted to find a way to highlight the tremendous work of adult and community education organisations," said AONTAS Director, Berni Brady. "The awards assessment process is intense. Projects must first submit an application with details about their work. They must demonstrate strong evidence of outcomes for learners. Projects are then shortlisted by a panel of independent judges. The judges meet with each of the projects shortlisted before choosing a winner. This process ensures that winning a STAR Award is really a mark of recognition and quality."

Community coming together in Wexford

The MADE group are a group of men that came together through an Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) a 14-week programme delivered by Co.Wexford Adult literacy Service with a view to helping participants to improve literacy and numeracy skills and to work towards independent living. The objective of the group was to engage them in personal development, life skills and building relationships. At the end of this project the group would have created something worth celebrating – what happened was beyond expectations .

The men encourage and support each other and one of the main positive outcomes is that the participants encourage new entrants to join the group. They have participated in community gardening projects as well as various self-development programmes, exhibitions, outings, barbeque, computer work and much more.

Motivated to change the perception of homelessness in Wexford and the stigma attached to it, the men set about volunteering their many skills to develop a flowerbed in their neighbourhood. The Talbot Green Women's Group were looking for able-bodied helpers to transform one part of their green. At first the neighbours looked out windows wondering who were the eclectic bunch tackling the long overgrown flowerbed. However, over the next few visits and after witnessing the dedication and hard work of the team, the residents in Talbot Green realised the value of the voluntary work being done. The MADE group were appreciated. They have made a positive contribution.

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RADIO AND TELEVISION

“WHOSE VOICES DO WE HEAR ALL THE TIME? WHOSE FACES DO WE SEE?”

TP O'Mahony, Religious Correspondent and Author discusses the issue of why the same people always seem to be used to discuss current affairs on the national media



Okay – listen up! Now the producer had the attention of the room. The message she wanted to convey troubled her: she was about to announce the team's next project. “We're going to do a programme on the effects on local communities of the austerity policies the Government has adopted.”

Was “adopt” the right word, she wondered, given that the austerity programme had been imposed by outside agencies. Just a few days earlier she had watched an interview on BBC One with the actor Ardal O'Hanlon. He got a laugh from his fellow-actor Brian Cox (an advocate of Scottish independence) when they were interviewed by Andrew Marr on the set of *The Weir*, a play by Conor McPherson in Wyndham's Theatre in London. “We've been independent from 1922 until about 2010,” said O'Hanlon, “and then the Germans took over!”

In another interview on RTE Radio 1, a political commentator said the most important people now in Europe were the central bankers. There was a curious irony in that given the mess the banks had created here. Anyway, the disposition of power in the EU was a matter for another day. For now the focus would be on austerity and its effects.

Two members of the team were scribbling on their yellow legal pads. One spoke up. “Concentrating on working-class areas is fine – in theory. But who are we going to get to go on air?”

“All three places have universities,” said the other member. “Why don't we start with sociologists or political scientists? We don't just want local councillors.”

The producer immediately shook her head. “No – no councillors. But no academics either. We want authentic voices.”

“Fine. But what are these voices going to say? We just don't want a series of rants.”

The producer was expecting this. She knew this was a perennial problem in broadcasting. Who should speak for whom? How representative were the panels of people chosen by programme-makers? What did “public service broadcasting” really mean anyway? Which “public” was being served?

Opening up access to the airwaves was an essential part of the democratisation of broadcasting. Controlling access was an exercise in power. “We live in an open society, or so the textbooks say,” she said. “But whose voices do we hear all the time? Whose faces do we see on television?”

The temptation for programme-makers was to pull in the usual suspects – the tried and trusted commentators. She remembered that the present Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, had once referred scathingly during his student days to “the autocracy of the articulate”. But she also knew that to be affective on air you had to be articulate.

The producer had also photocopied and distributed among her team a chapter from a book entitled *Mapping Irish Media: Critical Explorations*. Among the contributors was Rosemary Day, lecturer in media and communication studies at the University of Limerick.

Her chapter was entitled “Listen to Yourself: The Audience as Broadcaster in Community Radio”, and in it Ms. Day had written: “Traditionally, for radio, the audience member has been the listener. However, the relatively new sector of Irish broadcasting, community radio, turns this relationship on its head and works to facilitate the active participation of members of the community in the communication process.”

Not all the team members believed this was still the case. “According to the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, these stations were supposed to be owned and controlled by not-for-profit organisations,” said one staffer. “But how true is this today? How many of these local stations have been taken over by much bigger media organisations – organisations for which profit is the ultimate criterion?”

The producer had to acknowledge that community interests were not best served where commercial considerations predominated. She had also circulated a quote from the American writer, Gore Vidal: “Television is about offending the fewest. In TV the project is not the programme – it's the audience and the advertisers. It's about filling seats”.

“Let's face it, we're up against class bias.” “That's a big element, no doubt about that. There's an in-built hostility to working-class accents.”

“You're trying to strike a balance all the time. You want to provide a platform for the public, but at the same time you don't just want to be seen to be giving a soap-box to every crank, curmudgeon and whinger in the locality.”

“Anyway, the bottom line is that stories of hardship and deprivation are a big turn-off. Austerity isn't sexy.”



Who Is to Blame ?

By Kieran Murphy,
National Director, SVP

'I'll tell you who I blame – the politicians' was a comment I overheard recently on the train as two passengers discussed the state of the nation. This is not an uncommon statement. It raises an interesting question about the responsibility and accountability of government for what has happened to the most vulnerable people in Ireland over the last 5 years. In what way are Government responsible and how are they be held accountable.

Shortly the Society will publish its report **"It's the hardest job in the world": An exploratory research study with one parent families being assisted by the Society of St Vincent dePaul.** It tells the story of many and severe challenges faced by one-parent families. Lone parents have the highest risk of poverty rates of any group in Ireland and 56% of one-parent families in Ireland are going without basic necessities because they cannot afford them. That is shocking. But is no surprise to the 1,000's of SVP volunteers who visit lone parents' homes every week and hear stories of struggles to make ends meet and help with the cost of basics such as food, fuel, electricity, gas and education. Parenting alone is a challenge for anyone but even more so when you are on a low, fixed income and struggling to provide for even the basis essentials for you and your family.

It is not only the Society who is witnessing to the hardships and injustices being faced by our neighbours. The Community Platform, a network of 30 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality recently published its own report. **Now you see us: the Human Stories behind Poverty in Ireland.** The report is the response to a simple question: 'How is the recession, and Government policy, affecting your life?' The report documents, through personal life stories, the 'cumulative impacts of unemployment or poorly paid employment, lack of opportunities and cuts to services and supports over successive years'. Their stories are upsetting to read.

So, who is responsible for this and how should they be held accountable? In a recent Saturday paper there was an article titled **Ask Enda Anything.** Members of the public were invited to send in questions to the Taoiseach. In a reply to a question from a 12 year old girl he replied 'My job really is to lead, to chair, to encourage, to negotiate and to get things done. You see, in Government people give you a mandate and you've got to fulfil that. Ours is very clear: Fix our public finances and get our country working.' I'm presuming that is a fair summary of current government policy: get the public finances back in order and increase employment. Few people would dispute those priorities, except for the fact that they have come at a significant cost for the most vulnerable in our society. So, should politicians have to resign when the intended consequences of their decisions have devastating consequences? I have never asked this question of a Minister but I suspect that they are all highly motivated, well-intentioned and seek to act with integrity. They will say that they have had limited choices and feel heavily the burden when they have to make tough choices. But, it doesn't get away from the fact that an unstated principle of current government policy might be described as the 'Lesser of Two Evils'. You won't find it written anywhere but government policy has been to raise taxes and cut public services in order to address the debt faced by the country, in the certain knowledge that it will have devastating consequences on the most vulnerable.



SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL CAME TO IRELAND 170 YEARS AGO



By Gerry Martin,
SVP Historian

This year the Society in Ireland celebrates 170 years. It is worthwhile to consider where we have come from during this period and to pay tribute to the people who assembled on 16th December 1844 to start the organisation in Dublin. The men that began the Society had the headline of the group in Paris - eleven years earlier - who had set out, as laity, to bring temporal aid and Christian succour to the unfortunate.

Where M. Bailey, at 45, was known as the 'old man' of the fledgling French assembly, the Irish had Redmund O'Carroll, at a similar age, to guide them. Otherwise both groups were generally comprised of young men of belief. They had a certainty of operation and a love of God's less fortunate. O'Carroll was to die three years later - we believe having acquired typhus fever in the course of his charitable work. He is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, in the shadow of Daniel

O'Connell's monument. Redmund O'Carroll should be known and acknowledged by present-day Vincentians as a model of Christian leadership.



CHARLES STREET WEST DUBLIN

Thomas Willis whose 'White Cross Inn', or rooms, was the place that housed the first meeting of the new Society, was an exception to the youthfulness of the early members. Born in 1790, he had memories of the convulsions of 1798; he was a fellow of the Royal Statistical Society and was to write a substantial volume on the condition of the "working classes" of St. Michan's Parish in Dublin - the starting point of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Willis was conscious that his work was of such 'a startling nature as to appear incredible to those whose attention has never been directed to such matters, but I particularly address myself to those whose sympathy with the wretched, or whose avocations in life, prompt them to devise schemes of relief for the appalling suffering of the poor'.

Willis was incidentally a Guardian of North Dublin Union Workhouse. However; the aim of the early Vincentians was to keep the labouring or working classes out of the Workhouse. They regarded it as an achievement when they 'saved' a family from being admitted. They had no time for the Poor Law (Ireland) Act of 1838. Such was the approach of these men, but it was strictly new to them, just fifteen years after Catholic Emancipation had freed them from many constraints suffered by co-religionist. The men came from many occupations but we are not surprised to learn, meeting as they were in the shade of the Four Courts, that many were lawyers. Some were from the Young Ireland movement but not all.

Frederick Lucas, Editor of the Catholic journal, 'The Tablet', had a profound influence on the setting up of the movement in London and Dublin - although he was not, as far as is known, a Vincentian. He was aware of the French Society and wrote regularly in his paper of the value of such a group to the faithful in Great Britain and Ireland. He wrote several articles on the condition of the poor and wrote of the apathy of the State in the matter, and also the indifference of influential Catholics, who could have done much more:





CHARLES STREET WEST SIGN

“Who except the clergy visit the poor? As far as we are concerned, the approved plan seems to be to manage all by a secretary, to avoid all dirty work whenever it can be avoided and to labour by a committee; or we try to do by charity by nothing as vulgar as the sweat of the brow, in which all must labour, but by point genteel, not over-strained exertion of ladies and gentlemen in white kid gloves. We have already endeavoured to introduce to the favour of our readers a French society for lay persons. We refer to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.”

Relief was usually given in the form of a ticket – the practice was discontinued in the 1950s. One of the first practical actions of the Society, we are told in the first report, ‘was to enter into an arrangement with several provision dealers throughout the city, who would give to the poor whatever amount of relief might be marked on the ticket presented to them, and charge the value to the account of the Society’.

The rules of the organisation had been sent to Rome for approval and this was given. Most of the original guidelines are still in force, including prayers before the meetings, spiritual readings, minutes, secret bag, visiting in pairs.

Twelve months after the first meeting, the association had five branches in Dublin – Francis Street, Marlboro Street, Westland Row, Rathmines and Phibsboro. Cork had one unit which was to handle, because of the effects of the Great Famine, an amount of cash greater than the capital. Schull and Bantry were soon to follow. The President of St. Finbarr’s Conference, John Nicholas Murphy, at Cork’s second general meeting in December 1846, was to declare:

“For now, when the country groans beneath a fearful visitation, when famine, which heretofore pined in some dark cellar or lonely spot, now drags itself out into the open day, and we meet it, with haggard and bewildered mien, stalking along our streets and highways, when the people are dying from pure want of food.....who will for a moment hesitate to contribute generously towards the firm and permanent of our Society in this city, and its general extension throughout the country?”

The young Society was soon to be recognised internationally. The Famine had unfortunately put Ireland onto the world’s newspapers, and an appeal had been addressed to the various foreign Councils and Conferences then in existence. The outcome was substantial and the resulting finance was

important for the subsequent growth of the organisation. President-General Adolphe Baudon of the Paris Headquarters was to visit Ireland later and he encouraged the members to set up quarterly meetings, where national and local topics could be discussed and appropriate business transacted.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was, from the start, a lay organisation. Dr. Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, was fulsome in his welcome for the emergent group. He spoke of ‘a new and delicious source of consolation springs up within me’ and he gave the members his ‘pastoral benediction’. Dr. Paul Cullen, his successor, was less welcoming, although his apprehension may have been caused by the lay nature of the Society. He is reputed having said that Ireland had no educated lay men. Cullen, along with the fourth National President of the Society, Sir John Bradstreet, was extremely conservative but they worked well together. They were both in power for roughly thirty years. However, by the end of their lives, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was part of the established arm of the Catholic laity.

This is not to say that the early members could not adopt an independent view of matters which troubled them, and it was the issue of the Queen’s Colleges that caused difficulty for many. The ‘Godless Colleges’ had been condemned by the Hierarchy, but the Society supporters who were also Young Irelanders had alternative views which acknowledged the existence of the Cork, Galway and Belfast Universities.

The language used when reporting the facts of the day is, of course, strange to us. For instance, the ‘Tablet’, of 18th December 1847, told of the money that had been received from foreign Conferences:

“These sums have been expended with the greatest advantage, and with peculiar profit, in numberless cases where the recipients were above the grade of ordinary paupers, and required but temporary assistance and consolation to restore them to an independent position in society.”

170 years old and, despite the revision in language, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is still going strong.



GRAVE OF FIRST IRISH SVP PRESIDENT, REDMUND O’CARROLL IN GLASNEVIN CEMETERY, DUBLIN

CHARLES STREET, WEST – a substantial Dublin thoroughfare in the early 1800s was side-lined following the rebuilt O’Donovan Rossa Bridge (Ormond Bridge) and the development of Chancery Place. The Society’s first home, the White Cross Rooms, disappeared towards the end of the century and the Collier Dispensary (for the relief of tuberculosis) was built on the site. Mr. Thomas Willis, a founding member of the Society, lived around the corner in a house on Upper Ormond Quay, now regrettably no more.

“UNACCUSTOMED AS I AM.....”

By Cathal O'Rourke



The SVP Annual Christmas appeal is a very important event. For our Conference it constitutes the single greatest generator of revenue for the year. As such, it deserves special attention both in planning and execution.

It is the time every year when the call goes out in Conferences "what members will be making the appeal (in the Church) this year?" As fully participating members, most would want to help out. Everybody should be encouraged to do so as differing voices and ideas can offer variety to listeners. The task should not regularly fall on the "same old, same old" voices. Recognising that some members will hesitate or be lacking in confidence about facing a congregation from the pulpit, I am writing these lines by way of support to someone who is thinking of giving the talk for the first time.

I have learnt some lessons about this important Conference activity from regularly drawing the 'short straw' for these annual appeals over the past twelve years. I have no special qualifications in public speaking – I'm just relating some of my own views derived from practical experience of giving this particular SVP appeal and of listening to similar ones from other charities.

Your Purpose

You must first clarify in your own mind what the purpose of the talk is. Clearly this is to ask for donations and to justify that request.

The 'Ask'

Your appeal is not a platform for you to expound to your star-struck audience that you have been awarded a medal by the SVP for twenty-five years' service. It is not about you – it is about asking for money. I've listened to talks that have rambled on about charity work but never got round to asking for donations. Don't feel badly about doing so. Just picture in your mind the most needy person or family that you have visited and tell yourself that you are asking for him/her/ them. You are their voice, they can't do it, it is up to you. Make it easy for your listeners to learn how to contribute. At least once in your talk you should clearly ask for donations and specify how this can be done, e.g. "in the boxes outside" etc.

"We can claim longevity, reputational recognition/credibility, and person-to-person contact as key strengths of ours – all of which make the SVP unique in its role as a charitable organisation."

The 'Justification'

Your request for donations should be supported by some reasons why your listeners should consider giving us their hard earned money - and not to someone else. Remember the increasing multiplicity of charities that clamour for help around Christmas. Luckily we can claim longevity, reputational recognition/credibility and person-to-person contact as key strengths of ours – all of which make the SVP unique in its role as a charitable organisation.

So you might like to mention that we're unpaid volunteers and that the Society has been around since 1844. Highlight the importance we attach to visitation and our unique personalised delivery of help. You could describe in general terms what your local problem areas are. These might be sub-standard accommodation, illegal money lenders, fuel poverty, access to education, etc.

The more relevant to the local scene the better in order to involve your listeners. But beware of identifying any individual cases. That person may be in the congregation listening to you. I like to mention that the money we are given to distribute is spent by the recipients in the local area. Tell your listeners about your main areas of expenditure.

Footnotes

- Remember there is no such thing as a bad short speech. Six or seven minutes maximum would seem appropriate
- Check out the location where you are to speak from in advance. Ask the sacristan to show you how to check/ turn on/adjust the microphone
- Call to the sacristy in advance of Mass time and introduce yourself to the Celebrant so that he knows, at least by sight, who he is to call on
- Know the celebrant's name so that you can publicly thank him for the privilege of speaking
- Don't speak too close to the microphone as it distorts your voice
- Stay in the church after speaking because I've found you frequently will be approached by parishioners with offers of help, or to join.

Now, you have 2014 to prepare your talk. Get to it and good luck!

While public speaking can be challenging and difficult, spreading the word about the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is vital to informing the public.

Christmas 2013 was particularly difficult because of the controversy over the mis-use of public donations to voluntary charities in the health sector.

Reflecting on the period, Cathal O'Rourke, a member of St. Michael's Conference, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, writes about his personal experience of delivering the Annual Appeal talk from the pulpit and urges readers to use his hints and suggestions to prepare. Plenty of time to do so, but what is proposed in this article can be used by SVP members on any occasion when speaking in public about the Society's work is required.

Keep this article on file. It will be useful



FEELING THE PAIN OF AUSTERITY

The recent spell of cold weather which accompanied the storms and severe floods highlighted the plight of many older people, in particular those struggling with poverty or living alone. This edition of Just.Now focuses on the impact of the recession on their lives.

There is a perception that older people have by and large escaped unscathed from the recession. State Pension rates have been maintained and this is used as evidence that older people have been protected from the worst of the economic crisis. This is not the complete picture. There have been multiple cuts to benefits and services and increases in charges which cumulatively have had a very negative impact on older people. The most recent statistics from the CSO show that in 2011 approximately 45,000 people aged 65 and over were at risk of poverty. Moreover, over 11% of those aged 65 and over experienced deprivation. They were excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice consists of

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul,
The Vincentian Congregation, The
Daughters of Charity and The Sisters of
the Holy Faith. Working for social and
economic change, tackling poverty and
social exclusion

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OLDER PEOPLE IN THE RECESSION

The question is rarely asked 'What level of income is needed for a minimum acceptable standard of living?' Since 2001, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) has been seeking answers to this question and conducting research on the cost of a minimum acceptable standard of living. This is a standard of living that meets a household's physical, psychological and social needs. This is calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet their minimum needs. It is a standard of living that no one should be expected to live below.

This article draws on the research of the VPSJ and looks at how the last number of austerity budgets have affected older people in Ireland. It demonstrates the stark reality for those solely reliant on the State Pension and supports for their income.

THE EROSION OF SOCIAL SUPPORTS

When people reach retirement, they have very little scope, if any, to increase their income. Many older people depend on the State Pension and supports to meet their needs. Unfortunately, because of the crisis many older people are facing financial insecurity and

cannot afford a minimum standard of living. Since 2009, older people have seen supports and services, which they expected to be able to rely on in retirement, eroded.

Moreover, many are now faced with taxes and charges that they never anticipated. Coupled with this, is the rising cost of essentials such as gas and electricity.

The 2014 Budget had a number of age specific measures which will impact heavily on older people:

- Tightening the eligibility criteria for medical cards
- The increase in the prescription charge reduction in tax relief on private health insurance
- The abolishment of the Telephone Allowance and the Bereavement Grant.

Without social welfare transfers 88% of people age 65 and over in Ireland would be at risk of poverty. The cuts to the Household Benefits Package in Budget 2013 and 2014 mean a loss of €19 a week for older people. The average weekly income of the poorest 20% of older people had already fallen by 11.5% between 2009 and 2011. The cuts in all of the recent budgets are particularly severe for older people with an already grossly inadequate income. Against this backdrop, many older people are trying to manage a finite income and make do with less. While the State Pension rates have remained unchanged (€230.30 for the Contributory Pension and €219.00 for the Non Contributory Pension), the cost of living is rising and as a result the real value of the State Pension is declining.



THE PLIGHT OF OLDER PEOPLE LIVING ALONE

The VPSJ research has repeatedly demonstrated the particular plight of older people living alone. Older people living alone receive an additional €7.70 per week on top of their pension. However, research by the VPSJ has shown that this payment is insufficient, and despite repeated calls by the VPSJ and other organisations, this payment has not been increased since 1996.

One of the main issues facing older people living alone is fuel poverty. Research by the VPSJ has shown that older people living alone face many of the same costs as a household with two people and home heating fuel is just one example of this. An urban based pensioner living alone in a three bedroom house and using gas to heat the home needs to spend €32.38 (averaged over the year) per week to ensure that their house is adequately heated. For rural dwellers, oil is the fuel most predominantly used, and costs are higher again for a lone pensioner at €43.73 per week.

The cost of home heating is the same for a single person as it is for a couple household, demonstrating that those living alone face a significant additional financial burden in comparison to couple households, yet the Living Alone Allowance does not adequately compensate for this.

Home heating fuel is just one of many costs that pensioners have to meet, there are also many other essentials such as food, clothing and personal care, to name but a few of the costs. The VPSJ research shows that in 2013 a pensioner living alone in an urban area has a shortfall of almost €10.00 per week. For rural pensioners, the higher cost of home heating fuel and the need for a car due to the lack of public transport in rural areas results in a considerable shortfall for this household of almost €87 per week, which when calculated on an annual basis is €4,500.

Urban -weekly costs+		Rural - weekly costs	
Food	€70.29	Food	€68.83
Clothing	€10.56	Clothing	€12.07
Personal Care	€9.80	Personal Care	€10.13

Example of some of the costs for pensioners living alone (data for 2013). The cost of goods and services are broken down to give their weekly costs.

Weekly Expenditure+	Weekly Income++	Weekly Shortfall
Urban €257.82	€248.00	€9.82
Rural €334.63	€248.00	€86.63

+ Includes local authority rent of €30.00 per week
+ + Contributory Pension, Living Alone Allowance & Fuel Allowance

As a consequence of inadequate income, many older people living alone are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. While the State Pension has not been cut in the last number of budgets, a move which the VPSJ very much welcomes, older people, in particular those who live alone, are not immune from poverty and social exclusion.

As we begin 2014 it is important to remember that:

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life." - Nelson Mandela

EMPHASISING THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

JUST NOW JUSTICE BRIEFING

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) was established in 1995 to work for social and economic change – tackling poverty and exclusion. As a means of realising these goals the Partnership facilitates an Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme with people in areas of low-voter turnout. This is strictly non-party political. With the emphasis on helping people to explore their own capacity to work for change, the Programme has a transformative impact on participants. People discover that their vote is their voice.

Sr. Phyllis Lee DC, an accomplished facilitator working with groups the length and breadth of the country, describes her experience of working with people in preparation for the 2014 elections.

“There is enormous interest and enthusiasm on the part of many of the groups to facilitate the Local Government and EU Modules in their own areas. They found the training and resources available from the VPSJ to be excellent and accessible. They are determined that all those who avail of their services will be encouraged and given the skills to register and to vote to identify their issues, to stand up for themselves, to have their voices heard and to bring about a better quality of life for themselves, their families and local community. These leaders have prioritised groups within the community which need immediate attention. Working with them has been encouraging, exciting, energising and a privilege”.

Local and EU Elections 2014

The VPSJ has been working with many and varied groups since September 2013 in preparation for the May 2014 Local and EU Elections. There has been a considerable demand from leaders of groups including Community groups - St. John of God Services; Integration Kilkenny; Respond Housing; Traveller groups; VEC Adult Learning; Crosscare; Womens' Education groups; Youthreach and Local Co. Councils to facilitate the Active Citizens' Voter Education Programme and the 2 modules on Local and EU elections, with outreach staff, adults, students and service users. These groups are located in Celbridge, Ballymun, Crosscare, DIT Mountjoy Square, Crumlin, Kilkenny, Castlebar, Ballinrobe, Longford, Kells, Swords, Oranmore and Tuam. Other groups are located in Clonakilty, Limerick, Ballygar, Kerry, Ballyphehane, Mullingar, Tuam, Loughreagh, Ballinasloe and Connemara.

The Local Government Election workshop explores with participant their needs and those of the local area in the context of the nine main areas of responsibilities of Local Government: Housing and Building, - Road Transport and Safety, Water and Sewerage Schemes, Development and Incentive Controls, Environment Protection, Recreation and Amenities, Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare, Miscellaneous (e.g. voter registration). Participants become aware of the significance for their families and communities of decisions made by their local councillors. While the EU often seems remote from daily life in Ireland, participants in the EU workshops explore the role and responsibilities of MEPs, discovering the importance of electing MEPs who need a strong mandate, as with reduced numbers they seek to represent the interests of Irish citizens and the good of all EU citizens. Participants explore the increasing impact of EU legislation on our daily lives.

Issues Raised by Participants have included

At Local Level - Problems arising from lack of funding for -

- Community Centres and projects
- Facilities for the homeless in local areas
- Making services, transport and buildings accessible for people with disabilities
- Social housing, local transport, and for consultation with local communities.
- Decrease in Community Services and Education Training Programmes at a time when they are most needed.
- Household charges and water charges
- Recent problems from flooding damage
- Dangerous derelict housing estates

EU Level - Risks regarding:

- Neutrality
- Sovereignty
- Sense of EU as “Big Brother”
- Influence of the big 2 – Germany and France
- Challenges for Irish Fisheries and Irish Farmers
- Immigration

SOCIAL JUSTICE PRE-ELECTION MEETING

The SVP is working jointly with Trocaire and Social Justice Ireland to host a European Parliament ‘Hustings’ meeting on the evening of Thursday, May 1st with MEP candidates for the Dublin European Constituency. It will be held at the Wood Quay Venue, Dublin Civic Offices at 7 p.m. – all welcome to attend.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE - BALLYMUN IN DUBLIN IS A DIFFERENT PLACE AFTER VOTERS USED THEIR POWER

In 1997, in a room in one of the then large tower blocks in Ballymun, two members of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) talked to a small group of women about the then approaching General Election and workshops to raise awareness of the importance of voting. The majority of the women rejected the idea. Politicians rarely came to that part of Ballymun and when they did, they did not keep their promises. When the women were told that only two people in one of the tower blocks had voted in the previous election one of them retorted: “More fools they!” The two VPSJ members began to wonder about the value of prolonging the conversation, but one of them said to the six women: “It seems you are happy with the way things are in Ballymun. You don’t want change!” That brought immediate response: “What do you mean -happy? Look at the water running down the steps, the lifts out of order, litter everywhere.... We have no jobs, no sports facilities, nowhere safe for the kids to meet, no childcare services.. No, we are not happy”.

“If you want things to remain the same do nothing, - don’t vote. If you want things to change in Ballymun begin by using your vote. Your vote can be your voice for change,” replied the VPSJ.

That led to the decision to hold an Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme, non-party political, in preparation for the June elections. It was months after the workshops that the VPSJ learned that this group of women had mobilised their families and neighbourhood and organised a Registration Drive in the local shopping centre. Thanks to that small group of women active citizenship became an ever greater reality in that part of Ballymun. The people discovered their power as voters. Ballymun is now a different place.

CORRUPTION AND ITS EFFECTS?

“Power does not corrupt men; fools, however, if they get into power, corrupt power” G.B.Shaw.

- By Peg Hanafin

What does corruption mean? Can it be stopped?

Corruption is present in every country, regardless of wealth, level of development, region or ethnicity. So does that mean it is acceptable and part of the human condition of greed, deception and avarice?

The dictionary says that corruption is “dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power; the impairment of integrity, virtue or moral principle, improper and usually unlawful conduct intended to secure benefit for oneself or another and the misuse of inside information”. Daniel Kaufman, of the World Bank Institute says “corruption involves collusion between at least two parties, typically from the public and private sectors.” It also incorporates a definition that uses “undue influences” -as that of a private corporation over the government or the elite capture of resources; embezzlement, fraud, money-laundering, bribery, extortion, blackmail, nepotism and “putting in a good word...” Although undue influence may be hard to establish, the tracking of this type of corruption can be more problematic and is especially true in wealthy countries where things can be done under the radar by those in power - Like ‘jobs for the boy’s and ‘payback time for favours done’.

Corruption can include incompetency, where people are placed in positions of power though unable to do the job and then rely on consultants and spin-doctors, paid exorbitant salaries that lead to obscene pensions and golden handshakes.

Countries across the world have problems with the abuse of power and corrupt officials, resulting in those who are poor and powerless suffering the consequences. Insider-trading, using privileged information for personal purposes, abusing power and the diverting and siphoning of funds that should be going to services and the lowering or eliminating of services when funds are scarce, affect those in need on a daily basis. The poor also bear the brunt and the undue burden of the cost of corruption because of the distortion in a country’s fiscal framework when budgets are being formed. Because the poor have not the same power and organisational abilities or resources to lobby governments for their needs as those who have wealth and control, governments become biased in favour of influence and lobbying.

Corruption is more than about income, budgets and access. It breaks down trust in authority, gives example for others to follow suit and pollutes how people perceive public officials and those in authority. This erodes the rule of law and people lose faith in

those who they see as having power. According to the World Bank governance web site, corruption is the greatest single obstacle to economic and social development.

Failure to hold people to account for wrongdoing is having a negative impact on International perceptions of Ireland and with Matthew Elderfield, former Financial Regulator, chiding Ireland for not having a system in place capable of holding individuals to account or for tackling white collar crime, adds to the evidence that we do not have a stringent regulator in place.

The number of people designated to tackling white collar crime raises many questions. Just 60 employees that include Gardai, Central Bank officials and the Office of Public Enforcement are provided by the State to combat white collar crime and one might ask is this accidental or part of the powers that be to stymie enthusiasm for implementing rules and regulations? This is intolerable with the amount of known corruption, not to say about what is hidden and filtering out on a daily basis. If so, these powers are guilty by association to the damage being done to every citizen in our State by not putting in place adequate resources to examine and stop corrupt practices.

A survey by the European Commission found that 86% of Irish people surveyed think that corruption is a major problem in Ireland and 70% believe that Government efforts to combat corruption are not effective. The economic crisis has brought corrupt deeds into focus and that not enough has been done to detect, prevent or prosecute those responsible. All we have to do is look at those who brought our country to bankruptcy and are still enjoying the good life, holding on to golden handshakes and pensions that are both exorbitant and corrupt in these times of austerity, when the needs of people who are disabled, old and poor are being crippled with loss of income, services and lowering of facilities. Over 80% of Irish people in that survey believed that corruption exists in our national, regional and local institutions. The Global Corruption Barometer 2013 surveyed 107 countries and 114,000 people and found corruption widespread, with the belief that it had worsened. We can relate to that in Ireland.

The important distinguishing factor among people and governments are the different levels of tolerance to corruption. The difference between what is acceptable in our nearest neighbours, the UK and what happens in Ireland shows the arrogance and a sense of entitlement here, which brings rage to ordinary people.

After church authorities covered up abuse of children in their care, people who donated to charitable organisations around the country are angered over the revelations about how in some charities, their money was spent. This is a new deviation and the corruption, deception and arrogance of those in charge is astounding. This is a new low in Irish society. The ‘fall-out’ damage to all charities will hurt for a long time.

Peg Hanafin, M.Sc. Psy, Rehab.Couns, Dip Psych., is a Counsellor with 35 years’ experience





WATERFORDS GOT TALENT

IN SPADES

Report: John O'Connor, Photos: Pat McArdle

It was my privilege to compare the 5th Annual Combined Teenage Celebration held at The Mount Sion Hall in Barrack Street in Waterford, which was a great occasion displaying the talent of youth and their support for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Organised by Joe Dalton and sponsored by the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Waterford and the Information and Support Unit, this was a celebration of musical talent from students at secondary schools in Waterford City, Tramore, South Kilkenny, Carrick-on-Suir and New Ross.

It has grown to such a big event over the past few years during which it has been staged that this year it had to be moved to a bigger venue to accommodate all who wished to take part.

It was absolutely brilliant and there were some performances that would take your breath away. Without doubt, Waterford and its surrounding area has serious talent in spades.

Taking part were Mount Sion CBS; Our Lady of Mercy School; Waterpark College; Presentation Secondary School; Youth Reach Project; De La Salle College, CBS Tramore; Abbey Community

College, Ferrybank; Scoil Mhuire, Greenhills, Carrick on Suir; XLC Project; Grennan College, Thomastown; St. Mary's, New Ross and Stella Maris, Tramore.

The performers were absolutely wonderful and a great credit to themselves and especially so to their respective music teachers because you could see where the hard work was put in. There were some amazing individual performances and, at times, you could hear a pin drop in a large hall crammed with teenagers who gave confidence building support to each other. There was great fun as well. School rivalry went out the window and it was really nice to see them willing each other on to success. If anybody needed a little boost, the audience gave it to them by clapping along in appreciation.

God knows what the students made of me but I told them I wasn't a 'giddy old geezer' mouthing patronising platitudes just for the sake of it.

I hope they believed me because I was telling the truth.

They were super!



THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING HELPED BY THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL



By Caroline Fahey
SVP Social Policy
Development Officer

“I had nowhere else to turn. And I’d nothing else that I could do”

Home visitation is the mainstay of the work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, where volunteer members visit families and individuals in their homes and provide material and/or moral support as required. Personal contact between SVP members and people in need is the abiding hallmark of our work.

SVP members encounter families in very challenging situations, where severe poverty and financial struggles often influence every aspect of daily life. It is likely that by the time contact is made with the SVP, the household has been struggling for some time. An unexpected expense may prompt a person to ask for help from the SVP for the first time. For others, the ongoing grind of trying to make ends meet on an inadequate income eventually becomes too much, and they request help from the Society. Stressful life events, like bereavement, job loss, relationship breakdown or illness, are often part of the reason that our help is needed.

Explaining the role and importance of home visitation, the Founder of the Society, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, said: “Those who know the way to the home of their poorer brother, whose feet have swept the dust from his staircase, never knock at his door without feelings of respect.”

But what is it like to have to ask for help from the Society, and what is it like to be visited by our members? Does the help we provide make a difference? Can we do better? Research which has recently been carried out with some of the one-parent families being assisted by the SVP provides us with some insights.

Deciding to ask for help from the SVP

“It was hard for me when I had to start writing to St Vincent de Paul, it was like my pride. But I had to swallow it. I had to swallow it because I couldn’t freeze...when you’ve kids your pride has to take a fall.”

Not being able to make ends meet is a source of significant stress for households. The parents who took part in our study noted feelings of failure, distress, shame and embarrassment at having to request help from the SVP. Making the decision to ask for help, and gathering the courage to make the call for assistance was very difficult. Many people were ashamed of receiving support from the Society, and had not told their families that they were being helped. The findings of the research suggest that it is immediate, pressing and urgent need that results in people putting aside their reluctance to request assistance from the Society and asking for help. Requesting help from the SVP was often a last resort, when the person felt that they had nowhere else to turn.

Being helped by the SVP

“I was mortified ringing...absolutely mortified...never looked for help in my life. Mortified. And they (visiting Conference members) just don’t judge you and even if you’re feeling a bit teary or weepy they sit there and listen to you. They never try to say to you well maybe you shouldn’t do this or maybe you should be doing that. I had nothing to hide because when they called here I showed them everything. They try and help you. I thought they’d be somebody who was quite well off, volunteering, looking down their nose at you, feeling sorry for you and pity. Completely different, completely different in a very positive sense.”

Visiting members and the help they provided were spoken of as having a very positive impact and making a significant difference to the lives of the people who took part in the research. The sensitive and reassuring approach of SVP members was appreciated, and the companionship and advice which members provided during visits was welcome.

The positive aspects of visits as reported by the interviewees included the value of having someone to talk to and a non-judgemental listening ear; the provision of financial help with specific problems that the household was facing, where there was a focus on the well-being of the parent as well as the children in the household, where members acknowledged and understood the struggles that the household was facing and the feeling that the SVP is there to be called on in times of need.

“Yeah, they were lovely. They understand, there’s no, when they came in I had my dole, and I wanted to show them the proof and there was none of that. They were like, listen, here we know you’re struggling. Which was good because it’s embarrassing bringing up the whole, going around telling the story in your head, and then when the person comes you’re telling it again, it gets embarrassing.”

However, some respondents felt that they could not ask for the type of help they needed. A number of respondents felt they needed more help, but were reluctant to ask for more or what they felt might be seen as asking for too much.

In spite of generally positive experiences of receiving help from the SVP, many of the parents who took part in our research were reluctant to contact the SVP for more help in the future if they needed it. They were embarrassed to ask for more help and many said that they would only ask in a very urgent situation. This suggests that SVP is often only called on when problems have reached crisis point, which in turn makes it more difficult for SVP to



provide the kind of help that would change a family's circumstances rather than just mitigate the hardship at a particular moment in time.

Making a difference in the longer term

The research suggests that it is often an immediate and urgent need for help with a specific issue (e.g. energy costs, food, unexpected bills) which prompts a request for SVP assistance. The assistance provided by SVP members with these immediate needs was deeply appreciated by the respondents and had a positive impact on their day-to-day life, particularly in terms of relieving stress and worries.

However SVP members often wonder whether the help we provide makes a difference in the longer term. It is likely that the relief of immediate hardship and stress does have some positive impacts on the family in the longer term because unless immediate needs are addressed it is not possible to move beyond short-term thinking and crisis management and to begin to think about the future. Because a mother's education level is so closely related to her child's well-being, education presents itself as an ideal opportunity for the SVP to make a difference in the longer term.

Many of the participants in the research expressed a desire to develop new skills and enhance existing ones, or to take up employment and discontinue drawing social welfare payments. SVP members who participated in the research also noted the importance of providing help with education as a route out of the cycle of poverty. Where the SVP was helping with education costs and other bills for parents who had taken up education or training, it made a huge difference not only in terms of relieving the financial burden of being in education, but also in terms of helping the person see a brighter future for themselves and their children.

Conclusions

The findings of this research suggest that a level of need can remain hidden even from SVP members who are carrying out visits and who may have an ongoing relationship with a family. The friendship and

support provided by SVP members may help to build up a more accurate picture of the needs in a household, however because of the embarrassment felt by so many at having to ask for help from the SVP this is likely to be challenging. SVP members proactively asking about specific issues may be helpful as it may give the person in need an opportunity to ask for help with something that they did not feel comfortable raising. It may also be useful for SVP members to ask the person they are assisting whether or not the help they provide is meeting the needs of the household.

Sensitivity and tact are important elements of the home visitation experience. It will always be necessary to check in with a household to see whether their circumstances have changed.

Finally, the research highlighted the extent and depth of poverty which is being experienced by many of the households we help. The help SVP provides with immediate problems and difficulties makes a big difference by addressing those problems and taking some of the pressure off families.

One of the key findings of this research is that the social protection system and Irish health, housing and education services are not responding to the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in Irish society. The impact of austerity and the cuts to social welfare and supports for education, employment and training have made some very difficult and challenging situations even worse. SVP's help in this context is invaluable to those who receive it. The research also demonstrates however that having to resort to help from a charity to make ends meet can be a very negative experience, no matter how sensitively the help is delivered. The SVP's unique system of person-to-person contact and the important role played by providing support and friendship can mitigate the negativity of the experience. But until all individuals and families have an adequate income, timely access to good quality public services and clear pathways out of poverty, the SVP must continue to respond to the call to bring the love of Christ to those in need and to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality through our social justice work.



YOUNG SVP: A NORTHERN REGION CELEBRATION



Report : Becca Gallagher SVP, National Youth Development Coordinator

THREE HUNDRED Young SVP students from all across the Northern Region came together to celebrate and acknowledge the work they have accomplished and the projects they have engaged in over the past year. I was honoured to be invited and privileged to have the opportunity to join this celebration.

A huge amount of preparation and work went into the organisation of the event and Claire Morgan, Youth Development Officer in the Northern region is to be commended on putting together a truly special event that captured the very essence of what it is to be involved in the Young SVP Programme and the overall Society of SVP.

All 43 schools / groups registered to the new Youth Programme in the Northern region were extended an invitation to attend the Annual Youth Day held in the Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown. On the day members from 15 different schools / groups attended, along with their teachers / leaders. Also in attendance were a number of SVP members, SVP staff and other groups working in the area of Youth Development in Northern Ireland, bringing the total number to over 300.

The groups prepared individual displays highlighting the work they have engaged in, the projects they have undertaken and the impacts of their engagement in the Young SVP programme.

Throughout the day students and young people had the opportunity to walk around and see what other groups have been doing and talk about their projects. Each group was also interviewed and filmed providing highlights of their actions and engagement with Young SVP. These will be included in a DVD which will capture the activities and events of the day.

Once the displays were set up the whole group were invited to engage in some ice breaker games which were run by Coorymeela members; these games saw 289 students engaged in fun games and activities all in a relatively small space. These games set and captured both the atmosphere and the tone for the rest of the day, which some may have described it as mayhem but I saw the following coming through; teamwork, celebration, encouragement, engagement and enjoyment!

Grainne Lee, a former member of QUB SVP Conference and currently the Northern Representative on the National Youth Committee, made a short presentation to the full group about her experience within Queens University Conference and provided information about ways for young people to continue their engagement with SVP after their school Conference experience. This was very well received as was the next part of the day - lunch served by the staff of the Glenavon Hotel, after which each group engaged in one of six workshops. The topics were as follows;

- i) Jesus & the Poor
- ii) Effective Citizenship
- iii) Poverty in Northern Ireland
- iv) Social Exclusion
- v) Human Rights
- vi) Make your own campaign

Workshops were facilitated by SVP members who had kindly given up their time to attend and help out on the day, support that I know was really appreciated! The young people engaged with these interactive workshops where they were provided the opportunity to explore the meaning, relevance and impact of their work within SVP and within society more generally.

After this exploration and engagement three inspiring and motivating presentations were made;

- 1) Fr. Raymond McCullough – SVP Youth Chaplain/University of Ulster Coleraine Campus Chaplain: Speech on the importance of working within your local parish/community
- 2) Wayne Denner – Beat the Cyber Bully: Speech on social advocacy through social media
- 3) Mairead Eastwood – Mid-Ulster Area President: Speech was to thank all young people for attending on behalf of the Regional Council.

Claire Morgan, Northern Youth Officer, brought the day to an end thanking everyone for their attendance and said she is looking forward to seeing more of everyone in the coming months. Aidan Crawford, Regional President Northern Region commented: "The Annual Youth Day in the Northern Region was a great day and it was so inspiring to see so many young people in the one place on behalf of SVP. These young people are the future of the Society and now the seed has been sown for future work."



UPCOMING SVP YOUTH EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Sat 5th April – Dublin SVP Schools 5km Run (contact Deirdre Walsh YDO Dublin for more information)

Wed 30th April – Youth for Justice Exhibition North East Region (contact Attracta McNiece YDO North East for more information)

Thurs 1st May – Youth for Justice Exhibition Breffni Region (contact Sharon Tuohy YDO Breffni for more information)

Thurs 8th May – Youth for Justice Exhibition Cork Region (contact Sue Pearmain YDO Cork for more information)

Thurs 16th May – Dublin SVP Schools Sunshine House Day (contact Deirdre Walsh for more details)



MURPHYISM VERSUS LARKINISM – the struggle continues

By Padraigh Yeates



ones made during the war. Whether the actors are speaking in clipped public school accents or comic cockney ones the dialogue is probably the most sophisticated and effective agtprop you are ever likely to hear – advocating the sort of social solidarity values Britain needed if it was to survive, let alone win, the war. I was one of the beneficiaries of those values reflected as they were in free education, free health care, slum clearance and full employment. It required considerable effort and ingenuity to avoid working for a living, as I discovered when I left school. These values came under attack almost as soon as the war ended. Ironically Britain was excluded from the US Marshall Plan to save Europe from communism. The new Labour government had to introduce severe austerity measures to repay all the money borrowed from

Murphyism versus Larkinism – the struggle continues in 2011. A lot of things we hoped would happen, such as the Wrap on Liberty Hall and the performance of The Risen People in the Abbey. A lot of things didn't, such as the decision of the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee not to mark the Centenary of the Lockout. It seems commemorations are only welcome if they generate money and don't pose awkward questions.

What interests me most about the Lockout is its values, which were inculcated into me at home. My parents were literally children of the Lockout. They were born in the tenements in 1911 and 1912. But I grew up in post-Second World War Britain. I still like to watch Second World War movies – I mean the old black-and-white





Britain's gallant ally in the West to fight the war and simultaneously had to fund a massive defence budget to confront its former gallant ally in the East in case there was a third-world-war.

The Tories won the 1951 general election on an anti-austerity platform. Churchill dismissed the welfare state as 'Queuetopia'. He said, 'We are for the ladder. Let all try their best to climb it'. 'They', meaning Labour, were 'for the queue. Let each wait in place until his turn comes'. The core values of the next 14 years of Tory rule were immortalised by Harold McMillan in his 1959 election slogan, 'You've Never had it so good'. This was only surpassed by Maggie Thatcher in 1987 when she told 'Woman's Own' magazine there was 'No such thing as society'.

A reaction against the regimentation of the war years and the hardships of the austerity years was inevitable. It just happened to be the wrong one. The triumph of possessive individualism slew many collectivist dragons along the way, of which the trade union movement was the greatest. Unions, which had led the battle for social and economic justice across the industrialised world in the first half of the twentieth century, slowly sank into little more than alliances of sectional interest groups whose agendas were frequently hijacked by the most militant, sometimes the most selfish and occasionally by the most short-sighted pressure groups among the membership. They often mouthed the slogans of the Left but they paved the way for Thatcherism.

Of course any movement is ultimately the sum of the people it represents and the new generation, my generation, the beneficiaries of the welfare state, were not interested in hackneyed ideas of social solidarity. They not only bought into the low tax, easy credit, value free consumer model but in the process pulled up the ladder behind them. Today they are discovering that the devil's bargain that once only locked out vulnerable low income groups is now denying a future to many of their own children as well.

In Ireland the sequencing of this process was somewhat different but the rhythm of change was the same. Some of us who thought we were engaged in a revolutionary struggle to change society were actually trying to turn the clock back to the 1940s, to the high water mark of left social democracy and revolutionary communism.

We cannot turn the clock back but we can be driven backwards. I don't believe we have much of a future if we don't make our

starting point the sort of social solidarity values that made post-war Europe a better place. Murphyism and its slimmed down neo-liberal model have nothing to offer except another terrifying round on the roller coaster of boom and bust, yet there are no signs we will abandon it anytime soon. We continue to foot the bill for unsecured bank debts, we continue to allow free marketeers to dictate economic policy, we continue to march blindly towards a pensions time bomb and allow public services to be dismantled while we focus on irrelevancies like property tax. We are not the sum of the things we own, rather we are their slaves. But this obsession with property does expose the poverty of our ambition across the political spectrum.

Is it being too ambitious to hope that we can at least guarantee our children, and grandchildren, the same basic rights and opportunities I grew up with in post-war Britain almost 70 years ago? James Plunkett shared those social solidarity values; what I suppose we can christen the values of the welfare state. If we are to challenge the rule of Murphyism, we have to have the courage to demand the basic requirements of any civilised society - free health care, free education, free childcare, a secure roof over our heads and a decent pension in old age. This is hardly Larkin's New Jerusalem but it would be better than life in the cellars of the New Babylon. William Martin Murphy's heirs have nothing from The Risen People if they are poor in spirit.

Padraig Yeates is a journalist and trade union activist who wrote the book "Lookout" about the 1913 Labour Dispute.



Children look for food during the 'Lookout'

Northern Region

PARISIAN VISITATION

Report: Mary Waide
Mid Antrim Area President

Northern Region members who travelled to Paris to celebrate the Bicentenary of SVP Founder Frederic Ozanam had a troubled introduction to the French capital, in a coach where air conditioning broke down on an extremely hot day on the way from the airport to the city, followed by finding that their intended hotel had no bookings for them! After several hours of exhaustion and thoughts of refugees without a refuge, alternative accommodation was found. Over several days of the 'pilgrimage visit' the group went to several Vincentian and Ozanam locations.

These included the beautiful church of the Miraculous Medal in the Rue de Bac. It was here that the Blessed Virgin appeared to St Catherine Labouré, and a number of visionary experiences resulted in the minting of the Miraculous Medal. What a wonderful privilege to attend Mass, celebrated by Fr. Perry in this sacred space where lies the body of St Louise de Marillac, the Foundress of the Daughters of Charity, and where St Catherine Labouré's remains are interred below the floor. Here too is a silver reliquary containing the heart of St Vincent de Paul. Mass ended with the words; "Let us go to share the place and love of Christ, the Evangeliser of the Poor" (St Vincent de Paul).

A visit was made to the chapel of St. Vincent de Paul, the Mother House of the Vincentian Community where the body of St. Vincent lies in honour over the high altar and time was given for personal prayers. The museum in the Vincentian House gave a glimpse into the life of St Vincent and his humility was evident in his worn and tattered clothes and footwear. A walk of the Left Bank transported the group into the footsteps of Frederic Ozanam and Vincent – here was their world and the spiritual readings at Conference meetings came to life and were given meaning and realisation. In every church, Vincent looked down from the spectrum of stained glass windows, depicting scenes of his life, his love for the poor and his care of homeless children. In the gothic cathedral of Notre Dame, thousands of tourists milled around the few who prayed silently.

Our group also visited the University of the Sorbonne and sat in the same lecture theatre as did Frederic Ozanam – an unforgettable feeling of connection to our Blessed Founder. Interpreters were provided and the representatives of the Northern Region were formally welcomed to a conference on Frederic Ozanam. A packed lecture theatre was addressed by leading academics from all over France. A call was also paid to SVP international headquarters – a much smaller building than imagined, but no less impressive. This was a reminder that SVP is an international organisation with hands which reach across the world to help all who are in need of assistance. Conferences can become little islands and forget that we are one Society. Around the corner from the International Office is the Church of the Trinité, which has close associations with SVP. Seats were reserved at the front of the church for the Irish delegation at Sunday Mass and we were greeted by the President of the Paris Conference and also the past International President who was instrumental in the cause of the Beatification of Frederic Ozanam. Mass was a joyous celebration

concelebrated by about forty priests and a huge congregation filled the church. On the final day of their visit the group attended Mass at the tomb of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, an experience of a lifetime. Our Spiritual Director, Fr. Perry Gildea, had prepared a special liturgy. Mass was celebrated beside the tomb, which lies in front of the magnificent fresco of The Good Samaritan. The pilgrimage to Paris was momentous.



NO ROOM AT THE INN FOR THE NORTHERNERS



BETTER RECEPTION AT SVP INTERNATIONAL OFFICE



FR. PERRY GILDEA AND AIDAN CRAWFORD AT TOMB OF FREDERIC OZANAM



COMMUNITY
RESPONDERS

COMMUNITIES SHOULD RESPOND

NATIONAL NETWORK LAUNCHED FOR COMMUNITY CARDIAC RESPONSE Report: Colm Dempsey

CFR Ireland"- Cardiac First Responders Ireland – has been launched to act as a national network for all cardiac responder groups in Ireland in order to share information and support, and provide assistance to any community that wishes to start a responder group.

It was launched at 'Respond 2014,' the first national conference for First Responders, which was held in Tullamore at the start of March. The aims of the conference were to bring together the many groups from around the country that are running local cardiac responder groups and public access defibrillator schemes.

This was the brainchild of Dr. David Menzies and John Fitzgerald of County Wicklow Cardiac First Responders, who have over 30 CFR 'Responder Groups' and nearly 500 members in County Wicklow.

Respond 2014 received the full backing and support of the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council of Ireland (PHECC) The National Ambulance Service, The Irish Heart Foundation and The Centre of Emergency Medicine UCD. With an attendance of over 300 from all corners of Ireland, the conference was opened by Martin Dunne the Chief Ambulance Officer for Ireland. Delegates were then presented with a number of lectures.

Key note speakers were Professor Bryan McNally of Atlanta Georgia USA, speaking about improving cardiac arrest outcomes. Dr. Cathal O'Donnell, Medical Director of the National Ambulance Service, spoke about the interface between Cardiac First Responder Groups and the ambulance Service to improve the outcome for cardiac arrest victims.

One of the highlights of the conference was when a video of the BBC programme Helicopter Heroes was played which featured the crew of the Yorkshire Air Ambulance having to treat their fellow team member Chris Solomons for a heart attack he was having when he arrived to work. Their treatment and care of Chris

was being filmed by the BBC cameraman when Chris went into cardiac arrest, and the paramedics needed to commence CPR and use their Defibrillator to shock Chris twice, which successfully returned Chris's heart to a correct beating rhythm.



CHRIS SOLOMONS - A RESPONDER HIMSELF AND LIVING PROOF OF THE SYSTEM

Unbeknown to the delegates at Respond 2014 Chris Solomons was present at the conference, and was then introduced as the next speaker. As Chris arrived on stage he was greeted with rapturous applause from the delegates.

Under the heading of cardiac arrest – the view from the other side, Chris described his experiences of that day. As Chris himself said ... "he is living proof that early CPR & Defibrillation saves lives."

There was a range of workshops at the conference, which featured:

- AED & kit selection for CFR Groups
- CPR Academy
- Social Media for local responder groups
- Setting up a Cardiac First Responder Scheme
- Training and Skills Maintenance

Barry O'Sullivan of PHECC pledged the full support of PHECC to the new body CFR Ireland and thanked all the delegates for volunteering their time to help save lives in their communities.

St. Vincent De Paul Conferences can assist in the saving of lives in their communities. This can be done by promoting CFR Ireland to their local communities so that any locals interested in starting either a local public access defibrillator scheme or a full cardiac responder group may have access to supporting information on how to go about getting started.

- **More information on the CFR Ireland website: www.cfr.ie**





By Eamon Devlin CM

KEEPING CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS AND NOT X-MAS

The National Spiritual Director of the SVP in Ireland Gives His View

Annually, usually on cue with Christmas, a row rumbles through the country. The catalyst is the removal of a crib from the foyer of a public space, an objection to the time given in school to planning the Nativity play, or the growing trend to replace the greeting “Happy Christmas” with “Happy Holiday” or “Season’s Greetings!”

The debate tends to get stuck in the opposing trenches of protecting sensitivities and political correctness gone mad. Trench warfare is sadly an appropriate analogy because movement is miniscule on this issue and in general both constituencies are long since well and truly dug in. The fact that the issue tends to be seasonal and associated with Christmas has not been helpful either. Emotions run high at that time of year and nostalgia and sentiment are unhappily wrapped around the issue making reasonable debate more difficult.

In our Catholic tradition Sacramentals have always been important. Ours is an incarnated spirituality where the use of visible aids to prayer and devotion are helpful and desirable. Cribs, Calvary scenes, Shrines to the Mother of God adorn our churches and also dot our countryside.

Other Christian denominations are less enthusiastic. It is useful to note then that the annual debate is not necessarily a sacred/profane one between believer and secularist.

That said, is there any way we can move it forward?

Are believers sincerely convinced that those who wish to remove all visible signs of Christianity from civic spaces and shared workplaces are engaged in an Anti-Christian pogrom? Is this the sharp end of the wedge? And if it is, what will it lead to? More importantly, what could be a Christian response to what is happening?

If we look back, before we look forward, the human spirit’s irrepensible search for meaning has always found an external manifestation in our landscape. Mountains, valleys, woods and wells have provided focus for retreat, renewal and reflection. Christianity rightly resonates with this deep yearning and embraced the places and spaces that enabled people to externalise the spirit’s search. The Calvary and the Crib in village, town and city are extensions of this yearning. Even in more overtly repressive times such as the suppression of the monasteries and places of worship in these islands, the Faith of the people could not be reduced to the private sphere, all external sacramental and symbolic aspects wiped away. Why has this been so throughout our history? Surely this has much to do with the fact that at a very deep level the disciples of Jesus have always resonated with the fundamental truth of faith in Him, one that is rooted in “spirit and truth” as the Lord Himself described it in St. John’s Gospel.

As Christians we are the living stones that make up the Mystical Body of Christ. Every manifestation of our Faith, Crib, Calvary, Cross and Shrine is a reminder of that belonging to Christ, that Communion of Faith, but never a replacement for it. Remember who we are, immerse ourselves in that belonging to Christ which is our baptismal dignity and calling and all will be well.

No power present in our world or yet to come can separate us from the love of God, which is visible and clearly so in the person of Jesus Christ.

• Fr. Eamon Devlin CM is Provincial of the Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission – the Vincentian Fathers. From Derry, he has been working in St Peter’s, Phisborough, Dublin, for many years, as well as with the Homeless and Travelling Community.



MORNINGTON TODAY

FIFTY YEARS OF PROVIDING HAPPY HOLIDAYS

In 1962 SVP Drogheda Area Council were asked by Central Council of Meath to help in the purchase of premises, with the aim of providing holidays for underprivileged people, old and young. The current site in Mornington, on 4.5 acres, came on the market shortly afterwards and, being ideally situated near the sea, was purchased with the cost being donated by a friend of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Plans were drawn up, the premises built and the Ozanam Holiday Centre was opened in July 1964 by William Cashman, President of the Society in Ireland and blessed by Dr. John Kyne, Bishop of Meath. St. Joseph's Conference was formed to be responsible for the everyday running of the Centre.

At that time the Centre consisted of a 52-bed dormitory, bedrooms for stewards, kitchen bathrooms etc., an alcove for use as an Oratory with a bungalow for the Supervisor.

In 1968 a special building consisting of 4 bedrooms, sitting-room and a kitchenette was built for the domestic staff employed during the Summer. The next addition was an Oratory for prayer in 1971. At this time, because the Centre was 2 miles away from the nearest bar, it was decided to register the premises as a Club for

the Vincentian family, thus legalising the supply of intoxicating liquor to the visitors. At that time it was decided that spirits would not be provided but by 1985 miniatures of spirits were sold. In April 1975 a new wing with 16 double bedrooms and a TV room was opened by National President Bob Cashman and blessed by Dr. John McCormack, Bishop of Meath. Following the building of the new wing the Society was approached by the North Eastern Health Board and asked if they would co-operate with them in providing a Day Care Centre for the elderly in East Meath and South Louth. The Society agreed by providing suitable rooms and catering, with the Health Board providing the Professional Staff. The Day Care Centre functions all year round from Monday-to-Friday and is still in operation today.

In 1979 it was decided that the Holiday Centre would cater for senior citizens only. The kitchen & food store were extended and the original dormitory accommodation was converted into an additional 16 twin bedrooms. In 1982 a new dining room was added and the original dining room became the Day Room. In 2006, Mr. Frank Johnson who had attended the Day Care Centre, bequeathed his cottage to St Joseph's Conference and the proceeds of its sale allowed for further development - the Frank



SVP's Success Story at Mornington by the Boyne

**Report: Valerie Campbell,
Manager,
Ozanam Holiday Centre,
Mornington**

Johnson wing of 8 new bedrooms to be constructed bringing total accommodation to 32 ensuite twin rooms in the Centre. 2012 saw the addition of more recreational features - an all-weather bowling green, putting green and a garden feature.

The original committee was headed by John Wallace. Members included Maeilosa O'Riain, Patrick Gogarty, Tom Gerrard and others. Kathleen O'Neill joined in 1987, was elected President in 1990 and remained with the centre until 2011. Kathleen passed away in 2013 aged 89. St. Joseph's Conference has been very lucky with the great dedication of its Presidents and members over its 50-year history, who collectively have made the Ozanam Holiday Centre what it is today.

MORNINGTON AS IT WAS

The Ozanam Holiday Centre in 2014 again offers holidays to the over-55's on a full board basis for 6 nights with 5 nights of live music and dancing. The Centre operates through a dedicated team of Conference members, Staff, Local talented Musicians, shop and bar volunteers.

On its 50th Anniversary the Centre's overwhelming quality is the friendliness and good will which develops between people from many different walks of life from all over Ireland and beyond.

Mornington looks forward to welcoming many more people, old friends and new friends, for many years to come.



A Fixed Star



Hearing the Voice of Need

Emerging data from the SVP client case management (CCM) system is showing clearly the reliance of many Irish households on charitable assistance. The SVP CCM system shows overall numbers of people assisted, their presenting needs and how they are helped. This information allows SVP monitor its own services but also to bring greater evidence to policy makers of our work and our experience on the ground. The system is being rolled-out presently and therefore does not yet project a national picture. However, the huge potential of the system is becoming clearer as more and more Conferences and offices are using it. This information provides an overview of SVP work at national level, but it is also possible to extract information that will be of huge relevance to conferences, areas and regions. At present the SVP social justice and team is analysing this information in order to inform our policy positions in relation to education, energy, housing and health.

SVP concerned about inappropriate use of hotel accommodation as emergency housing.

The terrible lack of social housing in Dublin is seeing vulnerable families being housed in hotel and hostel type accommodation. SVP members have shared their experiences of trying to assist these households and express first hand their concern about the impact of such communal and transient living on children. In some instances families are at a far remove from schools and family support. There are apparent hazards to children in

terms of the physical environment but also where families find themselves in hotel accommodation without access to cooking facilities or other basics. While the Dublin Homeless Executive have taken steps to improve this situation they stress that with homelessness on the rise generally, and existing homeless accommodation at full occupancy that it is the chronic shortage of available accommodation that is at the core of the problem. In the short-term SVP, and other agencies, have put forward our concerns and proposals to the Dublin Homeless Executive to address the immediate need. However, in the longer term Irish Society and Government needs to re-examine the dependence on the private rented sector to provide such accommodation and indeed perhaps it is now time for Government to prioritise capital expenditure (and the consequent job creation) on meeting the social housing needs of over 90,000 households on social housing waiting lists.

SVP contributes to NESC discussions on housing

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) advises the Taoiseach on strategic issues for Ireland's economic and social development. Caroline Fahey, SVP's Social Policy Development Officer has been one of the four representatives of community and voluntary organisations on the Council since 2011.

NESC is currently working on the issue of housing, which was previously examined in 2004. The context has changed hugely in the past ten years, although many of the same problems remain.

Discussions and proposals will centre on how to ensure the adequate provision of social housing and enough affordable and quality rented accommodation for those who may experience affordability pressures in both the rental and home ownership sectors. There are almost 90,000 households in need of social housing, which is an increase of 86% since the last NESC housing report published in 2004. The cost of renting privately is also increasing, particularly in the lower segment of the housing market. The NESC work will look at short and medium term issues in order to influence developments in housing policy.

Conference feedback to Pay As You Go meters

SVP Conferences were invited to give feedback on the Pay As You Go meters to the social justice team. In particular we were anxious to hear about successes, challenges and weaknesses as these perspectives inform our consultations with the Commission for Energy Regulation and individual suppliers. Pay As You Go meters are supplied free of charge to customers in financial hardship, they do not incur additional charges and have a mechanism to deduct outstanding arrears at 25% of the customers vend.

Feedback in the main was positive to the impact for households, and in particular where households were using the facility of the meter to use energy more efficiently. While some households faced delays with installation the main concerns from members were those instances where a meter cannot be installed for technical reasons such as apartments or houses using day/night tariffs.

We are also concerned however that households in need are not differentiating Pay as You Go meters with 'lifestyle' pre-pay meters, which are being heavily marketed at present. Lifestyle prepayment meters come with the following conditions:

- An additional charge for meter rental of €0.37 cent (incl. vat) per day or just under €140 per year.
- Customers are obliged to take a 12-month contract, however if they opt out they are liable for the remaining unpaid rental.
- The companies do not take over outstanding arrears – the customer is still liable for these debts to their previous provider.

SVP does not advocate any particular supplier to people we assist. However it is important that customers consider the costs and the specific terms of use for any supplier.

SVP contributing to national energy policy

The advent of the Pay As You Go meters has certainly been a positive development for households however this does not represent the end of energy issues for the SVP. The cost of energy continues to frighten households and while pricing is an issue we must keep abreast of, it is also clear that more needs to be done for credit (non 'pre-pay') customers in arrears and that

energy use and efficiency is vital to assist people reduce their existing bills. Throughout our lobbying on the Pay As You Go issue SVP called for more statistical data to uncover the actual extent of energy debt in Irish households. Our most recent submission to the Commission for Energy Regulation SVP called for Ireland to introduce similar market monitoring social obligations as in Britain whereby information on disconnections, arrears and payment plans is published on a quarterly basis. The SVP submission can be found on the social justice pages of www.svp.ie

Solutions for Oil Dependent Households

SVP is discussing ways to pilot the Oil Saving Stamp scheme operated across Northern Ireland, and in a local manner in Kilcock, Co. Kildare, with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. SVP members have attended a number of meetings and it is hoped that the scheme could be extended beyond its present local reach. The Oil Saving Scheme has been running for 20 years in Northern Ireland and is one of a number of measures that are being examined in the Republic to tackle the financial strain experienced by households who are dependent on oil or solid fuel for heating.



MONEY LENDERS AGAIN A PROBLEM IN NAVAN

Report: Bill Lawlor

The problem of money lending has again come very much to the fore in Navan, Co.Meath, where the local SVP faces huge problems in dealing with its consequences.



Annemarie Kennedy,
Navan SVP Area President

This recurrent menace has reared its head in recent times in some local housing estates as the battle for many to meet everyday living costs intensifies.

SVP Area President Annemarie Kennedy says it is now “a more frequent problem in the town than ever before” and largely affects people who cannot obtain loans from the banks or credit unions.

“These are vulnerable families and individuals who often feel that their only option is to go to a moneylender if they have an urgent need for cash. But if these people can't afford to save even €5 a week, then they can't afford to repay a moneylender,” she said.

Another major problem encountered by the local SVP in recent times is the growing number of people seeking help to pay for their accommodation since the introduction of new rent supplement regulations.

Annemarie says that this has caused huge problems in Navan where the cost of rented accommodation and leased housing is particularly high. In many instances people are finding it difficult to remain in their homes.

Navan SVP last Christmas distributed about 300 food hampers to the needy. Two hundred of those also received toys.

NAVAN

REMEMBERING MICHAEL ON THE TARA ROAD

Report: Bill Lawlor

Navan SVP will hold another annual fundraising walk this summer from Navan to the historic Hill of Tara.

The 9km event on May 18 is being named 'The Michael O'Keeffe Memorial Walk' in commemoration of the late North East Regional President, Michael O'Keeffe, of Creevagh, Crossakiel, Co. Meath, who died in an accident on his farm on August 9 last. It was his encouragement that helped establish the original holding of this walk almost three years ago. As on previous occasions, it will start from the Ardboyne Hotel, Navan. Further information is available on phone 046-9073547.

Meanwhile, the society in Drogheda held its third annual SVP/ Drogheda Independent 5k fun run through the streets of the Co. Louth town on March 16.

AN EMOTIONAL 40th ANNIVERSARY

KILSKYRE

Report: Mary Lydon
St.Alphonsus Liguori Conference



The celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of our Conference was filled with mixed emotion.

Michael O'Keeffe was one of the founder members of St.Vincent de Paul in our Parish. Aged only 19 years he displayed great generosity and willingness to be part of a caring community from an early age. So the celebration of our 40th anniversary was an occasion was filled with mixed emotion as Michael would have been very proud to welcome everyone and celebrate with all the members the long tradition of St.Vincent de Paul.

The celebrations commenced with a tree planting ceremony in the grounds of Ballinlough Church, adjacent to the local Community Centre into which Michael had a major input in the recent refurbishment. A plaque is in place to commemorate his great contribution to the life of the parish. All the members of our Conference plus invited guests from neighbouring parishes joined with Michael's family his wife Anne Marie, children James and Ruth on the day. A remembrance service followed in the church with readings and music.

Michael was part of every SVP committee within the parish to include farming, finance for Church renovation, Pride of Place, Hall refurbishment and the list goes on. He will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of working alongside him. He was a man of vision and had a tremendous sense of justice and respect for all including those with differing opinions. Many of the great advances in our Parish are attributed to his contribution and wisdom.

BETTYSTOWN

NEW VINCENT'S SHOP

A new Vincent's shop to serve the fast developing Meath seaside resort of Bettystown-Laytown has been opened in the Bettystown Town Centre. This latest SVP retail outlet in the North-East Region provides the 11,000 population in its catchment area with bargain-priced clothing for adults and children, as well as books and bric-a-brac. The excellently fitted out and customer-friendly premises is open Monday to Saturday from 9.30 am. to 5.15 p.m. daily.

Report and Photos: Joe Dalton **WATERFORD**

CHRISTIANS COLLECT FOR SVP

The Maranatha Christian Community Church, Railway Square, Waterford, supported the Society of St.Vincent de Paul's Christmas collection by raising over €2,000. This support was deeply appreciated by the SVP in Waterford when Joe O'Mahony of the Community Church presented a cheque for €2,200 to David O'Neill, Regional Administrator of the Society of St.Vincent De Paul in Waterford. The money was the proceeds of two day's carol singing in City Square Shopping Complex, Waterford, prior to Christmas.



Joe O'Mahony, Maranatha Christian Community Church, presenting cheque to David O'Neill, Regional Administrator, SVP Waterford.



Andy Gilchrist collecting at the carol singing.



Members of the Maranatha Christian Community Church carol singing in City Square, Waterford.



TOY STORY - Hector Helps

The return of radio and TV star Hector O hEochagain to his home town prior to Christmas gave a huge boost to the Navan SVP 2FM toy appeal. Hundreds of fans turned up at the Smith's SuperValu in the local Johnstown Shopping for a live outside broadcast of "Breakfast With Hector ." SuperValu provided the location for gifts to be dropped off to help support families in need. Hector's arrival saw a surge of brightly wrapped donations, with over 300 toys gifted on the day.

Report: Bill Lawlor

BAILIEBORO

NEW VOLUNTEERS MUST BE READY FOR CHALLENGE

SVP North-East Regional Vice-President John Rooney now has an additional role that will see him focus on membership and training. He regards this as central to ensuring that new volunteers are properly prepared for the challenges that may face them – a major aim of the St.Vincent de Paul Society.

He admits that in the past this was not a major area of concentration, but says it has now become of key importance for the successful operation of the organisation. John, who has been a member of St. Anne's Conference in Bailieboro, Co. Cavan, for the past 17 years and is a former Cavan East Area President, aims to ensure that people coming into the Society are given adequate opportunity for structured training.

He points out: "If people don't get this guidance they are not in a position to properly function, especially in the area of visitation. We are now hopeful that when individuals join a Conference, or apply to do so, that their background details will be 'captured' from the time they go into the Regional Office to make an application for membership. That information will form a data base which can be cross-referenced with their subsequent training arrangements. From now on there will be nothing haphazard about this procedure."

As at present, when prospective volunteers have been approved for membership, having had their references checked and gone through Garda Siochana vetting, they will be put on a training session list.

"It is now very important, in view of the upcoming Charities Act and the onus being placed upon senior administrators and the trustees of the society, that our people on the ground adhere to accepted procedures and understand what is required of them," he adds.

While John will not be involved in one-to-one training, he will be engaged in organising training conferences and ensuring that there are sufficient of these sessions to meet the demand.

He will work closely with Margaret MacGowan, the region's Training Co-Ordinator, as well as with the designated trainers within the region.



John Rooney, New Focus on Training

NEW REGIONAL OFFICE IN RAPHOE

DONEGAL



Paul Doherty Architect, Mary Sheridan, Rosa Glacken, George Gill Contractor, Mary McGranaghan Regional Secretary, Kevin Gill Contractor and Eddie Shiels Regional Administrator.

The North-West has a new Regional SVP office at the Diamond in Raphoe which includes meeting and training rooms and a Thrift Shop.

Conference Presidents from all over the Region attended the official ceremony, which was followed by an 'open afternoon' for all members. The premises were blessed by SVP Spiritual Advisor Rev. Martin Cunningham and the Rev. Bill Brown representing the Presbyterian Church. The gathering was addressed by Donegal Deputy Mayor Michael McBride.

Regional President Rosa Glacken cited the commitment and dedication of generations of volunteers, including those present who continue to live out the legacy of our founder Frederic Ozanam. She thanked all those who worked towards the completion of the project and particularly her predecessor, former Regional President Mary Sheridan, who had seen the need for the facility and whose determination and vision brought it to fruition. "This would not have been achieved without the support of the members both moral and financial. As with all SVP work, team work is essential to the success of any project," said the Regional President.

- Contact details for the North West Regional Office, The Diamond, Raphoe Co. Donegal.
Phone: (074) 9173933
Email: svpnorthwest@gmail.com

Former Regional President, Mary Sheridan, now Regional Treasurer and current President, Rosa Glacken, unveil a plaque at the opening ceremony



PRESIDENT HIGGINS OPENS NEW CAVAN SVP COMMUNITY CENTRE

CAVAN



Sister Margaret McElgunn presents President Higgins with a wood carving by local sculptor Joey Burns.

Around 150 people watched President Michael D. Higgins officially open the magnificent new 6,500 sq. ft. St.Vincent de Paul Ozanam Centre in Cavan Town.

The local St. Joseph's Conference is responsible for the headline project, just off Bridge St. It incorporates The Tierney Social Rooms, training area and Stepping Stones Pre-School.

In his address, President Higgins paid tribute to the Conference's founding President, the late Tom Tierney and he also praised the town's SVP and the four Conferences active in Cavan.

The St. Joseph's Conference has a stock of 32 apartments and three houses in addition to the new community centre.

President Higgins told the gathering: "St. Joseph's Conference provides long-term housing for vulnerable people, as well as short term housing for those who need a temporary shelter in order to find respite – be it after a family break-up, loss of a job, or while they recover from an addiction before they move back into the community."

He also complimented the other three Conferences in Cavan town – St. Patrick's, St. Peter's and Our Lady of The Wayside - for their work in the community.

The President and his wife Sabina were warmly greeted by St. Joseph's Conference President Johnny O'Hanlon.

Mr. O'Hanlon acknowledged the financial assistance of SVP's national headquarters, and the input of the late Michael O'Keeffe, former North-East Regional Council President.

St. Joseph's Conference member, Sister Margaret McElgunn, thanked President Higgins, as well as the local community in Cavan for their support and presented President Higgins with a piece of wood sculpture, carved by local artist Joey Burns.

The community facility was jointly blessed by Bishop Leo O'Reilly and Canon Mark Lidwell.

Report: Deborah Costello, Fundraising SVP National Office

DUBLIN

JAILBREAKING STUDENTS

Students from four colleges, Trinity, UCC, UCD and NUIG, took part in Jailbreak 2014 in aid of SVP and Amnesty International. This is Ireland's biggest student charity event, the aim of which is to get as far away from your starting location as possible within 36 hours without spending any money. A total of 320 students took part, with starting points in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

The morning of the event in February in Dublin kicked off in Kilmainham Gaol with over 10, teams eagerly awaiting the 9 a.m. klaxon signalling the start of their 36 hour Jailbreak! Once the signal was given the students dashed! Some students had put plans in place, and headed to Dublin Airport, ferry terminals and train stations, to begin their task of blagging, and pleading their way onto flights, trains and ferries.

Trinity College, was a hive of activity as the core organisers of the event, John Lanigan Trinity VDP and Claire Cullen Amnesty, set up Jailbreak 2014 HQ with a team of 30 Trinity Students. Here they could monitor each teams progress and report on it through social media. It became a race between the colleges.

On their travels, students could collect donations from members of the public for the charities, they could not use this money to aid their getaway, these would be shared equally between the charities. An online sponsorship page was also set up.

Within a couple of hours, teams were heading off to USA, Singapore and a multitude of various European cities. FB and Twitter kept everyone up-to-date and also helped some students find accommodation and airmiles!

Coming to the end of the 36 hours two teams were leading with a Trinity Team on route to Sydney while a UCD team were hoping



Victory in Sydney

to make it to Bali. The winning team Salim and Kyrill, two medical students from Trinity, touched in Sydney with only 20 minutes to spare.

Students reached Dubai, Istanbul, Jamaica, New York, Chicago, Bali, Singapore and many cities throughout Europe. One team joined a skiing group in Tyrol and were officially the "highest" team at 3000m, while a team in Athens donned scuba gear and became the lowest team at -30m.

With the winning team in Sydney, we managed to make contact with Aussies NSW, who met up with Kyrill and Salim. Finn and Lulu a UCD team, who were in Singapore met up with a local SVP conference and one team in Paris were met by SVP Headquarters.

Just over €44,000 was raised. A huge thank you and congratulations must be given to the organisers John, Claire and Jack who organised Jailbreak 14, and to every student, airline, ferry, train, taxi and general members of the public for making this event a great success.

dances, see interesting performances and even sing with the "Dawn Chorus" on the last Sunday of May.

Bealtaine takes place in Museums, Galleries, Cinemas, Libraries, Care Centres, Active Retirement Associations and other venues all across the country. To check what's happening in your area in May 2014 please go to www.bealtaine.com or Facebook @ Bealtainefestival and Twitter @ BealtaineFest

Bealtaine is an Age & Opportunity initiative part-funded by the Arts Council and delivered by hundreds of organisations around the country.

BEALTAINÉ

May is the date for the Bealtaine Festival which celebrates creativity as people age. Established in 1996 this collaborative festival presents over 3,000 performances, concerts, workshops, dance classes, films and creative events taking place all over Ireland. The theme for the 2014 festival is 'And catch the heart off guard', a phrase from Seamus Heaney's poem 'Postscript.'

From May 1-31 Bealtaine provides the opportunity for older people to "get involved," Try something new and discover new or forgotten talents. People can attend art workshops, learn new

PORTARLINGTON

CHAMPAGNE GOLF

St.Michael's Conference, Portarlington, Co. Meath, are running a 'Champagne Golf Classic' at the town's golf club on Thursday, May 1st. Four-person teams are welcome with an entry fee of €60 per team. "There will champagne at the 19th hole" so the Conference promises to all those who enter:



THE LAST WORD

Letters to the Editor

"Not Listening to Us"

Dear Editor;

Older people are just being treated as fodder by the Government, as Christy Lynch wrote in his article in the last edition. We are treated appallingly. On fixed incomes the Government is disgraceful in the way it has attacked older people who paid their taxes and went through several recessions and paying mortgage bank interest rates of between 18 and 20 per cent. This Government disgusts me, after a life of trying to do my best I have to watch a miserable fixed income reduced every year to leave me with damn little to live on. And there is age discrimination and ageism rampant. For example, going over 70 you are even denied a driving licence for the same period as those under 70. Yet it is the younger people who have most accidents and most deaths on the road, but who is attacked by the Government - the older people. This is no country for the aged anymore.

Yours sincerely,

John O'Connor, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

Twinning

Dear Editor

As a potential new 'member-in- waiting' I would like to comment on an article in your SVP Bulletin about twinning with Conferences in Africa; which I thought was very good, but I would like to mention that in the mid-1980's Derry City was the first town in Ireland to be twinned with a part of Africa by twinning with Kebele 37 in Addis Ababa Ethiopia through the indention of the late Dr. Raymond McClean.

Yours faithfully,

Thomas Harkin, Marieville Park, Derry.

"Happy to Help"

From SVP Bundoran Holiday Centre
Main Street Bundoran
Co. Donegal

Some people may say a holiday in the current climate is a luxury but for many of our guests, this holiday may be the only one they ever get. A holiday away from the stresses and strains of everyday life may be just what some of those SVP Conferences help will need, giving them a little hope and something to look forward to in these difficult times. The preparation for and excitement of a holiday starts long before setting out for Bundoran. When our guests arrive, the look of delight and happiness on their faces says it all!!

To ensure that Bundoran Holiday Centre can continue providing holidays within the Society it is important that SVP Conferences continue to support it.

Bundoran Holiday Centre is available and open to all individuals, families, groups, clubs and associations. Please share this information with any other organisation, person or family who you might feel could benefit from the Centre.

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Assuring you of my personal attention and service at all times.

Georgina Fox,
SVP Bundoran Holiday Centre

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

IN TRIBUTE

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

MOLLIE HYLAND Nenagh

Mollie Hyland had lived and worked in London before returning to Nenagh, the area of which she was a native. She started her involvement with the SVP in the parish of St. Edmund's in London. She was the first woman to hold the office of SVP President in Nenagh where the Mayor of North Tipperary honoured her with an award for her inspirational services to the community. She was a very active member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, where she is sadly missed.
- St. Mary of the Rosary Conference, Nenagh

NICK THEATO Nenagh

Nick Theato's first contact with the SVP was through meeting parishioners at Mass in England where he lived and an invitation to join the Society, which membership he continued when he returned to Ireland and became a member of SVP Nenagh, where he was involved in home visitation and instrumental in preparing the opening of the SVP shop in Nenagh. His organisational ability, research and training of volunteers was a foundation to its success. His commitment to the Society and the support from his wife, Mary and family, in this work showed respect for each person regardless of creed, class or colour, as they were assisted by the Society through the dedicated attention of Nick, whose passing is a source of deep grief for all in the SVP in Nenagh as it is for Nick's family.
- St. Mary of the Rosary Conference, Nenagh

AILEEN BUCKLEY Knockadoon, Cork and Letterkenny

Aileen first began her involvement with SVP holidays for children at the former Ringabella centre when she was aged 16 and helped out there. She became an integral part of the SVP group which provided holidays there and later at Knockadoon for twenty years and was one of the special leaders who helped giving enjoyment to those who needed them in childhood. She met her husband Colm during this dedicated work and they married in July 2012. Both herself and Colm were founding members of the St Lawrence O'Toole Visitation Conference in Letterkenny where Aileen was an inspirational teacher; underlined when hundreds of current and former pupils attended her funeral. She had a unique strength of character and fortitude. When diagnosed with cancer her comment was: "It's better I got this than someone who couldn't cope with it." She never complained, got angry or resented the path that God had chosen for her. Originally from Cork, she was buried in Fermoy, the SVP crest on emblazoned on the Knockadoon hoodie which she wore in her coffin.

TIMOTHY FINN Killenaule

Tim was President of the SVP in Killenaule where he had been a member since the 1980s. He was a great community person and was involved with many local organisations, including the Credit Union, Chairman of the Senior Citizens' Club, Active Retirement and Point-to-Point Racing. He was very passionate at SVP Conference meetings about helping the less well-off in the community and worked hard at fund-raising for the Society and worked tirelessly with his wife, Regina, in establishing the SVP shop in Killenaule. His dedication and commitment is very much missed.



THE WAY WE WERE

ST.HUBERT, PATRON SAINT OF HOUNDS

The Blessing of the Hounds, to ward off rabies, is a cure attributed to Saint Hubert, patron saint of huntsmen and hounds. The blessing ceremony was started by Killeacle Beagle Hunt in 1955 at the request of the Grand Chapter of the Order of Saint Hubert, Vienna. Retired Irish Defence Forces officer Lt.Co.Phil Blake persuaded other hunts to follow suit, including the Scarteen Black and Tans (photographed here) the South Co.Dublin Hunt, the Northern Harriers in Cork and Dungarvan and the Ardfinnan Beagles. As with the French tradition the Royal Salute was sounded by trumpeters at the Elevation of the annual Mass of St.Hubert. In Killeacle the Hymn to St.Patrick was sung in honour of that Saint's escape from slavery in Ireland in a cargo of hounds. Saint Hubert is regarded as patron of furriers, trappers, mathematicians, metal workers and machinists and he is invoked against both rabies and bad behaviour in dogs especially in hounds and other hunting dogs.

Born in Maastricht, Holland, in 656 St.Hubert was appointed Bishop of Liege. The brotherhood of Saint Hubert has its headquarters in the small Ardennes town of Saint-Hubert where today, the Blessing of the Hounds is a major ceremonial. St.Hubert was the oldest son of Bertrand, Duke of Aquitaine and grandson of Charibert, King of Toulouse. As a courtier he was a worldly character, married with offspring. He preferred hunting with the hounds to attending church. Legend has it that he was out with hounds one Good Friday morning when a stag appeared to him. Between its antlers was a crucifix and a voice said: "Hubert, unless you turn to the Lord and lead a holy life, you shall go quickly down to the abyss of hell."

- Script by DW

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Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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