

THE

SPRING 2017



BULLETIN

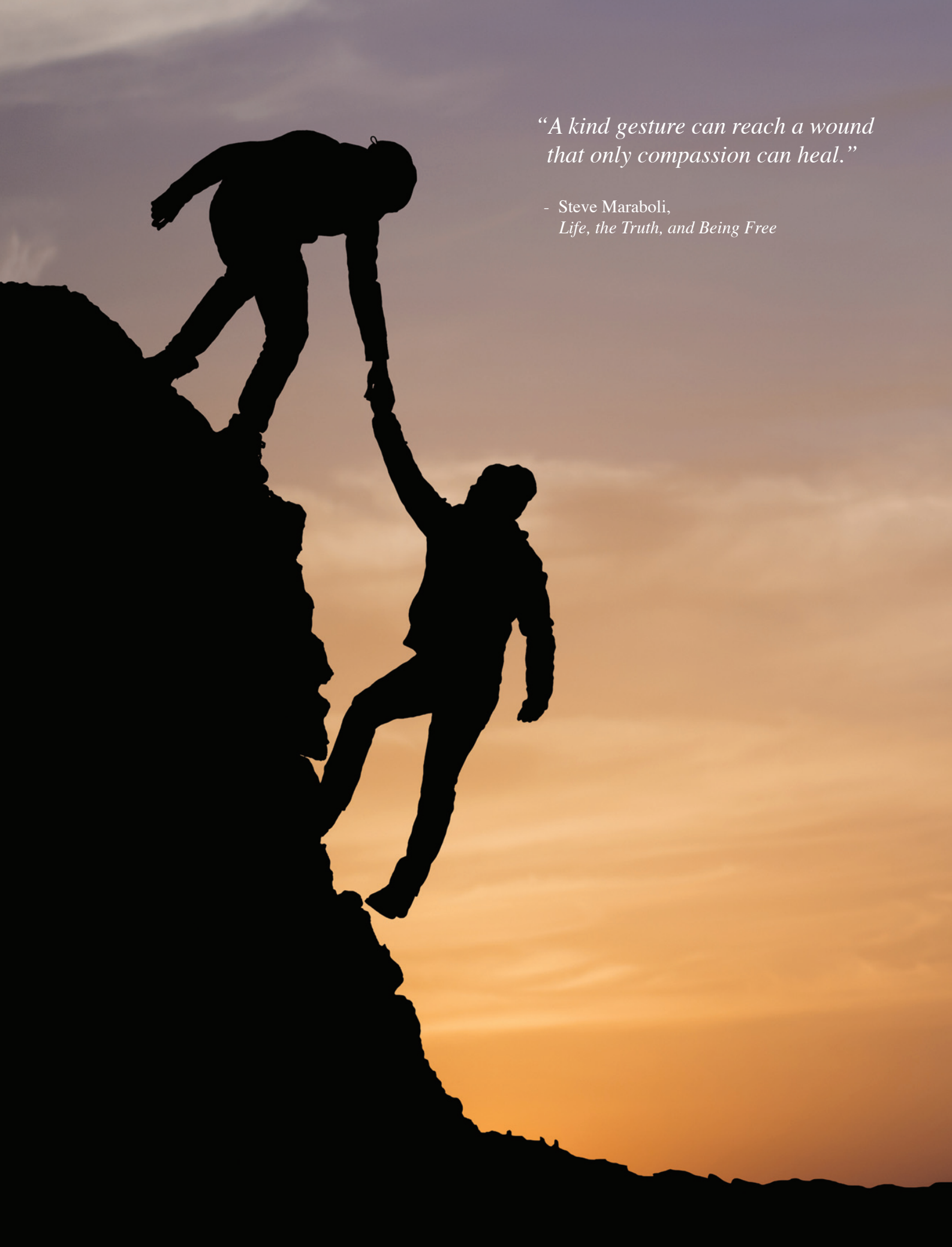
MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

**“THE WHAT, HOW
AND WHY OF SVP”**

**ETHOS IS A KEY PART OF
WHO WE ARE**

GROWING UP UNEQUAL

THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

The image shows two silhouetted figures on a dark, rocky cliff edge against a bright, orange-hued sunset sky. One figure is perched on the edge, leaning forward and reaching down to grasp the hand of another figure who is hanging off the cliff. The scene conveys a sense of support and assistance.

*“A kind gesture can reach a wound
that only compassion can heal.”*

- Steve Maraboli,
Life, the Truth, and Being Free



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

THE IRISH SVP OZANAM BULLETIN

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I was recently asked to fill out a personality questionnaire as part of a college assignment. To be honest, I had never heard of these before and I was quite dismissive of the idea of there being just 16 different types of personalities in the world. The results, however, were a bit of a surprise to me because of their accuracy. Straightaway, I could associate with the many character traits of the 'Advocate' personality I was assigned and in particular with the career choices of this group.

This got me thinking about the theme selected for this edition: 'The What, How and Why of SVP' and something became glaringly obvious. All I could think of was three 'C's': What do we do? – we care; How do we do it? – by caring; and Why do we do it? – because we care.

Each of these 'C's' apply to most, if not everyone involved in SVP, both staff and members. Believe me, there are much easier jobs and voluntary roles out there, with less stress and demands on one's life, but there is something about SVP that makes it so unique. We, in essence, are a large group of professional and volunteer advocates working diligently to help, and be a voice for people who, at this present moment in their life, are struggling to find their own voice or get by.

For over 10 years I have heard discussions between members along the lines of "Why do we need professional staff?" and, for me personally, making an assumption that staff's contribution is not of great worth. On the other hand, I have seen staff putting huge expectations on volunteers because they find it difficult to separate out the fact that, while they are paid and working fulltime at the role, volunteers give of their limited time for nothing. Are we forgetting that we are all a family, whether we get paid or volunteer; and our goal is to make our society a more just and equal place? I'm sure if you did a survey on staff, you might find a huge percentage of them also volunteer in Conferences, committees or even other organisations, and very often work way beyond the hours for which they are paid.

In this edition, you will read many stories of how staff are working hard to improve the services SVP provides and how our volunteers have dedicated so much of their lives and their time to helping others. We all play our part in making this a wonderful organisation and, yes, we often moan about how things could be better or changed, but when you see that one person who asked for help smile back at you with a sense of relief, a feeling of being loved and cared for; those moans quickly dissipate and you understand fully in your heart, in your soul and in your mind how and why we do what we do: it's because we care.

Linda O'Connell

Farewell

This is my last piece for the Bulletin as my term of five years as National President finishes at the end of May. It has been a privilege to serve the Society as National President and I thank all the Members and Staff across the country who showed me so much courtesy and encouragement in the role over the years.

As I complete my term of office it is probably appropriate that I try to outline areas where I think we have made progress but Members and Staff. I set out a number of current key areas of development and work also where challenges remain. Much has been achieved thanks to the drive and support of so many that is in progress, these are outlined in no particular order of priority.

1. Tremendous work is being done by our Area Presidents in supporting Conferences across the country. We have improved training support for Area Presidents, provided job descriptions and made available Membership Support Officers. This is working well and I thank Area Presidents for their huge commitment to their role, without them the structures in the Society will not work, more importantly Members in Conferences will not receive the support they deserve. I know that there are still vacancies for a number of Area President roles around the country, it is important these are filled as soon as possible. The Area President structure is working much better and is having a welcome impact, we need to build on the progress made to date.



2. We recently had an excellent discussion at National Council on what it means in the Society to be 'Volunteer Lead'. We all know that any Officer role, whether at Conference, Area, Regional and National levels are onerous and not honorary titles. We need to continue to encourage people to come forward and give a period to an Officer role. In particular Area Presidents need to encourage people at Conference level to come forward. At each level within the Society a current Officer needs to have people that can replace them, possible replacements need to be encouraged well in advance of changes. With out this the Society will not be able to maintain our 'Volunteer Lead' status that is so important to us.
3. Over the past number of years Conferences have improved significantly the emphasis on 'Quality Visitation'. This means spending more time really understanding the needs of those we serve and trying to come up with a plan that will get that person or family back to self sufficiency, with outside help and assistance if deemed necessary. It remains a challenge to reach many of those who continue to struggle who in many instances are unwilling to contact the Society. There are examples of superb work being done by Conferences in getting people back to self sufficiency, we need to build on that success. We owe it to our generous donors that we use their donations in the best way possible, to do this we need to both reach out to those who may be reluctant to contact us, also to really understand the circumstances of those coming to us for assistance.
4. To give people more time and seek out those in real need means having sufficient Conference Members to do the work. Each Conference should seek to attract some new Members EVERY year, in addition in recruiting we need to ensure we have the best mix of skills that are appropriate and a good mix between male and female Members. Within this, Members need to avail of training and regular updating through Area Meetings or Members days. Visitation remains the core work of the Society, we need to challenge ourselves that we are doing the job the best way possible, that involves bringing in new Members, good mix of skills and appropriate ongoing training.
5. The Society, after much consultation and work, is about to launch to every Conference a suggested revitalization of our Spirituality. We are unique in terms of our background and heritage, the feedback from our Members is that we need to revitalize our Ethos. In essence the message is that the HOW we serve those in need is as important as the WHAT we do. An approach is being recommended that links our Prayer to a Reflection to Questions that Members might briefly discuss at Conference meetings. Your National Council strongly endorses the approach

being taken. If widely implemented it should set the Society apart in terms of how we work with those in need, in addition it should minimize discord within the Society at all levels. This potentially has the most far reaching positive impact on the Society of all the changes made over the past few years.

6. The Society has had over the years a very proactive approach to Social Justice. We comment on matters that impact those we serve. We meet with Government Ministers and Officials and we issue Press Releases on various topics. In addition we do research on various topics that are relevant at particular times. Despite all of this excellent work the inequalities in our country and globally continue to widen. We have tried over the past few years to encourage wider debates on the type of society we want and have supported a number of projects in this regard. However the problems continue. I suggest that the Society, both Nationally and Internationally, needs to comment at least once a year on the wider issues and decisions impacting on the lives of people and make recommendations for change. The Society is highly regarded, both at home and abroad, we have a seat Internationally at the United Nations, we need to issue measured well thought out and researched commentary that will encourage policymakers make decisions that will improve the lives of people and create a more equal society.

I wish the incoming National President and National Management Council every good wish in their onerous work ahead. For any of us in leadership roles the aim has to be to hand over to the incoming Officers a Society that is in a better position than when we commenced, if we all aim to do that, in the spirit of Blessed Frederic, we will maintain a vibrant Society.

Thanks again to all of our Members, my colleagues on Management Council, National Council and Staff at all levels for your unstinting support and work. In particular I acknowledge all the members of National Management Council and Staff who I worked with, both current and retired, I acknowledge those members who had to retire due to illness and I wish them well in their recovery and I remember with sadness the loss of Michael O'Keeffe in a tragic accident.

To all, every good wish, it has been a pleasure.



Geoff Meagher
National President

Working for Social Justice: What we do, how and why

Caroline Fahey, Social Policy Development Officer



"You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis. You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long-term improvement." Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Working for Social Justice is a cornerstone of the work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. It is embedded in the mission statement of the Society and is a defining element of what we do, in conjunction with home visitation and supporting self-sufficiency by helping the people we assist to access education, training and employment. Home visitation and working for social justice are two sides of the same coin. SVP members witness at first hand the impact of the housing and homelessness crisis, child poverty, educational disadvantage, low income and loneliness and isolation on individuals and families across Ireland. We are called to challenge these issues through our social justice work, to engage with Government and policy makers to propose solutions and advocate for social change so that the common good is prioritised and the needs of people who are struggling due to poverty and social exclusion can be met.

The need to work for social justice is as pressing now as it was almost 200 years ago for Frederic Ozanam in Paris. The words of Pope Francis in 2015 remind us of this: *"Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment"*.



As an organisation with a Christian ethos, we can look to Catholic Social Teaching to help us to understand and respond to the social injustices which SVP members are seeing on the ground and to work for a fairer and more just society. Catholic Social Teaching analyses social issues in the light of scripture and provides guidance as to how we must respond. It addresses issues like poverty, hunger, workers' rights, war, migration and protection of the environment, as well as trade and tax justice. It is radical, challenging prevailing economic assumptions, taking on vested interests and calling for an end to inequality which benefits the few at the top at the expense of the rest of society.

Catholic Social Teaching tells us that a basic moral test for society is how our most vulnerable members are faring. We are asked to recognise the dignity inherent in every person, to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first and to work together in solidarity for the common good.

Challenging poverty and inequality can bring us into contested spaces and into conflict with ideologies that benefit those at the top rather than fostering the common good. At these difficult times, we can return to the words of Frederic Ozanam and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, to bring us back to the ethos which drives the work we do, the policy positions that we take and the public statements that we make:

"I am asking that you look after people who have too many needs and not enough rights – people who demand with reason a greater say in public affairs, freedom from poverty, access to education and security in employment." Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Thank you for supporting the Annual Appeal



Thank you to everyone who recently supported the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's Annual Appeal. Your generous support enables us to provide food, heat and other practical assistance to homes throughout Ireland.

Your help can last a lifetime.



Society of St. Vincent de Paul



Commencing our volunteering journey with the Society

*Mary Brickley, Home Visitation Volunteer,
St Aidan's Conference Ferns*

St. Aidan's Conference Ferns has been in existence for several decades. Up until recently the Conference comprised of a group of Home Visitation Volunteers with many years of service behind them. In Autumn 2016, the Conference volunteers decided that the time had arrived to pass on the mantle to a new cohort of volunteers. That is when our work began!

St. Aidan's Conference Ferns now comprises of nine members who first came together as a group in October 2016. Our journey to become Home Visitation Volunteers commenced with an information session delivered by our Area President, Nicholas Foley. Our first information session provided us with a detailed understanding of the role of Home Visitation Volunteers within the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We learned that the role of a Home Visitation Volunteer is to provide support and friendship, to promote self-sufficiency and to bring hope to those who request assistance.

On November 5th we attended our Induction Training Day. It was an engaging, informative and thoroughly enjoyable experience. Our induction training was delivered by Regional President, Margaret Conway and Wexford Area President, Bernadette Doyle. Our trainers provided us with comprehensive information regarding SVP Safeguarding Practice and Policy. They also offered us practical advice about carrying out home visitations. Induction training offered us a wonderful opportunity to meet with volunteers from conferences across the South-East Region. We also learned of the immense voluntary efforts being made to fulfil the mission statement of the society by 11,000 volunteers throughout Ireland. Our induction training imbued us with the feeling that we were now part of something

bigger. We were now part of a vibrant community of volunteers with a shared vision and a commitment to providing support to those in need.

As we are all new to volunteering with SVP, naturally, we felt a sense of trepidation about taking over the running of St. Aidan's Conference and commencing our duties as Home Visitation Volunteers. However, any fears which we had were allayed by the advice and guidance which we received from our Area President, Nicholas Foley and South East Regional Membership Support Officer, Christina Morrissey. The outgoing members of St Aidan's Conference, imparted to us the wisdom which they garnered through their many years of service as volunteers. Their wealth of knowledge has been immensely helpful in preparing us for our new role.

In December, we helped to organise the Church Gate Collection in Ferns Parish as part of the SVP Annual Appeal. In the run up to Christmas, we shadowed the outgoing conference members as they organised the delivery of fuel and food vouchers. In January, we took over the running of the St Aidan's Conference and commenced our role as Home Visitation Volunteers. In recent weeks, we have carried out our first home visits in response to requests for assistance in our local community. We are giving our time to volunteer with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul as we firmly believe in the need to promote social inclusion and alleviate poverty. As volunteers, we will get the opportunity to put our beliefs into action and to make a positive contribution to our local community. We look forward to serving as Home Visitation Volunteers in the years ahead.

Growing up unequal: What can be done to bridge the gap?

Tricia Keilthy, Social Policy Development Officer



Despite numerous action plans and strategies, child poverty in Ireland remains unacceptably high. In 2015, approximately 130,000 children were growing up in impoverished circumstances. SVP members know the stark reality behind this statistic; children who regularly go without basic necessities such as nutritious food, clothing and heating. Poverty also prevents children from participating fully in school and social activities and ultimately limits their true potential. The Growing up in Ireland study - a national survey of over 19,000 families - shows that differences in educational between advantaged and disadvantaged children emerge early and persist throughout childhood. SVP argues that without a concerted investment in educational services throughout the trajectory of childhood, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will persist.

Early years

Good quality early years care and education, ensures children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, get the best possible start in life. As well as the developmental and educational benefits, affordable childcare is an important measure to make work pay for low income families, and therefore secures a better standard of living for children. Over the past number of years, SVP have pressed the Government to increase investment in early years services and significant progress has been achieved with the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme in Budget 2017. Ongoing work with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will continue to make sure the scheme supports the most vulnerable through investment in affordability and quality.

Middle childhood

Although increased spending in the early years sector is welcome, it must not be at the expense of services for older children. Indeed, middle childhood is a time where school experiences shape long term expectations and outcomes. An ongoing concern for SVP members on the ground is that school costs prohibit children from participating in school fully. SVP has continually advocated the need to reduce the financial burden of school related costs, such as books, uniforms, school tours and 'voluntary' contribution, on low income families. For example, in 2011, SVP ran a public campaign to highlight unnecessary school book edition changes. It resulted in a code of conduct from publishers which they promised less edition changes. Despite this success, the issue of school costs still prevails. Successive

cuts to the school capital grants over the past six years means that schools are struggling to cover day-to-day expenses. One possible implication is that parents will be asked by schools to make up the difference. Over the coming year, the Social Justice team will be advocating that these cuts are reversed.

The main way disadvantage is addressed in schools is via DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). SVP acknowledge the good work carried out under this programme but believe that tackling educational inequality solely through DEIS is limited; many disadvantaged children do not attend DEIS schools. The new DEIS plan, announced in February, proposes tapered funding based on differing grades of disadvantage. While this is welcome, we still need a system where all disadvantaged children, regardless of the status of their school, have access to key supports, such as educational psychologists and additional teaching resources.

Adolescence and early adulthood

One important aim of DEIS is to combat early school leaving and since 2008 rates have declined significantly. However, transition to third level education for disadvantaged groups remains low. While post-primary measures to support transitions to third level are relevant, costs associated with further education are a significant barrier. Increases in fees, changes to the adjacent rate grant, limited supports for part time students and the rising cost of living means that for many young people, college is not an option. It is expected that a new funding model for third level education will be introduced in 2018. It is not yet clear what this model will look like but SVP will advocate that equity, accessibility and affordability are central to the proposed changes.

Ambition and investment

In February the Action Plan for Education 2017 was published. Although the plan recognises the transformational potential of education, it falls short on a number of areas including measures to address school costs, early disadvantaged and third level access. If the Government are truly committed to addressing childhood inequality it needs to be more ambitious and this ambition needs to be backed up with significant investment across the life course.

PRAYER REFLECTIONS



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Ethos Renewal

During the past couple of years in travelling to meet Members around the country, as National President, I was regularly asked about the Ethos of the Society, what is it, have we lost it, including the Spiritual aspect of the Society and the real feeling of people that we need to strengthen our identity.

Over a year ago your National Management Council commenced a consultation process in response to the requests from Members. Regional Councils were asked to have a discussion on the topic at their meetings and come back with their ideas. From the enthusiastic responses it was again clear that Members wanted to debate the topic. Whilst there was no unanimous view as to what should be done the overwhelming response is that we needed to do something. National Management Council set up an Ethos Sub Committee with representatives from both Members and Staff to evaluate the Regional responses and come up with some recommendations. These were discussed by National Management Council and then taken to National Council for further debate and input. I want to thank all those at all levels within the Society who generously gave of their time to input to this important work.

The overall outcome of the work reaffirms that Ethos is a key part of who we are and it needs to be revitalized. In that revitalization we must be true to our Vincentian heritage but present in a way that is relevant to our Members and Staff in 2017. A key overall message that came out of the feedback is that the HOW we do our work is as important as the WHAT we do. In other words people should see a difference in interacting with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul versus interacting with other organisations. That difference in approach should be influenced by our Ethos. It is also important that not alone should the public see a difference, it also should influence how we treat each other within the Society as Members and also how we treat our Staff.

Arising from all of the hard work and deliberations I am delighted to be able to announce that during March the Society will issue to every Conference in the country an updated Prayer and Reflection Booklet that is being recommended for use.

The approach adopted is as follows:

- Rather than saying the full Opening Prayers as we know them, the booklet takes a line from one of the Prayers followed by a short reflection.
- This is followed by a couple of suggested questions that the Conference might have a short discussion on. The questions are for guidance only and Conferences are free to have their own questions that they feel are more relevant to their particular circumstances.
- There are 48 separate Prayers and Reflections which over time pick up every key aspect of our current prayers. Again important to note that a Conference is free to pick and choose an Opening Prayer, Reflection and Questions that they feel are most relevant to their circumstances and would give Members confidence with the change.

- All key aspects of Vincentian work are covered: Quality Visitation, The Work of Justice, Faith in Action, Deepening our Vincentian Friendship.
- We close our meeting by repeating the one line Opening Prayer:
- The key point is that we link our Prayer to our Work, they are not two separate activities
- The approach recommended should take between five and ten minutes but should be far more meaningful.

I am aware that some Conferences are very attached to the current Prayers and some Conferences do more in terms of Spiritual readings. Important to note that we are not in any way down playing the current prayers, we are in fact using all of the key elements of the Prayers over a period of time but with the important additions of a Reflection on the Prayer and some questions that will link the Prayer back to our work. Should a Conference feel that it's current way of using the Opening and Closing Prayers works for them, then of course they are free to continue that way, the key challenge is whether there is a link between our Prayer and our Work and how we treat people, both internally within SVP and externally.

At our last National Council meeting, our Spiritual Director, Fr. Eamon Devlin, C.M. gave an outline of the rationale for the proposed approach. National Council suggested that Fr. Eamon's talk be videoed and be available to Members and Staff. This we are currently doing and will be on the Society website shortly. I would like, on behalf of National Council, to express our appreciation to Fr. Eamon for his support, encouragement and a lot of hard work in bringing our Ethos renewal to this point.

The past number of years have seen much change within the Society. Of all the improvements that your National Council have introduced this is the most important and far reaching. If the Society gets its Ethos right and is reflected in the work of our Members and Staff then I believe we will continue as a vibrant and relevant support to those in need for generations to come.

Your support for the changes proposed is enthusiastically recommended by your National Council. I would ask in particular that Area Presidents, with the support of their Membership Support Officers and the leadership of Regional Presidents would work with Conferences in encouraging them to introduce the recommended changes.

Finally thanks again to so many who have made this possible.



Geoff Meagher
National President



“It is important that we operate effectively and seek continuous improvement in the management of our housing stock”.

Taking stock & the work ahead within the Society's Social Housing and Specialist Services

Paula Kenny, National Manager For Social Housing & Specialist Services

As a qualified Town Planner Paula Kenny joins the Society having worked across a number of local authorities in the planning and development areas and most recently with the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), the national federation body for housing associations. Having a national remit in the housing development area Paula's role in the ICSH afforded her a diverse range of social housing work, representing and advocating on behalf of the social housing sector and working closely with the Department of Housing, local authorities, funders and housing stakeholders on various social housing initiatives across homelessness, disability, older people and Traveller accommodation areas.

Her experience to date has made Paula acutely aware of the issues impacting the social housing sector: "The challenges within the sector are multi-faceted - not only is the sector under significant pressure to address the severe housing under supply issue, but also faced with operating in a far more challenging regulated housing environment than when the sector first started out". The level of regulation has increased substantially, with compliance requirements arising from the Housing Regulator; the Residential Tenancies Board, and the Charities Regulator. All of these requirements impose significant additional work on organisations and voluntary boards and is a new challenging operating ground for many.

Why housing Regulation?

In terms of housing regulation from the Government's perspective, it has invested significantly into the voluntary housing sector and it requires assurance that the investment is being managed effectively and that the social housing provided will be of an appropriate standard and available into the future. Therefore the sector is required to be accountable for the condition of the housing asset and for the services it provides in particular to the tenant.

Speaking about her new role within SVP, Paula believes that Regulation provides a focus and in terms of SVP, it makes the Society ask important questions about its organisational structures and housing operations, allowing it to identify shortcomings/ areas of work in housing provision, management and financial viability.

"It is important that we operate effectively and seek continuous improvement in the management of our housing stock and ensure the delivery of quality services to the tenant whether it's having

appropriate information to inform our maintenance/funding requirements (through stock condition surveys), having appropriate policies and procedures in place to make informed decisions or recording our operational performance through a quarterly survey (HAPM) - it is all positive in terms of our overall operations and can only serve the organisation well in terms of overall management and sustainability."

Although the ask is challenging, Paula believes that the Society has to grasp the nettle and work together in progressing regulation requirements otherwise the Society is left exposed to being non-compliant which on foot of statutory regulation will have negative implications for our wider housing operations.


Going forward it is critical for Housing Conferences to have the appropriate people on board who are committed to working towards compliance.

Paula outlines that some Conferences should consider taking on new blood/skillsets who can assist with the additional compliance work areas suggesting recruitment in the technical, finance or social/health care areas. For Conferences who have such skillsets on board it is proving very beneficial.

A further key aspect of successful working going forward and something high on the Regulators agenda, given the Society's unique operating structure, is to ensure appropriate governance and oversight of housing operations on the ground – this will be achieved by having strong National and Regional Social Housing Committees. In particular, at Regional level, the Society requires strong leaders who can act as representatives for local housing Conferences, to bring them together, work at addressing issues, raise issues on their behalf and bring back the important messages emanating from National Department level.

Progress has been made in some Regions through both paid and volunteer roles and is proving extremely useful in terms of pushing the regulatory agenda and ensuring accountability which is vital to the Society reaching full compliance.

Notwithstanding the significant work ahead Paula is optimistic about the Society's future housing path and is firmly committed to supporting Conferences in its housing activity. She outlines that the hard work, commitment and dedication of housing Conferences has to be acknowledged in terms of the vitally important housing provision at local level and the part the Society is playing in the current housing crisis.



The continuing challenge of housing

Jennifer Thompson,
Social Policy Development Officer

“Our Conference is supporting a family - parents and three children, with school related costs and food deliveries. No rent allowance to help with rent of €50 per month in a two bedroomed house. There are no curtains, badly worn and dangerous floor covering, no basket in the fireplace, and the central heating is not working. The rent was raised to €100 per month and the family had to leave as they could not afford to pay.”

- SVP Member, East Region, September 2016

2016 brought signs of the continuation of a strengthening economy. Unemployment figures fell to their lowest levels since August 2008 and the Economic and Social Research Institute forecasted a growth of 4.8 percent for the economy. In stark contrast with this however, was the continuing rise of those on the housing waiting list and those who are homeless.

According to the Social Housing Assessment carried out by the Housing Agency in December 2016, the total number of qualified households for social housing at the end of 2016 stood at 91,600, an increase of 1,728 (+1.9%) from 2013. When this figure is broken down further, almost half (47%) of households have been qualified for social housing support for more than four years, with one-fifth (21%) qualified for more than seven years – in 2013 the equivalent figure was 9%.

In addition, as we entered 2017 the number of people homeless in Ireland passed the 7,000 mark for the first time as the crisis

continues to deepen. Latest figures show that 7,148 people (including over 2,500 children) were in emergency accommodation in the week before Christmas 2016, representing a 91% hike on the figures seen just two years previously.

Every week our members are visiting those experiencing the harsh impact and reality behind these startling statistics. Low-income households are struggling to keep up with rising rents, and face the threat of eviction due to being unable to keep up with the rents or precarious tenancy tenures. Often hesitant to raise issues with landlords, SVP members are also reporting cases of families living in housing that is of extremely poor physical standards, including cold and damp as well as unreasonable withholding of deposits by landlords.

Last Autumn, in an effort to raise awareness and SVP's concern at the housing and homeless crisis as well as the lack of social housing in Ireland, SVP launched the 'Hidden Homeless' campaign. The campaign focused on drawing attention to those people and families living in hotels and B&Bs, made homeless by increases in private rented sector rents and also people making do with poor quality rental units or 'sofa surfing' in the homes of friends or extended family. The conditions are often poor quality, overcrowded or expensive.

The National Economic and Social Council estimates that between 25-30 percent of households in Ireland require some

support in meeting their housing needs. A number of initiatives are available for those needing support, from provision of social housing to social housing supports to low-income tenants. One of the initiatives for those in need of longer-term support is the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). The Housing Assistance Payment is currently available across the country and will be available in Dublin from March 2017. While there are several positives to HAP, such as tenants being entitled to work full time while retaining their support (though dependent on their level of pay), and enhanced rules around regularity of inspection, there is typically a significant gap between the rents that landlords are seeking and the maximum payable under HAP.

Of great concern for those SVP is working with, is that when a person takes up HAP, the local authority deems that the housing need has been met and as a result, the person is taken off the waiting list for social housing, unlike with Rent Supplement. While tenants can opt to go on the transfer list when in receipt of HAP, so that they could transfer to social housing at some point in the future, we don't know how this is working in practice.

This is a real risk for those availing of HAP, as social housing offers greater security of tenure and affordability to tenants than HAP and is a more appropriate mechanism for meeting long term social housing needs. HAP is private rented accommodation support and as such has no guarantees with regard to security of tenure or affordability, unlike social housing provided by a local authority or approved housing body.

"We have been living in a B&B in west Dublin in 'emergency' conditions for over four months. My four children, partner and myself. All in one room that has two beds for me, my partner, and the two eldest -- a girl of seven and a boy of five. Our one-and-half year old has a cot and the nine week old baby sleeps in a basket. There is also a fridge which one of the staff in the B&B gave us last week. We had no choice but to accept emergency accommodation. I have tried to find a house to rent but when landlords hear that we are on rent supplement and have young children they are not interested. I have been on the housing list for seven years."

- Letter from a parent experiencing homelessness supported by SVP

There are maximum limits which the Department of Housing will pay HAP for, depending on the area and household size. While HAP and Rent Supplement limits were increased last year, these limits still fall short of the level of rents being demanded by landlords. If a household is unable to find a home within the limits they might decide to pay the difference themselves. This can result in people taking on a tenancy that they ultimately cannot afford and are at risk of losing. It can also result in people prioritising their rent payments and going without food, heating and other essentials.

Housing and homelessness are consistent and pressing needs that are being raised by members across the country. Improved affordability, increased rent certainty, security of occupancy to



tenants and improvements in quality of properties are clear priorities. While recent initiatives around rent regulation are welcomed, these however must be introduced in conjunction with measures to increase the supply of housing across all tenure types.

There is a concern over the current direction of Government policy that finds those unable to access social housing relying on the private rented sector. From listening to our members, it is clear that there is an urgent need to return to the large scale provision of social housing by local authorities and approved housing bodies in order to realise a lasting solution to the housing and homelessness crisis.

SVP's Social Justice Team will continue to engage the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on the above issues, working with them to come up with sustainable solutions to the housing crisis.

Cycling to Santiago de Compostela along the Camino Frances

Eamonn Donaghy, Belfast, September 2016

Over the last few years the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) has become increasingly popular for people who wish to take some time out and travel from various points in Europe to Santiago de Compostela, a city in the north east of Spain. Having said that, this pilgrim's journey to visit the believed burial place of St. James the Apostle has been on the go since before 1000 AD, so it's not exactly a new phenomenon!

After thinking about making this journey for many years, the opportunity arose last autumn for me to actually do it. In September, I joined my old school friend Damian to cycle from Pamplona to Santiago de Compostela along the Camino

Frances. We allotted 10 days to make this trip, which, given that it was almost 750km in distance, was in itself quite a challenge for a couple of guys who were not 'seasoned' cyclists. But the Camino is not meant to be easy or a relaxing vacation. It is a journey, a way and a pilgrimage. So whether by foot, bicycle or horse, it is a challenge to make it to Santiago.

As a relatively new member of St. Vincent de Paul, I decided to use the opportunity to try and raise funds for my local Conference. I set a target of £1 for every kilometer we cycled. I underestimated the generosity of my family and friends and whilst the final figure is still outstanding, it looks as if donations





will amount to over £3,000. For this reason alone my Camino has been worth it.

We set off from the city of Pamplona, famous for the annual running of the bulls through its narrow streets and headed west along a mix of main roads, country lanes and paths. We could not follow the exact Camino route all the time as often it became a mountain track, which is not welcoming to touring bikes with panniers but we stayed as close as we could to the main trail.

We aimed to stop at the main cities along the way including Logroño, Burgos and Leon. This allowed us to do some sightseeing in these wonderful old cities. Each one had its own character but they all had 'old town' centres and a great sense of history. For me, the highlights were the cathedrals in Burgos and Leon. The former was a magnificent complex of chapels and cloisters which were ornate and resplendent and the later was more austere but had a magnificent organ and fabulous stain glass windows. If you like old cathedrals you would love Burgos and Leon.

Cycling was quite intense with lots of hills and even a couple of mountains to cross. Not only did we cycle nearly 740km, we climbed over 25,000 feet along the way! Let's say that it was not always the easiest of journeys. Thankfully we had no punc-



tures or crashes and our equipment, legs and backsides stood up to the challenge.

We met quite a lot of people along the way from all parts of the world including: Australia, Canada, the United States and nearly every country in Europe. Almost everyone was friendly and we all shared the common goal of making it to Santiago. By custom you greet each person you meet with the phrase ' Buen Camino' which means 'Have a good Camino' and it was the common currency of our trip.

We had planned to complete our cycling in 10 days but as we approached our destination, we were gripped with a zeal to conclude the trip as soon as possible so we made it into the centre of Santiago after nine days! When we finally got off our bikes in the large square at the front of the famous old cathedral of Santiago, there were a few whoops of delight and a large smile on both our faces. We had made it to our journey's end.

Our early arrival gave us a 'free' day in Santiago and enabled us to go to the Pilgrim's Mass in the cathedral, embrace the statue of St. James and to do some sightseeing around this lovely old city. Mind you after our exertions of the Camino we did not do too much walking!



So now I need to take some time to reflect in my Camino. Nine days of tough cycling, living out of panniers, being away from my wife, children and home. It has certainly been a very significant experience for me. However I don't think that I had an epiphany along the way or that I have discovered myself. Having said that I have a lot of sights, sounds and memories to reflect on and I think these will have a longer term impact than I am experiencing now.

I would definitely recommend the Camino to anyone, young or old. It can be done all together or in stages, by foot, by bike or even by horse! You get a chance to get away from the world and focus on the things that matter most to you. Whilst it may not result in a life changing experience, it will allow you to look at life in a different way. If you do decide to give it a go then I wish you a 'Buen Camino'.

SVP Internal Audit

John Tuohy, National Internal Auditor

SVP currently operate in a very challenging environment. According to an Edelman Trust Barometer survey carried out in early 2016 less than half the general population of Ireland trust charities. This fact is compounded by recent scandals in the sector and puts increased demands on the Society to demonstrate a robust control environment that has strong controls, compliance, and effective risk management which are all overseen by a good governance structure.

Internal Audit (IA) is a key mechanism to evaluate and report on the overall control environment thereby assisting the National Management Council (NMC) in its Governance role.

Internal Audit in the Society - What is it and where does it fit?

The SVP's Internal Audit function has been in place over 10 years and has been developed to operate according to the best international standards. It provides objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value to the organisation and improve its operations.

IA reports to the National Audit Committee (NAC). This Committee comprises of four members who have a wealth of experience in audit, risk management, finance, legal and general business. The NAC is given its authority from the NMC, which allows IA to have full access to all available information on staff and members of the Society.

On a day-to-day basis IA reports to the National Vice President whose is responsible for governance.

The NAC tasks IA to complete an annual audit plan while also providing support and guidance where necessary. This plan is designed to enable IA, through the Committee, provide an annual assurance statement to the NMC on the overall state of the control environment of the Society.

What is the Annual Audit Plan?

The annual audit plan allows IA to assess the control environment in the Society. It includes these main elements:

- **Standard Audit Review** -- where activities across the eight regions are selected based on risk based criteria. The activity in question is reviewed to determine overall if the Conference is compliant with the Society's policies and legislative require



- ments. Approximately 40 Councils/Conferences are visited per year, with actual visit time varying from a couple of hours to two days depending on the complexity of the activity.
 - **Investigations** -- where activities are highlighted to IA and particular matters are investigated.
 - **Consultancy** -- involvement in key Society projects designed to improve the Society's control environment.
 - **Collaboration with External Auditors** -- information sharing and audit facilitation.
 - **Management of Audit Issues** -- working with activities to close any issues raised by both Internal and External Auditors.
- Throughout the year IA review and report on trends, themes and issues of concern to ensure they are highlighted and managed correctly.

How can Internal Audit help you as a Member, Volunteer or staff of the Society?

Traditionally IA was seen as something to be feared, a department that was there to point out faults or failings. This is 100% not the case. IA carries out reviews with the utmost professionalism and commitment to high standards. Through the reviews issues are highlighted which are then addressed and remediated. As the Society's National Internal Auditor I see one of my key functions as facilitating members, volunteers and staff in carrying out the Vincentian work in a controlled manner that helps positive client interaction with the Society, allows high levels of donor confidence all while protecting their personal and professional reputation.

I appreciate the high level of demands that are faced by Members, Volunteers and Staff. As part of this I am available where possible to provide advice and support on any queries. Members, Volunteers or staff have in relation to Risk Management, Controls, Governance and Compliance.

If you require more information please contact John Tuohy on john.tuohy@svp.ie

CIRCULAR LETTER 2017

President General Renato Lima de Oliveira



The President General's Circular Letter

On January 31st 2017, brother Renato Lima de Oliveira, 16th President General of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, reinstated the tradition of the annual Circular Letters and issued his first Circular Letter to communicate directly with members of the Society and Conferences throughout the world. Because of its length, it is suggested that the Circular Letter be divided into two or three parts, each of which could form the basis for a reflection at Conference meetings.

This is the first time in the history of the Society that a Circular Letter is written in Arabic, Italian and Chinese as well as the four official languages (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese).

President Renato said: *"I am very happy to revive the use of Circular Letters from the President General which is a great means of addressing Vincentians around the world and inviting them to reflect on key topics"*.

The Circular Letter has five parts: Introduction, Agenda of the General Council, Recommendations to Vincentians, 2017 - Year dedicated to Bailly and Conclusion. In addition to the text of the Letter itself, there are 21 footnotes, which provide additional information to enrich the understanding of the text.

The Council General requests all Superior/National Councils to circulate the Letter to all Councils, Conferences and Special works in their circumscription and also to the branches of the Vincentian Family.

To read the Circular Letter in full visit: <http://en.ssvpglobal.org/content/download/1440/18340/file/Lettre%20circulaire%20ENG.pdf>

Comments on the Circular Letter and suggestions for themes for the 2018 edition may be sent by email to: cgi.circularletter@gmail.com.

SVP Society of Saint Vincent de Paul



Life after SVP

*John Mark McClaffery, CEO Threshold,
former SVP Head of Social Justice*

I cycled home one cool, dry November Friday night from the SVP Offices in Dublin last year and my world had just changed. After 15 years working for the Society I was offered the CEO post with Threshold, the private rented sector NGO advising and representing tenants. While flattered that I had been offered the post, I was daunted by the role. I considered the implications for my life – the stretch it posed career-wise and the demands it would have on my time and energy. It also meant leaving SVP – something that up until now was just a theoretical prospect. This job offer meant a stark and immediate choice: stick with the familiar, or move out of my comfort zone.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time serving the Society through the years, working with members North and South. Leading a committed social justice team, I liaised with politicians and officials across a range of issues and Government Departments, addressed local and national media, and represented SVP nationally and internationally on various stages including Social Partnership, the Áras and the European Commission. I made connections with other charities on areas of common interest where greater policy gains could be made by working together. And SVP was a huge support to me through some of the darkest times in my own life. Yet life constantly changes and the challenge is to change and adapt with the flow.

So I took the plunge and am on the other side, having worried about whether there was life after SVP. A lot of my anxiousness came from struggling to separate my personal from my work identity – after all, working for SVP can be justifiably viewed as a 'vocation'. But my uneasiness also had its roots in institutionalisation; from having been working within an organisation for so long, regardless of how 'healthy' and functioning that organisation might be. It is early days in the new role so I'm drawing no conclusions yet, but I am applying my skills and relevant experience in the new job more effectively than my self-doubt predicted.

We usually make changes in our lives as a result of a mixture of 'push' and 'pull' factors. For me the pull factors were the challenge of the CEO role but in an organisation and policy area that I was fairly familiar with – Threshold and housing. Importantly, several push factors also featured in my recent decision making. First, one can be in an organisation too long – as a staff member or a volunteer. Familiarity can be helpful, but it can also make people more change resistant if they aren't careful. Increasingly, the job for life is not only rare, but seen as too passive an option for many workplaces. Sometimes the longer someone is in post, the less attractive they are to prospective employers. Increasingly for me, longevity in my role was becoming more of a liability and less of an asset in my career.

Social Justice is key to the mission of SVP and is at the heart of what Frederic Ozanam tried to achieve: charity alone was insufficient for him. Alongside assisting people, SVP's founder was committed to challenging and tackling the root causes of poverty to put an end to it. Over the last 20 years, through the work of leading members like the late Noel Clear and John Monaghan, SVP Ireland fundamentally reconnected with its social justice call, and a staff team grew at the behest of members to gather the issues 'from the ground up'; analyse them, and promote policy positions to Government and via both local and national media. SVP Social Justice became a recognised, respected and potent witness to peoples' struggles nationally and locally, by politicians, officials, regulators, energy companies, state services, broadcasters and charities alike.

In spite of the economic collapse and the years of austerity which followed, SVP had a number of notable achievements in its social justice work, including highlighting poverty among one parent families, bringing energy poverty to the forefront of policy debate and influencing the development of measures to improve the affordability and quality of childcare and early years services. However, much remains to be done and a strong commitment from the SVP leadership to the social justice work of the Society is needed so that the organisation can continue to bring its influence to bear on breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage that too many of our citizens are trapped in.

What's next for SVP in its influence to challenge social policies and structures? Are members ready to commit to help the people they visit in the long term? And what can SVP do to remain relevant in Irish society and social policy?

My experience suggests there is life after SVP, but what kind of life now for SVP?



Is it simply a name...

Padraic J Cassidy, President SVP Clontarf

When we are born, we are given a name, it is with us for life and it is important. It marks us out as being who we are and is the start of our identity. Through it we know our heritage and all that we have inherited from those who have gone before us with perhaps the same name. The formulation of this identity then moves out from the family environment and into the wider society. This further shapes our attitudes and will have an influence on our belief system and how we view the world. It also gives us a national identity, one where we are members of the tribe, members of the society. Within this membership our name tells others, who we are and something about us. Names are not just labels they can tell a story, they can become your only identity with a society and a culture. This being the case when you identify as being of your nation, you are Irish, French or from wherever. Nobody is a non-national, everybody has and possesses a nationality. It is their identity like it is yours, it has shaped and formed them.

We in the society visit people who are immigrants, people who have come to Ireland for a myriad of reasons. These are economic, employment, or asylum. They all have an identity and a nationality. When we refer to them as non-nationals we are denying them an integral part of who they are. Some of the people we visit will be Irish, like you and I they are full citizens with the same entitlements and eligibilities that citizenship gives them. What they are in fact is ethnic minority Irish. They may self-identify as Black-Irish, Asian-Irish or simply Irish with a

heritage of their original country. When we use the term non-national we take away their Irishness and indeed that of their children who are the Irish generation of tomorrow. They will be the members of this society in general and this Society of the SVP. They will be the people who staff our schools, hospitals and other places of employment. They will be financial contributors to society that will pay pensions and enable society the government to function.

Therefore, we must learn and get used to using names we have never encountered, names that give the identity we cherish for ourselves. I have lived abroad in English speaking countries and have never translated my name, not because of any nationalist motivation but because it is who I am. It tells you something about me, it was given to me as it meant something and I have held onto it as it was given. Some who read this may regard it as political correctness, perhaps it is, of a sort. What it is, is affording a person dignity and respect. This dignity and respect that we would expect if we were in another country. The Vincentian ethos in the people we deal with is based on these principles, that is the recognition of the dignity of the person and to respect them. Therefore, the starting point is to use a name, recognise and identity and applaud the nationality. So, we can then move away from the term non-national, something that is derogatory in nature and creates misinformed stereotyping and negative attitudes. As a society we can ensure the dignity of the person is adhered to simply by getting their name right.

Area Gatherings

A refreshing way to solve common problems

Brendan Hennessy, Membership Support Team

“Brendan, you’re not telling us anything we didn’t already know” said, to my total embarrassment, the SVP Regional President. But then he paused, and with these words saved my skin *“but up to now, we have never thought about it”*.

There is rarely anything new under the sun of the SVP but for those of us fortunate enough to have an overview: member to member - Conference to Conference - Area to Area; we get to see the bigger picture, to think about it and reflect it back to you, the members of the SVP. It is through that volunteer contact that we learn from the experiences of other Conferences, their dilemmas and their solutions. It is that thinking, those dilemmas and your solutions that the SVP Membership Support Team are bringing to Area Gatherings through-out the Society now.

Area Gatherings are a really useful, rewarding and affirming way for SVP members to learn from each other. We are actively working with Area Presidents, Membership Support Officer’s (MSO’s) and volunteers to plan, prepare and run Area Gatherings. The content is always informed by the needs of the Conferences on the ground and the agenda can include themes as diverse as SVP Ethos, Social justice and Conference Care. However, a key ingredient is Supporting Visitation using local experience.

Our approach is by putting members from different Conferences together to solve common SVP cases we learn the different approaches to solving problems. Those approaches can vary from the logical, common sense approach to the imaginative practical problem solving steeped in local knowledge and experience. Whatever the solutions are, the refreshing sense around the room is of shared learning and novel ideas. What’s more, we can also take away your ideas to share in our informal advice with other Conferences or, more formally, to include those ideas in the SVP Guidance and Best Practice Notes for the SVP.

Our experience so far is of refreshing days (or half-days and evenings!) which provide members an opportunity to rekindle their sense of the Vincentian community and ethos. By affirming the work and the experience of SVP members there is a greater sense of a common bond and the knowledge that it is often you who are telling us something new!

Please approach your Area President or MSO if you interested in holding or hosting an Area Gathering in your Area and the SVP Membership Support Team will be happy to help with it.



The Training Unit - Group Project - Waiting - Oil on Canvas - 120 X 100 cm

Humans Sharing Spaces

An Exhibition of Creative Arts by Students
in Prisons and a Post Release Centre

in partnership with the
Society of St. Vincent de Paul

The chq Building, 1 Custom House Quay, Dublin 1
9th March - 26th March 2017

Exhibition runs until the 26th March - Monday to Sunday inclusive 10am - 6pm and Bank Holiday



Humans Sharing Spaces

*Anthony Fitzgerald,
Member of Philip Neri Prison Visitation Conference*

The context for the title 'Humans Sharing Spaces' spans some four decades working as a volunteer with a diverse range of social groups.

During the late 1970's, I developed a small youth and social club in the North Inner City of Dublin. A major theme of this club focused on taking the children out of their surrounding and visiting rural Ireland. During those trips many of the children and teenagers would often tell how good it was to be in a different space, to feel safe, and not fear walking down the street. Others would frequently detail how they felt less than human when certain people in authority would treat them 'like animals' when they walked down their own street. These statements did not come from sociologists or anthropologists but children who had the misfortune to live in one of Western Europe's most deplorable locations.

Many years later, I had the pleasure to work with some of Dublin's Homeless Community. Many had addictions, while many more struggled with a mishmash of mental health issues. During this period I debated, discussed and listened to voices talking about a good space, a bad space, and often a dangerous space within many of Dublin homeless shelters. Those that preferred to sleep rough would detail the predicament of having human spit, vomit and urinate on them as they slept in doorways, treating them like rubbish and less than human.

In recent years, I have visited many of Dublin's detention centres. Specifically visiting vulnerable teenagers in St Patrick's Institution and Wheatfield Prison. At present, I regularly visit St Patrick's/ Mountjoy West and Wheatfield Prison with the Society's Philip Neri Prison Visitation Conference. During these visits an enduring topic discussed with those I meet relates to sharing spaces, be it unsafe spaces, or as many on 23-hour lock-up will share, feeling secure in their space.

Many other prisoners illustrate the feeling of being human when they visit the many educational opportunities with the Irish Prison Service (IPS), specifically the students of the creative art classes led by an inspirational, dedicated teaching staff. Over the past four years many prisoners have described how they would enjoy the challenge to creatively narrate or depict their take on 'Humans Sharing Spaces'.

With time, care and attention I hope the themed nature of this project, encouraged and nurtured by a superb teaching staff, will further examination this enormously intricate topic.

Humans Sharing Spaces Exhibition

During March 2017, St. Vincent de Paul, St Philip Neri Prison Visitation Conference in conjunction with the Irish Prison Service (IPS) will present an Art Exhibition of the many excellent artistic genres, i.e. poetry, prose, painting or any artistic endeavor from within the Irish Prison System.

Many of these prisoners are very talented fostered by an inspirational dedicated teaching staff.

The Humans Sharing Spaces Exhibition takes place in The CHQ Building, 1 Custom House Quay, Dublin 1. It opens on 9th March and runs until the 26th March – Mon to Fri 10am to 6pm – and Bank Holidays 12 noon to 5pm.

From 2015 Exhibition:



Training Unit - AM - The Crushed Bull - Oil on Daler Board - 36 x 46 cm

SVP NEW SHOP, CAFÉ, OFFICES AT 86 PARNELL STREET, ENNIS

*John Cullinane,
Clare Area President*

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Clare was the recipient of a substantial bequest four years ago from a generous benefactor. One of the conditions of the donors will was that the money was to be used for the benefit of the Society in Ennis and the Clare area. The Society decided the funds would be used to develop a new shop and other services in Ennis as well as a new headquarters for the Society in Clare. The new premises at 86 Parnell St. Ennis will be a one-stop-shop for all SVP activities in Ennis and a positive benefit for the community. It will incorporate an SVP retail shop and centre for donated goods, café and area for resource activities and an office.

The Society has operated a small charity shop in Ennis for almost 20 years in rented premises. This new building is twice the size of the existing shop, will ensure a stronger income stream and will be an immense benefit to the Society in integrating other SVP services and will ultimately have a long term benefit for the Society and those it helps. The shop will sell a wide range of reasonably priced clothes, shoes, books and general items and all profits will be used for the benefit of families supported by SVP in the area.

Using the bequest to purchase and develop this new building was a strategic decision, which will ensure that SVP has a strong foundation for providing its services to the people of Ennis and the Clare region well into the future. This new building

was made possible by a substantial bequest from a generous benefactor, Mr Edward Staunton former County Surgeon at Ennis County Hospital from 1950 to 1989 who died in 2012. With the agreement of his family, a plaque to his memory is erected to the front of the new premises.

This beautiful building is here for the work of St. Vincent de Paul to continue in Ennis and throughout County Clare. It only exists today because of the generosity of former County Surgeon Mr Edward Staunton. When you think what it means to be a Surgeon, we know it involves a rigorous training, a quick intellect, being courageous and always working on behalf of patients, it involves lifelong discipline, endeavour and integrity of purpose.

The Surgeon is often the last bastion of hope for the patient with the diagnosis they were hoping would never be delivered to them. Mr Staunton as a County Surgeon had to deal with every type of trauma and remedial surgery. When you are a County Surgeon you have to be fearless and deal with whatever presents to your theatre, you have to be brave and you have to be resilient in the face of adversity. A Surgeon deals with people who are very much on the cusp between life and death.

A life spent in the service of other people's health and wellbeing has to make a person think about the meaning of life and what matters most. How many people did he save who went on to do good things? How many families did he keep together? How many people's lives did he improve by his actions over the course of his life as a





L to R – Geoff Meagher National President, Bishop Fintan Monahan Bishop of Killaloe, Stan Moroney longest serving SVP volunteer in Ennis, Ann Norton Mayor of Ennis. Also behind partly hidden are John Cullinane Area President and Canon Bob Hanna Church of Ireland Rector of Ennis.

healthcare professional? This life of service, of thinking about others was a guiding principle of his professional life and his generosity continues with his decision to be a benefactor to SVP.

It is our intention and sincerest hope Mr Staunton's guiding principles to be a bastion of hope; to be of service and to make a difference to the lives of others who come to us in their hour of need will be the lived experience of this building. That the lives of the people we meet, the people we serve and reach will be made better because of Mr Staunton's legacy.

The core work of the Society is visiting families in need; our aim is to maintain the dignity of the individual and to promote long term self-sufficiency. While we act as a short-term safety net for those who fall outside the care of the Welfare state or need emergency financial support, we try to embrace those who are marginalised by helping them to rekindle their self-respect and sense of worth.

The Society continues to meet need from wherever it comes as best we can. I express a word of appreciation to the general public and our countless donors throughout the County, without your support we simply could not do our work. We look forward to the general public supporting our new Vincent's shop with donations of new and good quality clothing, bed linens, delph and DVDs which will be sold to persons and families in need at very reasonable cost.

SVP Shops

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) is the largest, voluntary, charitable organisation in Ireland. Its membership of 11,000 volunteers throughout the country is supported by professional staff, working for social justice and creation of a more just, caring nation. The Society is a direct service non-profit organisation whose work primarily involves person-to-person contact with people who have a variety of needs.

SVP shops which are almost nationwide are a very important aspect of the service SVP provides. For many years the Society has provided people in need with new and second-hand clothing, furniture and household goods. The large cohort of volunteers who work in our shops are essential in maintaining their viability and ethos, ably supported and managed in some case by paid Managers, volunteers and community employment trainees.

SVP shops are the 'public face' of SVP in the community and through them we can ensure that customers have access to high quality used goods at low prices, have the opportunity to donate goods in support of the Society's work and have an awareness of SVP at local level. The charity shop sector continues to be highly competitive with increasing professionalism of presentation and management evident. Shopper's expectations of quality and service product have increased. Competition for donations and recycling has increased, often by organisations of dubious veracity, adds further to the complexity and confusion for potential donors and customers.

400 Years of the Vincentian Charism

'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.' A Jubilee Year theme at the heart of our shared Vincentian calling

Larry Tuomey
Member in East Region, Ireland

Absorbed with Conference responsibilities, it is understandable that members may overlook that the Society is a worldwide organization with over 800,000 members in 151 countries. And that it is also part of the wider Vincentian Family which includes all organisations; ecclesiastical and lay, which share the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul. Chief among these are the Daughters of Charity, Congregation of the Mission, AIC (formerly Ladies of Charity), Vincentian Marian Youth and the Society, all of whom seek to collaborate together in common projects and develop close relationships.

The Society might not have survived its early days without the help of one Vincentian Family member. Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, took our founding members under her wing. Her wise counsel and support helped Ozanam and his companions to overcome their inexperience and timidity in dealing with poor people and strike out as a lay organisation inspired by the example of St. Vincent de Paul.

It is in this continued inspiration by the example of the life of St. Vincent de Paul that we celebrate this year, the 400th anniversary of the 'Way of St. Vincent de Paul'.

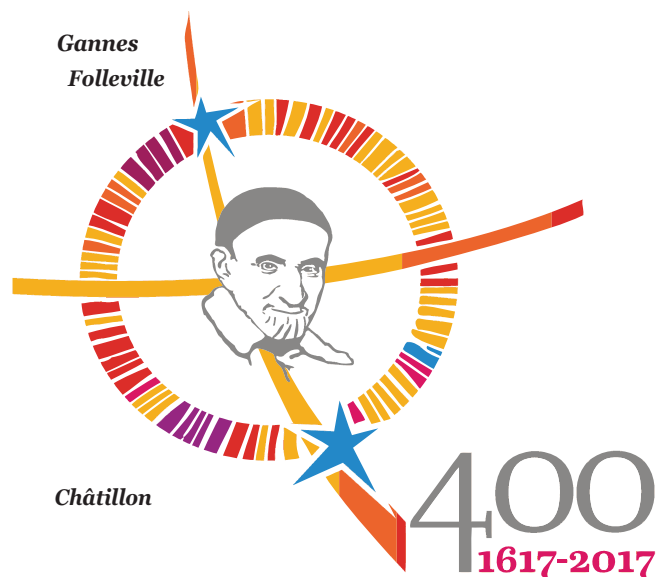
In 1617 while preaching in Châtillon (SW France), Vincent exhorted the congregation to take responsibility for a poor family where there was illness and hunger. The response was overwhelming. Vincent had his great flash of inspiration for a charity to be effective it must be properly organised – something which has had an impact on the world for the last 400 years. The Ladies of Charity was the first lay response, the first of thousands of members of numerous branches of the Vincentian Family who down the years have tried to live 'Vincent's Way', to the best of their abilities.

As Fr. Tomaz Mavric CM, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission in his message for the 400th Anniversary wrote – "Now it is our turn".

The theme for this Jubilee Year is from Matthew 25:35 (a Gospel text at the heart of our shared Vincentian calling) – 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'

The challenge for us all in our various branches of the Vincentian Family is how to respond.

One initiative Fr. Tomaz proposes is to encourage new members (religious or lay) to the various branches of the Vincentian Family, through prayer, active encouragement or positive action. His challenge for us in the Society is for each of us to introduce one possible new member to our Conference in this Jubilee Year. Nothing more but nothing less!





Pause and reflect...What we do, how and why?

Denis Loughrey, President of Immaculate Conception Conference, Cookstown

I would like all Vincentians to pause and reflect and ask themselves:

1. Do I enjoy helping people who are marginalised and less well-off in their struggles?
2. Do I enjoy and partake in the meetings, which are the format we have for determining our weekly schedule of visitations?
3. Do I believe my reasoning, as a Vincentian, as to why I am doing this charitable work?

I do not think there is a Vincentian, who on reflection does not remember their first home visit and the emotion it gave them forming a large part of the reason why they joined SVP. Our founder Frederic Ozanam stated, "The knowledge of social well-being and of reform can be learned, not from books, nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor persons garret, sitting by their bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces them, sharing the secrets of their lonely hearts and troubled minds." Serious challenges are implicit in this as our ageing population increases and our health service lowers the unit amount spent per person on mainline service provision.

Every Conference will have to directly address issues of loneliness and isolation especially, in the increasing elderly and mentally troubled persons. Many require a different approach and Vincentians need to think outside the traditional box.

Many old, mentally ill, addicted and lonely persons appreciate a friendly face, enjoy a chat and even a cuppa and a biscuit. Should we be looking at differing approaches? Shopping, home DIY and decorating, benefit checks and form filling in the home, trips to respite and residential centres?

Pause and Reflect!

I have met Vincentians who have been members of SVP for over 30 years and also fledgling members of only a few months. The more senior Vincentians are mostly set in the protection of the 'way it was always done' syndrome and the new members want to hit the ground running and make a difference to the social fabric of today by tackling all the modern social injustices. I have no criticism of either philosophy but in the context of a conference meeting it is not always feasible to accommodate both and unfortunately the meetings can be frustrating when different factions have differing agendas.

Pause and Reflect!

Should we allow or promote this? A variance of opinion is healthy as long as it has Vincentian motive and not just one of 'status quo' or 'power move', which would undermine our ethos.

Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland Eamon Martin, echoed the words and sentiments of Pope Francis, when he said,

"I thank God for the outreach of members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society who go out of their way to raise awareness and directly support people who have nowhere to call home."

Pause and Reflect!

Remember 'Why did I join SVP?' One will get their true answer to this vocational call whether they have been there 30 years or three years or three months. We may need to remind ourselves of our Founders response when he was asked what actions he had performed in alleviating the extreme squalor and conditions of the poor in Paris? In part of his reply he shared the sentiment that we always need to remember to protect and respect the dignity of those we help and also of our fellow man and Vincentian family.

Pause and Reflect!

Recognising an amazing woman



On Wednesday February 1st Mary Cunningham, from St John the Baptist Conference, Naas was recognised for her unbroken record of over 40 years as a serving member at Lawlor's Hotel, Naas. Liam Casey, East Regional President, presented Mary with a medal and scroll. Present day and retired members also attended the ceremony.

Mary was twice president of the St Vincent de Paul, Naas and was a founding member of the St Ita's Conference (Housing). She also started a Breakfast Club in Scoil an Linbh losa, Ballycane.

The presentation was organised by John Miley – the outgoing Conference President who had served his 5 years. The event was

opened by Tom O'Doherty, Kildare North Area President who welcomed everyone and introduced Liam Casey and John Miley.

The new Conference President Margaret Kelleher was presented with a bouquet of flowers to welcome her to the position.

A member of the conference Timmy Conway wrote a poem for Mary to mark the occasion, and read the poem aloud and then presented it to Mary.

Fitting tributes were paid to Mary on the night, extolling her hard work, dedication and above all her charitable heart. From all at SVP thank you Mary Cunningham.

Olympian Donation

Irish Olympic athlete, Ciara Mageean, pictured presenting East Region President, Liam Casey, with one of the 10 pairs of shoes donated today, courtesy of New Balance. Liam thanked Ciara for her very generous donation and wished her all the very best from SVP for her efforts on the track in 2017 and beyond.



St Micheal's Conference Skibbereen – 150 years of service

The 17th August 2016 was a momentous and memorable day for everyone involved with St. Michael's Conference, Skibbereen. This date marked the 150th Anniversary of the formation of its conference - exactly to the day.

On the 17th August 1866, the Society was instituted in the parish under the auspices of the then Bishop of Ross, Most Rev. Dr. Michael O'Hea and Rev. John Mc Bride, a Vincentian Missionary. The first meeting was held on that day to elect officers and the Bishop presided.

Mr Timothy McCarthy Downing was elected as its first president. He was a young solicitor, from Kenmare, and was the first chairman of the Town Commissioners. He was elected Member of Parliament for Cork County from 1868 until his death in 1897.

For the next 100 plus years meetings and house visitations took place after Sunday Mass. The significance of the 2016 date was first mentioned in 2012 by Br. Brendan Hamilton who proposed to the members that the occasion should be celebrated in due course, and, he also stated that it was his intention to compile a booklet on the history of the Society in Skibbereen.

On the evening of 17th August 2012 the anniversary was marked by a con-celebrated Mass with Bishop John Buckley of Cork and Ross as chief celebrant and assisted by Monsignor Len O'Brien (a Skibbereen native) who gave the homily, Fr. O'Sullivan, Fr. Thornton, and Fr. Cahill. Mons. O'Brien spoke about the history of the Society in Ireland in post-famine years and beyond, its major input in helping vulnerable people who faced the prospect of starvation, by giving a little in time of need which helped a lot, and, the huge affection held by the public for the Society.

The Mass was attended by the Regional President, Mr Christy Lynch, Area President; Mr Moss Johnson, former regional administrator; Pdraig Mc Carthy, Officers and members from our sister Conference's within the area; Representatives of various organisations in the town; as well as a large congregation of the public.

The choir was made up of SVP members from the West Cork Conferences and accompanying music was provided by members of the Skibbereen Conference.

Following the Mass, members and guests attended a very enjoyable meal and social in the Cara House (compliments of Skibbereen Geriatric Society).

The aforementioned booklet was launched by the Regional President and a copy was distributed to the assembled guests. This book traced the history of the Society from its foundation in 1866 till 2016, and gives some interesting extracts from the minutes of the previous 150 years and shows how times have changed. Most of the minute books of the conference meetings, over this time span, are still available. In fact, the original first minute book was located in recent years, in the basement of the Priests house, and, is in very good condition with some impec-



cable and immaculate writing therein. This book was one of the gifts brought to the altar at the Mass.

In acknowledgement Br. Brendan thanked everybody for their support and attendance and stated that "It is wonderful and sad that the SVP is in existence for so long - wonderful that the Society has reached this milestone of 150 years and has helped so many people, but, sadness in that it shows that over this long time span, there has been and there are still people in need of help. The 17th August 2016, in just a few hours, will be part of our history and we must look forward with hope and enthusiasm for the next 150 years."

Extracts from the minutes of the past

1866: Allocation of groceries ranged from one shilling worth up to four shillings and in the autumn of 1866 circulars were sent to local Protestants for subscriptions.

1867: At a meeting this month the relief given out was 34 lbs. bread, 28 stone meal, 5 1/2 ozs tea, and 5 lbs sugar. Total cost came to £2:12:21/2d and 24 families benefited, seven of whom were getting assistance for the first time.

1882: For the first 16 years, the conference spent £2000, and in this year the continuation of the conference was questioned and came close to extinction because of a lack of funds, and the expenditure for the year was £165 and its income was £160.

1928: A coffin was paid for at a cost of £1-5-0 and the large sum of £14-16-0 was for loaned for the purchase of a cow to enable a family to become self-sufficient.

1939: It was decided to allocate £45 for the purchase of coal.

1959: Coal cost 7-9d per cwt. The 1st issue of coal free, subsequent issues would cost each recipient 3-0d, and the Conference to pay balance of 4/9d.

1980: Sr. Joan O'Regan became the first female member to be admitted into the Society in Skibbereen, and in the Cork West Area.

1991: A German farmer living locally donated a bullock (unable to walk) to the Conference, and, a local butcher gave hams to the value of £160 for Christmas hampers in exchange.

Vincent's Clonakilty gets a make over

The newly refurbished Vincent's Clonakilty has been warmly received by the local community in West Cork, and is the template for the new look Vincent's stores. Based on Connolly Street, the shop is within walking distance of the town centre, and a visit is strongly recommended. This spacious unit consists of Ladies, Gents & Children's sections, a full multi-media area, along with an extensive supply of books & Bric-a-Brac.

Internal Vincent's branding can be evidenced once one steps inside the front door in the form of floor discs, extensive signage, and branded mat. The flow of clothes is broken by eye-catching mannequins backed with mirrors, and there is a volunteer recruitment station.

Noreen the shop manager and her team are on hand to look after all customer requests, and a return journey is guaranteed once you have sampled Vincent's Clonakilty. Donations of clothes are always well received, as are new volunteers.

The advice from all in Vincent's Clonakilty, come visit today, and see the remarkable range, space and value on offer.

Contact the shop on 086 0295142
or email vincentsclonakilty@gmail.com



Christmas in Carrick-on-Suir made brighter by St. Coleman's Youth Conference



Every Christmas, St. Coleman's Youth Conference Carrick-on-Suir deliver meals to the older people in need in the town and the surrounding area.

On Christmas morning 2016 Conference members gathered at Cafe West (a local cafe) with the owners Fergus and Ann Marie to begin the morning of preparation. Fergus, Ann Marie and their family very generously provided the Conference with the Café facilities and all the dinners at no cost.

The meals included a roast dinner, two soups, two desserts, a Christmas cracker and box of sweets.

Members helped to prepare meals and clean up, as well as delivering meals. Afterwards they were all invited to the Conference President's house for a Christmas morning fry-up.

"It was a lovely way to spend Christmas by giving to those who may not have family nearby to visit. We really enjoy doing this work and hope to continue it in years to come," says Conference member Nicole Breen.

Presentation of 10 Year Membership Certificates at St. Finian's Conference, Castletownbere, Co. Cork



Front left to right:
Catherine o Sullivan, Helen Brosnan, Mary Murphy, Eileen Healy

Back left to right:
John Joe O'Sullivan, Donal Kelly, JJ. McLaughlan and Canon Gearoid Walsh who made the presentation (Missing John Walsh)

Annual Bus Outing – Ulster American Folk Park



On Sunday 11th September 2016, St. Patrick's Conference Ballymoney, Co. Antrim held its annual bus outing for Senior Citizens and those living on their own in the community.

A great turnout of 38 people attended and travelled from Ballymoney to the Ulster American Folk Park near Omagh. There the group were able to tour the park at their leisure and on the return journey home the bus travelled via the scenic Gortin Glen, stopping at Walsh's Hotel in Maghera for a bite to eat.

St Patrick's Conference arrange an outing such as this every year, always with a different destination in mind. The aim of the trip is to give older members of the parish, as well as those from outside of the parish community who may also attend, the opportunity to socialise and enjoy each others company, and all for a small voluntary donation. It is always a key date in the social calendar of our parish and our local conference.

Presentation to 'Black Santa'



Presentation made on 1st February 2017 from Liam Beckett, (Ballymoney's Black Santa), who gave St Patrick's Conference, Ballymoney a donation of over £2,000.

Liam raised over £10,000 from his annual pre-Christmas Sit Out in December which he splits between five charities each year, including the SVP Conference in Ballymoney.

SVP raises £23k at Gala Ball fundraiser



Staff of St Vincent de Paul

Local Society of St Vincent de Paul, which has its regional headquarters on the Antrim Road, raised a staggering £23,000 at its Gala Ball. This money will support the charity's work locally with those most vulnerable in communities right across Northern Ireland, including north Belfast.

This was the third fundraiser to be held by the charity in recent years and as Pauline Brown, regional manager for SVP explains, it is the most successful they have had to date.

She said, "We know that times are still tough for everyone but we are so grateful that the public and local businesses have continued to step up to the mark and back our fundraiser. In fact, this year, the level of support we received for our Gala Ball was unprecedented and resulted in raising the most funds to date. We are so thankful to those who attended the dinner and made it such a special night, as well as those who provided the fantastic ballot and auction prizes."

"The funds raised will go straight back into local communities, helping us to alleviate poverty across the province. With more than 1,800 active volunteer members and a presence in every town, city and village, the Society of St Vincent de Paul is certainly one of the largest and most widespread charities in Northern Ireland. However, our work relies entirely on donations which is why receiving support from the public and the business community is so important to us. Without it, quite simply, we would not be able to assist the thousands of families and individuals from every community in NI that are struggling with financial hardship and the pressures of everyday life."

Pauline added, "I would also like to thank everyone who donated toys, hampers and funds to the charity in the run-up to Christmas, our busiest time of the year. We had such a generous response from the public, businesses, schools, industry organisations and those in the public sector which ensured that we were able to meet the needs of all those who approached us for support over Christmas and into the New Year."



Childhood memories forge a lifelong respect for SVP

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul is a long established Charity and like the GAA, there is a branch in most if not all parishes throughout Ireland. I have admired the work of the SVP all my life, beginning with witnessing my father's membership of SVP from the 1950s until the mid 1970s.

The members of the Rasharkin Branch in Co.Antrim were small in number and would be seen regularly collecting money outside the church door and attending weekly meetings in the parish meeting room.

As I got older I became more aware of individuals calling at our home frequently, my father would have vanished with them for a short time, and despite the questions as to where they had been the answers would be vague and short on detail.

Later I would learn of the home visitations, person to person contact and the Society's respected standing in the parish for their volunteer work in helping the needy in the locality.

These are my earliest memories of the SVP, the good work the society carries out in a discreet and respectful manner and in the spirit of generosity.

That spirit of generosity within the SVP has never been greater as their members continue to serve those in need, should that be in local parishes, distributions via the retail shops, support for the refugees at home or abroad to name a few examples.

SVP like the GAA is volunteer-led and maintains a remarkable low running cost ensuring the monies or garments donated benefits the charity as much as possible.

My decision as Ulster Council President to choose SVP as our Charity for 2016 was instinctive and I encourage all members to consider the SVP when making donations to charity.

I congratulate Regional President Aidan Crawford on his leadership of the SVP in the Northern Region over the past five years and I wish Aidan and all members of the SVP much satisfaction for the comfort they bring to the disadvantaged in society.



Aidan and Michael Hasson, Ulster GAA President who donated £1600 to SVP. The money was raised across the entire Ulster GAA family following its announcement in 2016 that it would be supporting The SVP

Clare Lodge



Clare Lodge committee and staff would like to extend their thanks to all the SVP members who have supported us in our first year, especially those who have dedicated their time and resources to ensure all our guests have an enjoyable and memorable stay. We couldn't have done it without you and look forward to your continuing support in the coming year.

And what a year it's been!

We have had Conferences sending guests from across the province as well as a number of groups using the centre including Gateway Club, Youth groups and Cross Community groups. We also provide meals and entertainment for those groups on a day trip as well as evening meals with entertainment if required.

Clare Lodge is becoming an integral part of the community in Newcastle through providing a monthly lunch club for Age NI and facilitating a Christmas Craft Fair to help support local charities.

The feedback has been very positive, with friendships built which have continued to flourish in Clare Lodge and in the community.

The following are comments our guests made about their stay at Clare Lodge:

"A home from home, all staff very friendly and helpful, always a smile and a cheery word... hope to return."

"Had a lovely stay and enjoyed it immensely, you really did spoil us."

"Our group had a fantastic week in Newcastle with you all. The building and facilities are state of the art better than some hotels, so suitable for our group... all looking forward to next year."

"This is an exceptional facility guaranteed to succeed, a beautiful setting and competent to handle group (visually impaired) with which I am a volunteer"

"The welcome, standard of food and comfort are worthy of A rating. Sincere Thanks"*

"What a great place & great staff, great chef and beautiful lodge"

"Wonderful place will be back."

Clare Lodge is open all year round and are currently taking bookings for 2017.

For more information contact:

Clare Lodge Centre

3 Castle Place

Newcastle, County Down

BT33 0AB

Telephone: 02843722849

(0044 if dialling from outside Northern Ireland)

Email: clare.lodge@svpni.co.uk



Michael Staunton - Celebrating 61 years in the Society

We had a happy occasion in Galway recently when a group gathered to celebrate Michael (Mick) Staunton's 61 years in the Society. Mick is a member of the St Nicholas Conference in Galway City.

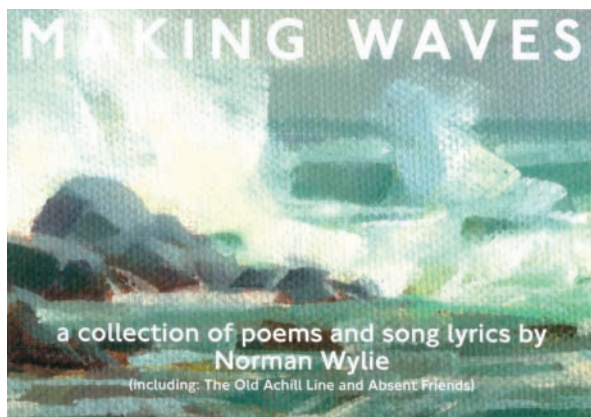
Michael joined in his first year in the Bish, St. Josephs College, Nuns Island, Galway — the local boys school. He was not on his own as his brother Brendan, Owen Quinn and others including the Coxs, the McCaffreys and the Canavans joined that time too - some even managed to be at the celebration but many are since dead. RIP.

It was a great night had by all with some fabulous stories of exploits in those early days.

A lovely memento was presented to Mick to commemorate the event.



Making Waves for SVP



An absolutely wonderful evening was had by all in Matt Mulloys Bar on a Sunday evening in late February to celebrate the launch of Norman Wylies collection of poems and songs.

Matts is a unique setting and lent itself ideally to the music and readings. Norman has dedicated this beautiful book to the Westport Conference as a mark of his appreciation for all their work. It really is a lovely production highlighted by brilliant photography and artwork.

A very big thank you to Brendan Hafferty for financing and organising its production and to the many others involved in the project such as Des Downes and Grainne O Reilly for the artwork and not forgetting the Wild Geese from Bradford who travelled over specially to play for the occasion.

Thank you one and all!

Coláiste an Chreagáin



4th Year Students from Coláiste an Chreagáin, Mountbellew, Co. Galway who raised €1,000 for the Society of St.Vincent de Paul just prior to Christmas by making Christmas logs out of trees that had been cut down in the school grounds. In the photo along with the pupils are Lorraine Donnellan, Teacher and Tom Cuniffe, Local SVP member.

Davy Dwyer - Celebrating 50 years of service in St Colmcille's Conference



The first ever meeting of the St Colmcille's Conference in Inistioge, Co Kilkenny took place in the sacristy of St. Colmcille's church after Mass on Sunday 13th February 1966. There were 12 local men at the meeting. One of those was Davy Dwyer, who recently celebrated 50 years as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Davy has been a valued member since that 1966 meeting. He has been called on many times over the years to use his carpentry skills to better the lives of people in Inistioge. His kind manner and his soft-spoken voice endear him, not only to the members of the Conference, but to the many people he has visited over the last 50 years. He is deeply respected by the Inistioge community.

A man of few words, when Davy speaks, people listen. His wit and his wisdom are greatly valued and appreciated. Fear cneasta, cineálta é, gan drochfhocal le rá faoi aon duine riamh aige.

The Conference was delighted to mark the occasion of Davy's 50 years of service to the Society. Liam Heffernan from the Kilkenny Conference presented Davy with his medal in recognition of his long-standing involvement with the Society.

This celebration came as a huge surprise to Davy as he thought he was attending a regular meeting. His wife, Bernie, was of course party to the ruse and a great night was had by everyone.

It was wonderful also to have Paddy Sutton, another original member who retired last year, present.

WLR Fm 'Be a little star' Christmas Appeal



WLRfm 'Be a Little Star' Christmas Appeal raised over €50,000 for SVP in Waterford City and county through charity auctions, Wear Red to Work and lots more fundraising activities. Where the people of Waterford supported the appeal, lots of schools also joined in the fundraising.

One school, which went above and beyond, was St Declan's in Kilmacthomas. With a new Conference set up the Transition Year, really pushed the boat out.

First they made the tea and served cakes in the local Kirwan's/ Mulhearn's shop, Kilmacthomas, which raised €1,200. From that success they went on to organise a Wear Red in School event with their fellow pupils raising an amazing €1,000.

The 2nd year students at St. Declan's also organised a food collection in the school resulting in 15 wonderful boxes of food being collected which went a long way to helping local families in need over the Christmas period.

Transition Year students and all students at St Declan's have helped so many family's over Christmas with their fundraising efforts and are a credit to the school, their teachers and to themselves.



Meeting the Christmas Needs in Waterford

Christmas as we all know is a special time of year for everyone, but one which places enormous financial pressure on families, and this is clearly reflected in the volume of requests for assistance which we receive. Waterford has been hit harder than most during the recession. The loss and failure to replace such an iconic industry as Waterford Crystal has hit the area so badly, and the repercussions are still very evident. For the last two years, one-in-nine households in the area requested assistance from SVP, and not surprisingly by early Summer the Area has run out of funds. Considering that 18% of our calls for assistance are received during the month of December it is clear to see the challenges facing the Area to meet the needs of our clients. With declining attendances at masses we can no longer rely on our traditional means of fund raising. As a consequence, we have had to look at new and innovative methods to raise the necessary funds to meet the increased calls for assistance.



WLR/SVP Christmas Appeal

After almost 40 years the WLR/Lions Club Christmas Appeal came to an end and we were delighted to join forces with the local radio station for a new and exciting Christmas Appeal. Following a tour of the wide range of SVP activities in the city by WLR management they were delighted to support the work of SVP in the area. West Waterford Area came on board to give a full county input to this new venture. After months of planning the radio Appeal took place from December 14th – 17th and involved a variety of activities such as Celebrity Auction, Wear Red to Work Day, County Coffee Morning, Farm Auction and Table Quiz's.

Throughout the campaign we also ran a Text-a-Donation line. The Mayor of Waterford Cllr. Adam Wyse was delighted to lend his support to the Appeal and launch the Wear Red to Work day. One of the items in the Celebrity Auction was generously donated to SVP by Waterford-born Irish soccer International, John O'Shea, which had three framed jerseys from his two club teams and an Ireland jersey. His mum Mary is a long serving SVP member and presented the jerseys on behalf of John. The total raised by the Appeal was over €50,000 which was really great for our first year.



WIT/SVP

Toys are such an integral part of Christmas and we all do our utmost to ensure no child is left without a toy at Christmas time. We are now in our second year of an exciting partnership with WIT to ensure a supply of toys to those children in most need. This is a partnership between the largest educational institution in the South East and the largest charitable organisation in the area, and one which has grown enormously in the last two years. We have major plans to further expand upon this relationship and involve the business community in a unique partnership which will provide the toys needed within the Waterford Area.



Cartimundi/SVP

We were so delighted to learn that Cartimundi had agreed to continue its participation in The Giving Tree in Georges Court. This continues a tradition of over 35 years by the previous owners of this Waterford based factory, who manufacture such well known board games as monopoly, connect-4 and cluedo. For every decoration children place on the Christmas tree in Georges Court the company gives a board game to SVP. Many of the local schools have embraced the concept of The Giving Tree and so we have children helping children in such a positive way at Christmas time.

SVP/Lions Club

As their relationship with WLR has ended the close relationship between SVP and Lions Club has continued. This Christmas we received hampers and vouchers to the value of €60,000 from the Lions Club. These were distributed by the various Conferences in the Area prior to Christmas to help ensure that those in need in our area would not be short at this time of year.



Local Companies

Once again we were so grateful to the various commercial outlets who once again supported our Toy Appeal. In particular we received lovely toys from Whitfield hospital, Techmahindra, Eistech and Land Registry. Staff were so delighted in the knowledge that they had helped provide toys for children in the area.



Our Thanks

We are so grateful and appreciative for all this wonderful support which we have received, especially when we bear in mind the number of charities who like ourselves are actively seeking assistance. It is a reflection of the high esteem in which the SVP is held that the above have chosen us as their designated charity to support. Despite the very cold weather our annual box collection in the city centre was again well supported by all. In addition to SVP members we were helped by pupils from a number of local secondary schools where Junior SVP Conferences are active.

We were also one of the beneficiaries of the Night at the Museum which was the launch of Winterval Christmas festival in the city which was a very successful and prestigious occasion.

SVP has been active here in Ireland's oldest city for 169 years, and we witness monthly the generosity of the people of Waterford who continue to support us. So many people in the Area who put their trust in SVP to ensure their donations reach their desired targets in their locality.

A lady rang the office in December 2015 to say that she had some food, toys etc. which she had collected from friends and family and wished to donate to SVP. We called to the lady and we were overwhelmed by generosity and sincerity of this family. Dena had three young children and was so anxious that they would appreciate the true meaning of Christmas.

This Christmas, Dena again contacted us and we called again to her. She had recently given birth to a fourth child but had still made the effort to support SVP. There was one heavy food box which we discovered had come from Katie, the eldest who is in sixth class, who had emptied her savings box to help make Christmas special for someone in need. Words cannot describe how we felt!

All of the above would not be possible but for a group of Unsung Heroes. Here I refer to the SVP members who weekly give their precious time to help people in need in the Area. It was great to acknowledge this commitment and dedication, before Christmas when the Area held a Long Service night at which members were presented with medals to mark their long service to SVP. One member has been an active member of SVP for 71 years, and is still an active member of one of our busier Conferences! Mass was followed by food and refreshments and the night was enjoyed by all. Thanks to our MSO who organised the night and our Regional President Margaret Conway presented the medals to members.

Christmas 2016 has now passed and we have already begun our planning for Christmas 2017.

Christmas in Wexford



According to Ben Doyle, Area President of SVP Wexford to say that Christmas was magical was an understatement. The Christmas period began with Bishop Denis Brennan launching the Annual Appeal throughout all the churches of the Diocese of Ferns. Bishop Brennan kindly and very willingly supports the Society's Appeal every year and is always ready to promote the good work of the Society.

South East Radio also came on board, offering interviews and lots of free promotional air-time. Some of the presenters visited St. Michael's Hall where they saw the volunteers taking in the donations, sorting it and getting it ready for re-distribution. Many of the volunteers were interviewed, which was later played on air. This programme was so well received by the public that it was replayed as part of the 'highlights' of the year.

Ben Doyle sincerely thanks all the businesses and individuals who donated toys. She wishes to thank everyone who donated cash and food. And most importantly very special thanks to the many volunteers in the Wexford area without whom none of this great work would be possible.

The High Hopes Choir from Waterford also visited St. Michael's Centre in Early December. Ben says that there wasn't a dry eye in the house when some of the members told their life story. According to Ben they are "a wonderful marvellous inspiring bunch of beautiful people".



Three members of St Patrick

Three members of St Patrick's Conference, Muine Beag, Bagenalstown, Co Carlow who received the Ozanam Medal for long service

L-R Sr Angela, Joseph Feeley, Kitty McDermott

In Tribute

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

Billy Duffy, Magherafelt

Billy Duffy was a dedicated member of the Society in Magherafelt and the mid-Ulster area for over 44 years, working tirelessly on behalf of those in need. He served at various times as President (1984-87), Secretary and Treasurer in Magherafelt and as Area Treasurer. A dedicated serving member right up until he died, Billy had arranged to help deliver hampers the day after.

Billy was also part of St Dismas Conference for 20 years visiting prisoners, providing help and friendship to the least advantaged in our society. In Magherafelt, he oversaw the acquisition of the SVP Conference Meeting House and the set up of the SVP Shop.

A devoted husband, the only time that Billy was absent from the Conference was 3 years ago to nurse his wife Doreen during her illness and subsequent passing.

Billy was a great friend to all Conference members and who are saddened to lose such a kind and caring friend who was dependable and a wonderful listener.

He made an immense contribution to the St Vincent de Paul Society and is sadly missed by the staff, volunteers and those he visited. His impact on the lives of thousands of individuals is a testament to his faith and generosity of spirit. We extend our deepest sympathy to his sons and daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren and all in the family circle.

May his gentle soul rest in peace.

Sr. Rosaleen MacMahon, Belfast

Sr. Rosaleen MacMahon, a member of the community of the Daughter of Charity who died on 26th January 2017 is sadly missed by many members of the Society. Sr. Rosaleen spent 17 years as a missionary in Ethiopia working in the area of catechesis. On her return to Ireland, she was appointed Principal of St. Louise's Comprehensive College on the Falls Road in west Belfast where she worked for another 17 years.

After retiring from St Louise's, Sr. Rosaleen set up 'Karios' a spirituality Centre on the grounds of the College for senior students as a way of engaging them in adult faith formation. Also, in her retirement she was a part-time and highly respected chaplain in Maghaberry, High Security Prison, Belfast.

She is sadly missed by her sisters, Sr. Bernadette, DC., Mrs. Evelyn Smith, her brother, Fr. Hugh, SSC., nephews, extended family and the Community of the Daughters of Charity.

May she rest in peace. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h'anam dlíis.

Patrick Joseph O'Brien, Wexford

The New Ross Conference has sadly lost its most senior and longest serving member with the death of Patrick O'Brien. Pat joined the Society in the mid 1960s. He has just started as a Maths and Irish teacher in New Ross C.B.S., later becoming deputy principal there. In spite of his busy schedule, he made time to do his best to help the poor in New Ross through the Society.

When Pat joined the Society of St Vincent de Paul the New Ross Conference consisted of only two members – Pat and the late Danny Nolan. They would hold meetings in the sacristy of the Parish Church after the men's Confraternity mass on Monday nights.

Pat's caring nature was also evident through his dedicated teaching. He gave up a half a day every Saturday to help his pupils to achieve their goal of Leaving Certificate Honours Maths. He also gave grinds to other pupils for free.

Pat was also a keen sportsman who played football and hurling for the local club. He later enjoyed many years of golf, and won the captains prize in 1972, with what can only be described as a unique swing.

Pat played a very active part in many other activities in New Ross over the years e.g. he was one of the founders of the Penny Bank, he was on the parish Theatre Committee – which involved buying seats for the venue and he acted as musical director in the Tops of the Town competition.

He had great faith and attended mass in the Parish church every morning.

To his wife Miriam, children and grandchildren we extend our most sincere sympathy.

May he rest in peace. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dlíis

Michael Hayes, Dublin

Our Lady Queen of Peace Conference, Merrion Road, Dublin lost a former President, dear friend and valued member with the death of Michael Hayes who died on the 1st January, 2017 after a long illness.

He was Professor and Head of the Department of Mathematical Physics at UCD from 1973 until his retirement in 2001.

He was born in 1936 in Kilfinane Village, County Limerick, the second of four sons and was educated in CBS, Sexton Street, Limerick and University College Galway. He received his PhD in Brown University, USA and was a Lecturer and Reader at Kings College, Newcastle where he met his beloved wife Colette whom he described as "the light of my life."

He was a devoted family man and will be sadly missed by his wife, six children, sixteen grandchildren, extended family and friends.

Michael was a lifelong and committed member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul being President of his local Conference and thereafter a member whose wise advice was always heeded. One of his comments was "if there is ever a child involved always err on their side".

He was a man of integrity, loyal and generous to a fault, courteous, upright and honourable.

He is survived by his wife Colette, children Paddy, Mairin, Siobhan, Michael, Paul and Sean and his brother Eugene.

May he rest in peace. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Matt O'Dwyer, Mayo

Matt O'Dwyer was a member of St. Patrick's Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo since 1971.

His sudden death last June left a sense of loss, not only in SVP but in the wider community. He was Secretary of the local branch for most of that time and also served as Regional President for some years.

Matt had a deep insight into the delicate and sensitive workings of our Society. He was tireless, patient and unassuming in his work and the loyal and trusted confidante of many people in need who were shocked and saddened by his passing.

He is greatly missed by his family, colleagues and members of the SVP.

We express our sympathy to his wife Geraldine, son Seamus and daughters Maire and Claire.

Kitty Smyth, Kildare

Allen Conference lost an inspirational community member with the passing of their dear sister, Kitty Smyth. Kitty was a founder member of the St. Anthony's Conference in Allen, Co. Kildare and continued as an active volunteer for over 25 years.

Kitty was an invaluable contributor to the Conference. She fundraised throughout her years of service and provided a sympathetic and confidential ear to all those she visited.

She epitomized the heart of St. Vincent de Paul with her natural, loving and caring qualities. Her sincerity, friendly smile and dedication are deeply missed by all those in Allen Conference and in her community.

We wish to express our most heartfelt sympathies to Kitty's family and very many friends.

May she Rest in Peace. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h'anam dílis.

Ar dheis De go raibh a anam dílis.

Dr. Joe Meehan, Ardmore

St Declan's Conference SVP are in mourning after the sudden bereavement of its trusted, loyal and great friend, Dr. Joe Meehan. Dr. Joe was a founding and active member of the Conference. He was widely regarded as a mentor, friend, GP and trusted confidant to many in both the parishes of Ardmore/Grange and Clashmore/Kinsalebeg.

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can".

The aforementioned words from George Bernard Shaw epitomise how Dr. Joe Meehan lived and served in the parish of Ardmore for over 35 years. Dr. Joe never counted days but made every day count in his professional duties as a GP and no amount of words or superlatives would do justice to a man who meant so much to so many people.

Deepest sympathy is extended to his wife Margaret, his children Patrick, Marianne & Jennifer and to the extended Meehan & Quinn families. We mourn your great loss and our thoughts and prayers are with you at this most difficult time. We thank Dr. Joe for the great memories he has left us and may the sod lay lightly on his chest.

May he rest in peace. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

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