

# Journey together

SVP Ireland

**STRATEGIC PLAN 2024–2028**



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Do not be afraid  
of new beginnings.  
Be creative.  
Be inventive.

– Blessed Frederick Ozanam

# The Ethos of the SVP

## – its collective spirit and character

Fr. Paschal Scallan CM  
**Spiritual Advisor to National Council**

The collective spirit and character, that is to say, the 'ethos' of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, emerge from the words and actions of Jesus Christ, the tradition and teaching of the Catholic Church and the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and the other founders of the SVP.

This ethos seeks to realize in the lives of everyone the insight that there is no greater urgency than to equate love of God and love of neighbour. St Irenaeus of Lyons put it as well as anyone ever has when he wrote: 'The glory of God is the human person fully alive!'

The work of the SVP, therefore, arises from the conviction that the life of the human person relates to the life of all humanity and to God who has created all life out of love. The SVP seeks to be more than a welfare agency; we serve in ways that preserve and build up the dignity of the whole person.

In terms that speak practically from the tradition into the culture of our time, Jesus' reading from the prophet Isaiah captures the essence of the material difference the SVP seeks to make, '...to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives' (Luke 4:18-21)

These sources of inspiration have always been at the heart of how Christians have sought to understand and alleviate poverty and its effects, but they have been developed intensively since the 1800s in a body of reflection and writing known as Catholic Social Teaching. It is in light of these insights and understanding that the SVP shapes the policies and procedures. These enable the members of the Society to meet and work effectively and respectfully with those who approach the SVP looking for help.

In 2010 the SVP in Northern Ireland said, 'Catholic Social Teaching emphasises the central place of justice in personal and social relationships', adding as well, however, 'Its fundamental principles are directed not just to Catholics, but to everyone in the Christian tradition and to people of goodwill everywhere...they draw on a language and philosophy which may resonate with peoples of all faiths and none.'

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul invites and values the participation of everyone who shares a vision of a country and its people relieved of the burdens of poverty in order to live with dignity and in solidarity, and with respect for personal and communal autonomy.

# About the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland

SVP is a large, national, voluntary organisation with extensive experience of working with a diverse range of people who experience poverty and exclusion. Through its network of over 11,000 volunteers and 800 staff, it is strongly committed to working for social justice and advocates the creation of a more just and caring society.

SVP employs people to support volunteers in a variety of settings including housing, community care, shops, administration and other specialist areas.

The Society is Christian based with a strong sense of Gospel values. The founder of the Society, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, was a devout Catholic and his legacy of spirituality remains a key element for volunteer members of the Society and underpins the conduct of conference meetings.

It can often therefore be normal practice within the Society that prayers are said at the beginning and end of Conference meetings or at meetings where members are in attendance as this underpins the ethos of the Society.

There is no requirement for staff members to actively participate in the saying of prayers but to respect the ethos of the Society and be aware that this practice may occur.



## SVP in the future

To members, volunteers and staff



As part of our preparation to face the changes in a way that continues to allow us to provide the high level of services that is expected of us and to operate effectively within the now highly regulated charity sector we have taken a big step forward for the Society with the roll-out of a new strategy entitled **Journey Together 2024–2028**. Thank you to many of you who have participated in the surveys and meetings to prepare this strategy.

As Blessed Frederick Ozanam said “*Do not be afraid of new beginnings. Be creative. Be inventive.*” Some of the aims of Journey Together 2024–2028 is to strengthen our organisational structure in terms of Governance, Risk and Compliance as well as ensuring that membership is secured for the future with a focus on recruitment and retention.

We now operate in a society where all organisations, including charities must not only act responsibly, but be seen to do so. It is a society where perception plays a major part in how individuals and organisations are judged.

We also now have to observe rules relating to discrimination, data protection, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, garda vetting, consent, confidentiality, and safe recruitment policies.

Managing an organisation in this modern era also requires us to embrace technology in a way unheard of 20 or 30 years ago.

While being mindful of all those legal and rule based issues we have to continue to support those in need to the best of our ability and always act to preserve the reputation of the Society we are devoted to.

As the largest voluntary charity in Ireland we are in the headlights when it comes to regulations and governance so we must show leadership for the sector.

While our new strategy was being developed we kept in mind that the key focus of everything we do has to be those in need who seek our help. Our history and the exhortation of our founders, especially Blessed Frederick Ozanam all have that as the cornerstone of our existence.

*Rose McGowan*

Rose McGowan  
**SVP National President**

# About this Strategy

The **Society of St. Vincent de Paul Strategic Plan, Journey Together**, sets out the direction of travel for our society across the 32 counties of Ireland for 2024–2028.

The strategic priorities and associated delivery objectives outlined within this document are there to help and guide us in meeting our ultimate aim to support and empower economic independence for people who seek our support through friendship, support in times of need, and to work for social justice and equity.

These are key to trying to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty that impacts upon so many people seeking our support.

The six strategic priorities encompass all our work with and for people experiencing poverty or being impacted by poverty i.e.

- **Membership Support and Visitation**
- **Child and Family Services**
- **Young SVP**
- **Social Housing**
- **Social Policy and Justice**
- **Retail**
- **Twinning**

The six strategic priorities also encompass all our organisational structure work i.e.

- **Finance**
- **IT**
- **Internal Audit**
- **HR**
- **Safeguarding**
- **Garda Vetting**
- **Risk and Compliance**
- **Fundraising**
- **Communications**

The strategy will be backed up by a comprehensive implementation plan. Progress on that plan will be closely monitored and reviewed internally by NMC, Committees, Heads of Function, and Regional Co-ordinators.

The strategy is the overarching strategy for SVP Ireland recognising that the existing **National Retail Strategy** and **National Social Housing Strategy** are key strategies in their own right and their implementation will go hand in hand with the agreed implementation plan for the SVP National Strategy.



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– Blessed Frederick Ozanam

# Vision, Mission, and Belief

## SVP Irelands' vision

is for an Ireland where no person or family lives in continuous disadvantage or hardship; where their support needs are met; where their rights are promoted and protected, and where they are supported and empowered to live with dignity.

## SVP Irelands' mission

is to support and empower economic independence, self-sufficiency, and personal self-worth, through friendship, support in times of need, and through our work for social justice and equity.

SVP Ireland believes  
in a fair and just society  
for everyone.



# Core Values and Virtues that underpin our work in Ireland

In preparation for developing this new strategy we asked members, volunteers, staff, and people who we have supported what values should underpin the work of SVP Ireland for the next five years. We received over 2,200 replies, and the top five core values were as follows:

1. **Respect**
2. **Non-judgemental**
3. **Empathy**
4. **Compassion**
5. **Social Justice**

These values will be core to everything we do in SVP Ireland over the lifetime of this new strategy. They also complement the existing five virtues contained within The Rule:

1. **Simplicity**
2. **Humility**
3. **Gentleness**
4. **Selflessness**
5. **Zeal**

# SVP Ireland

## Our Strategic Priorities 2024–2028

We have collaborated closely with members, volunteers, staff, and people who contact us for support to help us identify six priority areas for our new organisational strategy.



Membership Development



Impact



Reach



Needs Led



Quality Improvement



Organisational Strength

## Our Strategic Priorities



Membership  
Development

We will ensure membership is secured through focussing on recruitment, retention, training, support, recognition, succession, for all members and volunteers.



Impact

We will use our resources to maximise our impact in Irish society to reduce disadvantage and hardship both on an individual level, and a wider community level.



Reach

We will increase the proportion of people we support who are experiencing disadvantage or hardship by ensuring we are visible and relevant to as diverse a range of people and communities as possible.



Needs Led

We will ensure we are well placed to meet future and emerging needs by understanding them better across all our work.



Quality  
Improvement

We will strive for continuous improvement in delivering our services using evidence-based approaches and the sharing of best practice standards.



Organisational  
Strength

We will protect the work and reputation of SVP Ireland by maintaining a highly effective and professional organisation across the 32 counties of Ireland in the areas of governance, risk, policies, procedures, service delivery, and compliance.

Over the 5 years of this new strategy, we will build on our existing skills and strengths, and tackle the primary challenges that currently face us. We are working towards six outcomes across the 32 counties of Ireland, outcomes that are essential for achieving our vision of an Ireland where no one lives in continuous disadvantage or hardship.

# What will success look like in 2028?

At the end of this five-year plan, SVP will have demonstrated our ongoing flexibility, ability and capacity to meet the multiple, and changing needs, of the people we support.



- **We will continue to be a leading organisation** for quality, efficient services, for people affected by poverty and social disadvantage.
- **We will expand our reach** and work tirelessly with members and staff to achieve our vision and mission. This will include enhancing our current membership numbers by 10% to meet the ongoing demand for our services.
- **We will be an inclusive organisation** providing service and support to socially excluded members of Irish society and creating pathways for people to work towards self-sufficiency.
- **We shall strengthen our reputation** as the leading national charity working with people experiencing poverty and we shall use our expertise to influence policy and increase public awareness of the issues we see through all of our work.
- **Our diverse and inclusive One SVP team will play a key role** in delivering consistent and effective support for members and staff alike to ensure they can achieve their full potential.
- **By 2028 we shall have strengthened our governance structure** to protect and sustain our organisation into the future. This will ensure that those we support, our members, staff, donors, regulatory bodies and the general public are assured of SVP's strong commitment to governance excellence.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

## Membership Development

We will ensure membership is secured for the future through focussing on recruitment, retention, training, support, recognition, and succession for all members and volunteers.



### Our ambition

SVP Ireland will meet the increasing demands upon our services by recruiting more people, from a diverse range of communities and backgrounds, and give them the best support possible to ensure they stay with us longer and work effectively together as one SVP Ireland team. We will revisit, refocus, and reinforce our membership led ethos.

### Our challenge

SVP Irelands' work can be challenged by capacity issues in terms of member recruitment and retention, and by the pressures some roles are under.

## SVP Ireland Objectives:

1. Develop and implement a major digital membership recruitment strategy, complemented by more traditional approaches on a local, area, regional and national level.
2. Provide ongoing support to members, conferences, areas and regions on member and volunteer recruitment, induction, training, recognition, retention, and succession planning.
3. Develop a 'One SVP' culture across the society.
4. Develop 'SVP Values' workshops to underpin the 'One SVP' culture for all members, volunteers and staff.
5. Create opportunities for regular engagement with members, volunteers, and staff.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Impact

We will use our resources to maximise our impact in Irish society to reduce disadvantage and hardship both on an individual level, and a wider community level.



Our ambition

SVP Ireland will be able to fully understand and evidence the impact of our work across all sectors of the society, make the biggest impact we can from our resources, and in turn be able to objectively relate this to how we are achieving our vision and mission.

Our challenge

SVP Irelands’ impact measurement is curtailed by capacity issues in data collection and collation, which in turn limits the evidence available to fully understand the impact of our work on reducing continuous disadvantage and hardship in Ireland.

SVP Ireland Objectives:

- 1. Enhance our data capture and data sharing allowing greater focus on training, monitoring, and evaluation within our work.
- 2. Ensure the best possible outcomes for those we support by developing and implementing a social return on investment measure.
- 3. Explore and balance our approach to short term support with long term need (measure baseline, set strategic goals).
- 4. Advance our ability to support those we serve at all ages and stages of life in achieving their full potential using a life-cycle approach via education, skills training, access to employment, access to better housing, family services, and by advocating for social justice.
- 5. Creation of a new signposting and referral portal to other vital and specialist support services.



### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

## Reach

We will increase the proportion of people we support who are experiencing disadvantage or hardship by ensuring we are visible and relevant to as diverse a range of people and communities as possible.



### Our ambition

SVP Ireland will be able to reach all people in Ireland who need our support.

### Our challenge

SVP Ireland needs to ensure our reach is as wide as possible, and that we are open to anyone who needs our support, irrespective of where they live or what community they are part of in Ireland.

## SVP Ireland Objectives:

1. Wider engagement online and in the community to better communicate our work.
2. Reduce any stigma associated with seeking support from SVP Ireland.
3. Ensure we position ourselves and our work in a way that demonstrates support is offered to anyone who is in need, irrespective of their background or beliefs, protecting their confidentiality at all times (within the boundaries of SVP policy).
4. Explore meaningful ways of extending our reach into new communities, and to people and groups who are living in poverty or who are at high-risk of being impacted by poverty, by reaching out to representative organisations for advice/translation/new languages/cultural awareness/advice on changes SVP can make to be as inclusive as possible.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Needs Led

We will ensure we are well placed to meet future and emerging needs of people living in poverty by understanding them better across all of our work.



Our ambition

SVP Ireland will ensure the voice of people who use our services is a key element in our understanding of future and emerging need and plays a prominent role in any internal reviews we conduct on our current service delivery, and future new plans.

Our challenge

SVP Irelands’ understanding of future and emerging need is curtailed by capacity issues for meaningful engagement with those who use our services and internal service reviews.

SVP Ireland Objectives:

- 1. Increased engagement with those we support to seek their feedback on a wide range of topics impacting on their lives, including their experience of engaging with SVP Ireland.
- 2. Service evaluations to include extensive input from the people who use our services.
- 3. Introduce regular reviews of all key services.
- 4. Creation of opportunities for those we support to have an active voice in our work e.g., through regular focus groups, a lived experience panel, actively involved in our research work, annual independent feedback surveys.
- 5. Improved social listening to help us understand the issues impacting those we support.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5

Quality Improvement

We will strive for continuous improvement in delivering our services by the use of evidence based approaches and the sharing of best practice standards.



Our ambition

SVP Ireland will effectively deliver all of its services within recognised best practice standards.

Our challenge

SVP Ireland has a wide range of service provision both in terms of operational difference and delivery, and geographical spread. We need to ensure that the highest quality standards possible are implemented across all of our work.

SVP Ireland Objectives:

- 1. Use of 'Assessment Of Need' to focus on delivery impact and process improvement.
- 2. Enhanced and improved use of systems and quality data capture across all SVP Ireland conferences and services.
- 3. New SVP Ireland Code of Conduct Charter to be developed and rolled out across all conferences and services in year one of this strategy.
- 4. Review and monitoring of quality, complaints, and consistency. Learn from the feedback people give us, both the positive and the less than positive.
- 5. Achieve best practice standards across all areas of our work e.g., Keeping Children Safe; Health and Safety; Garda Vetting; Governance Compliance (Triple Lock Status); Safeguarding.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6

Organisational Strength

We will protect the work and reputation of SVP Ireland by maintaining a highly effective and professional organisation across the 32 counties of Ireland in the areas of governance, risk, policies, procedures, service delivery, and compliance.



Our ambition

SVP Ireland will have in place the necessary policies, procedures, and resources to ensure that our Governance and compliance is of the highest standard and all risk within the Society is minimised and mitigated.

Our challenge

SVP Ireland needs to ensure that we protect the work and reputation of SVP Ireland by continuing to strengthen governance, safeguarding, compliance, and risk reduction across all areas of our work.

SVP Ireland Objectives:

- 1. Continuous review of governance structures and reporting in a changing reporting and regulatory environment, particularly in relation to the operation of these structures.
- 2. Embed risk management and national policy compliance into all conferences, areas, regions, and SVP services.
- 3. Leadership development and succession planning for members and employees.
- 4. Training and provision of additional supports and resources to manage increasing compliance and regulation requirements in all areas of our work.
- 5. Investment in further systems and supports e.g., CRM, IT, H&S Monitoring, National and Regional Office's Capacity.

## Implementing and evaluating our Strategic Plan

Our 5-Year Strategic Plan will be implemented using a phased approach to working on the 6 Strategic Priorities contained within this document. This means that not everything will happen at once.

More detailed plans on how we deliver on our priorities and objectives will be developed during year one as we work to increase capacity and capability, making sure we have a solid base from which to grow.

NMC will conduct a mid-term review of progress to date on the implementation of this strategy.

The findings of this review will help to refocus aspects of the strategy in order to guide the continued implementation of all strategic priorities, and in preparation for a final review to commence in early 2028.

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– Blessed Frederick Ozanam





Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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