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DEBIT
MANDATE

THE



WINTER 2013



BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST.VINCENT DE PAUL



VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS HAVE POWER

SAYS NORTHERN IRELAND FIRST MINISTER

SVP IS CHANGING

IMPROVING SERVICES

PLUS


CHANGING SUICIDE SHAME

WINNING ON SCHOOL UNIFORMS

CENTRAL BANK MUST CHALLENGE MONEYLENDERS

THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

€2.95

A close-up photograph of a spider on its web. The spider is positioned in the center-right of the frame, facing the viewer. Its body is brown and textured, and its legs are a mix of brown and orange. The web is a complex, multi-layered spiral structure made of thin, silken threads. The background is a vibrant, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting. The lighting is bright, creating a high-contrast scene with some lens flare effects.

Hanging by a thread can be
challenging and dangerous,
but also have possibilities



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

THE IRISH SVP OZANAM BULLETIN

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WINTER 2013

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*The SVP wish you a
Happy and Holy Christmas
and a Peaceful New Year!*



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12 CHRISTMAS CLASSIC



21 SVP CHANGES



48 SVP VINTAGE STYLE

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SOCIETY CONTINUES TO BE A VOICE FOR THOSE IN NEED

As we approach the end of another year, I would like on behalf of my National Management Council colleagues and myself to express our thanks to all Members, Volunteers and Staff who have worked so hard to meet the needs of those we serve. The challenges faced by large numbers of people in everyday life continue to increase. With the combined efforts of so many and the continued generosity of the public I think the Society has managed to make a difference in the lives of significant numbers of people across the country.

As the complexity of problems of those we support increases, the pressures on our Members and Staff has also increased. In that context the structures within the Society, including in particular our Area Presidents, becomes increasingly important to make sure that Members in our Conferences across the country receive the supports they need. Thanks to all for the work involved to date in improving the quality of our Visitation and keeping it as close as possible to the ethos of our Founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam. In addition, both the National Management Council and National Council have endorsed a range of structure and other changes to make the Society more fit for purpose for generations to come. It is acknowledged that this will involve, for some people, a significant amount of change which is never easy.

The Society continues to meet need, from wherever it comes, as best we can. In particular we are conscious of very many people in low-paid employment who have been hit by on-going austerity Budgets and who get no benefits from the State. Also we are giving support to many people with debt problems. We

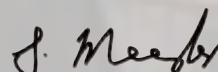
are helping them with the basics but also supporting them in finding solutions to their problems through agencies such as M.A.B.S. or advisors we use ourselves. Our aim is to try to get people back to some form of self-sufficiency if at all possible.

Through our Social Justice Committee and Staff we continue to speak out on the many issues impacting on so many in our communities today. The impact of on-going austerity Budgets is placing many families at breaking point financially. Unfortunately the financial problems lead to even greater difficulties in many cases. We think we have made some difference in our interaction with Government in pointing out the impact of many of their proposals and having them modified. During the year we called for a national debate on the type of society we want in Ireland for the future, a huge amount of time is going in to solve the finances of the country, is it not time we put some effort in to the values we want as a nation for the future?

I want to thank my National Management Council colleagues for their dedication to their work as Trustees of the Society. Being a Trustee carries in the world of today significant responsibilities. Every one of our 1,235 Conferences are part of a Trust (separate ones for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland). No Conference exists alone in its own right but as part of the Trusts. Therefore there is an onus on every Conference to make sure it plays its part in ensuring the Society meets all Regulatory requirements. I acknowledge the challenges faced by some members of the National Management Council personally during the year and also the tragic death of our colleague Michael O Keeffe (R.I.P.)

Finally a word of appreciation for our countless donors across the country. Without your support we simply could not do our work. We are conscious that many of our donors themselves are struggling due to the economic circumstances. To have such generosity from the public is all the more remarkable. We also try to ensure that we spend money donated wisely and as noted above try to get people back to manage their own affairs. In this context our Annual Appeal is underway, which is a major fundraising effort for us and to which the support of the public will be very much appreciated, as is the support always given to us during the festive season of Christmas which itself can place so many demands on families.

A very happy Christmas to all our Members, Volunteers, Staff and Donors. We look forward to 2014 in the hope of improving economic conditions for those we support and playing our part in helping those in need in so far as we can.



Geoff Meagher, **National President SVP Ireland.**

“None of us has any hope that we have a future here”

I'm a 24-year-old university graduate with a post-graduate qualification. I've been out of work for more than a year, which includes six months on a JobBridge scheme. I'd love to stay in Ireland with my family and friends. But it's time to go.

Last week I heard on the radio about a young man who'd been advised by his social welfare officer to consider emigrating to Canada. Was he being an insensitive bureaucrat or was he showing enough compassion to tell the truth?

I did reasonably well in my menial six-month placement, but there weren't many opportunities and I don't think they were ever seriously considering keeping any of us on.

After the Budget, in which the dole for under-26s was cut again, I reluctantly accept there's no place for me in this country.

Ministers lined up for interview after interview, with angry and upset people ringing in to give them a piece of their mind. Lots of annoyed young people.

‘After the Budget, in which the dole for under-26s was cut again, I reluctantly accept there's no place for me in this country.’

My friends who don't normally give a hoot about politics are talking about it, face to face and in Twitter rants.

The politicians never deviated from the well-worn script. Not a one. “Ah, yes, but economic sovereignty lost, budgets had to be cut, young people don't have any costs and they all live with their parents at the age of 25 and 26 and it will get them into training and work-placement schemes.”

They didn't acknowledge that huge numbers of these people are college education, often to postgraduate level and that we don't need any more training. There are no jobs to train for.

They didn't address the fact that many of the people they are targeting may have gone to college, as I did, in Dublin, coming from outside the capital. I had a life there; my friends and my girlfriend are there.

I've had to move home to Wexford because I couldn't afford to live on the dole in Dublin. The folks are great, but I'm the youngest by some distance and they want me out of their hair. They shouldn't have to support their 24-year-old son. Some of my friends don't get on with their parents. They are grown-ups and need space.

In the meantime this Budget has also hit Fás apprentices for college fees. They are generally from poorer or working-class backgrounds, where money is particularly tight. Some of them just don't have the money for fees, so they won't even be able to do a basic apprenticeship.

I know, I know. Sacrifices. Economic sovereignty. Nearly there. Worst is over. On the road to recovery. Don't disincentivise investment with taxes for high earners. Insert another platitude. I've heard it all before. None of us has any hope that we have a future here.

The only thing I can do now do, for my own sanity and sense, is emigrate. That's the message we're getting so, okay Ireland, I give in. I'll go. I've got friends in Canada. They say they're never coming back.

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TACKLING THE TWIN EVILS

- Poverty and Social Exclusion



We're all in this together

By Rt Hon Peter D. Robinson MLA

December is the month that I associate in particular with the sterling work carried out in the community by St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army.

Christmas is a time of great happiness, but it can also produce tremendous financial pressure on many families. Thankfully in Northern Ireland there are two organisations that play a leading role in helping to ease the strain and the legendary Christmas collaboration by these famous charities brings great joy to children, families and single people right across the Province. As a society we are enriched by the service they provide and I believe that theirs is an example that could usefully be followed in other areas of life here.

As the old year draws to a close this is traditionally the time to take stock of what has been achieved and as I go back over some of the notable public events of 2013 it is amazing just how far Northern Ireland has come.

We perhaps take it for granted that this region is enjoying its first period of sustained, stable government for more than 40 years. It's not that problems no longer exist, they do, but what is different now is that regardless of the issue, the devolved administration carries on functioning as it should and public services continue without interruption.

For this little corner of the world that is a considerable achievement given our history and it's actually been the norm for the last six years.

The deputy First Minister and I are resolved that no matter the challenge or setback we will work through it and the Executive will keep on delivering good government for everyone in Northern Ireland.

One measure of this is the success of the current Programme for Government which focuses on wealth generation and the creation of jobs through global inward investment. It sees progress on the economy, tourism, our built environment and technological infrastructures as vital for our future and to moving Northern Ireland away from its current over dependence on the public sector. It's a strategy which is working and impressively so.

Unemployment is now hovering around 7%, just below that in the rest of the UK and half that of our nearest trading partner the Republic of Ireland. It's all the more encouraging when you consider that when I first entered politics unemployment here stood at more than 19%.

Meanwhile one of our other key targets, tourism and the revenue that is derived from it, is at an all time high having reached the two million mark during the last financial year. Wherever I go in the world to help attract investors to Northern Ireland I am delighted to meet people from here who have built enormously successful careers in the lands of their adoption. It's wonderful to see and it makes me proud, but it's something that I would like to think one day will be the exception rather than the rule.

In future I want Northern Ireland to contain the opportunities and the career paths that didn't exist when these émigrés left the Province to realise their dreams. I want Northern Ireland's new emerging entrepreneurs to have the chance to be successful here at home.

That said, increasing prosperity for our citizens is only part of what is needed to really turn Northern Ireland around. Tackling the twin evils of poverty and social exclusion is also high on the Executive's agenda because they lie at the heart of many of our most intractable problems. Poor health, low educational attainment and lives blighted by limited opportunity can trap, not just individuals and families, but entire communities in a never-ending cycle of hopelessness.

The Executive is taking direct action through its 'Delivering Social Change' initiative. Essentially it's a new way of doing business and it works by co-ordinating all areas of government in the battle against poverty and deprivation, focusing in particular on problems with literacy and numeracy, the need

for parenting support, early intervention for children and community dereliction.

The Delivering Social Change Fund will be used to support work on childcare, the Social Investment Fund and a variety of Signature Programmes under the Delivering Social Change framework. We want to assist communities to help themselves and we are working directly with them to find the solutions that best meet their particular needs.

The £80 million Social Investment Fund, for example, targets nine zones – four in Belfast, one covering the City Council area in Londonderry and four others broadly aligned to the Health and Social Care Trust boundaries. Steering groups were established in each zone in October last year and firm project proposals have since been put forward for consideration.

However, no matter how successful we are in this work, or how stable and wealthy this region becomes, politicians will have failed the people who live here if we won't begin to change the ways in which we live, work and play together.

As I pointed out at a recent event to mark the role of the GAA in peace building, we will have achieved nothing in Northern Ireland if the post-conflict era merely reverts to a cold peace. As a people we have a clear choice to make. We can keep harping back to the past and re-fighting old battles, or we can do something to break down the tired old barriers that have for long bedevilled us as a society.

The focus now needs to be on our young and on creating a world for them filled with the opportunities that were not available to many in my generation because of the Troubles. This means that Catholics and Protestants, Unionists and Nationalists need to begin working together to change the social dynamic in Northern Ireland. We need to do it as a sustained and deliberate policy and in a way which ensures absolute respect for the culture and constitutional aspirations of the two traditions but which eliminates any residue of the toxic elements from our shared past.

The Executive is making a start on this with the United Community Strategy which sets out a number of goals including the sharing of school facilities at primary as well as secondary level.

Familiarity with each other from the earliest years of schooling is an essential first step towards breaking down many of the social barriers that have existed, but the strategy also focuses on the physical barriers that have been erected to keep our communities apart. It proposes that these too must be removed

and the Executive has a special programme in place to achieve this over time and with the consent of the localities involved. Sport is a natural arena in which we can work and play together and considerable progress has been made already by organisations such as the IFA, the IRFU and the GAA. The Executive is very enthusiastic about what these organisations are doing and looks to their achievements as examples of the natural cross-community co-operation government wants to see.

I believe that the collaborative work by Saint Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army is a perfect illustration of the community-wide engagement that Northern Ireland needs to see more of. Indeed I wonder whether other link-ups might be considered across the Voluntary and Community sector which might also reflect the message of common endeavour for the common good.

The old saying that 'charity begins at home' may yet turn out to have a powerful resonance for Northern Ireland because the organisations that represent the Voluntary and Community sector touch people's lives very directly, both physically and emotionally. How much more powerful that work could be if it also conveyed the message that we are all involved in doing this together.

Martin McGuinness and I have already given a lead in the area of reconciliation in a number of highly visible ways and we shall endeavour to do more. What we need now is for more front line organisations, such as those in the voluntary and community sector; to look for new ways of delivering their services.

Ways that not only address the direct needs of the people these organisations serve, but which also demonstrate in a very clear way that the battle against poverty, hardship, disability and marginalisation is one that we can all fight, and win, if we do it as a united community.



By Albert Perris
SVP National Hostels &
Homes Co-ordinator

REGIONAL SOCIAL HOUSING COMMITTEE CONVENED IN NORTH WEST

The first SVP Regional Social Housing Committee has been established in the North West Region. The function of the committee is to enable SVP Conferences involved in the provision of Social Housing to support each other, share experience and expertise and standardise SVP social housing delivery across the North West region. This will support best practice and help to ensure compliance with national standards, housing regulations and forthcoming legislation.

Over seventeen Conferences in the North West are actively involved in the management and delivery of social housing in Donegal and collectively manage over 130 units of housing on behalf of the Society. Individual Conferences manage between three and thirty units. Some Social Housing Conferences are also actively engaged in visitation work. Increasingly Conferences are recognising the challenge of trying to do both, and developments are afoot for some Conferences to become dedicated housing Conferences only. The group initially met in early 2011 and had four meetings before the decision was recently taken to establish a dedicated Social Housing Committee. The committee is comprised of representatives from each Area with social housing, and nominees or delegates feeding back information to the Housing conferences in their area.

The need for a social housing committee in the region was initially identified by the former Regional President, Mary

Sheridan and its formation was actively encouraged and supported by the National Hostels and Homes Coordinator. The value of such a committee quickly became apparent, after a series of initial consultation meetings, when members started sharing their experience, expertise and contacts with each other. Standing items on the committee's agenda will include Health and Safety, Maintenance & Repairs, Fire Safety, Changes in Housing Regulations and Legislation and Rent rates and Arrears.

Some housing Conferences can feel isolated or feel that their area of interest is not always a priority at Area or Regional Meetings, particularly if there are only one or two Conferences involved in housing in their area. This committee provides a place and space in the region where Social Housing is the key priority and members can brainstorm, problem-solve or share their successes.

With forthcoming amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act, which will require registration of all tenancies and a new standardised national tenancy agreement to be introduced, along with the Introduction of Statutory Regulation of Social Housing in 2015 it will be a busy year ahead.

Judging by the attendance, discussion and atmosphere at initial meetings it is likely to be a lively committee indeed!

GETTING THROUGH WINTER

**By Brendan Hennessy,
Membership Liaison Officer**



The problem with my office is that when it's cold and wet, there's a draught through my window. My thoughts drift between writing about the Budget and buying a Lemsip to preventing a cold. Of-course I can always turn on the heating too. Let's turn to the Budget instead.

The Government did not reduce the value of the fuel allowance nor the fuel measures in the household benefits package this year. Government also increased funding for energy retrofit programmes such as the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme. This has the added benefit of jobs as well as improved efficiency in homes. We must ensure though that those in most need benefit equally for such schemes.

However, where monies have been lost, such as the telephone allowance for older people, or the impending uncertainty about medical cards for families, there is an inevitable impact on households budgeting options and large energy bills can be the most difficult to face.

So what next now that winter is definitely upon us? SVP continues to work with households to assist, advise and guide them on energy usage. Often people come to us for help very late in the day and although we recognise that sometimes it can feel too challenging for people to open the latest bad news envelope, or take the pending phone call, a problem shared really is a problem halved and we encourage customers to maintain a relationship with their supplier as well as talking to us or other advocate groups. As ever we continue to promote Pay As You Go options where practicable and financially appropriate.

Utility bills are not the only energy costs though. About 70% of the rural population depend on oil, which is increasingly more expensive to buy and requires a minimum fill. Carbon taxes on solid fuels have become the norm and of course there's the cost of servicing and maintaining boilers and fittings equipment.

All energy providers and many websites promote energy savings tips, most are obvious, but are only any good if you put them into practice! A short-hand list includes only filling the kettle with as much as you need; a shower costs about 20% of a bath; turn off TV's and appliances completely, standing by costs money.

So now that the winter is upon us let's look at the wider energy issue and consider not only our costs and how we pay, but also our usage and the efficiency of our homes; because from now on neither can be dealt with in isolation from the other.

SVP REPORT ON FUEL COSTS DEBATED IN DAIL AND SEANAD

Senators raised the issue of fuel poverty, starting with Aideen Hayden (Lab, Taoiseach nominee) who drew attention to the annual report of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (Seanad Eireann, 3rd October 2013). The average annual energy cost for families had risen by €500 a year and it had increased its spending to help families from €3.8m to €10.4m.

In the Dail, Mary Lou McDonald (SF, Dublin) spoke of the heartbreaking stories of people who had to go without gas or electricity. Many families had to make a choice between paying energy bills or feeding their children. Arrears were mounting up and sleepless nights increasing.

The Tanaiste, Eamon Gilmore, agreed that energy prices were increasing but Ireland was at the receiving end of the internationally set price of fuel, at the end of a long pipeline from Russia. He had read the report of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and he agreed with its proposals for more to be done on insulation and retrofitting and he detailed the energy efficiency and insulation measures taken. The government had committed €40m to address fuel poverty and fuel prices, with €50m to retrofit local authority homes. Mary Lou McDonald described these measures as modest and underwhelming, with in addition an identifiable group of people who could not pay their bills at all and who had been cut off, even after using meters. The Tanaiste told her that this was not a short-term problem and retrofitting was what got down the cost of heating homes: this was what the Society said was the best way to deal with the problem.

Seamus Healy (Independent TD, Tipperary), also quoting the Society's report, drew attention to the cuts in free electricity units from 2,400 to 1,800 and then the fuel scheme by six weeks. We already knew that there were 1,000 additional deaths every winter, most due to cold-related conditions. Over the past three years, gas costs had gone up 32.5% and electricity 24.2%, with oil up 18% in 2012 alone. Would the government monitor deaths due to cold and lack of heating supports?

The Tanaiste said he was very much aware of the cost of fuel and the resulting pressure. Ireland was an energy receiver and that was why the government was focussing on increasing renewable energy and the retrofitting programme, which was the best way in the long term.

Seamus Healy, though, accused him of blaming world markets while his government cut supports to needy families which would lead to more elderly deaths.

The Tanaiste accused him of making over-the-top remarks but gave a commitment to see if the Central Statistics Office could produce figures. He was happy to ask for advice from anyone in the area who could provide it.



Howard Crosby and Mary Kennedy (centre) with members of the SVP Dublin organising committee, left to right: Larry Tuomey,, Bernadette Hughes; Patricia Carey; Don Mahony; Monica O'Reilly, Chairperson and Maria O'Hanrahan.

SVP CHRISTMAS CLASSIC

UNIQUE VERSION OF CHRISTMAS CLASSIC WILL RAISE FUNDS FOR SVP

A unique version of the Christmas classic carol, 'O Holy Night' is now on public sale with all proceeds going to the Society of the St.Vincent de Paul.

It is performed by Affinití, pictured on the front cover of this edition of The SVP Bulletin, a 'classical crossover group' made up of Harpist Aisling Ennis Soprano Emer Barry and Violinist Mary McCague. The orchestral backing is by the Prague Symphony Orchestra. Affinití are accompanied on the track by the Palestrina Boys Choir and Carlow Choral Society.

The record is available at €5 from all SVP 'Vincent Shops' in the Dublin area and can also be downloaded nationwide from iTunes.

Affinití's musical style has been summed-up as "the love child of classical and rock with Celtic blood" and they specialise in putting their own unique stamp on classic songs. They were described as 'exceptional' when winning the Group section in the UK Classical-Crossover Awards last year.

The idea behind the releasing of 'O Holy Night' as a charity single came about following Affinití's performance in the SVP Dublin Region's Bi-Centenary Celebration concert in the National Concert Hall last September. Many people wanted to know more about the group and where they could hear them again.

On the strength of this, the girls approached the SVP Dublin Region about the possibility of releasing their unique version of 'O Holy Night' 'for the benefit of the Society.

Affinití recorded the song in Jealoustown Studios with their Producer and Engineer, Mark Cahill, who also organised for the Prague Symphony Orchestra to provide orchestral backing to the song. Also accompanying Affinití on the track are Palestrina Boys

Choir and Carlow Choral Society. A debt of gratitude must go to the Manager of the Palestrina Boys Choir, Germaine Carlos, and Musical Director of both choirs, Blanaid Murphy, for their commitment to and support of the project. Sincere thanks also to the clergy of Star of the Sea Church, Sandymount, Dublin, who provided the venue for the choirs to record and to Fr.Pat at St. Mary's Church, Haddington Road, Dublin, who allowed that beautiful church to be used as the setting for the accompanying music video which was shot by film company Army of ID.

The Celebration Concert coincidentally took place on the anniversary of the actual date of the death of SVP Founder, September 8. It was organised within a 19-week framework. When approached, the spontaneous offer of the talents and time of all the performers and musicians, pro bono, was inspiring and humbling. Mary Byrne, The Dublin Gospel Choir, Howard Crosby (nephew of Bing), Deirdre Ni Chinneide, and Affinity enthralled a full Concert Hall and the supporting acts Tony Carty, David O'Connor and Kayleigh Cullinhan together with Accompanists Frank McNamara, Terence Browne, Aveen McEntee and Fintan Cleary completed a delightful programme. A ten-minute 'Playlet' depicting the moments of establishing the first Conference of SVP in Paris was a fitting centrepiece.

Mary Kennedy, a member of the Society in Dublin compered the evening with her customary grace and charm. Noel McDonagh, the Producer of the Concert worked tirelessly and with unfailing good humour in the preceding months free, gratis and for nothing. We thank him most sincerely for his generosity and professionalism. The Committee (Monica O'Reilly, Maria O'Hanrahan, Larry Tuomey and Don Mahony) are extremely grateful to all who helped make the event a night to remember.

----- Bernadette Hughes, Administrator Services SVP Dublin

“THE YOUTH OF TODAY DESERVE MORE OPPORTUNITIES”



says Becca Gallagher, National Youth Development Co-ordinator with the SVP

Young people in Ireland today are having a pretty hard time of it. The opportunities available to them are far more limited than they were a few short years ago. Jobs are, from all accounts, practically non-existent, education is becoming more and more expensive to access and now to top it all off social welfare rates for young people aged between 18-24 have been cut to €100 per week, and to those aged 25 to €144.

Education

With both the direct and indirect costs of Third Level education increasing young people and families are struggling to afford it. The March 2013 Consumer Price Index showed a 4.5 per cent increase in the cost of education, mainly due to rises in the student registration fee, which is €2,500. Transport costs are increasing, with price hikes every few months of late. Rent costs for those living out of home are on the up. Part-time jobs and grants are more and more difficult to access, leaving the onus on the family to support students through their college years and all those support costs add up. As a result the opportunities to access Third Level education are on the way down.

Employment

The current unemployment figure for 18-24 year-olds in Ireland is 29.7% (4th Quarter 2012). As many as one-in-three men under 25 are unemployed. Young people are trying their best but without experience in this market work is very difficult to find, even for those with experience and qualifications to back it up it is difficult.

Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee is a positive step towards encouraging and ensuring young people aged 18-24 are given the opportunity to get real life work experience, an apprenticeship, training or combined work and training within a defined period of time after leaving school or becoming unemployed. In Ireland we currently have over 30,000 young people out of work or training. It is difficult to see how all these young people can be accommodated/included in the new scheme within the set time frames of this guarantee. “The Youth Guarantee is hugely ambitious, and implementing it will be arduous. But it’s unquestionably the right commitment, and as the old saying goes, where there’s a will there’s a way” (Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton).

Social Welfare Cuts

There has been much discussion regarding the cuts in Budget 2014 to social welfare for young people. “Young people are being penalised by the social welfare system at a time when there simply are not enough jobs for the multitude of people applying for each vacancy,” according to the SVP’s Head of Social Justice, Johnmark McCafferty.

From where I am sitting it just seems unfair. The cost of living for a 20 year old is no different to that of a 40 year old, the Vincentian Partnership for Justice shows that the current minimum essential cost of living for an adult of working age is €256 (urban) or €317 (rural) per week (not including housing costs), while social welfare rates for 18-24 year olds have been reduced to €100 in Budget 2014.

Independence

Every 18 year old I have ever met wants to live independently. They don’t want to rely on their family for support nor do they want to have to apply for social welfare. The stark reality for so many of our young people today is that they will have to do both these things. Young people in Ireland are missing out on the benefits that come of learning how to survive on their own, instead they are learning about a hardship that is not their fault and they are existing as best they can.

Though all that said, in my years of experience working with young people, they are a resilient bunch. They will do their best to make do and to get on. All they need is the opportunity to do this. Young people develop through their experiences, they live and they learn. Our young people today are the next generation of leaders and change makers in our society, let us ensure they are included in it in the meantime, it is up to us to offer them every opportunity we can to ensure that they gain the experiences they need to become the best that they can.

*see also page 7 “An Emigrant writes”

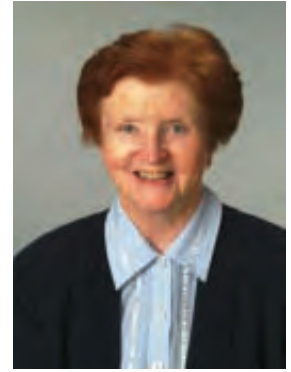
FIGURES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

While the figures may differ the reality is similar;

- 21.4% of NI working age population 16-24 are not in education, employment or training (described officially as ‘NEET’). In 2011 48,000 young people in NI were categorized as NEET (Business in the Community NI)
- Unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds in NI was 23.8% in October 2013
- The maximum tuition fee you can be charged in NI is £3575 per academic year (if choose to study elsewhere in the UK this figure could rise as high as £9000)
- Positive actions are being put in place, for example Steps to Work (, but the volume of people eligible for such programmes far exceeds the supply.

THE BULLETIN INTERVIEW

The Vincentian Partnership for Justice



- Interview by Tom MacSweeney, Editor, SVP Bulletin

The last steps of the stairs to the top of Ozanam House in Mountjoy Square are narrow, I seem to be climbing up to an eyrie, but it is actually an office where politicians might find themselves challenged next year, if the work which Sr. Bernadette MacMahon, who is waiting to talk to me about, is successful in raising public awareness about the importance of casting your vote in elections.

Sr. Bernadette, a member of the order of the Daughters of Charity, directs the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice which, since 1995 has been helping communities all over Ireland to make their voices heard, to empower themselves. As we sit down in the office she makes it clear that active citizenship very much involves casting your vote.

The Partnership is a collaborative initiative to work for social and economic change tackling poverty and exclusion. It was founded and is funded by The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of the Holy Faith.

"We raise funding for other work we undertake as we need it and as we can, but research work for social justice is an area where funding has to be located for various projects. The Partnership was established to work for social and economic change – tackling poverty and exclusion," Bernadette tells me as we are joined by Robert Thornton who explains the work that is being done on the Minimum Income Standard Calculator which the Partnership has devised. This provides an accurate analysis

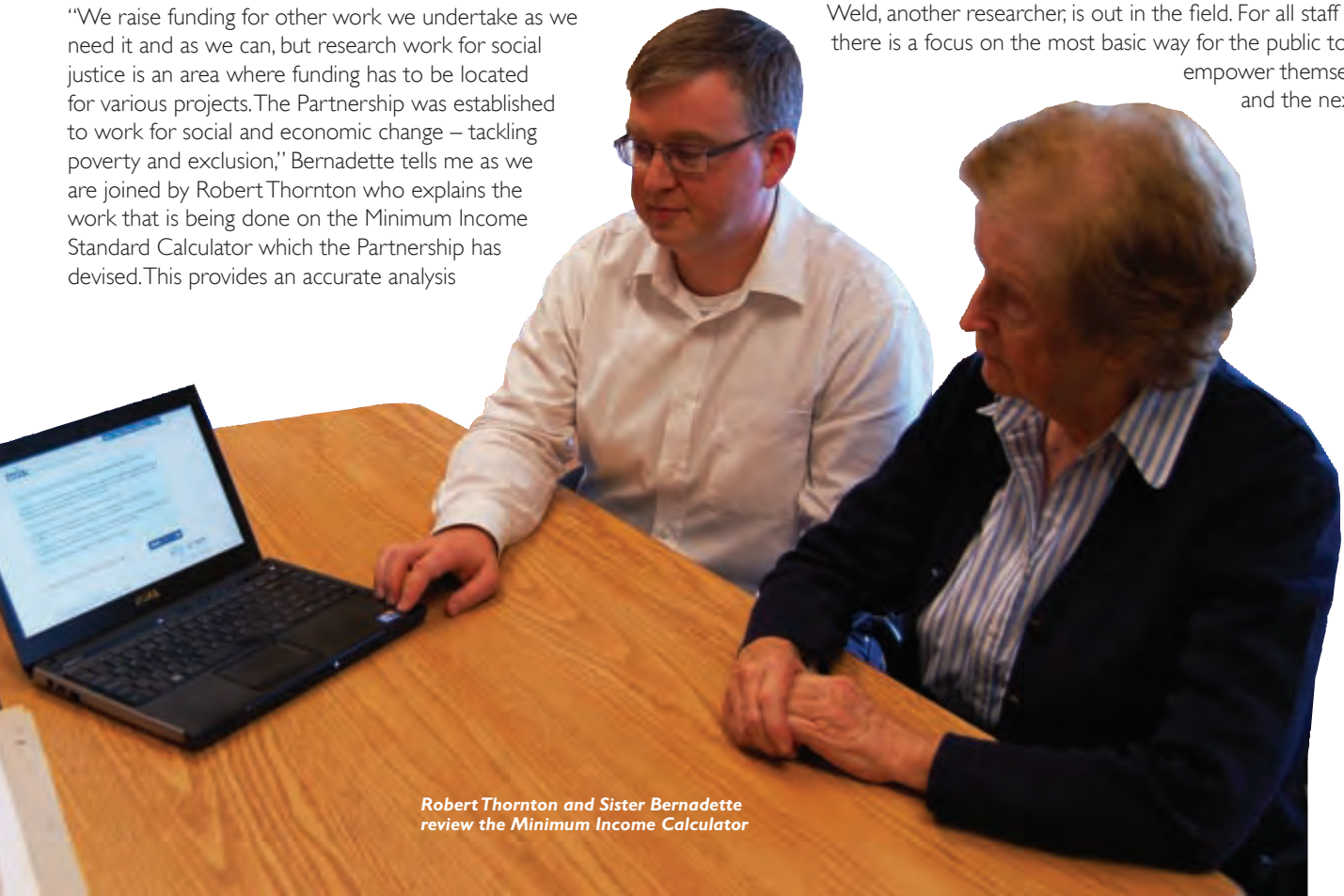
of income levels needed by households of varying size to live, calculated to the most basic items.

"Is your income enough to allow a minimum, basic but essential standard of living?" is the question answered by the Calculator.

"Accuracy without aggression," is what Bernadette tells me the Partnership uses as its guideline in its advocacy work for social justice. The calculator is a system which challenges preconceived notions by some commentators, economic, political and media, it seems to me, who do not accept what income a family or an individual requires to live decently. Those commentators would be more accurate in their publicly expressed views and analysis if they perused the facts contained in the Calculator.

"This has to be kept up-to-date and we do this by basic checking of baskets of items in the urban and rural situations, so that it remains always factual and accurate," says Robert.

I also meet Mary Murphy who manages the offices and deals with the work of being secretary to this busy agency. Grainne Weld, another researcher, is out in the field. For all staff there is a focus on the most basic way for the public to empower themselves and the next



Robert Thornton and Sister Bernadette review the Minimum Income Calculator

opportunity will be to use the right to vote in the local and European elections next year.

“Your Power, Your Choice, Your Vote – Counted In Or Counted Out?” is the slogan of the Partnership’s Active Citizenship Programme. The Partnership is strictly non-political. Bernadette emphasises that they want to stress to people the importance of using their vote:

“Many who do not vote do not realise that an area with a low voter turnout has little power to bring about change.”

And she tells me about how women in the former tower blocks of Ballymun in Dublin came to realise, many having first rejected even an interest in voting, that by doing so it helped empower a community towards change.

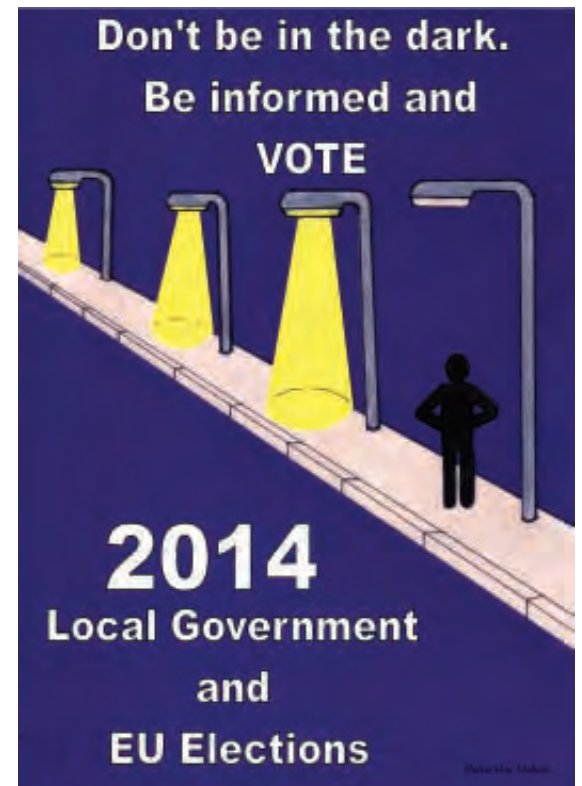
“This is getting democracy to work. Your vote is your power, so use it. That is what we tell those who take part in the citizenship programme workshops. These are led by trained facilitators who work with groups in their own centres. It is non-political, but it is getting democracy to work and this is what social justice is about, empowering people and working towards equality. We are doing these courses in several locations around the country.”

Sr. Bernadette reflects, as we talk, about what is the minimum people need to get out of poverty? It raises the question of trying to communicate with recognition of the situation for people in poverty, to get across to those who make decisions that affect people’s lives, what it is really like to live on basic social welfare.

“People are wounded by poverty, many severely and permanently damaged by it, but how can they be helped to move from their situation, to improve their lives, if they cannot express how they are suffering, if they cannot empower themselves to make change and that is surely through the ballot box, through expression in voting?”

She makes a point which I reflect on as I descend the stairs away from this centre of research and work for social justice: “We are all equal in God’s eyes, but in reality in this world perhaps the only place we are really equal is in the ballot box, where each individual has the right to express themselves.”

That is a point to remember as next year’s local and European elections approach.



THE GOSPEL – ACCORDING TO OZANAM!

They could have been celebrating Clare's All-Ireland victory when the rafters rang with "From Clare to Here" as 130 members of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul sang with gusto at the end of a very special evening.

In fact it was the day before Clare's victory in the All-Ireland replay over Cork and the location was not even in the Banner County but in the adjacent home of the defeated semi-finalists, Limerick. Nor was it a celebration of hurling but an evening to honour the Bi-Centenary of the birth of the Founder of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam.

The evening commenced with Mass led by Bishop Brendan Leamy, the newly- appointed Bishop of Limerick, assisted by Fr. Donogh O'Malley and Fr. John Byrne of St. Mary's Parish, Limerick. The Limerick Gospel Choir performed an array of musical numbers during the pleasant social evening which brought members of the Society in the Mid/West together in an occasion away from the turbulence and difficulties they deal with weekly due to the effects of the economic recession, though those situations were highlighted in discussions during the evening.

The choir's last choice 'From Clare to Here' was very apt!

Photo: Jessica O'Connor-Synan



Learning the Skills for Independent Living

The story of Carlow's Monastery Hostel

The Monastery Hostel run by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Carlow was set up at Dublin Road in the town in 1997 when volunteer members of the Society responded to the need for a night shelter in the town. They had seen a distinct need for this facility to alleviate the plight of homeless men. Some "knights of the road" were habitually arriving at the priests' house and the convent looking for food and lodgings. Others were sleeping in squats and in caravans. The shelter, formerly the Christian Brothers Monastery, opened in 1991 in conjunction with the Local Authority, HSE and FAS, and was further developed into a hostel in 2003, as it was believed that just giving a homeless man a bed for the night was never going to help him to address his homelessness in the long-term. The purpose of the hostel is to provide emergency accommodation to homeless men, and to enable them to learn the skills and form the habits necessary for independent living.

The hostel operates under the governance of the Conference of St. John Vianney, consisting of five members, each one being charged with a particular area of responsibility viz. Health & Safety, Service User Welfare, Finance, Staff, Property. Its Mission is to provide quality accommodation to homeless men; to assist them in getting their economic and social entitlements and encouraging them to regain independent living through the acquisition of life skills, the development of personal motivation and ambition, the growth of abilities to re-build independence and the application of skills in constructive ways.

This encompasses the overall aim of the Society – to do something practical about poverty, characterised by Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat..."

"Experience has shown us," say Conference members, "that in harmony with the Social Justice objectives of the Society, positive discrimination must be exercised in favour of this disadvantaged cohort."

Housing the Homeless is one of five areas of service to the poor/ disadvantaged carried out by the SVP. Since becoming a provider of emergency accommodation the hostel has been a member of the SVP network of hostels and of the South East hostel managers group and the Homeless Forum of Carlow County Council.

"Experience has shown us that homelessness has several causes and requires responses to a wide range of needs and must be addressed by a multi-pronged approach. Especially pertinent is

the knowledge we have gained in relation to the recurrence of homelessness, and the speed with which homelessness becomes a way of life," according to the Conference.

"Inability to maintain a tenancy figures largely among the reasons for homelessness. In turn, addiction accounts for a large proportion of those who reported being unable to maintain a tenancy. It can also be assumed in many cases where a separate tenancy was embarked upon prior to becoming homeless, that family breakdown will have occurred as a consequence of addiction."

Carlow Area of the Society of St Vincent De Paul

Carlow area is comprised of all Carlow County with slight overlaps into the adjoining counties of Laois, Wicklow, Wexford and Kilkenny. This area is part of the South Midlands Region, Regional President, Michael O'Connor.

The area consists of 12 Visitation Conferences, a Male 30-Bed Hostel in Carlow Town and a Shop Conference in Carlow town. A further shop is run in Bagenalstown by the Visitation Conference there. There are about 100 volunteers in the area with about 40 auxiliary members to support them.

Up to recently the main source of funds was the monthly Church Gate collections and a Golfing weekend at Carlow Golf Club which has been going for over 50 years. The golf weekend is used as an opportunity to seek corporate donations from local businesses and professionals and a raffle to add to the proceeds from the entry fees. With Church Gate collections falling and corporate donations reducing, the shop proceeds are keeping funding on a healthy basis. All Conferences have now got dedicated laptops to move to an IT-based method of reporting and financial management.

Carlow Area Council would like to thank all volunteers and auxiliaries for their constant commitment. We would also like to assure all our donors both individual and corporate that

- Monies raised locally are spent locally.
- We are not an alternative to social welfare. We help people in crisis situations to get back to self-respect and self-sufficiency



It's Difficult To Get Bigger At Trinity !!!!

There have been descriptions of the Trinity College SVP Conference in Dublin as being the biggest student Conference in the world and, be that as it may, the turn-out of students at the annual information evening was impressive and showed that the Trinity Conference which operates 22 weekly activities and has an active member base of over 300 people is very big and active indeed

"We are involved in anything from Soup Runs, Visitation and Flat Decorating, to Homework Clubs, Kids Day Clubs, Pantomimes and behind all these activities is a Fundraising Team who meet weekly and plan the year's events," says the Conference.

"This year we are busier than ever. Interest and attendance at all our activities and events since September has been massive and with several important dates coming up, such as the first-ever Trinity Charity Ball, the food-and-clothes drive and the second edition of the momentarily popular 'Jailbreak,' we can safely say that volunteering in Trinity doesn't get bigger than this.

"The Conference is growing all the time and new volunteers are always welcome to take part!"



SVP fundraising donation from Royal College of Surgeons to Deirdre Walsh, SVP Youth Development Officer, Dublin, together with SVP Trinity College Conference President Helen McEnery and Secretary, Emma Parker.



trinity VDP
Annual VDP Food and Clothes Drive
December 3rd-7th

Help brighten up someone's Christmas. A little goes a long way.

STUDENTS' UNION
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

COLLECTION POINTS:

- Arts Block,
- Hamilton,
- D'Oileir Street
- James' Hospital

Want to get involved?
Email foodcollection@trinityvdp.com

SUITABLE DONATIONS

- Tinned Foods:
- Tinned Fruit/ Vegetables
 - Packed/ Tinned Soup
 - Tinned Spaghetti and Baked Beans
 - Tinned Tuna/ Fish

- Beverages:
- Tea and Coffee
 - Sugar
 - Soft Drinks

- Treats:
- Chocolate
 - Crisps
 - Biscuits
 - Popcorn
 - Sweets

- Cereals & Carbohydrates:
- Breakfast Cereals and Muesli
 - Noodles, Rice and Pasta
 - Pasta/ Rice Sauce
 - Muesli Bars



Northern Regional President Aidan Crawford says it is "outrageous" that the Government in Stormont has not used £80m. which it has to relieve poverty



SITTING ON £80m.stg FOR THE RELIEF OF POVERTY

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul is reaching out in Northern Ireland to help those in need who are struggling under the pressures of the current economic climate and we are continuing to meet the demands requested of us.

Looking at the income details of some of the people we are helping such as the single-parent income of £50 per week, with a new baby to look after this is impossible, or the elderly couple surviving on £72 per week, or the parents with children trying to cope on £90 per week.

There is absolutely no way any of these people can afford to heat their houses or have any little luxury at all. Indeed it is no wonder that stress, depression and other illness takes hold.

Fuel poverty is talked about regularly, but we must also talk about other poverty, such as food, housing, rent, clothes, baby food, nappies etc.

The Government in Stormont has been sitting on £80 million stg for the relief of poverty in Northern Ireland for the past three years. The reason given for this is they don't want one side to get more than the other side, but this is playing politics with those in need.

This money could make such a major difference to the disadvantaged and marginalised and indeed save lives has not been utilised. The only spending out of the £80 million has been £400,000 to consultants!

The SVP is the largest charity existing to alleviate poverty. We know about poverty, probably better than any other organisation. We are uniquely positioned to help those in need and to ensure

that those we help, regardless of religious beliefs or lifestyle would benefit hugely from this funding, yet we have never received any official notification of how this £80 million would work, what activities would be considered suitable for support or how application for funding could be made.

Poverty is widespread and we do not make any distinction as to who would benefit. The divide in Northern Ireland here of orange/green does not come into it. Poverty affects everyone the same.

Cold is cold.

Hunger is hunger.

With 182 SVP Conferences, 29 SVP shops, 30 SVP youth conferences and visiting 2,000 to 2,500 homes per week, I believe we could have saved the Government the £400,000 they spent on consultants by providing them with advice, information and proposals.

Is there any other organisation better informed on poverty than the Society of St.Vincent de Paul?

I plead with the Members of the Legislative Assembly in Stormont, the MLAs, to talk to us, to turn this situation into a plan of action for the benefit of all.

Need is need no matter what religion you are.



SVP HAS A RADIO VOICE!!

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has its first radio station, at least one broadcasting from its premises!

These pictures show the station broadcasting from its new premises at Nagle House, South Abbey in Youghal, a seaside town in East Cork, formerly an SVP holiday home which was closed down a few years ago and now has several community-based organisations operating in the premises.

At the official opening of the station in November the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was praised for its policy of empowering local people and providing the station with a premises through which they could broadcast, expressing the views and voices of the community on the airwaves.

Community Radio Youghal broadcasts on 104FM and is available on the web.

Photo Michael Hussey



SVP NATIONAL COUNCIL APPROVES ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

The National Council of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul has approved administrative changes to improve its service to the public.

The changes have been driven by the demands on the SVP which have increased dramatically in volume and complexity over recent years. They are designed to give increased emphasis to the local volunteer-led Area and Conference structures which will remain unchanged.

The proposed changes will also provide better structured support for Members and Staff in their work and facilitate the Society's full compliance with the provisions of the Charities Act when it is implemented.

Detailed discussions will take place in the New Year and will involve consultation with all those affected within the Society.

Geoff Meagher SVP National President said, "The people that the Society supports have faced severe hardship over the past number of years of on-going austerity. Our Members and Staff have met the challenge with huge dedication and effort but are under on-going pressure. The people we help have had to adapt, we need to do the same and have structures that are relevant to the challenges we face. We also need to meet increased regulatory requirements which come at a financial cost. At the same time we must ensure the maximum possible of every Euro so generously donated goes directly to those in need. Doing nothing in the current climate is not a realistic option."

Calls for assistance to SVP have increased in excess of 100% over the past five years.

The finances and resources needed to provide appropriate assistance has also increased in proportion.

The programme of proposed changes to place the SVP in a better position to meet these needs includes a more streamlined and better resourced Regional administration structure, greater emphasis on the 114 Area Councils which support over 1,200 local Conferences; stronger representation for young people with the introduction of a national structure for youth involvement; a new management structure for shops and hostels and shared services for functions such as Finance, IT, HR and Facilities Management.

The changes have been endorsed unanimously by the SVP National Council which is made up of 130 Regional and Area Presidents throughout the country.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is the largest charity in Ireland and next year will mark its 170th year in existence. Approximately €40m annually is provided by the SVP in direct assistance to people in need. The bulk of this assistance goes to helping families with food, energy and education costs.

- The establishment of a new National Youth Committee has been approved. It will be chaired by Ailsa Flynn from County Wexford.



THE END OF THE LANE - NOT THE END OF THE ROAD

The lane that wound its way through the townland was in such poor condition that cars were being damaged in potholes that were everywhere. When the man who lived at the furthest end of the lane approached his neighbours, all agreed at first to contribute to its repair. When it came however to dividing up the costs some of those nearest the main road protested that they should pay in proportion to the section of the lane that concerned them, in some cases only thirty or forty yards. The plan foundered, literally one might say, on the short-sightedness of a few.

The ongoing review of the structures and services of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is not unlike the situation of the man who lives at the furthest end of the lane. It requires each member across the entire spectrum of the Society to remember the man or woman or family whose circumstances have deeply touched us and for whom we are concerned as members of the SVP. Everything we are engaged in in the review of our structures and services has as its goal the best possible care of those in greatest need, the one at the furthest end of the lane of need and care.

Short-sightedness is our greatest risk. To tell ourselves at Conference level or indeed personally: 'this is not our concern, this is not our problem,' or 'this service is not required in our area.' The scale of the task in hand may even prompt us to settle for things as they are, getting by in spite of the potholes and pitfalls. But only by keeping in mind those at the end of the lane can we continue patiently and with persistence to strive to make the Society more effective in caring for those whose poverty will trap them and diminish their lives.

- SVP National Spiritual Director, Eamon Devlin CM world that is used to their advantage.

Abstracts

Of Developments in Social Justice

IRELAND MOST UNEQUAL

Ireland is one of the most unequal countries among 53 examined in Europe by the World Health Organisation, where the top 20 per cent have on average, almost five times the income of those in the lowest 20 per cent. Ireland ranked fifth most unequal according to the Gini coefficient league table on income distribution.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION AGAINST AUSTERITY

Social welfare and health spending should be protected from International Monetary Fund and European Union-led demands for austerity, according to a report from the World Health Organisation. The consequences from "the financial crisis threaten a public health emergency and inaction will lead to a worsening of social, economic and health burdens," while youth unemployment "is a public health time-bomb waiting to explode," the WHO report says. It also warns that there is a widening gap across Europe between the health of the rich and the poor.

HSE REMOVES 45,000 MEDICAL CARDS

More than 45,000 Irish people had their medical cards removed by late October, following the biggest-ever review of eligibility conducted by the Health Service Executive. The status of 428,000 cards were reviewed, according to information emerging, resulting in almost 10,000 people being found to be ineligible, while over 35,000 did not respond to HSE requests or did not provide sufficient information to have their card renewed. HSE records showed 4,000 issued card holders to be deceased during the review. The HSE has continued to insist that there is no Government policy directive to slow down the issuing of medical cards or to withdraw as many as possible. General Practitioners and medical consultants continued to highlight difficulties experienced by patients in obtaining medical cards.

JOBLESS TOTAL LOWEST IN FOUR YEARS

Seasonal job figures show that the total number of people on the Live Register has dropped below 400,000 for the first time in more than four years. Central Statistics Office figures showed a figure of 397,000 at the start of November. The impact of emigration on the reduction of the Live Register figure has not been analysed. There is evidence of more people being moved off the Live Register onto training schemes.

CAUSES OF CROWDED ASYLUMS

Medical professionals and local communities protecting their economic interests had an effect on the incarceration of people in asylums, according to a new book "Irish Insanity: 1800-2000" the culmination of ten years' research work by Dr. Damien Brennan, Assistant Professor at the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College, Dublin.

MEN RELUCTANT TO WALK DOWN GROCERY AISLES

National Consumer Agency research has identified that 57 per cent of men claim to have no responsibility for buying groceries and, apparently, are reluctant to walk down the aisles of supermarkets.

MORE OVER 60S DIVORCING IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Divorce rates amongst those in their Sixties have tripled in England and Wales over the past 20 years, according to the UK Office for National Statistics. A loss of stigma about divorce among older age groups is one of the reasons given. In contrast, divorce is becoming less common amongst those under 60. The total number of divorces in 2011 in England and Wales, the latest year for which figures are available, was 118,000 compared with 165,000 in 1991.



THE 'OTHER' BURREN AND THE SVP!

Report: John Grant

Photos: Courtesy Mourne Observer

There is more than one 'Burren' in Ireland, even though that which is on the western coastline might be more well-known, though even that point would be subject to disputation by those who live around the beautiful village and townland known as Burren in County Down, near Newry and Warrenpoint.

This is the location of the newest Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Northern Ireland where it was inaugurated marking the Bicentenary of the Founder of the SVP, Frederic Ozanam

The idea for the new Conference came into being just before Christmas last year, thanks to the foresight of a member of the Warrenpoint Conference, who recognised the need for a local Conference in the Burren area. In January a number of volunteers came forward and in the weeks that followed they took part in Conference Induction Training which was completed in time for the celebrations thanks to the enthusiasm and commitment of the members of the new Conference which will be known as St Mary's Conference.

There was a tremendous turnout for the inauguration of the Conference, including Rev. Fr. Charles Byrne, PP; Rev. Fr. Perry Gildea, SVP Northern Region Spiritual Advisor and Rev. Fr. John Clarke who concelebrated Mass. Northern Regional President of the SVP, Aidan Crawford and representatives from all local Conferences in Kilkeel, Lower Mourne, Rostrevor, Warrenpoint, Kilcoo, Hilltown, Downpatrick and the 3 Newry Conferences were in attendance at a social gathering in the Burren Heritage Centre to mark the occasion and at which presentations of Induction Certificates were made to the new Conference members and old friendships were renewed and new ones made.

During the evening several parishioners attending expressed interest in becoming part of the Conference and over the following week they were visited by the new Conference President Sean Magill and Area Trainer John Grant. Five new members took part in Induction Training during May and June and for Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults.

Training has been arranged for all Conference members



With Inauguration Certificates - Back L to R: Darren Fegan, Noel Mussen, John Grant (Area Trainer), Des Kennedy, Gerard McKay. Front L to R: Sinead Murdock, Sean Magill, Aidan Crawford (Regional President), Rev. Fr. Charlie Byrne, PP., (Burren); Rev. Fr. Perry Gildea (Regional Spiritual Advisor)



Noel Mussen, Darren Fegan, Des Kennedy, Rev. Fr. Charlie Byrne, PP., (Burren) Gerard McKay, Sinead Murdock, Sean Magill



*Five Burren Conference members:
Brenda Fegan, Dan Doyle, Angela Murdock, Barbara Donnelly, Mary O'Hare*

From Catherine Coleman, Midlands Visitor Centre Management Committee:

This poem has been written by a visitor to Midlands Prison, Joanne Walsh, for staff of the Midlands Visitor Centre. This is an SVP project which had 38,988 adults and 13,715 children visitors last year. With a new wing opened we expect the visitor numbers to increase. The poem sums up the whole purpose and ethos of the Centre

Gratitude

Thank you for your kindness
It means a lot to me
When I was tired and thirsty
You refreshed me with some tea

You look after all the children
You treat them very well
To see how you work with them
Your patience is so swell

You interact with everyone
Make sure they are OK
Make sure people leave relaxed
As they leave this place today

So I will start my journey
I will head for home again
It was cloudy on the way here
But the sun has cleared the rain

Thanks for your hospitality
Every member of the staff
You brighten people's outlook
And even have a laugh

It was a pleasure being here
The company was great
I have to catch a train now
I hope I am not late

BUDGET 2014 PROVIDES LITTLE BY WAY OF HOPE



By Caroline Fahey
SVP Social Justice Team

- **YOUNG AND OLD TARGETED**
- **SEVERE IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS**
- **NO GREAT HELP FOR THOSE WHO “PAY FOR EVERYTHING”**

Although some individuals and families were protected in Budget 2014, it is clear that the struggles for thousands of others will be worsened from January 2014.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP), as the largest charity of social concern and action in Ireland, has a unique position in the homes of individuals and families who are struggling throughout the country. SVP members see at first-hand the devastation which a bill too many or a cut too far can bring about for vulnerable people, wreaking havoc on their lives, their children's lives and the whole community.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

The SVP campaigned under the slogan 'Make Your Voice Heard' for fairness and an end to austerity in Budget 2014. The Society invited people across Ireland to join its campaign and share their personal experiences of the stress, hardship and worry that austerity has brought into their lives. Many thousands of people took up the call and they told us about their struggles, expressing their despair and fears about what further cuts would mean for their families. The voices, messages and stories that supporters of this campaign sent to the SVP supported the messages contained in the Society's pre Budget submission to the Government, which called for the protection of income

supports and services relied upon by the people the SVP assists and those who are struggling. Thanks to those who supported this campaign, some of the harshest cuts that have been seen in recent years were not repeated. Further information is available on www.svp.ie/yourvoiceheard.

The Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, acknowledged in media interviews which she gave subsequent to the Budget announcement that she had met with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and had noted the SVP submissions and acted upon them where this was possible within Budgetary constraints. The Society had presented to her examples of the adverse effect of experiences of adversity on families and individuals submitted to the campaign. Receiving the book in the Dail

SVP Social Justice Team present the results of the 'Make Your Voice Heard' campaign to Minister Joan Burton



SVP ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

The SVP welcomes the protection of social welfare rates for those aged 26 and over and the fact that no further cuts to Child Benefit and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance have been made. Family Income Supplement, a crucial support for families in low paid employment has also been protected. The Fuel Allowance was also protected from cuts. Although the real value of this payment has been eroded by energy price increases in recent years, we are relieved that the payment has been maintained at current rates. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was protected for children in primary and second level education, but is no longer payable for those aged 18-22 in full time third level education. The expansion of Breakfast Clubs in disadvantaged areas is also to be welcomed.

However, families with children are still coping with reduced social welfare supports as a result of decisions made in previous budgets, and some of the measures announced in Budget 2013 will only begin to affect families from January 2014. A family with one or two children has lost more than one fifth of the Child Benefit payment since 2008 and has seen the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance reduced by 50% for younger children and by a third for those at second level. Child Benefit has now been standardised at a rate of €130 per child per month. This means that a further cut of €20 per month per child which was announced in Budget 2013 will affect families with four or more children from January 2014. Almost 40,000 families receiving Child Benefit had four or more children in 2012.

The decision to proceed with the reduction in the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment means that from January 2014 the earnings disregard will be reduced from €110 per week to €90 per week, reducing the take home pay of lone parents who are combining paid employment with the One Parent Family Payment. The earnings disregard is an important support for people parenting alone moving into paid employment, which recognises the challenges faced by some people parenting alone when it comes to taking up paid employment, in particular the lack of affordable, quality, accessible childcare and afterschool care. These problems have not been addressed and yet the reduction in the earnings disregard is set to continue, and will be reduced to €60 per week from 2015. This measure undermines the Government's stated objective of tackling the number of jobless households in Ireland.

The decision to extend the €100 rate of Jobseekers Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance to those aged 22-24 years, from €144 per week, and to reduce the payments from €188 to €144 for those aged 25 will result in financial hardship and increased risk of homelessness for many families and young people. However, young people who were in the care of the HSE during their 17th year will receive the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance up to age 24.

the Minister spent a lengthy time discussing its contents and the statements made with members of the SVP Social Justice Team and the National Vice-President for Social Justice Tom MacSweeney. Copies of the book in a pamphlet form were sent to all members of the Oireachtas, to the media and to all SVP Conferences and are available to the public on request to SVP Head Office.

"Those who responded to the campaign provided a first-hand account of what suffering from austerity means," said the National Vice-President. "They were a powerful evocation of what suffering means to individuals and families. This was the first time any charity had sought to receive and express directly to the Government the voices of the people on the effects of austerity. I have no doubt that they were listened to and made a considerable impression. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul continuously advocates for equality, based on facts and does so in a constructive, effective fashion. It is the voice of social justice and on this occasion, clearly, the voice of the people."

BUDGETARY ANALYSIS BY THE SVP SOCIAL JUSTICE TEAM

CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF CHARGES AND CUTS

There were some notable and welcome announcements in Budget 2014, but many individuals and families will be facing into more difficulties in 2014. While some of the SVP's key demands were met (protection of most social welfare payments, family income supplement, child benefit, fuel allowance and educational supports), the cumulative effect of increased charges and reduced payments in other areas will have a severe impact on household incomes.

In previous years cuts targeted children and families and the impact of these cuts are still being felt by families today, with further reductions in income that were announced in Budget 2013 set to kick in from January 2014. This year, young people and older people were targeted. Young people who are unable to find employment and older people who are isolated or suffering from ill health will be badly affected.

FAILURE AS A JOBS BUDGET

The measures to tackle unemployment announced by Government must concentrate on up-skilling those with low levels of skills, experience and education; provide opportunities to those who are long-term unemployed; and support all parents, particularly those parenting alone, to take up employment and training when they are available. A 'jobs budget' should avoid creating new unemployment traps. However Budget 2014 fails on this measure, with the announcement of the decision to remove the full medical card from those returning to employment; the decision to continue to reduce the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment; the decision to remove the One Parent Family tax credit affecting those who are sharing parenting and in employment; and the discontinuation of the payment of a VTOS/FAS training allowance to recipients of the One Parent Family Payment.

The Back-to-Education Allowance rate has also been reduced, from €188 per week to €160 per week for those aged 25. In 2012 there were 57,776 young people aged under 25 in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and a further 5,157 young people aged under 25 in receipt of Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance. The unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 years is 29.6%. Research from the Vincentian Partnership for Justice demonstrates that the cost of a minimum essential standard of living for a young adult living in the parental home is forecast to rise to €183.99 per week in 2014. There is a significant gap between what is required for a minimum essential standard of living and the support provided by Jobseekers' Allowance/Supplementary Welfare Allowance or the Back to Education Allowance rates for young people. This will result in further stress, struggling and hardship for low income individuals and families.

SVP is also concerned at the implications of this cut for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Young people who are resident in homeless hostels may have to leave emergency accommodation as they may be unable to afford their weekly payment to the hostel from their very low social welfare payment. Young people who are homeless may also be unable to move onto rented accommodation as it is unlikely that they will be able to afford the minimum rent supplement contribution from their reduced Jobseekers payment. Couples who are in receipt of Rent Supplement see the minimum contribution increase from €35 per week to €40 per week. It is important to remember that many people in private rented accommodation pay far more than the minimum contribution towards their rent and this additional €20 per month is likely to be the final straw for some households being able to stay in their family home.

While some individuals and families were protected from cuts in Budget 2014, it is clear that the income of thousands of other families will be reduced from January 2014 onwards.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

SVP welcomes the focus on energy retrofit, and the additional funding for the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme announced in Budget 2014. Household energy bills have increased by over €500 over the past three years and the SVP has increased its fuel assistance to households in Ireland from €3.8 million to over €10 million annually. While 250,000 homes have acquired retrofitting measures such as attic and cavity wall insulation, draught proofing and low energy lighting, the Government's own target of retrofitting 1 million homes by 2020 is not going to be achieved. Low income households with high fuel costs should be prioritised for energy retrofit and measures to tackle fuel poverty.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

While SVP welcomes the commitment to extend free GP care to children up to the age of six years we have been very disappointed by the lack of implementation to date of

Government's pledge to extend free GP care to all by 2016 and are concerned at the emerging questions regarding the viability of achieving the full commitment in the lifetime of this Government.

Given the very steep social gradient of health inequalities in Ireland SVP does not understand the increase in the prescription charge for medical card holders, up from €1.50 to €2.50 an item, up to a monthly ceiling of €25 per household. For those on the lowest incomes and with the poorest health this increase is substantial and has the potential to discourage people from filling prescriptions which can lead to more chronic illness and inappropriate admission to Accident and Emergency units. Withdrawing the full medical card from those who get jobs and replacing it with a GP visit card (estimated number 22,000) will work as a barrier to these people who will be very aware that paying for prescriptions and losing the other exemptions associated with the full medical card such as exemptions from paying exam fees and school transport charges will make it harder for them to make ends meet. This is not a pro-employment approach.

The removal of the full medical card from approximately 35,000 people who are aged over 70 will result in this group having to pay for their own prescriptions up to the current Drug Payment Threshold of €144 a month. This measure will affect those aged over 70 with an income of more than €500 per week for those living alone, or €900 per week for couples. This will have a substantial impact on people on a fixed income, particularly those with the poorest health who require more medication.

We are also very worried at the €660 million of health cuts and lack of detail as to how this will be achieved. We have a deep unease as to how exactly the medical card probity review (to save €113 million) will impact on those with most need for health care. We await clarification as to how these savings will be achieved. SVP is very fearful for households and individuals just above the income threshold for the full medical card whose income will be insufficient to meet their prescription and other health care costs. We are also concerned for the many families who have sacrificed much to retain their private health insurance as it will only be possible to claim tax relief on premiums up to €1,000 per adult and €500 per child. Tax relief will no longer be available on the portion of a premium which is over €1,000 per adult and €500 per child.

While the allocation of €20 million to develop community mental health services is welcome it is less than the 2013 allocation and will not be enough to bring the current and promised community mental health teams to an adequate level of a functioning across the country.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

SVP welcomes the €4.5 million allocated to improve quality in the pre-school sector through more inspectors, a training grant to help staff meet the new qualification requirements due in 2015 and a mentoring service to support the AISTEAR

curriculum and SÍOLTA framework. Unfortunately investment in the early years sector in Ireland has been very inadequate to date which continues to result in access, quality, and affordability problems, particularly for those with low incomes.

SVP notes that afterschool care continues to be noticeable by the absence of any funding. The €14 million pilot After School Childcare Scheme targeting low income parents announced in Budget 2013 has experienced low take up. While continuing to implement the scheme, the remaining funds have instead been redirected to provide another strand of the Childcare Education and Training Supports (CETS) scheme to provide part-time child care places for parents on Community Employment schemes. Previously only trainees on SOLAS and Education Training Board courses could avail of these child care places. The lack of investment in after school care and support is regrettable as the sector is informal and without any regulation.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SVP welcomes the additional €5 million funding for primary schools to encourage the establishment of school book rental schemes - we have campaigned on this issue and are pleased

with this step in the right direction to reduce book costs for over-burdened parents. Other practical solutions, which we continue to advocate for, must be introduced to continue to reduce the participation costs of education.

SVP notes the unchanged Pupil Teacher Ratio, the 1,395 new teaching posts, the protection of DEIS funding for disadvantaged schools, the protection of the €1.3 billion budget for children with special educational needs and the 2,000 training places ring-fenced for under 25 year olds in the Youth Guarantee Scheme. While we welcome the protection of the Student Maintenance Grant at its current levels we know that the €250 increase in the Student Contribution Charge to €2,750 for the 2014/2015 academic year will result in more hardship for families struggling to send children onto third level education. However, it is important to note that many students on a low income are exempt from all or part of the student contribution charge, depending on their family income.

*Minister for Social Protection
Joan Burton, TD*

SVP CONCLUSION SUMMARY OF BUDGET 2014 - Caroline Fahey, Social Policy and Development Officer

The SVP asked the Government for a Budget which would not cause further damage to communities and people, but instead provide hope and a future to look forward to. Cuts to supports like child benefit, social welfare, household benefits, medical cards and education, which only a few years ago would have been unthinkable have happened each year since 2008. The cumulative impact of these cuts will continue to affect those who are struggling.

The SVP therefore welcomes some of the measures announced in Budget 2014 as some of the harshest cuts seen in recent years were not repeated. However, for many people -- older people in poor health or living in isolation; individuals and families who are afraid that they will lose their medical card if they take up employment; those who have already lost their medical card in spite of being in medical and financial need; people who can no longer afford to pay for the prescriptions they need; those parenting alone who have borne the brunt of the cuts in recent years and young people who now feel that the only option open to them is to try and find the resources they need to emigrate, Budget 2014 provides little by way of hope. SVP is relieved that some of the harshest cuts which happened in previous years did not continue for 2014.

Although some individuals and families were protected from the worst of the cuts in Budget 2014, it is clear that the struggles for thousands of others will be worsened from January 2014. While a number of the SVP's key demands were met (protection of most social welfare payments, family income supplement, child benefit, fuel allowance and educational supports), the cumulative effect of increased charges and reduced payments in other areas will have a severe impact on the lives of people who are struggling.

However, for many people: older people in poor health or living in isolation; individuals and families who fear losing their medical card; those who have already lost the medical card in spite of being in medical and financial need; people who can no longer afford to pay for the prescriptions they need; families with children who have borne the brunt of the cuts in recent years and young people who now feel that the only option open to them is to try and find the resources they need to emigrate, Budget 2014 provides little by way of hope. Too many people across Ireland are faced with a very difficult future as a result of the austerity measures that have been implemented in recent years.



“Elderly People Are Crucified.... We Are Only Fodder....” *By Christy Lynch*

You work all your life, doing the best you can and then you get a government that just walks all over you. This is my view of how Budget 2014 has treated the elderly.

We built this country and we are not responsible for the economic mess which bankers, financiers, property speculators and lack of government regulation got the nation into. But now, as elderly people, we are being treated like fodder. I was working for 61 years. I reared my family, paid all my dues, all my taxes. Now I am very angry, indeed furious, at the way the government has treated older people.

I am a widower and living on a pension of €237 a week at the age of 75. The cut in the telephone allowance means extra cost to pensioners and for me, that phone is vital to stay in touch with the family who are scattered around the world. There seems to be no realisation at government level that this line is also needed for the alarm systems in many old people's homes, so they are being punished by the withdrawal of the allowance.

Elderly people have been crucified in this Budget. The government took away the death grant as well and even the money put aside by pensioners to cover the cost of a funeral is not safe from them with the increase in DIRT tax on deposits to 41 per cent.

As far as I can see the government attitude seems to be that if you are over a certain age, then the average pensioner might only live for another ten years, so they can keep on cutting and then the pensioner will be gone anyway. I have never been so angry with a government. I think they are hoping that pensioners will die away because, as far as they are concerned, it is all about saving money.

It is scandalous what they have done and it is no excuse that they say they have not touched the core payments. Pensioners will have to find the money which they took away, to cover things like the withdrawal of the telephone allowance. Where does the government think that money is going to come from? It is going to come from the basic, the core social welfare payment that the pensioner gets of course and that means that it reduces that payment effectively.

We have had older people coming into us at the SVP in Tralee and they are distraught and worried. We had three new cases in one morning after the Budget. The TDS who were elected by the people and who voted for the cuts in the Budget, with their fat salaries and their expenses and allowances, are they living in the real world? We have terrible cases, from all age groups, coming for help to the SVP because of the situation in the country and those TDs don't seem to realise how bad things are on the ground.

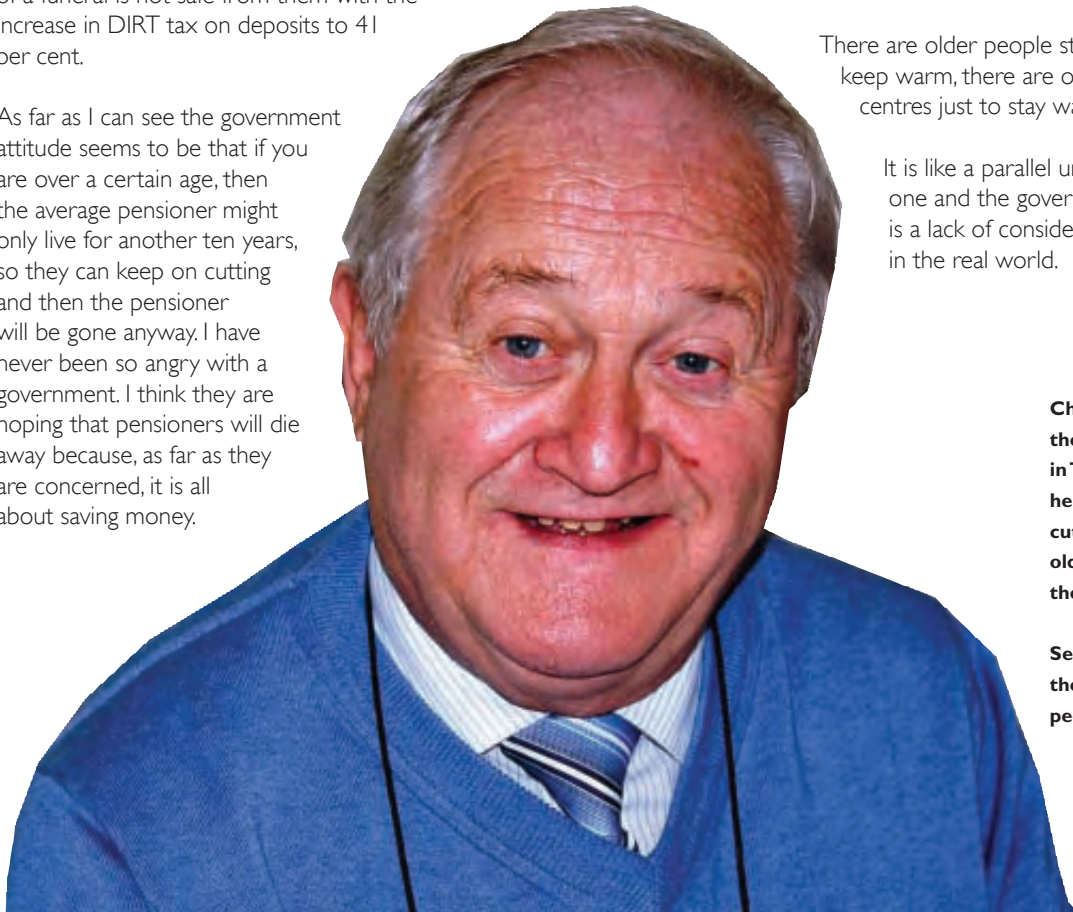
Apart from the cut in the telephone allowance, there is an even more damaging threat to the security situation for old people, because the phone line is connected to their personal security alarm and if they can't afford that anymore has the government thought what that means? That would make their panic buttons obsolete and has the government thought what that will mean for security for older people in their own homes?

There are older people staying in bed longer just to keep warm, there are older people going to shopping centres just to stay warm.

It is like a parallel universe where we are living in one and the government is in another and there is a lack of consideration on their part for people in the real world.

Christy Lynch is Area President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Tralee. Aged 75 and a widower, he responds here to the Budgetary cuts on the elderly and details how older people have been approaching the Society in Kerry for help.

See also page 13 for an outline of the effects of the Budget on young people





“When an old person
dies a library is lost”

– *Chinese proverb*

SHAME OF THE SUICIDE INQUEST

Peg Hanafin reflects on inquests and suggests changes when suicide is involved



More than one person dies by suicide every day in this country. That means that every day some family faces the pain and anguish that such a death imposes on parents, siblings, friends as well as the community at large. After the funeral, life moves on for some. For those most closely involved, the silence falls and the family are left to pick up the pieces.

Many families are surprised when, after six weeks or more, a member of the Garda Síochána calls to the family home to inform them of the date of the inquest on their family member. This can be the start of a painful and intrusive journey into their grief. I don't think it needs to be this way and that it could be changed.

An inquest is a public inquiry to establish the identity of the deceased, the date, place of death, and the circumstances and establishing the cause. It is overseen by a Coroner with the assistance of a jury of ten or twelve people. Similar to what happens in many courtrooms there can be a large number of people present - Gardai, a State pathologist, newspaper or other media reporters, witnesses, other persons who may have given a statement, the next-of-kin and the general public. The inquest may not tell why a person died by suicide but is a requirement of law to establish the facts. Evidence is given and, generally at the discretion of the Coroner, suicide notes or relevant letters may be read. This can be an added burden of anxiety, trauma and pain for the family involved.

Suicide was decriminalised in July 1993, twenty 20 years ago. Families of those who die by suicide have been thrust into an unknown situation when this sudden death arrives at their door. They may feel isolated. There can be shock and horror at being in an inquest. They should be able to expect some compassion as to how such a painful and public appearance is looked at by the authorities.

This could be so different and changed if the will to do so was there. There are no legal barriers to change, only lack of human compassion and understanding, I believe. There is a general lack of knowledge about the Coroner's service in the public domain. It is one of the oldest public services in existence which has evolved over time and covers all sudden and questionable deaths and under law an inquest must be carried out before a death certificate is issued. The Act under which a Coroner functions was passed in 1962. It operates as an independent judicial office to establish the "who, when, where and how" of unexplained deaths. It is not permitted to consider civil or criminal liability, it is there to establish the facts.

The system has not changed for fifty years, even though suicide was decriminalised in 1993 and an upward trend continues annually. For those who have already endured unimaginable grief

and loss it may be their first time to encounter such a system.

A working Group on the Review of the Coroner's Service published a report with more than 100 recommendations in 2000. It said that "rules should be established by statutory regulation and be capable of being amended" and "that changes in the work and practice of the Coroner are inevitable as the complexity and demands of modern society increase". These statements would appear to give a mandate to those in charge to change the system.

One Coroner has shown how change can be made.

John Lacey, Coroner for Navan in County Meath has, with the help of concerned people, changed the structure of how he addresses inquests for the bereaved families of those whose loved ones have died by suicide. He holds the inquest in an annexe of Navan Hospital and it is humanised by the presence of a group of trained bereavement personnel who provide refreshments and comfort for the family members. They, with the Coroner, encourage the family to ask questions if they so desire and the Gardai sit with the family and carry out their duty as gently as is possible. There is no need for Gardai to be in uniform. All of this provides a more humane and understanding environment. Sometimes statements by witnesses might be heard by the family for perhaps the first time. It is important to understand and respect their sensitivity to such statements.

Adapting this Navan model across the country would be a positive step towards affording more dignity and consolation to those affected by suicide.

We must never accept that a death by suicide has any criminality reflected in our attitudes and practices.

Peg Hanafin, M.Sc. Psy. Rehab.Couns, Dip Psych., is a Counsellor with 35 years' experience and writes from knowledge of life in Rural Ireland

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Kieran Murphy, National Director, SVP

The National Management Council recently presented a series of recommendations to the National Council which will transform the way in which we provide support, carry out our administration and the way in which we manage our services. It is the most radical reorganisation since the 1970's when the existing regional structure was introduced.

There are two compelling reasons for these changes. Firstly, to ensure we provide a better service to people in need and secondly, making sure we have a support, administration and management structure which is appropriate given the breadth, scale and complexity of the Society's operations. We are a large organisation, by any standards, with a turnover of over €70m, operating in over 1,000 locations, providing a variety of service from home visitation to hostels for people who are homeless, delivering our services in people's homes and from a large number of premises. The SVP is one of Ireland's largest charities.

Part of the reason why we need to change the way we organise ourselves is because the standards by which charities are now judged have changed dramatically in the last 15 years. It used to be the case that it was sufficient for a charity to be passionate about the need it was meeting and was doing its best. These are still important however, there are now new standards: we

also need to be accountable and transparent. Accountable to the people we provide services to; our donors; our members, volunteers and employees; and the wider public. And transparent about who we are, how we work, how we raise and spend our funds, and the difference we are making.

Accountability and transparency are words frequently heard nowadays and they are standards by which all organisations are judged. And charities are no exception. These are not driven by government but by the expectations of the general public.

There have been a number of developments over the last few years which set new standards for the operation of charities and which reflect the requirements for us to be accountable and transparent.

There is now a Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising. This is a government sponsored initiative to address concerns by the public about how charities do their fundraising, including whether or not organisations claiming to be charities are in fact charities; and how much of a donation actually goes to the charity. It is extremely important that the public have confidence in charities fundraising, even one scandal can impact negatively on all charities. It is because of this that SVP has signed up to Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising.

There is also a Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations which charities are expected to sign up to. This sets out a set of standards about how organisations like the SVP should be run. The code is designed to reassure donors and funders that their money is being managed by a well run organisation with good governance; to increase transparency - in that everyone knows exactly how the organisation is being run; help you avoid bad risks; help an organisation achieve its goals faster; and; reduce costs.

Both the Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising and the Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations are two examples of new standards being set for charities and are linked to a larger drive to introduce specific legislation for charities. There is now legislation in the North of Ireland and in the Republic. Both jurisdictions will shortly have operating Charity Commissions which will bring much greater levels of scrutiny and accountability for all charities.

These are welcome and positive developments. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that charities are well run and provide safe and quality services. The National Management Council's recommendations to the National Council are part of a programme of change to ensure that the SVP is in a position to comply with the requirements of the new charities and related legislation. But more importantly, in order to continue to fulfill our mission we need to protect the future of the SVP by ensuring that we wholeheartedly comply with the standards set for the operation of charities. If we are found wanting, the public will be unforgiving and rightly so.



VINCENTIAN JOURNEY

Northern Region Annual Meeting

“Vincentian Journey” was the theme of this year’s Members’ Annual Meeting of the Northern Ireland Region where Society volunteers heard talks encouraging them to “Seize the Day” – ideas which can be brought to Conference meetings for the benefit of everyone.

Gerry Falcona asked the question – “Are we doing the right things now or should we be doing different things also?”

He compared the ‘law of production’ versus ‘perfection’ and suggested that it was important for people not to “just sit there trying to make everything perfect, but “just get out there and do the things you do.”

Iris Corry of The Salvation Army spoke about the annual Family Appeal which is now a joint effort by the Army, the SVP and the BBC. She said it had started from very simple beginnings by a poster being put in a window of their building on the Dublin Road in Belfast, asking for toys at Christmas in 1980. Three hundred toys were donated and it was decided to make this an annual appeal. The poster caught the eye of Sean Rafferty, a former BBC Northern Ireland Presenter who offered to ask his bosses if they would publicise the Appeal. They did so and it then took off in earnest. “But it soon became apparent that the Appeal could only help those benefitting from the Salvation Army presence in their area and with this in mind, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul with its extensive network of Conferences across Northern Ireland, was invited to join, thus ensuring that more families could benefit from the Appeal which helped more than 13,000 children last Christmas.

SVP Regional President, Aidan Crawford, drew attention to the challenges faced by members in dealing with problems such as those created by the costs of school uniforms and other social justice issues.

A new Social Justice Committee has been formed in the Northern Region, chaired by Malachy McKernan and is liaising with the Social Justice Team at SVP National Office in Dublin where Malachy is also a member of the National Social Justice Policy Committee.

A new Northern Ireland Regional SVP Media Group has also been formed, chaired by Regional Vice-President Cormac Wilson who is also a member of the SVP National Media and Advocacy Committee.

Claire Morgan has been appointed the new Youth Development Officer in the Region and she was introduced to the meeting.

Ruairi Murray has been appointed Regional Shops Co-ordinator,



with the Shops’ Committee under Kevin Dougan and it is hoped to open more new shops in the future.

A Fundraising Committee has been established, chaired by Pat McCann.

Peter McVeigh is the new Twinning Officer for the Region.

Aidan Crawford reported that the former holiday home, Clare Lodge, had now been demolished and it was hoped to start construction on the new building very soon. He said that the Mountainview Centre in West Belfast (featured in the Autumn edition of The SVP Bulletin) was doing great work. The oil stamps scheme was proving successful and prison visitation is “continuing successfully.”

The meeting was held at the Dunsilly Hotel in Antrim.



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION RESPONDS POSITIVELY TO SVP ON SCHOOL UNIFORMS

The Minister for Education has instructed schools to survey parents on uniform preferences, a positive response to the Society's campaign to reduce the cost of school uniforms. A questionnaire will be issued to parents by all schools in time for the next school year starting next September. This will include low-cost options which SVP, Barnardos and the National Parents' Council have insisted must be available to parents

Audry Deane, SVP Social Justice & Policy Officer, said that the Society had repeatedly requested the Minister to act directly on this issue. "He has obviously listened," she said, adding that parents have had very little say in how decisions regarding school uniform policy are made at school level. "We know that many parents have little contact with their Boards of Management and find themselves having to pay unnecessary high uniform costs without their views being taken into account.

"We have been so concerned at this lack of accountability for parents that along with Barnardos and the National Parents' Council we invited the education bodies to endorse a guide on uniform policy containing a list of cost saving practical options. This guide was disseminated to all schools last May."

The SVP will continue to lobby for practical solutions to reducing other school costs such as school tours, school equipment, school books and digital aids.

"The SVP does not accept that lack of income is a good enough reason to stop children reaching their potential at school. We want a level playing field for all our pupils regardless of means." Ms. Deane said.

BUDGET 2014 ATTACKS YOUNG PEOPLE

By John-Mark McCafferty, Head of Social Justice & Policy

For most people in receipt of social welfare, Government kept its promise of not cutting weekly social welfare payments. That's a welcome result of our campaign for fairness in Budget 2014. But that promise doesn't cover everyone. Young people are being penalised by the social welfare system at a time when there simply are not enough jobs for the multitude of people applying for each vacancy; and at a time when almost 30% of young people are unable to find work.

The decision to extend the €100 rate of Jobseekers Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance to those aged 22-24 years, from €144 per week, and to reduce the payments from €188 to €144 for those aged 25 will result in financial hardship and increased risk of homelessness for many families and young people.

Research from the Vincentian Partnership for Justice shows that the cost of a minimum standard of living for a young adult living in the parental home is forecast to rise to €183.99 per week in 2014. These costs include food, transport, clothing and social inclusion. There is a significant gap between what is required for a minimum essential standard of living and the support provided by Jobseekers Allowance, Supplementary Welfare Allowance or the Back to Education Allowance rates for young people. This will result in further struggling and hardship for low income families. Some young people will have to fall back on support from family and friends to make ends meet. This will be an added strain for parents and families who are themselves trying to cope with cuts made in recent years. Young people are being given the message to emigrate – and while some will be able to come up with the resources to move abroad to look for work, and hopefully benefit from the experience – those with the least resources and the lowest levels of skills and education will be unable to do

so. Instead they will have to try and feed and house themselves, participate in society, take up education or training, take care of their mental health and of course look for a job on an income that is far below the poverty line.

Young people who cannot rely on family supports, and those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are facing additional difficulties. Some young job seekers in low income households, where relationships may be strained, will be at heightened risk of homelessness due to this cut.

Young people living in homeless hostels will have far less money to budget with and will struggle to pay the weekly charge for their hostel accommodation. Their reduced ability to afford their weekly payment may put their place in the hostel at risk. The reduction in the jobseekers payment will mean that it will be very difficult for young people who are homeless to move on to rented accommodation, as they won't be able to afford the minimum contribution towards their rent. This contradicts Government's stated aim of ending long term homelessness.

Government representatives have argued that these young people will benefit from the Youth Guarantee, a scheme of training opportunities. But these schemes only last 6 weeks. In any event, someone struggling to make ends meet on such a low income, or who is facing homelessness or the spectre of rough sleeping will be unable to get the benefit from these schemes. Surely we can do better for our young people.



A TERRIBLE INCIDENT!

By Gerry Martin, SVP Historian

In 1922 the National Office of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was badly affected by the hostilities on the east side of Upper Sackville [O'Connell] Street and the subsequent fire. The Office, at No. 23 Upper Sackville Street, which was over Mackey's, the seeds company, had been located in north Dublin city since it moved from 4/5 Cornmarket in 1905, on the south side. Sir Joseph A. Gwynn, Chairman of the National Health Insurance Commissioners, was then the President of the Society. He was also President of the Catholic Truth Society at 22 Upper Sackville Street.

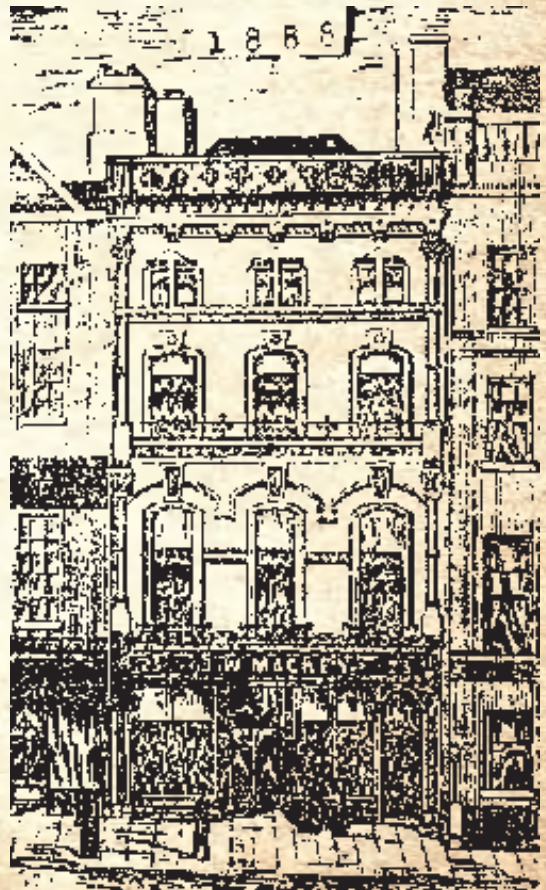
Upper Sackville Street, originally called Drogheda Street, was becoming commercialised. The private houses of the early nineteenth century were giving way to offices, hotels and clubs. Carlisle [O'Connell] Bridge had been widened and the chief thoroughfare of the city was regarded as one of the finest main streets in Europe. Mr. James William Mackey, a Scotsman, who owned Mackey's, and was the SVP's landlord, had been the Lord Mayor of the city on two occasions – 1866 and 1873. He was a progressive citizen and it was partially due to his inspiration that the bridge was enlarged.

Mackey's had been established in 1877. Originally Toole & Mackey, it had a great reputation as seed and-bulb merchants and nurserymen. Their building was certainly not dull and was easy to spot! James Joyce gave an extra celebrity to No.23 when he referred to the store in 'Ulysses'.

The Hammam Hotel, up to the Gresham Hotel, was devastated by the conflagration of 1922 and the buildings were subsequently levelled. In the fullness of time Hammam Hotel became Hammam Building, Thomas Gresham's hotel was enlarged [incorporating Mackey's and the SVP Office] and a fine main-road was created called Cathal Brugha Street, where once there had been a small pathway – Gregg's Lane. The Catholic Truth Society, neighbours of the SVP, was afforded temporary accommodation by the Francis Street SVP Conference.

After July 1922, the Society's Office moved to 30 South Anne Street, off Dawson Street, at the premises of the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland [now Cúnamh] - which had been founded in 1913. Sir Joseph Glynn, the National President of the SVP, and Matthew Lalor, the Dublin President, were both members of CPRSI.

Despite the terrible fire, the work of the SVP for the underprivileged of the city went on in an uninterrupted fashion. The 'Irish Times' tells us that there was a special meeting of the Council when the matter of the closure of many shops and the consequent shortages of food was addressed. The statutory Board of Guardians had asked the Society to help, just as they had in 1916. It was felt that there should be a recommendation 'to relieving officers for ordinary outdoor relief' in the case of continued unemployment. The newspaper said that the Guardians decided 'to join hands' with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and with the Local Government Board. The paper, in an editorial, further said that the Society was 'an excellent organisation which will have little difficulty in distinguishing between cases of real hardship and fraudulent applications for relief'. Despite the upheaval, the work of the SVP went on.



Pangur Bán was a Celtic monastic writer who “got wisdom day and night, Turning Darkness into light.” Our Pangur seeks to make commonsense from nonsense in current topics

Ministers in Government appear to have lost understanding of the use of English. Finance Minister Michael Noonan changes taxation arrangements for “gold plated health insurance policies” that he says will not affect most people. It appears 500,000 are, from his perspective... “not most people”.

“We are all in this together,” say Government Ministers, but it seems that the only ones paying the bills are those in the “not most people” sector because the ‘golden circle’ remains alive and well in Ireland and the Ministers also don't want to “disincentivise” foreign investors by placing extra taxes on the higher paid, those over €100,000. Never mind about ‘disincentivising’ those who are “not most people”.

The total number of Irish who have emigrated since 2008 is 200,600. Thankfully, this is “not most people” .. Most of them did so, despite the Government suggesting they were going away for experience, because they could not get jobs. Finance Minister Michael Noonan said in his Budget speech that “too many people in Ireland see themselves as employees for life. We must encourage people to start new businesses.”

The Government says it will provide a two-year tax exception scheme for people who have been unemployed for 15 months or more and who start-up a new self-employed business.

Unfortunately the banks won't give the unemployed any loans to start up a business. What is said and what is real do not seem to be the same in Government-speak.

The Dail is being reformed, TDs standard week in the Dáil chamber has increased from 23 hours to 28 hours, with two extra hours to debate actual legislation. The Dáil starts earlier on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays than previously and Friday sittings will be every two weeks instead of every month, so the politicians say, but where are they? Whenever I see the Dail TV transmission it takes just one hand to count the number of TDs actually in the Chamber?

What is a “boomerang”? It used to be an Australian returnable implement, now it is describing Ireland's “boomerang generation” where nearly 40pc of people in their 20s are living with their parents according to an INMI/Today FM Behaviour and Attitudes poll. A staggering 39pc of respondents between the age of 20 and 29 revealed that they live with their parents because they can't afford to live otherwise.

Close to 90 per cent of Junior Cert students study history but the Department of Education thinks that is no longer necessary and has

suggested dropping it as a compulsory subject. Right on there the Marlboro Street bureaucrats, probably better not to let the young people know who did what to destroy their opportunities in life. Perhaps that is why Ministers, politicians, economic commentators and the media like to use the phrase “we are where we are” .. Ignorance of who put us where we are could become a useful part of the Irish educational system for the benefit of Government!

Why does corruption seldom if ever end up in the dock in the Irish court system?

Because many in powerful positions enjoy impunity or immunity, or is it because of fear amongst the political establishment and the public service, which should be acting in the interests of the people, to fight corruption? Fighting corruption requires preventing future events from happening as well as holding those responsible for corruption to account on behalf of the people.

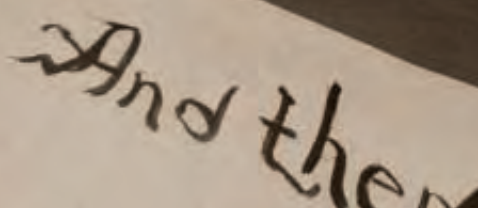
The Society of St.Vincent de Paul has urged that Irish Water should not be privatised.

Where it has been in England successive investors have taken over and sold privatised water companies, using a national natural source, to make massive profits, taking huge dividends for shareholders and bills to households have on average increased from £170 stg a year to £360 and that is three times the average increase in household incomes.

Hard-pressed Irish taxpayers will be pleased to know that the Irish Government is giving the European Central Bank, the key enforcer of austerity, money to help it pay €500,000 per office for staff who will work in the new European Central Bank Headquarters in Frankfurt.

The bankers, who enforce austerity on the suffering public do not do so on themselves. They are building the tallest bank in Europe to a height of more than 600 feet and not imposing budgetary controls on themselves. It started out to be €503m. but the cost has risen to €960m. and could go even higher – and they have had to pay €250,000 in settlement of a legal claim against them by a construction company which tendered a lower price, but the ECB decided on accepting a higher one.

And these are the people who tell the Irish government how to run the nation. The 17 members of the Eurozone are paying for the 45-storey building which is three years behind schedule. The enforcer of austerity has not shown financial prudence itself. Those paying for this fiasco include Ireland.



And then



UNLESS YOU ARE FIVE OR UNDER GETTING SICK HAS JUST BECOME MORE EXPENSIVE

By Audry Deane - SVP Social Justice and Policy Officer

If you have a medical card each prescription item you need will now cost you €2.50 up to a ceiling of €25 a month per household. If you are seventy or over and have an income of €500 a week, or €900 a week if you are a couple, you will lose your full medical card and have to pay for prescriptions, up to the monthly ceiling of €144. This measure will affect 35,000 older people. If you have private medical insurance your tax relief on this will be capped at €1000 per adult and at €500 per child. This change, portrayed by the Finance Minister as one which would affect those with 'gold plated' policies the most, will actually cause more than 577,000 people to bear a loss of at least €40. And lastly, the move to limit medical card cover for people who get a job to the GP Visit card only for three years, instead of a full medical card, cannot be viewed as a pro work approach. Having a full medical card entitles people to help with school books and exempts them from paying the State school exam fees and school transport charges which are expensive items for a family on a low income. 22,000 people are thought to be affected by this move.

So what's left for the rest of us between aged over 5 and under 70 years?

We can look forward to more explicit rationing of public health services - €666 million will need to be cut from 2014 health spending. We know it is serious when the CEO of the Health Executive Service goes on record to tell us how harsh a year 2014 will be for health spending given that they intend to cut 1,000 more jobs.

We can look forward with uncertainty and fear to the 'probity' review of medical cards which promises a saving of €113 million and which so far no one has been able to explain.

As for the toll all this is taking on our mental health - only €20 million is allocated for improving community adult and children mental health teams in 2014, instead of the previously agreed €35 million. Child and adolescent mental health teams are not all functioning with sufficient staff to provide an adequate and

appropriate service to those who need this critical service which is a cause for huge concern. Something tells us that the stark link between low income and poor health looks set to continue.

A POSITIVE RESULT!

- Ger Keohane, Area President East Cork

It's not often we get an opportunity to share some good news but I am happy to report that I got a positive result with my local Board of Management on reducing the cost of school uniforms by using the SVP's Social Justice lobbying work.

To explain - I am one of the two Parent Representatives on the Board of Management in a national primary school in Glanmire. As a father of four myself, currently unemployed, I understand at first hand the struggle involved in meeting the costs of school. I was so incensed at the poor practice that I saw locally that I researched the matter myself. What I found out really annoyed me... a company in Cavan was supplying uniforms to another company in Cork who in turn were supplying a local retailer. This shop was the preferred, and only, supplier of uniforms for local schools and parents were directed to this shop. My efforts to get my own school to supply the school crest so it could be digitally produced for sewing onto jumpers was refused.

I got in touch with Audry Deane of the SVP Social Justice team who filled me in on the lobbying that SVP had led on with regard to reducing uniform costs, namely that they got various leader organisations in education, unions and management to sit down together with SVP, Barnardos and the National Parents Council and make a short guide on how to keep uniform costs down. This common sense guide has a list of options which schools can explore and use to reduce costs. This guide has been sent out to all schools in Ireland, but my Board of Management had not given it much attention.

I went back to my Board and questioned why a decision made by a previous board and a contract set up by them should mean that parents had to struggle to buy expensive uniforms which had passed through two additional companies after leaving the factory they were made in. I showed them the guide on uniforms again and insisted that they have another look at how to get uniform costs down.

I got a result! The Board of Management agreed that from next year on they would not use the old preferred supplier approach. I am delighted that my persistence in bringing the uniform guide to their attention will mean cheaper uniforms and less stress for struggling families.

So - the motto of the story is even if your effort gets dismissed first time round - persistence is worth a go - in my case by pushing the Board to take another look at the guidelines I got the result I wanted. It was great having this short guide to hand, a practical tool for the pressing problem of expensive school costs.

SVP TROUBLED BY CENTRAL BANK FINDINGS ON MONEYLENDING

The Society of St Vincent de Paul has described the report on moneylending published by the Central Bank today as “benign” and described it as “failing to include any recommendations for further regulation of the sector” and showing “worrying levels of acceptance of high credit loans from consumers.”

Responding to the Bank's report, the Society said that it appreciated that the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the sector with the aim of "informing the Central Bank work in this area and to gain a better understanding of the relevant issues that affect the moneylending industry", as well as to assist the Central Bank to develop future policy'.

“However the report fails to examine critically the growth and size of the industry in Ireland as well and the extremely troubling acceptance of moneylending as a credit form 360,000 households” said Brendan Hennessy of the Society's Social Justice Office.

“It fails to question adequately why so many people, mainly in low income groups, resort to such expensive forms of credit. It offers no critical analysis of money lenders who can charge

combined interest and collection charges at APR rates of up to 287.2%, said Mr.Hennessy.

He also said that there appears to be some contradictions from respondents in the report regarding accessing alternative forms of credit, for example.

- Only 21% considered taking out (cheaper) credit before taking out a money lending loan. Yet 58% have savings in another institution
- And 62% believe they could credit from alternative sources. However 77% say they had been refused by a credit union or bank.

The SVP realises that for many people money lenders may appear to provide a convenient service but says that people should be encouraged to consider their repayment costs in relation to their household budgets and to create a greater relationship with their credit unions. The growth of 20% in customers of licenced moneylenders must be a call to arms for people who genuinely want to improve financial awareness.

“If there is anyone who needs to read this report it is the Department of Education in creating financial awareness courses on the school's curriculum and Credit Unions and other low cost credit institutions. The report should surely pose many questions for the Central Bank's Consumer Advisory Group and all those involved in promoting financial inclusion,” concluded the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in its response to the Central Bank.



SVP 'Gets Its Glow On' at Electric Picnic for the First time

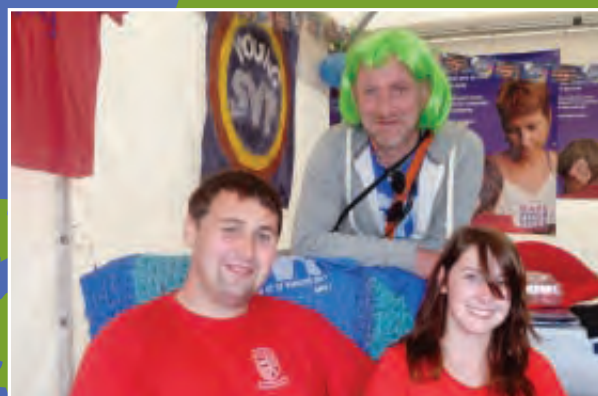
The Society made its first appearance at Electric Picnic at the end of Summer this year. Our theme was "Get your glow on!", asking the 30,000 festival goers to get involved with us and our activities, so they feel good on the inside, creating a "glow" on the outside. Our marquee, right in the heart of the Stradbally site in Co Laois, included a pop-up store with a range of products on sale, including vintage clothes, all sourced from the local SVP Shop in the nearby village, and run by local SVP volunteers from South Midlands, Mary McEvoy and Breda Maher. We also used the opportunity to ask fellow festival-goers to support our pre-budget campaign against austerity measures by visiting our website and clicking to register support. But our presence at Electric Picnic was also importantly about meeting, chatting and engaging with a diverse group of young – and not so young - people about the work of SVP and asking them to consider getting involved.

It was a team effort coordinating and planning for the festival with the social justice team, the Stradbally shop and youth development at both national and regional levels. Media and online communications were used to promote our presence there. As it was our first time to attend this event (or any like it) it was difficult to be sure how we should approach it. Deirdre Walsh, Youth Development Officer for Dublin Region, came up with the idea of sewing words on to SVP second hand clothes, highlighting our projects around the country, and hanging these from the roof of the tent on clothes lines. This linked all three elements of what we were doing at the Electric Picnic together, promoting our projects with people who visited our marquee. Deirdre also started a 'rag rug' made from strips of cloth from second hand bed sheets and crocheted it into a circular rug. People added to the rug as the weekend progressed and we had enjoyable chats sitting on the sofa as people asked us about what SVP do and how they could get involved. The rug was then donated to the Stradbally shop as a memento of the weekend. For Deirdre, 'the weekend was about putting the SVP name out there in Electric Picnic, where so many other charities have been present for many years.' She also wanted to highlight the relevance of SVP to young people and the opportunities that we can offer young people through engaging with SVP in schools and colleges.

SVP at Electric Picnic was a tremendous learning experience for all of us directly involved. Becca Gallagher, National Youth Development Co-ordinator, found this especially true. 'As a very new addition to the SVP team at the time, I found it a wonderful opportunity to work and collaborate with different departments in National office, to engage with local conferences working on the ground such as Stradbally and St Colman's in Carrick on Suir, one of SVP's youth Conferences. Rebecca and Declan from St Colman's joined us at short notice, for which we are really grateful. One of the highlights of the weekend for me was when Billy, Laois Area President and his wife popped in to say hello and ended up staying to help us out for at least an hour – the true spirit of SVP shining through!'

We met some interesting, passionate and amusing people over the weekend. The shop went down a treat, with lots of men in particular looking for wacky clothes to wear! One man in a large bear costume bought a very similar mini-bear to add to his look, the perfect accompaniment. 'Get your glow on' was our theme, and we all came away with a good feeling, happy to have had the opportunity to be involved with SVP's first year at Electric Picnic.

Report compiled by SVP Team :
Deirdre Walsh, Youth Development Officer, Dublin Region
Becca Gallagher, National Youth Development Co-ordinator
John-Mark McCafferty, Head of Social Justice



FOOD PARCEL SERVICE

Report: Tom McDonald
Carlow Area President

Graiguecullen Parish Council in Co-operation with the local SVP Conference of St.Fiach have started a "food parcel" service called "St. Clare's Hospitality".

Graiguecullen has a Poor Clare's Convent locally and hence the name. The system is a direct copy of the Capuchin service in Dublin but of a lower scale. Parcels will be available for collection between 10 and 12 a.m. on Wednesdays from a location in Garaiguecullen and a community centre in New Oak Carlow. The parcels will consist of 8 popular grocery items that would be shelf stable and healthy. The parcels packed in "unbranded bags" will have a retail value of about €10. The cost to provide the service is about €6 due to promised help from suppliers and local supermarkets who are keen to be seen to contribute. The Service will be based in St Fiac's Parish Hall which is a well-used and well laid-out unit and there is no issue in getting volunteers to work on this project.

The Service will have its own dedicated budget operated from the EBS in Dublin Street, Carlow and is applying for a CH number with Revenue. The steering committee of the project consists of Fr. J. Dunphy, PP Chairman and Joint Treasurer; the leader of the Parish Council, Isobel Brooker; Jennifer Murnane a local councillor and activist and Dave Hurley from St Fiac's SVP Conference. I am sitting in for the first three months to protect the interests of the Society during the tricky start-up period.

250 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Report: Alan Kelly

A magnificent record of 250 years' experience in charitable work in the pursuit of social justice with the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. Ten volunteers from the Mid West Region were presented with long-service medals. They included Regional President Michael Murphy.

They were presented with the medals at a special ceremony and Mass led by the Abbot of Glenstal Abbey Fr:Mark Hederman.

Over sixty members attended the evening event which also marked the re-dedication of Ozanam House in Limerick. This followed on from the Regional Board taking on the task of a complete refurbishment of the house including some structural work, fire proofing and re-wiring the building etc. The house was actually built circa 1840 by the Harris family, who owned a bakery in the city and who the late actor Richard Harris is a descendant!

As well as being the Regional Office, the house also has a number of meeting rooms which are used for meetings,



Carlow Area Council has provided a €5,000 grant to the project from shop funds earmarked for this type of venture. The parish matched this funding to finance the pre-Christmas period. After some publicity in the local paper (Carlow Nationalist) cash donations are arriving, including \$300 from a priest in California. The church gate collection that was falling slowly increased last month by about 30%. The Society has made no long-term financial commitment to this and is expected to be able to steer the right recipients into the service.

Pending a successful take-off we will drive the service to achieve an average delivery of 60 units per week with an annual budget of €25,000.

Longer-term Graigue Parish are committed to setting up a 'drop-in' Soup and Sandwich service in St.Fiac's Hall.



Back row L to R: Michael Keane (St.Claire's SVP Conference, Newmarket on Fergus); Mary Prendergast (St.Bridget's, Limerick City); Michael Murphy (Conference of Mary Help of Christians, Limerick City); Alice Moloney-Kett (St. Martin's Prison Visitation); Barry Tobin (St.Cronan's, Roscrea).

Front row: Norah Bourke and May Cleary (Our Lady of the Rosary, Limerick City); Ann McCarthy (St. Michael's, Cappamore); Pat Begley and Jimmy Lynch (Holy Family Conference, Limerick City).

training sessions etc. At the rear of the house, there is a 'Drop In' centre which was also completely refurbished. In the centre, refreshments/the opportunity to have a shower are offered to clients as well as pastoral support. Currently, it caters for over 90 people per day.



TYRONE

LEARNING TO SPEAK WITH AN OMAGH ACCENT !

Report: Tony Brogan

St.Columba's Conference, Omagh, has been teaching English to Eastern European immigrants, mainly Polish and Hungarian, for the past six year. Many of our original students are still in the Omagh area with their families. We have five groups of differing abilities meeting in the Pastoral Centre for a couple of hours every Wednesday morning, staying on after class for a chat and a cuppa. Sometimes there is a special celebration party where we get to enjoy their offerings of find bread and cakes. Sometimes there are a couple of forms to be filled in, a bit of guidance and advice needed here and there. Our students are mostly women, their men are at work and their children are at school. They are happy to be learning English, especially with their children's schooling and to be making friends.

SVP KNOCK PILGRIMAGE



There was a big attendance at the annual SVP Pilgrimage to Knock in September. After Mass at the grotto former National Secretary, Columba Faulkner, lead a group to visit the SVP Memorial Oak which is within the grounds of the Basicilica, close to the museum.



THREE NEW REGIONAL PRESIDENTS

Three new Regional Presidents have been elected. They are: Rosa Glacken for the North/West; Liam Reilly in the North/East and Geraldine Kelly, Breffni.

All three join the National Management Council and become Trustees of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.

NORTH-EAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

Meath Couple Win SVP Car Draw

A couple in the picturesque village of Slane, Co. Meath, received an early Christmas present, courtesy of the St.Vincent de Paul Society.

Barbara and Ged Brady were the winners of a Nissan Qashqai + 2 in the SVP North-East Region's hugely successful second annual Car Draw. The keys of the seven-seater luxury vehicle were presented in Drogheda to the lucky duo by new Regional Council President Liam Reilly of Dundalk, who thanked the

MEATH

public for their support and Society members who helped to make the promotion such a success.

There were three cash awards, ranging from €2,500 to €500. The winners were: Phil Ward, Ardagh, Monaghan (€2,500); Daniel Ahern, 6 Athlumney Village, Navan, Co. Meath (€1,000) and Robert Meegan, Belcotton, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth (€500).

Prior to the draw tickets were circulated to thousands of households throughout Meath, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan.



CENTENARIAN DEDICATION

Jack Hannigan is the oldest member of St.Mary's SVP Conference in Stranorlar, Co, Donegal and is pictured here at his "usual collection point" outside St.Mary's Church, awaiting the congregation to emerge after 11 o'clock Sunday Mass and contribute to the SVP collection.

Jack has been carrying out this duty on behalf of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul for over 50 years.

He was 100 years of age in October.

Is his work for the Society a record?
- Des Griffin, Conference Secretary

CLONMEL



CLONMEL MARATHON RUNNERS

Three men from Clonmel who ran the Dublin City Marathon to raise funds for the Society of St.Vincent De Paul. They are Brian Walters, Tommy Kiely and Brian Scanlon, pictured with Terry Stafford of the St.Francis Conference of the SVP in Clonmel, County Tipperary.



CIARAN SHERRY, BREFFNI REGIONAL PRESIDENT RECEIVES A COMMEMORATIVE CERTIFICATE FROM NATIONAL PRESIDENT GEOFF MEAGHER TO MARK THE COMPLETION OF HIS PERIOD IN OFFICE

COMPLETING SERVICE

SVP National President, Geoff Meagher, paid tribute to two Regional Presidents as they completed their periods in office, Mary Sheridan, North/West and Ciaran Sherry, Breffni. As they attended their final meeting of the National Management Council to complete their term of office they were presented with special certificates to mark their service to the Society at national level.

Mr.Meagher said that the demands of the role of a Regional President were a heavy responsibility in the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in modern times. As well as leading the Society in their regions and dealing with the many issues which arose there, they also had the role of representation of their regions at National Management Council meetings and the additional duty of being Trustees of the Society, with overall responsibility for it. He said it was a tribute to both that they had shown such dedication, including the demands of attending national meetings as well as those in their region and always remaining active at local level. He said the Society was fortunate that it had such dedicated people within its membership.

SVP NATIONAL PRESIDENT, GEOFF MEAGHER MAKING A PRESENTATION TO OUTGOING NORTH WEST REGIONAL PRESIDENT MARY SHERIDAN ON COMPLETING HER FIVE YEARS IN OFFICE



GIRLS FOR SVP

Giving young people's support to the SVP 11-year-old Ella Walsh and her friends in Sandford Downs, Dublin 18, held a cake sale in their estate and raised €330.89 for the Dublin Region of the Society.





A resident of McGwire House, putting the finishing touches to the Society's newly developed service for people out of home in the South East.

The Society of St.Vincent de Paul and Waterford City Council were presented with the award at the Allianz Community Housing Awards held in Whites' Hotel, Wexford, for the development of a new purpose-built €4m. EU-supported residential service for men 'out-of-home' in the South East.

Organised by the Irish Council for Social Housing the National Social Housing Awards recognise, acknowledge and celebrate excellence in the design, provision and management of Social Housing in Ireland. McGwire House, on Bath Street, Waterford City is a 32 bed residential homeless service for men out of home in Waterford and provides emergency and short term accommodation, while staff assist and support residents in finding long term sustainable housing. McGwire House has been development by the local SVP conference with the assistance and support of Waterford City Council and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Prior to the development of McGwire House, the Society had worked with people out of home in Waterford for many decades from an old Hostel on Lady Lane in the City, which has now been decommissioned.

Commenting after the award Ceremony Albert Perris, National Hostels and Homes Coordinator, commended the local Conference and staff involved: "This project was over four years in the planning and is likely to be one of the last purpose-built facilities in the country for people out of home in Ireland. The vision, commitment and expertise brought to this project are evidenced in the design, quality and execution of the development. One of the less obvious, but most important characteristics of the new service has been the role of service users and residents in the actual development of the project. From early consultation with those likely to use the service, to actual 'hands-on' involvement in the development of the garden and grounds, service users have been a central stakeholder in the project. A wide array of skills and craftsmanship has been brought to the project, not just by volunteers, members and professionals but by the residents themselves'.

WATERFORD

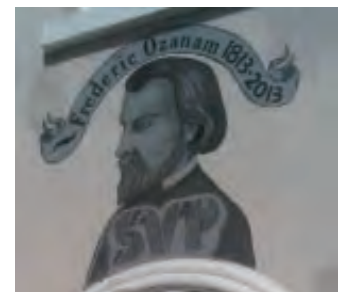
The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Waterford City Council have won a major Housing Award for McGwire House, for men out-of-home in the South East



Award-winning Waterford hostel at Bath Street

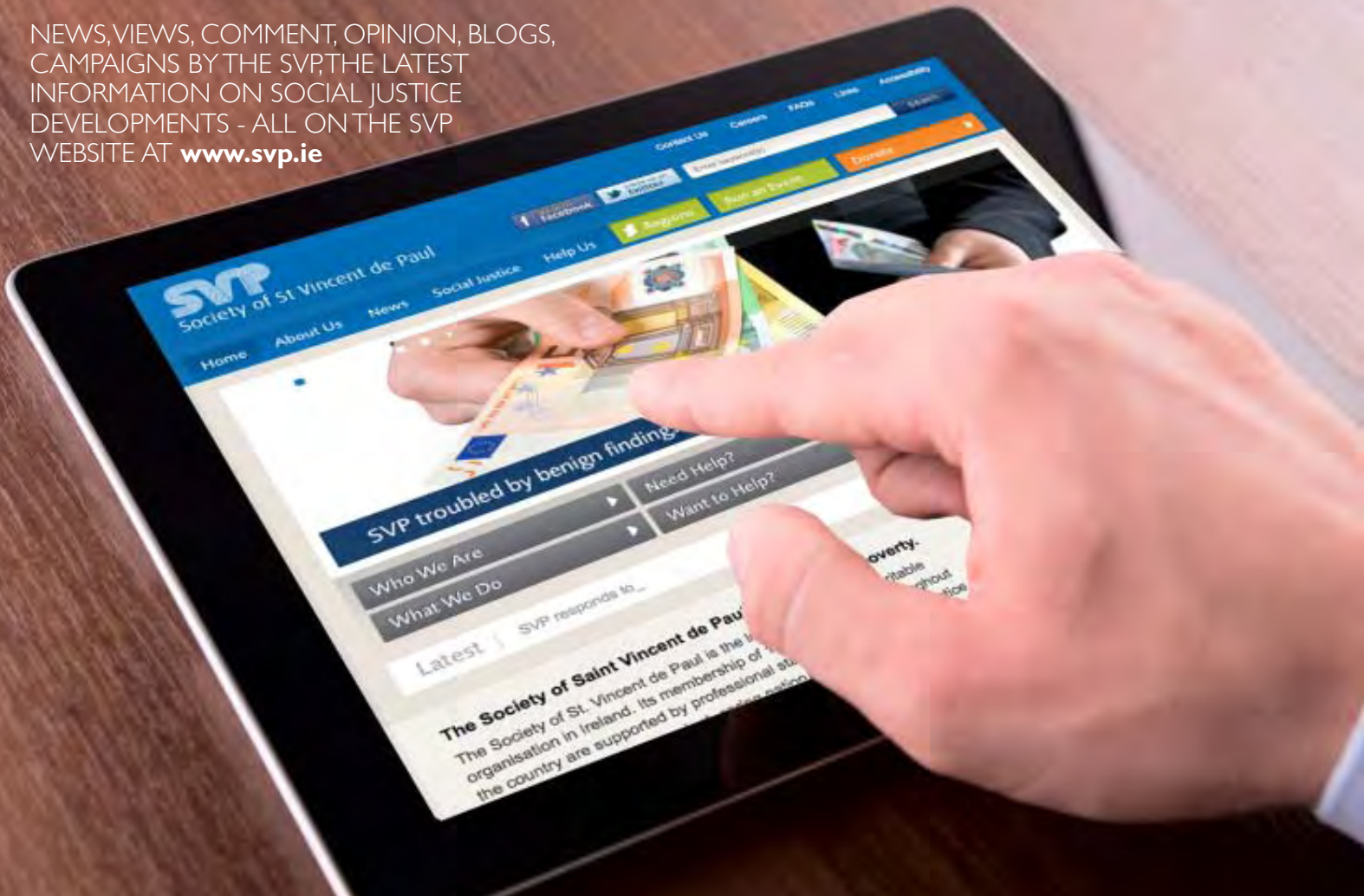
The awards, sponsored by Allianz, were presented by Jan O'Sullivan TD Minister of State, (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government with special responsibility for Housing and Planning) and Deputy Mayor of Wexford, Joe Ryan. The ICSH conference and awards ceremony was attended by some 300 delegates. Mr Donal McManus, Executive Director, ICSH commented: "a record number of submissions were received and the standard was exceptionally high". The judging panel commended the project for its 'impressive functional design and sustainability credentials, catering effectively for the needs of the homeless whilst respecting the neighbouring environment'.

McGwire House is one of two SVP Residential Facilities for men out of the home in the South East region. Ozanam House in Wexford Town also provides 32 emergency and short term places for men experiencing homelessness in the region.



Pictured are representatives from Waterford City Council and SVP receiving their award from the Deputy Mayor of Wexford Joe Ryan; Terence O'Neill, Manager SVP homeless Services in Waterford; Jan O'Sullivan TD Minister of State, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government with special responsibility for Housing and Planning (middle), Joe O' Sullivan, Waterford City Council and Colm Falconer, of C.J. Falconer(Architects).

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

TED MURTAGH Trim

Ted Murtagh was an esteemed member of the Trim community where he contributed to the betterment of life of the young, old and disadvantaged and was the longest active member of the local conference of St Vincent De Paul. He was a member continuously for 56 years. During this time he held all officer positions which cumulatively accounted for 15 years as President, 9 years as Secretary, and 10 years (including the current year) as Treasurer. His extensive knowledge of people in the community underpinned the successful working of the Conference where his involvement significantly helped a large number of families and particularly enabled young people to continue in school and progress to Third Level education, helping to break the cycle of poverty. Ted received the Bene Merenti Medal in 2005 from Pope John Paul II in recognition of his 50 years of active service to the St Vincent DePaul. He was also President of Trim GAA and involved with his wife, Anne, in the Active Retirement Club. He had a keen eye to watch out for those older people that may have been in hardship situations and the local Conference of SVP gave support. His was a low but effective and unrelenting profile of work for those in need, a wonderful attitude.

- Michael Kenny

BABS DONOGHUE Mullingar

The Society in Mullingar mourns the passing of one of their longest-serving members, Margaret (Babs) Donoghue. She was engaged in the distribution of clothing to people in need since the early 60s. The premises being used for the purpose, an upstairs room in the old St. Mary's Hall were far from ideal and Babs was pleased when the Society opened their Thrift Shop a short distance away in Bishopsgate Street in 1987. The change meant that she found herself in a more congenial atmosphere in which to display her talents for customer service. She served in the shop until last year when failing health forced her to retire. She was a gentle, unassuming lady, a true Vincentian, equally popular with staff and customers in the Thrift Shop and is greatly missed.

TWINNING AND ITS PURPOSE

Twinning has existed for many years as part of the work of SVP but in the past few years it has stepped out from the background and become valued, taking its place in the work that we do in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Many people in Ireland ask what the point of twinning is, why do it, often saying that it is impossible to solve the problems of Africa. I would have to agree totally with them –it is impossible for us in Ireland to solve the problems of Africa but it is not in any way impossible for Africa to solve its own problems. What better way for Africans to solve their own problems than through the structure of the SVP?

It is not the purpose of SVP Ireland to feed the poor of Africa, though that might sound very harsh, but it does have a duty and a care to enable and support the SVP which is active in The Gambia to tackle the problem of poverty. Gambians have a better knowledge and understanding of their own country, their own culture and most important of all their own problems. They know best when it comes to fixing their own problems.

On a visit to The Gambia- twinned with the Laois, Kildare and Carlow (The South Midlands) it was good to see the positive effect that our friendship and support have had on this country. But it is more than that; our support and our funding have enabled SVP to become stronger and better organised there. This charity that is so near to our own hearts is eventually beginning to see past the complete reliance of monies sent from Ireland to keep it functioning. Listening to the many conversations and discussions that were had it was possible to hear new words spoken, words like 'enabling', 'standing on our own' feet and even dreams of the time when they themselves could be no longer reliant on Irish monies.

Setting up and funding small projects is one of the only means of raising funds for SVP to tackle the problem of poverty in Africa. Gambian Vincentians cannot rely upon the public to support them at church gate collections, as the Christian community is

small and they themselves are also poor. Government funding is non-existent so the options to raise funds are limited and that is where the small projects such as orchards, fishing boats, rice-milling machines, small gardens and shops are so important and a successful way of using funds.

To return to The Gambia after several years and see the way these projects have developed and are producing is worthwhile. It reaffirms that the SVP is as capable of working in Africa as in Ireland and gives the reassurance that twinning with the Gambia can continue on into the future.

A few of the many projects worth mentioning are the funding of rice-milling machines and small fishing boats, with many benefits, they provide much needed funds to allow the local Conference in a parish to raise funds to tackle poverty. But it also removes the often time-consuming and back-breaking work done normally by the women and young girls of the parish. It then allows these women to spend more time with their families or to seek a better education, an education that might remove them from the poverty trap.

Likewise, with fishing boats, owned by the local SVP Conference and leased out to local fishermen either for a certain amount of money or if money is unavailable then payment in fish is acceptable. Either way it raises money or food to allow SVP to help the needy.

Beyond any doubt that the time spent in The Gambia was amazing and very worthwhile; it was a time spent continuing old friendships, making new ones, putting faces and names to our overseas brothers and sisters that we pray for at our weekly Conference meetings and above all a sharing of ideas and resources. It was hard to say good-bye but it is good to come home knowing that the charity we as Vincentians hold so dearly to our hearts is growing and standing on its own feet there, tackling its own problems in its own country in its own way--- with a little financial help and a lot of prayer from Irish Vincentians.



Vintage style comes to Vincent's shops

New "Vintage at Vincent's" sections have opened in six of the St Vincent de Paul charity shops. Five are in Dublin city and one in Greystones, Co. Wicklow. The Dublin city shops are in South Great Georges Street, Sean McDermott Street, Aungier Street, Rathmines and Fairview.

Pictured here are models Maria B and Joanne Northey from 1st Option Models wearing some of the 4,000 vintage items currently available at the Vincent's shops. The outfits were styled by Vincent's Vintage stylist, Anna Davies.

Elegant and inspirational cloths from another era have become hugely popular and the range available from the new Vincent's section will not disappoint. "This is yet another development in making the Vincent's shops in Dublin a 'go to' retailer. We have been constantly renewing our Vincent's shops in terms of layout and customer service. Many of our shops can rival more famous retailers in terms of range but few can beat us for value" said Dermot McGilloway, Dublin Retail Services Manager.

"Our shops are the 'public face' of SVP in the community and through them we can ensure that customers have access to high quality used goods at very competitive prices," said Mr. McGilloway.

There are 38 Vincent's shops in the Dublin region. They are a very important aspect of the service SVP provides.

All the financial surplus generated by the shops is recycled into local conferences to support those in need. These funds are increasingly important to the Society with calls for assistance regularly increasing, up 104% since 2009.

While the calls on the SVP support is increasing its resources are coming under increasing pressure with the general reduction in disposable income available to most people. The SVP now spends in the region of €40 million annually in direct assistance, primarily helping people with food, energy and educational needs.

The Dublin Region of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the largest region of the Society in Ireland. Over 3,000 volunteers work tirelessly to ensure that help is provided to those that need it in areas stretching right across Dublin and as far as Balbriggan, Arklow, Athy, Maynooth and surrounding areas.

Check out Facebook for SVP-Vincent's Charity Shops Dublin Region.



This an geimhreadh fairy tale look will cloak you head to toe in a lovely thick tartan shield. An oversized hood adds to the mystery and elegance of this major statement garment. Plaid cape - €35. Brown Leather bag - €18. Model. Maria B from 1st Option Models. Stylist. Anna Davies.



Cruella's Deliverance. Borrowing Cruella Deville's color palette and pairing it with rich heavy fabrics makes for a timeless winter wrap up. Red coat with velvet accent - €40. Black dress - €20. Black hand bag - €12. Black and white beehive hat - €12. The whole look - €84 Models. Maria B (left) and Joanna Northey from 1st Option Models. Stylist. Anna Davies.



Perfect for playing the part or to accompany the bride, this sunny blue dress is an instant attention grabber. Dress- €50. Cream hat - €15. Cream bag - €15. Model. Maria B from 1st Option Models. Stylist. Anna Davies.



Steal the Spotlight.
Perfect for playing the part or to
accompany the bride, this sunny yellow
dress is an instant attention grabber.
Dress - €50.
Grey pill box hat with veil - €15.
Cream bag with long strap - €10.
Model, Joanna Northey from 1st
Option Models. Stylist, Anna Davies.

A Fixed Star



SVP contributes to NESC discussions on poverty and exclusion

The National Economic and Social Council advise the Taoiseach on strategic issues for Ireland's economic and social development. The members of the Council are appointed by the Taoiseach for a three year term. These members are representatives of business and employers' organisations, trade unions, agricultural and farming organisations, community and voluntary organisations, and environmental organisations; as well as heads of Government departments and independent experts. Caroline Fahey, SVP's Social Policy Development Officer has been one of the four representatives of community and voluntary organisations on the Council since 2011. SVP's contribution to the NESC discussions involves bringing the experiences of the people we assist and our members to the table. It can be difficult to ensure that social issues like poverty and exclusion are always on NESC's agenda. However, the SVP has a unique contribution to make because of our experience working directly with people in need across Ireland.

SVP Post-budget Welfare Rates Guide available soon

The SVP National Social Justice and Policy Team will shortly be publishing an updated guide for members with the changes made to social welfare and other payments following Budget 2014. This guide will also have information for Conferences on latest developments affecting visitation such as protocols on energy assistance, assisting people with the new public services card and information on the Insolvency Service of Ireland. The booklets will be posted out to all Conference presidents for circulation amongst members.

Solutions for Oil Dependent Households

SVP is exploring ways of working with domestic oil providers and Government to realise the ambition of the National Warmer Homes Energy Affordability scheme to provide options for vulnerable customers of non-regulated energy providers, i.e. domestic home heating and solid fuels. Our colleagues in the South Midlands Region are presently piloting the oil stamp savings scheme which has been successfully operated by SVP in the Northern region for a number of years. SVP intends to bring this experience as well as its experience of working with the utility sector to the exploratory discussions.

Central Bank's Review of Money Lending Industry

The SVP submission in June of this year received significant media attention and led to the Central Bank revealing that there are over 300,000 customers of regulated money lenders in Ireland. As many SVP members will be aware customers often have more than one loan over a given time and some households have multiple loans within families.



THE LAST WORD

Letters to the Editor



“Not Listening to Us”

I was eking out my cup morning coffee when I heard Pat Kenny say it ... why can't the Irish live frugally, six or seven to a house and save their money and have cash to buy a home.... The discussion on his radio programme had been about why young people from Eastern Europe were taking up jobs in Ireland that the Irish would not take and a sociologist had likened that to Irish people doing the same in other countries in past years to earn money and send some back home, but that in Ireland the Irish did not live six or seven to a shared house between them, living frugally. Pat Kenny wanted to know why the Irish couldn't live frugally. My cup of coffee is an example of being frugal. I am in my mid 20s and living at home with my parents and trying to do so on a hundred Euros I get in social welfare and contributing what I can, because I don't want to be living off my parents. I have tried and tried and tried again to get a job, any job, but whatever about other Europeans finding work here, I can't find it and it is not for lack of going out, asking, as well as writing, sending off CVs and I do have some qualifications. What is so hurtful is the lack of people who are in a position of influence to listen and this is the way on these radio programmes with those who have so much dictating to those of us who have so little how we should behave. What do the well-off understand about living frugally, damn little I think.

Jerry Hennessy, County Tipperary.

NOT IMPRESSED

I was not impressed with the photographs of 2 young ladies you had on page 45 of your autumn edition of The Bulletin. They were inappropriately dressed - fashion show or not – for a Catholic magazine. Our Lady was a paragon of modesty and I would like to think your magazine will follow her lead.

**Dr. Owen Gallagher,
Glenavy, Co. Antrim.**

This is a magazine of social justice. The schoolgirls were helping the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in its work in this regard, by raising money for it. Their youth involvement is to be welcomed, not criticised. The term “catholic” has universal, more than one, application. – Editor

“I'd Like to See Someone Pay”

I bought your magazine in an Eason's store here in Galway where I know of the work of the SVP in projects such as Croi na Gaillimhe, so I was interested to read the articles and see that some organisation is interested in the social problems of Ireland today. What I wonder about the Irish is why, from a nation that was rebellious and fought for its independence, we have become so pliant about the more vital issues while we seem prepared to complain about other less important matters. The people of Cyprus got up and complained when they were treated badly by the EU but it seems we Irish can't get off our backsides even when there is the likelihood that the banks who caused all our problems will be able to tell families how much they should be able to live on and maybe even the amount and kind of food they should eat.

Many of your articles were interesting and there seems a lot of work going on by the Vincent de Paul but these are issues you should tackle in your magazine and why those who caused all our problems seem not to have suffered like most of the Irish people to whom they caused those problems.

**Mary Collins,
Galway.**

HAVE YOUR SAY

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



1 in 6 people in Ireland face poverty this winter

Please help St Vincent de Paul
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those who need it most

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