

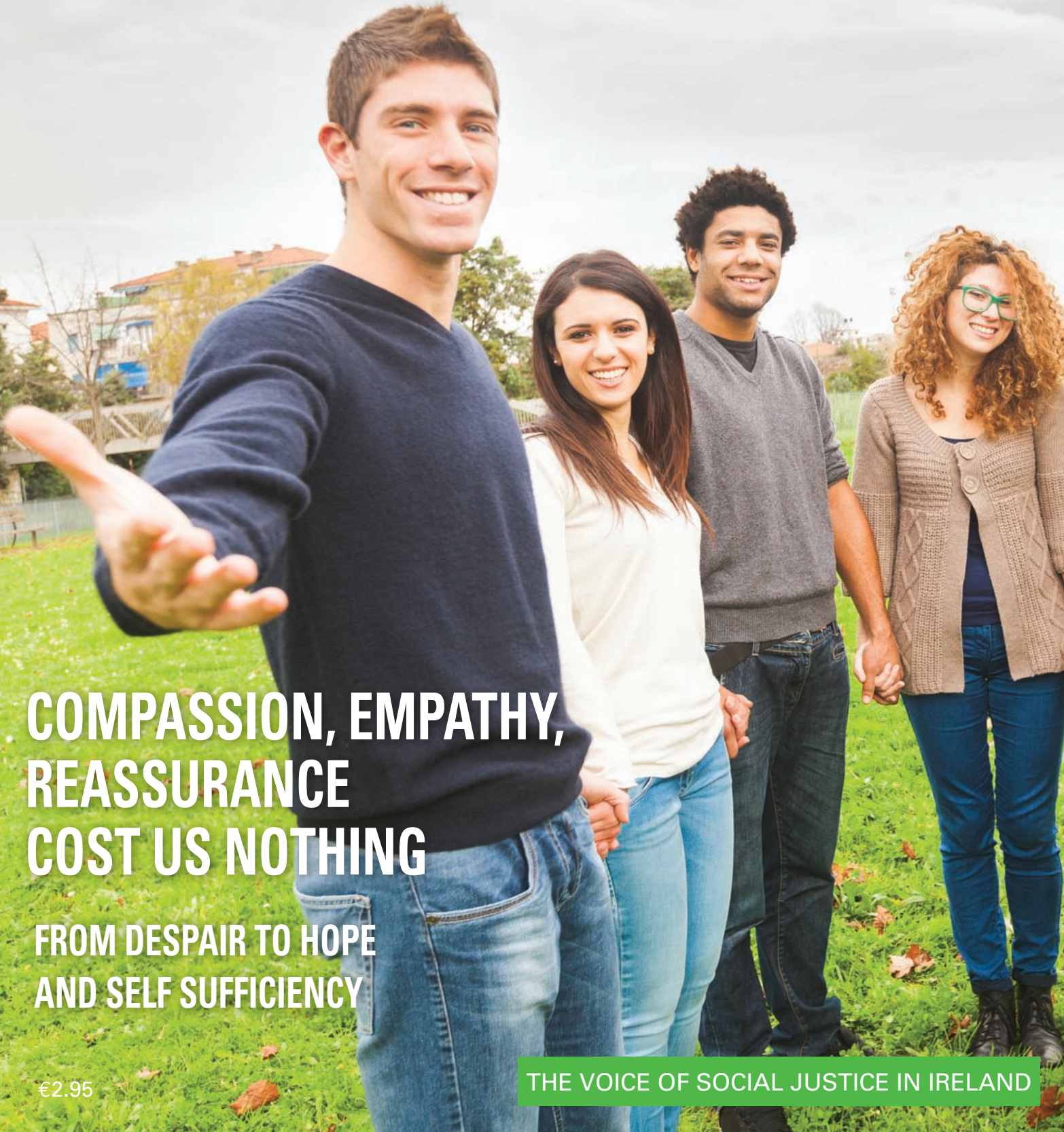
THE

SPRING 2016



# BULLETIN

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



**COMPASSION, EMPATHY,  
REASSURANCE  
COST US NOTHING**

**FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE  
AND SELF SUFFICIENCY**

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THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND



What we do for ourselves dies with us but what we do for others and the world remains and is immortal. So the intelligent way to be selfish is to work for the welfare of others

– Dalai Lama



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

# THE IRISH SVP OZANAM BULLETIN

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"Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?" – Martin Luther King Junior

We sometimes hear criticism from the public that we are giving to the wrong people or that our volunteers can be judgemental and this often angers me. When someone decides to join a voluntary or community based organisation it is usually because they want to make a difference in their community. They are moved or affected by what they are seeing or have experienced in their own lives or someone close to them. As Gandhi once said "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others".

When someone joins an organisation they join as the person, flaws and all. They do not receive a special cape, which gives them superhero powers and eradicates all the human negative qualities, which we ALL commonly share.

Do they get it wrong sometimes? Of course, but they get it right most of the time and the fact that they have decided to give of their time so freely is admirable. We have volunteers who go out in all types of weather; week after week, never asking for anything in return. They do this because they want to, because they see the pain people are suffering through poverty, social exclusion and loneliness.

Ask any volunteer why they do it, why they endure the cold winter conditions, verbal abuse or judgment, and they will all tell you it is because they care and want a better and equal society for all.

In this edition you will read some amazing stories from all ages of volunteers doing their part to improve the society in which we live together: A school youth Conference in Dublin; SVP Young college students; volunteers visiting people in their homes; resource centres working with refugees and asylum seekers, to welcome them into the Irish society; and volunteers putting smiles on older peoples faces.

We, as an organisation made up of 11,000 volunteers, are always striving to not only make our society a better place to grow up and grow older in, but to make ourselves better at what we do. Let us remember the large numbers of people who, day in and day out, through acts of volunteerism large and small, bring hope to so many. Let us ensure that this wonderful resource, available in abundance, is recognised and supported as it works towards a more prosperous and peaceful world.

In the words of Kofi Annan "If our hopes of building a better and safer world are to become more than wishful thinking, we will need the engagement of volunteers more than ever."

We are always working to improving ourselves as people and to improving how we interact with those we assist and this will always be at the forefront of our work.

*Linda O'Connell*

# The 'Ethos' of the Society

As we commence another busy year within the Society the National Management Council of the Society has given consideration during the past year to the 'Ethos' of the Society. Regional Councils have had discussions on the topic and this article is based on some of their feedback.

The Society has been Catholic in Ethos from its origins. That Ethos is based on the spirituality of the founding members and in particular Frederic Ozanam. The principles which motivated Frederic and his colleagues to set up what was to become the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were the same as those which motivated St. Vincent de Paul 200 years earlier.

Without such "Ethos" we are nothing. We have no principle(s) and thus lack the freedom and independence to be a voice for the voiceless. We would then depend on the State and/or on our funders to provide principle(s) for us to follow. The rights and dignity of those whom we serve would depend on the State's changing charter(s) over time.



'Ethos' as defined by Frederic informs, defines and demands the following –

- It defines our perception of those whom we visit.
- It demands that we recognise and fulfil our call to make the world a better place, governed by justice and charity.
- It demands that we respect the dignity of every person as being fashioned in the image of God. Thus it demands that we do not judge or diminish an individual's dignity by segregating or categorising that person.
- It demands that we rid ourselves of all personal baggage and that we go to see a person at where they are at, in their lives, and that we listen to their entire story.
- It demands we must renew our commitment to our principle that "no act of charity is foreign to the Society" and this principle must inform quality visitation and the building up of referral linkages between the Society and other agencies, organisations or groups to where a person can find specific sustainable solutions which would assist him/her back to self sufficiency. We cannot continue to listen to part of a person's story and ignore the rest.
- It demands we must re-commit ourselves to a "leadership of Service", as being the model of leadership we aspire to.
- It demands that we constantly realise that our work in the Society is not ours alone but emanates from the Gospels.
- It demands that we treat each other with respect and dignity in our service to others.

"Ethos" must permeate, motivate and determine the "what", the "why", the "who" and the "how" of all that we do and all that we are. Ethos must define the depth, the nature and the uniqueness of "what" we do. It must define and explain "why" we do what we do and what motivates us to do so. It must define "who" we are in the eyes of those we are privileged to serve, in the eyes of our benefactors and in the eyes of service providers with whom we may interact and in the eyes of the general public. It must constantly challenge us as to the "how" we do what we do and as to "how" we prepare ourselves to do what we do.

Ethos is key to our work, without clarity in that we are rudderless. Discussions at National Management Council will lead to the topic being debated at National Council. Arising from that I would hope that we arrive at a way in which we support better our Members and Staff across the country to deliver our work within the Ethos of our Founders.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Meagher". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Geoff Meagher  
National President

# Fall in Government spending on Exceptional Needs Payment Scheme

*Caroline Fahey,  
Social Policy Development Officer*

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is now spending more than the Department of Social Protection on helping people to meet the cost of 'exceptional needs', including rent deposits, household appliances, health-related travel costs, funerals and household bills.

The Department of Social Protection's expenditure on Exceptional Needs Payments has fallen from over €80 million in 2008 to just over €30 million in 2014. Government provided only €29 million for the scheme in 2015. This reduction in expenditure occurred at a time of increasing need, with poverty and deprivation rates increasing significantly between 2008 and 2014. The Society of St Vincent de Paul is now spending in excess of €40 million per annum on direct assistance to households, often helping families with the kinds of items that were previously accessed through the Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) scheme.

Exceptional Needs Payments are designed to help people on low incomes to meet essential, once-off expenditure which they cannot meet out of their weekly income. The number of these payments being made each year is falling, with just over 107,000 payments made by the Department of Social Protection in 2014 compared with almost 133,000 in 2013.

The Exceptional Needs Payment scheme is a vital safety net, and for many it is a last resort. One of the strengths of the scheme is that staff administering the payments can use their discretion and knowledge of a household's circumstances and needs when deciding whether or not an Exceptional Needs Payment should be made.

In spite of this, SVP members on the ground report that it has become more difficult for people in need to access Exceptional Needs Payments. As a result SVP is now helping more people with the cost of furniture, household appliances and travel to hospital appointments. We are also receiving more referrals from professionals like social workers when ENPs are refused. SVP members feel that the Community Welfare Officers (now known as representatives of the Department of Social Protection) would previously have provided help with these items, but due to cutbacks, are less likely to do so. This has resulted in hardship for struggling households, leaving many with no option but to turn to SVP for assistance, to go into debt, or to go without basic essentials.

SVP members are mindful of the pressures that front line staff of the Department of Social Protection are under, particularly when there is a great deal of downward pressure on budgets for demand led schemes such as the ENP scheme. The closure of local offices disbursing ENPs has also been highlighted by SVP members as problematic for some of the people we assist, particularly those in rural areas.

At a time of increasing need and a great deal of pressure on household budgets, SVP is concerned that the reduction in Government spending on Exceptional Needs Payments has been achieved by imposing further hardship on individuals and families on low incomes. SVP would like to see a bigger budget allocated for the Exceptional Needs Payment scheme. This is a demand-led scheme which assists people with exceptional and essential expenses, many of which mirror the issues that people request assistance from SVP with. As such, yearly reductions in its budget allocation will only result in hardship for people on low incomes.

The Social Justice team will continue to raise this issue with the Department of Social Protection so that we can work to protect the safety nets and schemes of last resort that are available to the people we assist.



# If SVP had no money how would we help?

*Brehdan Hennessy,  
National Membership Support  
Development Officer*



Financial assistance is probably the best known aspect, expectation and assumption of the charitable work of SVP. However, there are times when SVP's financial assistance cannot overcome a particular problem. What do we do then?

In my years with SVP's social justice team, and now with SVP membership support team we are often approached by Conferences who are struggling for the right approach to deal with a particular problem. Rarely has the challenge faced by one Conference not been experienced by another; or there may be a particular process or protocol which SVP might use that a Conference is unaware of. The job of SVP membership support is to share the learning. However, in some scenarios, when the usual support of SVP fails, a Conference can feel terribly frustrated at not making headway. In my view the answer in these cases is to ask ourselves 'if SVP had no money how would we help?'

We must remember and respect how difficult it can be for someone to decide to contact SVP, especially for the first time. For many this is to put their families' lives before their pride.

## **Imagine how this mother was feeling ahead of the first visit of SVP:**

"I was mortified ringing...absolutely mortified...never looked for help in my life. Mortified. And they (visiting Conference members) just don't judge you and even if you're feeling a bit teary or weepy they sit there and listen to you. They never try to say to you well maybe you shouldn't do this or maybe you should be doing that. I had nothing to hide because when they called here I showed them everything. They try and help you. I thought they'd be somebody who was quite well off, volunteering, looking down their nose at you, feeling sorry for you and pity. Completely different, completely different."

Sometimes I think we underestimate the inherent value in the friendship and listening ear we offer to a family or individual in distress; sometimes the ensuing advice and financial support is of secondary importance on the given day.

## **This family who were in severe financial distress described the effect of one visit from the local Conference of SVP:**

"I cannot describe what they have done for me and my husband. They put food on our table and clothes on my child but for the first time in months after they called I slept. I actually went to bed and fell asleep. Now my problems aren't solved. Maybe someday the Government will look at [the problem] and help ..., maybe they won't. I can't think about that anymore. At the moment I am holding onto the feeling that S. v de Paul have given me. I'm not as bitter anymore. I'm not as depressed or anxious. The St. Vincent de Paul has restored my faith in humanity."

Food vouchers alone do not evoke that response. The mother felt valued, her problems were shared (rather than resolved), and she had an outlet for her distress. Often in visitation the focus is on the value of our contribution when entering a home; in this case we can see the value after we left.

Sharing the positive experience of quality visitation is vital, but to do so we need to know what we mean by quality visitation. The outcome of quality visitation is not only a material transaction, it can be giving a sense of reassurance and hope, the person knowing they are not being judged, being open to the person's needs and actions, being a guide to the person on their own journey.

SVP members will often feel frustrated if there is no sign or sense of the individual's situation improving, but maybe we must question to whose standard we are trying to measure progress. Self-sufficiency is often cited within SVP, but what do we mean by it? Regularly people seek our assistance due to a short-term crisis and resolving it is their priority. Our goals for a family might be for the long-term, while theirs is simply 'in the now'. Recognising the importance of small steps may be the right direction in defining our understanding of self-sufficiency.

There need not be a financial transaction for every SVP visit. Compassion, empathy, reassurance cost us nothing but careful thought. Good advice and advocacy are priceless. These actions have effects, especially when you hear of someone being able to sleep again.



## A FOND FAREWELL TO THE MID-WEST REGION'S FORMER REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR EILEEN HOFFLER

*By Alan Kelly – Limerick City Area President*

On behalf of all the members in the Mid-West region, the Limerick City Area recently organised a social evening to say good bye, to their now, former Regional Co-Ordinator, Eileen Hoffler:

Eileen had been working with the Society for the past 18 years. From humble beginnings in the Limerick City shop, Eileen's commitment and passion for the Society led her to becoming the Regional Administrator (the position at that time) 12 years ago. The position of Regional Co-Ordinator carries a lot of responsibility, travel, and many long hours. In this regard, Eileen was passionate about the Society and its work and threw herself into the role tirelessly.

Eileen was also a valued member of the training team and indeed she trained many of us who only joined in the last 10 years. Her enthusiasm for the Society and infectious grin made us all more comfortable as new members leaping into something of the unknown when attending these training sessions!

A social evening was held in February to bid a fond farewell to Eileen and to wish her the best with her future endeavours. The

evening began with mass celebrated by Fr. Tom Corbett from the Roscrea (Co. Tipperary) parish. Readings and prayers of the faithful included a representative of the Regional Office and members from all the counties in the region.

Following some refreshments, a presentation on behalf of all the members was made by the current current Regional President John Lupton. The former Limerick City Area President Mary Prendergast and former Regional President Michael Murphy also paid tribute to Eileen's hard work and dedication to the Society.

The evening concluded with some wonderful musical entertainment. There was also a complimentary raffle – thanks to Lorraine Moroney in the Regional Office for organising the spot prizes!

We send our best wishes to Eileen and her family. We would like to wish well too in her position as Chief Executive Officer of the Redemptorists Father's charity 'Serve'.

Go n-éirí an bóthar leat!



# The practice of Home Visitation

*By Celine Martin, National Member Support Manager*

During the past year my work in SVP has taken me to the four corners of Ireland, I wanted to learn from the members, I wanted understand how we carry out the work of home visitation. We know our members visits to people in their homes supports so many throughout the country but I was intrigued to learn more. In an attempt to try to understand how the interventions from members of SVP make such a difference in the lives of those we assist I have learned there are two very important ingredients. The first is the person who seeks help and the second is the helper, if positive relationships are formed change is possible. This is not a new concept, the challenge to us is how to transfer this understanding to new members coming into the Society. Skills built up over many years of visiting people cannot be grasped following a nights visiting when time is precious or through a time limited training session. Let me share my reflections with you following my time spent with members over the past few months.

## **Background**

As part of my role as National Member Support Manager I was asked to look at how we intervene with those we assist and to find a way to impart this knowledge to new members. The interactions are so varied across our membership of over 10,000 people, this was no easy task. My work was to support the member /volunteer led training team and the National Training Co-Ordinator to deliver some new and engaging opportunities for enhanced training. During my endeavours I met with many members across the country and in particular the members of the quality visitation sub-committee in Galway. In 2012 as part of its work, this committee commissioned OCS Consulting to help inform the development of a holistic approach to SVP visitation in Galway City and County. As I am a firm believer in not reinventing the wheel I have used this research with the permission of those members to attempt to establish what a model



of "holistic home visitation" looks like in practice. Bringing the skills and experience from my own therapeutic background and my work in the community and voluntary sector I began to understand how key principles from a model of "Solution focussed brief intervention skills" (Steve de Shazer) work were very similar to the principles of "quality visitation" and moving people to "self-sufficiency".

**Research to Practice or is practice to research in the SVP**

Research shows that evidence based practice is known to be most effective in helping to bring about change, we need to be confident about the type of interventions we engage in, in order to help those we assist move to a better place in their lives. If we apply the principles of using evidence based models to bring best practice standards to our volunteering work we can be more assured in the service we are providing. In the Society we are in a most privileged position of sharing the opportunity for improved life chances with those we assist. It is comforting to know our interventions lend themselves to an evidence based best practice model.

**Practical application of best practice in Home Visitation**

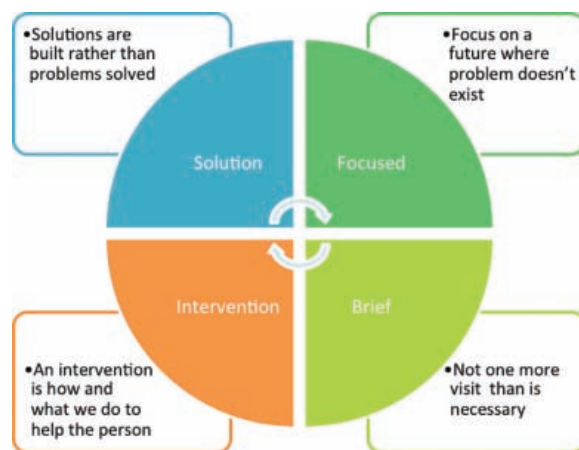
There are many ways to present how we deliver our services to those most in need, the following diagram is just one way of attempting to put the work we do into a framework that is clear and concise.

**Home Visitation Model**



**Solution Focussed Brief Intervention Model**

The concepts of "Solution focussed brief interventions" help us to allow the person we are supporting to find their own solutions to bring about change. We empower the person by assisting to build on their own strengths to enable change happen.



Finally the members of the Society themselves are the key agents of change; the ability to believe in the possibility of change is one of the key components of this model and the work we do. Thank you to all the members who have shared their knowledge, skills and vision with me during the past few months it is my hope the fruits of our conversations will be shared with many into the future.

**Vincentians "Sevre in Spe" ("Serve in Hope")**





# A Profile of an SVP School Conference – Holy Child School, Killiney, Co. Dublin.

*Emily Massey, President*  
*Kia Hayes, Vice - President*  
*Alison Rae, Secretary*

The SVP School Conference in Holy Child School, Killiney, is named after our Foundress, Cornelia Connelly, and is one of the many ways we live our school motto 'Actions not Words'. We have been supporting our local area Conferences for over 30 years, and in 2008 we decided to establish a School Conference with student leaders, mentored by our Chaplain, Mrs Moisselle, and helped by some other interested teachers.

Cornelia Connelly Conference is a whole school activity, led by a team of Fifth year students. Alongside this group each class nominates a SVP Representative who attends meetings, and co-ordinates the activities within her class. All SVP Representatives are proud to wear the Holy Child Killiney SVP badge, which has the logo of the Society, encircled with the words 'Cornelia Connelly Conference'.

We have 15 Fifth Year students who have volunteered to be in the Leadership Team. Each member has a very important role to play, and we were interviewed by our Chaplain and another teacher to be assigned these roles. We have a President and Vice President who lead the team; a Secretary who take the minutes and records all correspondence, and a Treasurer who

keeps our accounts. We have a P.R. student and a student who is responsible for the SVP Notice Board; other students are involved as link persons with the Class Representatives, and we find this is a really efficient way of co-ordinating school events such as the Christmas Campaign and the Afternoon Tea Gatherings. Even though we all have our own responsibilities within the group, we all work really well as a team.

We have a lunchtime meeting each Tuesday which begins and ends with a prayer; and we discuss and plan our activities and events. The Conference Team Leaders attend and, if we are planning an event or activity, the Class Representatives also attend. This means that the whole school is also involved in the work of Saint Vincent de Paul, and that we get to know girls from the younger years very well. Mrs Moisselle attends the Area Meeting and she sometimes shares some news with us about National campaigns or new initiatives.

Our Conference has very strong links with four local Conferences in Killiney, Shankill, Loughlinstown and Sallynoggin, and with the Hospital Conference in the National Rehabilitation Hospital.

We organise our Gift and Hamper Campaign to support the work of these Conferences who help families who need some support. Each class is assigned a family to buy gifts for, and the girls contribute €5 each. We really enjoy going shopping on the Saturday before Christmas and packing large gift bags for 18 families. Hamper Day is also a great success, and this year Holy Child Conference packed 27 hampers, filled with food donated by the school community. We spent an afternoon wrapping gifts, covering boxes and packing the food in the old gym; it was great fun, while very rewarding to think that we were making a difference to people.

For the past four years we have also packed hospital bags for long-term patients in hospitals, and this year packed 22 bags for the Hospital Campaign; we help with the delivering of the Christmas Appeal letters for three local areas, and we also volunteer in providing the music at the local Saturday Coffee morning, to help encourage people to come on in and donate to the Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire.

We invite a local area Conference President to address the school community at our Christmas Assembly on the last day of term. This year we were delighted to welcome Terry O' Regan who gave us an inspiring talk on the work of her Conference.

Each term we organise an Afternoon Tea Gathering for older people in the area. We have had as many as 35 guests at these events and they are really enjoyable for everyone, both the older guests and the girls who help. The girls bake really lovely food, and we have excellent musical performances from the students in every year who selflessly give of their time and talent. We pick a theme for each gathering, like Halloween, St Valentine or St Patrick's Day, depending on the date, and we really enjoy chatting and getting to know our guests.

Each year the Fifth Year Team Leaders plan a Peer-Teaching class for the Third Years, teaching about Saint Vincent de Paul as a Community of Faith. This ties in with their Junior Certificate Religious Education Exam, and, although it is a big challenge to prepare and teach, it is very worthwhile. We spend a long time preparing the class, researching the content and planning activities. We don't think anyone will be choosing a career in teaching after seeing the amount of preparation that goes into one 40-minute class period! We give the Third Years a treat of a 'Freddo' chocolate bar - this is so appropriate as it helps them remember the name of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of the SVP!

Last year the Fifth Year Team and all the Class Representatives went to the Daughters of Charity of Vincent de Paul House in Blackrock for a special event to conclude the year by Dart, followed by hot chocolate in Blackrock, and then walked to Dunardagh.

We had the opportunity to visit their Heritage Room and to hear about different Vincentian groups who work with Prisoners, Immigrants and in disadvantaged areas encouraging people to vote. We also saw some of their work with older people and people with an intellectual disability - it is a really interesting and inspirational exhibition.

Then we went to the Chapel for a Blessing Ceremony where we were all commissioned as young Vincentians, and given a Certificate. Sr Anne Neylon gave us a wonderful welcome in Dunardagh and it was a really enjoyable and informative trip.

Finally, 6 lucky girls from Holy Child are chosen each year to volunteer for a week in Kerdiffstown House, helping with the older people from our area who really enjoy this holiday break. Jennifer Cuffe is our adult mentor in Kerdiffstown, and she puts the girls through their paces! We are all going to apply this year as we have heard all about it in Assembly, and it sounds like really hard work, but such fun, and that's a story for another article!

To conclude - here are some words from a few girls in Cornelia Connelly SVP Conference explaining what it means to them to be involved:

"Being in SVP gives us a chance to share ideas and build connections with others" - Caoimhe and Lydia.

"SVP gave me the opportunity to bring happiness to people just around the corner, our neighbours, old and young" - Mia.

"SVP gives me a chance to give back" - Sara.

"SVP gives us life experiences which will stand to us in later years, and helps us be more understanding of the causes of poverty and injustice" - Emily.

"In SVP we learn that school isn't all about academic results, but also about developing social awareness" - Alison.

"I love the atmosphere that SVP brings to Holy Child; we get the opportunity to work with the younger students and hear their opinions, while doing good for others. Our Principal even agreed to buy a Microwave so that we wouldn't be late for the lunchtime meetings... We have nicknamed it 'Fred!!'" - Kia.

"SVP is like working with a close-knit group of friends. My aunt is involved, and my older sister" - Hannah.

"By helping others I help myself, and become aware of what's happening in the community" - Sabrina.





# ‘Flowering Sustainably at Intervarsity Weekend’

*Brigid O’ Dea,  
Young SVP College Support Intern*

It is difficult to hold a youth day in February without considering the obvious connotation of Spring and the imagery of rejuvenation and celebration that lie by her side. Wordsworth, in fact, may have been recalling an encounter with a crowd of young SVP when he referred to the famous ‘host of golden daffodils’. The weekend of February 19-21st marked our tenth annual SVP Intervarsity Weekend. This is a weekend which invites college students from all across Ireland, who are active in volunteer work with SVP, to attend a weekend of motivation, celebration, reflection and training that will inform best practice in their work. We had representation from a wide array of colleges which included UCC, UCD, TCD, DCU, NUIM, Sligo IT, Tralee IT, CCOC and 1833, with a total of just under fifty students. A major strength of our SVP college Conferences is the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere they succeed always in creating. This climate spread as a wool blanket across our weekend, under which all volunteers felt warm and comfortable to interact and contribute in every aspect.

Our weekend began with a team-building night-walk. Students meeting for the first time were blindfolded and by trusting the guidance of their non-blindfolded partner, and new friend, they completed a course around Cavan Centre, where the weekend was held. This was followed by a ‘speed quiz’, organised by Kevin Conlon, who was celebrating eight years of attending Intervarsities himself. This speed quiz involved quick-fire rounds of questions, preceded by a bonus round where our students competed in fashion walk-offs and cracker-eating challenges, before changing team, allowing interaction with a greater number of students. By Saturday morning, it was near impossible to detect which students stemmed from which Conference. This was fortunate, as the day ahead involved a significant amount of group work. Kevin McParland, from Kimmage Development Studies, framed our weekend by delivering a speech outlining the Sustainable Development Goals. Any students who had failed to shower the slumber of our late-night quiz, were successfully awoken and energised by Kevin’s lively and insight-

ful talk. Kevin focused not only on the SDGs as global goals but outlined the importance of these goals on a national and individual level. He underlined the importance of ensuring that the SDGs are a priority for our government, and our role in achieving this.

Following our guest speaker, students broke down into groups of approximately fifteen to attend a range of workshops. Our programme ensured that each student would have the opportunity to attend a choice of two of the following workshops; 'Homelessness as a Social Justice Issue', 'Holistic Health', 'Social Solidarity Economy', 'Education' and 'Finding your own Vision'. Workshops were engaging and interactive and provoked students to think critically about the work that they are involved in. They encouraged students to reflect on their position as global citizens and their vision for a sustainable, equal and peaceful global community. We asked students if they were addressing the needs of the modern Irish climate in the most effective manner; whether their good-will was synonymous with good-practice. Each workshop was a catalyst for discussion and debate. Our students contributed with insightful remarks, commenting that the workshops were 'empowering', 'energising' and contributed to a more holistic understanding of the inequality that exists in our world today.

A reflection session followed the workshops during which students dissected information that they had learnt over the course of the day, analysed the manner in which it fits into their volunteer role and shared thoughts and opinions that had surfaced with their peers. It was remarkable how honest our students were, self-aware and open equally to compliments and criticisms. The attendees were far from wilting flowers in expressing their viewpoints but ensured a climate of respect and sensitivity was maintained at all times.

Food-for-thought digested and food-for-the-belly ingested, we wrapped up a productive day with a stimulating debate. The motion 'this house believes that the next ten years poses greater challenges than opportunities to our SVP work' was proposed and six representatives from a selection of colleges debated the matter. Our teams argued that perhaps we could delve further into the motion and ask instead whether we could view every challenge as an opportunity and agreed that each opportunity brings a challenge with it. Our speakers reinforced the importance of their work in overcoming challenges, in embracing opportunities and in ensuring a future of civically engaged individuals. After a day of intensive mind-exercising, the students ended the day by shaking out their limbs on a make-shift dancefloor.

Sunday began with a full Irish fry-up which guaranteed a productive day to follow. Diane

Macken, South-West Youth Development Officer, led a lively energiser in which students had to pose in groups as 'James Bond', 'Elephants' and 'Toasters'; a funny combination which led to numerous humorous sights and plenty of laughs! The focus for Sunday was for students to reflect on the information that they had gathered the previous day during talks and workshops. We encouraged students to step back and digest this information before they moved forward in their direct practice volunteer work. We asked students to pick individual activities that they run in their Conferences and to highlight three strengths, three weaknesses and three improvements that could be made to this activity. Students addressed issues such as the sustainability, resourcing, continuity and relationship-building in their work. Many activities that are run by our student volunteers are, and should be, a source of pride and the students' commitment to a consistent bettering of their work is a spring of inspiration.

Wordsworth, in his poem 'Lines written in Early Spring' reflects sombrely on the link between nature and humanity and their contrasting ways of being. The poet grieves at 'what man has made of man' and while this statement contains a truth and a pertinence to today, Intervarsity Weekend was a reminder that as true as this discord is the choir 'of a thousand blended notes' created by our young people working together to ensure positive change and hope for our future.



# YOUNG SVP PROGRAMME HELPING TO REBUILD YOUTHS' CONFIDENCE



**Research by Electric Ireland reveals that the general public has a negative view of young people but participation in Young SVP helps to boost confidence -**

*Pictured at the 2016 SVP Annual Youth Day in Belfast are (from left): Joshua Moore, Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock, Belfast; Pauline Brown, Regional Manager, SVP; Clodagh McGurk, Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney, County Antrim; John Cunningham, Northern Ireland Residential Manager, Electric Ireland and Glen Harte, St Joseph's High School, Newry, County Down.*

Four in five young people feel the general public has a negative view of them according to a new survey of 15 to 24 year olds from across the island of Ireland.

The research was commissioned by Electric Ireland to mark its sponsorship of the Young St. Vincent de Paul (Young SVP) Youth Development programme, which encourages young people to get involved in social action and promotes their social and personal development. The results demonstrate disconnection between how young people today feel they are perceived by the public, versus how they really are.

The study also revealed almost 1 in 3 young people reported a lack of confidence while 65% of young people feel that adults don't take the time to get to know or understand them.

Of the respondents who have been part of the Young SVP programme, 57% say it made them more confident, 62% say it made them more aware of social justice, 48% more ready to help other people and 39% felt the programme made them more job ready.

To coincide with the release of the survey, Electric Ireland has created a cutting edge short film titled #WhatDoYouSee which was launched at the Young SVP Annual Youth Day Conference held recently at Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast. Available to view on [www.WhatDoYouSee.ie](http://www.WhatDoYouSee.ie), the film uses innovative technology, enabling a mobile in-browser, dual-message experience showcasing two perspectives of teenagers in Ireland, challenging the viewer to have a smarter perception of youth participation in the community.

On the day of the conference young people from schools right across Northern Ireland, showcased the projects they have been involved in and discussed with peers the positive impact that being part of Young SVP has had on their development.

John Cunningham, Northern Ireland Residential Manager, Electric Ireland, commented: "While perceptions of our young people are not always as positive as they should be, at Electric Ireland we see the potential of young people and continuously champion them through our sport, music and charity partnerships. The hope is that the Young SVP programme makes them more confident and helps them to grow and develop on a personal level and gives our society another opportunity to witness the potential of our young people."

Through the support of Young SVP, Electric Ireland ensures its commitment to Smarter Living reaches even the most vulnerable in society and empowers young people in Ireland to make a positive impact today.

Commenting on the survey results, Cormac Wilson, Senior Vice President Northern Region SVP said: "The results of the research speak for themselves; young people in the Northern Region of SVP are doing amazing things, and everyone should be doing more to celebrate this. The Annual Youth Conference is an opportunity for our young people to get together and inspire each other as well as showcasing the wonderful work they are doing. We are thrilled to be supported by Electric Ireland on this and other programmes so we can reach thousands of young people and help them express their true value to society."

# National Agresso Roll Out Financial Year 2015



This year over 200 Conference Treasurers will be using Agresso for the first time to do their Annual Report. They join 360 other Conferences in what is now a growing online Agresso user community. Agresso was introduced to SVP in order to help the Society comply with the Charities Act. The software 'lives' in a secure place in the 'cloud' and has effectively computerised the manual books that Conference Treasurers have been using in recent years.

The introduction of the computerised system has allowed the Society to slim down the Annual Report book and to have only one book to cover multiple activities, rather than one for each activity as was the case previously. Treasurers' may find the new system challenging but once they have printed out their end of year reports and of course signed them off, they can happily move on to 2016.

Agresso is actively being rolled out in 6 Regions. If you are in one of these Regions and want to move onto the system or if you want support with your Year End please make contact with one of the Rollout Administrators below.

## Contact Details for Active Regions

### Patsy Browne

North East & Midlands Region,  
Email: patsy.browne@svp.ie  
Mobile: 086 0213179

### Anne Ó Murchú

East Region  
Anne.omurchu@svpeast.ie  
086 410 1927

### Siobhan Heffernan

South East Region  
siobhan.heffernan@svp.ie  
Tel: 051 857112

### Caroline Manifold

Mid West Region  
caroline.manifold@svp.ie  
061 514569 / 087 4493000

### Ciaran Liggett

Northern Region  
ciaran.liggett@svpni.co.uk  
077388-378-71

### Frank Leonard

West Region  
frank.leonard@svp.ie  
086 4164035



## Volunteer Overseas with a Faith-Based Organisation

Since 2002 Vincentian Lay Missionaries have been making a difference to the lives of communities across Africa.

*We welcome retired people, those considering career breaks and volunteers for our annual 4-week summer programmes.*

### Volunteers Needed:

- Teachers • Educators • Administrators
- Community development workers
- Managers or leaders

*Photo: Volunteer Aoife Ní Ríordáin with Tsion & Fikerte at Atse Primary School, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*



Visit [www.vlm.ie](http://www.vlm.ie)

or contact Mary Anne Stokes on  
[info@vlm.ie](mailto:info@vlm.ie) or  
01-8102570/087-1397069



# National Consolidation 2015

Now in our 11th year, thank you to all our Conference Treasurers and Presidents whose hard work enabled the successful conclusion of the 2014 National Consolidation Audit. With over 1,300 Conference Annual Reports to complete, review and consolidate for the Society as a whole, this is an extensive piece of work each year for the Society, and relies heavily on the timely completion of the Annual Reports at Conference Level. The Financial Statements for the Society as a whole are available at [www.svp.ie/annualreports](http://www.svp.ie/annualreports)

**SVP is no doubt one of the largest consolidations in the country.** It takes many people each doing their part to make it happen: 1,300 Conference Treasurers/Presidents, 114 Area Treasurers/Presidents, and 8 Regional Treasurers/Presidents with support from the Regional Offices and National Office.

**So why do it?** The consolidated accounts are used for reporting to various statutory bodies and are generally used for grant applications. They are the foundation of financial decision making throughout the organisation. The consolidated figures are used by different groups within the Society to monitor trends and forecast needs. Finally, the consolidation allows SVP to engage with the Charities Regulator as one entity instead of 1,300 separate entities.

**How does the consolidation process work?** An Annual Report for each Conference activity needs to be filled in, balanced, signed by the Conference President and Treasurer, and the appropriate supporting documentation included. Due to their size, approximately 500 Conferences will also need to organise and include an Independent Examiners report. **All 1,300 completed Annual Reports are due to be submitted by Conference's to the Regional Office's by the 28th February 2016.**

From the beginning of March the Annual Reports are sent from the Regional Offices to National Office where the first marathon exercise of data input and data checking takes place. All Reports are checked for completeness. The most common errors are unsigned books and/or supporting documentation not included. Reports that pass are then moved to the next phase, which for manual report books is data entry onto our finance system. There are approximately 800 manual reports to be entered which mean a lot of typing – concentration levels remain intense! The other 500 Conferences use the finance

system to record their data on a monthly basis which, has the added advantage of creating the Annual Report at the end of the year! (For more information on using the finance system please contact your Regional Office)

The National Office takes possession of all of the complete books and conducts their own series of checks in advance of the audit commencing. Books with queries are returned to the Regional Office for follow up with Conferences. **The process continues until all books, checks and data entry are complete.**

In addition to this, SVP has over 50 Conferences that require a full audit in their own right. These are the largest Conferences within the Society. In addition to the Annual Reports, the Treasurers of these Conferences arrange for a full external audit, and a set of Financial Statements to be prepared – **final audited financial statements must be submitted by the Conference's to the Regional Office and National Office by 31st March 2016.** Each of these sets of Financial Statements take between 1 to 5 days to be analysed and the data entered onto the finance system. Suddenly all the days are all adding up in the process!

From the time the last Annual Report or set of financial statements is received, it takes 2 months to analyse, interpret, and prepare all the financial data into summarised National Consolidation Financial Statements. Then there is a handover to the external consolidation auditors who will generally spend 6 -8 weeks verifying the accounts. When complete, the consolidation accounts are made available to the Audit Committee, Finance Committee and from there to the National Management Council for signature and approval. **Unfortunately the process is reliant on the last Annual Report or set of financial statements being received – please support the Society in getting these in on time!**

All of this is only possible with the continued support, dedication and hard work of our Conference Treasurers and Presidents, and for this we are extremely grateful. Thank you. To all our Members, very many thanks for you continuing hard work and we wish you every good wish for 2016.

*(If you are a Conference Treasurer and have not received a report or need help making your return, please contact your Regional Coordinator directly.)*



# “Increase donations for SVP today at NO EXTRA cost to your supporters”

## Did you know?

ALL receipted donations over €250 received could be worth up to an extra €113 to us. Through the CHY3 Tax Effective Giving Scheme, Revenue allows charities to claim tax relief on all eligible\* receipted donations over €250 made within one calendar year. Both PAYE and Self Assessed donors can now be included. All tax refunds received on foot of eligible CHY3 donations go back to your Conference.

## How to claim?

To claim the tax relief on eligible receipted donations and increase the value of donations, whether you are a donor or an SVP Conference, just follow these easy steps:

1. **Conference Treasurer:** Record details of each donation received (monthly, annual or other) by donor name in the Treasurers Ledger. Records of each donation must be maintained as Revenue may ask to see them. Send all donors whose donation(s) amount to €250 or more in one year a CHY3 cert and return envelope with their thank you letter / receipt.

2. **Donors:** Donors simply sign the form once and return to National Office in the freepost envelope provided. As this is an enduring cert, it covers any future donations received for 5 years.

3. **National Office:** National Office then processes the claim directly with Revenue and will return eligible funds directly to the local Conference.

## Not claimed previously?

Conferences can claim the tax on any receipted donation for 4 previous years including 2015, 2014, 2013 and 2012, however these must be submitted by September 19th 2016 to be included in this year's claim. Any forms received after that date will be included in the following year's claim.

## Where can I get CHY forms and information packs?

1. **Donors:** Your Conference or Regional Office will send you the CHY3 form.

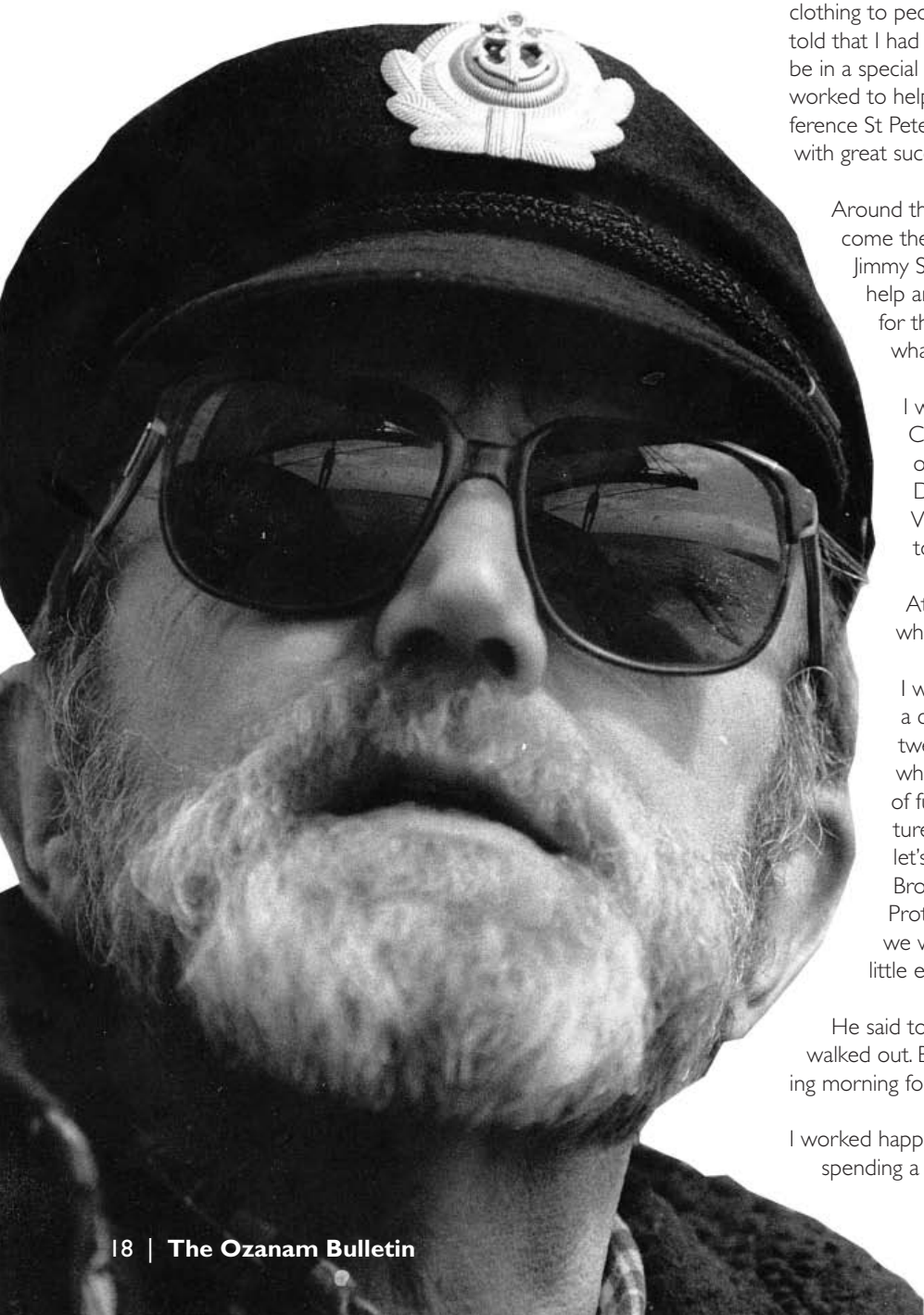
2. **SVP Conferences:** To request more CHY3 certs, freepost envelopes and letter templates simply call Deborah Costello on 01 829 9029 or email [deborah@svp.ie](mailto:deborah@svp.ie).

\* Donations from Ltd Companies are not included in CHY3 Tax Effective Giving Scheme.



# A reflection of 60 years as a member of The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul

By Eamon Mackey



I remember attending my first meeting of the Dublin Councils in all Hollow's College, Drumcondra. You had to be there early to get a seat. At that meeting, four men were given a special introduction for they had completed fifty years as members of our Society. I was in awe that these men had achieved this wonderful milestone. That was in 1955, and to my surprise I have passed that milestone in what seems to be about twenty years. The time has flown.

After school, I started work in a predominately Protestant Company. One of the senior men in that company approached me and asked, "What religion are you?" When I told him he said, "I think you should join the St Vincent de Paul Society. Meet me after work next Monday".

I was introduced to the Clothing Group in Ozanam House, Mountjoy Square, a special works Conference that supplied new clothing to people in need through the Conferences. I was then told that I had to be a member of a Conference before I could be in a special works Conference by Nicky McEvoy, a man who worked to help those in need for many years in his own Conference St Peter's Phibsboro. He also ran the Clothing Bureau with great success and was a great Vincentian.

Around that time a group was forming what was to become the Salvage Bureau downstairs in Ozanam House. Jimmy Sinclair was the first president and we joined in to help and in no time we got hooked on the possibilities for these two special works. They were the start of what is now, the Vincent's Shops.

I was sent to the Conference of Christ the King, Cabra, where I came face to face with the reality of poverty. The then president was an incredible Derry man John McNamara a school teacher in St Vincent's Glasnevin, who was to become my mentor, friend, and later my near neighbour.

At that time the usual food voucher was 5 shillings, which would be equal to about 20cents today.

I was about six months in the Conference when a call for help came from a man who had spent twenty years in St Brendan's Grangegorman, and when he came out, his wife had died and every stick of furniture was gone. "Ok let's get some furniture from the Salvage bureau and more important let's get some food into the house" I advised. "Eh Brother, I think you should know something, I'm a Protestant" I told him that that was unimportant, and we would help him, and maybe he could also get a little extra from his own Minister.

He said to me "I went to him first, but we had a row and I walked out. But I got my own back. I went to Mass the following morning for spite" How do you deal with that?

I worked happily in that Conference for a number of years, spending a week every year in Sunshine House in Balbriggan

as was normal with young members. I got a promotion in the Company I worked for, and I had to move around the Country a lot.

How it happened I don't remember, but I received a call from the President of the Council of Ireland Brother Bill Cashman. I could not have been more surprised if the Pope himself had called. When I'm down the Country could I visit Conferences and Councils and report back to him on their needs and progress. I was delighted, Television was not as yet in the Country and not everyone had phones. As I did not drink, the evenings in a hotel could be very boring. I visited many Conferences and Councils for the next few years. Bill Cashman decided to form a National Youth Council, which I joined with six other young Brothers, one being Larry Twomey who was our first President and he is still working hard on the Council of Dublin.

We organised an International Youth Meeting for young Vincenzian's in Gormanstown College 1965. There we had the pleasure of meeting the then President General Henri Jacob who came over from Paris to the meeting. During the preparation of this meeting we had to get volunteer typists, as there were no female members at that time. I was asked to leave one of these girls home after a very busy Sunday, I married her eighteen months later. She has not forgiven St Vincent de Paul or Fred Ozanam since... The six of us on the committee received a Papal medal; unfortunately mine was stolen in a robbery in my home many years later.

During this time I was also called to the Council of Ireland where I worked happily with Bill Cashman, and later his brother Bob who succeeded him as President, Cormack O' Brion, Dan Hampson, Larry Byrne, Larry Twomey, Michael Kilcullen, John Peacock (The National Secretary) and of course Charlie Gallagher; to name but a few. All these and many more wonderful people who worked hard to make the Society what it is today. I was asked to take over Propaganda. I said that I would, but only if I could change the name to Public Relations. This was agreed and I finished off my fifteen years on the Council of Ireland in this position. During that time we moved from Grafton St to Nicholas St. Many things happened in the Society during that time far too numerous to mention. But one of my proudest times was when I started the Christmas Cards, which are now a huge item within the Society.

I had one major incident while on the Council. I was getting up to date with my PR work in Nicholas St, and was on my own in the office, and it was about 8pm when the doorbell rang and when I answered it, a man was standing there with a parcel. "Give that to the poor" he said. I asked him if there was any money in the bag as I could give him a receipt. "Don't worry about that I don't want one" and he left. I went back to my work and put the parcel into the corner. At about pm I was finished, and decided to check the bag before going home. I opened it, and to my horror and surprise, bundles of £10 and £20 pounds were in the bag, I started counting the bundles and estimated that there was about £20,000 in the bag. When you consider this was about 1966 and in today's money would be about ½ million euro or even more. In shock I rang Bill



Cashman. "You will have to bring it home as you cannot leave it there" he said. "I can't take the responsibility of this amount of money" I replied. "There are three people that know about this Eamon, you, me and the stranger that gave it to you. If you are mugged I won't say anything the stranger won't say anything and the rest is up to you..."

I brought the parcel home telling none of my family and sleeping with the parcel and my dog in the bedroom. There was no happier person than I when I brought the parcel into John Peacock the next morning and I thought he was going to have a stroke when he opened the parcel. We never found out who the stranger was.

After my term on the Council, I then joined the Conference of St Columba, Iona Road, where I later served for a number of years as President. I moved to Howth as I always was a very keen sailor and was happily a member of the local Conference of The Assumption, Howth for ten years. I proudly received the Ozanam medal in 2005.

Grandchildren came, but they lived in the Southside, so we moved to be near them and our children. I am now a member of St Raphael's Conference Rathfarnham. And how happy I am to have Cormac O'Brion former Dublin and National President as a near neighbour.

It has been a fantastic sixty years. If asked, the only change I don't like about the modern Society is it being called SVP instead of the full name St Vincent de Paul Society. I have met many superb people within the Society many of whom I am very proud to call my friends. Alas a good few have died but I can say that I got a lot more out of the Society than I have put into it.



# Investing in our most precious resource

*By Audry Deane,  
Social Justice & Policy Officer*

Despite strong international evidence to show that Early Years Care and Education (ECCE) is good for children, society and the economy, and is of particular benefit to disadvantaged children, access to this precious resource is very expensive, poorly resourced and suffers from variable quality in Ireland.

Despite it being a well known and accepted fact that the early years is a critical time in a child's life and that international evidence clearly shows that good quality early years care pays dividends, it is still the case that you don't need any formal minimum qualification to work in childcare in Ireland. Plans to introduce the minimum requirement of a level 5 NFQ for centre based staff working with young children have been postponed, again, until December 2016. A survey for Pobal found that at the end of 2014, 13% of staff working in the sector had not yet achieved that basic qualification. Ireland is very far from the European benchmark of a 60% graduate led workforce, with only 15% of the workforce qualified to degree level.

This does not bode well for a sector which charges the highest cost for childcare in Europe and yet invests very little, less than 0.2% of GDP, while the OECD average investment is 0.8%.

But this is beginning to change. Last July, a groundbreaking Inter Departmental Group report on childcare and after school care was published which provided costed options which, if resourced and implemented, will improve quality and result in better outcomes for children. In October 2015 came the welcome news that the current confusing array of childcare and after school care schemes would be replaced by a single subsidised affordable childcare and after school programme to begin in 2017. A suite of announcements was made in Budget 2016 regarding improvements in quality, access to places, paid paternity leave and changes to how the targeted schemes operate. Funding was increased by a third to €345 million, so it is safe to say that while Ireland still lags behind the rest of Europe with huge challenges regarding affordability, access and quality of childcare, promises have been made which will provide our children with quality care in the years to come.

All these commitments will take time to bed in and bear fruit. But in the meantime, what about those families who are struggling to both find and afford a childcare or after school place? SVP is very worried about how the lack of affordable, quality and accessible ECCE, childcare and after school care affects a very vulnerable group in Irish society. Lone parent families experience very high levels of deprivation and consistent poverty. While not all lone parent families are disadvantaged, SVP is particularly concerned for those lone parents who are being explicitly 'activated' back to work or into training because of the age of their children. Lone parents have told us, in our research *It's the hardest job in the world*, that it does not make economic sense for them to take up low paid work and pay someone else to look after their children.

"I have had to leave work due to high childcare costs and no lone parents payment. I am now behind with my rent and they

are threatening me with eviction" – *Anonymous, It's the hardest job in the world*

If their goal is to access training or study, they must first meet the requirements of one of the targeted schemes and then secure a place with a convenient provider of after school care or childcare. This is not always possible as the schemes are not available country wide. With just 5,000 full time places available on the Training and Employment (TEC) Childcare programmes there are clearly not enough places to meet the needs of lone parents who will transition from the One Parent Family Payment in the coming years.

While SVP looks forward to the promised delivery of the affordable subsidised childcare and after school care scheme, promised for 2017, we will continue to push for immediate improvements in the near future. We need to see that the extension of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme to private providers does yield more places where people need them.

We need Government to look closely at the fact that the cost of a full week's place in a community provider averages €159 yet the maximum subsidy parents can receive is €95. This results in a gap which many parents simply cannot bridge. It also shows just how precarious the financial viability of many community providers is.

"The changes made to one parent family mean that I'm now on Job Seekers Transitional. I'm looking for work but anything I've a chance of getting is not going to pay the childcare. A lot of jobs are under the hours for Family Income Supplement so basically it feels like I'm been forced into a low paid job for the convenience of our government. Who's worried about my child? No one, only me." - *Anonymous, It's the hardest job in the world*

We intend to lobby the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as they design the new affordable subsidised scheme to ensure that is equitable, transparent, easy to access and affordable for those who need it. They deserve nothing less.

We will also lobby to improve the current underdeveloped and unmapped after school sector. As lone parents whose children are of primary school age tell us, the current inadequate provision of after school care for primary school aged children is having dire consequences for them.

SVP is pleased that the much needed investment in the early years, childcare and after school sector began in Budget 2016. There can be no turning back from this pivotal point. We know that fairer access to high quality services will benefit all of society. We understand that offering our young and school age children access to high quality care and education will equip them to both benefit from their brief years of childhood and acquire skills which will enhance their life chances. SVP believes it is vital to invest in our most precious resource, our children.



# Showing Vincentian Solidarity through Twinning

*Michael Kenny, North East & Midlands Twinning Officer, member St Patrick's Conference Trim, Co Meath*

SVP Zimbabwe has approximately 2,000 members and is twinned with the North East and Midlands (NE&M) region in Ireland. Most of the 13.7 million Zimbabweans live at subsistence level. Indeed most SVP Zimbabwe members would themselves be urgent clients for our SVP Conferences if they were living in Ireland. So the demand on SVP Zimbabwe's' 155 Conferences is great but their possibility for local fundraising is very limited. This article describes the twinning relationship between SVP NE&M and SVP Zimbabwe.

## **What is Twinning?**

Twinning is a direct link between two SVP Conferences or SVP councils sharing prayers, profound friendship and material resources within the Vincentian ethos. In Ireland SVP twinning is managed by the National Twinning Committee; one SVP representative from each region, and meets four to six times a year. The International General Council (IGC) of Saint Vincent De Paul officially launched twinning as a core Vincentian expression of solidarity with the poor in 1954 because "... we believe we are part of this unique world Conference that we are able to focus our efforts on the country that needs them most. Sometimes we will do this by praying, other times by sharing our resources". Through twinning IGC acknowledge that poor people cannot achieve self-sufficiency in the short term and that inequality needs to be challenged locally and globally.

## **Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe is a landlocked southern African country over 4 times bigger than Ireland. While its population is almost 3 times that of Ireland, the density of the population is almost half. Zimbabwe has a long and proud history and at one time was a progressive centre of civilisation in southern Africa. The colonial history of Zimbabwe, formerly known as Southern Rhodesia, dates back to 1890 when the British, following the Rhodes South African Company, ventured to this area in search of gold. Southern Rhodesia gained official independence as Zimbabwe in 1980. In the 1980s the hope was that Zimbabwe would be the breadbasket of East Africa because of its climate and land. However this has not happened and now unemployment is unmeasurable, probably at 70 to 80%, average incomes are 65 times less than in Ireland, and a woman or man in Zimbabwe will die over 20 years earlier than in Ireland.

## **SVP Zimbabwe**

SVP Zimbabwe has 155 Conferences with the membership of almost 2000. SVP members in Zimbabwe do their best against enormous challenges. Their programme of work is similar to ours in Ireland, i.e. providing clothes comfort and education for those in need. But they must also provide other relief such as food aid, healthcare, shelter; repatriation, and humanitarian

assistance because, with an average income 65 times less than that of Ireland, no social welfare, almost no pensions and no hope of employment, many people are completely destitute.

The vital statistics of Ireland and Zimbabwe compared		
	Ireland	Zimbabwe
Region	Europe	Eastern Africa
Surface area (square kilometres)	69,825	390,757
Population in 2012 (estimated, 000)	4,576	13,724
Population density in 2012 (per square kilometre)	65.5	35.1
Capital city and population in 2011 (000)	Dublin (1,121)	Harare (1,542)
GDP per capita 2012 (current US\$)	46,032.1	714.2
Life expectancy 2013 Male/female	56/61	79/83

### Twinning Activities

The NE&M region twins with SVP Zimbabwe in the following ways:

1. Prayer, friendship, and regular contact, particularly with Brother Michael Mangwende, the current SVP Zimbabwe Twinning Officer (SVP Zimbabwe members refer to each other as Brother and Sister)

2. A yearly contribution from the NE&M region assists the SVP Zimbabwe National Council fund national training programmes, visit district councils at AGM time, host the National Council Meetings/AGM, and support administration at the Society's Ozanam House in Harare. 70% of the contribution is distributed to active Conferences for support of their work; similar work to the Conferences in Ireland. Because of the very difficult financial situation it is not feasible for Conferences to raise money locally.

3. The NE&M region, along with the national twinning committee, is funding the renovation of the Nazareth Shelter for elderly destitute in the town of Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe. The shelter has capacity for 40 residents who come from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and South Africa and is run in partnership with Caritas Zimbabwe and the Diocese of Chinhoyi. Residents who have no family support receive accommodation, meals and social interaction. However, due to

poverty the shelter has fallen into serious disrepair. The renovation of Nazareth Shelter is a project in memory of North East SVP members Mary Toole, Navan, and Michael O'Keefe, Kells.

4. During a country visit in July 2015, Alan O'Rourke (Regional Treasurer and Kells Conference member) noticed that there were children in families being supported by SVP Conferences in Zimbabwe that could no longer attend school because their families could not play school fees. While local SVP Conferences do their best, seeing this Alan suggested that the SVP Zimbabwe National Council identify particularly needy children who cannot go to school. Alan suggested to the NE&M Regional President Liam Reilly and Council to ask Conferences in the region to sponsor yearly school fees for one child each. Why? Because in Zimbabwe education is one of the few possibilities for escaping grinding poverty. This initiative has taken off with generous offers coming through and a Special Works Conference to support children in school is being set up in the NE&M region and in SVP Zimbabwe.

5. Other ancillary activities such as contributing to a book covering day-to-day lives of children, ages 8-11, in developed and developing countries "A Day in the Life", as part of the SVP youth programme, etc.

6. Making inputs to member days, SVP seminars, regional newsletters and on this occasion the national magazine.

### Conclusion

The ethos of twinning is active in the NE&M Region and a strong relationship is evident between the region and SVP Zimbabwe. The NE&M Region is committed to the work progressed by the late Mary Toole, Navan, and Michael O'Keefe, Kells and being progressed by the NE&M Regional officers and the national twinning committee chaired by Rose McGowan.



*Pictured visiting a family with members of the local Chinhoyi SVP Conference are Alan O'Rourke Regional Treasurer, Kells Conference, and Michael Kenny, Regional Twinning Officer, Trim Conference (July 2015)*



# A Personal View on Social Justice



**By Johnmark McCafferty,  
Head of SVP Social  
Justice and Policy Team**

## Why bother?

I write this as the general election results are in but the Government is yet to be formed. Those who have been seeking election or re-election have shown little regard for the financial constraints that will face any future Government, rarely matching their promises with the resources required to fund them. It's a time of relative economic recovery, at least in Dublin and perhaps other urban centres. The growth in jobs in recent years is indisputable and very welcome, but has occurred mainly on the East coast. Jobs gains have been accompanied by a sharp rise in rents which, given the abject lack of social housing, has triggered a crisis of family homelessness. As one problem, such as unemployment, is solved – or at least partially tackled, – pressure is placed on another sector with resultant social challenges. Achieving policy success is easier said than done, even when money isn't a problem, and can often lead to unintended consequences.

Working for social justice is not a short term undertaking, and it has many moving parts. What sometimes seems like a compelling case of an 'injustice' is not always as clear cut as it seems.

Where we receive a case study from a Conference member, more information is usually required; the situations facing people are often complex; and people may not be claiming supports to which they are entitled. Once a fuller, clearer picture is gained, not all case studies lend themselves to a social justice 'cause'. So the work of identifying compelling cases requires investment and time. Not only that, but given the wide range of issues which face those we assist, the social justice team deals with a broad range of social policy areas. Housing and Homelessness is now a key concern in a way it wasn't five years ago. We need to 'update' our incomes policy as the cost of living increases, Government revenue improves and issues like the 'living wage' gain momentum. And we will watch closely how the new Government commits to, resources and implements recent promises regarding investment in Early Childhood Care and Education and After School Care, and also the recently announced Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty.

Social Justice is core work of the organisation. It is as central to the mission of the SVP as Conference visitation and the work of



members to empower the people we assist through accessing education, training and employment.

In Paris in the early 19th Century our founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam instructed SVP volunteers that: "You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis. You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long-term improvement." Similarly, in a speech Pope Francis gave in Bolivia early last summer about economic inequality, he said: "Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment."

It appears to me, after 14 years of working in the staff team and witnessing the incremental growth of our Social Justice work – and indeed its influence - that we are now at a crossroads.

The new Government commitments described above present an opportunity for SVP to achieve more policy change to improve the lives of the people we assist. We need to advocate strongly on emerging social justice issues such as family homelessness and to ensure that the experience of our members

working on the ground with individuals and families in need is the foundation of our social justice work.

However, many challenges remain. Notwithstanding the tentative economic recovery, there are major difficulties in the policy environment, including the growing housing crisis, stubbornly high poverty rates and more pressure on public services such as education and health. We also have growing numbers of children and older people in the population and we face possible political uncertainty if a stable Government is not formed after the General Election.

New challenges require new priorities and focus or we risk being less influential in the policy domain and less effective in changing things for the people and communities we assist. As St. Augustine said "Charity is no substitute for justice withheld". Without an ambitious commitment to social justice, why bother?

If you have a case study which you think would support our social justice work, please send details to email [brendan.hennessy@svp.ie](mailto:brendan.hennessy@svp.ie)

## Free Microchipping

For those on benefits or of limited means

From the 31st March 2016 it will be a legal requirement for all dogs in Ireland to be microchipped. Those who do not get their dog chipped may face a fine of up to €5,000.

In order to support those on benefits or low-income, the ISPCA is offering a limited number of free microchipping events across the country.

SVP members can contact the ISPCA on **043 3325035** or **[info@ispca.ie](mailto:info@ispca.ie)** if they feel that someone they assist could avail of this support.





# Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre Playing their part

## **OWL's (One World Ladies) Basketball Training Sessions - Celebrating Interculturalism**

Every Friday morning in Westside Community Centre a group of women come together for a basketball training session. These sessions are particularly unique as the participants are women from new communities and Irish women – different ages, different nationalities, different levels of fitness and skills but different together!

The sessions are supported by Titans Basketball Club who provide equipment and coaching expertise and the use of the Westside Centre at a reasonable fee. Croí na Gaillimhe support staff play alongside participants and it provides an opportunity to discuss and plan for the needs of new communities in particular.

Participants have spoken about the impact these sessions have on them, including:

Relieving stress especially for the women living in direct provision centres and those who have transitioned recently to the community.

Increased fitness and awareness of health and wellbeing, and increased coping and resilience mechanisms due to improved physical and mental wellbeing.

“I look forward to coming, I forget everything when I'm playing...it's just about getting the ball, playing as a team...all the worries are gone for that time”.

Above all, the participants both those from new communities and the Irish women talk about the social aspect of the sessions. For the most part these women did not previously know one another nor have the opportunity to interact with one another prior to the development of these sessions.

“The fun is great... we get to know each other in a way you don't in a more formal setting”.

The development of this special approach to Interculturalism was initially made possible by the SOLAS (2013 – 2015) Project funded under the European Refugee Fund which sought to develop supports for people in the asylum process in Galway and Mayo. Croí na Gaillimhe in partnership with Titans Basket-

ball Club have continued the successful approach established under the SOLAS Project and are planning ways of enhancing the process for the women involved based on the outcomes of the evaluation in December 2015.

## CHOIR

A Choir group meet every Thursday evening from 6.30pm to 7.30pm to sing at Croí na Gaillimhe, the group learn songs from around the world as well as loved and known tunes. The Choir is for people living in the Asylum Process and people from the local community. All voices are welcome. Group singing has been proven to have a positive effect on all!

“Group singing is cheaper than therapy, healthier than drinking and more fun than working out”



## Asylum Seeker Advocacy Group

Asylum Seeker Advocacy Group is a group of volunteers working with Croí Na Gaillimhe, to support Asylum Seekers in preparing for their interview or appeal for Refugee Status or Subsidiary Protection. They are not solicitors nor do they provide any legal advice.

Their goal is to enable the protection applicant to give a clear, coherent and complete account of their experience. They explain the interview or appeals process and help the applicant to:

- Prepare a timeline and personal statement prior to interview for Refugee Status.
- Provide Country of Origin information and/or case law relevant to the case.
- Email relevant documents to the solicitor of the applicant, who decides if it is useful to submit them to the Department of Justice.

**Working Group Members:** Cathriona Naughton, Cristabelle Metcalfe, Manon Jubert and Marian Merrick.

## CROÍ NA GAILLIMHE HOMEWORK CLUB WITH A DIFFERENCE

The Croí na Gaillimhe Homework Club in the Eglinton Direct Provision Centre started on the 8th September 2014. It provides homework support to up to 31 children living in the centre, in Salthill. It has two part-time staff and approximately 20 volunteers working with the children. The project is funded by the Maureen O’Connell bequest and supported by a Steering Committee, Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre and Christ the King, St. Vincent de Paul Conference. The Club runs from 2.30pm to 6.30pm Monday to Thursday. The majority of the children who come to the club attend primary school and range from senior infants to sixth class as well as four secondary school students.



Our volunteers are very dedicated and come with a wide range of skills and expertise and have contributed greatly to the success of the club so far.

We are very well assisted by four transition year students from Salerno Secondary School Galway, some of whom are included in accompanying photos.

Daria Michalik, Aoife Gallivan, Niamh Kavanagh and Ciara Quinn. Recently, the club held two very successful workshops with external facilitators: an anti-bullying workshop on 16th November and a Careers Guidance Workshop on 10th of November. All pupils attended the former while the latter was focussed on secondary students. We expect to follow up on these valuable additions in due course.

**For more information on all the above programmes:  
Contact Loretta Needham Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre 091-895203**

# THE RURAL DIVIDE

By Peg Hanafin

The most recent survey from the Survey on Income and Living conditions (SILC) shows a rising level of poverty in rural areas between 2008 and 2014, a continuing escalation of poor living conditions, and a lack of basic services, which adds to the exclusion of those who live in what is called “rural” Ireland. In 2014 19.1% of people living in rural Ireland were at risk of poverty, while those living in consistent poverty stood at 8% - double that of 2008 (SILC)

Over the past few decades, rural Ireland has suffered from closures and reductions of many public services. Further education, affordable childcare, social and affordable housing or financial services, are often non-existent .

I recently had an email from a friend who lives in what would be classed a remote rural area. He told me that when he was young, there were 4 shops, a post office and 3 pubs in the vibrant village near where he lived. Most of these are now gone and people need to travel several miles to the nearest villages for shopping, pensions and any other requirements. This isolates the elderly and those who are unable to drive or have no access to a car. Rural transport is vital in keeping communities alive and socially active.

“The saddest part of all” he said “is that at night there are no lights in windows across the fields or on the hillsides which were once a solace for the people living there that there was life nearby. The owners of these houses are either dead or emigrated and the houses are left to decay”. He also made the

point that without the intervention of the parish priest, who managed to obtain computers and modern equipment for the local primary school, it might have been closed also. The Priest also put in place a meditation garden for people to gather in prayer and meditate and to facilitate a space for social interaction amongst his parishioners.

In the recent past we have seen the devastation of family homes, farmland, damage to fodder and livestock and the despair of people trying to overcome floods. There are volumes written since the first Drainage Act of 1842 highlighting flooding as a major concern. If more of the recommendations made over all the years had been implemented the disastrous consequences for rural families and infrastructure could have been lessened. Families have seen their children emigrate. For the old and the sick, with no long-term care options, living out their lives in solitary and unsuitable homes is a tragedy.

We now have a large number of people suffering from stress and anxiety , feeling forgotten by successive government agencies. I ask when and how can this erosion of rural communities be brought to an end? It cannot be achieved without the commitment and input of all those responsible for the running and maintenance of our country. The Government has reduced investment in community development programmes since 2008. This thinking will have to be reversed and every assistance given to alleviate the growing exclusion being experienced in rural Ireland in 2016.



# How SVP has helped



SVP received a call from a young married couple with three children under the age of 10. Joan and David were both professionals, however they were made redundant and had been unemployed for 6 and 9 months respectively. One of the children had a serious health problem.

The family were living in a private home with 2 cars parked outside the door, but SVP members soon found that the house and one of the cars were for sale, and the family had been surviving by selling their furniture. At first, SVP helped with some vouchers to make sure there was food on the table and fuel when needed. At Christmas the Conference was able to give some toys and a food hamper as well. On the advice of the family doctor, they also helped with swimming lessons for the child with health problems.

Members also encouraged the family to seek the help of MABS. The financial help, together with advice and encouragement from SVP members to contact MABS, marked the turning point in this situation. The family were able to focus on the ongoing negotiations with banks and other financial institutions, and thankfully Joan found a new job in the New Year and things really started to look up. The members could see hope coming back into David's face and the family in general.

When Joan re-joined the workforce, SVP started cutting back on their assistance. They did this a little at a time until the family were able to cope alone. To the members and the Society this was a huge success story, they saw this family come from the depths of despair and dependency to hope and self-sufficiency.

A couple with two children contacted the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Mark had developed a serious medical problem a year earlier and was confined to a wheelchair and unable to leave the house most days. Elaine had a professional job, but was diagnosed with a serious illness and was unable to continue working. Her illness resulted in a lot of trips to Dublin for treatment and unfortunately bills started to build up.

Two SVP members visited the family to establish how the Society could best help. Vouchers and fuel help were given. Elaine finished her treatment and was able to return to work and SVP cut back on their help little by little until no more assistance was required.

Unfortunately Elaine's illness returned a few months later and a little help was given over the Christmas period. The Conference have told the family that they will be keeping in touch from time to time and the family know to contact the Society if they need to.

This family said that apart from the financial assistance, the companionship was invaluable as they saw very few people throughout the days and weeks and it helped them not to feel so alone.

\*All names have been changed

# Investing in public services should be priority for new Government

*Caroline Fahey, Social Policy Development Officer*

In the run up to the general election much of the debate focused on the so-called 'fiscal space' – i.e. the resources that the new Government may have available (depending on economic growth and other factors) to invest in public services, reduce taxes or pay down Ireland's debt.

Election pledges were made to reduce or abolish taxes and charges while promises were made to increase investment in essential public services such as housing, pensions, childcare, education and health at the same time. We were told that we could have it all, with Fine Gael MEP Brian Hayes saying in a speech in late November 2015 that "the choice between tax cuts and better public services is a false choice", suggesting that improved economic activity will allow for both a reduction in taxes on incomes and increased investment in services.

If economic growth continues it will present the Government with more choices. It is likely that there will be some reductions in tax, along with some increased investment in public services. The balance between these is a matter for Government to decide. But an organisation like SVP, which is committed to working for social justice and an end to poverty and social exclusion, can have a view.

SVP's main concern is that good quality public services and adequate income supports are accessible by the people we assist, whether they are in employment on low pay or in receipt of social welfare. Two of the biggest issues facing Irish society which are of concern to SVP are housing and childcare. The third level education sector will also face increasing pressures in the coming years. These areas require significant investment of

resources. More children and older people in the population also need to be catered for. We need to ask whether giving tax reductions means that not enough will be invested in public services and income supports to meet these emerging needs. We also need to consider how we are going to find the resources to tackle increasing inequality which is limiting the opportunities and life chances of too many of our citizens.

The measures to reduce the Universal Social Charge announced in Budget 2016 will cost an estimated €772 million in a full year. This is a substantial amount when we consider that in the midst of a housing crisis only €800 million was invested in housing programmes in 2015; and when the entire budget of the chronically underfunded Child and Family Agency, Tusla, is €662 million. Choices are always available to Government. For example, Barnardos estimates that making primary and second level education fully free for families, eliminating voluntary contributions, transport costs and the cost of school books etc, would cost €203 million per year. Would more investment in social housing and education have been a better use of public money than reducing the Universal Social Charge? What would make the biggest difference in the lives of the people we assist?

Helping people to become self-sufficient is a key aim of SVP, and this is closely linked to our social justice work. If we cannot achieve a more just society, with less inequality and greater access to good quality public services, the people we assist will continue to be trapped in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage. This is why we must continue to advocate for the kind of social and economic policies which will benefit everyone in our society, and in particular those who are struggling, even when it means asking difficult questions.





# Christmas (s) miles better for old folk thanks to SVP

*Connaught Telegraph columnist Man on the Bridge*

"As the evening Angelus bells rang in Castlebar one evening in December; I witnessed the true spirit of Christmas", writes Connaught Telegraph columnist Man on the Bridge.

Members of St. Vincent de Paul gathered in the evening gloom outside the Sacred Heart Hospital and began transferring festive goodies from car boots onto waiting trolleys. Bottles of whiskey and Baileys, boxes of sumptuous chocolates, and lots of fruit, including oranges and grapes were piled high.

A popular local musician known as Bumble Bee (Gerry Rowland) arrived to add to the festive celebrations. "He was squeezing his accordion so hard I feared for a moment the poor instrument might disintegrate, such was the force of his dancing fingers" notes the columnist Man on the Bridge.

"Bring me back to the Black Hills, the Black Hills of Dakota," the merry troubadour B.B. sang as he led the gift-laden members of the SVP Sacred Heart Visitation Conference into the hospital foyer where a Christmas tree sparkled brightly.

Down corridors to wards such as St. Anthony's and St. Joseph's the happy throng meandered, announcing their presence with lively song accompanied by the tireless Bumble Bee and his accordion.

In wards along the way, many a tired and ageing body responded to the banter and the music.

Hot whiskeys and other refreshments were offered to all, of course, under the supervision of watchful nurses, mindful of individual dietary and medication issues.

One woman in a wheelchair positively lit up like a 100-watt bulb when Bumble Bee sang 'Westmeath Bachelor' and began dancing in front of her. Visitors and staff joined in the fun with a spot of impromptu dancing.

"We have 13 members," patiently explained Ann, a leading member of the St. Vincent de Paul Visitation Conference. "Every Monday night we visit all of the units in the hospital for a chat with patients. Some are very responsive, others less so. At this stage many of the patients have got to know us and I like to think they look forward to and enjoy our visits."

Last week, one member of the visiting group from St. Vincent de Paul brought along her grandchildren.

"What a wonderful way, I thought to myself afterwards, to instill in young minds a sense of the real meaning of life and Christmastime," wrote the Connaught Telegraph columnist.



# The future of Post Offices

*Seamus Boland  
Irish Rural Link*

The turning of the tide or the power of gravity is forces that cannot be resisted and for good or evil we end up bowing to them. Similarly the decline of Post offices has gathered pace and in the more isolated rural areas is also proving to be unstoppable. It was with these ideas in mind I waited for the launch of the recent report on the future of post offices, which was produced by Dragon Dens star Bobby Kerr and his steering group. Appointed by Minister Alex White, who when launching the report on February 3rd, stated;

“Post Offices are the fabric of our local Communities and they have a pivotal role to play in the revival of rural Ireland, our towns and villages. A proper strategy needs to be drawn up for

the future sustainability of our post office network in our ever changing market space.”

The report recommends the establishment of a post office network renewal process, which is to be established immediately and will conclude its work before the end of August. The report wants to build on An Post’s existing five-year strategy for the network and address the number and spatial distribution of branches, branch modernisation, the streamlining of products and services, postmaster payments and contracts.

The narrative that describes the decline of the rural post office network is well known. Usage is down, costs are up, technol-





ogy social welfare payments are changing and the minority who benefit from the service have least influence. It is accepted that their closure does affect a significant number of people, mainly older people living in isolated rural areas, whose access to transport, to broadband needed for banking use is limited. This group is also vulnerable to instances of greater poverty, often benefitting from the volunteerism of organisations like the St Vincent De Paul.

Such closures represent the abandonment of the principle of providing public services to all of the people, not just those who fit the rules of profit return. It also serves to punish the population who live in these areas because they live there. Equally the loss of this service adds further to the huge challenges faced by smaller towns and villages that in many cases are fighting for their very survival.

Under Minister Mary O'Rourke back in 2001, the then report recommended the establishment of branches in shops, garages and assorted retail outlets. This was seen as a first step towards the widening of availability of the Post Office services and improving their ability to achieve profit. Sadly and despite these changes the network continues to decline in number. Such a phenomenon is also prominent in Europe generally, where solutions range between allowing them to go, without actions to

“ Such closures represent the abandonment of the principle of providing public services to all of the people, not just those who fit the rules of profit return”

replace them to the development of other services based in the network's premises.

Bobby Kerr's report is in many ways a logical extension of the O'Rourke report. It makes many recommendations, all of them designed to maximise profitable returns for the service. In that instance they should be supported. However there is a serious danger that the abandonment of public services because they are non profitable undermines the basic principles of fairness and equality which were cornerstones of the 1916 proclamation celebrated widely in this year 2016.

Unfortunately the evolution proposed may not stop the onward continuation of closures. Rural communities must also face up to the fact that, by not using the service they are also putting it in danger. If they do continue to close, then the next Government will need to appoint another group, not to look at the future of post offices, but to examine the provision of a one stop shop which will assist people with the availability of a place to go which will house a range of necessary services, which may cover anything from health, to financial assistance to use of home technology. Such places will need to provide a space for social interaction. Social interaction is a major antidote to depression and mental illness. I hope that the Kerr report will work. Certainly it's the last hope that the Post Office network has for its survival and if it fails, then rural communities will lose another pillar needed to ensure service equality. It should be remembered that 40% of the national population is rural. That means that a denial of access to services such as those represented by the Post Office network is unacceptable.



## Election 2016

### **For Whom and for What Will You Vote? An opportunity to work for a more just and inclusive Ireland**

*(At the time of writing this article the election had not yet taken place)*

During the past weeks we have been bombarded by election promises, debates and campaign manifestos. For the most part, little attention has been paid to the situation of that large section of our population which is experiencing poverty in all or some of its many forms, including lack of access to much needed services. There is an emphasis on tax reduction without consideration of the consequent reduction of resources for the more adequate funding of essential services such as housing, healthcare, public transport and childcare.

Twenty one years ago the VPSJ was established to work for social and economic change tackling poverty and exclusion. As a small organisation it had to narrow its focus to promoting an adequate income for all and greater participation in elections by people whose voices are still unheard.

In months previous to the election we saw statistics on income distribution. They tell us that the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. But people, unlike figures in the paper or on a computer screen, cannot be filed away. This edition of JustNow focuses on the present and less acknowledged reality of facts and figures and on the hopes of some of 2016's first time Voters. We hope that our readers when deciding for whom to vote, will give priority to the needs of people struggling with poverty and/or social exclusion.

### **Election 2016 - The Less Acknowledged Reality**

People Living Below the Poverty Line - Defined as having a disposable income below 60% of average (median) income in Ireland. People in this situation are described as 'at risk of poverty'. In reality most of them are living in actual poverty. In 2014 over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million people (755,570), including 213,656 children and 55,145 adults aged 65 years and over were living with an income below the poverty line in Ireland.

### **Deprivation**

A person is said to be deprived if they cannot afford at least two items from a list of eleven basic necessities. In 2014 1.3 million people were in deprivation, including about  $\frac{3}{4}$  million people without heat at some point in the last year and  $\frac{1}{2}$  million who cannot afford new clothes.

### **People Living In Consistent Poverty**

The 2014 CSO figures show over a third of a million people (370,832) are in consistent poverty. This is where their income puts them below the poverty line and they are experiencing deprivation. This includes over 1 in 10 children (11.2% or 128,653 children) living in households with inadequate income and going without basic necessities. People Who Are Homeless In December 2015 there were 5,241 homeless people including 2,564 adults without children and 775 families consisting of 1,061 parents and 1,616 children.

### **People on Hospital Trolleys**

On the 2nd February 2016 there were 456 patients on trolleys in our hospitals.

### **People in Direct Provision**

The rate of direct provision allowance for asylum seekers is €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child per week. Apart from meals, accommodation and limited assistance with clothing costs for some families, this is the total disposable income for people in the asylum process.

### **A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) for All - Why Not?**

A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is a standard which no one should be expected to live below. It is the minimum needed to live and partake in Irish society today, meeting the physical, psychological and social needs of individuals and households. It is a minimum standard for everyone, not just those in poverty, and identifies the cost of a dignified standard of living which allows participation in the norms of Irish life. An income below the MESL threshold means individuals and households must do without some essential goods and services.

In 1999 the VPSJ began to work to establish the expenditure and income necessary for a MESL. For most households income needs are met through employment (wages/salaries). For a significant number income is met by social welfare transfers or by a combination of social welfare transfers and a wage. The VPSJ facts and figures throw light on the adequacy of both social welfare transfers and wages in meeting the costs of a MESL.

The following illustrates the situation of two household types dependent on social welfare transfers: a single adult of working age living alone in rented accommodation and a two parent, two children household living in social housing. The weekly cost of a MESL is based on the weekly cost of all goods and services required by the household which range from the weekly cost of

furniture to perishable food items.  
Single Adult:  
Weekly cost of MESL= €340.68  
Weekly income from social transfers= €276.00  
Weekly Shortfall= €64.68

Two Parent, Two Children Household:  
Weekly cost of MESL= €477.00  
Weekly income from social transfers= €438.94  
Weekly shortfall= €38.06

Depending on whom we vote for, election 2016 will have either a negative or positive impact on the living standard of low income families.

### **The Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme leading up to the General Election 2016**

It is important to vote. The act of doing so is empowering regardless of the outcome. Voting, as we all know, is the cornerstone of a democracy and part of good citizenship, but sadly, many people in Ireland are alienated from the democratic system and are not voting. This reality is being ignored by our political thinkers and very little is being done to recognise and deal with this low voter turn-out.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice is responding to this alienation and low turn-out by facilitating the Voter Education Programme with groups throughout the country and by training Trainers to facilitate the Programme. The Programme emphasises the importance of voting and is increasing participation in the democratic process. The programme which is non-party political explores with people why to vote, explains how to register and complete a ballot sheet, to identify issues of concern, develop a position on the issues and how to choose a candidate who might pursue their issues of concern.

During recent months the emphasis has been on Training Trainers, who in turn can facilitate the Programme with groups in their own areas of work. The Adult Literacy Organisers of the ETB (formerly known as the VEC) organised Training for 20+ Adult Education Teachers in Ennis. All found the training and the resources available from the VPSJ excellent and accessible. They felt encouraged and ready to facilitate the programme with the unemployed, parents, early school leavers, new communities, literacy groups etc. and to go forward with the task of encouraging others to vote for a more just and equal society.

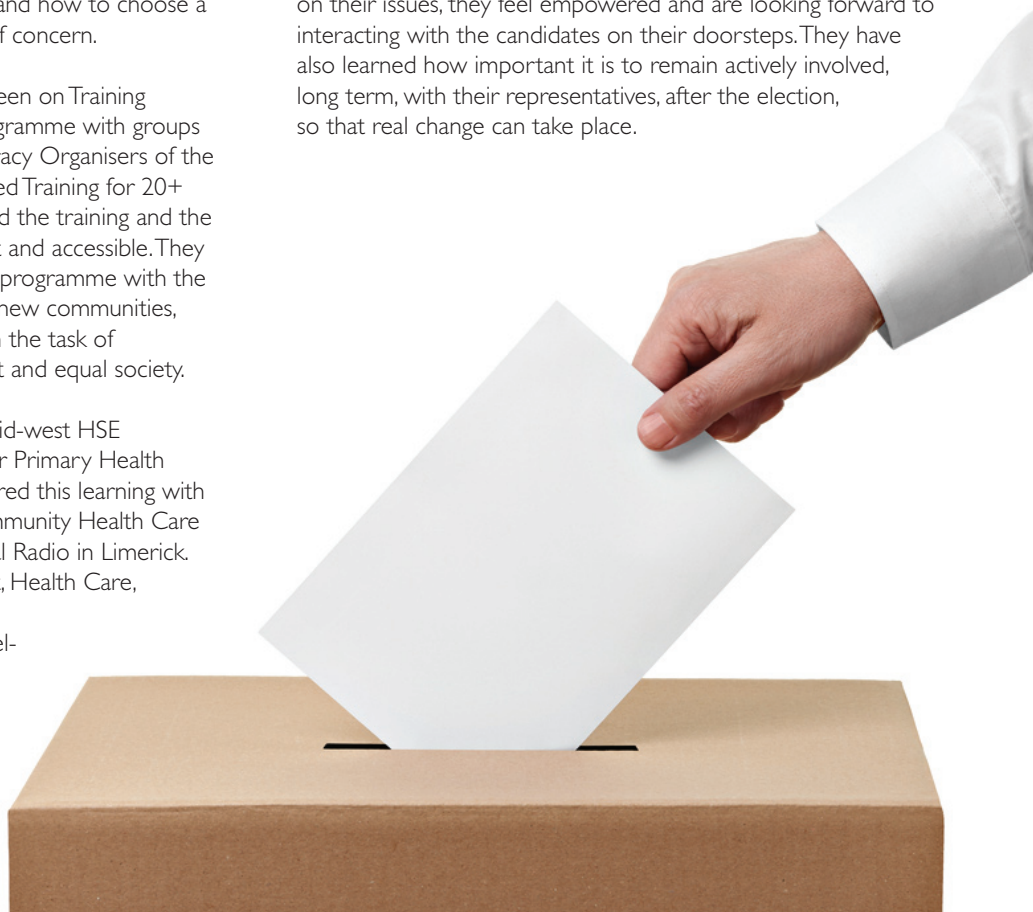
The Primary Health Care Project in the mid-west HSE organised Training for a number of Traveller Primary Health Care workers in Limerick, who in turn shared this learning with members of their own communities. "Community Health Care Matters" is now covering the topic on local Radio in Limerick. Many decisions on Education, Employment, Health Care, Transport, Housing and Environment that affect the health and wellbeing of the Traveller and the wider community are made by politicians. Travellers by adding their voices, hope to be part of the move-

ment to create a more equal society, so it is important to vote for the best representatives.

The DFI, Disability Federation of Ireland, the national support organisation for voluntary disability organisations, who provide services to people with disability and disabling conditions, organised Training in January 2016 for their services in Dublin, Limerick and Galway. Some people travelled from Kerry and Cork to be part of the training in Limerick and they will share their learning with their own groups. It is their hope to make disability a priority in the new programme for Government.

The Programme was also facilitated with Traveller Groups in Sandyford and Cashel and with community groups in Clonmel and Tipperary, where local TDs and local Co. Councillors joined the groups to participate and inform themselves regarding the Groups' issues and concerns. Two groups, the elderly and people with intellectual disability, in Newbridge and Kildare town found the Programme interesting, empowering and enjoyable. Following the completion of the Programmes, group leaders from four of the groups attended a Training session and are now ready to facilitate the Programme in their own particular services.

It's February and the Elections and campaigning are under way. Nonetheless the Voter Education Programme is in demand. On Mondays I facilitate the Programme with Sunbeam House Services in Bray for people with disability and on Tuesdays, with The Moore Abbey services in Monasterevin, for people with disability. A Traveller group in Castlebar hopes to fit in the Programme before the Election takes place on 26th February. People have enjoyed the programme, found it informative, practical, motivational and engaging. They also liked the interaction within the groups and the time for discussion. They are now more aware of the power of their vote and are convinced about the importance of actually going out to vote. Having developed a stance on their issues, they feel empowered and are looking forward to interacting with the candidates on their doorsteps. They have also learned how important it is to remain actively involved, long term, with their representatives, after the election, so that real change can take place.



## SAND, SEA AND PLENTY OF RELAXATION



The Ozanam Holiday centre is set on four acres in Mornington, Co. Meath, and is only a 10 minute walk from the beach and from the River Boyne where St Patrick is said to have landed. It is approximately 30 km from Dublin, 6km from Drogheda, and is within walking distance of the village of Bettystown.

The Ozanam Holiday Centre has 31 twin rooms, all en suite. The building is on ground level making it very accessible for those with mobility problems. Weekly full board is offered, which includes evening entertainment. The Centre has a relaxing sun room with a library, an oratory and a TV lounge with

widescreen TV. The bar is open for lunch and from 8.30pm to 11.30pm each evening.

The in-house entertainment includes five and six piece bands with nightly dancing and singing. Amenities include a landscaped patio garden with a relaxing water feature, and all-weather bowling green and all weather golf putting surface. Other activities include pool and croquet. A kitchenette with tea and coffee facilities is available 24 hours a day.

The Centre is open all year round and is available at weekends from September to May for group meetings, Meditation and Mindfulness, Yoga, Pilates, Wellness weekends and retreats etc. We can cater for all groups and weekends can be tailored to suit your needs.

Our Summer Season will commence on 29th May, 2016 when we have availability for individuals or groups to come and enjoy our 6 nights, full board accommodation in twin ensuite rooms with 5 nights live music and dancing.

We welcome you as a friend, this holiday is for you to enjoy in your own way, however we know you will leave here with new friends feeling refreshed.

For further information please contact 0419827808 or email [ozanamhome@eircom.net](mailto:ozanamhome@eircom.net)

## John O'Regan, Navan, Retires After 60 years of Service

**ST. FRANCIS SPECIAL WORKS CONFERENCE, NAVAN**

*Bill Lawlor, P.R.O. Navan*

One of Ireland's longest serving Vincentians, John O'Regan of Navan, has retired after over 60 years of unsparing effort in aid of those most in need.

A native of Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, he has been a member of the Society in the Meath town since 1970, prior to which he was attached to the SVP in Mullingar for 10 years and in Dublin for five.

He was aged 80 in 2012 when he was presented with a long service medal to mark half a century's work for the Society and his community. John was a member of the local St. Paul's Conference up to the time of his departure. Prior to that he belonged to the St. Patrick's Conference, of which he was President from 1982 to 1986. He held the post of Area President on two occasions – from 1973 to 1980 and from 1986 to 1993.

In 1973 the former Office of Public Works (OPW) engineer participated in Dublin in the first ever-international meeting outside of Paris of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul.

During his long and fruitful career, John's tackling of difficult situations and wise counselling proved invaluable at Conference and higher levels of the Society. A strong, no-nonsense advocate of equality and fairness, his aim always was to help and advance the rights of the disadvantaged.

Over the years, his assistance towards and encouragement of new members was also greatly appreciated, as was his organisational skills which were particularly evident some decades ago in his restructuring and strengthening of arrangements for Navan SVP's annual church gate collection – a vital source of funds for the local organisation.

At a recent presentation occasion, he was the recipient of many warm tributes by SVP colleagues who wished John, his wife Margaret and family health and happiness in the years ahead.

## Midland Bikers Toy Run For Bethany House and St. Martha`s Hostels Longford

On the Sunday 13th December last over 70 Bikers arrived with Santa and Mrs Claus to bring toys and presents to the women and children in Bethany House and the Men in St. Martha`s Hostels in Longford.

Staff,Volunteers, Conference members and friends turned out to welcome them on arrival. All the children got to meet Santa and the excitement on the faces of many of the children was fantastic. Both services are very thankful to all involved.



## Navan SVP welcomes new Area President



The new Navan Area President Stephen Flattery has been a member of the town's St. Patrick's Conference since 2009 and has been its President for the past five years. A native of Castlerea, Co. Roscommon, he is an employee of Tara Mines and is married, with two teenage children.

Stephen, who is particularly concerned about the plight of the homeless in Navan, says he is hopeful

that the Society of St.Vincent de Paul can persuade the appropriate authorities to initiate a project to improve the lifestyle and mental well-being of those living locally in emergency accommodation while in receipt of inadequate State payments.

He envisages a project similar to that of a Men's Shed that could occupy the talents and lift the spirits of these individuals. He says that the implementation of such a scheme would require the goodwill and involvement of the HSE and Meath County Council, which could be assured of the support of SVP.

Stephen is also seeking the faster payment of approved grants to third level students who frequently face hardship for many weeks because of the delay in this procedure. He points out that the absence of a University or an Institute of Technology in Meath means that young people face heavy expenditure in travelling to colleges in neighbouring counties or even further afield.

We wish Stephen well in his endeavours.

## World Day of the Sick



On Thursday, February 11, 2016 the St. Kilian's Conference in Mullagh, Co.Cavan held their annual Mass and Blessing of the Sick in St. Kilian's Heritage Centre in Mullagh. For over twenty years members have organised this lovely occasion in conjunction with the local parish clergy. Fr. John Gilhooly PP, Mullagh celebrated the Mass Sheila Fox and members of the church choir led the hymn singing in which all the congregation participated enthusiastically. Each person who chose to do so received the Sacrament of the Sick with the choir singing appropriate hymns.

The Mass was followed by a wonderful lunch, with lots of discussion and camaraderie. Older people who don't go out much were delighted to meet old friends for a chat. A raffle was held and all the guests went home happy and really delighted.

## Dunboyne children fundraise for SVP!!!!



A donation of €840 was collected by the children of Dunboyne Junior School and presented to the local Conference of SVP. The Conference members were delighted commenting "it was great to see such young children and their teachers so interested in our work"..

*From Left : Deputy Principal Anne Gleeson, Veronica O'Reilly SVP, Jack Carney SVP and Principal Siobhan Cartuir and some children from the School.*

## Dunshaughlin Fashion Show a rip roaring success

The Team at Vincent's Dunshaughlin lead by Shop Manager Marina, co-ordinated and organised a Fashion Show which was held on November 20th last at the prestigious Tattersalls House, Co. Meath.

With weeks of preparation and hard work, the event was a rip roaring success. The Team managed to raise over €6,700.00!

Support for the event was overwhelming. It was a real community event with every business in the town contributing products and services for prizes. Local schools assisted with the stage preparation and some doubled up as models.

"Everybody put in a huge effort to make the evening a reality. We had Pop up Stalls for clothes, bric a brac, jewellery, bags and shoes. We had models ranging in age from seven to eighty six said Marina - They were fabulous. The models came out to oohs and aahs, and some of them didn't even get back into the fitting room before the clothes were bought off their backs! Everything ran as smooth as silk. I'm so proud of everyone for helping make the show such a success".

Following the show Marina and the Team received many plaudits from customers and sponsors alike for an outstanding event.

Everyone at the NE&M Regional Office congratulates a great Team and Community success.



## Weathering out the snow storms - 25th Anniversary of St Finians Conference



In late 1990 the then Parish Priest, V. Rev. Brian O'Sullivan encouraged the establishment of a Conference of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul in River Valley.

River Valley was a relatively new Parish set up on the Western side of Swords from the original Parish of St. Colmcilles. At the time new non-stop building development had projected the population to in excess of 5,000 people, mainly new young families who were first time buyers paying exorbitant mortgage rates. Fr. O'Sullivan noted that some of these families were in dire financial need and that perhaps the establishment of a St. Vincent de Paul Conference might be able to offer some comfort to these families.

So it came to pass, some local parishioners were recruited and the Conference was set up under the title St. Finian's Conference, River Valley with seven members. The first meeting was held on Monday 5th February 1991. However, this was not the first official event to be carried out by the new Conference because then as now, finances for the new Conference was paramount, so on Saturday 3rd February 1991 in a blinding snow storm the first Church door collection was made by Phyllis and Denis Barry following the 7.30 p.m. vigil Mass. The departing Mass goes obviously taking pity on the two snowman like figures, a tidy collection was gathered.

From these humble beginnings St. Finian's Conference has become a strong member of the Dublin North County Area today with a vibrant membership serving the needs of the Parish. On Tuesday 2nd February 2016, St. Finian's Conference held a celebration Mass marking 25 years in existence. V. Rev. Des Doyle was celebrant and he spoke highly of the work of the St.Vincent de Paul in the Parish. The Mass was attended by members of Conferences Dublin North County together with members from SVP HQ in Sean McDermott St.

During the ceremony 25 year service medals and certificates were presented to Phyllis and Denis Barry whose service goes back to the original Church door collection during a snowstorm in 1991.

## Pearse College for Further Education

The Staff and students of Pearse College for Further Education situated in Clogher Road, Dublin have again this year raised funds for the local Conference of SVP, St. Bernadette's. They raised a fantastic €500 which will be used to help those most in need in the area.

As well as the students, the photo includes from right to left Principal Jacqui Nunan, Noel Boyce Area President South West Crumlin & Treasurer of St. Bernadette's Conference and teacher and organiser Briffni Conaty.



## Gaelscoil Sáirséal



Michael Murphy of SVP receiving monies raised by the Gaelscoil Sáirséal Bridge Street, Limerick school choir & grúpa ceoil (children from 4th, 5th & 6th class) who went carol-singing on O'Connell St on Monday December 21st in aid of the local St.Vincent de Paul. They raised an amazing €254.

## Archbishop Eamon Martin Official Opening Chapel Lane Centre Armagh



Wednesday 23rd September saw a dream become a reality for Armagh's Saint Patrick's Conference as His Grace Archbishop Eamon Martin took time out from his busy schedule to officially open the Conference's new Chapel Lane Centre. The centre situated in one of the oldest streets of Armagh once comprised of three old houses dating back to the 17th century.

Over the centuries these houses have nestled underneath the watchful eye of St Patrick's Church of Ireland and the Malachy's Centre (the reputed birthplace of St Malachy Saint and Scholar of Armagh). It is a fitting tribute that the SVP Chapel Lane Centre will be used as an education establishment for local people in keeping with our scholarly saints.

A strong Church and cross community representation was evident on the evening as guests included The Very Reverend Dean Gregory Dunstan (COI) and the Reverend Tony Davidson, with Fr Peter Mc Anenly (Armagh Parish administrator) and Fr Rory Coyle. Aidan Crawford (Regional President) and Cormac Wilson (Regional Vice President) were in attendance as were Ivan Burns from Christians Against Poverty and the President of

the Royal British Legion and two members of the PSNI. Previous Chief Executive (John Briggs) of the old Armagh City and District Council and Meala Campbell (SDLP) also attended.

The St Patrick's Conference President Kathy Donnelly provided an opening address welcoming His Grace Archbishop Martin, invited guests and Conference members. Archbishop Martin gave a short address to those present paying praise to the work of the Society and its many volunteers who gave of their time so willingly to help those in need. The Very Reverend Dean Dunstan was invited during prayerful reflection and official blessing to participate in the Gospel reading of the day. Aidan Crawford (RP) provided an update on the refugee crisis and the work of the Society.

The official marble dedication plaque was presented to the St Patrick's Conference by Mr and Mrs Seamus and Patricia Mc Cann and family ARMATILE.

All in all a pleasant evening was had by all in attendance.



## St. Angela's Youth Conference- past, present and future



The revival of St. Angela's Youth Conference in St. Angela's Secondary School Waterford, in 2013 under the Young SVP Programme was welcomed by both staff and students of the school and also SVP in Waterford. SVP have always had a strong presence in St. Angela's.

Over the decades, every Christmas, generation after generation has contributed to the SVP crib offering in the school, from which hundreds of hampers were made and delivered to families in need in Waterford. This tradition has is still been honoured and was coordinated this year by the youth conference lead by Grace Mc Grath and Sue Anne O Beirne. As well as

upholding traditions from times past, St. Angela's Youth Conference are very progressive in their social action projects today. From table quizzes to generate awareness of SVP in the school to clothes drives to paired reading projects, the girls from St. Angela's SVP are making a real difference in the Waterford City. Congratulations to all involved and long may it last!!

In the picture are members of St. Angela's Youth Conference past and present and future leaders of the group. Also picture are Ms Winnie Power Youth Conference Coordinator; Debbie O Halloran Youth Development Officer and assisting teachers/ SVP members.

## Ballymoney Conference

The Ballymoney Conference would like to say a huge thank you to everyone at R&F Mechanical Services of Ballymoney, Co. Antrim who raised money for the local SVP Conference and the local Salvation Army. Each charity was presented with a cheque for £750.



L-R: Captain Joan Archibald from The Salvation Army, David Fleming from R&F Mechanical Services, and Eugene Wallace, President St. Patrick's Saint Vincent de Paul, Ballymoney.

## American Visitors

The Northern SVP regional office got a nice surprise when some American visitors made an impromptu visit whilst on vacation in Ireland.



L-R: Aidan Crawford (Regional President); Pauline Brown (Regional Coordinator); Patty Hughes (Regional Council President for Manhattan, New York); her sister Jeannie along with Brian O'Reilly (International RVP)

## Christmas Fast Wexford



L – R: Joanne Walsh & Joe Ryan (Wexford Women's Refuge €7,000), Canon Arthur Minion, Joe Costello (Wexford Hospice Homecare €7,000 and Irish Cancer Research €2051), Bernadette Doyle (St Vincent De Paul €20,000), Lar Cuddihy (Ozanam House €7,000), Fr Aodhan Marken, Peter Hudson (Irish Flood Victims €5,000), Oliver McAdam (Ozanam House), Françoise Davison (St Iberius) and Brian MacGonagle (Irish Flood Victims and St Vincent De Paul).

The St Iberius Four-Day Fast may have ended in December, but that didn't stop the funds rolling in for the six worthy causes and towards the end of January 2016 in St Iberius Church there was a presentation of cheques raised by the Christmas Fast of Canon Arthur Minion and Fr Aodhan Marken.

Despite initial predictions that the total raised would be lower this year, Rev Arthur Minion and Fr Aodhán Marken managed to surpass all expectations by pulling in €49,051. This year marked the first time that Fr Marken took part in the annual event. In a special speech at the Christmas Eve service, he remarked on the sense of community and friendship that he witnessed over the four days.

'The sense of celebration was wonderful,' said Parish secretary Louise Evans. 'They were both thrilled with the result.'

Harsh weather conditions made the four-day fundraiser challenging for them when they began the fast on Sunday December 20. However, the determined pair braved the cold and surpassed last year's total by almost €4000.

According to Ms Evans, they hugged and cried when it came to an end on Christmas Eve. 'They were broken men,' she said.

Although they traditionally receive food in Westgate after the fundraiser, Fr Marken also ensured to factor in a special Christmas treat.

'He told me that he bought a sirloin steak to eat after midnight mass,' laughed Louise.

This year the charities to benefit are the St Vincent de Paul, Ozanam House Mens Shelter, Wexford Womens Refuge, Wexford Hospice Homecare, Cancer Research and Midlands Flood Victims.

Rev Arthur Minion and Fr Aodhan Marken demonstrated their own generosity when stormy conditions forced an outdoor movie event to be cancelled on December 23. The doors of St Iberius Church were opened to children and their families so that the screening of Home Alone could still go ahead.

# In Tribute

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

### Joseph A O'Dwyer, Killorglin

Joe O'Dwyer, teacher, educator, manager, golfer, Vincentian has died. The entire mid-Kerry area was deeply saddened at the passing of this extraordinary man who, for over 60 years, had such a large influence on the Killorglin area and far beyond.

In the 1960s he was Conference President and introduced ladies to the Conference for the first time. He also started a Youth Conference, their weekly task being to collect and deliver laundry (on their bicycles). The new ladies did the laundry and from this the first Clothes Shop developed. Joe became Kerry Regional President in the early 1970s and oversaw many innovative developments - including sheltered housing for up to 10 people in Killorglin.

In 1997 Joe led a Killorglin/Kerry SVP group to the Beatification of Frederick Ozanam Ceremonies in Paris. Joe had an intimate knowledge of the City (he used take his students on an educational trip to Paris annually) and showed the group all the great sights and different places that had been part of Ozanam's daily life as a student.

Joe lived a fruitful life in Killorglin. His many past pupils all over the world will have their own memories of him. For the local Conference members, his invaluable contribution and his faithful service to those in need will be where he will be most fondly remembered. Joe was a keen Latin scholar and his school motto was 'per ardua ad astra,'--through hard work to the stars. Joe indeed lived his life to the full.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

### Eugene Feeley, Limerick City

Eugene Feeley became a member of SVP in 1982. He was President of St Martins Conference Limerick, trainer and general oracle. Most of Eugene's time in the early days was spent guiding the work of St Martins Conference which at the time worked mostly with members of the travelling community. As well as the practical support given through regular visitation St Martin's volunteers were also pioneers in the area of social justice taking and winning a case against Limerick City Council in relation to the inadequate provision of housing, the case was prosecuted by a talented young barrister called Mary Robinson.

Eugene served on the Midwest Regional Board for 5 years. In later years Eugene went onto volunteer in the Limerick SVP Drop in Centre helping to serve soup, sandwiches and good cheer to the service users, many of whom were homeless. He was one of a band of senior volunteers whom the staff affectionately called "Dads Army" a moniker that always made Eugene chuckle. Up until his sudden death in October 2015 he was a member of St Munchin's visitation Conference, and persevered with his SVP work even as ill healthy crept up on him.

In addition to his regular visitation work Eugene was a robust advocate for training. Eugene's time spent as a member of the regional education committee interviewing potential grant recipients was

a natural extension of his passion for training. He was a skilled and compassionate interviewer and was regularly impressed with the applicants and their determination in the face of often complex difficulties.

Eugene, you never straddled the fence – rest in peace my friend.  
Eileen Hoffer former Regional Coordinator Midwest Region

### Frederick O'Dwyer, Dublin

Frederick O'Dwyer, one of life's true gentlemen, died on 12th November 2015 in his 93rd year. His contribution to the Society was immense having had an involvement since the 1950's. I only knew Fred from when he joined St. Patrick's Conference Kilquade in 2006 soon after the death of his wife Frances. He was a wonderfully resourceful person, he showed a genuine interest in people, and was a good listener.

Fred was a member of St Joseph's Conference in Berkeley Road for many decades. He was very dynamic member, supportive of new members, encouraging their ideas and good about entrusting them with responsibility. He was a great supporter of women becoming members of the Society when they were first allowed to join.

Fred served as Area President in Dublin North Central. In that capacity he worked as a mentor with school Conferences and with "transitional Conferences" made up from past pupils from Eccles Street and Belvedere College. Rose McGowan remembers him well from that period working to arrange events for the old folks, helping at Kerdiffstown each year and working on the annual fundraising event in the Mansion House.

Fred also worked with St Peters Conference focusing on job creation and mentoring those who were trying to establish new businesses. He had a wealth of knowledge and experience in business to bring to that role.

On behalf of the Society I extend deepest sympathy to Fred's family, to his children Freddie, Ursula, Peter and Anne-Marie, and to his beloved grandchildren.  
Mona O'Rourke

### Phil O Connor, Baltinglass

January 2015 saw the passing of Phil O Connor, one of the founding members of the John Paul Conference in Baltinglass. Originally from Beara Co Cork, Phil spent her later years in Baltinglass. Phil was dedicated to helping those less fortunate than herself. She did so in an understanding, caring and non-judgmental manner. Phil had a gift of being able to feel the suffering of others. She empathised with them and she saw the huge value in simply sitting, listening and understanding their problems. Phil had a particular concern for children effected by poverty and she considered this to be one of the greatest challenges facing SVP. Phil was inspirational within the conference and took great interest in those new members joining. The Conference and those we assist have suffered a great loss with the untimely manner of Phil's passing.

We express our deep sympathy to Phil's family and pray that she is continuing to look after us all.

May her gentle soul rest in peace.

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