

**THE**

**SUMMER 2017**



# **BULLETIN**

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

## **SOCIAL INEQUALITIES**

IS OUR SOCIETY BASED ON MERITOCRACY?

## **HOPES FOR THE FUTURE**

OUR NEW NATIONAL PRESIDENT

## **PRE-BUDGET**

**SUBMISSION 2018**



**THE VOICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IRELAND**



“Poverty is not just a lack of money;  
it is not having the capability to  
realize one’s full potential as a human being.”

– Amartya Sen



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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When you look at society as a whole, it is glaringly obvious to most, that is to those willing to acknowledge and see it, that large numbers of us live and exist in worlds that are complete polar opposites of one another for many different reasons. One might be fooled into thinking for the large part that this might be by choice but this does not hold true. Many of us know it can largely be attributed to intrinsic societal inequalities that predetermine the nature and extent of our burdens before we even arrive in the labour ward.

I suppose, to be fair to those who do not acknowledge these inequalities, it might be because they have never been challenged, or felt the need, to look at these when they have never directly affected their lives. Like blind people being asked to describe a large statue based on the part that they touch, we tend to view groups of people according to our own limited experiences. Because of these limitations, people's views and arguments can then often be based on where they source their information.

Unfortunately, this group may listen to like-minded commentary in the media and don't let the facts interfere with their world view. These are people, typically, who've worked hard all their lives (yes, getting

up early each morning) and have earned the success and the rewards to which they are unbegrudgingly entitled. They then go on, however, to make a number of false assumptions. The first is that hard work guarantees success, and the second being that those who are struggling are lazy or have made stupid choices.

Many with this mindset would argue the case for a meritocracy and would feel they occupy the moral high ground when a 'jobs for the boys' recruitment policy or an 'old school tie' network is highlighted in the press. These people need to be reminded, however, that in order to climb the ladder to success you have to get your foot on the first rung and it is often at this point that many are stymied. Even if this obstacle is overcome, events outside one's control can thwart progress and alter outcomes considerably.

The reality, as I see it, is that chance - the when, where, and to whom you are born, down to whether you were wrapped in pink or blue - plays a huge part in anyone's success or failure and that the stars have to align perfectly in order for you to have a perfect outcome.

So, when it comes to addressing inequality in our society, it behoves us all to reflect on what part good fortune has played in our lives as we look to those less fortunate.

Within this edition, you will read how members see first-hand the inequalities that people they are assisting face, such as lack of adequate housing, exorbitant rents, access to education, poor work pay, etc. You will also read how the SVP Social Justice team highlighted many of these inequalities in their recently published Pre-Budget Submission entitled "Bridging the Gap - Investing for an equitable future". Much of the content here really demonstrates the determination of SVP members, staff and other organisations to highlight these inequalities and to demand of those in power to do something about it.

*"There is strength in numbers, yes, but even more so in collective good will. For those endeavours are supported by mighty forces unseen."* Richelle E. Goodrich.

*Linda O'Connell*

# AN UNEQUAL NATION



For over 170 years the Society of St Vincent de Paul have been helping families and individuals in Ireland, supporting those in need with friendship and material help. Through a Famine, a War of Independence, a Civil War, two World Wars, and several economic recessions our members have been on the front line of fighting poverty in their communities and have made a difference to so many lives.

Our 11,000 members are out visiting people in their homes every night, responding to requests for help. We meet the people who are not sharing in the economic recovery, in fact for many, their situation has gotten worse. Long-standing problems of low income, coupled with the cost of education, energy, and lack of services, have made life more challenging for an increasing number of households, both in and out of work. Last year alone 130,000 people were forced to seek help from SVP.

We are committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland and, in solidarity with poor and disadvantaged people, to advocate and work for the changes required to create a more just and caring society. It was with these principles in mind that SVP recently launched its Pre-Budget Submission in the presence of many interested people including politicians from across the political spectrum.

It is clear from the experiences of our members visiting those in need that we live in an unequal nation. Evidence of growing gaps in income is shown by the fact that income share increased

by 20% for the top 1% and fell by 15% for the bottom 50%, with 1 in 4 one-parent families living in consistent poverty. There is a 25% increase in the number of working households qualifying for social housing resulting in the fact that there are now 91,000 households in need of social housing and over 2,700 children are currently homeless. From 2008 to 2015 there was a 145% increase in the proportion of people who cannot afford to adequately heat their home.

In our Pre-Budget submission we have set out what we believe needs to be done to address these shocking statistics. Our members meet the people behind these shameful figures and witness the stress and sadness caused. Under the four categories of housing, energy, education and income adequacy we have outlined the measures we believe are necessary to invest in an equitable future for all our citizens. Evidence shows that countries that are more equal do better economically, and many economists have said that inequality is actually a threat to a country's economic growth. We must ask ourselves are we happy to live in a society where 130,000 children live in poverty, where working families are evicted

because they can't afford to pay high rent increases, where two children in school will have unequal opportunities based on the income of the family they come from, where many people in poverty believe that no one cares about them or their situation?

The inequalities of past and present will deepen unless we address the current deficits in our public services and infrastructure. SVP wants to see a roadmap from Government for all Irish society which ensures we are heading towards a positive and equitable future – where every child has a warm secure home, does not go to school hungry, is included among their peers and receives all the necessary resources and supports at home, at school, and in their communities to achieve their full potential.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has said he wants to build a Republic where every citizen gets a fair go and has the opportunity to succeed; we look forward to seeing this happen.

Kieran Stafford  
National President

Celebrate with us 400 Years of  
Vincentian Charism on our Annual Pilgrimage to

# Knock Shrine

Saturday, 9th September, 2017

The Vincentian Family in Ireland



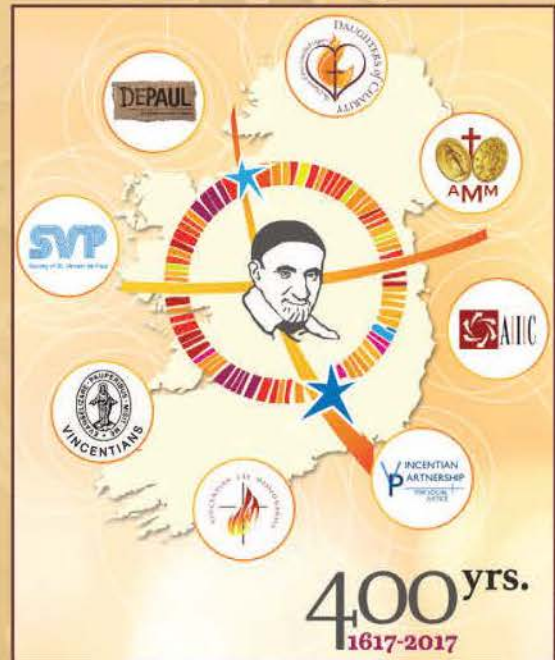
St Vincent de Paul  
Feast Days: 27th September



St Louise de Marillac  
Feast Day: 9th May



Blessed Frédéric Ozanam  
Feast Days: 7th September



Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul  
Vincentian Fathers  
Society of St Vincent de Paul

## PROGRAMME

from 10.00 a.m. onwards – Sacrament of Reconciliation

- 12.00: Will you welcome the Stranger?  
– Reflection on the Vincentian Family in Ireland  
presented by Sr. Carmel Ryan D.C.  
(St. John's Rest Centre)
- 2.00: Stations of the Cross
- 2.15: Pilgrim walk with Our Lady (Rosary)
- 3.00: Eucharistic celebration and Sacrament of the Sick  
with Dunmore Parish Choir



## YOUNG ADULT SPACE

- 11.30: Walk to the Oak Tree
- 12.00: The Hub – Hear – Understand – Believe  
(This is an opportunity for young adults to see the relevance of  
the apparition in today's world)

Prayer Guidance takes place from 12.00 and throughout the day there will be Eucharistic Adoration in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and a reconciliation service in the Reconciliation Chapel.

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Sarah Dooley: 01-8299024; sarah@svp.ie • Columba Faulkner: columbaseven@hotmail.com



## On the margins of society

Thirty years ago, Sinead decided to take action for what she believed in and joined a special Traveller Conference of SVP. Today, she is still fighting against discrimination. Her Conference has made so much progress for this community.

### **Why did you join St. Vincent de Paul?**

I moved to the south of Ireland about 30 years ago. At that time there was a large encampment of the Traveller community in the same area. I was shocked by the horrendous living conditions they were in. I felt particularly bad for the children, their situation was dreadful. I could not believe they were not able to go to school. Having come from a humble background myself, I thought – If my children can go to school, then why aren't these children allowed.

So I got involved with the Society who happened to be running a Traveller-focused Conference in the area. You couldn't have got a better group than SVP, in this area in particular. They're extremely non-judgmental, and that is so important to me. Their priority at the time was to get better accommodation for the local Travellers. But I always believed in the value of education. So we fought to get the children into school. I'm talking about 1988 now, not 1888! And it took quite a long time.

### **What has your Conference achieved over the years?**

It started with the Government making provision for special classes. I actually got a job working in one at my local school. Then I realised that this was all wrong. The children had to be washed and they had to be this and that, and they were always segregated. That's not the way to educate people. So I made it my lifetime mission to improve education for the Traveller community.

*“When I started working with Traveller children, many of them were on the streets begging. The lads were in the dumps collecting scrap to make a living. Things still aren't perfect, but now all those children go to school in some form or other.”*

We started with classes for the mothers in a local resource centre. We taught cookery, flower arranging and personal development. This allowed us build relationships of trust and empowered the women to want something more for their family. Then we were allowed work with the children. We helped to keep them in school and we took them on outings into the city.

It has taken a long time, battling discrimination and many underlying factors, but we have made substantial progress.

We are now in a position where some children are continuing as far as their Leaving Cert. Not the first set of kids we worked with, but their children.

### **What sort of difference has this made for Traveller families?**

Well if we take one girl we have helped, Sarah, as an example. Sarah was very young when I first met her, living in dreadful conditions. Then her mother died and she was left floating around, sleeping on sofas, until she got married.

She was only 18 when she married a settled lad. She actually got married from my house because she had no other house to go from. They started their own business and everything went well for them. But then the castle started to crumble. Her husband had problems with addiction, the business collapsed and she left.

Sarah came back to our Conference for support. She really wanted to go back to education and make sure her children stayed in school. She was a very determined woman. So she did her Leaving Cert and we gave her support for the books and to pay for childcare. Now she's back working full-time. She's independent and all of her children are in school.

### **How do you keep going, working in such a demanding Conference?**

I have to say it's down to my husband and family support. My children grew up in the same area where the Conference works and they were mocked in school for what their mother did. But they always understood and supported me.

I would also say my Christian faith. I am not a devout Catholic and SVP helps everyone regardless of religion. But I find some of the simplest messages most powerful. Such as 'If you do it for the least of my brethren, you do it for me'. I just feel like you're only passing through life, so you should do whatever good you can.

*Based on a true story from a family helped by SVP. Names and some details have been changed for confidentiality.*



Tom O'Doherty, Maria Peate-Sorensen and Brendan Hennessy

On the night I was worried no one would turn up, I needn't have worried! There was a great turnout from the Members in the Area and everyone interacted and got involved. The aim of the Gathering was to get Members together to share information, approaches and experiences of Conference visitation and provide an opportunity for Members to meet with other Members in the Area.

Whilst the area gathering requires a lot of organising, in my capacity as Area President I am fortunate enough to have a strong Area Council who became very involved in the organisation of the evening. The planning stage of the gathering takes several meetings including conference calls with Brendan Hennessy, Area Council involvement and our MSO for Kildare North. Brigid Forristal (Area Secretary) organised the venue and food; John Miley (Area Vice President) organised the sound and visual systems; Mary Kiely (Area Treasurer) organised the speaker for the evening.

The gathering agenda included a guest speaker, the local Social Protection Officer; case studies from Conference experience and an input from Young SVP. We decided to limit the case studies to five to keep the meeting to two hours and provided all those attending with a pack including guidance notes on the topics to be discussed on the night.

For the guest speaker we identified the most important social welfare issues in advance and the Social Protection Officer gave a candid account of the Exceptional Needs Payment, Rent Supplement and the Appeals System. Our case studies included subjects common to all Conferences like 'On-going need', 'Legal Money Lending'; 'Mortgage and Third Level Costs'; 'Migration'

# Membership Support Area Gatherings

## On the night I was worried no one would turn up

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

as well as a local case regarding illness and assistance. Brendan Hennessy facilitated the case studies and discussion between members. Clare Mander, Youth Development Officer East Region gave a short presentation to the Area Gathering and encouraged Conferences to engage with local schools going forward.

32 members of the Kildare North Area attended with representation from all Conferences in the area and their feedback has prompted me to do hold another joint Gathering next year with an adjoining area.

*"Very informative evening perhaps it could be an annual event going forward."*

*"Great to meet other Conference members and share our experiences."*

*"Enjoyed meeting other conference members and Young SVP's Clare."*

So if you are an Area President considering holding an area gathering the advice I would give you is put plenty of time into planning. What we did in the Area was to provide members with a template outlining various options the gathering could cover with an opportunity for Members to provide their own input on what to cover on the night – so the gathering covered items of interest to local members. I would like to thank all the members from the Area who attended on the night along with Celine Martin and Brendan from National Membership Support, Maria Peate Sorensen our Membership Support Officer and Clare Mander, Young SVP East Region.





# Planting Seeds for Social Justice

## Young SVP South West

*Diane Mackin, South-West Youth Development Officer*

The Young SVP programme celebrated in style and fun this year at our annual Exhibition held on May 4th at the Clayton Silver Springs Hotel in Cork. The exhibition hosted over 350 representatives from 25 schools and three third-level Conferences across the region to celebrate & display the wonderful, inspiring work they had done this year as part of their involvement with SVP.

As part of Young SVP programme students learn about the Society, its history, values & work and they gain an understanding of social justice. They have been promoting the mission and ethos of SVP through a wide array of Befriending, Education, Social Research Action and Fundraising projects, all with a view to supporting those in need and improving communities. The students displayed their projects with wonderful colour and creativity and were delighted to share their learning and experiences with one another.

Befriending projects such as 'Old but Gold', 'Dare to Care' & 'Caring in Our Community' demonstrate what Frederic Ozanam had urged "*Yours must be a work of love, of kindness*" where students gave their time, talents and themselves to visit and make friends with elderly people in nursing homes, hospitals & community centres. One group learned to knit and made beautiful blankets for local cancer patients. 'Help to Grow, Grow to Help' project saw students do a planting project with students with special needs, in the words of one participant: "*I believe this programme has made the students with special needs feel a lot more included in our school*".

Some students tackled social justice issues such as: homelessness, poverty, & gender equality where they saw "*A struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much*" (Frederic Ozanam). 'Stolen People Stolen Dreams' project saw the students gain an understanding of the complexities and horrors of human trafficking. As one student told me "*you get more time in jail for dealing drugs than you do for dealing people*". These students contacted their local TD's, held an awareness morning and produced a rap to highlight the issue.

Many of the schools hosted various fundraises for their local SVP Conference particularly at Christmas.

Local Conference Members hosted a stand for the first time this year and made connections with students through sharing experiences of Conference work and their personal motivations to volunteer with SVP, planting seeds for members of the future. Our Regional President, Christy Lynch told the students he himself was 'Old but Gold', and congratulated them for their work on behalf of SVP and reminded them that SVP is also there for them.

College Conference members highlighted the benefits of joining SVP in college. Their amazing work this year ranged from: Campaigns on campus such as: 'Homeless Week' & 'Throwing out the blues', educational supports such as, free grinds, supporting homework clubs; befriending such as visiting SVP homeless hostels and elderly in the community; Fundraising such as; fashion show, homeless packs for SVP hostels, clothes & food drives, Jail Break, Giving Tree collections to name a few.

It is often difficult to measure the impact of this work and the benefits it has on students and on others, the following are just some of what students felt about being part of Young SVP this year: It "*Helped us connect more with the community*"; "*We learned about how & why people can fall on hard times and how SVP helps*"; "*We loved being able to give back and help people*"; "*We learned new skills*"; "*We got an understanding of the people we were helping*"; "*Making friends with the elderly and others was the best part*."

Bob Hope said "*if you haven't any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble*". If the Young SVP programme can continue to foster connection, empathy and understanding for those who are most in need in our society we won't need to be concerned for this worst kind of heart trouble in our young people.

If you would like further information about the programme you are most welcome to contact [Diane.Mackin@svp.ie](mailto:Diane.Mackin@svp.ie)



# EMPOWERING THROUGH VISITATION

*John Lupton  
Mid-West Regional President*

On page 8 of the little blue book, the “Rule of our Society”, Rule 1.10 reminds us that as Vincentians we must “endeavour to help the poor to help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and that of their local community”.

The commentary to that rule asserts “the ultimate empowerment is for the poor to gain the confidence and skills to be able to forge and change the destiny of their local community.” Thus, as Vincentians, this rule and its commentary, signals for us that which should be our objective i.e. ‘empowerment’ of those whom we find in our Visitation in a relative state of ‘disempowerment’, as all of those whom we find, and seek to find, are in some way disempowered by their situation.

We all live our lives somewhere between complete disempowerment and complete empowerment, with many more, I believe, at the extremity of disempowerment. I say that mindful of the words of the American Socialist Eugene Victor Debs – “while there is a soul in prison, I am not free”. Thus, we may paraphrase this to read – “while there is a soul disempowered, I am not completely empowered”.

While we know from our visitation that many are severely disempowered, we also know that it is not attributable alone to their need but more significantly is systemic and related to an injustice which caused that need and which is often subtle and described as ‘life’. So it takes courage to confront injustice and courage is only possible if we are free. Our ethos, as Vincentians, is the key to that freedom, as otherwise we are slaves to systemic deference and ‘empowerment’ is then outside our grasp. In such a scenario we could never hope to facilitate the empowerment of the poor. As Vincentians we must avoid such a mental state of slavish existence at all costs as it negates what we profess ourselves to be!

I remember when I was in National School; the school appeared to come first, with the pupil having to adjust to the school, its needs and objectives, within the ‘educational’ environment in which it operated. Hence students were categorised into those who could satisfactorily deal with the then primary certificate examination and those who could not. Those who could not were left to one side and brutalised if they interfered with the operation of a system, which isolated and marginalised them. They did not go beyond fourth or fifth class and left the ‘educational’ system in many cases totally illiterate. They were disempowered, and in life, very often, were to remain so.

During my years in the Society I was often to visit many of those and their families. I was always conscious of the great injustice, which they suffered, but all the more so because that

injustice was never named, it was euphemistically called ‘life’. Those were also the days when the women in mother and baby homes were made to feel guilt and blame by society and hence they too were stripped of all their rights and were completely disempowered.

Today we categorise Travelling Community, migrants, those in Direct Provision Centres and more recently those who do not fit into the national narrative of recovery. Political correctness demands that we remain silent with regard to this process of categorisation and demonisation. There are also many in our schools with varying learning difficulties, many of whom would be capable of obtaining, for instance, PhD’s, if their condition was diagnosed, named, and were given necessary facilitation. However, again Government has prioritised a policy of categorisation. Categorisation as ‘slow learners’ and allocating resources to that categorisation is more cost effective than individual psychological assessment. Again political correctness demands silence.

Yes – today for us Vincentians and for those we serve, quality visitation (hearing and understanding the underlying story) is essential, as is the freedom our ethos gives us to enable us to highlight the injustices, which we become aware of.

We must meet that challenge, that same challenge, which Ozanam faced, of promoting self-sufficiency and that of facilitating empowerment. Thus, as we face tomorrow’s horizon, let us have the vision, courage and persistence to stand apart as Vincentians, and, to shun political correctness and the collaborative silence it imposes.



**WE'D LIKE TO INVITE YOU  
TO HAVE YOUR SAY!**

# **ARE YOU PARENTING ALONE?**



**HAVE YOU EVER WORKED IN  
TEMPORARY FIXED TERM, OR  
PART-TIME WORK WITH  
IRREGULAR HOURS? SELF-  
EMPLOYED?**

**WE'D LOVE TO HAVE AN INFORMAL  
AND COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS  
CHAT WITH YOU.**

**FIND OUT MORE BY CONTACTING  
SINEAD VIA EMAIL AT  
SPEMBROKE@TASC.IE OR BY  
PHONE AT +353 1 6169050**

**TASC** 

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES  
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE  
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



# The TASC-FEPS Social Implications of Precarious Work Project

*Sinead Pembroke-TASC*

SVP, along with a number of other NGOs, were recently asked by TASC (Think-Tank on Action for Social Change) to input to a new research project examining the social implications of precarious work. SVP did not hesitate in taking part, as there is a growing concern among members about the additional stress and strain insecure and irregular work causes low-income households.

The group meet to discuss the progress of the research and SVP provide insight from members' experience of home visitation. The Social Justice Team also assist the researchers with the recruitment of participants for the project. The final report will be published later in the year and will be used to inform our policy and advocacy work.

Dr. Sinead Pembroke from TASC describes the objectives and initial findings of the project.

There's been a lot of talk about Ireland's economic recovery, and the media tends to focus on the falling unemployment rate. However, what do not tend to be investigated are the types of jobs that people are becoming employed in, especially young people. Many sectors like social care, hospitality, retail, construction and education are becoming increasingly reliant on employing people on a fixed term, zero-hour or self-employed basis.

The Social Implications of Precarious Work is a joint project between FEPS (Foundation for European Progressive Studies) and TASC (Think-Tank on Action for Social Change) looking at the affect these insecure contracts (or lack thereof) have on the lives of the people working in this way. It's looking to speak to people between the ages of 18 and 40 working on a fixed term, zero-hour or self-employed basis and living in Ireland.

The project is looking at the extent and forms of precarious work in Ireland today and the affect these types of employment have on the lives of people hired in such a way. These interviews will contribute to a report on this matter to inform the public and policy makers. So far 29 men and

women have been interviewed and taking part remains completely anonymous. Altogether we are looking to interview approximately 50 people about their experience of fixed term, zero hour or self-employed work.

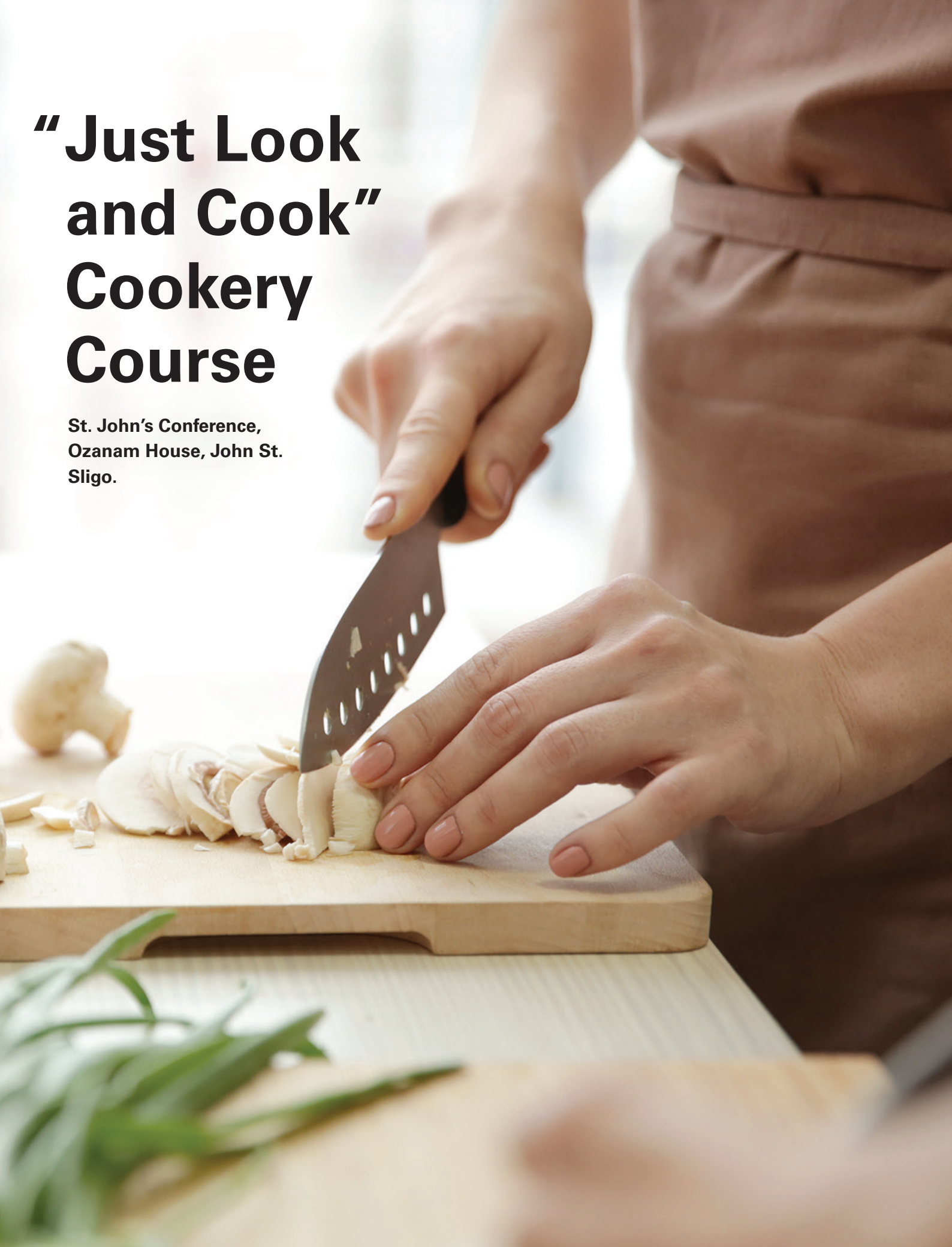
The interviews don't just explore people's experiences of insecure work, but they also tell the story of how these working conditions affect their lives outside of work. This includes their experience of finding a place to live, accessing healthcare, having a family, fitting in socially, and relationships with other people, planning for the future and how their mental health is affected by all of this.

Health is one area on which precarious work has a significant effect on. It has been a prominent feature throughout our interviews, not only in terms of how it affects their personal health but also in how it is affecting their ability to access healthcare in Ireland. Many could not afford to pay to see a GP, and spoke of having to borrow money when it was absolutely necessary to see one or seek treatment.

Healthcare and more will be tackled in our report, so if you would like to be a part of this and you work on a fixed term, zero-hour or self-employed basis please get in touch with Sinead Pembroke at [spembroke@tasc.ie](mailto:spembroke@tasc.ie).

# **“Just Look and Cook” Cookery Course**

**St. John’s Conference,  
Ozanam House, John St.  
Sligo.**



The cookery course came about as a response to a discussion at a Sligo Area Meeting in early 2017 where a request was made to members to discuss in their Conference new ideas and projects to bring back to the next meeting for discussion. When we in St. John's Conference were chatting about it, members mentioned previous SVP Home Management Courses run in St Angela's College (a College of the National University of Ireland specialising in Home Economics). Another member told of courses being run by the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Educational Training Board (MSLETB) and an innovative Tutor who had a "hands on", budget-aware approach and who had developed an easy recipe book using instructive pictures.

We approached MSLETB and formed a partnership agreement to deliver the course to 10 women, both Irish and New Irish over 6 weeks starting in April. In discussion with Tutor Eileen, it was agreed that participants would have an opportunity to sit down and eat what they had made, and that we would purchase dishes of the right size to replicate the recipes. Each Tuesday class started at 10 am and a dish was cooked which could be made up from kitchen left overs e.g. frittata together with either a starter and main or main dish and dessert e.g. chicken curry & rice, apple crumble with custard. The two hours were very busy as washup also had to be done!

The course was a great success, as they got to sit, chat and eat their masterpieces. When they brought what they cooked home together with the recipe and dish they received great feedback and encouragement from their family resulting in many of them often making the dish again before the next class.



At the end of the course the cookery students received a Certificate, chef hat, Just Look & Cook Cookery Book, Booklet of all class recipes, MABS 101 Recipe Book and a dish to replicate recipes. Representatives from MSLETB attended an additional session and all of the women have decided to take part in more cookery, childcare and other QQI accredited courses.

We have decided to continue our partnership with Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Educational Training Board (MSLETB) with a

course for men with children in September 2017. We would like to thank; Tutor Eileen Kirrane, Class Assistant, Joan Moffitt, Cathy Powell from MSLETB, and the Conference members who encouraged, recruited and attended classes and most of all the participants. We were absolutely delighted with the results and success of the course and to see how the women grew in confidence made it all worthwhile.



### Just Look & Cook

Eileen Kirrane was the Tutor on this course. She has developed an innovative new Cookery Book called "Just Look and Cook" with the foreword by Neven Maguire. It contains simple economical recipes in a user-friendly format. The pictures show you what to do and there are simple measurements e.g. 2 carrots, 3 mugs, 1 teaspoon used so you don't need great literacy, especially if English is not your first language, or any special equipment. It also includes a detailed shopping list and it is proving very popular. "Just Look and Cook" Book is published by Riverhouse Books and are stocked in Eason outlets (ISBN 978-0-9575789-0-6) or contact Eileen directly at [justlookandcook.ie](http://justlookandcook.ie) or on her Facebook Page "Just Look and Cook" or 087-2708627

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# INEQUALITY

*Padraic Cassidy, Blessed Virgin, Clontarf*



In *Animal Farm* by George Orwell the notion that “all pigs” are equal starts off laudable and it appears to work; however, it then descends rapidly into some are more equal than others. This is regarded as a commentary on socialism, that in reality there are no societies where all are equal. There are those who have and those who have not, those who have access to adequate education, health and other services and those who do not.

Within the Gospels Jesus puts forward, what are regarded as liberating ideas where the poor are to share in the harvest. That if one has the cloak of a man held as collateral for a loan then it must be returned to him before sunset. This was because it also doubled as his blanket and therefore he would not only have a cloak but also his bedding! How does social inequality manifest itself in society today? All one must do is look around, it is endemic in our society and we as the Society of St Vincent de Paul must challenge and ask the difficult questions, such as, why is this so?

Housing is the subject du jour, where families are placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and single people are placed in dormitories and the response is that they have been given a roof over their head. Is it that simple, that a person only requires a bed and a roof over their head? There are also people who have escaped their home country because of war and persecution where they are placed in centres, called “reception centres”, when in fact the correct term maybe “detention centres”. They are expected to live in these centres until their asylum application has been processed, which can take up to nine years. How has this become acceptable, how have we as a people tolerated this? In these centres, there are those who have held positions of authority and responsibility in their home country. They are all left, and they are left because they have no one to advocate vociferously on their behalf, which is also the case for families in B&Bs. There are voluntary organisations that represent these groups of people, but their voices sometimes seem to go unheard. Why would that be the case, perhaps one reason is that because they receive their funding from central and local government and therefore cannot be seen to overly criticise those that fund them or else nothing at all would happen.

We in the Society are in a unique position, we are not reliant on these funding streams and so we can challenge inequality more objectively. We are called by the nature of our Vincentian ethos to advocate on behalf of the poor and marginalised. This moves us beyond the practical aspects of the assistance we provide. It defines us as a voice of the dispossessed and those who are experiencing the inequalities of society.

Oscar Romero paid a price, with his life for trying to highlight and make society more equal. Those who did not want the status quo to be challenged dubbed him a socialist or communist. For him the Orwellian notion at the start of the novel was the one that was present throughout. He advocated and promoted what we as Christians ascribe to, sentiments and actions as defined by Catholic Social Teaching. From certain quarters, people such as Romero were ostracised and regarded with suspicion. They are abandoned like the biblical Prophets, by the very people who one would think would subscribe to the same faith and belief system. In fact, at his funeral there was only one of the six Salvadorian Bishops in attendance. *“The world of the poor teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of hand-outs from governments or from the churches, but when they themselves are the masters and protagonists of their own struggle for liberation.”*

As members of the Society we are revolutionaries, albeit quiet ones, where we revolt against the inequality we experience through visitation and our social justice work. We promote the rights and dignity of the person. We are advocates of a just and fair society, where people have access to the fundamentals such as food and shelter. We also must go beyond these and be the voice, like Romero of those who have no other voice, we welcome the stranger from the shadows. The Society liberates people; they are liberated by our quiet revolution from the chains of poverty and isolation and are afforded the equality of opportunity as we ourselves have. As a member led organisation it is our duty to make those in authority listen. Those who occupy ‘elected’ positions within the Society are custodians of the Vincentian ethos and we the members have entrusted this to them. As a custodian, they have the responsibility to challenge, on our behalf and those we assist, the inequalities that remain in society and advocate an agenda where these are removed, or at the very least are no longer ones that will prevent the coming generations from reaching their full potential. So, our quiet revolution continues and we succeed due to the level of commitment of the membership and people who give of their time to make a difference in the lives of people. We continue to follow the Vincentian ethos and in some small way we mirror the work of people such as Oscar Romero and become the voice that is no longer in the wilderness.



## Is the Government living up to its own commitments on Childcare?

*Liz Kerrins  
Early Years Manager  
Children's Rights Alliance*



Children love to be rewarded with good grades in school, and sometimes children require incentives to do better. It turns out, so does the Government! Earlier this year, the Children's Rights Alliance gave the current Government a B+ for its efforts to make childcare more affordable for parents. Why did the Government deserve this grade?

The Children's Rights Alliance is a national membership-based organisation working to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. Every year, the Alliance holds the Government to account by grading its progress in implementing their own commitments to children contained in the Programme for Government. We publicise these grades in our annual flagship publication Report Card 2017, which was launched in February just gone.

Report Card 2017 is the first under A Programme for a Partnership Government, published in May 2016 following the formation of the new Government. The Programme is a really important document for children and families as the commitments it contains are the ones on which the success of this Government will be judged, and this can motivate Ministers and civil servants to prioritise planned actions.

Report Card 2017 marks the first time that childcare (also called Early Childhood Education and Care) received a standalone chapter in the report, indicating its increasing importance as a national policy issue. While carefully researched and compiled by Alliance staff, with input from Alliance members like SVP, a high-level independent assessment panel ultimately awards the grades.

### The Childcare Commitment

A Programme for a Partnership Government committed to introduce subsidised high-quality childcare for children aged nine-36 months and to continue to support low-income families through a simplified targeted childcare subsidy.

This is a long-awaited and vital commitment by Government. Childcare costs are unaffordable for many parents in Ireland, as SVP members know well from visiting their homes. You won't be surprised to learn that childcare costs in Ireland are the highest for one-parent families and the second highest for two-parent families in the EU. This is partly due to the lack of a comprehensive childcare subsidy system, available in most EU countries.

Unaffordable childcare can prevent children from accessing the quality early education, from which they could benefit, particularly children whose home environment does not support their learning and development. Research by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice indicates that excessive childcare costs compromise the ability of some low-paid families to meet their basic living costs. Unaffordable childcare costs can prevent parents from working outside the home, which is bad news for our high child poverty rates.

## The Report Card Grade

The Government received a 'B+' grade for its commitment to introduce a childcare subsidy for children aged six-months to three-years and to continue to support low-income families through a simplified targeted childcare subsidy. It was the highest grade in Report Card 2017. The Government's efforts to meet broader childcare commitments, including improving service quality, received a 'C+'.

When the 'B+' was awarded when Report Card 2017 went to print in January, the Government's much-publicised 'Affordable Childcare Scheme' (ACS) was at an advanced stage of development and had been allocated an additional €19m in Budget 2017. The ACS is a scheme of financial support for all parents, which aims to make childcare more affordable in respect of children aged six-months to 15 years old.

All children under three can benefit from some level of subsidy regardless of parental income, making this the first time that an Irish Government has introduced a 'universal' childcare subsidy. A means-tested, simplified, targeted subsidy is also available through the ACS to low- and middle-income families, widening access to childcare subsidies to parents in both employment and in training/education on the basis of household income. The ACS also represents the first time that a broad group of parents will be supported to meet the costs of childcare during school holidays and after-school.

An estimated 79,000 children were to benefit from the ACS from September 2017 – including 31,500 children already in receipt of a targeted subsidy and 47,500 new beneficiaries whose parents would receive a childcare subsidy for the very first time.

The Alliance recognises that the early childhood and school age childcare sectors are historically underdeveloped and require quality enhancement; however, we welcome the ACS as potentially transformational in supporting access for children to services, and supporting hard-pressed parents make ends meet. What next for the Government's childcare affordability commitments?

The introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme has been postponed. In April 2017, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs announced that the online IT system through which parents would apply and be means-tested for the subsidy would not be ready to support the implementation of the ACS in September 2017.

The Government now proposes to make childcare 'more affordable' for an estimated 70,000 children, rather than 79,000 this year. Without an operational online IT system, means-testing to determine eligibility for targeted subsidies is not possible, which is why fewer parents will qualify for a subsidy. It can only be dispensed to parents who have been previously means-tested for another purpose, e.g., social welfare payments, Family Income Supplement, or the GP card for a child over six.

The existing targeted childcare schemes, which were to be simplified, will be used to distribute increased levels of subsidy to childcare services. This means that childcare providers, rather than the planned online system, will have the difficult job of determining eligibility. This is not ideal for the smooth implementation of the scheme. However, no means-testing is required to qualify for the universal element of the ACS for children under three so these decisions should be more straightforward.

Is all this good or bad news? It is good news that the €19m additional childcare funding allocated in Budget 2017 will still be used for childcare. It is good news that far more parents and children than ever before should receive some level of childcare subsidy from September. It is bad news that around 9,000 children who were expected to receive a childcare subsidy under ACS may not receive it in September. Additionally, the level of subsidy that parents and children may receive this year may be different to that they will receive under ACS when means-tested for it in the future.

What grade will the Government receive next year in Report Card 2018 for its efforts to improve childcare affordability for parents? We will need to wait and see how effective and efficient the implementation of more affordable childcare is this September and whether or not it improves children's access to childcare services and supports families' standards of living. It also depends on when the ACS is actually implemented, as Government has not yet indicated a date. The story of the delivery of the current Government's commitments on childcare affordability is far from over.

Report Card 2017 is available at:  
[www.childrensrights.ie/content/report-card-2017](http://www.childrensrights.ie/content/report-card-2017)

Information on More Affordable Childcare is available at:  
[www.affordablechildcare.ie](http://www.affordablechildcare.ie)

A Programme for a Partnership Government is available at: [www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme\\_for\\_Partnership\\_Government.pdf](http://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf)



# MY HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

*Kieran Stafford, National President*



Over the past 10 years during my time on NMC I have worked with so many great Vincentians & Vincentian Staff, too numerous to name individually, and I am deeply grateful for all the advice support, wisdom and encouragement I was fortunate to receive from all and look forward to working with you all over the next few years.

Sincere thanks also to my current NMC colleagues, along with many members for supporting and encouraging me, and for the many good wishes I have received from so many since being elected.

Most importantly thanks to all of you, the Area Presidents and the wider Conference members who have placed your trust in me as your National President, I am humbled by the support you have shown me.

I have been lucky to work with two great National Presidents in my time, Mairead Bushnell and Geoff Meagher, both of whom I have great personal regard for. It is thanks to Mairead and Geoff that SVP is in such good standing today, at a time when public confidence in charities is at an all time low. I will never forget the passion and dedication that Mairead and Geoff put into their presidencies and I know they will always be available for advice that is a great comfort to me.

My Vincentian story started 16 years ago when I was 'recruited' by a good friend, Eamon Griffin. His famous line was "*it'll only be for an hour a week*", I still laugh about that when I meet him. I will be continuing my Conference Visitation work as I have with all the roles I have held in the Society as it is a privilege to be asked into someone's home to support and help them.

I joined SVP because I had something in me, I didn't know at the time that it was Vincentian Spirit – the desire to help those in need. 400 years ago two great people St. Louise de Marillac and St. Vincent de Paul started our Vincentian family, they ignited the Spirit of caring and giving, in so many people, inspiring our founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam to start OUR great Society.

Today this Spirit lives on in so many SVP members throughout the world, and in the words of Blessed Frederic we have certainly "*embraced the whole world in a network of love*" at a time in my opinion when this is needed the most.

This September you will have an opportunity to celebrate 400 years of Vincentian charism at our annual pilgrimage to Knock and I ask you to encourage our members to join with the rest of the Vincentian family for this special day.

# From listening to members and from my own experience at National and local Conference level I have identified some key areas for us to focus on:

## Supporting the role of the Area President

As Area Presidents yours is a vital role in SVP. Without you visiting and supporting your Conferences there can be no communication to or from them, without you they are effectively cut off from the rest of the Society. I thank you for all the hard work you have done in your Area President roles to date and I promise to support you in whatever way I can to continue this vital work. It is essential that members are supported in their work by their Area, Regional, and National Presidents.

## Recruitment to enhance membership in the Society – Recruitment and training

Ensuring we have enough properly trained members to respond to the requests we receive for help.

This means addressing Conferences needs by recruiting new members with the right skills and empathy to deal with the increase in demand for our help and assistance.

## Fundraising channels and sharing

Maximising the fundraising channels and sharing the available funds the Society holds so that we have the resources in the places they are needed to materially help those requesting help. This means supporting our Conferences with fundraising knowledge and materials, and sharing the funds we receive.

## Social Justice Advocacy

That we are a strong voice for the rights of those we help. We live in an unequal society so it is our duty to do all we can to ensure that those we visit have the same opportunities as anyone else. Advocacy for Social Justice is part of being a Vincentian.

To me Social Justice is about asking the hard questions:

- Are we happy to live in a society where 130,000 children exist in poverty?
- Where working families are evicted because they can't afford to pay extortionate rents.
- Where children in a classroom will have unequal opportunities based on the income of the family they come from.

- Where quality of health care will depend on where you live.
- Where many people in poverty believe that no one cares about them or their situation.

If we are serious about returning those we help to the dignity of self-sufficiency then we must tackle the cause of their poverty.

*"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".*

How many times as members have we seen 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation families coming to us for help? Unless we help to change the causes of poverty this will continue. Supporting people to access all strands of education is one way to break the poverty cycle, let's look at how we can do that even more than we currently do.

Maintaining SVP as a reputable Organisation- Good Governance We must conform to the law and regulations governing our work. Each and every one of us is responsible for that. If one member remains not vetted we will be prosecuted.

## Communication and listening

That we communicate effectively with each other using whatever means available to us.

We all need to listen to each other. For my part I intend to visit as many areas as I can to hear the hopes and concerns of our members. The area gatherings are an excellent opportunity to meet, talk, listen, and learn and I strongly encourage members to attend these. We need to be organised. All of this comes down to organising ourselves well

*"No work is great if it is not organised"*

## Vincentian values and our ethos

Think about what SVP means to you and what is important for you, for us to build on, for the Society moving forward. I intend to hear from as many of you as possible in order to inform my thoughts and plans for my time as National President.

If we work together with the person in need at the centre of our thoughts, then we can truly claim to have Vincentian Spirit.

Our founder said:

*"Only one thing can hinder and destroy us: losing our founding Spirit"*



# NATIONAL AWARD FOR ST. MICHAELS HOUSING PROJECT, FOXFORD CO MAYO



*Joseph Davitt, Chairman Regional Housing West, St. Vincent de Paul, Paula Kenny, National Manager for Social Housing and Specialist Services, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Maria Kelleher, John Halligan Architects, Jim Loughran, Commercial Director, Kingspan Insulation, John Halligan, John Halligan Architects.*

The Society of St Vincent de Paul St Michael's Housing Project, Foxford designed by John Halligan Architects were announced as the 'Housing project of the Year' at the Building and Architects of the year awards recently held in Dublin. The prestigious awards ceremony is an excellent platform for Architects and their buildings, where the rich variety of architecture encompassing all the main building types can be appraised.

St Michael's Housing Project, funded by Mayo County Council under the Local Authority housing programme, delivered by Clydesdale Construction contractors was designed by John Halligan Architects, a Mayo Company delivering architecture services from their offices in Charlestown for 35 years.

A registered RIAI practice, and a Grade II conservation practice, the office works on a diverse range of projects, including residential, healthcare, education, and hospitality, ecclesiastical and domestic projects. John Halligan Architects prides itself on being a design led practice, committed to close involvement with both their clients and fellow professionals.



The award-winning project sits on a picturesque site located off a service road, which terminates in a cul-de-sac, and next to a crèche. The brief was to provide one and two bedroom houses, which were to be fully accessible, together with a community building. The houses were to become permanent accommodation for elderly people of the community. The Foxford Conference of St. Vincent de Paul wanted to create a community atmosphere in the development, and foster new friendships between occupants. The development sits well into the landscape of Foxford, with pedestrian connection back into the town from the rear of the site through the church grounds. John Halligan of John Halligan Architects outlined, *“We are delighted to be involved in this award winning project and to receive industry recognition for this social housing scheme. The St. Vincent de Paul Foxford committee worked tirelessly with the design team to deliver such a high quality development”*.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul, Foxford Conference moved into their new complex of eight houses specially designed for the elderly and disabled in April 2016. The Society was very aware that they needed a build that would provide very low maintenance both externally and internally. This was achieved very handsomely. The houses are in a very picturesque location and the design has certainly lent itself well to this. The externals are all of natural slate roofing; local stone frontages and a permanent colour plaster finish with triple glazing throughout. Internally, great care has been taken to ensure comfort and warmth, and all of this achieved at very low running cost.

Paul Benson, Head of Housing at Mayo County Council congratulated and acknowledged the work of Halligan Architects and all involved with the project outlining, *“St Michaels Housing Scheme in Foxford is an excellent example of*

*Mayo County Councils successful partnership working with local community approved housing bodies. The high quality sensitively designed scheme successfully meets the needs of both older people and people with disabilities and integrates most successfully within the context of Foxford village and its existing community facilities”*.

Paula Kenny, SVP National Manager for Social Housing said, *“The Society of St Vincent De Paul are delighted to receive the Award. The project demonstrates the excellent work and dedication of the Society’s volunteer members to meet a local community housing need and the quality of housing provision that can be realised through effective partnership working.*

*The members of the Foxford Conference have an immense Vincentian spirit, which emanates from all their work in particular their on-going dedication to the tenants to ensure a sense of well being and belonging within the Foxford community. The strive to achieve high quality standards was key to the successful delivery of the project, with the strength of approach further demonstrated in the effective housing and tenant management practices. St Michael’s Scheme and the work of St Patrick’s Conference can only serve as a good practice model for the Society’s housing nationally”*.

For further information on the project visit [www.jharch.ie](http://www.jharch.ie)



Jennifer Thompson, Social Policy Development Officer  
Kieran Stafford, National President  
Tricia Kellthy, Social Policy Development Officer

# Economic recovery? Not for the most vulnerable in our society

*Kieran Stafford, National President*

The past 12 months have been marked by economic growth and falling unemployment. However, it is clear from my own Conference work in Clonmel, and from other members on the ground right across the country, that the most vulnerable in our society are not experiencing the benefit from these improvements.

The long-standing problems of low income, coupled with the high costs of education and energy, and lack of services, have made life more challenging for an increasing number of households, both in and out of work. Our members regularly visit individuals and families who are experiencing the continual threat of homelessness, rising rents, making do in poor quality and inadequate housing, as well as surviving on low income while trying to cope with the rising costs of education.

While the political and social landscape may have changed since SVP was founded in 1844, given the current challenges facing Ireland today – the words of our founder, Fredrick Ozanam, remain relevant:

*“The question which is agitating the world today is a social one. It is a struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much. It is a violent clash of opulence and poverty which is shaking the ground under our feet.”*

This time last year, the new Programme for Government committed to tackling unmet needs through budgets with an emphasis on prioritising public spending over tax reductions. The 3:1 ratio of expenditure to cuts under Budget 2017 was welcome. SVP believes it is imperative that the new Taoiseach and government maintains this stance.

Most of what we outline in this year's Pre-Budget Submission are integrated agendas, requiring a whole of government approach to ensure the delivery of appropriate services to meet the emerging demographic demands. SVP is calling on the government to prioritise the necessary investment to address the urgent needs in housing, education, energy efficiency measures as well as targeted income supports for those at the margins of society.

The inequalities of past and present will deepen unless we address the current deficits in our public services and infrastructure. It is vital that equality is central to budgetary decisions. Now is the time for Government to bridge the gaps to ensure the rewards of economic growth are shared among all people.



# Bridging the Gap - SVPs Pre-Budget Submission Priorities for 2018



*Jennifer Thompson,  
Social Policy  
Development  
Officer*

## Priority 1: Housing

### **Entrenched and intensifying housing crisis – the urgent need for social and affordable housing**

Despite on-going economic growth and signs of continued recovery, Ireland remains in the grip of an acute housing and homelessness crisis. The impact on families is immense with many spending extended periods in emergency accommodation (hosted at a cost to the public finances that exceeds what would arise from the provision of social housing solutions), years on the social housing waiting list or facing the challenge and burden of spiralling rents. Increasing rents are leading to situations of economic homelessness as the private rental sector is moving further out of reach for low income and increasingly average income families. With the extension of the Housing Assistance Payment, many more families will be relying on the private rental sector. This at a time when properties available for rent are at their lowest levels.

The housing crisis is exacerbated by the acute shortage of social and affordable houses. SVP urgently calls for increased investment in the building and acquiring of social housing units. Security of tenure also needs to be enhanced with protections to ensure that people can remain in their own homes, including for tenants in buy-to-let properties. Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment limits are increasingly falling short of what is being asked, and need to be increased to realistic levels so they are in line with market rents.

In such a context, SVP are seeing the reluctance of many tenants to raise concerns over inadequate accommodation in fear of eviction and so make do with cold, damp and substandard conditions. No one should have to endure substandard conditions and sufficient resources must be secured for local authorities to conduct inspections of rental properties to enforce current minimum standards.

## Priority 2: Energy

### **Everyone deserves a home that they can afford to heat and light**

Many households continue to struggle to make ends meet, for whom opening the electricity or gas bill is a real cause of anxiety as they wonder how they will be able to pay the bill.

Over a quarter of households live in energy poverty, with high energy costs, low income, and energy inefficient housing being the main contributing factors. Between 2008 and 2015, the proportion of individuals who reported they were unable to afford to keep their house warm increased by 145%.

A number of initiatives under the Better Homes scheme have been introduced by the government and have worked to improve the energy efficiency of thousands of homes. These have been expanded in recent months, but tend to target homeowners. Those in rented accommodation are twice as likely to live in a home with a poor energy efficiency rating than a homeowner.

Regulation around minimum energy efficiency in the private rental sector is needed to address such situations. The Better Energy Warmer Home Scheme should also be expanded to include landlords who agree to make their property available to those in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment.

SVP recognise however, that even at the highest efficiency level examined, social welfare dependent households tend to remain in energy poverty and face inadequate income. Consequently, policy must address both overall income adequacy and dwelling efficiency.



*Tricia Keilthy,  
Social Policy  
Development  
Officer*

### **Priority 3: Income adequacy**

#### **Income support continue to be an important measure for keeping people out of poverty**

Without income supports such as Jobseekers Allowance and Child Benefit, just over 45% of the Irish population would be living below the poverty line. This is why it is critical to ensure households both in and out of work have an income that not only keeps them above the poverty line but ensures they can afford a minimum essential standard of living. In Budget 2018, SVP wants to see an improvement in income supports for those experiencing the greatest levels of deprivation.

SVP remains concerned at the high rate of poverty among children growing up in one parent families. The reforms of income support to lone parents have not been delivered in ways that help parents reach their full potential; instead they have created poverty traps. SVP are asking that income support for one parent families are improved so they can better balance their caring, employment and/or education roles more effectively.

Social welfare supports for children need to be structured in a way that reflects the higher costs faced by families with older children. Members engaged in home visitation see first-hand the difference in outgoings on food, clothes and education costs for a household with an eight-year-old compared to a household with a sixteen-year-old. However, our current social welfare system does not take account of these differences.

Children and families living in Direct Provision are one of the most vulnerable groups in Ireland today. SVP members assist where possible to allow these children to have the same educational and social experiences as their peers. Although the announcement to increase income supports early this month was welcomed, they were below the required levels being sought by SVP.

In 2015, the Society spent more than the Department of Social Protection helping people with the costs of 'exceptional needs', including household appliances, rent deposits, and health-related

hospital costs. This has placed undue financial pressure on low income households. SVP are therefore asking for an increase in the overall budget for Exceptional Needs Payment by €20 million.

### **Priority 4: Education**

#### **An underfunded education system is trapping too many people in a cycle of disadvantage**

Underinvestment in our education system is prohibiting too many children, young people and second chance learners from reaching their potential. SVP calls on Government to value and prioritise investment in our education system, based on the transformative effect it has on people who experience poverty and disadvantage.

Children's educational success should not be based on their parent's ability to pay, but SVP members see how school costs continue to prevent disadvantaged children from participating in school. In Budget 2018, SVP wants to see an end to the practice of 'so-called' voluntary contributions through direct investment in schools. In the next five years, an entirely free school books scheme should be implemented – this begins by providing additional funding to existing book rental schemes. Financial supports for parents are also important and SVP are advocating for further improvements in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and extending Child Benefit to child over 18 still in school.

Costs also remain a barrier to participation at third level and SVP are concerned about the low rate of progression to further and higher education by disadvantaged and non-traditional students. This year, SVP are calling on Government to reverse the changes to the student grant and expand eligibility to part-time students. This will be a first step to addressing the high cost of education and training faced by low income households.

#### **An Equitable Future**

Laying the foundations for an equitable future involves ensuring everyone has the right to a secure and adequate home, to a good quality education at all ages and stages, and increased investment in services as well as social welfare supports that are designed in a way that helps people reach their potential and guarantees a good standard of living. The Social Justice team will continue to work with the Government to realise a roadmap for all Irish society which ensures we are heading towards a positive and equitable future.

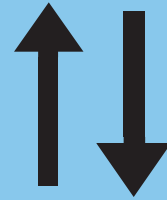
**To read our full Pre-Budget Submission online go to <http://www.svp.ie/pbs18>**

# AN UNEQUAL NATION



## GROWING GAPS IN INCOME

Income share increased by 20% for the top 1% and fell by 15% for the bottom 50% (2014-2015)



## INADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

25% ↑

Increase in the number of working households qualifying for social housing



More than **91,000** households are in need of social housing and over 2,700 children are currently homeless



**1 in 4** one parent families are living in consistent poverty

145% ↑

Increase in the proportion of people who cannot afford to adequately heat their home (2008-2015)

## LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

5 X

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are **five times** more likely to perform poorly in science, reading and maths compared to their advantaged peers



840

Is the average cost for a secondary school student



As little as **15%** of young people living in deprived areas go to third level compared to up to **90%** of young people living in affluent areas



130,000

Requests for assistance to SVP (2016)



€ 33m

Spent by SVP providing direct assistance to individuals and families (2015)

# National Economic Dialogue: SVP analysis and solutions



*Hazel O'Byrne,  
Head of Social  
Justice*

As part of its work in advocating for social justice issues with policy makers, SVP took part in the National Economic Dialogue event in Dublin Castle over two days in June, represented by Hazel O'Byrne who has recently joined the Social Justice and Policy Team.

The National Economic Dialogue is part of the government's preparation for the budget and is attended by a number of cabinet ministers, including An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar; Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure Pascal Donoghue and Minister for Employment and Social Protection, Regina Doherty as well as senior civil servants.

The event offers the opportunity for organisations with wide range of interests to present their analysis of current economic and social circumstances their perspectives and what they see as the priority issues for this year's budget. Speakers at the event include representatives of workers, employers, farmers, environmental groups and social concerns.

While the event overall emphasised the improvements economy and their projected continuation, SVP used its time to remind participants that for all the talk of growth, there remain tens of thousands of people throughout the country who have felt little or no impact from recovery. We encouraged decision-makers to prioritise equality and also outlined some specific proposals from the pre-budget submission to address inequality. Below is an extract of SVP contribution at the event.

SVP members visit households every week where the concept of economic recovery is extremely remote. The reality that many families and individuals experience continues to be one of inadequate income from work or social welfare, rising rents and insecure tenancies, poor quality housing, unavailability of employment and costly or inaccessible services with the consequent stress and anxiety that this creates.

We know, unfortunately all too well, that trickle-down economics and the theory of a rising tide lifting all boats

are fallacy. However, at a policy and decision-making level, the beginnings of improvements in economic circumstances nationally do allow for discussion and exploration of the choices that are available to us as a country about how the benefits of recovery are prioritised and who in society gains. The message of SVP is that we must ensure that values of inclusion, equality and social justice underpin and guide those considerations and decisions.

This means that investment in chronically underfunded services like childcare and education, housing and social protection, must take precedence for the allocation of resources.

Some specific choices that could be made to realise these values, and that would make a significant difference to many families in Ireland, were outlined in SVP's pre-budget submission and include:

- first and foremost, prioritise investing in social housing provision; and until that becomes available, increase rent supplement and housing assistance payments to more adequately meet market rents;
- we need to invest in quality early childhood care and education as a public good, recognising the full costs of quality provision; similarly, with primary and second level education we need to fully cover the costs of provision of these essential services;
- another key measure to tackle child and family poverty, is to increase earnings disregards for lone parents returning to work, in acknowledgement that this is the family type most at risk of poverty;
- adjust Qualified Child Increases to social welfare payments for parents of older children to better reflect costs for families with teenagers.

SVP emphasised that tackling exclusion should not be considered an optional extra and that with sufficient determination and vision, it is possible to address poverty and inequality and build for a more sustainable and inclusive future.



# PREVIOUS NATIONAL PRESIDENTS

Just before Geoff Meagher finished his term as National President he met with five previous National Presidents who's terms collectively span over 40 years, in the National Office to discuss the Society and to celebrate all the years dedication they had given to the Society and still continue to do.

- Cormac O Brion 1975 – 1981
- Don Mahony 1981 – 1987
- Brian O Reilly 2002 – 2007
- Mairead Bushnell 2007 – 2012
- Geoff Meagher 2012 – 2017

*Photo: L-R: Brian O Reilly, Geoff Meagher, Cormac O Brion, Mairead Bushnell and Don Mahony.*

## THE C.I.F. BENEVOLENT TRUST

The Trust was established by the Construction Industry Federation in 1982. It is a charitable trust and its function is to assist in times of severe distress gravely impacting on employers, directors, sole traders and senior management, including their dependents, in the construction industry.

Central to the Trust's establishment was a recognition that families of employers and senior management can also need help in times of family hardship.

It covers the Republic of Ireland.

If you are a person in the construction industry (past or present), who meets this criteria, please make contact in confidence. The Trustee looks at each case on its own merits, with the purpose of relieving hardship.

All information received is treated in confidence.



Registered Charity Number 20011413    CHY Number 6357



Contact: by post  
 Chairperson  
 The C.I.F. Benevolent Trust, c/o C.I.F.  
 Construction House, Canal Road, Dublin 6 by email: [erbt@cif.ie](mailto:erbt@cif.ie)



**Derry SVP man recognised for his services to charity**

Local Derry man, Cormac Wilson, who has been a volunteer with St Vincent de Paul for more than 33 years, was recently recognised for his outstanding service to the Society.

Many friends, family and SVP volunteers from Derry as well as other members from right across Ireland, travelled to the regional headquarters in Belfast for a special ceremony led by Father Eddie McGee.

At the service, Cormac, currently Regional Senior Vice-President was awarded with an international St Vincent de Paul medal, which recognises members for their long-standing service. The North regional President, Aidan Crawford, who organised the event to thank Cormac, presented this for his support during his presidency.

Aidan explained, *"After five years, my presidency term comes to an end in September and I wanted to organise this event to thank Cormac for the support and guidance he has provided to me, the charity and everyone that he has helped during that time. It was great to see so many people turn up to the service, including the National President elect of SVP in Ireland, which shows how greatly respected Cormac is within the Society right across the island."*

He continued, *"During my time as President, Cormac has been such a fantastic help to me - I'm not sure if I could have stuck the pace without him! As a former President of SVP himself, Cormac understood my role completely and his advice has always been invaluable. I also wanted to recognise Cormac for his loyalty and passion for St Vincent de Paul and those who we serve. Not only has he volunteered with the charity for more than 30 years, but during that time, he has given so much to the Society, usually volunteering at least 50-60 hours a week. Even with his current health battle, Cormac is still as committed as he always has been to helping others and he continues to play such an important role at a regional and local level of SVP."*

Cormac, who hails from Bishop Street in the City and has seven children with his wife Rosaleen, as well as nine grandchildren, has spent more of his lifetime as part of the Society than out of it. Joining SVP back in 1984 when he was in his early thirties, he started as a member of St Columba's (Long Tower) Conference. Recognising the level of need within the city, he decided to devote all his spare time to assisting those who needed help.

*"I began my journey with SVP by carrying out visits to local families in need right across the community, assessing their situation and doing all we could to support them through difficult times,"* Cormac explained. *"This could be by providing very practical items such as coal, food and clothing, or indeed helping them through family issues or debt. A problem shared is a problem halved."*

In 1993, Cormac was elected as Conference president of St Columba's, and he continued his volunteering alongside working as a successful driving instructor. Due to ill health and following a

triple bypass, Cormac then retired in 1999 and instead of sitting back and taking it easy, he decided to volunteer full-time with SVP.

*"Once I was aware of how hard some other people have it, I couldn't just sit back",* he said. *"I devoted all the time I could to help those facing poverty or social exclusion. I was elected president of the entire Derry city area in 2002 and also joined the Magilligan Prison Visitation Conference. In addition, I became a trainer within the Society and also worked very closely with the Salvation Army to help co-ordinate the joint Family Toy Appeal. This is such an important initiative thus ensuring that no child in Northern Ireland has to go without a gift at Christmas."*

In 2007, he was elected Regional President, meaning he had overarching responsibility for the charity right across Northern Ireland for five years. During this time he worked closely with SVP in the south, also becoming a member of the National Board of Ireland and the National Management Committee.

*"I certainly have been involved in every aspect of the Society over the years!"* he said. *"But it is only with the support and inspiration from other members that this has been possible. And indeed, as our work is fully funded by donations, it can only be carried out thanks to the kindness of the people right across Northern Ireland who continue to donate so generously which we are very grateful for."*

Speaking at the event, Cormac said he was humbled but very honoured to be recognised. He explained: *"When I heard about the ceremony I was very surprised as there are so many dedicated people involved with SVP and while I have been a member for 33 years, believe it or not, there are so many other volunteers that have been with the charity for much longer than that!"*

*"But I do feel very honoured to have been recognised by the Regional President, Aidan Crawford. We have volunteered together for more than 20 years and while he would say that my support has helped him in his role, I would actually say the opposite and that I have learned so much from him. If it wasn't for my current health issues, my intention was to stand in the next president's election. Thanks to Aidan, I feel I would be better equipped to undertake another term and believe that I have more to contribute following the standards and example he has set. However, I will continue to serve those who need help in any capacity."*

Outside of SVP (and his family of course), Cormac would describe his only other love as supporting Derry City FC. He added, *"This is my escape and my way of relaxing and I would try my best to get to as many matches as possible. Although after the results of some of the games you maybe don't feel too relaxed but I am definitely a Derry City fan through and through!"*



# Words, Words, Words

*Michael Boyle, Area President, West Tallaght*



Many SVP members have assisted multiple generations of the same family and have seen the repetition of disadvantage over decades and have sought to try to break this cycle. This article by Michael Boyle, an SVP member in the Tallaght area, offers an analysis of research and evidence about young children's very early experiences how important they are for future life outcomes.

Did you ever wonder why most children from certain Postal Districts in Dublin go on to Third Level education, while most children from other Postal Districts do not? The answer is not that some are cleverer than others. There are of course geniuses, but the vast majority have about the same potential brainpower. How does a baby learn to use this latent ability? Scientists and sociologists have investigated this question for decades, and great progress has been made in recent years in analysing the brain – how it works, and how it develops.

Most newborns have brains consisting of about 100 billion neurons – switches that can link with each other – and as soon as they are born, the neurons begin to link up. From birth to about three years of age 700 to 1,000 such links are made every second. By the time the child is three years old, 80% of the linkages are complete. What causes these links to be formed? Everything the child hears, sees, tastes, smells and touches.

In the 1980s sociologists in the US Hart and Risley, designed and carried out studies into babies' experience in these early years. Forty-two families with newborns were recruited and trained observers recorded everything that the baby heard, saw, tasted, smelled and touched and analysed the vast amount of data gathered.

All the babies began to talk at about the same time. However there were significant differences in the number and quality of the words the babies heard. Some heard about 45 million words over three years, while others heard only 15 million. The ones hearing the most words had a vocabulary of 1,100 words. Those hearing the fewest had only 550 words.

Those hearing the most words also heard six times as many "affirmations" (praise, encouragement) and half as many "prohibitions" (orders, criticisms, arguments).

The children were re-examined when they were aged nine to 10 years of age. Those who had heard the most words had the best language skills, and gained the best school test scores. The gap between them and those who had heard the fewest words, and the most "prohibitions" grew over time.

School test scores predict the child's lifetime achievements, with a high degree of reliability.

The babies who heard the fewest words were mostly in public housing. But even there, some babies heard many more words than others, and it showed in their better results.

By three to four years of age, the development of the brain's learning ability is 85% complete. That means that the first three to four years are the best for development of speech and language, so that children will be ready to start schooling. Hart and Risley's work and conclusions have been confirmed and built on, to develop programmes which are aimed at maximizing brain development and language skills in the first three years of life. Two of these are Lifestart and Preparing for Life, providing monthly home visits to coach mother and child, now in parts of Dublin and beyond.

We now know that high quality parenting support and mentorship in the home is effective in an Irish context. Children whose families participated in the Preparing for Life home visiting programme had higher cognitive scores at the start of primary school than those who didn't and were less likely to be overweight, have behavioural problems such as hyperactivity and inattention, and used fewer hospital services.

In Ireland today, large numbers of children starting school in DEIS areas are found to be in need of additional education and behavioural supports – they are not school-ready. For example, they might have limited vocabulary, be unable to hold a pencil or a crayon, and have difficulty sitting still. Family participation in evidence-based home visiting programmes can significantly contribute to children being more school-ready.

For us as SVP members, developing our awareness of the significant potential for development in this early phase of life can strengthen our visitation to families with infants and toddlers and the types of services and support we signpost them towards.

For example, St. Aidan's Conference in West Tallaght is now giving out packs of books to families with infants on a monthly basis – "Books for Babies" – and parents are delighted reading them to their children. Our conference would like to thank the Shop Team in SVP House that kindly sourced and supplied the books.

We hope that "Books for Babies" will help these children to be better prepared for school when the time comes.



Aidan Crawford from Ballymena was named Charity Champion at the Sunday Life Spirit of Northern Ireland Awards. Presenting Aidan with his award is Conor Boyle from category sponsor Lidl along with IBF bantamweight world champion Ryan Burnett. Also pictured are ambassadors from title sponsor Specsavers, Alison and Laura Crimmins. Aidan was one of ten winners on the night, which was held at the Culloden Resort and Spa.

## NI SVP President Aidan Crawford wins Spirit of Northern Ireland Award

The northern regional president of St Vincent de Paul, Aidan Crawford, was named Charity Champion of the Year at the 2017 Sunday Life Spirit of Northern Ireland Awards.

The awards recognise and celebrate unsung community heroes – ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things to make a real difference to life in Northern Ireland, touching the hearts of their neighbours along the way.

More than 350 people, including the 10 remarkable winners and their families attended the star-studded bash at the Culloden Hotel, which was hosted by UTV's Mark Mallett and Pamela Ballantine.

Aidan was recognised for his work with St Vincent de Paul over the last 20 years, and particularly his role in helping refugees.

Judges of the awards said: "Aidan Crawford has dedicated his heart and soul into helping people living in Northern Ireland break the cycle of poverty. More recently, the Ballymena man has been involved in gathering and distributing aid to Syrian refugees and has even travelled to refugee camps in Greece and France where he witnessed heart-breaking scenes. He is a true inspiration to everyone involved with St. Vincent de Paul and will not stop until dignity and respect has been restored to refugees, calling on governments to do more to help."



Aidan Crawford on stage with UTV's Marc Mallett

Conor Boyle presented Aidan with the award from category sponsor Lidl along with IBF bantamweight world champion Ryan Burnett.

Brian O’Kane, Chairman of Specsavers Northern Ireland and director of Cookstown and Magherafelt Specsavers stores, said:

*“We at Specsavers are so thrilled and proud to be title sponsor of such a special event which celebrates the unsung heroes in our communities across Northern Ireland and we were absolutely overwhelmed to receive over 1,000 entries this year.*

*“As a judge it was certainly a challenge to choose just 10 winners as there were so many stories which moved us and highlighted the amazing community spirit which is not just alive, but thriving here.*

*“Each winner has shown incredible courage, grace and strength, putting others’ needs before their own and for that we warmly congratulate them and thank them for the inspirational qualities they have shown.”*

Sunday Life editor Martin Breen, added: “We’ve been involved in the Spirit of Northern Ireland awards for eight years and I can truly say that each year we continue to be hugely impressed by these very special people who have demonstrated incredible selfless behaviour to improve the lives of others and make our country a better place.

“We had some of the biggest names in entertainment there to enjoy the evening which was fantastic but the true heroes in all

our eyes were the winners of these awards. Their stories moved the judging panel immensely and we are delighted to celebrate all their achievements.”

Celebrities who attended on the night to present awards included veteran broadcaster Eamonn Holmes, who had been on the judging panel, soap stars including Lucy Fallon who plays Bethany in Coronation Street, Emmerdale actors Dominic Brunt, Gaynor Faye, Michelle Hardwick, and Liam Fox, otherwise known as Paddy, Megan, Vanessa and Dan.

Other big names presenting awards included NI football manager Michael O’Neill and new world-boxing champion Ryan Burnett while Ulster player Craig Gilroy and Miss Northern Ireland Anna Henry also took to the stage to honour the category winners.

The crowd were entertained by Boyzlife singers, Keith Duffy and Brian McFadden and Britain’s Got Talent finalists St Patrick’s Junior Choir from Drumgreenagh, County Down. Terry Brennan, Head of News and Programmes, UTV said: *“UTV is delighted to be televising the Spirit of Northern Awards once again this year. The awards truly capture all that is good about Northern Ireland, rewarding inspirational people for their achievements and endeavours. We are very proud to bring the atmosphere and the celebrations of the night to people’s homes, and last year the programme attracted over 200,000 viewers, reflecting its continued popularity among the people of Northern Ireland.”*



Charity Champion Aidan Crawford pictured with his wife Patricia and daughter Aideen at the Sunday Life Spirit of Northern Ireland Awards.

## Galway Mayor Awards - Children and Youth Award 2017



Croí na Gaillimhe Homework Club has won the Children and Youth Award for their dedication and energy in working with children in the Eglinton Hostel.

The Croí na Gaillimhe Homework Club based in the Eglinton Resource Centre (a direct provision centre for asylum seekers located in Salthill) started in September 2014. It provides homework support for up to approximately 25 children living in the centre.

The establishment of the Croí na Gaillimhe Homework Club has developed a new approach to educational support to those in the asylum process, including building the capacity of children to engage as equals in the mainstream educational process. In respect to parents it offers a new way of facilitating dialogue with and building capacity of parents to assist in devising new solutions to problems of educational disadvantage for themselves and their children.

Approximately 20 volunteers support the homework club by supervising homework groups and providing one-to-one homework assistance to children who need it. The volunteers are very dedicated and committed and share their time, expertise, talents and experience on a daily basis. They are experienced in working with children, assisting them with their educational needs. Our volunteers are very reliable, which is essential when providing this necessary service. They help build friendly relationships between children and parents living in direct provision with members of the community.

Some of our volunteers are retired teachers which give the service an intergenerational aspect and our younger volunteers serve as good role models. Our volunteers add to the good spirit and positive attitude to learning that is created in our homework club.

## Galway Art Competition

The SVP in Galway recently held an Art Competition for Galway Secondary pupils with the prizes sponsored by Easons Ireland, Galway and Supermac's Galway. A big congratulations to the winner Sam Madden and runner up Sophie McDonagh, both students from Coláiste Mhuirlinne/Merlin College.

Geraldine Collins from Easons and Paddy Daly, SVP Youth Development Office presented the two students with their prizes. A special thanks to Art Teacher Karen Conway from their school.



## Croí na Gaillimhe Initiatives

Croí na Gaillimhe introduced two new initiatives recently for people who are leaving Direct Provision. One was with the local Credit Unions and the other assisting people with status to move into the community.

### Leaving Direct Provision: Easing the Financial Pressure

A new initiative introduced by Croí na Gaillimhe and delivered by the Galway Credit Union:

Families and individuals who have 'leave to remain' status in Ireland face a number of obstacles when trying to move into the community. Finding suitable accommodation is a real difficulty and the well documented situation of demand exceeding supply means that people often remain in direct provision for long periods of time. The cost of moving is another issue as the majority of people have no savings and can't access credit through the normal lending channels. This seriously disadvantages people as they can't make up any shortfalls in deposits or buy essentials when they find a home.

This situation prompted Croí na Gaillimhe to contact St Columba's and St Anthony's and Claddagh Credit Union to discuss the possibility of offering loans to people in direct provision with a deferred payment option until they move into their home. The Credit Unions were very open to the idea and promptly put a mechanism in place for people to apply for the loan. They have held information sessions in both direct provision centres and already have new customers.

The SVP Social Justice Committee is also very supportive of the initiative as it is a natural fit with their aims and objectives.

Croí na Gaillimhe is delighted that the Credit Union responded so quickly and that the initiative will in some way help make the transition to the community that bit easier. Perhaps this could be an option for other Credit Unions in different parts of Ireland to implement.

### Leaving Direct Provision to move to the community

In November 2016 we extended our services to people living in direct provision who have got their status (leave to remain/ refugee status/subsidiary protection) and are planning to move to their new home.

The Bridge service operates two mornings a week and we offer:

- Information on applying for housing and social protection payments
- Help with filling in forms
- Support in dealing with landlords and services.

This is the only dedicated service of its type in Galway and there is no doubt that we will be busy in the coming months. While we can help and support people, the issue of housing supply remains the biggest challenge of all.

We look forward to updating you on the progress in the coming months.

As part of the Bridge Project we launched a Galway Guide to Leaving Direct Provision accommodation.

Today in Galway there are twenty six households living in direct provision accommodation whose application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been granted. This means that they are entitled to move out of direct provision and start their new life in the community. This is obviously great news after years of being unable to participate fully in society and having only €19.10 a week to spend but the current shortage of housing at affordable rents poses a huge obstacle to people trying to leave direct provision.

Isn't this a problem for everyone looking for accommodation? Yes it is, says Janet Kehelly, Project Officer, of Croí and Gaillimhe Resource Centre, but people leaving direct provision face additional obstacles as well, such as having no savings or income to top up rents until such time as they get work, or transport to go and view properties, or having no tenant references to show a landlord. All of these things can push people further down on a landlords list of possible tenants. Janet added that the lack of supply and the continuous hikes in rent, result in people staying in direct provision when they should be living in the community.

While Croí an Gaillimhe can't offer people accommodation, the Bridge Project does provide an information and support point for people looking for guidance on how to move into the community. The Bridge Project offers people help with housing and social protection applications and along with the support of other agencies, guidance on looking for private rented accommodation.

Their new information booklet, Galway Guide to Leaving Direct Provision, launched by Hildegard Naughton TD and sets out the steps to becoming part of our communities. Once they find their accommodation, we need to do our bit to help them feel part of it. You can download the booklet [www.croinagaillimhe.ie](http://www.croinagaillimhe.ie).

For further information please contact Loretta Needham, Manager of Croí na Gaillimhe @ 091 895203.

## A fond farewell & huge thanks



After so many years as a devoted member of the St. Brigid's Conference of St.Vincent de Paul Dunshaughlin, we felt the retirement of Joe Mahon could not go unmarked.

As a founder member of St. Brigid's Conference in 1989, many years of selfless service followed. He diligently served as Treasurer for twenty-two years and as Conference President for the last five. Since its inception our Conference has gone from strength to strength with Joe at the helm.

One of the key strengths of SVP is in the personalised delivery of non-judgemental help in a caring and non-threatening environment. Over his entire career with those in need throughout the community of Dunshaughlin he ensured the support required was delivered in the most discreet and efficient way.

Joe's approachable and compassionate manner helped to maintain the dignity of the individuals that were assisted in our local area. He has consistently treated those in need as well as our colleagues of the SVP with the upmost respect which has resulted in sound friendships built on a foundation of trust and confidentiality.

Both the Conference of St. Brigid, as well as the community of Dunshaughlin have benefited from his years of faithful service. His sound advice and unfailing desire to improve the support we offer has helped to embrace those marginalised individuals in our community enabling them to rekindle their self respect and sense of worth. Joe Mahon's noble endeavours have helped to make our Conference what it is today.

We wish to sincerely thank Joe for his years of devoted service and wish him well in his retirement.

## North East and Midlands Region Long Service Award



Diane Boylan who recently retired was presented with the silver medal by the North East and Midlands Region's Brian Sheridan, President of Pope John 23rd and Mr Billy Brown of the Corpusty Christian Conference.

## Difference is a source of richness

Everything has a consequence. . . . .difference is a source of Richness not the basis for unfair treatment.

Social Inequality is all too real and that many are denied the opportunity to share fully in the richness of contemporary life is all too evident. Very many children are born into a life, which will struggle to give them their basic requirements let alone full equality of opportunity. The life enhancing and transformative power of education is absent from the experience of far too many children. Disabled people continue to be confronted by very real obstacles in realising their capacity to participate in daily life. Too, often, to be a woman is to face inequality in pay and income and to bear an unequal share of responsibility of childcare.

Those with mental health or addiction difficulties are particularly vulnerable and can face isolation. Older people, too, risk isolation and a perception that theirs is a limited potential to be part of society. Those who are different, because of race, religion, sexual orientation, can face hostility and attack.

## Holy Rosary Senior Citizen's Visit Mount Stewart

The Holy Rosary Conference in Belfast organised a very enjoyable outing for senior citizens to Mount Stewart on Saturday 17th June 2017. Over 40 people participated from the Holy Rosary and neighbouring parishes. The coach left Belfast at 10.00am in glorious sunshine, which remained throughout the day.

On arrival at Mount Stewart the group were greeted by National Trust staff who escorted them from the car park and organised visitors into smaller groups to take a guided tour of the newly-refurbished house. The very knowledgeable tour guides relayed lots of fascinating information about the 19th-century house and its surrounding gardens.

The beauty of the house, its interesting history and the splendour of its furnishings impressed all present. After visiting the house there was still time for a stroll around Mount Stewart's world-class gardens and to pop into the gift shop and café or simply to sit and enjoy the sunshine and beautiful surroundings.

Geography can have a significant impact on securing or diminishing access to important services. In making any society a more equal place we must harmonise our thinking with our actions. All people are entitled to equal respect, equality of opportunity is an entitlement, and nobody is just an economic unit whose dignity, value or rights are determined or measured in terms of contributions to the economy. The real value of a successful economy is in the opportunity for growth and development it offers individuals.

Lets all be realistic and acknowledge that equality of opportunity is far from being realised, that there are very many in this society whose lives are blighted by inequality. Lets make a call to awareness and to action so that we can improve opportunity for all.

For lunch the group travelled onwards to Harrison's of Greyabbey, a wonderful location for their restaurant, nursery and farm shop, which offers spectacular views over Strangford Lough. The helpful and considerate staff warmly welcomed the group, and everyone enjoyed a delicious meal in the spacious restaurant. Time was available for browsing in the gift shop and nursery – many colourful plants accompanied us on the coach back to Belfast!

The sunshine hitchhiked with the group on the drive back to Belfast where we arrived just before 5 pm having spent a very pleasant day on the Ards Peninsula.



## De La Salle College Waterford Junior SVP Coffee Morning



An end of year cheque presentation was made to SVP Waterford Area President, Michael Curran from De La Salle College Waterford Junior SVP. Money was raised through a coffee morning event for the staff of the college. The Conference concentrated on raising awareness of SVP and the work undertaken by the Conference in the school.

The Conference has a very successful mentoring programme for pupils entering the college from primary schools. This helps the pupils make a smooth transition from primary to secondary school.

Members were presented with SVP certificates to acknowledge their participation throughout the school year. Our thanks to the De La Salle College for all the help and support we received from them during the school year.

Michael Curran, Waterford Area President

## Ballymoney Fundraiser



## Lions Club Award



*Before the awards ceremony, members of St Colman's SVP, in Dudley, Birmingham (Left to right: Nicholas Casey-founder, Nicole Breen-President, Jack Hickey-treasurer, Shane Torpey-committee member)*

Jack Hickey of St Colman's Youth Conference, sponsored by Carrick-on-Suir Lions Club, was awarded the Shipshape Award at the Multiple District Final of the Young Ambassador Competition, which took place last February in Birmingham.

The award gives Jack the opportunity to take part in a leadership programme on board a Tall Ship named the Lord Nelson, for one week while sailing as a crewmember around the coast of England with the Jubilee Sailing Trust. During the week Jack will learn leadership skills while assisting other members of the crew. This is the first time a candidate from Ireland has been awarded the Shipshape Award.

In addition Jack did the Conference very proud in his interview for the Young Ambassador Award and although the bursary was given to another candidate, the adjudicators were incredibly impressed with Jack's dedication and interest and they commended him on the work that he has done to date.

Jack was supported over the weekend by his parents, members of the Carrick-on-Suir Lions Club and members of St Colman's Youth St.Vincent de Paul.

Staff and pupils from Our Lady of Lourdes School in Ballymoney presenting a cheque for £100 to St Patrick's Conference Ballymoney from a tales and teapots afternoon they had earlier this year.

*Photo L-R: Noel Burns and Kevin McKillop from St Patrick's Conference Ballymoney.*



## Nairobi Remand Prison – Visitation Programme



Staff, prisoners and SVP volunteers at the Nairobi Remand Prison. Also included in the group is Irish Vincentian priest, Fr. Roderic Crowley.

For a number of years we have been funding a prison visitation programme in Nairobi. This SVP group has been supporting the HIV-positive prisoners in the prison with food hampers, mainly fruit and milk. By improving the nutrition of these prisoners the programme significantly improves their health as the prison diet is poor and living conditions are very basic.

Many of the prisoners suffer from TB as a consequence of HIV so in a letter of appreciation the prisoners say *“we are doing well in terms of drug adherence and support due to your support. We pray that God will continue to bless you abundantly to continue doing good to us and to others who are in need like us”*.

SVP has also been supporting the prisoners in a craft project so that they can generate some funds of their own and also gain some skills that they can use on their release. They have also a small garden in which to grow vegetables to supplement their daily meals.

### Nairobi Remand Prison – Visitation Programme

Dear Sir/Madam,  
I am writing this letter to thank SVP Area Council Kitale for the school fees when I was assistance they accorded me to pay my school fees when I was totally stranded.

I was brought up in a poor family. My father, who was the breadwinner, passed on in 2013 when I was in primary school. My mother is a housewife.

In 2014 I passed my primary exams and qualified to join secondary schools but my mother could not raise the school

## The Kenyan SVP National Council

Following difficulties in recent years the National Council in Kenya has been reconstituted under a new President, Euphrasia Mutsami, a retired school teacher. This is a welcome development for the future of SVP in Kenya and the new structures will help to strengthen the twinning relationship with Ireland. Over the coming months they plan to initiate a number of projects in conjunction with local conferences including food banks, agricultural projects and feeding programmes for street children. The new Twinning Officer is Wilbroda Shinanda, a local high school teacher.



(L to R) Vitalis Owuor (Vice-President), Euphrasia Mutsami (President), Mary Goretti Munyi, Wilbroda Shinanda (Twinning Officer), Urbanus Kinuthia, Doris Achieng (Treasurer), Michael Musembi, Sophia Kemunto (Vice-Secretary)

fees and provide for the family's basic needs. This became very difficult and I could not even report to school. I had almost given up because I was getting late when I met Alice Slyoi, a member of SVP, who asked me why I had not gone to school. I told her my problems and she listened and told me to pray to God to open the way. After two days she brought me a cheque payable to the above school and I went to school.

I do not know what I would have done without the assistance of SVP. I am now in Form 2 and I pray that his continues so that I complete my studies and assist others in the future.

Yours faithfully,  
Joseph

# In Tribute

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

### **Bernard Byrne** **Waterford**

Sacred Heart of Mary Conference in Ferrybank has lost a much loved and respected member and treasurer in Bernard Byrne. Bernard, originally from Dublin was a member of the Ferrybank Conference for almost 40 years and Treasurer for as long as actually anyone can remember. Bernard was an inspirational member of our Conference whom we all turned to for advice and support.

He had a deep knowledge and insight into the delicate and sensitive workings of our Society and was always available to advise on how to deal with difficult and sensitive situations. He was a man of the highest integrity and in reality was a mentor to us all. Bernard spent his working life in the Court system and was the Clerk of the Court in Kilkenny for many years until his retirement in 2003.

He was a devoted husband to his wife Nancy, whom he married in Ferrybank in September 1965 and who predeceased him in July 2014. He was also a wonderful supportive father to his son Greg and daughter Rachael. Of course his grandchildren, Raymond, Adrian, Julianne, Mia, and Nathan were the apple of his eye and he doted on them at every opportunity. The Parish of Ferrybank and our Conference in particular will miss him greatly and leaves us with a very big void that we will find almost impossible to fill.

May he rest in peace with his beloved Nancy.

### **Robert Murphy** **Dublin**

Robert Murphy, an SVP stalwart for almost 60 years, sadly passed away, aged 85, on 31 May 2017, after a short illness. Known to all as 'Bob', he became a member of the Little Flower Conference (Donore Avenue) in the south inner city of Dublin, in 1959, joining his two close friends, Frank Molloy and Paddy Culligan. Bob was a dedicated SVP member, twice serving as both Treasurer and President of his Conference. His social commitments were, however, not limited to SVP: a founding director of the local Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), he served on its Board for many years; he also gave long service to the local parish finance committee. The parish was always an area of substantial need and Bob saw the transformation of this need in the early 1980s when the scourge of drug addiction was added to the obstacles facing the local community.

Bob worked particularly closely with Paddy Culligan, a fellow SVP member for over 50 years. The Conference went through fallow times in terms of membership but Bob and Paddy never faltered in their good-humoured commitment, continuing with collections outside the church and visits to families in need, well into their ninth and tenth/ 80's and 90's decades respectively. In recent years, the Conference has gone from strength to strength, however, and Bob was delighted to share his knowledge and experience with new members. He is survived by his wife, Madge, and their six children, who are all immensely proud of his work with SVP.



**Eamon Markey**  
**Rathfarnham, Dublin 14**

The members of St. Raphael's Conference, Ballyroan have lost a valued member on the death of Eamon Markey. Eamon was a lifelong and committed Vincentian, having joined the society as a schoolboy at Dominical College Newbridge. During his 60 years of service he held the role of President and Vice-President in various adult Conferences. He was a founder member of the Salvage Bureau, which later became The Vincentian Shops. He served on the Council of Ireland as Public Relations Officer and introduced the Vincent de Paul Christmas cards.

As well as his tireless devotion to the poor and disadvantaged, Eamon was happy to be called upon to fix things, like broken collection boxes, design and laminate the Conference's calling cards, count, bag and lodge the coin from collections, and drive members to visit families in need who lived in the mountain area on snowy or icy days.

Eamon was well-known in our area, with his jaunty sailor's cap, sea-faring beard, accompanied by his beloved dog Borris. He had a friendly chat with all those he met. He was a great storyteller and he often regaled the society members with his tales of famous people he had encountered on his travels. Eamon was a keen sailor. As Commodore of the Fleet he organised a Flotilla of Yachts on the Liffey, which raised substantial funds for the Society.

The Communion reflection at Eamon's Requiem Mass referred to

*"Sometime at Eve when water is low, I shall slip my moorings  
and sail away,  
O'er the Unknown Sea – to the Unknown Shore".*

Let perpetual light shine upon him, may he rest in peace.

**Eddie Murphy**  
**St. Mura's Conference, Fahan**

The members of St. Mura's Conference, Fahan and the wider SVP community in the North West Region mourn the loss of our fellow member, Eddie. Eddie was a member for approximately 30 years and during that time he was passionate about the ethos of the Society and devoted his time to offering friendship and support to all who sought assistance, promoting self-sufficiency and working for social justice for all.

He became involved at Area and Regional level and 13 years ago joined the Regional Training Team, subsequently joining the national team. He was a popular member of the team, known for speaking his mind and promoting discussion and debate. He felt very strongly about the SVP prayer leaflet, calling it his bible. He used it throughout his illness and his faith in it was an inspiration.

Eddie will be sorely missed and we offer our sincere condolences to his wife Elizabeth and his family.



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