



Society of St Vincent de Paul



Vincetian News

Yearbook 2020

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St Vincent de Paul



The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) was established in Ireland in 1844. It is the largest voluntary charitable organisation in Ireland. Our focus is on a practical approach to dealing with poverty, alleviating its effects on individuals and families through working primarily in person-to-person contact by a unique system of Home Visitation and seeking to achieve social justice and equality of opportunity for all citizens.

The Society promotes community self-sufficiency, enabling people to help themselves. Any assistance offered by the Society is given in a non-judgemental spirit, based on the needs of the individual or family seeking help.

The Society respects the dignity of those who contact us, offering assistance and advice when sought, maintaining their dignity while assisting them towards long-term self-sufficiency in a relationship of friendship, trust and confidentiality.

Our Mission and Ethos

SVP is a Christian voluntary organisation, working with people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. We are involved in a diverse range of activities characterised by:



Support and friendship

Through person-to-person contact, we are committed to respecting the dignity of those we assist and fostering self-respect. We assure confidentiality at all times and endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship.



Promoting self-sufficiency

It is not enough to promote short-term material support. Those we assist are also helped to achieve self-sufficiency in the longer term and the sense of self-worth this provides. When problems are beyond our competence we enlist the support of specialised help.



Working for Social Justice

We are committed to identifying the root cause of poverty and social exclusion and, in solidarity with poor and disadvantaged people, to advocate and work for the changes required to create a more just and caring society.



SVP Services



Home Visits



Homeless Services + Other Centres



Education Support



Resource Centres



Youth Programmes + Services



Budget Counselling



Social Justice Advocacy



Food Distribution



Community Development Services



Young SVP Youth Programmes



Twinning Programmes

How SVP Responds



Home Visits



Online



Services and Resources Centres



Phone

How SVP Helps

186

Conferences across Northern Ireland

1,800
members

Who SVP Helps

20,000
people
in 2020

SVP Charity Shops

33 across Northern Ireland

65 staff

500 volunteers

SVP Expenditure
in 2019

£2,976,000



Spiritual Reflection by Fr Perry Gildea C.M.

We are living in a confused and confusing world, with many voices clamouring for different agendas to solve their problems. We should be listening for a voice that offers a solution to our problem. That is the problem faced by the whole population and not just of our area or country but the whole human family. How can the human family survive the coronavirus? While we wait, as Vincentians we must engage with the problem of those who suffer. As members of SVP, we have precedent and example. Both Frederic Ozanam and St Vincent struggled with plagues or epidemics locally as severe as our present pandemic.

In a letter to his mother dated 26 May 1832, Frederic wrote; "Cholera has spread horrendously in Paris, within a fortnight it has struck 3,075 people, causing the death of 1,200. Yesterday, 717 new cases were reported, and carts were seen in the streets with five, 10 or 12 coffins". This is similar to the worst daily totals at the height of the pandemic in our own country. In the same letter he also describes the response of his colleagues and the populace

in general. "Collections are being held everywhere for those suffering from cholera, for orphans etc, no one can refuse, in conscience, we join in enthusiastically, without thinking about it and so the purse empties, but at least this money is not being wasted; it will come back one day".

In 1835 when Ozanam was at home with his mother in Lyon, to one of his friends he writes; "the fear of cholera has frozen hearts...we are isolated...no eating with friends or walks in the country". To another friend; "we are in constant danger from cholera here. Already self-sacrifice and flight are both in evidence, the people are crying out in the face of the epidemic."

While Lyon was under the threat of the cholera epidemic there was a twofold response. False news led to rioting and violence on the one hand and faith and true devotion led to a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière on a hill above the city. The prayers of the several thousand were heard and the dreaded cholera did not affect the city.

Later there was a second severe outbreak of cholera in Paris in 1849. On this occasion the Society, having grown from its early days, could offer more help. Ozanam was able to marshal 40 volunteers to assist victims who could not be taken to hospital. Such was their example and enthusiasm, the original 40 volunteers soon became 112. These put their own lives at risk to help the most needy and abandoned. It should offer both comfort and inspiration to the Society today to know that Ozanam struggled with similar conditions to those created by our current pandemic.

Our President General has commented; "Charity cannot stop: the poor, the homeless, the unemployed and the refugees are there waiting for the friendly hand of SVP, all over the planet. We must reinvent ways in which our

Conferences, special works and Councils operate, serving in the hope that God will protect us and free us from this pandemic, with faith", Renato Lima de Oliveira.

St Vincent directing works to respond to similar epidemics also insisted on prayer.

Prayer:

Dear Lord and Father, as Vincentians we are dedicated to doing your work to help those in need around the world. Please protect all Vincentians from communicable diseases in our home visits and in the many other forms of service we do in your name. Please, protect those now afflicted with coronavirus and help this global pandemic to speedily pass. For this we humbly pray.

We leave the last word to Ozanam; "Life is a school where God teaches Christians: in this school there are some tough, difficult years, with little time for recreation, much weariness, harsh lessons whose meaning is difficult to grasp. But you know too that the Teacher is good, that the lessons are only going to make us better and me perfect creatures." (Letter to his wife, 27 July 1844)



Introduction by National President, Rose McGowan

A year of crisis but we must look to the future

The past 12 months have been a time that I know most people wish to forget.

The litany of difficulties kept growing as the year went on. Apart from the deaths and illness from the virus, there was a lack of contact with loved ones for long periods, many people feeling lonely and isolated, thousands more unemployed, the closure of hundreds of family businesses, families struggling with home schooling and more people struggling to pay bills.



As an organisation, SVP was not immune to the effects and restrictions introduced as a result of the pandemic. When COVID-19 hit the country, the safety of our members and the people we visit had to be our first priority.

Consequently we followed Government guidelines and suspended Home Visitations throughout the country and arranged support in other ways.

As a result, help was provided through telephone and online contact with food, vouchers or other needs delivered by post, or dropped off by those volunteers who were still in a position to do so.

This was a major decision, as Home Visitation is the core element of the Society's work.

Quality visitation is paramount – the key objective of the Society is to be out there among people, not just with material help, but with respect, love and admiration. Our visits – listening – sharing – supporting (financially and with advice) are the priceless Vincentian gifts we offer on our visitation.

Also, as a result of COVID-19, our finances have been stretched. The enforced closure of the 234 Vincent's shops for a number of months and the cessation of church gate collections created great difficulty for the Society.

One positive of the past 12 months has been the sense of community that has been shown time and time again, organisations coming together, isolated people and older neighbours being supported by their neighbours. We heard numerous stories of such generosity.

We are now moving towards the light and my hope is that such generosity of spirit may long continue. It is vital within the Society that we look after each other as well as those we support.

It is extremely important that we are aware of each other's needs as we work for a common good.

In December last I wrote to members, volunteers and staff to thank them on behalf of myself and my National Management Council colleagues for what you have done for the Society during 2020 under very difficult circumstances.

I also said at the time that members and volunteers who took a step back to ensure the health and safety of themselves and those they would have been supporting directly are to be commended for taking what was a brave decision.

Those sentiments are still alive with me and deserve repeating.

If you are reading this as a member who took that step back last year we hope to see you resuming an active role in the Society in the coming months as we move towards and return to a more stable situation.

While the loss of visitation opportunities left a big gap in the quality of the service we could provide, we look forward to the time we can resume in a safe manner.

The roll-out of vaccinations is speeding up as I write, particularly in Northern Ireland. With it brings renewed hope that what we consider normal living returns and we can as SVP members, volunteers and staff resume with renewed vigour and commitment to supporting those who need our help.

Welcome by Regional President, Mary Waide

Welcome to our first SVP Vincentian News Yearbook. I hope you enjoy reading this publication and find it informative.

In the previous 12 months the world has changed beyond recognition. Families have been devastated by separation and bereavement and we have all felt the fear and isolation caused by COVID-19.

We have been faced with situations out of our control but it is important to reflect on the history of our Society, the foundations of which were built up on by members who faced diverse challenges.

Frederic Ozanam founded The Society in Paris in 1833, in a period of major social upheaval and poverty. Eleven years later in 1844 The Society was formed in Ireland and faced the challenges of mass starvation as a result of The Famine.

Over the years St Vincent de Paul members have assisted those in need through a civil war, The Troubles and economic recessions.

The Society has been a constant support to the vulnerable and the COVID-19 pandemic has presented limitations in visitation, which is at the heart of our work.

Many people who would never have needed assistance are requesting help and calls have dramatically increased.

Loved ones have been lost and livelihoods have disappeared. Conference members have been resilient and dedicated in reaching out and finding new ways to deal with requests.

Relationships have been forged with other organisations. We are particularly grateful to members of the GAA who stepped



in with such generosity of spirit at the height of the lockdown.

Local Councils have been extremely generous with hampers and grants. Our work was recognised by the Department for Communities in their allocation of substantial funding.

I want to express heartfelt gratitude to our members for their diligence and dedication in accounting for and the distribution of vouchers, hampers and whatever was needed.

We are indebted to Regional Manager, Pauline Brown, and her loyal staff who worked throughout the year and went above and beyond the call of duty to enable us to continue with our work.

Conferences and Areas have embraced technology in Zoom meetings. We look forward to meeting up face to face again but retaining our new skills.

I feel honoured to have been elected as Regional President at this difficult time when my fellow Vincentians are carrying on the works of and preserving the legacy of Frederic Ozanam and St Vincent de Paul.

Thank you and God bless you.

Meet the St Vincent de Paul Regional Board

Mary Waide, Regional President

Regional President Mary Waide has been a member of SVP Blessed Virgin Conference in Ballymena for 15 years. She has had the privilege and experience of working in a very large vibrant, active Conference with dedicated, committed members. On joining, she felt the warmth of the spirit of the Vincentian Family, which is so important in our work. Mary believes everyone goes into a meeting as equals. There is no hierarchy in SVP as everyone simply has different responsibilities.

Patrick Friel, Regional Treasurer

Currently Regional Treasurer, Patrick joined SVP after attending an inaugural meeting in the new Christ the King Chapel in Strathroy, Omagh, which was opened in 1979 to serve a large new housing estate nearby. An old dormant Conference was resurrected in the parish of Knockmoyle and Patrick is still a member of that Conference. He has been President and Treasurer and is currently Area President in Omagh Area where there are 8 Conferences and two successful shops. Patrick also acted as Regional President during 2020.

Henry O'Loan, Regional Vice President

Henry joined St Mary's Glenravel, on 1 January 2007 and became President in January 2014. He was subsequently elected as Area President for Mid Antrim in December 2017. He is also interested in adult faith development having joined the Adult Faith Development Pathways programme in Drumalis Retreat Centre in 2006 which he

found engaged him in living his faith as a true Christian. It has enabled Henry to be a better visible sign of Christ and to be able to bear witness to his boundless love.

Anne Irwin, Regional Vice President

A friend invited Anne to become a volunteer of her local Conference 18 years ago. She realised there was a level of poverty that she hadn't been aware of, prior to becoming a volunteer and felt good giving something back to society by spending a couple of hours a week visiting those in need while providing food, electricity, coal etc. Before becoming Area President in 2019. Anne was Treasurer and originally had responsibility for 10 Visitation Conferences. Anne keeps in regular contact with Conference Presidents via phone, face to face and Zoom meetings.

Anne McLarnon, Regional Secretary

Just before she retired in 2015, Anne joined SVP. She wanted to help as she was aware of hardships many face from her previous work and chose SVP because of its Christian ethos. Early in 2017, Anne was invited to be Secretary of the Area Council, which was a great learning experience. In November 2017, she agreed to stand for election as Area President and, as there was no competition, was elected! North Down Ards is a very active area with 6 Visitation Conferences making it easier to keep in touch. The Conferences are always busy and the shops in Kircubbin are busy, generating a great sense of Community in the town and an area hub for people dropping in to browse and chat.

Fr Perry, Spiritual Advisor

Fr Perry is the Spiritual Advisor for the Region. He has a Doctorate in Moral and Pastoral Theology from the Alphonsianum in Rome and a Masters in Liturgical Studies from Notre Dame, USA. Fr Perry formerly lectured in All Hallows College, Dublin and in St Mary's College, Twickenham. He has extensive experience as a Spiritual Director and University Chaplain as well as having served as a parish priest in London. Fr Perry is a member of the Adult Faith Development team at Drumalis, developing and delivering programmes in collaboration with St Mary's University College, Belfast.

Brendan McKernan, Regional Retail Representative, Chair of Regional Retail Committee

Currently Area President for Armagh and Craigavon Area, Brendan has been a member of the St Patrick's Keady Conference for 13 years. Brendan has worked in retail for a significant part of his life, starting work in his local supermarket aged 14. He has also worked in Special Education and Fundraising. Brendan currently works in an administration and fundraising role in a Parish and is delighted to have been appointed as the Retail Chair. He is looking forward to meeting members across the Region in the coming years.

Peter McVeigh, Twinning and Prisons

A member of SVP for over 40 years, Peter has responsibility for the Regional Prison Conferences. He represents the Region at the National Twinning Committee and has participated at Regional Board and Council for the past 10 years.

Meet St Vincent de Paul Regional Staff

Pauline Brown, Regional Manager

T: 028 9075 0150

E: pauline.brown@svpni.co.uk

Pauline manages the Regional staff team and supports the Regional President, Board and Council. She is responsible, along with the Regional Board, for the strategic management of the Region including, people, finances, property and projects. Pauline also supports and provides member guidance and development. She is responsible for media, networking, lobbying and the development of external relationships.

Colm Crummy, Regional Accountant & Treasurer Support

T: 028 9075 0155

E: colm.crummey@svpni.co.uk

Colm supports the Regional Manager, Regional Treasurer and Head of Finance & Shared Services. He is responsible for regional office accounting and payroll. Colm prepares budgets, financial analysis and forecasts and he reports to the Regional Board and Council on all regional balances. Colm assists in capital projects, property administration and ensures legal compliance in line with charity regulations.

Ciaran Liggett, Special Works & Treasurer Support Officer

T: 028 9075 0156

E: agresso.support@svpni.co.uk

Ciaran is responsible for Treasurer Training and provides Agresso support to all Treasurers across the Region. He also processes all annual financial returns and quarterly bank balances and account information providing a report to the Regional Treasurer. Ciaran administers the regional Oil Stamps Scheme and manages Gift Aid, credit card donations, Blue Envelopes and all fundraising campaigns.

Joann Barr, Membership Support Officer, Derry Office

T: 028 7137 7311

E: joann.barr@svpni.co.uk

Joann works with Area Presidents within the Region and provides support on a range of membership matters. These include, processing new member applications, AccessNI checks and organising training. She also supports Area Presidents in their role on quality assurance, member compliance, record keeping, and data cleansing on CRM. Recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Niamh Mulholland Youth Development Officer

T: 028 9075 0159

E: Niamh.mulholland@svpni.co.uk

Niamh promotes and supports the SVP Youth Development Programme through Young SVP

Conferences in schools. She raises awareness of the work of SVP and fosters support through the building links with schools and Conferences. Niamh provides young people with the experience of helping others, volunteering, of making a difference to someone, offering them personal and social development.

Christine Gaston, Information Support Officer, Regional Office

T: 028 9035 1561

E: info@svpni.co.uk

Thomas Reilly, Information Support Officer, Regional Office

T: 028 9035 1561

E: thomas.reilly@svpni.co.uk

The Information Support Officers manage the referrals on a daily basis and provide administrative and technical support to members. They are responsible for the CRM database within the Region. Both Christine and Thomas provide support to the Region as a whole and manage the stocks and supplies for Regional Office.

Anne Crossan
Regional Retail Manager

T: 028 9075 0153
E: anne.crossan@svpni.co.uk

Anne is responsible for business development for retail. She delivers on the National Retail Strategy and oversees operations of all shops within the Region. Anne manages the teams of shop staff and volunteers. She is also responsible for stock rotation, recycling and customer service and satisfaction.

Alison Edmunds,
HR Service Partner

T: 028 9075 0158
E: Alison.edmunds@svpni.co.uk

Alison provides support to managers, employees, office holders and members with any HR queries. She administers and provides full recruitment and selection advice, support and guidance. Ensuring full compliance with the SVP Recruitment and Selection policy she manages the induction programme for new employees in collaboration with line managers.



Spotlight
On Area
Presidents

Teresa Darragh,
Mid Ulster



When did you join SVP?

I joined St Anne's Kilrea in 1988

Becoming Area President

I was President and Treasurer and represented my Conference at Area Meetings. I was Area President some years ago and then resumed the role again after I retired in 2016.

Tell us a little about your Area and your role

There are nine Conferences in the Mid Ulster Area, three of which also run a shop. I am Chairperson of the Shop Committee in St Anne's and the role is interesting and enjoyable. The role of Area President has been challenging during lockdown but our Conference members have all worked hard manning helplines and giving help as requested - mainly oil and food. One Conference runs a food bank and with the help of technology, I am able to keep people well-informed via Zoom meetings.

Lockdown has been a challenge for SVP in many ways but the financial support of the public in donating to us has been outstanding, including the blue envelopes.

What do you think the future holds for SVP?

I believe the challenge for SVP will be to strive to get more members, especially young people, to join. This will ensure we have enough people to reach out to those in need of any kind in our communities so that no one is deprived of our love and attention.

Denis Gormley,
North Derry



When did you join SVP?

I joined St Patrick's Claudy in 2000 and after a break from the Society I rejoined in 2015.

Becoming Area President

Within a short time of rejoining I became Treasurer and then President. I became Area President in 2018.

Tell us a little about your Area and your role

We help people who are underprivileged and my role entails helping the eight Conferences in my area with any problems they encounter including financial and organisational. I am also responsible for the Conference in Magilligan Prison. Sadly the pandemic made Conferences feel more remote as there couldn't be any face to face contact eg Home Visitation or meetings.

What do you think the future holds for SVP?

I believe our biggest challenge is to recruit new members.

Anne Irwin,
North Antrim
North East Derry



When did you join SVP?

I joined SVP 18 years ago

Becoming Area President

I was nervous when I first joined the Society but always tried to attend as many Area Meetings as possible, as they gave me the opportunity to meet other volunteers and also gave me the chance to see and hear what was happening in other Conferences and across the Region.

I became Area President in 2019 with responsibility for 10 Visitation Conferences.

Tell us a little about your Area and your role

I keep in regular contact with Conference Presidents via phone, face to face and Zoom meetings. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was more difficult to keep in touch as many volunteers had to shield due to age and some having underlying health issues. It has been important to ensure that those in need continue to get the help they require.

What do you think the future holds for SVP?

In my view the main challenge for the Society for the future is to get younger members to volunteer as a large percentage of our current membership are in the 60's plus age group. We will also have to continue to embrace modern technology and online donation platforms as chapel numbers are declining therefore our church collections will continue to drop which, in the past, had been our main source of income.

Brendan McKernan, Armagh and Craigavon



When did you join SVP?

I became a member of SVP 13 years ago as I wanted to support those in my community and further afield who were in poverty.

Becoming Area President

I became Area President in March 2020 and my role involves serving the Conferences within my area, offering any assistance I can particularly in relation to funding, membership issues and training.

Tell us a little about your Area and your role

I represent 13 Conferences and the main work includes Home Visitation, managing seven shops, working with Prison, a childcare facility and two resource centres.

During lockdown we have been fortunate enough to have two area gatherings which enabled members to catch up and have light hearted conversation which, for many, took us away from the doom and gloom of life with COVID-19.

It has been wonderful also to see Craigavon and Keady achieve such wonderful shop improvements which was thanks to the Conference and dedication of the shop teams.

During the pandemic our Conferences engaged with other community and statutory groups which was beneficial, in particular the local Council and Department for Communities projects.

Conference members have furthered their IT skills and many are now able to use Zoom to communicate. The members have challenged themselves and moved out of their comfort zones to ensure that the needs of the poor are met. I think during the pandemic members came together much more, they looked out for each other as well as those in need. Members have also seen the benefit of keeping records on CRM which allowed us to receive significant government funding.

A number of members achieved a Mental Health First Aid Qualification so that they are better equipped to support people with mental illness.

What do you think the future holds for SVP?

As we look to the future beyond the pandemic, I think that when the current funding dries up, Conferences will be left with trying to support many people who will have lost jobs and those who have wiped out their savings. Fundraising will be a challenge. We will also have many people with mental health issues and other illnesses that have been unable to receive the treatment needed during the pandemic and they will need support. I think a lot of older people will be worried about socialising and at the same time will be extremely lonely, so we will have to try to offer opportunities for the elderly to meet again in a safe environment where they can feel comfortable.

I would like to add my thanks to all the members for their dedication and commitment to the Society and those living in poverty. They may not be recognised now in any great way, however I am certain that in years to come history will remember the Vincentian members who came to the assistance of the needy despite the risks to themselves. In my humble opinion they followed closely the footsteps and message of our founders.

Newry



Your Kind Heart Brings Hope 'Behind Closed Doors' in Newry

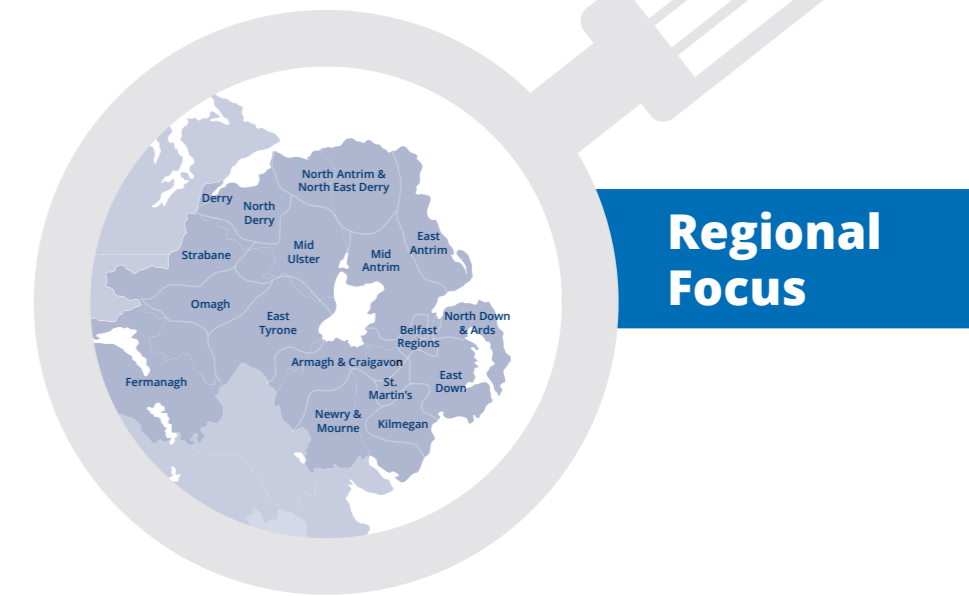
In March 2020, coronavirus shut all our front doors. Along with it, SVP's drop-in centre in Newry had to close its doors for the first time in a decade. But **Mario Siotto**, for whom the centre is a labour of love, wasn't about to let the virus stop your generosity from reaching the most vulnerable in the community.

You might have seen the little 'Vincent's' shop front in Mill Street. It's a beautiful forest green façade with beveled gold lettering and speaks of SVP's long history of hope in the small community here.

But what you may not know is that above the shop sits another very special place...

A place which has been bringing great comfort and relief to the weary for more than a decade. And at a time when the North is experiencing record-numbers of homelessness, the centre acts as a beacon of light for Newry's lost and lonely souls.

When Mario speaks about the drop-in centre, his eyes light up like a boy on Christmas morning. And even



Regional Focus

though its doors have been forced closed by coronavirus, Mario is working away behind locked doors even today – determined that the generosity shown in these dark and difficult days will not go to waste.

Little Parcels of Hope

With swift help and generous donations from local businesses, Mario and his team of volunteers have been quick to adapt the drop-in centre's services to meet the new 'normal' stretching out ahead.



In the first two weeks of lockdown, kind gifts helped send over 100 food and care packages to the most vulnerable homeless people in Newry, holed-up in B&Bs and temporary homes.

Since January, Mario has distributed more than 2,000 food parcels, helping more than 250 households to put food on their tables.

As well as essential supplies, a little of the light generous hearts showed since this crisis began is enclosed with every parcel.

Not-Forgotten Friends

Mario keeps a close watch over the most fragile people in Newry. He's worried about the people he's come to know through the centre. That's why he's grateful for the generosity of the local community and tells homeless friends that while they may be out of sight right now...they are not forgotten.

A Labour of Love

"I have a picture of Saint Vincent de Paul and it says "Doing charity is not a difficult task". "I take this to heart", says Mario. "I am proud to carry the bread basket and the soup kettle with a smile, just as St Vincent de Paul did on the streets of Paris 400 years ago. That simple but fundamental message will always be engraved in my heart."

As always, the crisis and its long-term impacts are likely to hit the very poorest the hardest. "I really hope that we're going to be okay", says Mario, who is expecting the drop-in centre will see many new faces in the aftermath of coronavirus.

Whatever the future holds, with the warmth of Mario's welcome and the generous hearts of those who donate, SVP will be in Newry to meet it when it comes.

St Bernadette's Conference, Belfast

No Man Is An Island, Entire Of Itself

The past year has been unprecedented in the challenges it has posed for all those of us who work in the statutory and voluntary organisations and who have been struggling to continue to provide a service to those in need of them.

Our Conference was no different, as we were challenged to be more creative in our work in managing to do what was needed whilst at the same time keeping ourselves and those we serve safe, whilst adhering at all times to the regulations.

It was clear to us from an early stage in the crisis, that need was escalating for our assistance at a time when our donations were falling due to the cessation of attendance at weekly Masses and an inability to fundraise. Indeed, we quickly became aware that families were struggling to manage to meet the increased costs due to the closure of schools, in particular heating and food. We were blessed to find ourselves being offered support by others who came to our assistance at such an extraordinary time. One became aware of the truth of John Donne's writing; "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent a part of the main". This has never been more poignantly revealed than during the current pandemic. In rule 6.7 we are told "Vincentians may contact state agencies and other more specialised charitable organisations, agencies or institutions that could assist their work.....".



Representatives from St Bernadette's SVP receiving a donation from Bredagh GAA and Rosario Football Club.

Whilst being careful at all times to protect the confidentiality of the people we serve, we were delighted to engage in collaborative work with a number of partners, including the Parish Primary School, Our Lady's and St Patrick's Grammar School Knock, Bredagh GAA, Rosario Football Club, SOS food bus programme, local food banks and the joint SVP and Salvation Army Family Appeal. Where sharing of information was necessary, we obtained the explicit consent of our families/individuals to pass on contact details to enable them to avail of the service being offered; this included food bank deliveries and meal deliveries from the SOS bus.

In addition to provision of food hampers throughout the summer months, Bredagh GAA and Rosario Football Club in the aftermath of Christmas, donated £7,500 of Centra

Vouchers to our Conference. We were able to share these with several other local Conferences including Holy Rosary, St Malachy's, and St Matthew's. As well as enabling families to purchase food they were also able to use them to top up utilities.

Our Lady and St Patrick's Grammar School community collected a phenomenal £3,055, gifts for teenagers, food items, and a huge selection of baby clothes. We donated the baby clothes to a project in North Belfast which looks after new young mothers, and we donated the food to our nearest food bank (to which we regularly refer our families).

Bredagh GAA in addition to all the earlier mentioned support facilitated collecting and delivering all the donated goods from the school and taking the food to the food bank.

Participation in the joint SVP Family Appeal with Salvation Army is an annual event and in spite of the restrictions we were able to manage this safely and ensure that none of our families lost out. Thanks to Fr Hickland, our parish priest, we were able to use the enormous parish hall to safely sort the toys whilst ensuring social distancing.

We are so grateful to all those organisations for the time, care and effort involved in enabling our Conference to continue responding to families in need. We are more than ever aware that together we make up the whole!

The old Irish proverb "Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine" ("It is in each other's shadow that people live") was never more apposite than in these strange times.

A great big thank you to all who made it possible!

Liz Kerr, President

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Drumbo

We had our last “real” meeting on 17 March 2020 and after lockdown was imposed we stayed in touch via a WhatsApp Group and actioned all our referrals by telephone, engaging with members as we needed advice/consensus on the level of assistance appropriate.

We have recommenced our weekly meetings, via Zoom, since the beginning of the year and, while it is not the same, it definitely helps maintain that sense of connectedness and collective support.

Our Conference tends not to be particularly busy – we would deal with two to three referrals per week and this did not change really until the Christmas period, when we became noticeably busier.

Ordinarily, at Christmas time, we would distribute food hampers, donated by the two primary schools in our parish, to needy families and we would also provide toy vouchers to families with children. This Christmas past, we decided not to do this on account of the logistical issues around handling and the potential risk to members, instead, we gave vouchers in lieu of hampers and also gave vouchers towards childrens toys – a total of around £2,500.

We have had no red box collections since last March but we did receive a number of very generous donations from parishioners, for which we were very grateful.

It has been very gratifying to know that we have made a difference to people during a very difficult time. One lady sent us a lovely card and said “I want to thank you so so much for all your help, empathy and kindness. Making that first phone call was one of the hardest things I had to do but it turned out to be the best decision I made for a long time.....I am forever grateful and will support you always”.

Kate McCallum, President

We are blessed in our Conference to have many long serving members. I have only been in the Society for six years but here is an example of the dedicated service provided by a number of our members:



Tony McAllister, who recently celebrated 42 years of dedicated service to SVP.

Tony McAllister	42 years
Marie Lalor	37 years
Peter Woods	36 years
Mary Corr	35 years
Frances O'Hare	35 years
Sheila Rice	21 years
Maria Graham	21 years



Immaculate Conception Conference, Newcastle



Like all the world, we were faced with making some changes in 2020 as to how we operated while still providing the same support and financial assistance to our clients.

Firstly, with no meetings we needed to communicate so we set up a Conference WhatsApp group where we chatted every day and also gave our weekly reports. As President I was fully informed of day to day requests and was able to offer 24/7 support to members, as required. The member in charge of CRM input could also see the reports and complete the required details, making us more efficient, and our secretary compiled minutes for distribution from a week of WhatsApp activity.

With visitation out of the question, using the helpline phone to assess the needs of clients became more important and, with WhatsApp, advice was at hand for

every member. Members took their turn as always on the helpline and delivery of material help to clients but could call on the assistance of others if needed with a few clicks on the phone.

Meetings were also stopped so we took to Zoom on the advice of our spiritual adviser, Sr Teresa Clancy (a young eighty something), and this gave members the opportunity to discuss policy and events within the Conference.

Revenue also had to be adapted to closed churches and then reduced congregations. We swapped red boxes for red buckets which could be left beside the exits and to help the older folk and we had a board made to hold the bucket up off the ground.

Bank standing orders were suggested to donors if possible, especially at our annual collection, which we promote and hold at the feast of St Vincent de Paul on 27 September. Thank goodness our donors sought other means to contribute and we were not left short of funds!

On advice, we applied to “Awards For All” for a grant to cover some of the cost of our “Children’s Christmas Toy Appeal” which we run during November and distribute vouchers to families in December. We were successful and received a grant of £9,700 which, with our local collection, meant we could be generous to around a 100 families (each family receiving an average of £150) as well as providing oil and food vouchers to many more clients, new and old.

We had one retirement during the year, Rita Murphy, who after 34 years of regular service decided to retire from

active duty. We also had a client who overcame his financial difficulties and was recruited as a driver for our local Vincent's Furniture Store.

The Newcastle community is full of caring people and groups and I noticed there was some overlap of help and lack of knowledge of what each group was doing. With that in mind I set up a WhatsApp group for all the local groups to join and all did indeed join in. We now have YMCA, Home Start, Sure Start. Surgery social workers, local councillors, CAP, Unit T, Newcastle Helping Hands, Parish Office, Murlough Association, MYMY, Lions, charity shops and several more all in touch with each other and combining services to help the community. This working together came into its own during the run up to Christmas allowing the groups to combine their efforts in the provision of hampers, toys, meals and food collected from the supermarkets. Going forward we hope this cooperation may grow and attract funding for the area.

From facing adversity in the beginning of 2020 the Conference grew, with each member using their particular skills, to overcome all challenges and meet all demands. We are probably stronger now and certainly more efficient with clients receiving assistance as soon as possible. We do miss Home Visitation as this brought us closer to our clients and we could witness their needs firsthand.

So far 2021 looks to be continuing on from 2020 but Immaculate Conception Conference is prepared, with God's help, for whatever comes our way. We hope to look at some problems which home schooling has identified within the poorer families and perhaps offer some assistance there too.

Brendan Downey, President



Boxing Clever for SVP Keady

Keady SVP benefited from an enthusiastic and energetic fundraiser by members of the local Sean Doran Boxing Club recently. Sixteen men and women completed an ambitious running and walking challenge over 48 hours with little sleep in between. The whole community got involved and 3,000km were covered - the equivalent of running around the coast of Ireland. The main aim of the challenge was to promote physical and mental wellbeing in the community and a presentation of £2,500 was made to SVP. The club members thanked everyone for their support of the challenge and thanked SVP Keady for the continuous and very important work in the local community.



St Joseph's Centre For The Deaf

Invitation - In this the Year of Saint Joseph given to us by Pope Francis, we will be celebrating the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Saint Joseph's Centre for the Deaf and all their work in the deaf community in October (more details to follow)

In late 2014 there were several changes implemented into the structures of Saint Joseph's when Fr Patrick Devlin was instated by the Diocese of Down and Connor to be the Chaplain to the deaf community. Fr Devlin is the parish priest in St Vincent De Paul located in Ligoniel and now splits his time working between there and St Joseph's.

He has set about implementing many new and exciting programs allowing for the future growth of the organisation and the sustainability of St Joseph's centre on the Grosvenor Road which has always been a vital hub for the deaf community.

The deaf community are some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Due to their condition, members of the community are generally more isolated from everyday normal activities and find it difficult to feel included and St Joseph's has embarked on a journey to correct this. We have implemented a full programme of activity to create a safe space allowing us to assist all members of the deaf community in meeting their Spiritual, Pastoral, Educational and the Social needs. We have consulted with the deaf community in all areas of our interactions and we feel we are now meeting the needs that they require.

On a weekly basis we are now engaging upwards of 100 individuals from the deaf community within the confines of St Joseph's Centre. As well as this programme we have part

funded and lead trips for members of the deaf community to Lourdes, Knock and in 2015 we attended the Eucharistic congress in the Philippines.

We are currently working with Jordanstown School for the Deaf in implementing a community drive to introduce a full programme of linguistics for the deaf community. One of the failings of society is that members of the deaf community are not taught to be proficient in the full use of the English language which then in turn leads them with less opportunities for employment. We are working on this and hope to create greater opportunities for all service users in this field.

We are indebted to SVP for its continued support, without your help we would be unable to undertake all of the programmes and activities that we do and we look forward with great anticipation to the future development of not only our organisation but also the continued growth of St Joseph's Centre for the Deaf.

**Father Patrick Devlin, Parish Priest,
Full-Time Chaplain to the Deaf Community**



Cover Story

Meet Eamonn Holmes

Eamonn Holmes took time out from his busy schedule to meet with Mary Waide and Pauline Brown to get a sense firsthand of the help that SVP has been providing throughout the pandemic. He also took time to answer a few questions they posed to him as well.



Eamonn Holmes meets with Pauline Brown and Mary Waide at SVP Regional Office.

What are your earliest memories of growing up in North Belfast?

Definitely the sense of community. Everyone knew their neighbours and when events happened, be they weddings or funerals, the community came together. We actually lived beside a general grocery store which sold everything from fruit and veg to fruit pastilles. When I think of it now, how amazing was that? To literally be able to go next door and buy anything needed.

What is your happiest childhood memory?

Being with my Granny Fitzsimons, my Mother's Mother. Her and I were very close and we spent a lot of time together. She would collect me from school and we would go and feed the ducks in the local park. She died when I was just five but I still think of her all the time.

What is your favourite Belfast saying?

"Away and feel your Head!" which basically means "No!"

What makes you most proud about being from Northern Ireland?

That throughout the world we are known as good mixers, good people

with a great sense of humour. That, plus the fact that we produce the best potato crisps, fizzy orange and ice cream The Planet has ever known.

When you're in London, what do you miss most about 'home'?

Everything, but especially The Sea. The smell of the sea, the little seaside towns we have, The Coast Road, The Cave Hill and my whole family circle which, believe me, is a Big Circle.

When did you first become aware of the work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul?

I've been very aware of SVP since I was a child. SVP was something there would have been collections for in school and after Mass. I always remember the little lapel stickers you got after donating.

How vital do you think the work of SVP is?

It's never been more vital. Everything seems to have stopped because of the pandemic but the needs of so many individuals and families hasn't stopped, sadly those needs have increased. I hear the stories from our volunteers and members and they are very sad indeed. Circumstances can

change for any of us and I think one of the motivating forces for SVP for all of us is "There for The Grace of God go I".

You've heard from Mary and Pauline about the impact the pandemic has had on the work of SVP in local communities across the country, what is your message to the members and volunteers as they look to the future and navigate their way out of the pandemic?

The fact that we actually have volunteers is inspiring in itself. The fact that people can be so motivated by the plight of others that they get involved to do something about it. We need those volunteers more than ever because we know that as we emerge from lockdown there will be more stories from more people about their hardships, their predicaments, their circumstances, their relationships and their health physical and mental. More people than ever before will need SVP help and SVP will need help too in terms of donations – physical and financial. For us to be there so must our volunteers. What a responsibility but also what a Privilege.



St Vincent de Paul celebrated during Feast Mass

As Members Day had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, for the first time, a mass celebrating the Feast of St Vincent de Paul was streamed live for members of SVP and parishioners who were unable to attend the service at Holy Family due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Fr Perry addressed those in attendance at a social distance and those watching online at home and spoke of how St Vincent de Paul had himself endured a plague and assured the congregation that this current situation we are living through is 'nothing new under the sun'.

Northern Regional President, Mary Waide, read St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians before the assembled worshippers received holy communion from Fr Perry, who was assisted by Deacon Brendan Dowd.

While recognising the impact that the pandemic is having on families, our young people and the prospect of people losing jobs and businesses being unsustainable, The Most Reverend Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor, took a moment to express his gratitude to the work of SVP in the North Region. He said: "I want to salute the work of the Conferences across the North Region for the great work that you do."

Mary Waide, Regional President, SVP, said: "Whilst we appreciate that our members get great benefit from attending our annual Members Day, this mass was an appropriate way for our region to come together and celebrate St Vincent de Paul virtually on the day that we would normally host our SVP NI Members Day. With the current restrictions it was decided that we would offer members the opportunity to join in the celebration of St Vincent de Paul from their own homes and it was a privilege to have Bishop Treanor present at the service."

SVP Northern Regional President Mary Waide with The Most Reverend Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor, and Fr Perry, at a mass celebrating St Vincent de Paul in Holy Family





First Minister Arlene Foster and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill launched the Christmas Family Appeal with Mary Waide, Regional President of SVP, and Major Paul Kingscott, Divisional Leader, The Salvation Army.

A Covid Christmas!

"Impossible Choices" was the theme and tone for a very different Christmas 2020.

There is no doubt that the impact of a global pandemic hit so many people very hard. Many families were on the receiving end of hardship as many had been made redundant, been furloughed, experienced delays in receiving benefits and worried about ill health. People were finding it very difficult to make a choice between providing food on the table and heating their home. For so many, Christmas was the last thing on their mind. Having to find the money to provide as normal a Christmas as possible, was stressful. The Society experienced an increase in the number of referrals of almost 70% compared to Christmas 2019, with an estimate of 4,000 people requesting our assistance during December.

Having to adapt to how we traditionally support children and families was a challenge for the Society. Government restrictions, social distancing and guidelines on health and safety meant that we could not physically collect and distribute gifts and toys. Providing vouchers, purchased through the very generous financial donations, enabled us to empower families to choose a gift, toy and buy food for their families.

Our donors came up with new and unique ways to raise money to assist us with our Christmas Appeals, ensuring that no family struggled or went without.

The Giving Tree in partnership with Belfast Central Mission and the Department for Communities, went virtual! A "just giving" page was organised and the staff from government offices around Northern Ireland, donated the price of a toy to the Appeal. In total approximately £15,300 was raised and split between both charities.

SaffronAid were very enthusiastic about coming up with a novel way to replace their shoebox appeal. Instead, a traditional Irish music event was organised from an Antrim GAA member's home shed! Sean McCorry and his family played for five hours and encouraged those "tuning in" to pledge a donation to have their favourite ballad dedicated. All in all the evening raised just over £8,000.

Translink's StuffABus, in partnership with U105 and Belfast Live, pulled out all the stops and went virtual! With an online platform, members of the public were widely encouraged to help us raise a target of £50,000. Within the first week this target was smashed.....and, an astonishing £125,200 was raised which was shared with Salvation Army as part of our Family Appeal.

SVP recognised that we needed to give our donors choice too! With churches closed, it was important that we made it easy for anyone wishing to donate. We were able to provide a user friendly online donation link on the website so that members of the public could choose which Conference or Area they wished their money to go to.

A dedicated telephone line was also set up and people could give their donation over the phone. We also initiated a Blue Envelope campaign, with inserts into the Irish News and Belfast Telegraph. These new and innovative ways enabled an increase in donations to the Region and the Appeal yielded in excess of £124,000.

Companies and business showed their ongoing support by organising virtual online donations. The Education Authority, with limited opportunities for staff and pupil get together, donated £17,000. This is now the second

There are so many other organisations and individuals who donated, too numerous to mention! Here are just a few of those who went the extra mile:

AllState NI
Belfast City Council
Chartered Accountants NI
CTR
Culturlann McAdam O Fiaich
Cyber Source
First Derivatives
Gordons Chemists
Huhtamaki
Kerry
Lagan Construction
Macron
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Northern Ireland Assembly
Northern Ireland Audit Office
PSNI
Queen's University Belfast
SONI
Tughans Solicitors
Ulster Garden Villages
Ulster Property Sales
Vaughans
Whitemountain

year they have invoked their own internal appeal, for which we are truly grateful.

We were delighted to obtain a large government grant just before Christmas. A presentation to the Department for Communities, was successful in receiving £335,000. The first of its kind within the Region, meant that we were able to reach out to even more people who had been impacted by COVID-19. We were able to provide additional support of fuel, heating, food, clothing, toiletries and white goods to those families and individuals during the months of December 2020 and January 2021.

Statutory funding was also received from a number of local Councils across the Region, including Belfast City, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon and Derry and Strabane Councils.

We are hopeful that this will put the Society in good stead for any further funding opportunities in the future so that we can help even more families who require our support.

The Society is truly grateful for all of the donations received, we cannot do our work without the financial support and generosity of the public. The impact of the difference we can make in the lives of those we help is immeasurable.

These heart-warming words were received from Louise which she sent us on Christmas Eve. She asked that we pass it on to every member, whom she described as Christmas Angels:

Christmas dinner is prepped, and thanks to you I can actually COOK the dinner because of the electricity vouchers you gave me.

The beautiful gifts for my children are waiting to be opened in a few hours.

As a mum, I will be forever grateful for the help your supporters have given me. Their generosity has made a huge difference to this wee family.

Thank you again, from the bottom of my heart.

Louise and family xo



Sophie (7) and James Waide (5) are pictured at the launch of StuffABus.

StuffABus

Speaking about StuffABus which became a virtual campaign for the first time in 2020, Chris Conway, Translink Group Chief Executive, said: "Our StuffABus Appeal has become one of our flagship annual campaigns bringing together our passengers, staff and the wider public with a common goal to support local families in need.

"Every year it's smashed targets with our 2020 campaign exceeding all expectations and raising over £125,000. StuffABus is a fantastic example of effective partnership working and what can be achieved when a passionate and dedicated team comes together.

"The campaign is a key part of our commitment to corporate responsibility and delivering social impact that improves lives in the communities in which we operate right across Northern Ireland.

"Last Christmas we faced the extra challenge of delivering the campaign during a pandemic but our decision to go virtual paid off. We were able to reach an even wider audience and were overwhelmed by the number of donations received. A massive thank you to everyone who has supported the Appeal over the years and to our partners Saint Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, U105 Radio and Belfast Live for making it such a success."

John Daly Lending a Hand in Lisburn

Local television personality, John Daly, contacted SVP in Lisburn and offered his help. He supplied his own time and car to help deliver Christmas hampers and vouchers to those families who were isolating or didn't have means of transport to pick up their own. And he also helped to load and carry hampers to peoples' cars as they arrived for collection. John was one of three drivers who came forward to offer help during this busy time for us. The hampers were distributed over a period of three consecutive days. John was a model volunteer who went about his business quietly and humbly in the background. We are grateful for his support.

Damian French, President of St Patrick's Conference



SVP Makes Christmas Special for Mourne Families in Need During Pandemic

Despite greatly reduced church door collections because of the pandemic, St Colman's Conference assisted over 90 Mourne households in need over the Christmas period, made possible by the generosity of so many parishioners and other organisations who assisted in the task. St Louis Grammar School held a special collection which enabled SVP to purchase gift vouchers from local shops to support local business and families in need. Pupils of St Colman's, St Columban's, Grange primary schools and Gaelscoil na mBeann decorated specially designed Christmas cards to accompany the gifts being distributed.

Newry Chamber of Commerce turned up trumps again this year donating a small mountain of toys for the children identified by SVP and the local Health Visitor team. Our partners at Cornerstone Food Bank, Kilkeel Development Association, Home-Start, and Mourne Matters joined us to ensure that food parcels, toiletries, masks, sanitisers, clothes, and other goods reached those in need. Our Conference also provided fuel stamps, electricity top-ups, recycled furniture and white goods to families beset by redundancy, unexpected bills, and welfare cuts.

Seamus Mullan, President



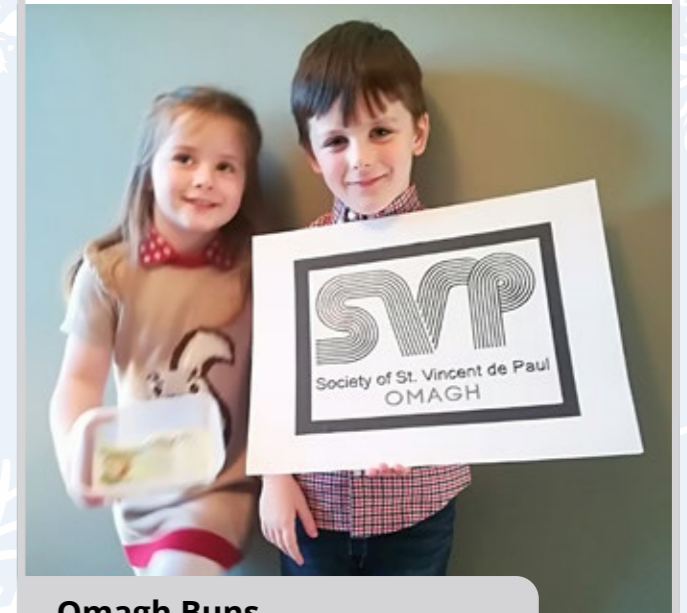
Mercy Dash Brings Joy to Sick Children

Dr Julie-Ann Maney, Consultant in Paediatric Emergency Medicine in the Emergency Department of the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children made a mercy dash to SVP Regional Office to collect toys from Pauline and Thomas a couple of days before Christmas. Speaking about the much needed donation, Dr Maney said: "Thank you on behalf of the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children Emergency Department and the children and young people we look after. We are extremely grateful to you for the toys and gifts we distributed to children who attended the hospital over Christmas. The much needed donations of toys had been reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful to SVP for stepping up and helping us make sick and injured childrens' Christmas a little brighter. Thank you to St Vincent de Paul!"



Kicking Off Christmas Appeal With Cliftonville Football Club

SVP Regional Manager, Pauline Brown, and her grandson Raighain, collected a very generous donation of £120 worth of vouchers from Cliftonville Football Club's star players, Chris Curran (Captain), Joe Gormley and Levi Ives, to help kick off the SVP Christmas Appeal. Not only did Raighain meet his local footballing heroes, he took three penalties against the goal keeper – and scored two!



Omagh Buns

After a family discussion about poverty and its impact on many children, especially during the festive season, kind hearted siblings, five year old Sam McKenna and his younger sister Ava baked some little buns and sold them at their gate on a cold, blustery, damp December morning. The generous duo then donated £50 to SVP Christmas Appeal. Subsequently this sparked off lively discussions in primary school about poverty and the role of SVP. Sam and Ava have proved you are never too young to help those in need!

Pocket Money

These thoughtful McLarnon brothers, Aodhan (11), Emmet (9) and Ronan (5), donated their pocket money to buy Smyths Toys vouchers for the SVP Christmas Appeal – thank you!



Bangor Catholic Primary Schools Show Generosity to SVP at Christmas

St Comgall's Primary School pupils were asked that rather than buy a Christmas present for their teachers if they would donate their pocket money to SVP. What a response?! As well as a healthy donation of non-perishable food, SVP representatives were presented with a cheque for £850 towards their Christmas Appeal. St Malachy's Primary School presented SVP with a magnificent 65 food hampers for distribution in the Conference catchment area.



Children from St Malachy's Primary School are joined by Carley Dempster and Principal Stephen Rafferty, presenting hampers to SVP Members Maria Hughes and Anne Coyle.



Ballymoney

SVP Ballymoney President, Willie Fisher, met with pupils and staff from Our Lady of Lourdes Ballymoney who arranged a Christmas hamper raffle raising £900 for the Ballymoney Conference.

Corran Integrated Primary School

SVP has a long tradition with Corran Integrated Primary School in partnership with Belfast Central Mission and Paddy Stewart, member from Our Lady of Lourdes, Whitehead is pictured picking up some gifts from the school on behalf of SVP.



St Teresa's Primary School

St Teresa's Primary School on Belfast's Glen Road made SVP the focus of their 2020 Christmas Appeal raising almost £4000. Peter McAlister, President of St Teresa of Avila Conference Belfast, addressed the school assembly via Zoom on behalf of SVP to thank them for their efforts and the amazing amount raised by Jane McKee and the pupils.



St Patrick's Church Coleraine

St Patrick's Church Coleraine made a presentation of £1275 cash and £130 of gift vouchers to the joint SVP and The Salvation Army Family Appeal. Pictured are Caroline Kimber of St Patrick's Church, Anne Irwin, SVP Area President for North Antrim and North East Derry, Alison Wallace of St Patrick's Church and Jane Marie and Tim Cook of The Salvation Army.

St Endas GAA

SVP volunteers Michael Donnelly and Eamon Campbell met with representatives from St Endas GAA Omagh who presented St Columba's Conference Omagh with £2,500 worth of vouchers to distribute for oil, coal blocks, food, meals and clothing.



Eire Og Football Club, Craigavon

Members of Eire Og Football Club Craigavon organised donations of food, toys and money, raising over £2,000 for SVP Christmas Appeal in their local area. Anita McGeown of St Anthony's Conference Craigavon is pictured accepting the generous donation on behalf of SVP.



Mat McGlynn

SVP members Martin Woodhead and Michael Donnelly are pictured receiving a cheque for £420 from Mat McGlynn who donated the proceeds from a CD he made at Christmas to SVP.



The Knights of St Columbanus

Representatives of SVP received a cheque for £10,000 from The Knights of St Columbanus for seven Conferences in North and West Belfast. Although 2020 was very demanding for many it was particularly difficult for those who lost relatives and for those facing financial difficulties. As SVP traditionally provides great assistance with food supplies and finance to help many through the Christmas season, The Knights of St Columbanus in Belfast and Carryduff recognised that this vital work, normally supported through weekly church door collections and from food hampers supplied by schools, was greatly reduced and so they responded with this tremendous fundraising effort.



Hillmount Garden Centre

Thank you to Robin and Alan Mercer who celebrated Hillmount Garden Centre's 80th anniversary, with a donation of 500 toys to SVP for the Christmas Family Appeal. Hillmount staff Wayne Little and Terence Morrison are pictured making the delivery to SVP Regional Office.





Seaforde Scrap Metals Ltd

Thank you to John Killen, owner of Seaforde Scrap Metals Ltd, who has donated a very generous £1920 to SVP in celebration of the business being 100 years old. Pictured are Evan Gilmore and Eddie McMullan of Seaforde Scrap Metals presenting the donation to Gerard McShane from SVP.

Gordons Chemists

Paddy Donnelly, long serving member of St Colmcille's Ballyhackamore, has been instrumental in building the relationship between SVP and Gordons Chemists. The chemist chain recently made a donation of £1,000 to SVP, presented by Director Robert Gordon to Brian McLoughlin of St Comcille's SVP. SVP collection boxes are also placed at till points in their stores around Northern Ireland, enabling customers to donate to SVP when shopping.



Huhtamaki Foodservice Delta

Thank you to staff of Huhtamaki Foodservice Delta who voted to donate to the Family Appeal from an internal initiative celebrating two years accident free on their Belfast site. Pictured are Niamh Flannery and Christopher McMahon with Pauline Brown of SVP and Paul Wright from The Salvation Army.



Education Authority

The Lord Mayor of Belfast Alderman Frank McCoubrey, joined Elizabeth Quinn of SVP and Keira Wood of The Salvation Army to launch the Education Authority's online giving campaign for the Christmas Family Appeal with Robbie McGreevy and Paul Burns of Education Authority. More than £17,000 was raised from an original target of £10,000 and SVP is extremely grateful for this wonderfully generous donation.



Macron

Colm Crummy of SVP accepts a generous donation of £1,500 from Macron - thank you!



The Difference SVP Makes

SVP has been a Godsend. With no local family support and the children all at home during lockdown I was really struggling to cover the cost of food and heating. You helped me out with oil stamps and a big food parcel as well as a Christmas gift pack containing a perfume set and shoes for my teenage daughters. I used the Asda voucher to buy our Christmas dinner. Thank you so much. We'd be stuck without SVP.

A big thank you for the oil stamps and toys, toiletries, books and games for the children. Really made Christmas for us at a difficult time when we were all stuck at home with the pandemic.

I wanted to write to you. To thank you for all your help in what you have done for me and my family. It's beyond words, how much gratitude I have towards you. Not just in everything you have done for me but for others too. I was at a low point last year in my life, five months pregnant with a one year old, moving during a pandemic with everything closed and shut I literally had nothing. The community was helpful, but SVP was so amazing in helping me get on my feet in a new home and with a new baby on the way. So I just wanted to thank every worker in regards to helping me and my family, I will be forever grateful and will never forget this. There truly are some amazing people out there, no matter the circumstances you all helped me. I cannot thank you enough. Keep doing what you are doing because you workers of SVP truly do make the world feel like a better place and that it is okay to ask for help.

You got us out of a hole at Christmas. My husband is out of work and we had spent all our money moving to our new home. When we arrived, we discovered there was no oil in the tank. You kindly gave us fuel stamps and shoes and games for our daughter. Can't thank you enough.

Tony didn't know where to turn when his wife died and originally contacted SVP to get help paying for the funeral. This is a major cost for anyone, but for someone living solely on a state pension, it is a huge burden. SVP volunteers used kind contributions, such as yours, to help

Tony with the funeral costs. What also stands out about Tony is that he has no one there for him but the volunteers.

Loneliness is often the biggest problem faced by older people living alone. This is especially true during winter and Christmas time. SVP volunteers are trying to encourage him to become less isolated.

"I have gotten the greatest comfort from SVP," says Tony, "not only by the financial help, but by the fact that I have someone to talk to and someone who has shown that they actually care." Your kindness, felt through the caring work of our volunteers, means we can be there with so much more than just material support.

Prison Visitation

We have three Prison Conferences in the Region, each trying to fulfil the Gospel of St Matthew "For I was in prison and you visited me".

Our Prison Conferences of St Joseph Maghaberry, St Dismas Magilligan and St Pio Belfast serve the prisons of Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood respectively.

The work in our Conferences vary, however we all make direct contact with prison residents who wish to have a conversation, some people just want to chat to someone as they may not have any visitors. Others may need some support or request support for their families.

Here is a flavour of the work done in the three Prisons

A typical visit to Maghaberry Prison involves members going in pairs to each house in the prison.

If we are visiting the older houses then we make ourselves known to the senior officer in each wing who informs the residents that we are on the wing. The cells in the older blocks are very small, roughly about 8' x 8', most with a set of bunk beds and a toilet, the rooms are too small for us to visit in and so we use a designated interview room.

The new houses have much more facilities, rooms are slightly larger and some are single room. These wings have some exercise equipment, a pool table and a selection of board games. In these houses we are able to sit in the communal areas where residents can sit down and chat in groups, in a very informal way.

Our role is similar to that of Home Visitation, we chat to people, some just want to chat about life in general, what's happening in the world etc. Some request help, typically this is help with funds for their tuck shop so they can buy toiletry items or phone credit to contact loved ones.

We also get a number of requests for clothing items which we source and deliver to the prison.

Some may ask us to help their families, there is the normal increase for this support at times like Christmas.

Those requesting funds for themselves are typically given between £5 and £10 whereas for those requesting support for their families, we contact the local Conference for help. Prison residents also work to repay the fund that we contribute, many make artefacts such as bird boxes, feeders and planters, which we are able to sell in our local Vincent's Shops with the funds raised going back into the SVP Prisoner Fund.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 we have not been able to visit the residents, members however continue to provide clothing and we assist with the packaging of this clothing which is then quarantined before being distributed.

A large portion of those living in prisons have arrived there due to addiction, poor education or mental health issues. It is for us to assist them in the small way that we can and to hope that those in authority can give them the opportunity and support needed so that they can return to society and be able to continue with a better life.

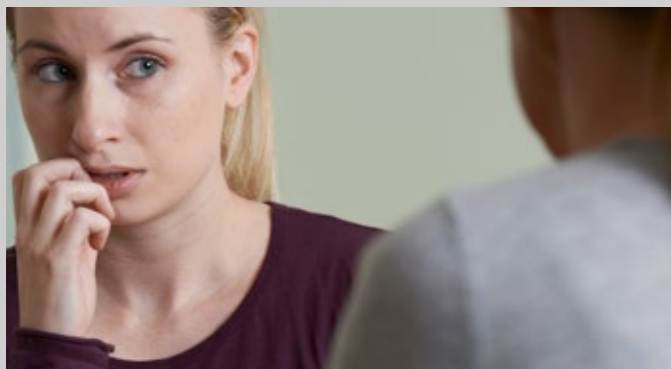
Peter McVeigh

Hydebank Wood, Belfast

Hydebank Wood is situated in a pretty, landscaped, wooded area on the outskirts of south Belfast. Ash House is home to approx 60-70 females of all ages and is the only female prison in Northern Ireland. The other section, which is divided into houses known as Cedar, Willow and Beech, is home to all detained young male offenders in Northern Ireland aged between 18 and 24.

In light of a number of heavily critical reports focussing on various failings, particularly the numbers reoffending, the prison was given a complete overhaul and in 2015 and rebranded itself as a College. It is now known as Hydebank Wood College with its occupants referred to as students. As research has shown the importance of skills and education in the reduction of reoffending, Hydebank Wood College is the first institution of its kind to try a focused approach to education.

Drugs, mental health problems and self-harm are still huge issues but attempts are being made to address



these. In fact, with the huge push on education, the daily engagement of students in educational projects, is seemingly going some way to alleviate these problems. Some students have even reached third level and many have attained vocational qualifications which sets them up for employment on their release.

Apart from education, the campus provides a variety of "normalising" features including the pleasant external environment, the enhanced landings and the cabin cafe in which the students produce meals. There is also a walk in tuck shop. A horticultural unit has been set up to teach gardening and farming and some of the students help care for the many sheep, goats and dogs in the onsite farm. Chickens produce the eggs for consumption and are sold to the public in the Barn shop in the public carpark.

Animal therapy, with the College's two chocolate Labradors, has been credited with having a massive impact on the mental health of some of Hydebank's troubled women.

Murray House, a newly built non-secure facility, provides opportunities for a small number of female students, coming towards the end of a long sentence, to experience a gradual but supported reintegration back into the community.

Despite all the attempted improvements at the facility, there is still a well- documented shortage of staff due to sickness and other various reasons and while students may avail of many of the above activities, lack of staff often results in long lock ups causing isolation and low mood among students.

In 2004 the need for volunteers in Hydebank became apparent. St Pio's Conference was established and for the last 17 years, SVP members have been visiting. However this has been curtailed during the pandemic but hopefully

things will return to normal soon and we can recommence our routine.

Visitation normally takes place in pairs, two males visit the male students and two females visit the ladies every Sunday. Volunteers walk freely through the landings and engage with those we encounter, introducing ourselves to any new committals.

Prison officers identify people who have requested a visit though we have many regular students who look forward to our call every week and with whom we have established a good relationship. We sit and chat to people in their cells or in the day room and sometimes spend time chatting with a group together in an informal way. This often initiates requests for individual visitations which we follow up on.

We have an account within the prison and are able to put money on a student's account. Prison wardens give us access to the accounts so that we can verify the need, to ensure that our funds are spent wisely and handled with the utmost care, prudence and generosity. We help out with clothing as necessary, handing in clothes through the usual prison system. We never bring anything in or take anything out except in the authorised manner through the scanning dept. We buy new clothes at times but mostly buy from Vincent's where we can purchase good quality second hand clothes at a reasonable cost.

We take referrals for families in need from both the chaplains and the students and pass on the details to those SVP members responsible in the community. At Christmas we provide presents for each student and also at Easter.

Most of our work consists of merely listening and befriending those inside. Prison is a place filled with

mistrust. As SVP volunteers we try to build up trust with those we visit by exercising confidentiality.

Some SVP members from parish Conferences are involved in visiting people who have no relatives or friends coming to see them. These visits are usually set up through referral by the chaplains and the visits take place in the relatives visiting area under the usual rules with dates and times sent out by the prison authorities.

Volunteers are very well known within the prison and are trusted fully never having been scanned or checked in any way throughout our 17 years visiting. We are regularly invited to prison functions such as Carol services and Interdenominational Church services. We have in the past attended baptisms, First Communion, weddings and other services inside and we sometimes attend the church service in Hydebank when we are in visiting on Sundays.

Prison visitation is a very worthwhile ministry and though volunteers face dealing with numerous emotions such as depression, grief, anxiety, loneliness and worry, officers and students frequently remark on how much difference a quiet chat or a listening ear can make.

And there are always the happier times when volunteers are welcomed on a Sunday with the joyous news from students of passing exams, graduating from university, getting engaged or even just a new lamb born in the college.

At present due to COVID-19 restrictions, face to face visitation with students is not permitted. However we continue to liaise with chaplains and staff to ensure the continuity of support both financially and otherwise.

Eilish Armstrong

Twinning Support

The Northern Region continues our twinned support with our Countries of Ghana and Botswana.

Ghana

- 30 million people
- Almost 15% living on less than £1.50 per day
- Average life expectancy is just 63
- Only a small portion of the eligible population can enter third level education due to financial constraints

Botswana

- 2.3 million people
- 16% of people live in poverty
- 6% who live on less than 73p per day
- Average life expectancy is 69

Our Region has been able to support those living in poverty through the work of our Conferences in Botswana and Ghana.

In Botswana our Conferences run a small care centre housing 12 Children, Little Friends Childcare, Members also carry out visitation and offer support to those in need by way of food and assistance with projects such as the guinea fowl project which allowed a disabled man and his children to be self-sufficient.

Our Region has been assisting Botswana to build a hostel. The hostel will offer visitors such as business people a room, the profits from this will sustain the families who will live in other rooms in the hostel at no cost.

In Ghana members work to support those in poverty by delivering bags of grain and maize to those living in remote areas as well as delivering hot meals to others who live in the city. Members support those with Addiction, Leprosy, those living in Witch Camps and others with education and medical support.

Like ourselves here in our Region, members in Ghana and Botswana live out the Vincentian values and attempt to ease suffering caused by poverty and social injustices.

How can the Northern Region can help our Vincentian Brothers and Sisters support those living in poverty in Ghana and Botswana?

1. Continue to support Twinning with your 2% Levy
2. Sell "Gifts of Hope" – These gifts can be bought in many of our shops, each represents a gift that can be purchased by our twinned members. Items include Solar Lamps, Water Purification Tablets and Agricultural equipment to name but a few.
3. Commit to supporting a third level student for three years at £500 per year. This will allow members in Africa to assist young people to achieve a third level education. If you feel your Conference can support this project please contact the Twinning Team at twinning@svpni.co.uk

Thank you for your ongoing support of Twinning.

Peter McVeigh, Northern Regional Twinning Chair



Families arriving at the House of Bread to receive maize.



SVP Youth Council Ghana assisting clean up project.



Vital food supplies.



Hostel project.



Completed Guinea Fowl farm.



Little Friends Childcare, Botswana.



Always Forward, Never Back

“Always Forward, Never Back”, this simple quote from Blessed Junipero Serra is something which I believe we must concentrate on as we move forward in retail. We are all aware that the last year has been a very challenging time for us all, including in the area of retail, but we cannot dwell on the negatives of the past, we simply need to move forward and look to the future because there are always brighter days to come.

As I write this, our shop volunteers and staff continue to work behind the scenes in many of our shops to create a safe space and prepare for reopening in the near future.

We will be ready! We have hand sanitising stations, COVID-19 safety protocols and of course PPE already in place. Volunteers are sifting through donations in stores to ensure that when we reopen we have the very highest quality merchandise ready for all our wonderful customers who will have missed us over the last few months. Although our shops may have been closed, many Conferences made use of the shops and continue to support those in need.

Vincent's Ormeau Road reopening with a Click and Collect service managed by Gerry Keating.



I pay tribute to the areas and Conferences such as Cookstown which provided necessary PPE to various homeless centres and hostels throughout Ireland and to the Omagh Area, Keady and Armagh shops, and many others, transforming the shop floor into food banks so that we could continue to support clients, while still maintaining the client's dignity.

This kind of work shows that while the main focus of our charity shops is to raise funds for the Society's work, they can and must also be a place where those in need of support can visit to know they can obtain affordable clothing or signposting to our Conferences.

I also congratulate our shops in Craigavon, Cushendall, Keady and Newcastle which used the lockdown period as an opportunity to give their shop a facelift and add to the service we can provide in our stores. And to Killyclogher on moving into a brand new shop unit!

Speaking about the refurbishment of Tullygally in Craigavon, Anita McGeown, President of St Anthony's Craigavon, said: "Vincent's Tullygally is the heart of our local community where people come, often daily, to pick up generously donated clothing, household items or furniture at affordable prices. Usually having a good chat as they browse. Thanks to the assistance from Regional Office and our wonderful volunteers, our newly refurbished shop reopened its doors in August 2020, for an even more pleasant shopping experience for all."

The closure of our shops through lockdown has also allowed us to experiment with alternative selling options such as our Thriftify online charity shop and more recently in line with government guidelines we began to trial a "Click and Collect" service through Facebook for our shops in Belfast, Cookstown, Cushendall, Dunmurry, Keady, Magherafelt, Newry and Portadown.

While both of these new endeavours are still in their infancy, I am hopeful that with the usual tweaks these can add to the methods of sales in the future.

So what's to come in retail?

I am delighted to say that a Retail Committee has been formed and it is our hope that we can work with members on the ground, to identify any improvements which can be made in retail and address these quickly, so that we can move forward with the progression of retail in the Region.

I would be keen to develop our SVP Vincent's brand, to ensure our customers know how SVP help in the communities we serve and so reinforce the ethos of the Society in our shops. Together we must continue to improve our shops and both Anne Crossan, Regional Retail Manager, and the Retail Committee, are happy to support shops in any way we can.

It would be wonderful to see an increase in our stores throughout the Region, so if you believe a shop would improve the SVP offering in your area then please get in touch.

We have lots to do in retail and so I invite anyone who feels they can contribute in improving and developing retail to contact me directly, after all "many hands make light work!"

There just remains for me to ask you to engage in the development in retail and to sincerely thank you and all our shop volunteers and staff for their dedicated service.

Until we meet in person, may I wish you and your families good health.

God Bless
Brendan McKernan, Regional Retail Representative

Corporate Stock Donations

Our 33 Vincent's shops are well placed to accept large donations of stock from our counterparts on the High Street. Working together with our colleagues in ROI, we have been able to distribute and sell large donations of accessories, toys and clothing in the past few years.

Corporates can be reassured that their donations can and do go to every nook and cranny in Ireland and are resold to generate much needed funds for SVP as well as providing our loyal customers the opportunity to purchase top quality items at a price they can afford.

If any corporate would like to consider donating to SVP, please contact Anne Crossan, Regional Retail Manager by email at anne.crossan@svpni.co.uk.

Corporate Volunteering Opportunities

There are plenty of volunteering opportunities within SVP shops however don't panic if you're not able to commit to a permanent post! We welcome corporate volunteers in-store and would be very excited to see how your team's skills and experience could enrich our offering.

In return, your team will see firsthand how enriching it is to work in a charity shop. Many people don't realise the environmental benefits charity shops provide. We prevent clothing etc from going to landfill and give it a second chance at being loved again. We'll not pretend it's not hard work, but the rewards outweigh that.

Who needs a gym when you work in a charity shop?

Volunteering at Vincent's

Geraldine O'Donnell, Volunteer at Vincent's Antrim Road, Belfast, tells Vincentian News why she became a Vincent's Volunteer.

Shortly after my professional retirement I was delighted to be offered an opportunity to volunteer at Vincent's on Antrim Road, Belfast. My involvement has satisfied one of my personal passions in embattling waste and the need to reduce, re-use and recycle much of what we consume. Being able to maintain contact with previous colleagues and having great fun with many new friends while being physically active is a great bonus at this phase of my life. Participating in the shop has also made me more aware of the practical needs of many people in our community, and everyone working together can ease the burden. I would strongly encourage anyone who is thinking about volunteering to join in and they will be made very welcome.



Congratulations to Vincent's Volunteers of the Season

SPRING: June Mc Ardle , Mill St, Newry	AUTUMN: Geraldine O'Donnell , Antrim Rd.
SUMMER: Denis Loughry , Cookstown	WINTER: Maureen McIlroy , Cushendall

2020

VINCENT'S
SUPPORTING THE WORK OF SVP THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

VOLUNTEERING...IT'S GOOD FOR YOU

96% of volunteers say that it makes them happier.

- BUILDS PERSONAL RESILIENCE
- REDUCES SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE
- BOOSTS SKILLS
- INCREASES SOCIAL INCLUSION
- BUILDS COMMUNITIES
- GROWS NETWORKS & FRIENDSHIPS
- GROWS SENSE OF PURPOSE
- LOWERS STRESS
- INCREASES HEALTH & WELLBEING
- PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT
- REDUCES ISOLATION & LONELINESS
- WIN/WIN RIGHT!?

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

- KNOWLEDGE**: Share your knowledge with others
- FULFILMENT**: Gain personal fulfilment
- CONFIDENCE**: Increase your confidence
- SKILLS**: Maintain and develop skills
- COMMUNITY**: Make a difference in your community
- FUN**: Have fun!

To find out more visit www.svp.ie/volunteer

LEAVE YOUR FOOTPRINT

Volunteer with Vincent's shops and OFCs. Apply at www.svp.ie/shopvolunteer

SVP Society of St Vincent de Paul

VINCENT'S SUPPORTING THE WORK OF SVP THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

SVP Society of St Vincent de Paul

OUR VOLUNTEER,
Thank You

for your help Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Vibrant Volunteers

Vincent's Volunteers are a vibrant bunch and their enthusiasm is palpable. I would just like to say a heartfelt thank you to each and every one of them for their commitment and dedication.

Anne Crossan, Regional Retail Manager

Membership

It's been over 12 months since coronavirus entered our lives and disrupted it in ways we never imagined possible. From the initial novelty of a more constrained lifestyle to the realisation that this pandemic would last for months rather than weeks, we're now starting to realise that our world has changed immeasurably.

What hasn't changed is that SVP is here to help those in need. What hasn't changed is that the values, ethos and compassion that has inspired the Society for 177 years remains undiminished. What hasn't changed is that no-one need travel the road alone.

With judgment set aside, we open our hearts to assist those who need it most. With our resolve stronger than ever, we open our ears to those who need to be heard. With resources reduced, we still find the means to help.

The Society is led by devoted volunteers, supported by dedicated staff. We have been tested and we have struggled. But we have worked together at local and national level to reaffirm the commitment of those who went before us, to offer solace to those who need it. We keep going because our concerns are the concerns of our brothers and sisters in our communities. We keep going because we have faith. Faith in mysteries beyond ourselves. Faith in each other. Faith in hope.

We pray for the lives lost in the past 12 months. We pray for those who are currently ill and we pray for their recovery. We pray for their families and friends. We pray for the front line workers and the countless selfless acts that can only be captured in our souls. We pray for each other.

And when the dust settles on this terrible storm, the Society of St Vincent de Paul will continue to walk together with our neighbours, squinting hopefully at brighter days ahead.



Michael Higgins
SVP National Member Support Manager

CRM Training

The National CRM Advisory Committee has provided an Introduction to the Conference Portal (CRM) training. If you would like to engage with the system which underpins the core activity of SVP, Home Visitation, please contact us for more information.

Induction Training via Zoom

The National Training Committee is delivering the Face to Face training via Zoom.

Two groups of trainees have already completed their Face to Face training with excellent feedback. New members should complete their online training and reserve a place for Face to Face training via Zoom.

Area Gatherings 2021

So far in 2021 a total of seven Area Councils have invited their members to take part in an Area Gathering and three more are planned.

Area Gatherings are a great opportunity for all Conference members in the Area to reconnect with each other. To discuss topics and issues that are relevant to their particular Area, especially how we are helping and assessing people during the pandemic.

The key goals of any Area Gathering is to give members an opportunity to talk, share experiences and learn from each other.

The feedback has been excellent.

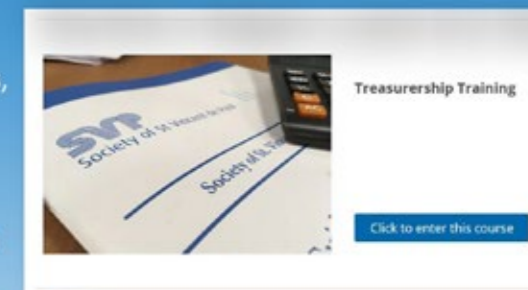


Finance

Online Treasurer Training launched

“Northern Region Leads the Way”

During March 2021 the Northern Region became the first in Ireland to roll-out the new online “Treasurership Training” module. Over 170 Treasurers from Conferences, Shops and Areas have been invited to attend the course.



Benefits of Training

It is essential that all Treasurers check their emails and take up this invite to complete the course. It covers many key topics from Governance, Controls, Policies and Procedures, through to Books of Account, Annual Returns and Agresso. Each module guides the user through the topic and ends in a quiz. You can pause, rewind and complete the course at your own pace but it lasts around three hours at one sitting.

There are also many links to documents, sites and videos, that can be accessed at any time for future reference. These are periodically updated. All participants will receive a unique Certificate upon completion of the course.

Everyone is welcome to join the training whether you are a Treasurer or not. Just drop me an email and I'll arrange an invite. If you require any further information, please leave me a message on **028 9075 0156** or drop me an email **agresso.support@svpni.co.uk**

Ciarán Liggett
Treasurer Support Officer





Protection of Children and Adults at Risk - A Shared Responsibility

Having retired from my post as Director of Children's Services, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, it wasn't long before I realised that there's only so much relaxing and chilling out one person can do.

I agreed to chair a couple of Serious Case Reviews for both the Northern and Eastern Trusts, volunteered at Marie Curie Hospice in Belfast, but it was after a conversation with a friend about the work of St Vincent de Paul that I thought that was something I would like to become involved with. I was aware of the work of the Society but have to say I didn't fully appreciate the extent and range of services and support given day and daily by members, volunteers and employees to some of the most vulnerable in our society. Often when no other support is there.

So it was as part of the Home Visiting Service in my local Conference, that I learned to fully appreciate the pressures and difficulties faced by families and individuals in the face of social and financial hardship. About a year ago I was asked if I would consider the Regional Safeguarding Officer post which had become vacant. I agreed and hope that my understanding and experience of safeguarding, in respect of both children and adults, will help me provide the guidance and support necessary to the role.

I have learned that through a network of local Conferences, Areas, Regions and professional services, SVP provides a variety of supports to potentially vulnerable groups including children, young people and adults who may be at risk or in need of protection for many different reasons. This work is fundamental

to the ethos of our Society but at times it can be both challenging and stressful. It can challenge our personal beliefs and understanding but it can also be some of the most rewarding work we undertake. It is important therefore, that all those carrying out the work of the Society, who find themselves in a situation where there is a need to think about and give consideration to issues of safety and protection, that they also have confidence in what steps they need to take and feel supported in doing so.

To this end the Society has developed a number of guiding principles to underpin the work we do and clear procedures to support us in carrying it out. These are contained within our Policy and Procedures document - SVP Recognising and Reporting Welfare and Protection Concerns about Children or Adults at Risk or in Need of Protection October 2018. These guiding principles and procedures apply to all members, non member volunteers, Conference and Committees, employees, students on placement and any others undertaking the work of SVP. In essence it commits us to providing a safe, healthy and inclusive environment for all, but also ensures that the best interests of vulnerable groups, including children, availing of our services, are paramount.

Safe practice means ensuring that all SVP staff know how to recognise a protection concern. This does not mean they are responsible for deciding whether abuse has occurred or a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm - that is a task for the professional agencies (Social Services and the PSNI) - but they do have a responsibility to be alert to signs and indicators of risk or abuse and to act upon them. It could of course emerge that a person's initial observations or information is not as first thought and there is another

explanation. But we cannot afford to take the chance of not reporting initial concerns.

In those situations, the concern should be recorded and contact made with the identified Designated Liaison Person - the Regional Safeguarding Officer. This will give an opportunity to discuss the situation, provide reassurance and support and agree the way forward. Many people feel anxious about contacting Social Services or the PSNI, or about passing information to anyone else. This is natural but shouldn't hold them back from taking action. It is for this reason that there is a mechanism in place which provides an opportunity to discuss concerns confidentially, within the Society in the first instance, and why there are agreed protocols in place to manage the interface with Statutory Agencies.

Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone. It is to this end that establishing a Regional Safeguarding Committee is planned. This will provide a forum to address safeguarding issues on an ongoing basis across the Society. It will provide a framework within which Safeguarding sits, including the policies and procedures within which we operate, and it will consider and address ongoing training needs as required. The work and function of the Committee will be kept under review and it is hoped that this will be a representative group of individuals, across all the services we provide.

Ultimately it should support the work of the Society in always acting in the best interests of those with whom we are involved, ensuring their needs are met and that they are safe and protected from any form of abuse or neglect.

Rosemary Simpson, Regional Safeguarding Officer
Tel 07739 085703



Niamh Mulholland tells Vincentian News how she became SVP Youth Development Officer

Give a brief outline of your career to date.

I began my career at a small independent homeless hostel in Portadown, working as a support worker. This role focused on offering an holistic approach in supporting the residents back into permanent accommodation and into the community. I then worked in two schools as a Classroom Assistant before completing my PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) and taking a teaching position at Larne Grammar School. I taught English Language and English Literature for two years across the age ranges. Before embarking on my current role at St Vincent De Paul I worked for a year and a half as a Training and Development Practitioner with Advice NI. Within this role I delivered training to those working within the Advice sector and also to community groups, mainly around the topics of welfare reform and financial wellbeing.

What was your favourite subject at school?

I loved English at school and still do. I always loved to read and analyse different aspects of literature and consider the hidden meanings in the works. I was influenced by my teachers and after leaving Lismore Comprehensive School, I studied English Literature at The University of Liverpool.

Did you go on to further/higher education, if so what did you study and where?

I studied for a degree in English Literature and Language at University of Liverpool and five years later I went to Queen's University Belfast to complete a PGCE. I also have Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) Level 5 Certificate in Learning and Development.

How did you get into your area of work?

I am passionate about charity and education. With my experience of working in the voluntary sector and as a teacher I consider my current role at SVP as a marrying together of my passions. I previously worked with adults in education but I missed working with young people that I enjoyed when working as a teacher so this role at SVP is such a unique opportunity to essentially do my perfect job.

Is this what you always wanted to do?

I didn't realise when I was setting out at the beginning of my career that this was what I wanted to do as I wasn't aware that this particular role existed, however it is actually my dream role. I wasn't necessarily happy with the academic structure of teaching but I loved working in the voluntary sector so I began to search for the perfect role without realising that I would actually find a role which would combine my loves.

Were there any particular essential qualifications or experience needed?

I would say that desirable criteria like having a degree in teaching would be helpful for the role or a background in working with young people in an education environment. An understanding of both the voluntary and education sectors is also important. I have found too that having an understanding of the groups and the challenges faced in society today is critical because young people can easily sense how committed adults are and wouldn't engage as fully if I couldn't guide them in their work and believe in what they are hoping to achieve.

Are there alternative routes into the job?

It's such a unique role that I think that there are many different routes into the job but there are certain skills that are really essential. For example, I would say that having a skillset to engage with young people in the workshops I host or encouraging them to participate in group work is important so someone with experience in working with young people or someone who has experience as a trainer or handling group interactions may be suited to this type of job.

What are the main personal skills your job requires?

Being empathetic and caring are two of the most important personal skills required. Being socially conscious is also important and it certainly wouldn't suit someone who's jaded. Being able to gain trust from the groups I'm working with is another key attribute as the young people are responsible for helping their communities. They depend on my advice regarding thoughtful social action so it's important that I believe in them and have the necessary communication skills to read situations, personalities and the young people's moods and feelings. I also work with staff in schools so being flexible helps and being able to understand the boundaries, especially in schools where eg. resourcing is an issue or if teachers are under pressure at certain times of the school calendar and my visits may not be a priority for them.

What does a typical day entail?

There is so much variety in my job. I could be linking in with Members of SVP in the local community or with the local Conference in the area to engage young people from the local school in eg helping pack hampers or in seeking a way of engaging them in complimenting the work of SVP in the wider network. A typical day may include me visiting two schools. One could be new to the programme so I would be meeting young people to explain the programme and try and recruit volunteers to form a Young SVP group. I could be delivering a workshop to another school and tackling a topic that will inform the work they are going to carry out. Or I could be facilitating the election of roles within the

group. I book my school visits to suit the teachers and the school calendar so when I'm not visiting a school and supporting the groups I'm in my office at SVP headquarters in Belfast creating resources, planning my next session, following up with potential new schools and catching up on admin.

What are the best and most challenging aspects of the job?

The best part about my job is undoubtedly getting out and working with young people in schools across Northern Ireland. The Young SVP Programme is student led and they choose what they want to achieve from it. I love seeing their ideas and being engaged on a wide range of topics. It gives me real joy in observing their enthusiasm and helping put their ideas into action. They are dealing with real issues and know how they want to address them like caring, mental health, inequality, being self-absorbed, climate change and politics, all the topics that are impacting us on a daily basis. I work with a wide range of groups from those in high achieving grammar schools to those living in areas of social deprivation and although their approaches and priorities may be very different, they have the same keenness and seeing them taking collective action and truly having impact at a local level really inspires me.

The most challenging part of my job is trying to integrate into the school calendar which is already packed due to the nature of the school year. I try to be as flexible as possible as I'm aware teachers are constantly juggling. Sometimes I will work with youth groups in the local community if opportunities to reach the local youth in schools is proving difficult. Thankfully any of the challenges I've faced so far can be overcome.

Why is what you do important?

As a Youth Development Officer with SVP I'm giving young people the space to have a voice and the opportunity to make a difference. I believe this generation is facing some of the biggest challenges ever and they have a real sense of understanding of their social responsibility and that need to give back in their community. I am proud to be helping facilitate them in feeling like they are contributing to something in a meaningful way.

What advice would you give anyone looking to follow a similar career path?

Gain as much experience as possible eg volunteering for a local charity or working with young people in youth groups and learn from the experiences of those you are working with and also those you are supporting. Focus on what's important. Be able to listen to the next generation. I'd also say go and work somewhere different, outside of Northern Ireland.

If you weren't doing this what would you like to do?

I would definitely be running an animal sanctuary. I love all animals but dogs definitely come top of the list.

If you could go back, what is the one piece of advice you would give to yourself on your first day?

Don't be so nervous. It's not going to be as hard as you think.

Describe your ideal day off.

Lie in, nice coffee to start the day, take my dogs Bella (4) who is a Lab Springer Cross and Lola (2), a Collie Cross, out for a lovely walk. Once back home I'd curl up with a book and afterwards head out for lunch with friends or family.

**We interviewed Niamh about her role prior to the pandemic.*



Young SVP Hosts Virtual Book Club



On 3 November, Young SVP hosted a virtual Book Club at 7.00pm and organisers of the Book Club invited teenagers to come together in the safety of their own home where they were encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas around books they have read on social justice and the environment.

In this first for SVP, they were urged to be kind and non-judgemental during the discussion and debate between those attending this innovative event.

To mark the EU Day for the Eradication of Poverty, a selection of books on social justice issues with book club activities were distributed to secondary schools across Northern Ireland, together with books that students can share with their local primary schools or younger siblings.

Niamh Mulholland, SVP Youth Development Officer, said: "As we have been unable to host Young SVP initiatives in the usual way this year and as some young people are feeling isolated due to missing out on the interaction they have been used to with their peers, our new virtual Book Club is a great way for young people to connect with each other in a safe space. We use the time to discuss books they've read recently relating to social justice issues and be encouraging them to share their feelings on highly emotive and topical subjects which impact their local communities and the world around them."

Before attending the virtual Book Club, students were encouraged to let their parent or guardian know that they were joining and log in details were provided by email from SVP.



Young SVP at St Patrick's College Dungannon

Being offered the option to take part in the Young SVP in my school's enrichment programme gave me the hope of bringing to light the issues that affect our community and often are not talked about. I was elected President of our SVP Youth Conference by my peers, which gave me the opportunity to investigate issues and educate the pupils on the issues that affect people locally, nationally and internationally.

Our group engaged in many different activities over the academic year. We explored prejudices surrounding poverty, why people believe these prejudices and how to overcome them. A local Vincentian visited the school to discuss what the local Dungannon SVP Conference does in the community. We heard how often people were left without heat to warm their house or put food on the table, only having enough for their rent. SVP is a lifeline to so many people who find themselves in difficult situations. These are local people helping local people, which is community in action.

Our group also organised a political debate, inviting local political parties to explain how they're tackling poverty, both locally and nationally. We explored the effects the current welfare system is causing to individuals and families within our community, with many having to resort to local food banks just so they can put food on the table due to waiting weeks for a payment. We challenged local politicians to help create a world which tries to eradicate poverty and inequality.

It was a pleasure to host a stall at our school's Christmas Fayre in December. We collected unwanted toys from pupils and staff, raising both funds and awareness for SVP in the process which turned out to be a great success. We raised money for SVP but also raised the profile of our work as young Vincentians.

Our school annually takes part in SVP's appeal for hampers to support the most vulnerable in our community. This year we donated 46 hampers to SVP, all being distributed locally. It was great to see our school community come together as one to support the most vulnerable in our community.

We had also planned a fun day for pupils and staff consisting of dodgeball, with staff vs students, while raising the issue of homelessness within our society and how widespread it is. The island of Ireland has over 25,000 homeless. Unfortunately, this event didn't take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, when life resumes we can continue where we left off and educate the pupils and staff about the great work that is carried out by SVP and how we can both contribute and raise awareness on the issues that cause pain and suffering in our communities, and ways to overcome them.

I was delighted to be elected President of Young Saint Vincent De Paul group by my peers. I will no doubt continue to be conscious of and an advocate for social injustice in Ireland and abroad when I leave school this year. Now more than ever, we need to be united. The crisis we currently find ourselves in has shown the best in people and what we can achieve when we come together as one.

Niall Daly
Young SVP President, St Patrick's School Dungannon

SVP Celebrates

The Farmer's Found A Wife



Undeterred by the latest lockdown, **Henry O'Loan** and **Clare Gilmore** celebrated their wedding on 6 January in front of a select number of family and friends.

"Despite the limitations imposed by lockdown I followed the desire of my heart and popped the question four months ago", says Henry who grew up in a farm in Glenravel, Ballymena. After two years of courtship, Henry said he "found it became increasingly difficult to spend time away from Clare" as he realised they shared so much in common and he could not bear the thought of another lockdown without her by his side.

Both members of SVP, Henry and Clare met while participating in an adult faith development course in Drumalis Retreat Centre in Larne back in 2008. Veterinary surgeon Henry says he first noticed Clare's tattoos and piercings but while facilitating a small group on the course he got to know her better and says "I was struck by her breadth of knowledge and considerate approach to others."

Clare, who is originally from the Ards Peninsula, near Kircubbin, had left Northern Ireland to study at university in Dublin. 12 years later she returned north noticing Henry way back on the first day they met at the development course in 2008 but said: "I just assumed he was already taken so thought no more of it."

Having marked her as 'one to watch' when Clare came to his parish to help run a youth group Henry's sister suggested he teach her to dance. Their friendship developed over Salsa classes but Henry attributes the nuns in Drumalis as helping Cupid as they often tried, with other friends, to matchmake the couple. They enjoyed each

other's company at SVP Christmas galas, Salsa balls and nights out at QFT.

As their friendship developed, Henry and Clare enjoyed weekends in Dublin and Donegal and a trip to Norway for Clare's birthday. After returning from Norway Henry says he 'bit the bullet' and asked Clare if they could enter a romantic relationship. He said: "It was a risk, if it worked - wonderful, if it didn't - then would it ruin the fabulous friendship we had built?"

"Our first date took place in Drumalis, and Clare reminds me I ended up being over an hour late. When I eventually turned up to see Clare, I explained I had made a visit to someone who rang St Vincent de Paul for help and she was understanding as she too is a member of the Society. It was a relief that she was willing to put others before us, as the work of SVP is very important."

Clare says: "Although we entered a relationship two years ago, when we're asked how long we've been together, I think the answer is really 12 years because that's when the embers first began and God set in motion that we would connect. It is the depth of conversation and sharing of life's meaning in those in between years that have made our relationship as strong and as deep as it is now. The influence of Fr Perry Gildea, a Vincentian friend, has been keen in our development and growth both as individuals and as a couple. His sharing his outlook on life and the role faith has to play in making the world a better place is a big part of who we are as a couple and how we want to be in our local community."

Currently living in Larne, now that the farmer has found a wife, animal loving Henry and his wife Clare, who is a Personal Secretary in Braid Valley Hospital, plan to move back to Glenravel soon to pursue their love of farming.

A Happy Retirement!

Wishing a happy retirement to **Myles Gallagher** who has loyally served St Patrick's Conference Ballymoney for 34 years, many as Conference Treasurer. Myles is pictured with Willie Fisher, Conference President and Conference member Eugene Wallace.



Golden Celebrations

John Carey Celebrates 50 Years

John Carey of St Mary's Conference, Portglenone, recently celebrated 50 years of 'golden' service. John joined the Society in 1970 and over the years he has been, and continues to be, a very committed and dedicated Vincentian. John has led the work of the Conference in the role of President (two terms) and volunteers his time willingly to the visitation aspect of our work. John is also a member of the St Dismas Prison Visitation Conference, faithfully travelling to Magilligan every month for the last decade to meet with prisoners, truly living the Christian spirit of St Vincent de Paul and our founder Blessed Fredric Ozanam.

St Mary's Conference congratulates John and wishes him many more years of good health and active service with SVP in Portglenone. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have been unable to gather in number, but we hope to hold a Mass of Celebration in the near future for John, his family and the Parish.

Ciaran McDonnell



Annette McWilliams Celebrates 50 Years

Celebrating 50 years plus service to SVP in Ballymena is **Annette McWilliams**.

Pictured with Past Conference President, Marion O'Hara, Annette was congratulated by the Conference during an evening of celebration before the pandemic struck. Annette is a dedicated and hardworking member and we thank her for her continued commitment to the Society.

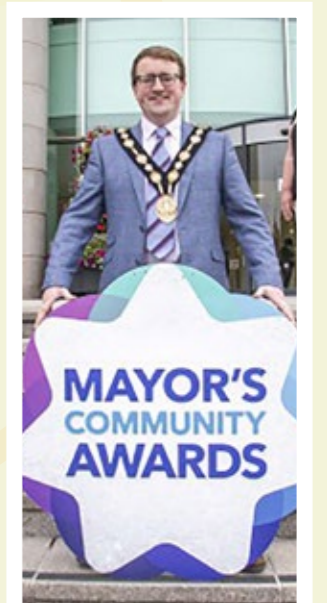


Lisburn Conference Awarded by City Council

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Mayor Nicholas Trimble awarded SVP Lisburn with the 'Building Bridges Together Award' at the Council's first virtual awards ceremony. Accepting the award on behalf of SVP Lisburn, Damian French said; "Over the last year, communities have really pulled together and supported each other during these very difficult times. I am delighted to accept this award on behalf of St Vincent de Paul and we will continue to do our best to help those in need.

"This is a tremendous achievement for the small team of SVP members who, like other Conferences, are passionate and dedicated to helping others irrespective of their background, religion or nationality. We could not assist others if it was not for the kind donations and support we get from our Parish and the local community."

The awards event acknowledged the work that community and voluntary groups play within the local community with 49 groups nominated in six categories.



IN MEMORIAM



Patrick (Pat) Kell

The members of St James' Conference, Crumlin and Aldergrove, and people of the local community, mourned the passing of Patrick (Pat) Kell on 15 September 2020. A dedicated and longstanding member of the Society, Pat devoted many years of his life to our local Conference, including serving as President, but derived the greatest satisfaction from his quiet and continuous work of helping people in need.

He was well known throughout the local community as a hardworking and respected man, for whom nothing was ever too much trouble. Despite a period of ill health, his dedication to the Society never waned: he was arranging support and assistance for a local family in the hours before his sudden passing.

Pat's sense of humour and positivity energised our Conference meetings, and are greatly missed by all of us. His wit and wisdom will be remembered by all of us who were lucky enough to have known him.

May he rest in peace.



Declan Martin

A vital member of the Blessed Virgin Conference, Declan had a wealth of experience and knowledge. When visiting he would make sure that individuals were receiving all the benefits that they were entitled to. He was a very determined man and once he started something, he would see it through to the end.

Declan, who passed away on 23 August 2020, was the embodiment of a Vincentian. On his visitations he showed the utmost respect and compassion to those who needed help. Declan was never judgemental. He understood that many people suffered hardships in life and would help them there and then. If an individual needed to change certain habits or behaviours he would tell them. He understood that change wasn't easy for many and directed people to organisations that would assist with this. He would always revisit to see how they were coping. Declan cared about people, he wanted to make their lives better and he certainly did.

He is greatly missed by us all.

IN MEMORIAM



Jim McArdle

Past President of St Brigid's Conference Newry, Jim sadly passed away in February 2021. He spent a lot of time, energy and compassion in the service of our Conference. We pass our sincere condolences to his family and remember them in our prayers.

May he rest in peace.



Alex McDonnell

Alex died on 16 May 2020 aged 80 years. He is greatly missed and fondly remembered by all fellow Vincentians in St Mary's Conference Portglenone, St Dismas Prison Visitation Conference and the Mid-Antrim Area Council.

Alex joined the Society back in 1964 and for 56 years he was a very committed and dedicated Vincentian. He held a number of key office roles in this time; namely Conference President (two terms), Secretary for 12 years and right up to a few weeks before his death, he volunteered his time freely to the visitation aspect of our work.

Alex's reflective nature and sincerity were invaluable qualities in the visitation work he undertook with St Mary's Conference and also for 12 years, as a member of the St Dismas Prison Visitation Conference, faithfully travelling with his brother-in-law and fellow member John Carey to Magilligan every month to meet with prisoners in both a spiritual and social capacity.

Alex's faith in God was very important to him and SVP, with its emphasis on visiting and caring for those in need, suited him as the best way to put his faith into practice. One of life's true gentlemen, Alex's generosity and willingness to help is a great loss to the SVP and the wider community. He is greatly missed by his wide family circle and all who knew him.

St Vincent De Paul, pray for him.

Northern Region

19 Area Councils



Derry City

O L Lourdes Steelstown
 Holy Family Galliagh
 St Columba Longtower
 Our Lady Longtower
 St John Waterside
 Imm Concep Ardmore
 St Peter Strathfoyle
 St Eugene Cathedral
 Good Shepherd Gobnascale
 St Mary Creggan
 St Francis Ballymagroarty
 St Eithne Hazelbank
 The Assumption Culmore
 St Patrick Carnhill
 St Canice Pennyburn

North Derry

St Joseph Banagher
 St Patrick Claudy
 St Canice Limavady
 St Patrick Dungiven
 St Anthony Mullabouy
 St Anne Faughanvale
 St Aidan Magilligan
 St Dismas Prison

Mid Ulster

St Lurach Maghera
 St Columba Ballinascreen
 St Patrick Magherafelt
 Imm Concep Cookstown
 St Mary Bellaghy
 St Anne Kilrea
 St John Granaghan
 St O Plunkett Greenlough
 St Brigid Lavey

Strabane

St Therese Sion Mills
 St Mary & Joseph Strabane
 St Patrick Leckpatrick
 St Patrick Castlederg

Omagh

St Columba Omagh
 St Malachy Beragh
 Christ the King Strathroy
 St Davog Dromore
 Visitation Termonmaguirc
 St Patrick Drumquin
 St Mary Killyclogher
 St Lawrence Fintona

Fermanagh

Blessed Virgin Enniskillen
 St Molaise Irvinestown
 Imm Con Newtownbutler
 Holy Cross Lisnaskea
 St Joseph Ederney
 St Ninnidh Derrylin
 St Mary Tempo
 St Nailes Kinawley

East Tyrone

Holy Family Coalisland
 St Patrick Dungannon
 St Mary Stewartstown
 St Bridget Clonoe
 St John Moy
 St Ciaran Ballygawley

Armagh & Craigavon

St Patrick Portadown
 St Peter & St Paul Lurgan
 St Patrick Armagh
 St Joseph Maghaberry
 St Anthony Craigavon
 St Patrick Aghagallon
 St Patrick Keady
 Holy Family Seagoe
 St Mary Tullysaran
 St John XXIII Magheralin
 St John Paul II Whitecross

Newry & Mourne

St Brigid Newry
 St Joseph Newry
 St Malachy Bessbrook
 Sacred Heart Cloghogue
 St John Hilltown
 St Bronagh Rostrevor
 St Patrick Warrenpoint
 St Colman Kilkeel

St Joachim Attical
 St O Plunkett Camlough
 St Benedict NT Hamilton
 St Mary Burren

Kilmegan

St Malachy Castlewellan
 Sacred Heart Dundrum
 St Malachy Kilcoo
 St Patrick Ballynahinch
 Christ the King Drumanness
 Imm Concept Newcastle
 St Patrick Leitrim
 St Michael Finnis

East Down

St Nicholas Ardglass/S'ford
 St Colmcille Downpatrick
 St Joseph Killough/Bright
 St Patrick Saul
 St Mochai Saintfield
 Stella Maris Strangford
 St Joseph Crossgar/Kilmore
 St Patrick Downpatrick

N Down & Ards

St Comgall Bangor
 St Patrick Newtownards
 St Patrick Portaferry
 Blessed F Oz Kircubbin
 Holy Redeemer Ballyholme
 St Colmcille Holywood

St Martin's

St Patrick Banbridge
 St Colman Dromore

Mid Antrim

St Mary Ahoghill
 St Comgall Antrim

St Joseph Antrim
 Blessed Virgin Ballymena
 Our Lady Harryville
 St Mary Portglenone
 St Mary Glenravel
 St Joseph Glenavy
 St MacNissi Randalstown
 St James Aldergrove
 SVP Toome & Duneane

N Ant & NE Derry

Errigal SVP
 St John Coleraine
 St Malachy Coleraine
 St Mary Castlerock
 St Mary Portstewart
 St Patrick Ballymoney
 St Patrick Portrush
 St Brigid Ballycastle
 St Mary Rasharkin
 St Patrick Loughgiel
 Sacred Heart Cloughmills

East Antrim

Sacred Heart Ballyclare
 St Mary Cushendall
 St Patrick Glenariffe
 St Comgall Larne
 St Nicholas Carrickfergus
 Imm Concep Glenarm
 OL Lourdes Whitehead

North Belfast

St Mary Whitehouse
 St James Whiteabbey
 St Gerard & St Mary
 SVP Ligoniel
 Holy Cross
 Sacred Heart
 Our Lady Deanby Gardens

Holy Family
 St Patrick
 Ch of the Resurrection
 St Colman Greenisland
 St Therese Somerton Road
 St Mary Carnmoney
 St Augustine VET

S&E Belfast

St Brigid
 St Malachy
 Holy Rosary
 St Bernadette
 St Colmcille B'Hackamore
 Imm Heart Mary Drumbo
 St Matthew

West Belfast

Corpus Christi
 St Luke Twinbrook
 St Anne Dunmurry
 St Patrick Lisburn
 St Patrick Derriagh
 St Michael
 St Oliver Plunkett
 Most Holy Redeemer
 Holy Trinity
 St John
 St Paul
 St Teresa
 St Peter & St Vincent
 Matt Talbot
 Ch of the Nativity Poleglass
 St Joseph Hannahstown
 Our Lady Queen of Peace
 Christ the Redeemer
 St Peter the Rock S'Ford
 St Pio Prison
 St Agnes

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