

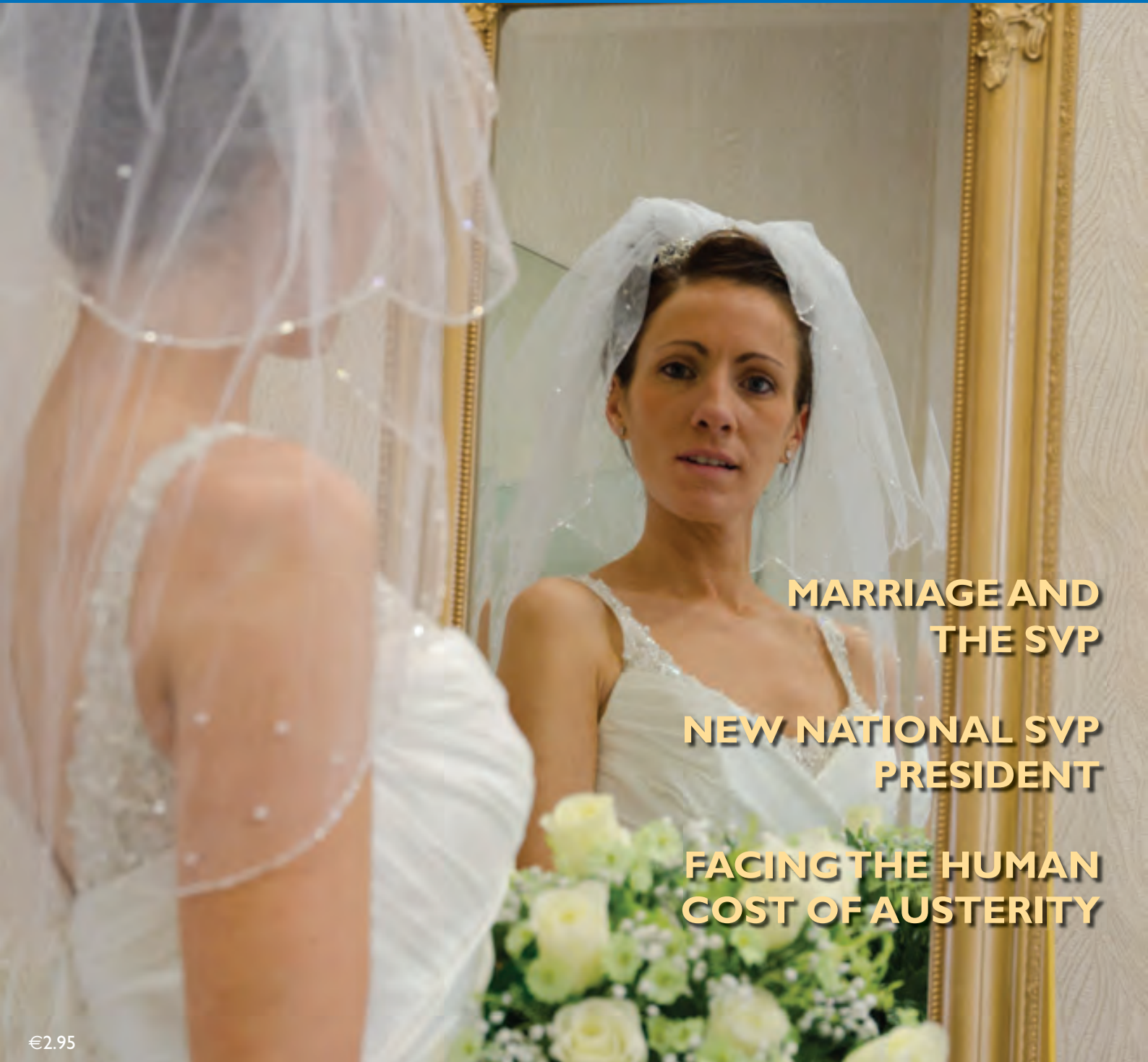
THE



**BULLETIN**

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL

**SUMMER**  
2012



**MARRIAGE AND  
THE SVP**

**NEW NATIONAL SVP  
PRESIDENT**

**FACING THE HUMAN  
COST OF AUSTERITY**

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**THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND**

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# OPINION

## Times are changing and we must change with them

Time Flies! My five years as National President have come and gone. During this time I have enjoyed visiting many parts of the country North and South. Each place that I have visited has been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me. The commitment, generosity and imagination as evidenced by the many SVP projects I witnessed has been most impressive.

During the past five years we have endeavoured to maintain the good name and high profile of the SVP. Many changes have taken place in our structure and methods, but the basic principles of our Mission Statement remain the same - Service to the poor, to those in need of our help and assistance, provided by the more than 10,000 volunteers of the Society throughout the 32 Counties of Ireland, supported by the work of the SVP staff in national and regional offices.

Some changes have come about due to State legislation with which we must comply. This legislation required several important changes. The National Management Council now meets more frequently and all twenty members had to take on the added responsibility of being a Trustee of the SVP.

I thank each member of the Council for generously sharing their talents and their time for the benefit of the SVP, thirteen of them also with additional responsibilities as Regional Presidents and I thank all the voluntary members for the work they have put into the expansion of SVP services.

We are updating our Social Housing stock to make it of the best possible standard. The number of SVP shops has increased in many parts of the country, with new initiatives and developments. As you will see elsewhere in this edition of The Bulletin, our shops have greatly improved their services, are extensively involved in recycling and are an important source of income, providing funding for the assistance which the Society delivers to those in need. They are the public face of SVP, a significant role in our work.

There are SVP Regional Offices in each of the 13 Regions around the country now, with a Regional Administrator and staff in the various offices, all adding to the service which the Society provides, backed up by volunteers who, in these recessionary times have had to give more of their personal time to the work of the Society. The recession has had a significant effect. We have had to deal with a major increase in the number of calls to us for help. The need and misery the SVP has encountered and continues to encounter is unprecedented with particular reference to those

**Mairéad Bushnell, SVP National President**



who are NEW TO NEED. Calls to our offices have increased by between 25% to 50%.

Debt management has become another major concern. We acknowledge the co-operation of MABS and of those who donate their time and talents to advise people with large debts.

The spiralling cost of energy has now become a daily concern.

THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL HAS COMPLETED HER FIVE-YEAR TERM IN OFFICE AND REFLECTS IN HER FINAL ARTICLE ON THOSE YEARS

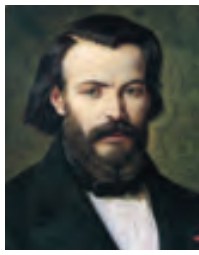
I have always regarded the support and help we given through education funding to be very beneficial. Thousands of people have and are attending the many and various courses available, either in colleges or in SVP resource centres. The benefit of Pre-school activities, Breakfast clubs, Homework clubs, Computer classes, Language classes, Home management classes and many other services which the SVP provides is priceless.

I salute all the wonderful people who work tirelessly in the interests of those in need in this Society, all our volunteers who have endless enthusiasm, energy, and good ideas and I particularly express appreciation to the younger members because it is on them that the work of the SVP in years to come depends.

Being National President has been a wonderful and rewarding experience. May God Bless you All.

See page 5 for announcement of the election of the new National President.





THE IRISH SVP  
**OZANAM  
 BULLETIN**

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SUMMER 2012

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



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



## WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING?

Government for the people, by the people, of the people? Can this description of democracy be applied to the present Government in relation to the way in which it has dealt with the deprivation and poverty in Irish society today? Very serious questions have to be asked of a Government which presides over a health system that does not care equally for all the people, an economy where costs have been allowed spiral out of control with consequences that are penal on those who are already deprived and in need and are threatening the security of many more, while yet the divisions grow and the gaps are more apparent between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Is the

Government running a country for the people, or an economy? The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has taken serious issue with Government policies. The Society has very strong questions to ask of Government policies. The pages of this edition of The Bulletin show what voluntary effort is doing, very often the work that should be done by the State. In more and more instances, because of Government policy failures, voluntary organisations are doing the work that the State should be carrying out for its people. Is the Government running the country for the people, or merely running an economy which the people are expected to serve?

SVP BULLETIN EDITORIAL SPRING 2003

# LOGIC AND LANGUAGE

**T**he editorial reprinted above appeared over nine years ago in this magazine, when the Society of St.Vincent de Paul warned that Ireland was being divided socially by Government policies. While there has been a change of Government since, the warning by this Society applies today.

Logic is defined as the science of reasoning; Language as a method of expression. There appear to be some difficulties amongst those at the higher echelons of Irish life in understanding and fully applying these methods of communication to the situation of those in this country who are finding it difficult to

survive economically at present: the people who are assisted by this Society, who approach it for assistance in the difficulties they face, as outlined in other pages of this edition of The SVP Bulletin. The expression has regularly been used by politicians, economists and others in leading, influential positions that they "**understand the problems of ordinary people**" as they enforce austerity to pay for the economic errors, some now termed 'criminal,' which have afflicted many families and individuals with great suffering.

It has to be asked if the logic of this use of language is fully understood by those who use it, those who are not in a situation where they have to consider every Euro, every cent that

they have and on what they can spend the little resource they possess: who cannot meet bills from day-to-day, from month-to-month: who worry constantly about money and the next bill. There is an obscenity in Irish life today about the very high levels of pay which some sectors of Irish society still enjoy, compared with those at the lower levels who face basic subsistence. Suffering has been visited on ordinary families to pay for the economic damage caused by the greed of those at higher levels of life.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul provides hope and practical help to those in need. This is the logic and language of responding to those who are deprived in Ireland today.

# NEW IRISH NATIONAL SVP PRESIDENT ELECTED



Geoff Meagher from Kilkenny, who has been National Treasurer of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in Ireland for the past five years, has been elected National President by the members of the Society in Ireland. He will take up office in June.

He has been an active member of St.Canice's Visitation Conference for over thirty years where he has served as both Secretary and President. For over ten years he was also a Regional Trainer in the Ormond Region and currently serves on the Ormond Regional Board and Council.

At National level Geoff Meagher has served on the National Board / National Management Council for the past six years. He has been National Treasurer for the past five years where he has progressed a number of national projects including the successful completion of an annual audit, preparation of annual cash forecasts, measurement and control of administration costs, progress on the sharing of surplus funds and

development of an IT system for use throughout the Society.

He said that he had joined his local Conference of the Society "to be involved in visitation and bring hope and help to those in need."

"I see visitation as being the core of what we do and where I see the strength of volunteer membership.

"My vision for the Society covers three main areas –

- Enhancing further the role of visitation through supporting Members with relevant training and encouraging a mix of talents, gender and age groups. In particular I would like to see the support we provide always given in a spirit of Christian charity. I believe as a country over the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' years we lost many of our values. The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has the opportunity to be part of recapturing some of those values through the way we do our work.

- The range and complexity of problems, including large debts, which our Members face, has increased significantly due to the economic downturn. We do not have the resources or expertise to solve all these issues but we can bring hope and guide people to the appropriate agencies and advice centres to find a way forward, in some instances we may play a part in the final solution.

- We run many specialised services and these have expanded significantly over the past number of years, doing excellent work. At the same time the regulatory climate has made the running of these services more challenging for a volunteer-led organisation. I would like to have a review of each of these activities and make a realistic assessment of our capability to manage them. For those we continue with we need to have an acceptance of the need for appropriately qualified staff and at the same time have structures in place that gives the Society comfort that the volunteer leadership can fulfil their responsibilities.





# "At St. Vincent De Paul We Re-Use It All"

## 5 Million Visits to SVP Shops in Dublin

There were over five million customer visits to SVP shops in Dublin in the past year. The 34 "Vincent's" retail outlets in the region are part of a major 'outreach' by the Society to the public across the nation and a major fundraising operation which helps to provide the financial resources needed by those who approach the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for assistance. There are over 150 SVP shops nationwide.

"SVP shops are more than just being a shop, they provide a vital service in the community," says Dermot McGilloway, Regional Manager of Retail Services in the SVP Dublin Region. "They are a contact point for the Society, they distribute information, they are a presence in the community, indicating that the SVP is there to help."

New initiatives are regularly introduced and one in Dublin has attracted a lot of attention – the first SVP wedding shop!

The Bridal Wear and Special Occasions shop opened at 92 Terenure Road North on a floor above the existing "Vincent's" shop, appropriately on St. Valentine's Day this year, stocking a wide range of bridal gowns priced from as little as €200. It also offers bridal accessories and a range of wear for bridesmaids, the mother-of-the-bride and general evening wear and First

Communion dresses.

"With the average wedding dress costing between €700 and €1,500 this service will be of considerable help to those planning weddings," said McGilloway. "The wedding shop attracted a lot of attention when it opened, but it is not just a sales location. After the 'Big Day' bridal gowns and other wedding attire, including unwanted gifts can be donated to the SVP, providing help for others, this is what we are about, helping those who need our assistance."

Dermot McGilloway's office in the Dublin SVP Regional base at Sean McDermott Street in the heart of Dublin City centre is above the SVP Region's main store which is a busy place. Behind the public face of the shop is a busy warehouse centre where clothes and other items donated to the SVP are brought for initial examination, sorting and preparation for re-sale. Vans collect from the 34 shops in the region and deliver to Sean McDermott Street where they are then re-cycled and prepared for re-use. After they have been sorted and treated. A wide variety of additional items as well as clothing is donated and every one is carefully checked for future usage. The variety of donated items is wide-ranging. The store has glassware, souvenir items, postage stamps, jewellery, books, videos and much else besides. As well as the wide range of clothing and accessories there are household items, books, toys, collectibles, antiques. This

resource provides the wide variety of choice offered to customers in "Vincent's" shops.

The shops themselves are impressive. They are well laid-out, with clothing and other items nicely displayed, a regular retail presentation, the response to which has been strong customer support.

"There are now 34 separate locations in the Dublin Region and there is a lot of variety and choice," Dermot McGilloway said. "Within that number Terenure offers both a Vincent's charity shop and the bridal shop. Lucan has a new shop and a dedicated bookshop for example. All of the shops are providing a vital service in the community. They are a public face for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at the heart of 34 communities in Dublin. They distribute information on SVP services in 11 languages and information on homeless and other services which the Society provides.

"Our shops provide emergency assistance for homeless visitors who cannot avail of Conference assistance at that time and who can then be referred as needed for more help. They provide social interaction which is important between customers, SVP volunteers and shop staff in a welcoming environment and we operate a policy of running customer appreciation evenings to show how much the SVP values the support we receive."

*Terenure wedding shop photographs showing SVP shop staff Joanna Proszky, Audrey Newman, Valerie O'Reilly, Deirdre Feely and Grace Curley of the Finglas SVP shop, and the Dublin City re-cycling centre and shop at Séan McDermott Street.*





## Cover Story

The system developed in the Dublin Region has been devised by constant study and assessment of the needs of customers, driven by the main purpose of the Society which is not to operate a retail sales business, but a service which helps those in need of SVP assistance in the widest, most efficient and responsive way, at the core of which is the recycling of unwanted items donated by the public.

"This is our unique way of re-cycling, or re-using. We say and we mean it, that 'at St.Vincent de Paul we re-use it all,'" the Manager of Retail Services said.

"The Vincent's shops are totally committed to recycling and ensure that every single garment donated to the SVP in the Dublin Region is either given out under our emergency assistance programme, sold or further re-cycled, but all used in the maximum way to do what was intended by the donor and that is to provide support for those in need through the Society.

"We have a great team, volunteers and staff who are dedicated in the commitment they give to this work. Our warehouse team found a market for unsold bric-a-brac and household items. The warehouse also recycles cardboard and plastic. Our team goes to exceptional lengths to extract the maximum value out of all donated goods and are committed to continuous improvement in the areas of pollution prevention, waste reduction and the re-use, recovery and re-cycling of every donated item.

"The shops also require volunteers and so they offer a way in which the public can get involved with the Society and give their time to help us. We run a successful Community Enterprise programme which has a high progression rate into employment and have provided volunteer training on the valuation of antiques, window dressing and retail skills and have further training planned."

Altogether there are 18-20 workers employed by SVP at its Dublin warehouse - six of whom primarily sort through the thousands of tonnes of donations the charity receives. Vincent's warehouse employs six van staff – three drivers and three van helpers – and three vans a day are out on the road collecting donations six-days a week. As well as donations coming from the Vincent's shops, other collection points are regularly in place at churches in addition to company and mobile collections. Clothing is the predominant item donated but Vincent's has now diversified with a much wider range of goods on sale such as jewellery, books, CDs, toys, underwear and cards.

SVP's 'Donate with Style' campaign was successfully developed and the Society has worked hard to widen its reach in attracting donations. The Society holds collection points not only at Catholic Churches but across a number of religious denominations – a move that has received tremendous support.

With its function shifting from a service provider to an important fundraiser, Vincent's offers a unique proposition to the community. Under one roof a homeless person can avail of clothing for free in line with its charitable ethos while at the same time designer items can also be purchased.

"The Vincent's line of shops have become steadily more profitable enjoying seven to eight years of sustained growth providing the Society with a net contribution of €2 million this year. This incremental growth has sprung from a cultural transformation with changes taking place in the running of the shops. The new approach focused on emphasising quality allowing Vincent's to be run like a business while staying true to its charitable ethos," said Mr. McGilloway. "Vincent's has successfully heightened its reach by offering a wider range of stock combined with longer opening hours and a broader price range and therein lies the key to its popular appeal."

SVP shops in Dublin and nationwide are a community support. This is the essence of what the Society is about and the shops are focussed on providing help to those in need.

Terenure wedding shop



Warehouse Supervisor Carl Deegan and the Séan McDermott Street Shop





# OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT OF CROÍ NA GAILLIMHE RESOURCE CENTRE

## President Higgins presents award

Croí na Gaillimhe, the SVP Resource Centre in Galway City, has been given an AONTAS Star Award, recognising its outstanding achievements.

The award was presented by President Michael D. Higgins at a special ceremony in Dublin, when he said that career and other opportunities in life are often determined by the level of educational attainment achieved.

"For some the lifelong learning journey has been a natural progression through primary and second level and onwards but for others that experience may have been very different and the path of re-engagement with the world of education may seem daunting and uncertain."

Croí na Gaillimhe provides a number of services and facilities to the local community. These include adult education courses, a dinner and social club for older people, art and relaxation and computer classes. The centre has developed a highly innovative intergenerational learning programme together with NUI Galway based on a programme called "Living Scenes" which brings older people together with Transition Year students. Participants in this year-long project completed modules in creative writing and art and even appeared on stage. The culmination of the work was the "Rising Tide" Booklet which brings together learning from the project.

Centre Manager Loretta Needham said that the award recognised "the hard work of our volunteers, staff and the people who take part

in our services which makes Croí na Gaillimhe a warm and welcoming place for so many people in Galway."

"Over the past number of years we have built up the number of education opportunities for people in the area. During these difficult times our services are even more needed, helping people combat isolation, make friends and creating strong links across different generations."

Funding for this project is from the Maureen O'Connell Fund of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

AONTAS, which organised the awards, is the National Adult Learning Organisation.

*Harry Kenney, Secretary of St. James' Conference, which operates Croí na Gaillimhe; with President Higgins and Loretta Needham, Manager, Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre*



# The Human Cost of Austerity and the Vincentian Challenge

*The State's Economic and Social Research Institute claims that austerity is working but low-income households suffer most of the pain and little sympathy is offered to the poorest in Ireland, who are the human faces of the effects of austerity. The SVP is called on to identify the structural causes of poverty.*



**John Monaghan** SVP National Vice-President

Three reports were published over the past few months that have very direct relevance for the lives of the increasing number of people now seeking assistance from the Society.

These reports were published by the Vincentian Partnership for Justice, entitled "On a Minimum Essential Budget"; the Quarterly Economic Summary by the ESRI and the Quarterly National Household Survey published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

*One of the key findings from the Vincentian Partnership Report was that:*

- For couples with two children, solely dependent on welfare, with one adult working full-time on the Minimum Wage, or for a couple with one adult working fulltime on the Minimum Wage and the other in part-time employment that in each case their income became increasingly inadequate to sustain a

Minimum Essential Budget as the children got older.

Unfortunately recent changes in areas such as Child Benefit, the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowances, Rent Supplement and other changes will make this situation much worse.

*The CSO survey, conducted during the summer of 2011, found that:*

- More than 50% of the households surveyed had cut back on groceries
- Two-thirds of households had cut back spending of clothes and shoes
- 15% had cut their health insurance
- 10% had cut their pension contributions
- 10% had missed bills
- 20% had missed payments on credit cards

The worrying thing about these numbers is that they refer to last summer; before the impact of the last Budget, so it is safe to assume that these numbers are now worse.

Some of the main conclusions from the ESRI report, which did take account of the impact of the recent Budget, are:

- Families with one or more earners and children have been affected most by the harsh austerity Budgets of the past four years, losing about 12% of their income.
- Of those on welfare, the single unemployed and one-parent families were found to have experienced some of the greatest losses, with their income reducing by 11% and 6% respectively.
- That a combination of indirect taxes and

welfare cuts in the recent Budget had a greater impact on low-income households compared with those on higher incomes. Yet strikingly the ESRI contended that 'austerity was working' as evidenced by the improvement in the public finances, but sadly offered little sympathy to the poorest in society who are the human face behind this austerity.

## **AUSTERITY – FOR THE POOR TO SUFFER**

On reading these reports I was forcibly reminded of the words of Frederic Ozanam to the early members of the SVP.

'I am asking that we look after people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who demand with reason a fuller share in public affairs, security in work and safeguards against poverty' -- Frederic Ozanam, February 1842.

And the sad thing is that these words are as relevant for the Society of St Vincent De Paul in the Ireland of 2012 as they were back in 1842.

What all these reports certainly highlight are the statistical details of the impact of austerity in Ireland today for people existing on low-incomes, whether in work on low pay, or relying on welfare supports. But unfortunately what this mass of statistics cannot show is the human cost - the fear, the lost dreams and the despair that lie behind these numbers, such as:

- The devastating impact of current and proposed cuts in support for lone parents effectively dashes any hopes they might



have of moving from welfare to work so as to improve their lives and that of their children.

- The apparent inability of the Government to recognise the corrosive long-term impact of cuts to essential school services for children with disabilities or special needs; or by failing to recognize that children do not suddenly become illiterate or innumerate as teenagers. Consequently cuts in school services will virtually guarantee that such children will struggle to gain the qualifications necessary to find work and live with dignity in an increasingly more complex world.
- Despite Ireland already having a very high level of fuel poverty it apparently makes sense in the cause of 'austerity' to cut the fuel allowance to families and older people, thereby potentially damaging their health, if not threatening their lives.
- While the Department of Social Protection argues that the level of Rent Supplement paid for private rented accommodation should reflect market rates - and it most certainly should - they then take the cowardly approach of expecting vulnerable tenants to argue for these reductions with their landlords, while the alternative if the landlord refuses, is to make themselves and their children homeless. Isn't that some choice!

## **POWERFUL, VESTED INTERESTS WANT THE POOR TO PAY**

These are just some of the human stories that lie behind the 'Austerity is working' or the 'We don't have any choice – the Troika made us do it' mantra beloved of politicians and sections of the media. But there are always choices, the question is do we as a people have the courage to make fair choices in the face of powerful vested interests who can insist that whoever else pays for the current financial difficulties of the country, it won't be them.

What all of this means is that over the coming years we members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul will have to remember that there are in fact three intertwined strands to our SVP Mission Statement. We are all quite comfortable with the first two, offering friendship and support and helping people become independent of both us and the State, a bit like the modern application of the story of the Good Samaritan. But the third strand of our Mission Statement challenges us to identify the structural causes of poverty and need in the country and advocate for their elimination.

Unfortunately not all members are comfortable with this strand. Indeed some feel it is too 'political' and that we should not speak out or be critical of Government actions.

So it's worth reminding ourselves once again of the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam:

'You must not be content with simply tiding the poor over a poverty crisis, but rather you must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty with the aim of a long-term improvement'.

And so by engaging in our Vincentian advocacy work we are doing nothing more than living out that instruction from Blessed Frederic. In fact we are, in a very practical way, invoking the spirit of the great social Encyclicals of the Church and the application of Catholic social teaching for the 'Common Good'. So if we are to try and bring alive the message of love and hope contained in the Gospels then we must not only continue to 'seek and find those who are forgotten' but we must also point out to the Government and others, that every day we see the very ugly face of austerity and that whether austerity is in fact working very much depends on where you are in the Irish social pecking order.



## FREDERIC OZANAM LECTURE

This event is being organised by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice for the members of the Vincentian Family in Ireland which includes the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Fathers, Daughters of Charity and Holy Faith Sisters. Enquiries to Bernadette at 01-8780425.

It will take place on Tuesday night, October 9 next at 7 p.m. at All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 when the keynote address "The Spirituality, Charism and Vision in the person of Blessed Frederic Ozanam" will be delivered by Dr. Michael Thio, President-General of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Contributions on the influences on Frederic and his companions of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Rosalie Rendu will be made by a Vincentian Father and a Daughter of Charity.

# ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY HOLIDAY CENTRES

## A Warm Welcome and Life Long Friendships

*By Georgina Fox, Manager, Bundoran Holiday Centre*

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has been providing holiday breaks for many years to individuals and families. Holidays range from a week to a weekend and are proving to be a very worthwhile and rewarding experience.

Every year those that are involved in providing these holidays meet to share their experiences and learn how to develop and improve their holiday centre. This year the annual holiday centre seminar took place in Bundoran Holiday Centre in March. Each of the holiday centres are unique and special in their own way and offer an array of different facilities and activities. Whether the holiday is action packed or is in a relaxing hideaway, each one of the holiday centres shares a common goal and their focus is on their residents and making their holiday one they will never forget.

For all of us, the anticipation and excitement of a holiday is huge. For many of our guests, this holiday may be the only one they get or have ever had.

The benefits and memorable experiences our guests take away from their holiday are enormous and in some cases life-changing. In many cases the friendships made while on holiday leave an everlasting impression and give hope to someone who may have been lost and lonely.

All of the holiday centres provide a safe, welcoming and caring environment away from the stresses and strains of everyday life. We are informal and easy-going and believe in traditional home values, peace, joy and friendship and that everyone deserves the benefits a warm and relaxing holiday can bring.

The weekend gave rise to lively and informative discussion with members highlighting both the achievements and challenges involved in providing holidays to those in need of a break in these harsh economic times. SVP Holiday Centres pride themselves on providing a highly personalised service, characterised by the warmth of their welcome, personal care and attention, full and

varied activity programmes and an opportunity to make life-long friendships and a store of happy memories.

Activities provided range from music and dance to tai chi and jewellery making, as well as the ever popular Bingo. Each Centre has its own unique history, charm and character but all are united in the welcome they offer and the care they provide to all their guests.

SVP Holiday Centres provide guests with a welcome respite from the challenges and stresses of daily life and provide an experience of peace, joy, warmth and friendship.

The seven Centres rely on the support of SVP Conferences to ensure people who are in need are supported to enjoy a holiday break. Holidays help build happy memories and life-long friendships. These are precious and to be valued and celebrated.

CENTRE	ADDRESS	PHONE/EMAIL
The Towers Centre	Sandhill Road, Ballybunion, Co. Kerry	068-27371 / towersballyb@gmail.com
Bundoran Holiday Centre	Main Street Bundoran, Co. Donegal	071 9833900 / bhcsvp@yahoo.com
Kerdiffstown Holiday Centre	Johnstown, Naas, Co. Kildare	045 866337 / kerdiffsholcen@svpdublin.ie
St. Catherine Laboure Holiday Centre	Knock, Co. Mayo	094 9388262 / stcatherinelaboure@eircom.net
Carne Holiday Centre	Carne, Co. Wexford	carneholidaycentre@yahoo.ie
Ozanam Holiday Centre	Mornington, Co. Meath	041-9827808 / ozanamhome@eircom.net
Clare Lodge	Newcastle, Co. Down	028 43273127



*SVP Members involved in operating holiday centres*



# The Eucharistic Congress is an opportunity for Vincentians

Conor Gannon who represents the Irish SVP National Social Justice and Policy Committee on the Justice sub-group of the IEC says that, while initially there was little enthusiasm for this year's International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin because of the child abuse scandals, attitudes towards it have changed.



As many members of the Society will be aware, the 50th Eucharistic Congress will be held in Dublin this June. Talking to some members before Christmas, there seemed to be little enthusiasm for what appeared to be a replication of the display of triumphalism that was seen in 1932. On that occasion, perhaps still within the memory of some members, the Irish church organised a tour de force of Catholic religious expression. Count John Mc Cormack sang at the event and members of the houses of the Oireachtas queued to offer their salutations to the Papal Legate. In short, it was a declaration to the world that we were a confident, independent Catholic nation. The iconic image that many will remember is that of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at a high altar which was erected on O'Connell Bridge.

Of course that was a marvellous occasion for the State and did much to affirm the Faith, to say nothing of its effect on national self-confidence. However, many today feel that the time is not right for another Eucharistic Congress in light of the child abuse scandals which have shaken both the laity and clergy to their core. Since the start of the New Year; I think the mood is changing. There appears to be more attention being given

to the Congress in the media. There is curiosity as to whether the Pope will visit Ireland and, more generally, how the Irish people will react to a series of events celebrating the Christ present in the Eucharist.

As part of the preparations for the Congress, the St. Vincent de Paul Society is involved in trying to encourage people to reflect on the social dimension of Holy Communion. Members of the Society are well placed to reflect on the connection between their work and the values of the Gospel. So many members work tirelessly, expressing their Catholic Faith in actions more than words. For them, the invitation at the end of the Mass to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord" is a challenge to engage with the problems of those on the margins with renewed vigour. In fact it was Blessed Frederic Ozanam who said that "the best way to economise time" was to 'lose' half an hour attending Holy Mass.

Preparations for the Congress are in full swing and some members of the Society are involved at both national and parish level. The SVP will be represented at the Congress and volunteers will promote its work between June 10 and 17 at a stand in the Royal Dublin Society at Ballsbridge..

This is a wonderful opportunity for renewal in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

We must not be pessimistic about the future but bring hope to those we meet who are in need. Ozanam says that "those who know the way to the home of their poorer brother; whose feet have swept the dust from his staircase never knock at his door without feelings of respect."

Perhaps the challenge for us Vincentians is to encourage others to see the connection between the respect we accord to Christ in the Eucharist and the respect we ought to show to those in need.

- *Conor Gannon is a member of the SVP Conference of St. Mobhi based in Ballymun, Dublin.*

*There were 3,171,697 Catholics in Ireland in 1932 according to records of the time when the 31st International Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin from June 21 to 26. It commemorated the 15th centenary of the mission of St. Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland. Pope Pius XI, sent Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri as Papal Legate to attend the Congress. While the occasion was celebrated throughout Ireland the main events took place in Dublin. Altars were erected at venues throughout the country and many thousands of people attended Masses, Benediction ceremonies and Eucharistic Processions through the streets which were decorated with floral arrangements and bunting. A high power radio station was established by the Government in Athlone to coincide with the staging of the Eucharistic Congress. 2RN and 6CK, already in existence and Athlone became known as "Radio Athlone" or "Radio Áth Luain". Radio Athlone became known as "Radio Éireann" in 1938. Irish listeners heard the voice of John McCormack singing at High Mass. The event was also relayed by the BBC and several national stations in Continental Europe. The Taoiseach at the time who welcomed the Papal Legate was Eamon de Valera, who had been excommunicated by the Church during the Irish War of Independence.*

Eucharistic Congress 1932





# *Telling the Government the Reality of Life*

*The Society of St. Vincent de Paul carries out extensive research and advocacy work dealing with issues of national social concern, making submissions to Government Departments, meeting Ministers, Departmental officials, discussing and liaising with State agencies and local authorities on matters which relate to the general public and the community at large and also on specific matters where those who are in need or suffering from social deprivation are concerned. It also liaises with other voluntary and non-governmental organisations engaged in representation of issues of mutual concern in assisting those in need. This representative work is carried out often away from public media attention, but is vital groundwork involved in the preparation of national public policies relating to issues of social concern.*



**T**here has been an unprecedented level of requests for submissions and public consultations on a range of social policy issues of concern and relevance to the SVP. Submissions to Government Departments and agencies include subjects as diverse as Electronic payments, Sustainable Development, Water Services Reform, Regulatory Framework for Lobbyists, Personal insolvency and Property Tax. We are also involved in a number of Government initiatives aiming to connect with particular groups who are excluded in some way. These include Basic Bank accounts for low income households without a history of using banks, energy affordability measures for the fuel poor, and assisting older people with the switchover to digital TV.

#### **ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS**

In this submission we advocated that the Central Bank's Payment Plan needs to ensure that the groups we assist are not further disadvantaged. We believe that the Plan needs to be designed, implemented and monitored in a way that facilitates financial inclusion for the people affected without undermining personal autonomy or security. While we generally welcome the move toward electronic payments and it is our view that these systems will create savings for people, of particular concern are the needs of older people in terms of elder abuse, and people with disabilities, who have expressed concerns regarding possible implications of electronic payments. These worries need to be addressed and reflected in the final strategy.

#### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development are inter-connected, and addressing one aspect of sustainable development can have a positive effect on the other areas. Tackling poverty and social exclusion, addressing the spatial aspects of poverty, supporting sustainable communities and improving energy efficiency will have clear benefits those we assist. The advantages of a joined-up approach to these policies relate to public health outcomes, protecting the environment, supporting active citizenship, reducing the amounts households must spend on fuel/energy, and the move towards sustainable public finances. These are all potential benefits of a framework for sustainable development.

#### **REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR LOBBYISTS**

We conduct our social justice advocacy within many Government steering groups,

task forces, committees and of course all the Social Partnership Agreements since 2000. We acknowledge and support The Wheel (the name given to the group working on this issue) and fully endorse their recommendation that Government create a special category, with the full agreement of the Revenue Commissioners, within the register of lobbyists where charities who engage in advocacy can register as public benefit advocates while avoiding reference to lobbying.

#### **PERSONAL INSOLVENCY**

The Bill includes various arrangements which we believe will benefit some of the indebted households we assist, particularly with regard to the retention of minimum income, residual debt write-off and defined payment periods. The draft wording of the legislation is a positive response by Government but needs to tackle the fundamental social and economic factors which perpetuate the problems that brought rise to the development of the Bill. In this submission we set out some ways in which the legislation could be strengthened in order to better assist lower income households with significant debts, including mortgage debts.

#### **PROPERTY TAX**

This submission highlights the crucial need for adequate Exchequer resources for inclusive local services, including social housing and related investment and maintenance, while balancing this with taking account of households' ability to pay. Issues include home owners who may be asset rich but cash poor, or who paid significant stamp duty in the previous decade. The treatment of private rented sector properties also poses a number of considerations, as do payment methods.

#### **THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE'S INITIATIVE ON BASIC BANKING**

Under the auspices of the Department of Finance and as the first stage in their strategy towards greater financial inclusion for many of the people we assist, a pilot project is being developed by a range of stakeholders including the Department of Social Protection, the Irish Bankers Federation, the Central Bank, the National Consumer Agency and the Social Finance Foundation among others. Deloitte are managing the project where areas of Tallaght, Tullamore and New Ross in County Wexford are piloting initiatives to promote and provide transaction accounts for people on lower incomes who do not have a current account and have not had access to one for over three years, if ever.

#### **AFFORDABLE ENERGY STRATEGY – HELPING THE FUEL POOR**

This is the first full year of the implementation of the long-awaited Affordable Energy Strategy, driven by the Department of Energy. The plan requires the involvement of many Departments and organisations including the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, utility companies, the Regulator of Community Based Organisations. This year there are five 'work packages' being progressed. These include Thermal Efficiency Standards of housing, improved payment arrangements for consumers, an Area Based Approach for retrofitting measures for local authority housing, better Data and Information about fuel poverty, its nature and extent and the fifth package is Communications and Referrals, including identifying households most in need of assistance.

#### **ANALOGUE TV SWITCH-OFF AND DIGITAL SWITCHOVER**

The aim of this programme, also chaired by the Department of Energy and Communications, is to involve community and voluntary organisations like the SVP in reaching out to the people who otherwise may not make the switch to a digital television service, before the analogue signal is turned off on 24 October 2012. The Wheel and Irish Rural Link are driving this project and they are aiming to harness the goodwill, energy and 'can do' spirit of people involved in organisations that already work with and provide essential services to, the target group who may risk getting left behind with the switch from analogue TV, accessed by an aerial, to digital. Those most at risk are older, disadvantaged or isolated.

• See page 51 for list of SVP Submissions on Social Justice

# MINISTER for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People

*Kathleen Lynch, T.D.* Interviewed by SVP Bulletin Editor, Tom MacSweeney

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*We are sitting in the constituency office of the Minister in a shopping centre on the northside of Cork City on a Saturday morning as she tells me that from the window she came see the home where she was reared, the youngest of a large family of eleven and which is not far from her present home.*

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She has four adult children of her own and she tells me that all of her family live close to the original family home and they have mortgages to pay, they have suffered from the downturn in the economy, some of the members of the family have lost jobs. She makes the point, strong emphasis that she “does understand” the effects the recessionary difficulties are having on families as a result of Government policies.

I have put to her what has appeared to be a commonly-held impression amongst the public that those policies have been causing hardships to a level that the politicians themselves do not understand, because they are remote from the struggles ordinary people are having in their everyday lives.

“There may be some politicians who do not know, I cannot speak for them all, but in this country politicians are the most accessible of any nation in the world, it is the democracy we have

and it does give us an understanding of people.

Then she uses a phrase which is redolent of Cork “when people got a few bob together.” It describes in a particular Corkonian way the circumstance when people have managed to put enough money together to achieve what they needed to get.

She is referring to parents who told her that it was only on Christmas Eve last year that they were able to “get a few bob together” to buy presents for the children and “it wasn’t X-Boxes or anything fancy, it was basic, so that the family could have a Christmas... That is not to me a happy situation and people like that must find things extraordinarily difficult, It is at times like that when the difficulties can really hit a family and I would have huge sympathy for people like that. I understand them fully.”

She then goes onto tell me, in a remarkably frank description how when she had “two very small children, my husband was unemployed for two years and I always had to have a list of what I could buy, what I could get, on what I could spend the money we had and that wasn’t much. That feeling has never left me - of always having to have a list, having to be so careful about your money, having to go without, of being in fear of something happening for which you wouldn’t have enough money .

“I always say from that experience and how we had to live then as a family, that you never see the poor at sales because they cannot accumulate enough money to avail of the bargains that are available. That feeling of dread I had at the time, of fearing that you would have a bill coming in the door that you simply could not pay has never left me.

“The ESB is one bill, the gas another bill, food,

schools, clothing, all of those things, they are worries but I think that the most enormous, most difficult thing of all must be to lose your home, to have to tell your children that your house, your home is being taken away from you.

The Minister is also a grandmother, to four grandchildren, so she has no doubt that she is very much in touch with the “ordinary people” in the job she does.

“When you are at home, when you are walking along the street, people stop and talk to you, greet you, this is unique in Ireland in our availability as politicians. Maybe some don’t understand the ordinary people, but I certainly do and it is a benefit to me, a value which I appreciate, that they tell me their feelings about Government policies about the way they are being affected.”

We started the interview discussing Equality, one of the four areas for which she is responsible, the others are Disability, Mental Health and Older People.

Equality she says can be misunderstood as an area of government activity, but to her it is a core which brings the others together and she quotes the experience of being at the United Nations and discussing the “Thousand Day Programme” from a study of developing nations which had reported that the majority of farmers in those countries were women, who were producing the food needed for nutrition.

She talks about the thousand days for children from birth to their second year as crucial in forming their physical and mental well-being for life and how Ireland Aid will be providing a programme of food vouchers to help families in those nations to ensure the well-be.



We turn to mental health and she is enthusiastic about the "Vision for Change" a proposal which, uniquely in the Dail, was given wide acceptance, no opposition. The document deals with "the service and the system, with depression and with suicide," the Minister says.

Legislation updating the law on mental health is to be published shortly, reforming the law in respect of adults who are vulnerable, in the sense that they may lack some or all capacity to make important decisions for themselves. It will also modernise the law on capacity, which dates back to the 19th century. It will replace the ward-of-court system. She also says that, in the present time when there are facilities being closed in the health system, she does not want to see resources lost and intends to have them preserved in community support systems, with home visiting teams.

"There are people who will need hospitalisation, who will need in-patient treatment, but the approach to be taken should be to provide a system which supports both sets of need," not just to refer people to institutions for years, for long numbers of years, the issue is people and to look after people, this is what government policy, what a community of people, a nation should be about," she says.

A scheme is to be introduced to allow people with disabilities to avail of employment opportunities while continuing to receive an income-support payment, a recognition that the present approach of categorising people as either fit or unfit for work does not adequately reflect the reality for many people.

Depression and suicide are issues which worry her and she uses the word "resilience" several times as important in the human experience in helping to overcome difficulties. Her view is that most people who suffer from depression or are suicidal at some stage have or will make contact with a GP but that doctors can be under such pressure that the necessary follow-ups to families, for example, may not be possible and that providing a framework to assist those in difficulty is a role which must be developed, using the expertise available to do so.

Throughout the interview the Minister returns several times to what she sees as an important aspect in helping people, in the widest sense, to be resilient to try to overcome their problems, that tomorrow may be better than today and in the State role being to assist, to focus on developing programmes which help people and seeing people, not individuals, not numbers, but people.

She takes the same view when we discuss the fourth area of her responsibilities, older people, with the number of people over the age of 65 increasing by 20,000 a year.

Minister Lynch says the priority is that older people should not be seen as "a burden to the community, but a positive resource of knowledge, experience, a wealth of ability from their own lives not to be phased by problems, but to be able to help to resolve them whether in families or communities."

She reflects that where the public view has been that those with disability or mental problems

should be taken out of institutions, there seems at times to be pressure on her that she should be putting older people into institutions, which is not what she wants to see.

She says that her vision is formulated by communities she has seen specially-built for those elderly people who want or need to live in a situation where they feel comfortable, secure, with facilities and assistance at hand. "Not everyone will want to do that, many older people will want to maintain their independence, live in their own homes, but others will want a different approach. What we must do as a government, as a community is to provide supports so that both are possibilities.

As we end the interview she stresses again the need for a national appreciation of the role of older people and that they must not be seen as a burden on society and she deplores ageism, citing the comments of her political friend, President Michael D. Higgins, who articulated the same opinion "and did so very well, because it underlined the contribution which older people still have to make and he is the right person to make that clear and to do so at the right time in this year of active ageing and inter-generational solidarity."

Minister Lynch is also working on the introduction of new legal provisions to deal with domestic violence. While the Minister for Justice has, apparently, taken the view that this is already covered by the offence of common assault, Minister Lynch has said that using this offence for prosecution requires the co-operation of a victim in giving evidence and some victims might be afraid or reluctant for other reasons to do so. The Minister has indicated that she believes the issue of domestic violence has not been adequately dealt with by politicians and because of lack of specific regulations, there are people who are suffering in silence.

# SVP HOUSING IS ABOUT PEOPLE

BUT THE CHALLENGES OF PROVIDING SOCIAL HOUSING ARE INCREASING



*In the last issue of The Bulletin, **Albert Perris, SVP National Hostels and Homes Co-ordinator** gave an overview of SVP Social Housing in Ireland. In this issue he looks at what being a member of a Social Housing Conference entails and the challenges and rewards of providing social housing.*

Over three hundred SVP members are actively involved in Social Housing Conferences, providing almost 1,000 housing units around the country making SVP one of the largest voluntary housing providers in Ireland. From Derrybeg in Co. Donegal to Killarney in Co. Kerry, SVP members have been involved in the development and administration of SVP Social housing, some for up to forty years. I have often been asked by members of visitation Conferences, 'why would anyone want to be managing housing?' and this can best be answered by members of Housing Conferences. Members and volunteers routinely share with me their experiences and motivation; their stories of **watching a young couple with children have their own home with a garden for the first time, or of seeing an elderly person who had been living alone in a remote or isolated area living in unacceptable conditions, move into a secure home closer to the town or closer to family. SVP Housing is full of Good News Stories and Conference members take great pride and satisfaction in seeing the fruits of their work, in facilitating and supporting people to make SVP housing their home and their community.**

But behind the good news stories and connections with residents, there are huge challenges and huge commitments. It takes many years of volunteer investment to get a housing scheme established and a great deal of time and effort is involved in the day-to-day administration of housing. Members are better placed than most in bearing witness to the fact that the challenges of providing Social Housing are becoming greater and greater every year. Expectations have rightly changed in recent years around the quality of Rental Housing in Ireland and this has impacted both on social housing and expectations on housing providers generally. Providing Social Housing can be demanding, rewarding, exciting, frustrating and affirming, frequently all at the same time. And it is a 365-days-a-year task.

Day-to-day activities for members of Housing Conferences may involve reviewing applications and waiting lists or responding to enquiries from potential applicants or referring agencies. It may include managing vacancies, recording rental income and arrears, issuing receipts or signing rent books; Tracking expenditure for minor works, refurbishment or cyclical maintenance jobs or getting quotes for and overseeing larger maintenance works; Keeping a record of health and safety checks, from boiler maintenance and chimney sweeping to fitting and checking of smoke alarms and CO2 alarms are all routine responsibilities. As can be seen, 'Administrative' duties constitute an increasingly significant workload in any housing scheme. Many Conferences have responded to these duties both creatively and pragmatically. Regarding Rent Collection, many Conferences have now moved to Standing Order arrangements and no longer require residents to keep cash on site for collection. This is preferable both for volunteers collecting rent and for tenants paying it - many of whom are elderly and may not like having to keep cash at home. Traditionally, volunteers would visit in pairs on a weekly or fortnightly basis, collecting rent in cash or by cheque. From a security point of view this was not ideal, either for the residents or the volunteers. Administratively, it is also preferable for rent payments to be lodged directly to the bank. Volunteers still visit residents on a regular basis, to give receipts, sign rent books and discuss maintenance issues with them, or just for a visit, a chat and a cup of tea.

Fire safety is always a priority and every unit of Social Housing should have a mains-wired smoke alarm or two ten-year battery operated alarms, a fire blanket and a fire extinguisher. These are checked by members regularly to ensure they are still in place and working.

Securing vacant units and 'wintering out' - making sure pipes are turned off and windows and doors are secure, if a unit is likely to be vacant

for a prolonged period, is always an important task. In recent years BER (Building Energy Rating) certification, retrofitting of insulation and compliance with the 2008 Rental Housing Standards, which have been phased in over the past four years, has increasingly occupied SVP Housing Conferences. While all these tasks may be the 'nuts and bolts' of Social Housing, **SVP Housing is not primarily about housing. It is about people. Housing is the means through which SVP members support people in their own community, not the ends.** Advocating for residents with the Department of Social Protection or with local authorities; helping with messages and shopping or meals-on-wheels, contributing to or facilitating communal and recreational activities, paying regular visits to an elderly tenant who may be living alone, or doesn't have family or relatives around; these are all part and parcel of SVP Housing.

**I am often struck by the informality and familiarity which regularly characterises the relationships between SVP tenants and Conference members - A real sense of community prevails, a coming together. It is a most unusual and unique relationship for a tenant and housing provider to have with each other - And a delicate balance for both parties to maintain between neighbourliness, familiarity and responsibility.**

SVP Housing Conferences are made up of people with a wide variety of skills, life-experience and gifts. People with practical expertise or experience in estate or property management, in maintenance and administration and practical skills are always an asset to a housing Conference, as are people skills.

**Tenants are always at the centre of SVP Housing.**







# Rural Ireland is Upset

says Seamus Boland, Chief Executive of Irish Rural Link



**Rural Ireland is upset** and in the language of urban writer Sean O’Casey, is in “a state of chassis.” There is prohibition of turf-cutting, the septic tank charge inspections and the household charges. There are the closures of small rural schools, Garda stations, some community services centres and of course small businesses. Then there is carbon tax, increases in school bus fares and the renewal of emigration. Such actions in isolation would be enough to spark considerable anger but, together, they have imbued the rural population with a sense of inordinate unfairness.

Deep-down, communities are aware of the logic that in straightened financial times, they must expect sacrifice and hardship to come their way. However, there is awareness that the pain experienced this time is more acute than that of previous recessions and because of the isolated living patterns of the people, such pain is guaranteed to last a lot longer. Rural communities are often met with the charge from some economists that living in rural areas is a choice and that by making such a choice people must be prepared to pay extra for services.

The fact that just under 39% of our total population live in diverse rural settlements is illustrative of the reality, that most of the population live and work on their farms and are not in a position to choose where to live.

**The lack of positive initiatives that would ease the plight of communities who genuinely believe themselves under siege, ensures that meetings called to protest against the various government proposals, are large, extreme in terms of rancour and share the common belief that rural communities are expendable.**

There used to be a rural white paper, a national spatial strategy, some regional development planning and lots of talk about supporting the creation of jobs appropriate to the area they are placed. On the positive side agriculture and farming is on the up. Farm prices have increased significantly. However the increased input costs that inevitably follow have managed to cut farm profit margins considerably and therefore maintain the fact that on its own farming is seldom viable to sustain a family without the spouse or indeed both partners having to go to work. The rule of thumb is that farm family income is in average terms never more than 75% of the industrial wage and on some enterprises such as beef, sheep and tillage is considerably less. In terms of deprivation rural communities account for two thirds of the economically poor and on average need an extra €100 per week per household to maintain the same standard of living as their urban counter part (*Vincetian Partnership Study 2010*). Equally strides in improvement of broadband, rural transport and monies dispensed through LEADER and the social inclusion programme managed by Pobal must also be acknowledged.

Rural households' disposable income is already below that of their urban counterparts and recent CSO figures have shown that disposable income per person was highest in the Dublin region, where it was more than 12% above the State average.

The Border region was 8% below the average and the Midland region was 9.4% below average. Only Limerick, Kildare and Meath were the other counties above the State average. Donegal had the lowest disposable income per person at more than

16.5% below the State average. One of the main contributory factors to rural poverty is the rising cost of fuel of all types, which has not been helped by the imposition of carbon tax. It is a universal economic truth that carbon tax discriminates harder against rural families. Apart from the obvious increase in transport costs, which is not a luxury in rural communities, there is also the effect on home heating.

**Unfortunately this cost is causing a significant increase in fuel poverty.**

A household is living in fuel poverty if (a) the house has to be heated to attain World Health Organisation recommended temperatures and (b) if the cost of this heating would be 10% or more of household income. It is estimated that in Ireland a total of 227,000 households experience some form of fuel poverty. Of these 62,000 households, just under 5% of all households, experience what is called persistent fuel poverty and a further 165,000 (12.7%) households experience intermittent fuel poverty (SEI, 2003). The World Health Organisation has said it is shocked that 17 per cent of households in Ireland are 'fuel poor' (*Irish Times, August 28, 2008*).

Turf is a very inexpensive source of fuel and can be at least 60% cheaper than oil, with the majority of the cost coming from labour. This has undoubtedly prevented some rural households experiencing fuel poverty and the cessation of cutting under the European Directive for the preservation of high raised bogs will expose a significant number of households to fuel poverty.

Irish Rural Link in its submission to the Peatlands Council and to the forum chaired by Justice John Quirke, both established to resolve this problem, makes it clear that this Directive should be resolved in terms of providing sustainable domestic fuel alternatives. We believe that with the combined knowledge of organisations who are expert in this area, both in the public and private arena, it should be possible to devise long-term sustainable heating systems that are affordable and could provide extra employment for people who are in many cases contemplating emigration.

**The challenge to the Government in terms of attracting a modicum of confidence is that it needs to acknowledge that rural communities are genuinely upset because of a litany of measures which are unfairly targeting them in terms of extracting more and more from their declining incomes. It also needs to set out a clear rural and regional strategy that is respectful of the fears of rural communities. Such a strategy would be based on the need to involve rural communities in the process of devising means and methods to build healthy sustainable and resilient rural communities.**



*A young American medical student, Mary Kate Claiborne, from Augusta, Georgia is fascinated by the workings of an old hand operated water pump, dating from 1797, located in the Comeragh foothills overlooking Clonmel on the Tipperary-Waterford border at Scrouthea, Clonmel. A generation or two ago the 'parish pump' was a meeting place for rural young and old, where the news of the day and other stories were exchanged.*

**Photo: Donal Wyld**

Irish Rural Link is 21 years in existence and is the national network representing the interests of rural communities and of community groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies and sharing experiences and examples of good practice. A non-profit organisation, it was formed in 1991 and is composed of a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development. It directly represents 500 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000 and is a member of the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Social Partnership.



# 'Awesome' Youth Talent in SVP South-East Show



It was Lord Tennyson who wrote of music that it lies gently on the spirit and the music which emanated from the Waterford 'Combined Teenage Celebration' organised through the South-East Regional office of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul uplifted that spirit.

It was the third year in succession that this event took place in the Edmund Rice Chapel, Mount Sion, Waterford, under the umbrella of St. Vincent De Paul Waterford and the Information and Support Unit, Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre.

Joe Dalton was the SVP volunteer who again organised the event, putting a huge amount

of work into its preparation, the results of which were evident in the attendance by 160 students from secondary schools in Waterford City, Tramore, New Ross, Carrick-on-Suir and Mooncoin. It was described as an "awesome" sharing of talent at a very high level by the young people involved.

David O'Neill, Regional Administrator, SVP South-East, was MC for the occasion. Michael Comerford took responsibility for videoing the event, while Dragana Stevanovic was official photographer.

The programme was as diverse as was its quality, with each school bringing along its own unique

talent on the day. From jigs and reels to Vaughan Williams on the violin and "Superbass" and "Stars In Their Eyes" to uilleann pipes and a medley based on "In this City", those performing kept the students enthralled and entertained.

Photos by Dragana Stevanovic

- **Check out [www.svp.ie/south-east](http://www.svp.ie/south-east) to see and hear the teenage talent that resides in the "Sunny South-East."**





# THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE SVP IN IRELAND

*Redmund Peter O'Carroll [1804-1847]* By Gerry Martin



*Grave of Redmund O'Carroll in Glasnevin Cemetery*

Little is known of the first President of our Society, Redmund Peter O'Carroll who was a married man when the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded. He lived at Great Charles Street, in Dublin, off Mountjoy Square. His house was a substantial residence in an affluent district, as befitted an up-and-coming Barrister with prospects. He was initially Law Advisor to the Commissioners of National Education. Redmund was then appointed Catholic Secretary to the Charitable Bequests Board - at a time when there was difficulty with the Roman Catholic Bishops and Protestant Bishops when it came to the proper person to benefit from a Will.

He knew his neighbour Archbishop Daniel Murray, who had a troubled life, very well. Dr. Murray was at loggerheads with other members of the Hierarchy on many issues and was regarded as an unflattering 'Castle Catholic'. But he was a man of great principle and suffered with the population during the years of the Great Famine.

Murray formed a friendship with Archbishop Affre of Paris who was killed on the barricades in that city in 1848. Affre assembled a committee in 1847 to send money to Ireland for the Great Famine and it was to Dr. Murray and O'Carroll that he directed the funds. Redmund O'Carroll was to be the Irish link. In a letter dated 27th May 1847, O'Carroll told Archbishop Murray that the sum of £6,000 had been sent to the Society in Ireland by the International SVP Society.

O'Carroll, who attended the first meeting of the Society in Ireland at the 'White Cross' rooms on Monday, December 16, 1844, was the 'old man' of the founders, at just 40 when the SVP started in Ireland. He died at the age of forty three.

Redmund Peter had two sons, both of whom joined the priesthood. One son became a Jesuit. There was a family tradition with that Order, for Redmund, himself, was sent to Stonehurst, in England, for his education and his sons went to Clongowes Wood College. Father John James O'Carroll S.J. was Professor of Modern Languages at the Royal University in Dublin. He was reputed to speak 14 languages fluently and wrote extensively for the 'Gaelic Journal', the forerunner for Gaelic League publications.

The sons, John James and Francis Augustus, died also early in life but they did out-live their mother, Mary Catherine O'Carroll [née Goid], who died in 1877. She was governess of the Female Penitent Asylum in 1845 and became Matron of Grangegorman Female Prison on her husband's death. The writer, Maria Luddy, tells us that the 'exclusive use of this prison' for women was an innovative and unprecedented step in penal history in these islands

Redmund's sister, Anne Margaret O'Carroll, was mother to John Naish [1841-1890], who went on to be Lord Chancellor of Ireland.

Redmund Peter O'Carroll died in Bray on 8th October 8, 1847. He is reputed to have died from typhus. Whether he succumbed to this as a result of his Vincentian work we can only speculate. It was not unknown for the SVP 'visitors' to be affected when they went to the homes of fever victims. His story is recounted in Bernard Burke's 'Vicissitudes of Families' 1883 edition.

Redmund is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin. The grave lies in the shadow of Daniel O'Connell's monument. Both men died in 1847. Redmund's wife was also buried in the same grave.



# Where is the HOPE?

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*SVP NATIONAL DIRECTOR KIERAN MURPHY SEEKS HOPE IN TODAY'S IRELAND AND EXPLAINS WHY HE HAS STOPPED LISTENING TO RADIO NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES.*

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One of the first things I used to do each morning was turn on the radio, listen to the news headlines and catch up on the latest current affairs. Not anymore. I found that over the last few years there was a constant stream of negative news stories: cutbacks to essential services for vulnerable people; rising unemployment and growing emigration; political corruption; the bailout of the banks and the implications for Ireland of the arrival of the Troika. The number and complexity of the problems seemed almost overwhelming. I found it hard to listen to the never-ending and worsening situation and felt powerless to do much about it.

It seemed at times as though we, as a nation, were caught up collectively in a national lament: mourning the passing of a time of apparent confidence and great opportunity throughout the so called 'Celtic Tiger' years after which we found ourselves grappling with a vast array of complex problems, at both a national and at a personal level with devastating consequences for 10's, if not 100's, of thousands of people. It was a kind of 'aisling': an ancient Irish poetic form which laments the current state of the world and predicts an imminent revival. The only problem was that there did not appear to be much reference to a revival.

I noticed that there are often several different ways of describing an experience; that there are choices being made about what to focus on. I know of a small company which is linked to the building industry. Since late 2007 it had seen a dramatic decline in business, going from employing almost 30 people to less than 5. I imagined that if it were to be covered

on a news programme the story would be told of their struggle, decline, stress, and hardship. While it was all of these things, it was not the full story of this company. I could see that over the last 4 years it has also displayed dogged determination not to go under; huge energy in trying to develop new markets and a hopefulness that, in spite of the day-to-day struggle to keep the company afloat, a future was possible.

I'm not suggesting that we should ignore the problems we are facing. Nor am I looking for a relentless stream of good news stories. What I am looking for is a more balanced view that sees both the negative and the positive.

I recently met an emigrant to Ireland. He, his wife and family came here seven years ago having left a career and everything behind that was familiar. He left because of political unrest in his country and it was no longer safe for him and his family. Within months of arriving in Ireland he found himself 'almost destitute'. With food vouchers from his local SVP Conference he was able to survive from week-to-week and with further help from the SVP was able to find a job. Since then he and his family have made a life for themselves here in spite of the odds stacked against them.



This story illustrates that in the midst of the many and complex challenges we face there are signs of hope. Firstly, people have a great resilience when it comes to the problems they face. Their ability to cope with dramatic change, work their way through it and in some instances, thrive is a sign of hope. The other sign? People's willingness to gift their time, skills and expertise to help others in their local community, which we see in the increased numbers of people coming forward to volunteer. Over the last few years the SVP has welcomed 100's of new volunteers.

The problems which we in Ireland face are real and devastating for many people. But if we just focus on the problems, the disappointments, the negatives, we are distorting the picture. We also need to see and talk about, the signs of hope.





# **WATER CHARGES**

**WHAT CAN HOUSEHOLDS EXPECT?**



**John-Mark McCafferty, Head of Social Justice, at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, points to research which suggests charges of €400 or more per household and says that the charges present a serious social issue in Ireland, particularly for those already struggling to pay utility charges**

**D**omestic water charges ended in 1997 but are being reinstated by the end of 2013 as a result of the bailout agreed between the State, the IMF and the EU.

There are currently two options for the Government: meter-based or a flat rate annual payment. While the State would like to see meters introduced, a flat rate fee will more than likely be introduced in the short-term. At the beginning of this year the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government sought views from interested parties and the SVP made a submission on water services reform, including metering and governance.

This can be seen in detail on the Submissions Section of the SVP website. It is currently very unclear just how much each household will be expected to pay for water over the next number of years. Equally unclear is whether, and if so how, water meters will be installed in the vast majority of households. The Government has indicated that it intends to install such meters over the next three years but that seems to be a tall order given the logistics involved. It appears that units within apartment blocks will not be metered due to the technical difficulties involved and these occupants will probably be subject to a flat rate, regardless of how much they conserve water usage.

Once charges are fully established, average water bills could be €400 annually and even significantly higher according to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). They go on to say that meter installation across the state could take 10 years, given that the statutory body responsible for such an ambitious roll-out effectively does not yet exist. In addition, those installing the meters will have to get permission to access peoples' homes, which is going to be time-consuming. The Government has decided on Bord Gáis as the single public water agency.

At some point in the next three years or so, it appears that metering will start to be introduced. With metering comes the question of whether households will receive an allocation of free units, especially where ability to pay is an issue. Our preference is for a reasonable level of a free water units allowance, based on income and if possible household composition.

From a social point of view, the concern is that the flat rate may be imposed on households regardless of their water consumption, household size and composition, or indeed their income and ability to pay. This last issue is crucial for the SVP, particularly in the current context of Pay-As-You-Go meters being rolled out to struggling energy customers. The way in which waste charges were levied by local authorities was a problem for poorer households in the middle of the last decade. Given the much larger cost of water and the current problems with energy arrears, the way in which and the extent to which water is charged are crucial social policy issues and have serious implications for SVP local Conferences. Poorer households currently struggle with existing charges and arrears. Soon they will be expected to pay for the new water charges in addition to what they are currently coping with.

**The Department of the Environment's recent track record regarding waste charges and their fundamental failure to provide adequate social housing in times of plenty speaks for itself. We hope that the future will augur better regarding the Department's approach to water charges from a social inclusion point of view.**

The SVP will continue to liaise with the Department and monitor developments in this area, lobbying for a just and appropriate approach to water charges for those on low incomes.



# TOP AWARDS AT UCC

Report: Anna Louise Brunton  
UCC SVP Conference

The student Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at University College, Cork, won four awards at the annual college ceremony to honour the commitment of students to voluntary work.



They were awarded Best Campaign, Best Financial Management, Best Charitable Society and Society Achievement Award.

At times the workload became strenuous having set our own bar of achievement so high. However, this March the University and the UCC Societies Guild deemed us worthy of these awards so the sweat, blood and tears were all worth it.

Yet there remains something greater to be taken from this year - the sense of fulfilment following each achievement, both

big and small, gaining approval to hold UCC SVP's first-ever 24 hour on-campus sleep-out, successfully setting up new activities, grabbing the attention of local and national media and above all the sense of community that encompasses all that we do.

We were nothing less than a family and the UCC SVP Committee 2011/2012 will never forget the experiences shared, the generosity encountered and the sense of being part of something bigger. Wish us luck for another great year!







# Who do they think we are?

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*Charles O'Rourke was asked an unusual question when on an SVP visitation call and wonders does everyone know what the Society of St.Vincent de Paul does*

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## **He said: "Do you get paid for doing this work?"**

My visitation partner and I had just completed our initial visit to a new person requesting help when he posed the question. We both looked at each other, surprised and responded with a brief explanation of the mission of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul and of our role as volunteers within it.

Afterwards, his unusual question set me thinking. Do we assume too much nowadays in expecting those we help to know anything at all about our Society? He had contacted the SVP at the request of his mother - (God bless Irish mothers!).

With the decline in religious practise it seems that someone can, like him, reach the age of thirty without hearing anything about us at all. Even if he had, let's face it, our name does not immediately explain what we do to the non-church-going person. There are many societies around and one named after a saint would not resonate with a non-religious person - nor inspire him to enquire about it.

Now I know that the Society does a marvellous job in the media around Christmas and pre-Budget times in raising public awareness of our work - yet it is just one, albeit powerful, voice among many other charities competing for attention at such times. Maybe what is required is a more sustained effort throughout the year to identify the role of our Society in Irish life. I also know that, when tinkering, it's best to keep all the pieces.

Getting our message out more clearly could involve major advertising expense if done by professionals. What to do? Now, I have no special skill in marketing but I have noticed

that many successful business organisations use a sub-title or epithet immediately following their brand names to describe what they are about. Some examples are, "Kia -the home of the seven year warranty"; "Dunnes Stores - better value every day"; "Audi -Vorsprung durch Technik"; "Tesco - every little helps"; "Brennan's Bread - today's bread today"; "Toyota - the best built cars in the world"; "Guinness - is good for you". Sheer repetition engraves the message on the brain - so much so that I could list these examples effortlessly from memory here - and you are left in no doubt about what each organisation wants to be identified with.

I think we should consider adopting a similar technique and offer it as a suggestion "The Society of St.Vincent de Paul"- help us help others". It would cost little to tag this to our name on all printed matter, collection boxes and in audio ads. I believe it would help inform an increasingly secular public about our caring role in Irish society.

By the way, the whimsical thought occurred to me that if all Irish SVP volunteers actually were paid for their commitment of time, say even at the minimum wage of €8.65, for a modest average of four hours per week it would amount in aggregate to over €17 million annually. How unaffordable that would prove to be - even for the Celtic Tiger State!



# SVP NOW ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

The Society of St Vincent de Paul now has strong national Social Media profiles on Facebook and Twitter. There are 8,000 registered 'followers' on Facebook, people who regularly read the updated information and news of

the Society's activities. The reaction has been tremendous with people showing their support and telling their stories. There is up-to-date information on news of SVP activities, news releases, information and comment on social justice issues, fundraising events and much else. The Facebook page also provides information

on where people who need help can seek assistance and about opportunities to become members of the Society or to volunteer to help in other ways, to fundraise or donate. Twitter provides immediate information on SVP activities and opinion. These are in addition to the SVP national website [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie)

*If you would like to 'follow' the SVP or participate in either social media please visit the following links:*



[www.facebook.com/SVPIreland](http://www.facebook.com/SVPIreland)



[www.twitter.com/SVP\\_Ireland](http://www.twitter.com/SVP_Ireland)

# MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE

By Linda O'Connell, National Web Editor/ Social Media Administrator

This is a summary of some of the stories the Society has shared with its friends and followers on the SVP Website and on Twitter and Facebook social media over the past few months. It demonstrates how the Society of St Vincent de Paul has made a difference in the lives of people and enabled them to improve their circumstances with just a little helping hand. It also highlights the tremendous work our volunteers are doing on a weekly basis in order to help someone become self-sufficient. If you would like to share your story with the SVP you can email them to me at [linda@svpcork.ie](mailto:linda@svpcork.ie).

## Story 1

"I sent you an email last week .To begin with when I sent you the email I was down to my last drop of milk and was running out of coal for my fire to heat my house . My daughter's 'runners' were leaking and I couldn't stand the thought of another day struggling anymore. Tonight is a very different story, thanks to you for reading my email and to SVP I have food on the table and new 'runners' for my daughter. Next week we are moving into our new house with carpets & furniture. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the help that you have given us; I really don't think you'll ever know how much. After coming out of a destructive relationship my confidence was completely destroyed & I thought that I deserved all the hardship & this was my life from now on. Speaking to the SVP volunteers who called to me the first day I was blown away, I felt completely at ease with them both and learnt that I really had support & their understanding. When I get on my feet (and I will) I will always remember how SVP helped me through the toughest time of my life. Now I can sleep at night knowing that tomorrow is a bright day & I can deal with things and build me & my daughter's future."

## Story 2

### LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT (A Volunteer's Story)

People experiencing poverty cannot buy in bulk and so cannot make savings or get bargains that most of us take for granted. This was brought home to us in a case where a couple spent almost €250 every month travelling to and from work by bus. They could not afford to pay up front for two bus passes that would have saved them about €130. A monthly bus pass costs about €60. We provided this couple with two bus passes for a few months while they were getting their affairs in order and it was a big help in many ways. They were also able to avail of the bus passes at weekends for journeys other than to their workplace. It greatly improved their quality of life.

## Story 3

### A NOTE OF THANKS

Dear SVP,  
I have received the cheque to help me pay my college fees today with thanks! I am so grateful for this support towards my education, words are not enough to express my gratitude. I pray that the St. Vincent De Paul will continue to progress in grace and in strength. I am very happy and my self-esteem is restored.

## Story 4

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Just before Christmas the SVP came across a young mum and toddler who were homeless and living with friends but that arrangement was running thin. The Society liaised with the statutory authorities and found her a nice place to live. For this girl and her daughter it was the first real home either of them had ever experienced. We assisted with the basics such as a second-hand fridge, 3 piece suite etc. (all second-hand but in good clean condition). We ensured that Santa paid his visit to everyone in the house. We have a good relationship with this girl and she knows that if things get hard again, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is there for her.

## Story 5

### THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

A lone parent with a 3-year-old daughter was struggling on all fronts when she approached the Society for help not really knowing what she wanted. With the friendship and support she received from the volunteers who visited her, she began to grow in confidence. She had left school early. With encouragement from the SVP volunteers she completed her Junior and Leaving Certificates and is now attending University. She says: "It is a path I never dreamed I would take and with your kind help and weekly chat you have helped me get where I am today, some day I will be able to repay your kindness"

## Story 6

### CHANGING DARK DAYS

This man lives with his wife and 6 children and first contacted the Society when he became unemployed as this was a soul-destroying experience for him. He was amazed at the response he got from the Society: "In those dark early days, the volunteers couldn't do enough for us. They provided food, coal, clothes and toys. They also supported us with education funding which is so important nowadays and above all friendship and encouragement. My wife is always very anxious as we live on invalidity pension now. It is still very tight trying to provide for everyone and as she says the children are our main concern. We still depend on the Society to help out when things get tight and they have never failed us yet. In fact I look forward to their visit. The volunteers are so encouraging and supportive. We would never have survived as a family only for the volunteers of the Society".

- You can see more about the SVP on the social media - Facebook [www.facebook.com/SVPireland](http://www.facebook.com/SVPireland) or on Twitter - [twitter.com/svp\\_ireland](https://twitter.com/svp_ireland) and on the SVP website: [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie)





*Education Minister Ruairi Quinn has praised SVP challenging the cost of school books. SVP Vice-President John Monaghan And Audrey Deane pictured with the Minister.*

# PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

*By Audry Deane SVP National Social Policy Officer*

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, along with other members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar, meet regularly with the Department of Health and the HSE to discuss ways of protecting services to our most vulnerable citizens. Critical issues such as delays in getting medical cards, difficulties getting key services such as home helps, home care packages and how services can be improved for at risk groups are discussed. The SVP uses these meetings to champion the needs of those we seek to help and to ensure their voice is heard in the design and delivery of important health services.

### BATTLING THE COST OF EDUCATION

We are continuing our campaigning work of highlighting education costs which push struggling families over the edge. Last year we ran a very successful campaign where 9,000 people signed our petition to put an end to the ridiculous costs of frequent school book edition changes. The Minister for Education listened and is setting in motion changes which promise to mean less cost for parents and more rental schemes in schools. Minister Quinn recently praised SVP for its leadership on this important issue. Now we are putting the spotlight on uniforms and how we can improve the way schools approach this issue and make it more affordable for everyone.

### CHILDHOOD SACRAMENTS – FOCUSING ON THE SPIRITUAL NOT THE SPEND

The SVP realises that being able to celebrate an important ceremony such as a Communion or Confirmation is an important family event where children should not be made to feel different due to their family circumstances. The

Society has been supporting families to enjoy their special day but is also aware of the danger of overspend and subsequent indebtedness which can result. A return in emphasis to the spiritual aspect of these sacraments is something of which the SVP would like to see more. We have just embarked on a dialogue with relevant stakeholders to work collaboratively on this sensitive but very Vincentian topic.

### EDUCATING FOR LIFE - SUPPORTING EDUCATION INITIATIVES

SVP members intuitively know how important it is for children to enjoy their school days. Childhood is fleeting and once the carefree years are gone they do not come back. SVP members all over the country try in discreet, sensitive and often very innovative ways to remove the barriers which can stack up against children whose life circumstances are difficult. Some members do this through their visitation work where they see at first-hand the pressure faced by families struggling to meet the ongoing costs of education. In this all-too-familiar situation SVP members can offer both financial support and also find appropriate ways to encourage families to see the value of education that can have a long-term and transformative effect on both the family and the child involved.

We all know the corrosive and long-term damage which can follow early school-leaving. Lives can be lost through under-achievement, poorer health and mental health outcomes and the prospect of a lifetime of welfare dependency. Intervening to encourage a child to engage with school and to enjoy their experience can be a critical event with long-term positive consequences. Because of its deep and long-standing presence in disadvantaged communities SVP members are well-placed

to liaise discretely with schools and colleges and work co-operatively with committed teachers, principals and college staff to support disadvantaged students. Members often do this by setting up after-school clubs, supporting breakfast clubs, paying for drama, music and other after-school activities. Other members set-up specific groups to focus their attention and resources on ensuring that low income third level students are supported throughout their studies. The SVP Social Justice and Policy team support this work by offering guidance to Society groups involved in this work. Education meetings have been held in Kerry and Galway over the winter to share good practice on how best to work with colleges and families to support these students.

While members continue their transformative work on the ground the Social Justice and Policy team is busy lobbying key policy makers in the Department of Education to make sure that the message is conveyed to them that the cost of education acts as a deterrent for too many families.

We are continuing the leadership, recently praised by Minister Quinn, of the successful school book rental campaign which galvanised public opinion and offered a practical commonsense solution to the issue of the cost of school books and frequency of edition changes. We are currently exploring the cost of school uniforms and are working with the key stakeholders - parents, boards of management, teaching unions and leadership and policy makers. We intend to apply the same solution focused approach to this issue. We believe that uniforms should not be a heavy cost, beyond their resources for families under pressure.



# MAD PRIDE Ireland

## Celebrate Diversity Stop Loneliness

## Emotional distress is a disease of the soul not of the brain

*Says David McCarthy of the Irish mental health group, Mad Pride*

2012 is the most important year in Irish mental health according to the organisation, Mad Pride Ireland, an Irish mental health group which campaigns for, according to its own description, “the rights of the mad community and promotes the normality of madness.” It says that this is much more “about human rights than stigma.”

Mad Pride Ireland takes as its starting point that it is not possible to lose one's legal capacity. Legal capacity is the recognition given by a legal system to the agency and choice of individuals. It is not a quantity to be measured but a right that all human beings have to consider ourselves as the final arbiter in our own lives and to be recognised as such by others.

The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) adopts this view of legal capacity by requiring States to recognise that “persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life.” Legal capacity instrumentalises the principle of “respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices and independence of persons.” That is among the governing principles of the CRPD.

The social model of disability tells us that the burden of bridging a gap in worldview, or of accommodating mental/emotional diversity, cannot be placed on people with psychosocial disabilities. Instead, it is a collective responsibility of society to design inclusive standards establishing the parameters of personal choice and autonomy (i.e. as limited by criminal law and civil obligations, such as an obligation to one's spouse and children) and inclusive processes for conducting the legal formalities pertaining to such choices.

Mad Pride Ireland involved itself with a discussion group facilitated by Amnesty Ireland over the past 12 months. This group included members covering areas like Alzheimer's, Dementia, Brain Acquired Injury, Intellectual Disability and Mental Health among others. It was during this process that we believed it was vitally important to the human rights of the mad

community that we submit our own proposal to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence as we felt strongly that a compromised proposal that hoped to cover so many diverse areas would only fail those people we are hoping to help.

The proposed Capacity Legislation is a hugely important piece of work that will have wide-ranging effects on the lives of those living with the normality of madness. This is why we feel it necessary to show there are other opinions in this area.

Emotional distress, without sounding too philosophical, is a disease of the soul not of the brain.

Madness does not degenerate brain function in the same way as say Alzheimer's does and so should not be dealt with in the same way.



# ference ness



Capacity deals with our ability to make decisions, it does not deal with the merit or otherwise of those decisions, and we would argue that at no point does someone with emotional problems lose the capacity to make decisions.

The starting point for many of the opinions that will have been submitted to this committee will be that capacity is lost, a position that we argue does not apply to mental health. If this is to happen, that this legislation is drawn up from this starting point of the 'loss' of capacity then the review of the Mental Health Act 2001 will be coloured and the basic human rights of the mad community will again be ignored.

Madness may cause an individual to make poor decisions, life itself can and does cause people to make poor decisions, but what cannot be argued is that those with emotional problems have lost their decision-making capacity.

We need to develop a service that will help users come to the best decision for them, the individual, while also respecting their decision to disagree. This will require a sea change in

thinking from our policy makers and from the service providers. It will take courage of thought and conviction. The easy route is to take a compromise position, tick the box for compliance with the UNCRPD and move on. That would be a 'poor decision' and would lead me to ask have policy makers and service providers the capacity to decide on the future treatment of those within the mental health services.

There are no easy roads in this area, nor should there be. But we should all be cognisant of the very busy roads our mental health services are heading into. The financial crisis of the past number of years, growing unemployment and debt will only increase the need for these services and if they are not equipped and designed to deal with this we are heading toward many tragedies.

So where is it we need to go? We hear a lot about community facilities and multi-disciplinary teams but we are not seeing the result of this talk where it matters, on the ground within our communities. We all have a responsibility

to ourselves and our neighbours, we need to take that responsibility more seriously and empower our communities to tackle issues of loneliness, isolation and emotional distress as a community.

Mad Pride Ireland is looking at this right now with the HSE, we hope to facilitate discussions within our communities to help identify their individual problems and to work with them to put in place unique solutions that they will own and control. This is a plan to empower communities and the individuals within them. It is time for us all to take control not to be reliant on others or the State to make the first steps.

Keep in touch with us at [www.madprideireland.ie](http://www.madprideireland.ie) and follow our progress, and maybe even get involved.

# SVP NATIONWIDE

## MORNINGTON HOLIDAY CENTRE

Nearing 50th Anniversary With Major Improvements

Report: Bill Lawlor

The Ozanam Holiday Centre in Mornington, Co. Meath, is looking forward to the 50th anniversary of its establishment in 2014 with a number of upgrades and renovations in the pipeline. Fergus Ledwith, who took over the position of St. Joseph's Conference President in September 2011 from long serving incumbent Kathleen O'Neill, says that this year he expects that a patio garden with a relaxing water feature will be "on stream."



Fergus Ledwith

Also likely to be available will be an all-weather bowling green and golf putting surface. Indoor entertainment will include a twice-weekly DVD feature film on widescreen TV, as well as a new bar. Other features and activities which have yet to be confirmed, are also being considered, he added. The bar will be open for lunch and from 8.30 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. daily. Entertainment from Monday-to-Friday will include six-piece and five-piece bands with nightly dancing and singing.

The ground-level centre, built in 1964, has an idyllic seaside location on 4.5 acres. It has proved a favourite holiday destination for families and individuals from all parts of the country from May to September. Facilities include 31 twin-bed rooms or five single and 26 twin rooms (all ensuite). Two of the rooms are specially adapted for wheelchair use.

Fergus, who is confident of increasing the number of visitors to the centre in future,

has a background in the textile industry as a manufacturing engineer. He was a member of the St. Mary's Conference in Drogheda for 10 years before joining St. Joseph's at the Ozanam Centre in 2009.

## DROGHEDA

Fourth SVP Shop

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul opened its fourth Vincent's Shop in Drogheda. Situated in the Laurence Centre, it has already become the mecca for discerning customers in search of good quality and even designer label clothes, according to Area President Michael Grogan, who is very grateful to the public for their donations of high grade items. The owner of the Centre, Gerry Maguire and General Manager, Susan Drumm, have been particularly generous to the Society, which has also received their help in merchandising for the new premises.

The Society has also opened a furniture outlet on the nearby Donore Industrial Estate.

• Anyone wishing to donate goods should phone 041 9843832 or 086 0584838.



*Drogheda Laurence Centre Manager, Susan Drumm, presenting the key of the new shop to Drogheda Area President, Michael Grogan. On the left is SVP Vincent's Shop Manager Lillian Hickey.*

## NORTH-EAST ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CLOTHING BANKS BATTLE POVERTY

Report: Bill Lawlor

The St. Vincent de Paul Society's clothing bank project in the North-East is making a huge contribution towards the organisation's efforts to tackle poverty in the Region. Total net income from the scheme reached €179,876 last year when 332 tonnes of clothes were collected, according to the man-in-charge, Manager Peter Johnson.

"This venture is a vital part of our fund-raising activities which are helping to ease the economic burden for a growing number of people today," commented Regional Council President Michael O'Keeffe. He has appealed to the public for even wider support for the project, the proceeds of which are used by the SVP's local branches in helping the needy in their areas.

The total number of SVP clothing banks currently sited throughout Counties Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan is 175. The Society has contracted a commercial firm to operate the service and the distinctive blue bins are now a familiar landmark in all four counties. While the bulk of the collected material is sent for re-cycling, some SVP shops in the North-East receive items from the clothes banks. These outlets sort through the bags and keep about five per cent of the clothes for re-sale and re-cycle the remainder.

"The shops re-cycled 210 tonnes of clothes last year, receiving a total income of €147,000 from the procedure," said Manager Johnson, who is now seeking sites for the location of additional SVP bins.

• Peter Johnson can be contacted on mobile phone 087 6490396 or by Email: peterjohnsonsvp@eircom.net. He says that items from the bins will be collected three times a week and the areas surrounding them will be simultaneously cleaned by professional staff.

At the annual meeting of regional members, held in Kells, National President Mairead Bushnell reminded North-East Region members that their task was not to judge people, but to help them.

"Those in need, for whatever reason, require our wholehearted support and assistance and not a judgemental approach," she said, stressing the importance of the unique work of the Society in visiting those who are experiencing problems in their own homes. She also said that it must be acknowledged that for many members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the extreme pressure under which they were doing their work, because of the current recession, was a serious issue.

Regional Council President Michael O'Keeffe said the SVP must make it as easy as possible for people in need to approach the Society.



To help in this regard, new local Conferences, the parish branches of the SVP were being established where required.

He highlighted the importance of "more effective communication between ourselves, those we assist, those who assist us and the wider community."

**BLANCHARDSTOWN**

Next Help

The Staff of 'Next' at Blanchardstown in County Dublin held a fundraiser to assist the SVP and presented the money raised to help the Vincent's shops. Photo shows Ken Thornton of 'Next' making the presentation to Sean Osborne of St.Killian's Conference, Mullagh, Co. Cavan. Ken, who works for 'Next' at Blanchardstown lives in the parish where St.Killian's operates and has been a great support to the Vincent's shop operated by the Conference.



**WATERFORD**



**New Ways To Deal With Mortgage Problems**  
There was a strong turn-out for the annual meeting in Waterford which discussed a wide variety of topics, including how to find new ways to respond to the severe mortgage difficulties which many people were encountering and how to develop specialised, individual services to do this which the Society has arranged with an experienced advisor. The increasing severity of the recession and the more widespread and new level of demands which it is presenting were also discussed as were the issues of

communications and gaining more public understanding of the Society's work to raise more support. National President Mairead Bushnell attended and addressed the meeting.

**NAVAN**

Take a Walk and Give Help

Navan SVP is organising a fund raising walk from Navan to the Hill of Tara on Sunday, May 20. The Society in the town is under severe pressure to meet the demands being made upon it in today's recession and is hopeful that the early-summer sponsored event will attract both young and old so that their participation helps to raise finance for the Society. Navan SVP is also seeking commercial sponsors to help with running the event and for individual volunteer helpers on the day.

- Anyone wishing to assist should contact Jackie (0860593200) or Email Navan SVP@live.ie

**CORK**

President in a Kayak *Report: Yvonne Harris*

A team of Cork kayakers travelled the southern coastline from Kinsale to Cork to raise funds for the SVP. They departed from Kinsale at 7 a.m. for the 15-mile journey and arrived at the Lapp's Quay Boardwalk in the centre of Cork City to a big welcome from supporters at 4 p.m. Cork Regional President and 'mariner' Brendan Dempsey joined them in his own kayak on the approaches up the River Lee to the city and escorted the kayakers – Alan Dorgan, Jon Hynes, Alan Dalton and Gerry Geaney with Shane McCarthy the shoreside support along the way. They raised just over €3,000 for the Society. Two years ago Alan and Jon kayaked from Cork to Kinsale and wanted to complete the journey again in reverse in aid of the Society. The group had the support of Union Chandlery and the Clarion Hotel and received wonderful support from friends, the public and local companies.



*Brendan Dempsey, Cork Regional President, at rear of photo escorts kayakers to the finish line in the city.*



*Family members and supporters welcome the kayakers to Cork.*

**KERRY**

New Regional President



Donal Kelly is the new Regional President in Kerry. He lives in Castletownbere, West Cork, which is within the Kerry Region.

**MID-WEST**

Refurbishing Centre

Extensive refurbishment of the Limerick City Drop-In Centre has been completed. Renovations of Ozanam House, the regional centre has been extensive and has made it more user-friendly for the delivery of services to those who need assistance. The Mid-West Region is carrying out a study of developing outreach housing. A project is being undertaken in Newcastlewest which includes the building of a shop, office and four social housing units.

## SVP Nationwide

### NEWRY

#### Renovation Works

The existing shop, with a community and meeting room is to be refurbished. The premises is operated by the Sacred Heart Conference. Planning approval has been granted and the project has been approved by the SVP National Management Council.

### NAVAN

#### Members Receive Long Service Awards

Report: Bill Lawlor

Four members of the Society in Navan were presented with medals for giving half-a-century of service to the SVP and to their community through the work they have done for those in need over the long period of 50 years each. They are, pictured with their medals: Tom Gibbons, Mary Toole, John O'Regan and Jim McKeever.

The presentations, at a Mass in the church of the local St. Anne's Loreto Convent, were made by Very Rev. Declan Hurley, Adm.

Mary Toole and Jim McKeever have given all of their service to the Society in Navan. John O'Regan served the SVP in Mullingar before moving to Navan, while Tom Gibbons was a Vincentian in Trim prior to becoming a member of Navan SVP.



Navan Area President Catherine O'Connor said that all members of the Society hoped that all of the recipients will continue to be active members for many years to come

### CAVAN

#### School Sweet Thought

It was a sweet thought by the senior pupils of St. Killian's National School, Mullagh, Co. Cavan.

An end-of-term tea party, with cakes baked by the youngsters from their own favourite recipes, realised €500 for the local SVP Conference.

"It was a great experience for our members

who were invited along to sample everything and showed the contact between the Society and young people," said Conference President Philomena Osbourne, who also paid tribute to teachers Louise Traynor and Breda Kenny.

### 'TWINNERS' GATHERING

Report: Larry Hynes

The 'TWINNERS' those members who are committed to 'Twinning' met in SVP Kerdiffstown House to discuss the present



state of 'Twinning' in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which involves giving support overseas to SVP national organisations in the African Continent.

Some of those present had many years' experience in this sphere but for others it was a new venture with discussions led by National Twinning President Kevin Cooley. The focus for the weekend was - "Twinning in Ireland -- The next three years" so, hopefully, the results will be good and of benefit to the people we work with in Africa. It was a weekend of hard, dedicated work and consideration of the various aspects of 'Twinning' and the attention which this aspect of SVP work deserves and needs.

Thanks were expressed to Kerdiffstown House staff for their help and support during the weekend.

• Photo shows: Standing l to r John Maxwell, Rose McGowan, Mike Burke, Brian Hynes, Kevin Cooley, Fr. Jim Noonan, Mary McMahon, Rev. Alec Pursur, Linda O'Connell and Larry Hynes. Seated l. to r.: Molly Hyland and Mary Toole.

### CORK

#### Novel Food

Report: Yvonne Harris

The 5th class students of Glasheen Boys' School along with their teacher Ms. Ciara Bowe came up with a novel idea to raise funds for the SVP at Christmas time when they developed "Reindeer Food". The boys packaged specially-bought 'reindeer food' to boost the energy of Santa's transport power;

sourced clear plastic wrap and ribbon donated by local florist Fiona Donnelly at Flowers in Bloom. They then designed, printed and backed labels for the food, packaged and sold it to other pupils, together with printed notes explaining it all and put posters in each classroom. They sold the Reindeer Food for €1 per packet. Such was their success that they had to re-stock supplies and raised approximately €200 which they divided equally between the SVP and, appropriately, Bothar.



Reindeer food





# NEW NORTH-EAST AREA PRESIDENTS LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Report: Bill Lawlor

Four new SVP Area Presidents have been appointed in the North-East Region.

They are Michael Grogan in Drogheda; Michael Rice Mid-Louth; David Nelson Meath South-East and Fergal Lynch Cavan East.

Michael Grogan is a member of St. Mary's Conference Drogheda. Now retired, he is a former Managing Director of building materials group Cement-Roadstone (CRH). He is married to Nuala, who is also a member of St. Mary's Conference. They have two sons and a daughter. He says an emphasis on fundraising and a new approach to it will be an important priority in his future plans for the society in Drogheda.

"The ever-increasing demands on our resources in the current circumstances means that we must strive even harder to replenish our fast-

emptying coffers, and I will be exploring a number of initiatives in this respect. This will require renewed commitment from all our members and indeed we will be appealing to outside groups and individuals to assist us in this respect by organising events. Everyone is aware of how an unprecedented number of people have been hit by joblessness, mortgage and other re-payment difficulties. If the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to adequately assist these victims of our times it will require a huge effort by ourselves and hopefully the general public will support our financing campaigns," he said.

Michael Rice who is President of the Ardee conference is planning a revitalisation programme for the Mid-Louth Area Council and intends to meet the members of all eight Conferences under his remit as he implements a drive to boost membership. A retired Sales

Manager with CRH in the North-East, he is married with three children.

David Nelson of the Ratoath Conference is a retired businessman and recently completed a Diploma in Evangelisation and Ministry with Distinction at Maryville Institute in Birmingham – an approved pontifical college. His immediate aim is to learn more about the requirements of those in need throughout the heavily populated South-East Meath region and to continue to ensure that they are aided to the greatest possible extent by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Fergal Lynch of the Virginia Conference is a native of Navan, Co. Meath. Married with two children, he is aiming "to have all Conferences in the area speak with one voice on all issues."



Michael Grogan



David Nelson



Fergal Lynch



Michael Rice



Soprano Virginia Kerr hands over the cheque for €4,300 to Dunboyne SVP President Ellen Cogavin

## Soprano hits the right note for SVP in Dunboyne

Report: Bill Lawlor

Internationally-renowned soprano Virginia Kerr hit a much appreciated charitable note when she presented Ellen Cogavin, President of the SVP Conference in Dunboyne, Co. Meath with a cheque for €4,300 part of the proceeds from the Virginia Kerr Annual Concert held at Tattersalls in nearby Ratoath.

Since 2003 the Meath artiste has been holding concerts to raise funds for the Dunboyne-based charity, The Romanian Bread Basket Appeal (RBBA), which has saved thousands of people from starvation. Last year, Virginia and the RBBA agreed that, in the light of the changed circumstances in Ireland and the fact that there was now a branch

of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Dunboyne, it should also benefit from the annual concert.

Accepting the cheque on behalf of Dunboyne SVP which was established in January 2009, Ellen Cogavin said she was truly moved and very surprised by the amount of the donation. She assured Virginia that every cent would be put to good use. She said that since the establishment of the SVP in Dunboyne the response from local people in helping the less fortunate had been remarkable and added that, because support in the area has been so strong, the Society was able last July to open what has become a very successful shop in the town.

# 'TITANIC' SHIP OF DREAMS

*In April 1912 fourteen men and women from Addergoole, in North Mayo, set sail from Queenstown, Cork for a new life in America. Within days, eleven had died in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. Their ship, 'Titanic', sank on her maiden voyage. Rural Ireland resounds with tales of emigration, steeped in the traditions of 'letting go'.*

Each year the Addergoole Titanic Society in Lahardane North Mayo Ireland holds a unique bell ringing service for its fourteen emigrants who sailed on RMS Titanic from Queenstown, now named Cobh, in Cork Harbour.

"Addergoole will never let go of the memory of those who disappeared with that "Ship of Dreams," it is said locally where the villagers marked the centenary anniversary of the sinking of the liner RMS Titanic off the Great Banks of Newfoundland at 2.20 a.m. on the morning of April 15, 1912, by carrying out their annual commemoration ceremony when the ringing of the free-standing Timoney Bell at St.Patrick's Church resounded across the village at precisely the time of the sinking.

The annual bell-ringing ceremony includes poetry readings, recitations and songs. Many of the bell-ringers are direct descendants of the fourteen who set out from there in early April 1912 on their long journey to Cobh and from there met their fate aboard Titanic.

Dr Paul Nolan, Chairman of the Addergoole Titanic Society, recalled;

"Titanic's dead may be down in the dark icy waters of the North Atlantic, but they are still remembered. As our bell tolls for that lonely time in the darkness of the early morning, the peals ring out over the windswept slopes of Nephin Mountain and echo across the dark waters of Lough Conn, reminding us that all our emigrants, no matter where they travelled to in the world, or how they fared, are fondly remembered by us here in North Mayo."

Ireland's Titanic Village, as Addergoole describes itself, has stunning Titanic and Emigration-themed stained glass windows in its church

Designed by local artist Michael Coleman of Whitethorn Studios, the task of constructing the windows went to Art Glass in Derry, who also had the commission to create the stained glass dome ceiling in the re-created ballroom of the new Belfast Titanic Quarter.

"The two stained glass windows, one entitled 'Emigration' and the other 'The Titanic Rescue', required research with an eye for detail, as well as respect for those who perished and those who survived," according to the Titanic Addergoole Titanic Society.

Present-day descendants of the Addergoole Fourteen have kept this story committed to memory and the windows are a memorial to their ancestors, placed either side of the existing marble memorial plaque, which itself was placed in St.Patrick's Church in 2002 to honour the memory of the fourteen local emigrants who sailed on RMS Titanic in 1912.

The Titanic Window, depicting Boat 16 being lowered, is based on what Addergoole survivor, Annie Kate Kelly, who became Sister Patrick Joseph, an Adrian Dominican Sister in Michigan USA, remembered. Annie was standing in line waiting to enter Boat 16. A man accompanying two woman was refused entry. One woman said: "I'll not leave my husband" and the other: "I'll not leave my brother". They were Catherine and Mary Bourke from Addergoole. Annie, next in line, was given a place. As the lifeboat was lowered she looked up and saw her cousin, Pat Canavan and the others including James Flynn.

The window depicts, Pat was holding his rosary beads and waving. The lifeboat's capacity was 65, but it was not full. Eleven other passengers who also boarded at Queenstown were saved in this boat, which was lowered at about 1.20am. Eight were from Co.Longford and three from Co.Galway. A Galway survivor, Ellie Mockler from Caltra, also became a nun with the Sisters of Mercy, according to the Addergoole Titanic Society.

"The Titanic Window is one of the very few church windows, worldwide, dedicated to Titanic victims. Equally the Society is not aware of any church window in the country dedicated to Emigration. Significantly, these windows stand alongside the 'Harry Clark' classic church window of the Madonna and Child, a triumphant trio of

church craftsmanship for all to see in St Patrick's Church, Lahardane.

"American descendants of the three survivors generously donated the cost of the Titanic Window. Then Society members, Bridie Syron and David Donoghue, descendants of 'The Addergoole Fourteen', secured funding for the Emigration Window from other descendants in America and the U.K. of those lost. Donations were also received from other local descendants and from people with an interest in the Addergoole Titanic story."







In the centre of the village the Addergoole Titanic Memorial Park has a 12ft. sculpture of the liner's bow showing its name and anchors, memorial plaques and figures depicting the local emigrants.

"Time brought us solace, but we do not forget those who were lost from this area," say the people of Lahardane.



The annual bell ringing ceremony takes place in the very early morning of 15th April, between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. The Timoney Bell in St Patrick's Church grounds, Lahardane, North Mayo is used to commemorate the 14 Addergoole passengers who were on RMS Titanic when it sank. Mícheál O'Tiomnaidhe, the renowned Gaelic Scholar and folklore collector, erected this free standing bell in 1937. It is tolled at 2.20 a.m., starting with slow knells for the 11 victims that drowned. This is followed by fast joyous rings for the 3 women saved. Many of the Society's bell-ringers are direct descendants of the Addergoole Fourteen.

Addergoole is the only location across Europe, where the sinking of the Titanic is acknowledged by the ringing of a lonely church bell in the dead of night. It's the big bell that's now silent for the rest of the year. We have done it each year since the memorial to the Addergoole Fourteen was erected in the church back in 2002.

As the bell tolls for that lonely hour in the dark of the early morning across the deserted village street of Lahardane, over the barren windswept slopes of Nephin and across the empty dark waters of Lough Conn, the custom is a solitary significant reminder of the passing of time and the ending of lives. The dead of the Titanic may have disappeared into the dark waters of the North Atlantic, but they are still recalled by the tolling of a bell in the silence and emptiness across mountains and plains of North Mayo



*Linking Prayer & Action*



PEG HANAFIN, Counsellor, M.Sc. Psy.Rehab.Couns, Dip Psych., who has 35 years' experience in the SVP writes a personal reflection about her membership and outlines how, though housebound now, she continues to do what she can to help others.



I was a member of the St.Vincent de Paul Society for thirty-five years, serving as a Conference Secretary for twenty-four and Conference President for six years. Since 2001, when I became incapacitated and largely housebound, I have had plenty of time to think about why people like me join voluntary organisations. In my experience, the enormous amount of time, the decision-making for the distribution of other people's monetary contributions and the daily commitment to SVP duties were at all times of the year, demanding and challenging.

Although no longer an attendee of a Conference, I try to continue the work I have always done. The difference is that now I do it by telephone and through visits to my home. I no longer live in the town where I worked and was a Conference member but many people travel from there to visit me and many others come to me locally. I have near-daily contact with a wide range of people seeking advice and assistance and I come in contact with many families in need of rehabilitation. Although much of what I do is informed by my background in psychology and rehabilitation, I make what contribution I can voluntarily and in the spirit of St.Vincent de Paul.

During my years in the SVP I met many Conference members drawn from middle-class backgrounds who, before joining, may have had little direct contact with poverty or its implications. The training of members that I observed was of a certain ethos. In all of my years I never heard what I consider to be an essential and pertinent explanation of the word "empathy" which I believe is at the core of face-to-face interaction.

Empathy means "the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings". From my experience during the time I was a member, and in the intervening years I have come to believe that even though it is important to be able to give financial help, that there are many other factors that must be taken into account if the Society is to make a real difference in people's lives. SVP prayers urge: "Help us to love and respect them, to understand their deeper needs and to share their burdens and joys as true friends." We must be able to empathise with the myriad of problems that people who are disadvantaged (not necessarily

by lack of money) endure and they must be assisted in how other people perceive them and how they perceive themselves. People whose life is a daily struggle need to know that they have a valuable contribution to make to the community in which they live. They need to know that being short of money or having made mistakes is no measure of the values the person holds or the skills they must have in order to survive.

Many people who have few of the perks in life give enormous support to others in the same situation. They are able to share heartfelt feelings for others in dire straits, physically, emotionally and mentally. They can truly empathise with the feelings of despair, loneliness, isolation and being on the fringes. They have the living experience of these insights into all the realms of poverty. Moreover they have a resilience which is difficult to understand for those who have not had their experiences. Never having experienced these traumas, many of our members do not have the capacity to have an inner sense of what it is like to be bereft of emotional well-being, or to have no voice or standing in the community in which they live. These tribulations are realities for those whom we choose to serve and I often ponder the real effects of our work with those we serve.

Is that work friendship? Do SVP members actually respect all those whose lives may be blighted by addictions, perceived failures, imprisonment, or falling foul of the law on an on-going basis, because these are the commitments people make to become members of any helping organisation but especially the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. Our inspirational opening prayers before every meeting and the closing prayers that acknowledge the words of St. Francis of Assisi give an insight into what is expected and how we should carry out our duties. Do members of the SVP take cognisance of these lovely and thought-provoking prayers? "To seek out the poor and the lonely, to bring our love to the suffering and the deprived". Do they ask themselves what that "love" means in terms of those with whom we connect, or is it just a duty? Is it a true friendship, really treating them as brothers and sisters, generous with time, possessions and oneself? There are so many questions, so few honest answers.


The Society of the St. Vincent de Paul is one of the oldest charitable organisations in this country and ten thousand members give their time to its vision.

Today more than ever, people whose lives are shattered need empathy, not sympathy, to help them cope. The St. Vincent de Paul Society is very often the first place of refuge, especially in urban areas. All members need to be constantly reminded of the importance of not just the unmet needs, but the understanding that often means the difference between the offer of a hand-out and the offer of friendship bringing hope for a resolution. Loneliness, isolation, aloneness and anxiety are among the great modern poverties of our time. We live in a time of confusion, loss of leadership in Church and State and insecurity about the future for the elderly, the young, and the unemployed and for many families. Volunteering and voluntary bodies have the potential to make a huge input into addressing issues of social justice, equality, helping one's neighbour, and bringing "love to the suffering and deprived".

My time in the St.Vincent de Paul during which I was involved in the organisation and delivery of Senior Citizens' and youth holidays annually for thirty years, outings, visitation, hospital visitation, outings for elderly hospital patients, prison visitation, education, rehabilitating those with addictions and the myriad other duties and works of the Society gave me some understanding of the things that made a difference to people. These things are empathy, respect, compassion, understanding, unconditional love, being present when people needed you and above all, sincere friendship. Since I became ill, the loyalty and support of those who have been short-changed in life has been so profound that it gives a new meaning to the love, support and friendship promoted in the prayers of the Society members at Conference meetings.

There is a challenge for the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in the opening prayers. Friendship, empathy, acceptance and a continuity of presence to those whose needs the Society serves will go a long way to giving hope and support and to lightening the burden for so many.





Newsletter of the SVP Social  
Justice and Policy Committee  
Summer 2012

# A Fixed Star

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is composed of Conferences, which are the local Parish-based groups of the SVP throughout the country and this edition of the newsletter of the National Social Justice and Policy Committee brings information about the work of these Conferences and outlines how this Committee represents issues of concern to the Society and those it helps with the Government. The problems which SVP Conferences are dealing with as a result of their visits to families in their homes and other persons in need of help can be very broad, ranging from issues of migration to energy, welfare, education, health and housing. It is often where these problems converge that people can be left in dire straits without any hope or resolution in sight. The work of the Social Justice section of the Society also involves responding to proposals by external organisations or pro-actively seeking in-depth information through research.

This edition of the Fixed Star, the newsletter of the Social Justice and Policy Committee has information on Government proposals dealing with Single Working Age Payments and research

work which the SVP will be undertaking in relation to one-parent families.

The SVP Social and Justice Team has published two new guide books and are also embarking on a series of Member Support and Social Justice Seminars.

### **SVP experience of the Habitual Residence Condition**

A recent report 'Person or Number?' published by Crosscare, Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre and Doras Luimní makes many recommendations regarding the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC). The purpose of the HRC is to ensure people who apply for certain Social Welfare benefits have sufficient connection to the State. The report finds that there has been inconsistent decision-making by officials in relation to HRC cases and that knowledge of the HRC and its implementation is poor. The report also says that some claimants have experienced prejudicial attitudes from officials.

SVP Conferences often come in contact with people who have received a negative decision on a Social Welfare application. In such (as in all) cases it is vital that the decision has been received in writing, and that if appropriate an appeal is made quickly. In 2011 there were 2,369 successful appeals. The report calls for a "dramatic reduction" in the appeals processing time. The State is effectively denying some people their right to a payment due to such lengthy processing times. For those whose appeals are successful, back pay is a poor result for the time, often months, they had to do without means.

In the meantime the SVP continues to come across cases, such as this one identified by a Conference in County Cork, where the effect and misapplication of the HRC leaves families in dire straits:

"In the small number of cases we encountered the effect was enormous in that they literally had no income and no money for food, rent, heating or clothing. We work closely with them to ensure that they get whatever benefits they

are entitled to. They usually are entitled to something and their problem is usually getting the correct information and then receiving the actual benefit."

The report 'Person or Number' can be accessed on the Nasc website: [www.nascireland.org](http://www.nascireland.org)

### Rent Supplement Reductions and 'Top-Ups' to Landlords

The reductions in the Rent Supplement Scheme payments along with the increased rental contribution to be made by tenants is having a negative effect on those households dependent on the private rented sector for accommodation. This is doubly the case when landlords seek additional 'top-ups' in order to maintain higher rental incomes. Despite pressure on landlords to service their mortgages on investment properties the payment of 'top-ups' is illegal and is placing their tenants in great danger of poverty. The SVP, through its Conferences is presently carrying out inquiries as to how widespread this practice is and we will be bringing that information to the Department of Social Protection.

### Using Networks

The Community and Voluntary Pillar, which includes the SVP among other organisations, meets with the Department of Social Protection twice each year to highlight concerns and the experiences of people being assisted. Some of the issues to be raised at the next meeting include rent supplement changes, the habitual residence condition and the single working age payment proposals.

### Single Working Age Payment Proposals From The Department Of Social Protection

Proposals to replace all means-tested social assistance payments such as Jobseekers' Allowance, One-Parent Family Payment, Disability Allowance, Farm Assist, Qualified Adult Allowance etc., with a Single Working Age Payment (SWAP) over the next three years are being considered at a high level in the Department of Social Protection. The intention is that rather than seeing some groups as outside the labour force (for example, lone parents, people with disabilities, qualified adult dependents) people on the Single Working Age Payment will instead be seen as unemployed members of the labour force and will be required to seek employment, education or training as a condition of receiving a social

welfare support. The SVP is concerned that this could result in significant loss of income for lone parents and people with disabilities who are combining some paid employment with their Social Welfare payment. The SVP is asking that before the Single Working Age Payment is introduced, the appropriate supports and services to help people move from welfare into valuable and sustainable employment are first introduced. The necessary services and supports include affordable, accessible and good quality childcare and after-school care; access to healthcare professionals to manage disability, illness, addiction etc.; dedicated resources to tackle literacy and numeracy issues and enough training and education places to ensure that people will be able to earn an adequate income to support themselves and their families while they are in employment in order to prevent levels of in-work poverty increasing. The SVP will continue to advocate on this issue over the coming months.

### Protecting The Health Of Our Most Vulnerable

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul, along with other members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar; meet regularly with the Department of Health and the HSE to discuss ways of protecting services to our most vulnerable citizens. Critical issues such as delays in getting medical cards, difficulties in gaining access to services such as home helps, home care packages and how services can be improved for at- risk groups are discussed. The SVP represents the needs of those we seek to help and to ensure their voice is heard in the design and delivery of important health services.

### SVP Research With One-Parent Families

The Society's National Management Council has decided that a research projects should be undertaken looking at the issues faced by one-parent families which the SVP helps. The largest group requesting assistance through contacting SVP regional offices are households with children, in particular those headed by a person parenting alone. The aim of the research is to identify how the Society can focus its services and social policy work to ensure that our support to lone parents most effectively enables their full and equal participation in Irish society. External consultants will be appointed to carry out this project with which SVP members will be involved.

### Working With Families With Children – A Guide For SVP Conferences

This guide has been developed to help SVP members in their work with families with children - whether providing assistance with day-to-day living expenses; promoting self-sufficiency by supporting parents to access education, employment or training; providing once-off assistance for the return to school for children; help with Christmas or Communion/ Confirmation costs, developing projects to support families and other tasks. This handbook is not designed to outline all of the State supports and services available to families. It outlines some of the issues facing families in Ireland and provides guidance and suggestions on challenges identified by SVP members in their work. The handbook also outlines some

### SVP Energy Agreements and Social Welfare Rates 2012

This booklet is a supplement to the last edition of 'Facts are Friendly' made necessary due to the changing nature of the energy market and changes to government payments and schemes. The cost of energy including electricity, natural gas, oil and solid fuels continues to fluctuate. This is happening at a time of reduced incomes for all households, particularly for those households assisted by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Helping people to meet the cost of living is an integral part of the experience of many SVP Conferences. This guide includes the latest social welfare and rent supplement rates and income scenarios. We thank our colleagues in the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice for providing up-dated Minimum Essential Budgets. Members seeking to clarify any details should contact Brendan Hennessy, SVP Membership Liaison Officer for Social Justice and Policy on 021-4943540 or [brendan@svpcork.ie](mailto:brendan@svpcork.ie)



## A Fixed Star

### SVP Member Support and Social Justice Seminars

One of the objectives of the National Social Justice and Policy Committee (NSJPC) this year is to offer a series of Member Support and Social Justice Seminars. The purpose of these seminars is :

- To offer practical support to Conferences by bringing the SVP guidance booklets 'to life' and
- To engage in debate about achieving social justice in Ireland.

The rationale from the NSJPC is that there has been great demand from SVP members for guidance but that it could be made more relevant by engaging the membership. Tough decisions face Ireland and the SVP social justice and policy position must reflect the engaged debate of members. Already a number of regions have expressed an interest in these seminars and the Committee and team will work toward

using venues that allow wide participation.

### Saorview Digital TV

The analogue TV signal is being turned off in both the Republic and Northern Ireland on October 24 next. The 'Community Outreach Digital Switchover Programme' is a community effort taking place across the State to assist people to make the switchover before the signal is turned off. Community and voluntary organisations are being asked by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to get involved in identifying and reaching out to older, isolated people who require most support with the switchover to digital television. The SVP is on the National Advisory Group overseeing the roll-out of the process. At local level however, there are opportunities to get more involved which can be done by:

- By identifying older people most likely to rely on an aerial for only 3 or 4 of the Irish channels and who are least likely to know about the digital switchover and the need for a set-top

box and, in some cases, a new aerial.

- By encouraging people to use approved contractors for the switch-over and to alert them to fraudsters – see <http://www.saorview.ie/news/avoid-scams-door-to-door-seller-warning/>
- By alerting people working at county level, to be known as 'Digital Outreach Champions', of people in the above target group. These 'Champions' are being tasked with the role of promoting ways in which people in the target group can make the switch to digital as easily as possible.



SVP Conference Meeting

## In Tribute

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

**PAT McHUGH**  
Cavan

Pat McHugh, a member of St. Patrick's Conference, Cavan town, gave lifelong service to the Church and to the community. He firmly believed he was a servant of the poor and did not spare himself in trying to bring them comfort. He carried furniture up flights of stairs when into his eighties. His diligence in wintertime was legendary. For twenty years Pat served as chief usher in Cavan Cathedral and built a willing band of workers around him. In his many roles in the Department of Agriculture Pat, a native of Hollymount, Co. Mayo, made friends all over Ireland. Sincere sympathy is extended to his daughters, Angela and Pauline, and his brother, Pete, and sister Nora. Pat was predeceased by his wife, Madeline.

**ANNE MULVEY**  
Birr

The sudden passing of Anne Mulvey, who joined St. Brendan's Conference in 1985 was a profound shock and created great sadness. She became Vice-President of the Conference in 1986 and held that position for nine years, becoming President in 1995 and remaining in that office until 1998. She was instrumental in the opening of the SVP shop and in many other ventures also for the Society and for those in need, seeing the face of Jesus in every poor, lonely or socially-deprived person and always speaking on their behalf. She is very much missed and all members of the Conference are bereft by her loss. To her husband, Frank, her wonderful family and cherished grandchildren we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

Margaret Kenny, St. Brendan's Conference, Birr





# SVP INTERNATIONAL

## *Reviving the Society in Malawi*

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was established in Malawi in 1973 by two missionaries (Irish and French) and had grown to over 80 Conferences mainly in the Dioceses of Blantyre, Zomba and Mzuzu.

Regrettably in recent years most Conferences had ceased to function, communications were poor and Malawi became isolated from the international Society. The SVP there is twinned with the West Region in Ireland.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranking 153rd out of 169 countries in the UN World Human Development Index. 17% of the population of 15 million are Catholic. Half of the population is under the age of 18. Most people survive through subsistence farming. The economy is agriculturally based with tea, coffee and tobacco the main crops. Exports of these crops are declining which has led to lower foreign exchange earnings and consequently an inability to import essential commodities like petrol. These shortages have led to civil unrest in recent months and caused much suffering among the people.

A new National President – Peter Mkandawire – was recently elected and has appointed a 10-person Board of the National Council to assist him in the revival of the Society. With the assistance of the VinPaz Commission of the International Council General (two of whose members – Juliet Marumahoko from Zimbabwe and myself led a Leadership Training Programme for the new National Board in Lilongwe) an Action Plan was drawn up to address the weaknesses identified. A Diocesan Council structure is to be set up. None exists at present. All known Conferences are to be visited to establish which are active, while it is intended that dormant Conferences are to be revived, communications are to be established between all members and the internal Rule drawn up and made known to members.

These plans require resources to implement and support from the international Society will be vital. The West Region, as the Irish 'twin' is considering how best to help. Twinning Officers - Larry and Mary Hynes - hope to visit Malawi.



*Larry Tuomey presenting Malawi National President Peter Mkandawire with the certificate of Aggregation for the Conference of St. Michael Mzuzu*



*Reviving the SVP in Malawi*

# SHOWING IRISH YOUTH WORK TO EUROPE

By Sharon Tuohy, Youth Development Officer, Breffni Region



I gave a presentation on youth work in Ireland and in particular our Youth for Justice Action Project at the Europe I Conference in Rome. 'Youth for Justice' is a schools-based project which gives secondary school students the opportunity to look at what is happening in their community, to then identify a need and, most important, to develop a project to help meet that need.

After attending an exhibition of Schools projects in Breffni, Our National President Mairead Bushnell was so impressed with the students work that she requested that we find a way to make this project available to students around the country. Two years ago we documented the work that I have been doing in schools in the Breffni region over the past 10 years. And with this information we developed a manual with a view to replicating the project.

We then hired a Youth Development Officer, Attracta McNiece in Oriel and ran a pilot scheme there. This was very successful and we now have a Development officer in the North West, Valarie Bryce and in Cork. The project is going from strength-to-strength and is being received really well in all of the participating schools.

'Youth for Justice' Action Project is unique to Ireland and was really well received by all of the participants at the European Conference, with lots of requests from other countries for information about how they could develop Youth for Justice as a model. The conference had two parallel groups, European National Council and Youth development Representation. Each group got to present the outcomes of their discussions to each other on the final day of the conference.

I was delighted to be able to attend the conference in Rome and pleased to listen to presentations from other countries. As a group of Youth development workers we all learned a lot from these presentations, whether it was through challenges or successes. We had lots of group work and through discussion we identified some models of good practice which can be shared. We also made a commitment to staying in contact as a group so as to share information, resources, ideas and support. This experience not only provided us with knowledge and valuable information, but we felt invigorated and had fresh inspiration. This showed us the value of gathering together, whether at National or International level.



A sunset over a pebbly beach with a wooden boardwalk leading towards the water. The sky is filled with golden and orange clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon. The beach is covered in small, multi-colored pebbles. A wooden boardwalk made of planks leads from the foreground towards the water in the distance.

## *They that Love*

*They that Love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill that which never dies. Nor can spirits ever be divided, that love and live in the same divine principle, the root and record of their friendship. If absence be not death neither is theirs.*

*Death is but crossing the world as friends so the seas; they live in one another still. This is the comfort of friends that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are in the best sense, ever present because immortal.*

*William Penn 1644-1718*



VINCENTIAN FATHERS • DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY  
SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL • SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAITH

# Vincentian Annual Pilgrimage Knock

**Saturday, 8th September, 2012**



MISS JUDITH O'NEILL

# SVP VOICE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

*This is a list of submissions made by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul through its Social Justice and Policy Section on various issues to the Government, State Departments, semi-State and other organisations. Detailed submissions can be obtained on the SVP website at [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie)*

## 2012

- SVP Submission to Department of Environment on Water Sector Reform
- SVP Submission on the draft Framework for Sustainable Development

## 2011

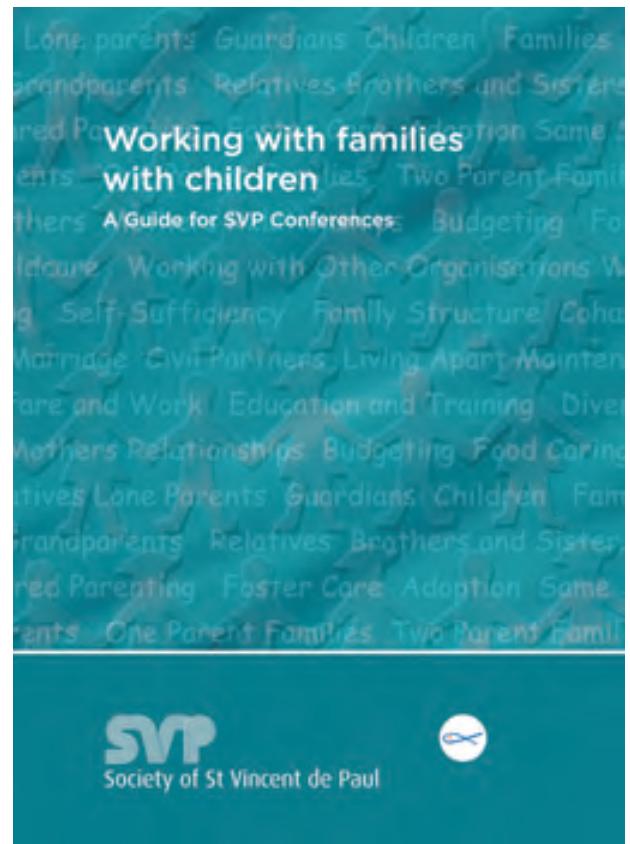
- SVP Submission on National Payments Plan Central Bank of Ireland
- SVP Submission on SOLAS
- SVP Submission on Preventing Homelessness: Changing Section 10 of the Housing Act (1988)
- Energy Poverty Coalition
- SVP Submission on Social Insurance cover for the self employed
- SVP Presentation to Joint Committee on Finance Public Expenditure and Reform
- SVP Pre-Budget Submission
- SVP submission on Electricity and Natural Gas Supplier Handbook
- Prepayment Metering in the Electricity and Gas Markets
- Child Deprivation Indicators Research Report
- Submission to Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare
- SVP Submission to Credit Unions Commission
- SVP Submission on the Strategy on Financial Inclusion
- SVP Submission to Energy Regulator on Customer Arrears
- SVP Response to Structured Dialogue Process
- SVP Submission on Customer Protection in the Deregulated Electricity Market
- SVP Submission to the Independent Review of EROs & REAs
- Energy Poverty Coalition Pre-Budget Submission

## 2010

- SVP Submission to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government's Draft Statement on Waste Policy
- CV Pillar document on Recovery Strategy
- SVP Supplementary Submission to Child Income Support Policy Review
- National Smart Metering Programme Submission
- SVP Joint Submission on Energy Affordability
- SVP Submission to DSFA on Rent Review
- SVP Submission on Energy Utilities Codes of Practice
- Submission to Value for Money and Policy Review of Child Income Supports
- SVP Response to the Law Reform Commission's Consultation on Debt

## 2009

- SVP Pre-Budget Submission
- SVP Submission to the Citizens Information Board
- SVP Submission to the European Commission on Financial Inclusion
- SVP Submission to Health Financing
- SVP Submission to the Private Residential Tenancies Board
- SVP Submission on Underachievement at 2nd Level
- SVP Submission on the Review of Gambling
- CV Pillar Submission to Joint Oireachtas Committee
- SVP Submission on National Positive Ageing Strategy
- SVP Pre-Budget Submission





# *A Society of Youngsters*

Twenty-year-old student Frederic Ozanam and a few friends started the Society of St.Vincent de Paul (SVP) in Paris on April 23, 1833 at a time of great turbulence in that country following the French Revolution of 1830.

It is a tribute to youth and a remarkable example which can be followed by young people today that, well aware of the very difficult political, social and economic problems of their times that young men, students starting out on their future lives, all in their early 20s, did not waste time or energy, but preferred to commit themselves to

an active, moral and material service to the most deprived. Favouring a practical, direct approach to dealing with poverty by their own efforts and raising what finance they could, they worked to alleviate the sufferings and poverty of others. Frederic Ozanam and his friends believed that Christian help and friendship were the best means of achieving social justice.

This is the same path followed today by the members of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in Ireland. The Society has been in Ireland since 1844 and was involved in providing relief to

those in need as far back as the Great Famine of 1847.

The name of St.Vincent de Paul was chosen for the Society when it was decided that a patron saint should be adopted.

The members of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in Ireland continue to follow the vision of St.Vincent de Paul and their founder, Frederic Ozanam, seeking to achieve social justice.

## Quotations from Frederic Ozanam

"There is exploitation when the Master considers the worker, not as an associate, as a helper, but as an instrument from which he must draw the greatest service at the lowest possible cost." – Made during a lecture about commercial law in 1840.

"I do not reject or spurn any form of political government, but I only acknowledge them as instruments to make people happier and more worthy. – Made in a letter written to supporters in 1834, followed by the comment in a lecture on liberty in 1839: "The overthrow of a tyrannical government could not be termed as sedition. Any ruler who abuses power deserves to lose it."

"There is a useful method for strengthening hearts which lack courage. This is to give them the privilege of seeing the poor, to learn what it means to be hungry and thirsty, or to live without clothing or furniture, to see dire poverty." – In a letter to SVP supporters written in 1853.

