

THE

WINTER 2017



# BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Christmas is not the  
same for everyone.



**SVP ANNUAL APPEAL:**

YOUR YES CAN LAST A LIFETIME

**SVP A LEADER OF POSITIVE CHANGE**

**A STATE OF CONSTANT MOVEMENT**

THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND

*“With some people solitariness is an escape not from others but from themselves. For they see in the eyes of others only a reflection of themselves.”*

– Eric Hoffer





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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## Is what we are doing good enough?

In my 12 years working and volunteering for the Society I don't recall too many times when I have heard the words uttered, "I think I made a difference". Why is that? Why do many of us feel that what we are doing isn't good enough?

There are many of us who strive to make this world a just and better place, not because we are looking for credit or praise but because we can empathise with our fellow man. I often wonder whether this impulse to help others comes from a pure, noble intention or whether it comes from some sort of an underlying sense of unworthiness or ego-driven motivation. You might say "Who cares why? As long as people are benefiting from these impulses, why question them?" But it is important to reflect on this.

Maybe it's a case that those of us who commit to these altruistic acts do so because something within us doesn't feel good or worthy enough unless we are devoted to helping others. We don't believe that we're worthy, not because of any external action, but because we all have within us a spark of the Divine

which makes us inherently worthy. So we go out and help people, and some tell us how we've made a difference, and then we feel more worthy. Then our worried, scared, 'never good enough' egos feel a little bit better for a while.

So what would happen if someone waved a magic wand and we all suddenly woke up and knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that we were worthy without all the accolades and applause from those we've helped. Would we lose all ambition to help others? I don't think so. And this is evident when we look around the Society at what our Members, Staff and Volunteers are doing every week.

It is possible to believe we are all worthy, and serve others from a pure, clean impulse to ease the suffering of others. This will be apparent from the many articles in this latest Autumn edition of the Bulletin, which includes histories of Members such as Noel Clear and Don Mahony, who worked tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of many to present day efforts by current Members, Social Justice team and our SVP Young teams around the country. You will also read of the amazing work our Retail team are carrying out nationally and the positive impacts these outlets have in local communities.

*Linda O'Connell*

## What impact will it have on the people we assist?



The small increase in social welfare is welcome, but for many families this will likely be absorbed by the recently announced increases in electricity prices and the PSO levy, and continually rising rents.

On the eve of Budget day, a report on the reforms of the One Parent Family Payment highlighted what SVP has been saying for years; the reforms increased poverty among one parent families and made parenting alone more difficult. Despite this, the announcements on Budget day were piecemeal, with no comprehensive plan to support lone parents into education, and sustainable employment. As a Society, we see the transformational impact education can have on families living in poverty. It was therefore very disappointing that Budget 2018 failed to deliver measures to tackle education costs. This August, SVP received a record number of calls, as 5,000 parents sought help with back to school costs. Next year parents will still be cutting back on essentials like food and heating to meet these costs. Children will continue to feel different because their uniform is too small or they don't have the right materials, or they can't

take part in activities like their friends.

For the 1,442 families, and 3,048 children living in emergency accommodation, Budget 2018 doesn't offer much certainty for the future. The targets for next year mean very few will have hope of finding a secure home —almost 80% of social housing need will be met through the private rented sector. Every week our Conferences meet families who struggle to find a landlord who will prioritise a HAP tenancy, or are at risk of becoming homeless as they pay unsustainable top-ups. A more ambitious target for the social housing output was needed.

A new National Anti-Poverty Strategy is due shortly and it must set out a clear road map to address poverty and inequality so no one is left behind. As an organisation committed to social justice, we believe it is not acceptable for anyone to live in poverty. It should also not be acceptable for our Government. Within all of this the Society will continue to quietly and actively support people in a variety of ways.

Kieran Stafford  
National President

Back in June, we set out SVP vision, solutions and hopes for a more equal Society at the launch of our pre-budget submission. Expectation were high in advance of Budget day as both Minister Doherty and the Taoiseach had expressed their commitment to lifting over 100,000 children out of poverty by 2020.

The Budget came and went, and it is now time to reflect and assess what it will mean for the people and households we assist. Will the changes have a meaningful impact on people and families living in poverty? Will our 11,000 volunteers see a difference in the lives of struggling households they visit every week?

Unfortunately, the answer is no. Additional resources were spread too thinly, meaning it will do little to address the huge deficits in housing, childcare and education. The Government can't end poverty overnight, but we had hoped that this Budget would have been more ambitious, taking a longer-term view of what is required to improve our public services and infrastructure, particularly for those most in need of quality services and supports.

We witness the reality behind the poverty statistics every week through our home visitation work; parents who go without food so their children can eat. Yet, the €2 increase for our poorest children, while welcome, will do little to address these levels of deprivation. We know households with teenagers particularly struggle, so it was also very disappointing that there wasn't a higher rate of payment for older children.

# Clear Vision - The Life and Legacy of Noel Clear

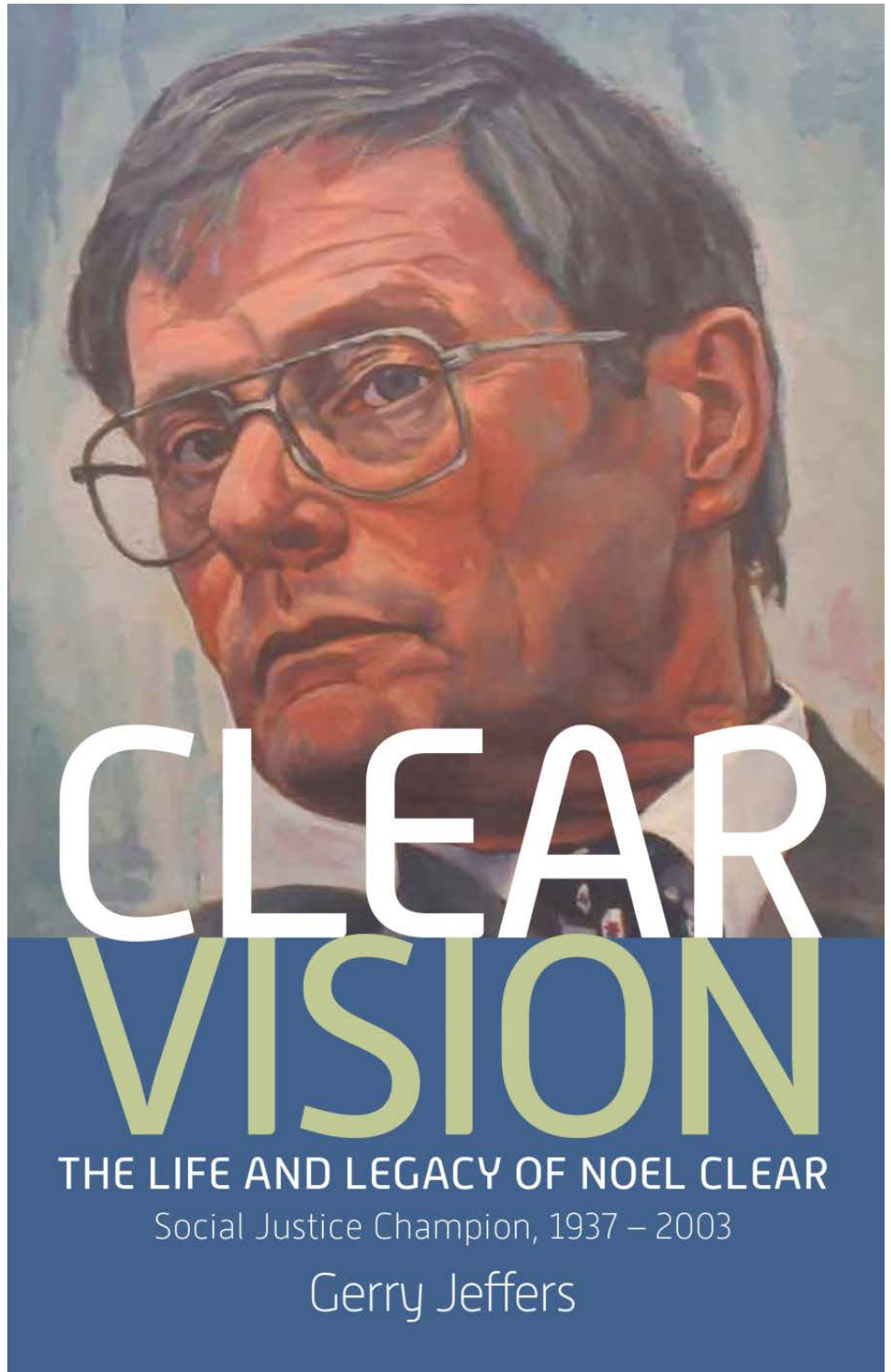
A new book, written by Gerry Jeffers on the life of Noel Clear, previous SVP National President, will be launched next month. As an indefatigable champion of the marginalised and dispossessed, Noel Clear was the very embodiment of Christ's commandment to 'love one another'. Best known for his innovative stewardship of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, where he served as national president from 1996 until 2002, Noel's commitment to helping improve the lot of the poor and vulnerable informed every aspect of his life, both personally and professionally, until his untimely death, aged just sixty-five, in 2003.

Noel Clear's campaign for social justice can be traced back to his formative years growing up in Inchicore, where, as a deeply committed voluntary youth leader, he gave unstintingly of his time and energy. Later, Noel's involvement with the Probation and Welfare Service, where he worked for almost four decades, endeared him to countless clients who experienced first-hand his deep-seated compassion and kindness.

In ClearVision, Gerry Jeffers pays tribute to this remarkable, self-effacing figure and explores the many facets of Noel's character as campaigner, humanitarian and devoted family man. Featuring first-person testimonies from family members, as well as those who worked with him down through the years, ClearVision offers a comprehensive portrait of a man who dedicated his life to others and whose legacy will inspire all who share in it.

In the words of Joe Duffy, in his moving foreword, 'anyone reading this honourable and noble book about such an honourable and noble man will quickly realise that we need more people like Noel Clear – now more than ever'.

The book will be available to purchase on the Veritas website and in all their stores from mid November.





# a state of constant movement

*Tom O'Doherty reflects about the  
successful Kildare North Area Gathering*

The Heraclitan quote that a person cannot step into the same river twice could be something that within the Society we think about. We are in a state of constant movement and the Society needs to examine and evaluate how we carry out the work that we do. If we are not evolving and moving as the river then we become like the water in a pond and begin to stagnate.

Over the past year the landscape has changed, politically and culturally. How does this affect us and the work we do, and how does it inform our attitudes?

As a group of people, collectively we are apolitical. We advocate no political affiliations and are not aligned with any group. There are however Members who are active in the politics of their locality or nationally and they bring some of those aspects to the Society. We need to be cautious in how we are applying those principles and that within the Society we are not advocating an agenda that is not within the remit of our work and especially that it is not counter to our Vincentian ethos.

Vincentian spirituality informs what we do, it gives us a constant, that has been handed down by those who have gone before us. We are the current custodians of this in the present and cherish it, to be able to hand it on to those who come after us. It is within this spirit that we must evaluate what has gone well and what has not gone as well as we might have hoped.

How can we carry out an evaluation based on the Vincentian values and ethos? It may seem remote and something that is rather archaic. When in fact it moves with the times, it is ageless and cannot be ascribed more so to one era rather than another. This year is the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism. How can this impact or rather inform our evaluation of what we do; quite simply it's how we apply the Vincentian spirit and who we respond to and how the response is made. The theme for this celebratory year is "I was a stranger and you welcomed me". This is not something of the past, it is something of the now and unfortunately something of the future. Therefore, we must carry out any evaluation based on how we apply this. The definition of the stranger is not solely those who come to this country seeking refuge, it also applies to those who have been made strangers in their own country by virtue of their circumstances. They are strangers or rather estranged from opportunities and advancement. They are made to feel less important than others and become marginalised and disenfranchised from society. We counter this by interpreting the Vincentian charism and apply it to their circumstances. They recognise through us that they are equally valued members of society and that we care.

The care that we show for and to people is a direct translation of how St. Vincent de Paul and Fredric Ozanam approached the same people and can be evidenced by their writings; and we must be mindful of this in our approach. It is sometimes in the simple things where care is shown, and as each person who reads this can attest to, there are also the major hurdles in life that we have helped overcome for people. The list of this assistance is endless and each Conference will have dealt with and responded to these differently, but what remains the same is the response was Vincentian, and 'welcoming'. It shows that the common factor, despite our differences is that we all subscribe to a Vincentian ethos.

Each Conference will have stories to relate about the people they have helped and the success of this assistance, equally they will have the things that did not go well. We cannot be despondent when this happens, as with success, failure can also bring learning. The learning achieved can then be used when informing future decisions. It does not however prevent us from our future positive responses to those in need.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is of its time; it has proven that it responds to the current need within society. This is evident in Ireland by the response of each conference to what is required in the locality and nationally; whether it is to asylum seekers, those in temporary accommodation or those who are trying to break the cycle of poverty by accessing educational opportunities. The responses we make to these will go well and not so well. It's how we assess them is what is important. Assessment and evaluation should not be based on some corporate basis rather it should be informed by our Vincentian ethos. Perhaps one method of evaluation to be used is; how would I like people to respond to me if I were in crisis or need; or how would I like people to communicate and assist me. How you answer this is what will inform what you as an individual do and it will then inform the Conference and its members. The collective response will be where the Vincentian spirit will be evident and the collegiate response will be truly Vincentian as advocated by Bl. Frederic and from this we will always "welcome the stranger" and allow them to no longer be strangers in their own land".

## 220 attend the National Retail Conference in Croke Park

Over 220 delegates from across Ireland attended the National Shop Managers Conference in Croke Park in Dublin on 29th September. Delegates received a very warm welcome from National Vice President for Members, Rose McGowan, who reminded all in attendance of the importance of promoting SVP core values in our national network of shops.

External speakers included Malachy Hanberry, Managing Director of Eurospar Ireland; Dr Edmund O'Callaghan, Head of Retail Management Studies at DIT Dublin and Robin Osterley, CEO of the Charity Retail Association in the UK. Vincent's in Ireland is now the largest overseas member of the Charity Retail Association.

Malachy Hanberry and Robin Osterley spoke on the importance of running the national network of 220 shops and Order Fulfilment Centres on a commercial basis whilst Head of Retail for DIT, and SVP National Shops Committee member, Dr Edmund O'Callaghan spoke on the importance of internal branding for Vincent's and the importance of staff and volunteers recognising and valuing the brand before the customer enters the shop. Dr O'Callaghan is carrying out academic research on the topic and also distributed a questionnaire to delegates.

Attendees also received a short report from each of the Regional Retail Managers, Anne Crossan (North), Peter Johnston (North East and Midland), Mark O'Brien (East), Noel Cassidy (South East), Mark Hussey (South West), Declan Byrne (Mid West) and Padraic McDonagh (West) detailing recent retailing innovations in their Regions. Updates included the development of central sorting and redistribution centres or Order Fulfilment Centres (OFC'S) in several Regions, the introduction of credit / debit cards and Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) in a number of shops nationally and the adoption of the Vincent's name and logo in shops across the country.

National Volunteer Co-Ordinator, Rasa Visokiene, updated the conference on the new Volunteer recruitment and retention programme whilst National Retail Co-ordinator, Anne Sophie Basset, identified many ways that the shopping experience of our customers can be enhanced and enriched. The morning session ended with a short presentation by the headline sponsor for the Conference, Alltex Recycling, who gave attendees a visual tour of its facility in Cloghmill, County Antrim.

In a packed afternoon session, delegates were introduced to HR Service partners Patricia Ryan, Aisling Kenny who will provide

maternity cover for Jennifer Curry and Daniele McHanson. The Regional and National winners were also announced in the recent National Shop Window campaign. The theme of the competition was to devise a window display to support the 'Donate with Style – Volunteer with Passion' campaign. 63 shops from across Ireland participated with each shop receiving a certificate to mark their participation.

The winners are:

### Regional Winners

- North Region: Vincent's Rosemary Street, Belfast
- North West Region: Vincent's Bundoran
- North East & Midlands Region: Vincent's Laurence Centre, Drogheda
- East Region: Vincent's Newtown Mount Kennedy
- South East Region: Vincent's Abbeyleix
- South West Region: Vincent's Friary Lane, Tralee
- Mid West Region: Vincent's Roscrea
- West Region: Vincent's Oranmore

### National Winners

Volunteer Category: Vincent's Laurence Centre, Drogheda

### Donations Category:

Vincent's Newtown Mount Kennedy







National Retail Development Manager, Dermot McGilloway paid tribute to the 220 delegates who had travelled to Dublin from as far afield as Buncrana and Killarney to attend the Conference. Mr McGilloway also thanked the external speakers, the National Retail Committee and Headline sponsor Alltex Recycling and Secondary Sponsor Acopia shop fitters for making the event possible. Mr McGilloway reserved special thanks to the National Retail Team for their magnificent contribution to the event and for entertaining attendees with a headline grabbing Village People –YMCA dance routine. Master of Ceremonies for the day was Ruth Flynn, Regional Co-ordinator from North East and Midlands.



The Conference ended on an elegant note with National Chair for Special Works, Mr Liam Reilly, launching the National 'Donate with Style – Volunteer with Passion' campaign. Shop volunteer and Dublin Rose of Tralee, Maria Coughlan was on hand to model some beautiful outfits that had been created by Anne Sophie Basset and Anne Crossan from North Region.



Maria (Dublin Rose of Tralee, Dermot (National Retail Manager) Liam (National Chair of Special Works)



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needed  
nationwide**



Proudly supported by  
**Dublin Rose of Tralee  
Maria Coughlan**



*Donate with Style*  
**Volunteer with Passion**

# SVP launches 'Donate with Style – Volunteer with Passion' Campaign



Called 'Donate with Style - Volunteer with Passion' this national campaign which ran through October 2017 and had twin aims; to attract donations to the national network of 220 shops throughout Ireland and to recruit new volunteers.

Speaking at the launch of the campaign Dermot McGilloway SVP National Retail Development Manager said; "We urgently need clean saleable clothes that can be distributed throughout our network of shops, men and women's clothing, winter wear and large sizes are particularly welcome."

"We also need clean bed linen, curtains, shoes, bric-a-brac, pictures, antiques, collectables and small household items. Some shops can also accommodate furniture," he said.

In relation to volunteers, Mr McGilloway said that volunteers are needed for both shops and sorting centres across Ireland with some of the busier shops needing Volunteers for late night openings.

SVP shop volunteers provide a valuable service in customer care, general housekeeping, merchandising, sorting and pricing clothing and other donated items.

This twin campaign has also received the support of Vincent's shop volunteer and Rose of Tralee Contestant, Maria Coughlan and Ireland's most famous twins, Jedward.

Maria Coughlan modelled some beautiful SVP creations at the recent Croke Park Conference whilst Jedward helped to launch the campaign in our shops in Sean McDermott Street in Dublin and in Turf Lodge in West Belfast. Jedward also generously donated two of their jackets for auction by SVP.

Mr McGilloway stated "Jedward and Maria Coughlan have been extremely generous with their time and their enthusiasm for our campaign and will help SVP to reach new audiences with this important campaign".

To find your nearest SVP shop go to [www.svp.ie/shops](http://www.svp.ie/shops) Call +353 (1) 8386990, or email [retailvolunteer@svp.ie](mailto:retailvolunteer@svp.ie)

# Vincent's Toolbox

At the recent Vincent's Retail Conference in Croke Park, National Retail Development Manager Dermot McGilloway launched the Vincent's Toolbox to assist with retail development. McGilloway states "A central tenet of our national retail strategy is to work in partnership with our local Conferences across Ireland to ensure that we get the very best return from our national network of charity shops, this toolbox is packed with tools that are easy to use, affordable and highly effective."

McGilloway explained that the toolbox blends the very latest academic research on customer behaviour with the core values, ethos and history of SVP to create an affordable and ethical shopping experience which will also excite the customer. Citing recent research on how shop window displays can alter the affective state of the customer, McGilloway said "When we design window displays we should incorporate both pattern and novelty as our brains derive pleasure and reassurance from the pattern and are aroused by the novelty, this creates an overwhelming sense of excitement. An excited customer is more inclined to spend time in a shop and will want to return". McGilloway added *"In this shop window from Vincent's in Sean McDermott Street in Dublin, the team have created a underlying country kitchen theme but keep the customer interested with a wide range of product types...it's a perfect example of novelty with underlying pattern"*.

The Toolbox identifies over 50 different tactics that have been placed in nine separate categories. The Toolbox also introduces the concept that all shops, regardless of age, can be plotted on a retail life cycle from introductory stage through to decline. McGilloway adds *"In the Toolbox, we have identified each of four stages in the retail life cycle and associated characteristics for each stage, we then recommend multiple tactics to help energise and rejuvenate the business regardless of its position on that life cycle"*.

The Toolbox also offers tips on the most suitable locations for future shop openings. McGilloway explains that Vincent's charity shops serve a unique dual function of providing a vital point of contact in the local community whilst raising funds through the shops and he identifies the importance of locating shops close to where people live rather than where they necessarily shop. McGilloway argues that when Blessed Frederick Ozanam and his associates reached out to people in Paris in 1833, that they met and supported people in their local community. By extension, McGilloway argues that the next generation of Vincent's charity shops must be located at the heart of our housing estates, towns and villages to ensure that the widest number of people can access SVP products and services.



McGilloway identifies that SVP is now trading in what is called 'The Experience Economy' where customers derive as much value from the experience of shopping as they do the product that is purchased. McGilloway recommends a new generation of charity shops which promote social justice, social interaction, self-sufficiency and a stimulating shopping experience on the doorstep of the people who need it most. McGilloway adds *"Poverty disconnects people from Society, we plan to use our shops as recreational hubs to reconnect people in a very authentic way with their local community and in so doing we are making ourselves more relevant for the next generation of shoppers"*.

The Vincent's Toolbox is available for use by all SVP staff and volunteers who currently run a shop or are thinking of running one in the future. Contact your local Regional Retail Manager or National Retail team on 01 8188407 for your Vincent's Toolbox.



# VINCENT'S

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North West Region The Diamond, Raphoe, Donegal

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# SVP announces its latest shop opening in Limerick

Regional Retail Manager for Mid West, Mr Declan Byrne has announced the opening of the latest Vincent's charity shop at the Roxoboro Shopping Centre in Southhill, Limerick. This is Vincent's second store opening in Limerick. National Retail Development Manager, Dermot McGilloway welcomed the opening of this new shop and added that this latest shop opening aligns perfectly with the National Retail Strategy of opening new shops at the heart of our local communities and would hopefully be the first of many new shop opening across the 32 counties.

Tanya Fitzgerald shop manager feels the shop will be a visual presence of SVP in the area. "There will be good quality clothes and items at affordable prices available and it will a place of focus for the community, and of course help raise much needed funds for the Visitation Conferences" said Tanya



# STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET?

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) and Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) want to talk to people about how their family cope with low and inadequate incomes.

.....

## Dependent on Social Welfare?

## In low paid work?

## Working irregular hours?

.....

We are looking for participants (parents / head of household) from families with children (under 18), and living in Dublin, to take part in an interview project about how those on low income struggle to get by.

Participants will take part in one short telephone call (approx. 10 minutes) followed by a face to face interview at a convenient time and venue (approx. 1 hour)

Assistance with transport and childcare costs is available to those taking part. Participants will also receive a One4All voucher, in recognition of their time and contribution to the project.

**If you are interested in taking part please contact:**

Bernadette, at the VPSJ

Call: 01 8780425 or Email: [info@vpsj.ie](mailto:info@vpsj.ie)



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Sir Joseph Aloysius Glynn





# Twenty Five Years of Service

## A tribute to Sir Joseph Alysus Glynn

In 1917 the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland elected a new National President and one hundred years later, it is only right that we should pay tribute to him. Sir Joseph Alysus Glynn was the man who was to direct our affairs for twenty five years – the longest period of Presidential service in the modern life of the organisation. Originally from Gort, Co. Galway, Glynn was a solicitor and Chairman of Galway County Council. He was aged 46 when he assumed office in the Society.

Joseph Glynn was to come to prominence as Chairman of the National Insurance Commission and he served in this position from 1912 to 1940. The 'National [Health] Insurance Act' of 1911 was the logical follow-on to the 'Old Age Pension' legislation of 1908. The early years of the 20th century saw the end of the Poor Law and the Workhouses system. Both in Britain and Ireland, the old, the sick, the unemployed, were to have a standard of living which, though not great, was no longer penury. It was mainly through the efforts of the Liberal members at Westminster – and their friends, the Irish Parliamentary Party – that the relevant legislation was enacted. Joseph Glynn was responsible for the Irish side of the new law. Since the research of the SVP member, Thomas Willis in Dublin, nearly sixty six years earlier, the poor, the subject of our Society's care, were being helped.

Glynn entered the role of President of the Society during the later days of the Great War and terminated his term of office in the time of the Second World War: He saw Ireland's standing in the world change and he had to cope with many changes in our organisation – not the least the disastrous fire at the office at Upper Sackville [O'Connell] Street, in 1922. There were agreeable happenings too – the Eucharistic Congress of 1932, and the celebration, in 1933, of the centenary of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Joseph Glynn was appointed a K.C.S.G. by Pope Pius XII in 1944. He had, like Catholics everywhere, been influenced by Pius XI's early encyclical which promoted 'Catholic Action'. 'Quadragesimo anno', in 1931, had also celebrated – 40 years earlier – the significant message of Pope Leo XIII's 'Rerum novarum'. These dogmas were devoted primarily to lay involvement in the work of the Church and to the new issue of social justice. Pope Pius

XI's pontificate when from 1922 to 1939 – which mirrored our President's term of office. Joseph Glynn had stated that there was a need to return to pre-reformation Catholicism, with its recognition of personal service. He was active in 'An Rioghachr' [the League of Kingship of Christ] for many years.

Glynn was knighted in 1915 and received an honorary doctorate from N.U.I. He was involved with the Catholic Truth Society [C.T.S.], and he wrote a tract concerning with the life of Matt Talbot. He was a member of the Board of Technical Instruction and was vice-chairman of the Hospitals Committee, which worked with the Irish Sweepstake Board.

The resignation of Brother Glynn, as National President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in 1942, was received by the Council General in Paris in unusual circumstances. The chief office of the Society was operating from the 'Free Zone' in France. This was a very difficult time for communications and the Council of the Society in Portugal was used as a postal service. The Vice-President General, Anthony Hua, was being prudent when he wrote: "In order to increase the chances of safe arrival, I shall direct a letter to him [Glynn] in a short time by another route."

Glynn had suffered a personal tragedy in the fact that his wife, Bridget, was killed in a motor accident in 1921; he remarried shortly after. His son, Frank, had been awarded the Military Cross during his service with the British Army, in France, during the First World War. Rev. Gerald O'Collins S.J., Frank's cousin, tells of young Glynn's attempts to settle in Australia following the war. Father O'Collins relates that, in 1923, he was suffering from lung failure.

Joseph Glynn died in 1951. His obituary was very detailed and was a very accurate account of his significant life.

seniorline

Free  
phone

1800 80 45 91

# SeniorLine

## When listening is helping

*“I was waiting for you to open, I had a very long, lonely night.”*

*“I am extremely worried, and need someone to talk to.”*

*“My husband is becoming very forgetful, and I don’t want to tell the family.”*

*“I’m dreading the winter, it is impossible to keep the house heated, and I’m mainly housebound.”*

These extracts are just a small selection of calls received by SeniorLine every day. The national, confidential telephone listening service for older people is open every day of the year from 10am to 10pm, including Christmas Day. SeniorLine is Ireland’s only peer telephone service for older people, and is particularly supportive to those who suffer from loneliness and isolation.

Earlier this year, the service changed its name from Senior Help Line to SeniorLine, because research indicated that many callers found the word ‘help’ to be a disincentive, contradictory as this sounds. Some callers wanted to access company and conversation, without feeling they needed to have a problem to call. Others misinterpreted the word ‘help’ as providing practical information on pensions, for example, or house repairs. The kind of help SeniorLine offers is an effective, empathic listening in which callers can feel valued and heard.

**So the new title is SeniorLine – when listening is helping.**

**SeniorLine also has a new Freephone number  
1800 80 45 91.**

SeniorLine has a Directory of Services to which callers can be referred. The Society of St Vincent de Paul and its many services are part of this Directory, and our volunteers are happy to recommend the SVP to relevant callers. Equally, SVP members may wish to give the SeniorLine Freephone number to some older people they visit, particularly those who may be on their own, and have nobody to talk to during the day or evening.

Established almost 20 years ago, SeniorLine now receives up to 1,000 calls each month from older people nationally. People phone with specific problems, including physical health, family,

income, depression and anxiety. Serious problems include elder abuse or suicidal thoughts, and the service has a strict protocol in responding to such callers, which supports the caller and protects the volunteer. Callers may phone to say ‘good night’, and often the SeniorLine volunteer may be the only human voice they hear all day – or all week.

SeniorLine is recognised as a primary health care service, helping to keep older people living independent lives at home for longer. This is the wish of many, and part of government policy. SeniorLine uses the anonymised information from every call to advocate on behalf of each caller and for older people generally. SeniorLine regularly publicises the need for home services for older people, good rural public transport, retention of local services such as banks, post offices and hospitals.

At time of relaunch SeniorLine published the results of a national independent survey revealing that many older people with a problem would phone a help line if they thought they would be ‘listened to properly’, and if the exchange were confidential. Aine Brady, CEO of Third Age, the voluntary agency that manages SeniorLine, explains what makes the service unique: “SeniorLine really listens. Our volunteers are trained to listen to every caller, and support them in any worries or difficulties. SeniorLine is confidential. We are aware of the dignity and respect owing to each caller who trusts us with the personal details of their lives. Our sole aim is to encourage each caller with any

*Jim Daly, Minister of State, Aine Brady CEO and Damian Leneghan Programme Manager at the launch of SeniorLine in Dublin*



## Humans Sharing Spaces – Exhibition Review

by Mary Flanagan, March 2017

Art is the source of enchantment. The need for art is as basic as the need for bread, perhaps even more so. Without bread one dies of hunger. But without art, one dies of boredom' – these words of the great French artist, and champion of 'art brut', Jean Dubuffet, come to mind at the exhibition of works by artists in prisons, 'Humans Sharing Spaces'.

In its totality, the exhibition, held earlier this year at the chq building, Custom House Quay, Dublin 1, is a testament to the creativity of the artists, and to the capacity of the tutors/facilitators who enabled the endeavour. The exhibition of about 70 works by over 100 hundred artists, constitutes a representative sample of the extraordinary and accomplished art that is being produced within the walls of Irish prisons and related institutions.

Taking into account the situational context in which the art works have been created, that is, in the limitations of a prison setting, the level of artistic achievement is to be marvelled at. The artworks on display are diverse and varied, both thematically and aesthetically. The range of media includes ceramics, clay sculpture, painting using oils, acrylic, water colour, mixed media, appliqué, digital media/audio-visual, felt work, pottery, photography, installations, stained glass. There are group projects and

individual pieces. The exhibition includes an area dedicated to poetry and writing, showcasing the Writers in Prison Scheme. The art works emerged from the Visual Artist in Prison Scheme (Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon), and the ETB art education scheme.

These artists are of necessity not named or identified, except by initials or first names. What is known is that each artist produced their art work while in the confines of a prison. No more than one could separate the art of Jean Michel Basquiat from 80's Uptown New York, or that of Jackson Pollock from the zeitgeist of the US, post WW2, the work of these artists is a product of the context of their incarceration. These artists share a space (reflected in the exhibition's title), the experience of being in a prison, and of having been found guilty. But as the viewer becomes ever more absorbed by the content of the exhibition, what takes over is the quality of the works and their undeniable status as works of art.

A number of group projects feature in the exhibition. Among the most impressive is the large painting entitled 'The Training Unit'. This is a beautifully rendered treatise on loneliness, isolation, and boredom. A large work, 120 x 100 cm, using oil on canvas, it achieves technical and emotional brilliance.

A number of the paintings are in a conventional vein, such as 'Venetian Scene II', while others mine contemporary influences, for example 'Temporary Shelter' a technically precise yet moving work, which graphically reminds us of the observational reach of Google.



'Indian Bus', a perfectly executed work, evokes Gauguin perhaps, but has an integrity all of its own. With its turquoise blue sky, and a central image of crowded bus in an Indian setting, could this be a work of the imagination or is it derived from a picture, or from memory?

Darker in theme but no less well crafted is 'Harsh Reality', an exposition of the violent side of prison life. This large painting is overtly representational, but on closer reading would appear to play with the time sequence; it seems that the events represented are not taking place at the same time, but sequentially. This has a disorienting effect that is powerful and disconcerting.

The exquisite painting, 'Onwards and Upwards' uses acrylic on canvas to create a silhouette of an urban scene against a red and yellow sky and framed as if one is looking out a window. The impact of the barbed wire in the foreground is unsettling, but the overall effect is wistful and beautiful.

All of the works in the exhibition, too numerous for each to be mentioned individually, convey profound messages both of a personal and universal nature. 'Art is a language, an instrument of knowledge, an instrument of communication' Jean Dubuffet declared in the mid 1940s, and again his words have a relevance



to the works on view in Humans Sharing Spaces. The intensity of emotion contained in so many of the pieces suggest that for the artists making art is indeed an instrument of communication.

Attesting to this is one of the standout pieces in the exhibition, entitled 'Flexing'. This autobiographical work uses many different materials to create a unified artwork that is captivating and very moving. Incorporating urban style, pop art, street art, graffiti art, collage and montage, the work is in its own way unique, and overall is stylistically resolved and integrated. 'Flexing' took the artist six weeks to complete, working on it for over twelve hours a day. It is a work of rich communication and expression.

Expressing through art what may be hard to verbalise, particularly one might surmise in the context of being imprisoned, many of the art works on display here convey deep human feeling. It is possible only to speculate on what being provided with artistic opportunity and having an artwork exhibited means to the individual artists. A clue may be found in the words of one of the artists who in the notes accompanying his painting, states, 'I love the smell of paint, and I love the physicality of painting... Painting has helped me pass the time in prison, and to cope with my sentence'. Much of the art on display indicates a pre-existing giftedness, and an artistic ability unleashed perhaps by the opportunity for expression, albeit in a prison setting.



A significant number of the artworks make reference to global themes such as migration and the ravages of war, and bring these themes home, thereby merging the local and the global, the personal and the political. Using acrylic on canvas, the beautiful work, 'Migrants' encapsulates shared human experience. In a similar vein, the painting 'All Alone' which, while replicating the image of the Syrian boy following a bomb attack, manages to evoke ill treatment of children in the local context.

The exhibition organiser has done a fine job of showcasing the work of artists in prisons. Thoughtfully curated, the exhibition stands as a powerful, original and accomplished group show.

Humans Sharing Spaces was an exhibition of creative arts by students in prison and a post release centre. The exhibition is a joint initiative of the Irish Prison Service and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.



# Developing the Society of St Vincent de Paul Social Justice Network

*by Harry Kenney, Chair of the Social Justice and Policy Committee*

The Social Justice and Policy work of the St. Vincent de Paul is based to a large extent on the work of the volunteer membership base and our voice is heard because it is understood to represent the lived experience of those who St. Vincent de Paul Members assist. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is unique in that Members throughout Ireland have the opportunity and privilege to visit individuals and families in their homes and hear about the problems they face in their lives. The objective is to provide assistance to these individuals and families but also to advocate for changes which will improve their living standards and this is where the work of the Social Justice & Policy function of the Society comes in.

As Chair of the Social Justice & Policy Committee one of my objectives is to raise the profile of social justice among St. Vincent de Paul Members and improve communications between the Members and the Social Justice Team. It is proposed to do this in two ways: through the Regional Social Justice Representatives and by establishing a St. Vincent de Paul Social Justice Network.

This network is intended to provide a broader mechanism whereby the Social Justice and Policy team in National Office can identify the types of issues and problems that Members are encountering in their visitation work.

Social Justice Network members will be asked to contribute based on the experience of their conference. We hope to build a network of sufficient size and geographic spread to capture a broad range of circumstances and issues throughout Ireland. As well as general issues, the network will also provide a direct channel to identify case studies that exemplify the social justice causes on which we advocate. These are anonymised summaries of specific cases and are essential in presentations and discussions with politicians and government departments.

Recruitment of members to join the Social Justice Network has already commenced and will continue by various methods including attendance at area gatherings by Regional Social Justice Representatives and members of the Social Justice Team to explain the work of the team and invite interested members to provide their contact details.

Communication is a two way process so there will be quarterly updates from the Social Justice & Policy Team to network members to highlight where details provided through the social justice network have been used in submissions, meetings with politicians, media etc. and successes achieved.

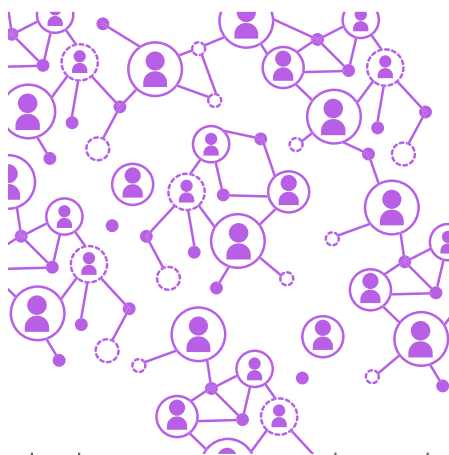
The success of the Social Justice Network will depend to a large extent on the support of Society Members and I am confident that this support will be provided to enhance the important work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in advocating for those individuals and families who we visit.



You are invited to join the

# SVP SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK

The Social Justice and Policy Team are looking for interested members to join a membership network committed to addressing the underlying causes of poverty and disadvantage in Ireland



## Who should join?

- Members regularly involved in home visitation and providing assistance to those in need and interested in the links between decisions made by government/state agencies and the experience of people that SVP assist.

## What does membership entail?

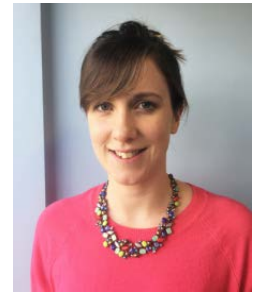
- Attending Social Justice development days once a year focusing on campaigning, advocacy, policy analysis and media engagement skills.
- Availability to respond to periodic requests to feed back on specific social justice issues you face in visitation work either by phone, email, postal or online surveys (4 or 5 times per year).
- Communicating emerging issues that your conference is encountering to the National Social Justice committee.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN JOINING, PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR NAME, CONFERENCE LOCATION, CONTACT DETAILS AND AREA OF INTEREST USING THE SIGN UP SHEET OR CONTACT [SJNETWORK@SVP.IE](mailto:SJNETWORK@SVP.IE)





# Now that we know Government reforms increased poverty among lone parents: what next?



*Tricia Keilthy,  
Acting Head of  
Social Justice*

Late last Monday evening, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection published a report outlining the impact of the reforms of the One Parent Family Payment. Since 2012, when the reforms were first implemented, SVP has continued to highlight some of the negative impacts and unintended consequences of the changes. We have been particularly critical of the decision to abolish the features of the One Parent Family Payment which supported lone parents to take up part-time employment.

The report confirmed much of what we had expected – despite a small increase in full time employment, over 50% of lone parents stated they were worse off financially, and poverty rates had increased. As a result, 40% of parents reported that their well-being and the well-being of their children had been negatively impacted.

Despite these stark findings, there were no recommendations to address these issues – the 141-page report only mentions childcare and housing twice. It seems this patchy report had a bearing on Budget day as the incremental measures announced failed to provide a comprehensive package of supports that would improve access to education, training, and sustainable employment. Even after the increase in the earning disregard, Family Income Supplement (FIS) and minimum wage in Budget 2018, a parent working part-time will see their income decrease when their youngest child reaches the age of seven, because FIS is no longer payable with the Jobseekers Transition Payment.

We are also still a long way from a 'Scandinavian' style system of early years education and childcare. The roll out of the Affordable Childcare Scheme has been delayed and the overall funding allocated under Budget 2017 falls short in delivering the targeted elements of the scheme – only 24,000 children are receiving targeted subsidies as of this September, compared to 33,000 previously. While this figure is likely to increase over the course of the year, it suggests that access to affordable childcare has become more difficult.

There have been some recent positive initiatives to improve access to education, such as enhanced grants for lone parents and better access to supports while at University. However, we

had hoped this Budget would have addressed the anomalies created by the reforms that made access to the SUSI grant more difficult.

So, what next? The overall tone of the report suggests that the Government will continue with a 'work first approach'. This is problematic, as it does not consider the low level of educational attainment among lone parents, making access to quality employment more difficult, nor does it consider the impact low paid, insecure employment has on family wellbeing.

Good quality employment has wide ranging benefits, not just financial, for parents and their families. However, labour market activation can't occur in a vacuum and changes in the tax/benefit system need to be considered alongside other policy changes such as childcare and family friendly employment practices, and legislation relating to precarious work, minimum wage, and maintenance. Policy decisions in these areas must be firmly rooted in evidence on the employment, social welfare and parenting experiences of one parent families.

The Government now has four recent reports at their disposal – Review of the Amendments to the One-parent Family Payment since January 2012 (October 2017); The Position of Lone Parents in Ireland (June 2017); Supports and Barriers to Higher Education for Lone Parents (August 2017); and Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context (September 2016). This evidence should be compiled, analysed and a concrete, cross departmental action plan developed and implemented. The plan should be holistic, integrated, and person and family centred. The new National Anti-Poverty Strategy should also have a specific target with supporting actions to reduce poverty rates in one parent households.

And what next for SVP? The Social Justice and Policy Team will continue to engage with members to understand the persistent and emerging issues facing one parent families and advocate to ensure that the needs of lone parents and their children are better supported.

# Limited sense of urgency and ambition for addressing the housing crisis



by Jennifer Thompson  
Social Policy Development Officer

Minister Donoghue's Budget 2018 speech offered an assurance that housing remains a critical priority for the government. This was followed by an announcement of an increase in the housing budget to €1.9 billion – a 46% increase on 2017, the largest increase of budget for any government department.

But how will this translate for the individuals and families that SVP's 11,000 members visit, who are experiencing the stress and challenge of homelessness, overcrowding, rising rents, insecure tenancy arrangements and making do in poor quality and inadequate housing.

The budget saw some positive and welcome steps towards enhancing the supply of housing and escalation of state building. Next year 5,000 new social houses will be built by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies, or provided through Part V (where 10% of houses built by developers must be allo-

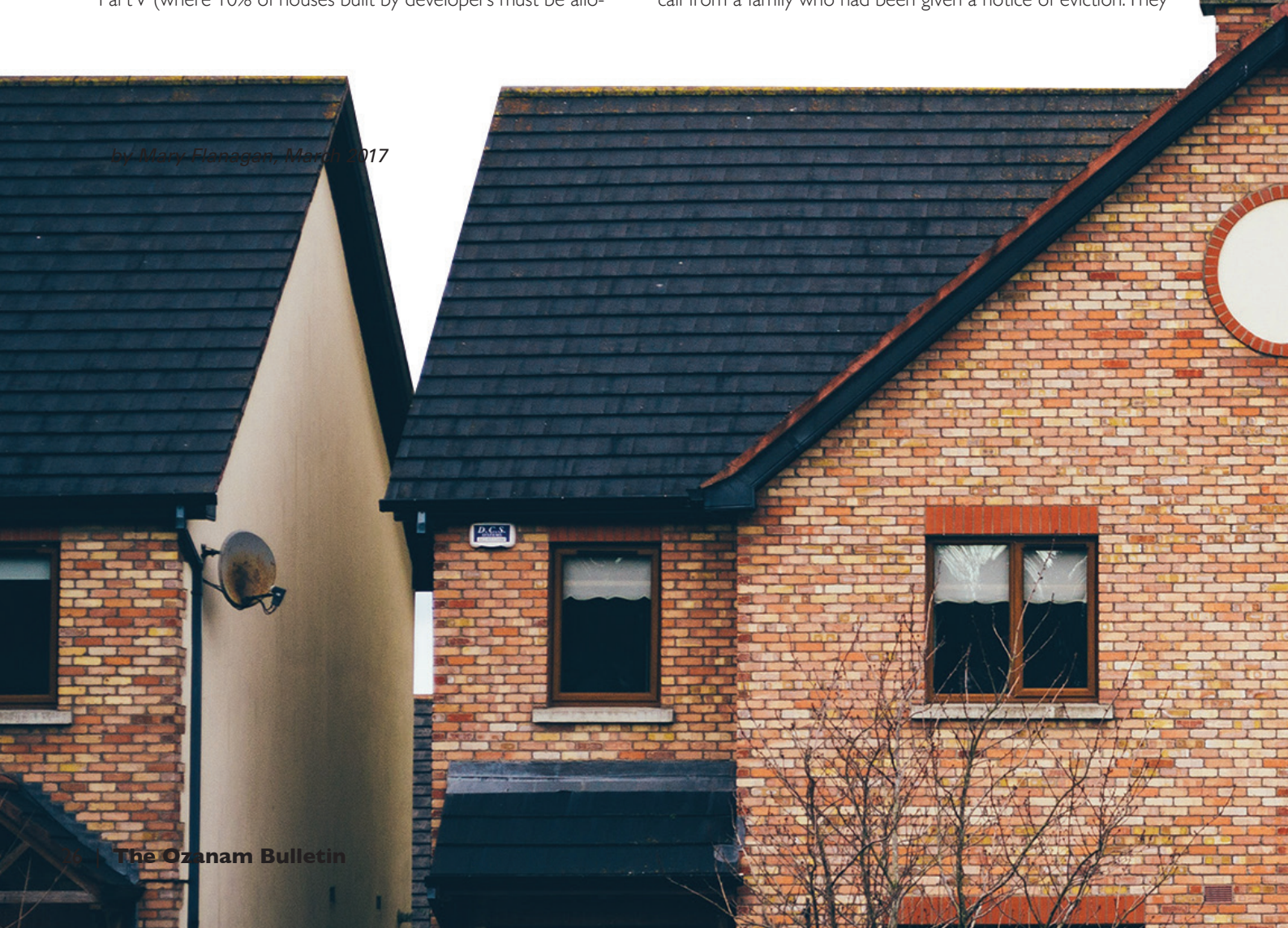
cated for social housing) with an additional 900 houses acquired, equating to a total of 5,900 new social homes delivered.

The announced move towards rebalancing the Government's action plan for housing in favour of more housing construction is overdue and extremely welcome. When the target for social housing builds is compared to last year however (which was 5,869), the number of social housing units delivered represents an increase in target of only 31 extra social housing units.

With over 91,000 people on the social housing waiting list, and a record number of homeless (5,222 adults and 3,048 children), it is clear that this budget needed a more ambitious target for social housing output.

Shortly before last Tuesday's budget, SVP members received a call from a family who had been given a notice of eviction. They

by Mary Flanagan, March 2017



know the landlord's letter is not legal, but they also face the threat of their water being cut off and feel they have no choice but to act quickly to avoid homelessness, to look urgently for a new home, preferably in the same area. Their child is happy and thriving in the local school, and the family are settled in their community. As a family in the private rented sector in the current crisis situation, time is not on their side. They are facing the stark reality of a lack of security and assurance of being able to remain in their home.

As part of the housing package, Minister Donougue announced a further €149 million for the Housing Assistance Payment which will enable a further 17,000 households to be accommodated, as well as continue supporting the 32,000 existing HAP tenancies. This is a necessary support to those struggling to meet their rent, but the shortage of supply remains a significant barrier. Equating to five times as many social housing tenants accommodated through the private rented sector, HAP represents the continued overreliance on the private sector to meet social housing need. The budget did not deliver the necessary scale of change in this approach - the consequences of which SVP members see regularly as they assist people who go without food, heating and other essentials in order to make rent payments.

Among the positive steps taken in the budget is the increase in the vacant site levy from 3 to 7 percent. It will take time for the effects of this to be seen, with levy's becoming payable in a cou-

ple of years' time. The Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland have also indicated that the tax hike may not go far enough and be sufficient in a market with double digit capital appreciation rates on development land.

A further encouraging move is the establishment of the Home Building Finance Ireland which will stimulate more building by providing finance at commercially competitive rates to developers who are struggling to access financing for residential construction. As this new entity comes into being, it will be important to consider how this can be best utilised to address the social element of the housing crisis and enhance the much-needed supply of affordable and social housing.

As the housing and homeless crisis shows little sign of abating, more effective and ambitious action is needed to help people acquire secure and affordable accommodation, protect against people losing their homes and address the shortage of housing across all tenures.



# Budget 2018 Assessment

## The Vincentian Partnership for Social

Budget 2018 brings further welcome increases to social welfare supports. 2018 will be the second consecutive year with increases in non-pension supports (and third year of increases in state pension rates) following a prolonged period of social welfare rate stagnation. These measures are forecast to bring about an improvement in the position of eligible social welfare dependent and low income households; reducing the depth of income inadequacy and a number household types moving to income adequacy.

The Budget builds on the progress in 2017, moving towards restoring the real value of primary social welfare supports. The lack of meaningful adjustment to secondary supports which target those most in need (e.g. pensioners living alone and social welfare dependent households with older children) demonstrates the lack of a comprehensive evidence based plan underpinning the budgetary measures.

Additionally, delaying the implementation of social welfare increases to mid 2018 (March and June), while tax reductions commence from the start of 2018, creates further inequality in the dispersal of the benefits of recovery.

On the basis of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research, the VPSJ recommended measures for Budget 2018. These were based on research and data, identifying the household types with the greatest degree of income inadequacy and gaps in social welfare provision which drive the inadequacy. The measures outlined were vital steps towards the longer term goal of social welfare ultimately providing an adequate income for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

Budget 2018 takes positive steps, but misses the opportunity to enact vital policy decisions based on the evidence and research available. Budget 2018 does not prioritise those households and groups which data identifies as having the greatest income inadequacy, the highest risk of poverty, high deprivation rates, low pay, etc. This is a matter of regret for the VPSJ. Key points of the VPSJ Budget assessment

- The measures in Budget 2018 bring welcome increases to social welfare supports, and build on the progress in 2017, to move towards restoring the real value of primary social welfare supports, following a prolonged period of social welfare rate stagnation.
- The Budget's €5.00 per week increase to weekly social welfare rates, with proportional adjustments to Qualified Adult and Qualified Child is welcome. The inclusion of a €2 adjustment to Qualified Child supports is also welcome; this begins to restore the proportional value of the payment following its omission from adjustments in Budget 2017.

- It is regrettable that the introduction of the increases is again delayed until March, as was the case in 2017. Consequently social welfare dependent households will miss 12 weeks of increased support. This reduces the effective value of the increase to an average of €3.85 per week, over the full 52 weeks.

- Delaying the implementation of social welfare increases while tax reductions commence from the start of 2018 creates further inequality in the distribution of the benefits of recovery.
- Extending the reduced Prescription Charge, of €2.00, to those under 70, is a welcome move toward restoring the full value of the Medical Card.

- Meaningful adjustments to secondary supports are limited, and include a modest extension to the Fuel Allowance season, of one week, and the introduction of a tightly targeted Telephone Support Allowance.

- Not focusing limited resources on the most vulnerable is a missed opportunity. Whilst the €5 increase in the State Pension will improve the position of the pensioner living alone, the same expenditure of resources could have supported a €5 increase to the Living Alone Allowance for pensioners and the full restoration of the Fuel Allowance.

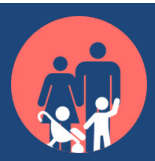





- The position of the low-paid and inadequacy of the National Minimum Wage rate, will not be addressed by the €0.30 increase to NMW, nor by the adjustments to USC and PAYE Income Tax.

- The adjustments to personal taxation results in a limited change in net income for those on low incomes (€0.63 per week for a full-time minimum wage worker), for individuals with incomes of €70,000+ the change is larger (€6.31 per week). At both ends of the income scale the impact of the change is likely to have a negligible effect on household income.

- Adjustment to in-work social welfare supports for households with children, in conjunction with the increase to NMW and adjustment to USC, will result in modest increases in total household income – potentially improving the position of families in minimum wage and low paid employment.

- The cost of an MESL is highest for children at second level age, and social welfare supports meet 54% of these MESL needs. It is regrettable that the measures in Budget 2018 again failed to recognise the vital need for a higher level of support for households with older children. Child poverty and income inadequacy cannot be reduced until this need is recognised.

TABLE 1 INCOME ADEQUACY 2017 & 2018 (FORECAST)

		2017		2018	
		Social Welfare	Employed NMW	Social Welfare	Employed NMW
<b>Two Parent Pre-School &amp; Primary School</b>					
	MESL Expenditure	463.10	587.84	470.28	595.23
	Income (Net)	447.72	642.59	460.02	653.55
	Adequacy	-15.39	54.75	-10.26	58.32
<b>Two Parent Primary School &amp; Second Level</b>					
	MESL Expenditure	541.87	631.70	550.06	639.76
	Income (Net)	452.53	647.40	464.83	658.36
	Adequacy	-89.34	15.70	-85.24	18.60
<b>One Parent Pre-School &amp; Primary School</b>					
	MESL Expenditure	348.65	642.80	354.05	651.74
	Income (Net)	330.87	636.66	340.30	648.23
	Adequacy	-17.78	-6.14	-13.74	-3.51
<b>One Parent Primary School &amp; Second Level</b>					
	MESL Expenditure	427.41	525.49	433.83	532.73
	Income (Net)	335.68	576.65	345.11	585.91
	Adequacy	-91.74	51.16	-88.72	53.18
<b>Single Adult Working Age</b>					
	MESL Expenditure*	246.69	435.56	249.44	449.47
	Income (Net)	193.00	336.91	198.00	342.92
	Adequacy	-53.69	-98.65	-51.44	-106.55
<b>Pensioner Living Alone</b>					
	MESL Expenditure	246.98		250.65	
	Income (Net)	247.25		255.18	
	Adequacy	0.27		4.53	

# Christmas is not the same for everyone.



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

## ANNUAL APPEAL

YOUR YES CAN LAST A LIFETIME

Please give locally or at [svp.ie](http://svp.ie)

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a registered charity - CHY6892

# SVP Annual Appeal 2017

This year's Annual Appeal will start on November 15th 2017 and continue until December 31st 2017. This is the third year of our three-year campaign entitled:

## **'Your yes can last a lifetime'.**

The overall focus of the campaign is to bring to life what SVP volunteers see every day, how sometimes all it takes is a small incident, an unexpected event to tip a person into a cycle of crisis and poverty. But, we also know that the opposite is true. Often, a simple word of encouragement, or a timely helping hand of support can stop a domino effect leading to someone experiencing prolonged hardship.

The campaign urges everyone to support us generously by telling them how their yes can last a lifetime. This message will be actively promoted on TV, radio, online and in the press from November 15th 2017.

To complement this year's campaign and to draw particular attention to the fact that the most vulnerable in our society are not benefiting from recent economic improvements, we are supporting our poster and radio campaign with another strong message:

## **'Christmas is not the same for everyone'.**

For a lot of us, Christmas is a time of plenty. It is filled with presents, food, parties and joy. But unfortunately, for many of the families that we support, it is not filled with those things. Instead, it is a time of dread and worry as they see their families go without.

This extra message gives our donors a strong emotional reason to support our campaign this Christmas, whilst also reassuring them with our positive message that their yes will last a lifetime.

## **SVP Collection Sunday**



This year's SVP Collection Sunday will happen on December 10th. Highlighting your collection in your parish newsletter and nominating a Conference member to speak from the pulpit has been shown to dramatically increase donations to your Conference. This year we will be including sample pulpit speeches and sample text for your parish newsletter in your Annual Appeal Support Pack.

Lastly, please use SVP branded buckets and bibs. Using these materials can also make a big difference to your collection as people can easily identify who they are giving to.

## **The very best of luck**

So, look out for the Annual Appeal Support Pack, which will arrive to all Conferences in early November. Thank you most sincerely for your support and the very best of luck with your appeal.



## Postal Strike and Social Welfare Payments

When the Society took on the extraordinary task of facilitating the distribution of Social Welfare benefits.

In 1979, postal services and facilities in the Republic were at a standstill due to an 18-week Post Office strike. A particular dilemma arose when it appeared that the recipients of the State Social Welfare Pension would be without funds, due to the fact that their pension books would not be available. This group of people included those in receipt of old age pensions, disability benefits, deserted wives benefits, widows pensions etc. Being the most vulnerable section of the community, extraordinary action was necessary to help them.

Following discussions with the Department of Social Welfare, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul undertook the task of ensuring that facilities and funds would be made available where and when required. The decision to act was influenced by the fact that if help was not provided, many people would suffer.

Much has been written on the changing works of the Society and it is worth repeating the words of our late President General, Monsieur Pierre Chouard, when he said in 1955 "We shall have to recultivate a willingness to take risks; to become

imprudent even up to the limits allowed in the practice of the Christian virtue of prudence. Unusual cases taken us by surprise; they scandalize us and, using discretion to wrong purpose, we keep them at arm's length."

At the time it was emphasized that the Society could not hope to meet the standards of the State system and that we were not competing with the officials who were on strike. However, any shortcomings were offset by the interest and personal attention of the Members, and many friends, who performed the work for 13 long weeks.

Many lessons have been learnt from the exercise. We now, for instance, have a greater appreciation of the actual extent of State assistance. We had an opportunity of meeting many new friends from within the community not normally visited by us and we were encouraged to think of what further help can be given. We found a large number of willing helpers encouraged to participate more fully in our work.



# The following report gives details of the operation

SVP Special Scheme for payment of Social Welfare Pensions  
by Don Mahony

The notice in the national newspapers on 29th March, 1979 read 'The Society of St. Vincent de Paul wishes to inform all Social Welfare pensioners who will be availing of its special services that detailed arrangements for their weekly payments will be published in next Sunday's national newspapers'. This simple message told over 100,000 pensioners that, come what may, the Society would ensure payment of their weekly pensions for as long as the normal of other possible arrangements remained cause up in the nationwide postal dispute.

The Society was assuring pensioners that they would be looked after. The message served to allay fears of uncertainty prevalent among thousands of old people.

The Society had a few days earlier responded to a request by the Minister for Social Welfare to place its membership and organization at the disposal of pensioners who normally drew pensions from Post Offices then closed because of the postal problems. Looking back at those early days, it can now be admitted that it was only when the many organizational and administrative problems were worked on that the full magnitude of the task ahead started to emerge.

For a start there were upwards of 100,000 pensioners within the Society's special payment services who required first payments to be made on 5th April. But perhaps the biggest problem at the planning stage was the absence of information about where these 100,000 pensioners lived. All we knew was that they normally drew payments from the 92 main Post Offices around the country that were then closed.

There was, no alternative but to plan for over capacity. In this way we were at least reasonably certain of coping. The strategy was to open 51 Pay Centres in Dublin initially. After two weeks this reduced to 24 Centres. When arrangements finally settled down the Society operated 105 separate Pay Centres all over the country.

We fortunately had many things going for us. The Society's own organization structure provided a Conference presence in each of the locations where the Post Offices were closed. In addition our telephone and grapevine network, always a feature of our internal communications, was in good working order and adequately replaced the postal services which had stopped and which otherwise would have been our main sources of contact.

And so it was possible to organize at very short notice meet-

ings of Regional and Area Presidents and those Conference Presidents who collectively were to form the nucleus of the administrative arm set up to run and monitor the scheme. These special meetings set the stage for the whole undertaking commenced on 5th April and was, in the event, to continue until 30th June.

Indeed the memory of members making their way to Heuston Station on the Saturday afternoon, 31st March, with literally thousands of cheques under their arms will not easily be forgotten. The meetings were surely unique occasions for the Society. Here we were discussing, questioning and agreeing, the many and varied aspects of the payments system which at the end of the day was to make no fewer than 750,000 payments and to remit over £11 million.

At the peak period over 700,000 pensioners were receiving their pensions each week from the Society, which in money terms was a disbursement of £1.2 million. The meetings demonstrated the capacity and determination of members to undertake an aid programme of such proportions, in circumstances of urgency, where the alternative to action was extreme hardship and insecurity for thousands upon thousands of old people throughout the country.

These meetings followed a period of intensive organizing, system designing and decision making at Headquarters, followed by even more urgent and comprehensive arrangements at local level. Special SVP Accounts were opened in Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks, who also undertook the continuous printing of cheques, the mode for paying pensions. The contribution of the Banks was considerable. They delivered 175,000 cheques to Nicholas Street within a mere two days of being asked. In all, over 1¼ million cheques were printed and distributed to Pay Centres. It was a superb service from the Banks to the Society. The Newspapers played their part also in publishing Society messages to Pensioners at very short notice. Collectively everybody helped to get arrangements off the ground on time and in an orderly way. And many of the volunteers were friends of Society members who offered services in areas they had expertise.

In the first week alone, notwithstanding the problems of communicating with old people, over 35,000 pensioners came to the Society's Pay Centres around the country, and over £1 million was disbursed weekly as the numbers rose. Over 1,000 Society members and friends managed 125 Pay Centres scattered throughout the country. Pay Centres opened on Thursdays and Fridays and in some areas on Saturdays also. Throughout the period about 75,000 old age pensioners availed of SVP special services, some every week.

In most Pay Centres it became more than just a payment service. Centres literally developed into social clubs and in some



locations tea and coffee was served. Pensioners sat, talked and made new friends. They chatted long after they collected their pensions. To the Society it turned out to be yet another means of finding fresh cases of need and hardship and our services have in consequence been considerably enhanced. We learned more about the range and adequacy of Social Welfare pensions and, if by chance we did not know it already, we now appreciate even more how so many people were so utterly dependent of their weekly pensions. In so many cases a single day's delay in payment is a day literally without anything.

For the Society as a whole, the 13 long weeks of payments demonstrated a capacity to undertake emergency services to the community of a scale and complexity not normally identified with a voluntary organisation. It confirmed our reputation as an organization for getting things done, for getting on with the job

without fuss or publicity, was indeed justified and was true. It served to show that our strength is in our practical work, in our ability and capacity to act quickly and effectively where real need exists.

All levels of the Society came together to carry out perhaps the biggest single task ever given to us. Now that we have achieved that objective and are a little more used to working that much more closely together despite the many geographical divides, let us keep that teamwork intact. By doing so the many people who need and depend on us will benefit that much more.

# SVP - A LEADER OF POSITIVE CHANGE

## but is it a champion of its own inevitable change?

*Brendan Hennessy, National Membership Support Development Officer,*

VP member support has the great opportunity through one-to-one and area gathering meetings to meet our volunteers. Many of you, but not all, report Conferences being quieter than before and express concern about their future. It stands to reason that some Conferences are quieter. SVP experienced an upsurge in requests during the recession. Falling unemployment and other factors mean there are less people seeking assistance. Of course there are communities that experience such consistent levels of poverty that they will always rely on and require the Vincent de Paul. You know the families I mean.

SVP's expenditure is changing too, back to more sustainable levels than heretofore. Some of this expenditure decrease is due to SVP's own advocacy, particularly in the area of energy. Decreases in one area presents an opportunity to go deeper elsewhere. Wouldn't it be great if SVP's high expenditure on energy was directed to education? We know that's where the difference between families needing or not needing the SVP can be made. And yet SVP's expenditure on education has dropped too. There will be many reasons for this, but instead of those, lets focus on how we can boost our education spend and target those in need.

Sitting in the SVP meeting room in Tuckey Street in Cork a man sat down to tell us his education need. He perched on the end of the chair, with eyes only for the door. We introduced the Society's work to him; he went to leave: "I don't want to take the food from anybody's mouth" he said. "You're not" he was reassured "we have a separate fund for education". He was relieved and continued with his application.

Education committees around the country have put in huge

work identifying students for the Millennium scholar (and other) bursaries. There wasn't a difficulty in finding candidates, even if the reporting requirements for an outside funder seemed onerous. This is a need well met through a fund well spent, possibly because the students could identify with the fund and our members could identify with the dedicated mechanism. Imagine a scenario where SVP also had an 'early-years' fund; or large special funds dedicated to 'primary' 'secondary' and 'special needs' too. Why not widen that horizon to housing.

One way of facing complex problems in SVP is with the question 'how would SVP solve that problem if we had no money?' The future of the SVP is not about finance, it's about having enough volunteer members to carry out meaningful work in the community. There is the possibility of needing to plan for a smaller sized SVP organisation in the future. It's not that it's definitely going to happen, but it just might.

It just may be too that we need additional approaches to augment visitation to ensure that the Society can continue to fight poverty in a volunteer led way. The financial approach suggested here is a new one which suggests that both people in need and SVP members will be more inclined to seek and give if we create dedicated funds for certain needs. The non-financial approach, be that to recognise the potential of a different SVP in the years to come or to facing the challenging times of today is not new to SVP; it's one the volunteers of the SVP have always done well – being leaders for positive change.



## Responding to need Planning for the future

*Celine Martin,  
National Member Support Manager*

On a blustery Saturday morning in October our SVP volunteer members and staff braved "Storm Brian" to arrive in Mount St. Anne's retreat and Conference centre in Portarlington for the National Council meeting.

The Society under the stewardship of Kieran Stafford, the new National President along with his new team, clarified the priorities for their term of office by introducing the theme of the day "People in need - planning for the future".

Kieran Stafford, in his opening address welcomed everyone, he spoke of the importance in reaching out to people in need, of finding innovative ways to respond. Kieran mentioned the challenges facing the Society regarding member development, recruitment and training. He welcomed the newly formed Member Development, Recruitment and Training committee and looked forward to how, this group alongside the workshops planned for the day, would begin to tackle some of our key challenges in this area. Kieran talked about working together, this day was the beginning of that journey. The other workshops in areas covering, member support, social justice and support to Area Presidents, provided the forum for an inclusive approach to developing a future plan of action.

"Welcoming the Stranger" was the theme of the key note speakers address from Sr. Carmel Ryan, Daughters of Charity. Sr. Carmel certainly challenged us on how it feels to be a stranger yourself and perhaps this is forgotten in our Conferences. Do we welcome new volunteer members to our Conferences or do they leave as strangers? Do we welcome fully those who

request assistance from us or do we prejudge? These questions resonated with some Area Presidents, as they face many of these challenges in the Conferences they visit on a regular basis. Head of Fundraising, Nichola Mullen, gave a detailed overview of our National Fundraising Strategy, the unique opportunities that exist for the Society in raising funds at Conference level were clearly outlined. The day moved on with the various workshops, feedback and round table discussions in the key topic areas. The energy in the breakout groups was difficult to curtail at times, with plenty of lively debate. SVP staff members did an excellent job providing some up to date knowledge on current developments in specific topic areas. The continued growth of Members, volunteers and staff working together is needed for effective future planning.

John Lupton, Regional President from the Mid-West and Brendan Hennessy from the Member Support team gave two thought provoking presentations. John's, a reflection on circumstance and opportunity and how this can lead to very different outcomes for different people. Brendan's, a presentation that focussed on the need to plan for change. Both presentations left us with new considerations for the future direction of the Society's work.

Following an open forum session, the meeting was closed, Kieran Stafford, thanked everyone for their attendance. He gave a special word of thanks to those who were involved in preparing for the day including, Pat Carroll from the Mid-West who kept the day flowing and the staff in Mount St. Anne's who looked after us very well.

This was a very successful National Council meeting and perhaps it was the beginning of a conversation in the planning for the future of the Society. We are on a journey and this day was just one stage, We have begun a process of learning, reflection and planning. It will take more reflection, discussion and planning before we can gather consensus on a way forward for SVP. Many thanks to each of you for your time, contributions and commitment to the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

# Young SVP Mid-West Region



Things have been quite busy in the Mid-West over the last few weeks and months. Our last year's groups are back and have increased in numbers. The great work the students have done has been widely recognised and more students want to join school conferences every day.

We published a Young SVP newsletter over the summer and sent it out to all the schools as well as all our Conferences across the Region. The response has been fantastic, new schools get in touch all the time and want to set up their own conferences! More members have come on board as well, and together with our YDO we've been very busy visiting all of the groups and supporting them on their Vincentian journey.

We also took part in the Killaloe Diocesan Youth Faith Festival which was a great opportunity to get inspired, as well as promote Young SVP. There seems to be a very exciting year ahead of us!





# Young SVP East Region School Get Togethers 2017



This year the East Region of the Society of St Vincent de Paul held two School Get Togethers at the start of the academic year. The Get Togethers were for students and their teachers from schools who were already involved with Young SVP or wanted to get involved. Attendees met students and teachers from other schools, met SVP members, learned about SVP and social justice, learned how to plan and carry out an effective social action and shared ideas.

## 28th September, Dominican College Sion Hill

Eight schools were represented on the day. Students from St Mary's Holy Faith Glasnevin opened the day by reading a reflection entitled 'Justice & the Young-Agents of Change, Bearers of Hope' and lighting the SVP candle. Liam Casey, East Region President addressed the young people, reminding them of the words of Blessed Frederic Ozanam who said "I tell myself...that the mission of a young person in society today is very serious

and very important...I rejoice at being born at an epoch when perhaps I shall have to do much good". This was followed by ice breaker activities facilitated by Becca Gallagher, National Youth Development Coordinator. Students from Mount Anville Secondary School gave a presentation on the 'Origins and Work of SVP'. Students from Dominican College Sion Hill gave a presentation on the care packages they had made for the parents of babies in hospital.

Jennifer Thompson from the SVP Social Justice Team spoke to the students about what it means to work for Social Justice. Clare Mander, Youth Development Officer for the East Region, gave the students advice on how to plan a social action. The students then began to think about the volunteering they would like to do this year. Ideas included; befriending older people in nursing homes and paired reading with local primary schools. Ally Conlon (Vice Activities Officer) from UCD spoke about being a young person in a 3rd level Conference. Anna, a student

from St Joseph of Cluny Killiney closed the gathering by reading a reflection on the Good Samaritan.

### 5th October, Sunshine House

Nine schools attended the Get Together in Sunshine House. Students from Loreto College Swords started the gathering by reading the opening reflection and lighting the SVP candle. This was followed by some activities to help the attendees get to know each other. Students from St Aidan's, Whitehall gave a presentation to the other students on the 'Origins & Work of SVP'.

Tricia Kielthy, Acting Head of Social Justice and Policy, spoke to the attendees about social justice issues in Ireland today. Students from Loreto Balbriggan gave a presentation on the work of their Young SVP Conference. The students then began planning their social action ideas, these included an awareness raising campaign about mental health, a party for local older people and fundraising for homeless services. Elizabeth from St Mary's Arklow concluded the day by reading the closing reflection. Mary Ita Niall (North County) thanked everyone who attended and asked the students to remember the words of Margaret Meade who said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has".

We asked the young people and teachers for some feedback on the Get Togethers and this is what they had to say:

- "I learned what I could do to help SVP."
- "It was very informative and enjoyable. It helped give out SVP committee more ideas for the future."
- "The day was very interesting and informative. This will be a help to our action projects and volunteering work."
- "The day was lovely because I got a lot of information."
- "I really enjoyed today... I enjoyed meeting and talking to new people. I also found out a lot about SVP and enjoyed giving my presentation with my classmates."
- "I really enjoyed the day. I thought the friendship games were very good, as it made everyone much more comfortable with each other."
- "Good, insightful, thought provoking, helpful with planning."
- "I had a very good day because it was fun to get to meet new people that I probably wouldn't meet if I didn't come. I learned a lot of things I didn't know about SVP."



- "Very enjoyable day. Great way for students to interact with other schools. Found the group work very useful, getting them into mixed groups worked really well."
- "Very interesting and informative, it was good that it was very inclusive of everyone and it was a great social event."
- "Very good day. Interactive and inspiring with practical emphasis, leaving the audience inspired to raise awareness among their peers and take action to make a difference."

A big thank you to everyone who made these events possible - students, teachers, SVP Members and staff. A special thank you to Dominican College Sion Hill, Sunshine

House and North County Area Council for hosting the Get Togethers. Thank you to the schools who attended: Mount Anville Secondary School, Dominican College Sion Hill, Ballinteer Community School, St Joseph of Cluny Killiney, St Mary's Holy Faith Glasnevin, Rosmini Community School, Colaiste Íosagáin, St Paul's College Raheny, St Aidan's CBS Whitehall, Ardgillan Community College, Coláiste Ghlór na Mara, Loreto Balbriggan, Loreto Swords, Balbriggan Community College, St Joseph's CBS Fairview and St Mary's College Arklow.

# Young SVP Social Justice Conference – Knock Shrine



There was a large gathering of over 300 secondary school students from schools across the West Region – Mayo, Galway and Roscommon at our Young SVP Social Justice Conference which was held in Knock Shrine on Thursday 14th September last. The conference formally launched The Young SVP Schools Programme in the West region. Helen Ralph and Paddy Daly, Youth Development Officers for the West Region, were the main organisers of the event with the support and assistance of regional SVP staff and volunteers, along with members of the youth development team.

It was the day after the Junior Cert results so it was with some apprehension that we set up the venue in the Rest & Care centre in Knock. We had decided on a Round Table format in which students would be seated at tables with a guest to facilitate. There were four main speakers each of whom would give input for 10 to 15 minutes and this would be followed by a table discussion and feedback session. Around the edges of the hall we

set up a variety of interactive displays for students to browse before the start and at break times. These displays reflected the themes of our conference which were addressed the by four invited guests, which were:

- Homelessness – Fr. Peter McVerry
- Environment – Dr. Cara Augustenbourg
- Community – Mr John Lonergan
- Lets get going - Joanne O Riordan

After our opening prayer, Michael McCann SVP Regional President formally welcomed all our guests and introduced to our first speaker Fr. Peter McVerry. Everyone settled quickly into their seats anxious to hear Fr. Peter speak. His talk set a tone for the rest of the day, it was inspiring, searching, challenging and full of insight and wisdom. I attempted to take some notes during his talk but found that I could write every word such was its importance. A few moments stood out, including:





“Homelessness, what can I do?”

“We all have the power to acknowledge someone who may be homeless and begging on the street with a greeting or a “how are you?” even if we may not be in position to help.”

He addressed at some length the issue of drug addiction and stated that for many people he encounters taking drugs is not a matter of getting a buzz or an act of mere curiosity but is more often than not because they want to forget about their past, to blot out a memory of abuse or neglect and drugs do achieve that.

Next up, Dr. Cara Agustenbourg who is head of Friends of the Earth, gave a very insightful talk on what our future might look like in a post Carbon World. A circular economy rather than a consumerist economy will come into existence where we share consumerist goods such as our electric cars, gardening tools, etc. and this will all happen very quickly over the next 20 years.

After lunch John Lonergan took to the stage with his inspiring presence and delivery. He aptly chose to reference the Mayo football team and upcoming All Ireland Final; how sport makes us proud of where we come from and how each player takes to the field as a result of the voluntary effort of so many in their home communities. Everyone should consider giving at least 1 hour a week in a voluntary capacity to make their community a better place to live in.

The final speaker of the day was Joanne O Riordan and it is fair to say that she stole the show and stole people’s hearts. She is inspiring, funny, witty, and humble, all rolled up on one beautiful person. Students waited back in the hall long after closing to get a photo with Joanne. She sent us home on a high, inspired; indeed it was a moment which I felt privileged to be part of. Thanks Joanne!

Thanks to all our wonderful guests, to Knock Rest and Care Centre staff and all SVP Members and Volunteers who made the day possible.

Paddy Daly & Helen Ralph  
SVP West Region



A note from Becca Gallagher – National Youth Development Coordinator

It was great to see so many students and schools represented at this exciting event which officially launched the Young SVP programme in the West region. The students who attended the day have now returned to their schools as Young SVP ambassadors, they go with a greater awareness of the issues discussed and with some fantastic ideas for how to get more involved in social action projects and activities over the coming year. They will be supported through the year by their Youth Development Officers, Helen and Paddy – who we must all commend on organising such a novel and creative event.

Congratulations to all involved and I look forward to hearing about the continued work and involvement of our new Young SVP ambassadors throughout this year and for many years to come.

No matter where you are in the country, if you know of a group interested in getting involved with the programme please contact your regional Youth Development Officer or email [youth@svp.ie](mailto:youth@svp.ie) for more information.



# Thoughts of a Reinstated Conference

*By Eamonn Drayne  
Lisburn Conference*



Lisburn Conference in Co. Antrim had been on the go for many years with the same limited number of conference members who were doing all the work. The Members weren't getting any younger and the needs and demands of the area weren't getting any less, so eventually, after many, many years of hard work and devotion, the remaining four Members of the Conference could carry on no longer and the Conference folded.

When asked why didn't they stand up at the pulpit and ask for new members, they said they "...didn't want to make a fuss..." - they were too busy getting on with assisting those in need.

The end result is that the Lisburn Conference was closed for 18 months. During this period, the needs of the people of the Lisburn area were kindly and without fuss covered by people from adjoining Conferences. The work of the SVP carried on.

But there was a gap and some people wanted to do something about it. Thanks to the proactivity of Damian French and Mary Logue, feelers were put out to gauge the level of support from local people who would be interested in becoming involved. The response was very positive and in a very short period of time a group was re-instigated in May 2017.

Once the necessary training was obtained, the Conference started to meet on a regular basis and after the appropriate probationary period had passed, the Conference started to carry out visitations.

There are currently eight active members. All but one of us is new to SVP. There is a good mix of male and female members who all bring different skills to the group. Some are strong in finance, some in administration, some have an excellent knowledge of benefits (this is invaluable as there are a lot of potential benefits out there, but they are not only complex but also seem to be constantly changing), one had experience of many years of participation in an adjoining conference, and this prior knowledge has been very useful.

The common theme is that all have an inner desire to assist those in need in their locality. At the same time, sometimes the issues discussed can be distressing, or the clients encountered can be difficult, so it is extremely fortuitous that the Lisburn group support each other, are honest with each other but also have a laugh along the way.

Camaraderie isn't essential, but it greatly helps. Open and honest discussion in a friendly environment where people aren't scared to ask seemingly stupid questions or to challenge someone else (in a respectful manner) leads to healthy interaction and ultimately better decision making.

Being part of a new group has its advantages and disadvantages.

We have a lot of learning to do but we are all learning together - there is no 'hierarchy of knowledge'.

We have all quickly learned to appreciate the fact that every case is unique. It is important to try and not to have any pre-conceived opinions before visiting. Also, we shouldn't try to do too much for a client. We may be able to make a difference, but we cannot always guarantee a happy ending.

Already it is easy to see how you could get very emotionally involved with people's issues and circumstances. This is fraught with difficulty and something that should be avoided. Do what you can, but appreciate that you can only do so much.

We shouldn't be afraid to ask for assistance, whether it is from another Conference Member or from Regional Office - there are plenty of people out there with a lot of experience who are only too willing to help.

We as a Conference need to maximise fund raising because, the more money we collect, the more people we can support. The weekly church collection happens without fail, but we need to do more. The local schools have been contacted and they are going to actively support us at the key time of Christmas, even some that we didn't think would be natural supporters of SVP, so that is great. We are also working closely with another local charity to the mutual benefit of both, an example of the much sought after 'win win' outcome. Potential revenue from the recycling of clothes is currently being investigated. Other avenues for income generation have been and will continue to be explored.

There are a lot of people with a lot of issues out there. SVP can't transform people's lives, but we can make a difference.

It has been a privilege to be involved for the short time that I have been in SVP. Long may it continue.



## St Vincent de Paul calls for more support on Poverty Eradication Day

Lack of devolved government in NI detrimental to supporting those in need locally

St Vincent de Paul (SVP) marked Poverty Eradication Day on 17 October by calling for more support to help the local organisation assist those in desperate need within communities across Northern Ireland. With no devolved government currently in place, SVP is noticing a marked increase in those seeking its support, which could be the result of a lack of advocacy at legislative level.

Brendan O'Neill, Regional President for SVP, comments: "Some people in Northern Ireland are facing the depths of poverty every day and, due to the political situation, there are no opportunities for groups to campaign on their behalf at governmental level.

"We have seen an increase in families and individuals contacting SVP asking for help with the basic necessities since this time last year. 31% of those we have supported in the last year have needed help with food, 21% needed assistance with fuel and 16% required household goods, such as chairs to sit on or a table from which to feed their families.

"Many of those whom we support are unemployed single parents living alone in rented accommodation, surviving on basic benefits. In some cases they have to choose between heating their home for their children and feeding them; a choice no one should have to make.

"Our network of volunteers makes hundreds of visits per week to families and individuals, offering a shoulder to lean on and a helping hand, where possible. What they see can be shocking and is leading to raised levels of frustration as, SVP believes, there should be activists proactively speaking up for those in need and, indeed, a platform from which to do so."

With changes to the way in which benefits have been paid already introduced in Limavady that will be rolled out to the rest of Northern Ireland, the lack of an active devolved govern-

ment acting on behalf of local people is becoming even more ostensible.

Brendan continues: "With the introduction of Universal Credit, we will evolve and adapt to continue to fulfil the vital role that we play in providing support to those in need within local communities, as we initially did when the scheme was introduced in Limavady. However, our network of volunteers is becoming even more stretched as increasing numbers of people are calling for our assistance.

"As an organisation, through our Conferences (groups), we work with those in need, irrespective of creed, ethnic or social backgrounds, health, gender or political opinions, in local areas. This includes paying weekly visits to people as well as carrying out a wide range of activities and support across the province, such as crèches, breakfast clubs and the management of 32 Vincent's shops.

"We have 1800 volunteers currently supporting our work and sadly, with limited resources and a lack of government backing our work, there is a limit to the number of people that can be helped. SVP does what we can, when we can and we will continue to make a difference to whomever we can help."

"Our hope for Poverty Eradication Day 2017 is that governmental stability can return soon, which can offer us opportunities to speak on behalf of those in desperate need who are, currently, without a voice that can engender any positive change."

To find out more about St Vincent de Paul NI, please email call 028 9035 1561 or email [info@svpni.co.uk](mailto:info@svpni.co.uk).



# Wild Ozzie's garden blooms at Ozanam

*Aly Mc Neill*  
*Landscape Designer*

We started the garden at Ozanam House, Green Street, Wexford last April and the wee garden is now reaching completion. The field of weeds behind the men's hostel has now been transformed into a beautiful eclectic, tranquil, peaceful little place, even though it was practically a derelict site. The little green spot on the hill always had a very special ambience, we could feel it, and we really knew something special would be born.

Anyway through blood, sweat, tears and blisters the phoenix did rise from the ashes: Wild Ozzies was born, named after a bald eagle named Ozzie. Ozzie was badly injured in Florida, he was taken to hospital to be rehabilitated for a few months, and then when he was on the mend he was released. The men's hostel is an emergency accommodation offering men in need security, stability and most importantly giving them a home until such time they find a more permanent solution. We felt Wild Ozzies was very apt.

St Vincent de Paul Conference and management at Ozanam House had a steadfast belief in the building of the garden. We had good vision and they never said no to any requests made for materials etc. The management gave us great freedom to build this garden which is full of magic.

We knew we wanted a garden that offered the men at the hostel and the staff a place of sanctuary; we believe we have certainly achieved that.

Thank you to the Service Users for all their hard work. To Vincent Kennedy for his kindness and support. To all the gentlemen from the warm project.

It was with all this help and goodwill that our garden blossomed.



## Claudia Friel - Transition Year SVP Volunteer



The subject of my Junior Cert CSPE Action Project was our local SVP shop, in Dungloe, County Donegal. I enjoyed it so much that I applied to work in the shop, on a voluntary basis, for my TY work experience. I really liked that the job entailed an extensive involvement with my local community, and was thrilled when they agreed to take me on board.

The position involved input into a wide range of different activities; customer service, pricing, operating a till, cleaning, etc. It was an ex-

tremely interesting and useful introduction to the world of work. And it introduced me to an awesome organisation that does an important job in giving assistance to people in need - which was a great bonus!

I attended a couple of SVP training days. I found them extremely useful, in that they dealt with various aspects of customer service, and also found them interesting, in their discussion of the history of the SVP and its role in our society.

I worked at the shop every Wednesday for the duration of the school year, and occasionally during the holidays. I know that in many cases across the country the TY work experience is completed over blocks of several weeks at a time. Personally, I preferred stretching it out over a longer period - to me it felt more substantial, and the accumulation of experience over a longer period was very rewarding.

I got to know many of the customers well, and it helped that they knew that I'd be there on Wednesdays. The shop always has a relaxed and convivial atmosphere, and is an interesting and friendly focal point for many in the town.

I would highly recommend voluntary work at the SVP shop as TY work experience. I've had comments to the effect that all the customer service experience will be useful to me. Maybe it will, but that's not how I look back on the experience. It was great to play a small part in such an ongoing communal effort that's much bigger than any of the individuals involved - that, and we had plenty of craic.

## Cake Sale



Meabh Mearns (right) and her friends Aoibhinn and Cuan De Buitlear decided to have a cake-sale for SVP with the proceeds going to St. Bernadette's Conference. Noel Boyce - Area President South West - Crumlin. The amount collected from the cake sale was €151.70.

## St Attractas Conference



A recent pilgrimage to Knock Shrine, celebrating 400 Years of Vicentian Charism. Members of St Attracta Conference Meadowbrook Dundrum, Dublin. L-R Dolores McGillian, Michael Wall, Katherine Reilly

## Portaferry man appointed as President of North St Vincent de Paul



Portaferry resident Brendan O'Neill has been elected as Regional President for the Society of St Vincent de Paul in its Northern Region.

This is a volunteer role in which Brendan will have responsibility for the Society's 1850 volunteers, 70 paid staff and 32 shops in Northern Ireland.

Brendan commented: "Our role is one of service to those in need and that need has increased year on year and will continue to do so, particularly with the advent of the Universal Credit benefit system. "Now that the Christmas period is approaching we expect demands for our services to rocket, as they do every year at this time. Our volunteers will give selflessly to ensure that the families who contact us can have toys and food for their children on Christmas morning that they perhaps wouldn't have had without our intervention."

Brendan continued: "On behalf of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, a huge thank you goes out to the general public who support us and we ask for their continued support, particularly at this time. We can't do what we do without you."

Anyone interested in supporting St Vincent de Paul should contact the regional office on 028 9035 1561.

## Vincent's Shop official opening in Mullingar

SVP in Mullingar have just officially opened its new Vincent's shop at Friars Mill Road, Mullingar. This new unit is trading in addition to a furniture and bric-a-brac shop at Bishop Gate Street. SVP have been trading in Mullingar for over 30 years.

Dermot McGilloway, National Retail Development Manager said "I'd like to congratulate the members and volunteers of St Margaret's Conference, Area President John Burke, Conference President Seamus Mimmagh, Shop Manager Alison Scally, shop staff, the shop volunteers, Regional Retail Manager, Peter Johnson and the North East and Midlands Region for having the vision, energy and commitment to open one of our finest shops to date. This is a fantastic addition to the retailing landscape in Mullingar."

The shop was officially opened by Mick Foster of Foster and Allen and blessed by Fr. Paul Crosby. The shop will trade from 10am to 5pm from Monday to Friday and 10am to 1pm on Saturday and offers a fantastic selection of good as new products to meet every budget.



## Area Gathering and Social Evening Mid Cork



On Wednesday 20th September the Mid County Cork Area President Mr Paddy O'Flynn had an area gathering for Members with a special emphasis on long service presentation of medals and certificates.

Once SVP business was concluded and information related to those attending the meeting Paddy then introduced a long serving Member, Mr Sean O'Leary from St Colman's Conference in Macroom. Sean has been a Member for 42 years and gave a wonderful history lesson on how the Mid County Cork Area became established.

St Colman Conference Macroom was founded in 1938 having being left the proceeds of the sale of a house by a man named Con Lynch who was a retired RIC Officer in the town. The house was left to Canon Barrett who set up a Conference with local people, JM Fitzgerald- Conference President, Dan Murphy- Conference Treasurer and Paddy Desmond Conference Secretary. Maureen O'Leary joined in 1974 and was the 1st woman Member.

Sean O'Leary joined in 1976 and was elected Conference President in 1987. On his election he realised the extent of the area he covered which was under North Cork but covered an area from the County Bounds (Cork/Kerry boarder) to Beal na Blath, Rylane to Dripsey and Gouganne Barra to Ballyvourney. Sean began to look at setting up new Conferences in the area and from there a number of new conference came in to being. The following conferences were established, St Gobnait Bal-

*Presentation of medals and certificates for years of service (10 to 40 years) in Mid Cork, presented by South West Regional President at Castle Hotel, Macroom*

*Sean O'Leary – St Colmans Macroom gave a wonderful account of how the mid-county area came about. St Colman's Macroom was founded in 1937, it was then under North Cork Area*

lyvourney was set up by Sean O Cheillachair & Nell Kelleher, Naomh Ronan Ballygeary was set up by Sean O'Laoire & Maire Dineen and St Mary's Kilmurray was set up with the help of Sile Ni Buchualla (RIP). St Olan's Aghabullaouge/Coachford was set up some years later.

To complete the setting up of a new area Blessed Virgin Bandon were asked to join by the then Regional President of Cork Council Mr Jack Barriscale and Mr Dick Griffin was the Area President of North Cork. Mr R.J. Dowling who had been the Conference President of Blessed Virgin Bandon became an honorary life long President and Mr Gerry Holland became the President Blessed Virgin Bandon.

Members enjoyed a cuppa and a chat before the Regional President Mr Christy Lynch presented long service medals and certificates to Members of Mid Cork.



## Mid-West Regional Members Day



Members from all over the Mid-West Region gathered at the Cistercian College, Roscrea, for Regional Members' Day on September 16th last. The focus of the day was on reflection of the ethos and renewal of spirits in order to further the quality of our work on behalf of the Society in the Region. Following a warm welcome from Mary O'Sullivan, Area President for North Tipperary and the opening reflection by Fr. Tom Corbett, John Lupton, Regional President, in his opening address focused on the Visitation journey and reminded Members that the Society exists for the needy not the worthy. He spoke of the challenge that exists for Members to journey to where the needy are at, which is not merely where they live. He called on Members to journey 'far beyond the bricks and mortar to places of hopelessness and despair; to places of anxiety and worry, to places that are not on the satnav -- fortified by the Ethos' of the Society of St Vincent de Paul which integrates prayer and reflection with positive action.

Teresa Ryan, Area President for East Limerick, prompted Members to reflect on their motivation when first they joined the Society suggesting that the majority joined to do some good, to give something back and to empathise and journey with those going through challenging times in their lives. She spoke of the value of the work carried out by Members every day, week and month of the year and the commitment of Members to the Society – in some instances for in excess of 40 years.

Very ably aided by Celine Martin, National Member Support Manager and Brendan Hennessy from Social Justice, Members engaged in breakout sessions where they were afforded the opportunity to share experiences, practice and differences in approach. The focus of the sessions was on the value of listening, understanding and assessing needs, considering how decisions are reached at Conference meetings, the dichotomy of the visit versus the voucher and Members skills, qualities and attitudes.

Following lunch Celine Martin led the Members in a session around self-care and reflection. The National President, Kieran Stafford addressed the Members thanking them for their work and commitment and expressing his delight that his first Regional Members Day since becoming National President was in his own Region. Pat Carroll, Regional Vice President facilitated an open forum during which Members raised matters not raised during the day. The day closed with Mass in the College Chapel celebrated that the Regional Spiritual Advisor Fr. Tom Corbett.

The work of the Regional Members Day 2017 signals the commencement of a journey to support the Membership in achieving quality visitation and a heightened understanding of need and how best this can be assessed. Through the Area structures the Regional Council now plans to have representatives visit all Conferences in the Region to engage in further reflection on what it means to be a Vincentian and how to integrate Ethos into every aspect of the work.

## Veolia Employees volunteer to perform a facelift in the Mid-West Regional Office

The Mid-West Regional Office – Ozanam House, Hartstonge Street in Limerick has recently undergone a facelift aided in no small way by staff of Veolia who contacted us to offer their services for a day in September. As part of Veolia's contribution to volunteerism and corporate responsibility, four staff were released for the day and came equipped with tools and materials to paint two rooms, one of which is used as a doctor's surgery for the Homeless. The Veolia Team had completed the job and transformed the rooms within hours. It was a real pleasure dealing with the staff of this Company and it is hoped that this will become an annual event.



*Pictured left to right are the four Veolia Employees who carried out the work: Thomas Russel, Glenn Bain, Michael Tuohy and Nicola Walshe.*



*“Autumn is a second spring  
where every leaf is a flower”.*

– Albert Camus

# In Tribute

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

### **Áine Forrest**

#### **Our Lady Queen of Peace Conference, Merrion Road, Dublin**

Our Lady of Peace Conference, Merrion Road, Dublin has lost another valued member, Áine Forrest who died on 22nd June 2017.

Áine was the Conference Secretary for many years. She is now in heaven with her beloved late sister Thecla. Áine was a popular member of the Conference both with volunteers and families visited and always had a smile on her face.

The families she visited over the years remember her fondly and we have never heard a bad word said about her. She was always optimistic and a glass half full person.

She will be sadly missed by the Conference but also her parents, Lawrence and Anne and her brothers Mark, John and Michael.

May she rest in peace.

### **Mrs Maureen Higgins**

#### **Conference of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Limerick**

Robert Murphy, an SVP stalwart for almost 60 years, sadly Mrs Maureen Higgins, of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Conference, Raheen, Limerick is sadly missed by her SVP friends. She was an example of the Vincentian Ethos, kind, caring, compassionate, understanding, generous and always willing to help those who needed.

May she rest in peace.

### **Frank O'Meara**

#### **St Peter & Paul Conference, Ennis**

The Society in Ennis lost its longest serving and most dedicated member with the recent death of Frank O'Meara.

Frank passed away unexpectedly at University Hospital Limerick on 23rd September 2017 at the age of 85. He had been a member of SVP for over 50 years.

Frank was a Dublin man but spent the last 45 years living in Quin, Co. Clare, a few miles from Ennis. An architect by profession he was also an accomplished artist.

He was a very religious man, a daily communicant who made no apologies for living his life strictly in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels.

Frank was a member of St Peter & Paul Conference, Ennis from the time he arrived in Clare 45 years ago. He attended the Conference meeting every Monday night and did family visitation during the week with his good friend Martin Frawley. He continued this right up to the time of his death.

Frank is survived by his sister, Sr. Margaret Mary in England, stepsister Anick in the USA and many cousins.

Although advanced in years Frank was young at heart and was a great conversationalist. He will be hugely missed by a great number of people whose lives he touched and who can be privileged to be numbered among his friends.

Ar dheis De go raibh a anam dilis.

### **Charlie O'Donnell**

The members of the St Columba, Omagh Conference in Co Tyrone, are deeply saddened and shocked at the sudden death of their Vincentian brother Charlie O'Donnell, who died on the 16th September 2017. He showed all of us by his warmth how to have faith and love. Charlie always answered the call when asked by SVP.

From Chair, Una and all his fellow members.



# REGIONAL OFFICES

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