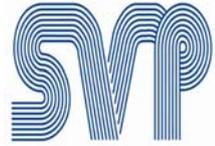


A Fixed Star



NEWSLETTER FROM THE SVP SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLICY COMMITTEE
Spring 2013

At the beginning of the year it is usually nice to foresee some hope for the coming months. While we cannot leave last year without acknowledging the worsening financial situation and strain for many households, there are some hopeful themes which we should bring with us into the New Year. As a Christian charity SVP is delighted with the solidarity shown by the public with our work and with those people we assist. The generosity of the public with their time, talents and resources gives the Society of St. Vincent de Paul great heart and trust for the future. Solidarity and generosity are best demonstrated with compassion, a compassion that our own SVP members and staff bring to their everyday work. The Society will continue to espouse solidarity, generosity and compassion and it is our hope, as the National Social Justice and Policy Committee of the SVP, to bring and encourage those values through our social policy work.

SVP in top three of 'force for social change'

The Society was voted as the second greatest force for social change in Ireland in a survey by *Social Entrepreneurs Ireland*. Coming between the GAA and former President Mary McAleese the Society's work as both a charity and community organisation were identified with what 'Irish people are most proud of'. The GAA's sporting and cultural impact in every parish in Ireland led them to top honours with the 'bridge-building' work of the former president being acknowledged as her individual contribution. Political life and the health system scored highly in the 'least proud of in Ireland' section of the survey while NGO's and Charities were described as 'the best performing sector of Irish Society'. A significant aspect of this survey, however, is the finding that Irish people believe that individuals and communities are most responsible for social change – *an encouraging message for us all!*

Catholic Organisations Call for Social Justice

Seven Catholic organisations working in the field of social justice, nationally and globally, have come together to appeal for a change of direction in Government policy, in and beyond Budget 2013. Drawing on their collective experience they highlighted the wide range of evidence that demonstrates the extremely damaging impact of the austerity policies pursued over the past few years. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, cuts in health, education and social services, reductions in social welfare payments, and increases in taxes and charges have had a devastating impact on the ability of many people in Ireland to maintain an acceptable standard of living and to gain access to needed services. The consequences of austerity measures have not been limited to Ireland, however, as the achievements of recent years in addressing global poverty are threatened by cuts to Overseas Development Aid. Meanwhile, the groups argue, for those sections of Irish society that remain better off, the economic crisis has had a proportionately less significant impact. The participating organisations are: *Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference; Council for Research and Development of the Irish Episcopal Conference; Crosscare; Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice; Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Trócaire; Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.*

Communions and Confirmations

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is also working presently with the Catholic Bishops on the issue of Communion and Confirmation costs. The costs of participating in the sacraments have become an

increasing concern as expensive festivities become either a barrier or an enormous debt for households. While not wishing to deny families the tradition of marking these milestones for children, the Society is looking for examples and case-studies of practical solutions that Conferences, schools and communities have used to overcome the practice of families over-spending for the sacraments. Please contact Brendan Hennessy at 021-4270444 or Brendan@sypcork.ie with examples.

Health Services, Medical Cards and Home-Help Hours

The Society is further concerned about the level of Health Service rationing and the consequent impact on vulnerable households dependent on the public health system. The Society has opportunities through quarterly meetings with the Department of Health to bring issues to the attention of policy-makers. Recently SVP highlighted the difficulties experienced by people obtaining medical cards. SVP wishes to gather information on other health cuts faced by the public and in particular the process for reviewing home-help hours.

The Department of Health and HSE has outlined the following process for reviewing home help and home care supports:

- No ones hours should be taken away without a full assessment of their case.
- No one should be informed of a decision by voicemail. Direct contact is vital. Only in exceptional situations should this be carried out by letter
- A clear mechanism is to be put in place for the review of individual decisions. A designated individual is responsible for ensuring that such reviews are carried out in as timely a manner as possible.
- An escalation process to a senior manager is to be in place so that cases can be properly reviewed

Anyone with examples of such cuts please contact Audry Deane at audry@svp.ie or 01-8386990.