



Society of St Vincent de Paul



Yearbook 2025

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Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

Heavenly Father, You, inspired Frédéric Ozanam to alleviate poverty and injustice and, endowed him with untiring generosity in the service of all who were suffering.

His vision for society was a network of charity encircling the world and he imitated St Vincent de Paul's spirit of love, boldness and humility.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) was established in Ireland over 180 years ago, in 1844. It is the largest voluntary charitable organisation in Ireland.

Our focus is on a practical approach to dealing with poverty, alleviating its effects on individuals and families through working primarily in person-to-person contact by a unique system of home visitation and seeking to achieve social justice and equality of opportunity for all citizens.

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

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

"Yours must be a work of love, of kindness; you must give of your talents and yourselves"

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

Our Mission and Ethos

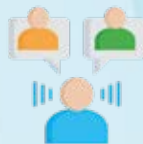
SVP is a Christian voluntary organisation, working with people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. We are involved in a diverse range of activities characterised by:

Support and Friendship



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

Promoting Self-sufficiency



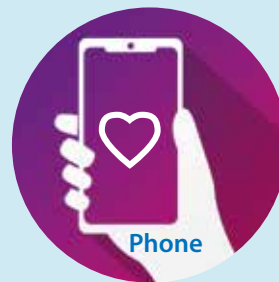
It is not enough to promote short-term material support. Those we assist are also helped to achieve self-sufficiency in the longer term and the sense of self-worth this provides. When problems are beyond our competencies, we enlist the support of specialist help.

Working for Social Justice



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

How SVP Responds



How SVP Helps in the Northern Region

17
Area Councils
154
Conferences



SVP continues to help individuals and families by direct assistance



SVP expenditure in 2024/25 was **£5,500,000** in the Northern Region

The key areas of expenditure: **Electricity, Food, Gas, Oil and Household Goods**

SVP Membership: Over **700 members** across the Northern Region

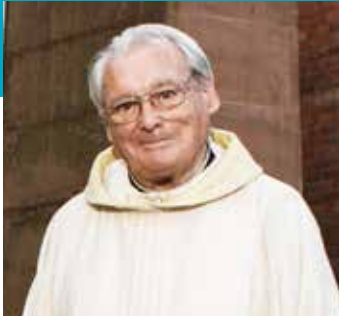


27 Vincent's Charity Shops across the Northern Region





Relic of St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac



Spiritual Reflection by Fr Perry Gildea C.M.

“Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be in the strength of our arms and in the sweat of our brow. Sentiments of love of God, of kindness, of good will, good as these may be, are often suspect if they do not result in good deeds.”

Some Vincentian Thoughts at the Beginning of a New Year

How quickly these early weeks of the new year seem to pass! Traditionally the new year is a time for new beginnings or a time to refresh old ideas. For a Vincentian this means the work must go on and of necessary with renewed energy and application and perhaps with more imagination.

As we begin this new year, we must admit the world around us is in sore need of a profound insertion of Christian values. Wars and the promise of violence is everywhere, and the consequent extremes of poverty, hunger and injury are experienced by so many of the victims of war. It is important to remember that St Vincent spent many years addressing the consequences of war and helping the victims, with aid, food, shelter and financial support. He did this while at the same time continuing to deal with the regular victims of poverty that came to his door or attention. It is equally important to remember that it is not simply out of human compassion that he did all this but from a profound realisation that every poor person was identified with Christ.

“Whatsoever you do to the least of my brother and sisters, that you do unto me.”

What Vincent strove to realise was not just sympathy, but what he called effective love.

And for those who don't seem to be experiencing such loving or positive thoughts he has this to say: *“There are others among you who have no feeling for God at all...Do you cease to love God? No, certainly not, for you do all that the others do and with a love that is all the stronger from the fact that you feel it less. This is effective love which does not cease to operate, although it does not make itself felt.”*

Both Blessed Frédéric and St Vincent recognised that dealing with the major aspects of world poverty and need might be beyond any individual's effort. However, they recognised that each one is called to do something and that the apparently little that we might do becomes part of the active love of God in our world. And so the effective love of each Conference of the Society is adding to the presence in our world of Christ's love for the poor everywhere.

On behalf of the Northern Region, we would take this opportunity to recognise Fr Perry's long and dedicated service to St Vincent de Paul. A true Vincentian, we are indebted to his wise counsel. His advice and guidance continue to be invaluable to the Society.

Welcome from Regional President

Mary Waide



Welcome to the annual St Vincent de Paul Yearbook.

Producing a yearbook as a reference guide and a record of the active membership engagement has been a highlight at the end of each year of my presidency.

It's hard to believe that this Yearbook documents the end of my second term as Regional President and I am feeling blessed and forever grateful that we have so many dedicated SVP members throughout the Northern Region.

As Blessed Frédéric Ozanam said:
*"Do not be afraid of new beginnings.
Be creative. Be inventive."*

I am thankful that I met so many of you on Members' Day where we had a strong representation from most Areas within the Region, at our Feast Day Mass and at various member meetings and Area Gatherings throughout the past year.

I have been met by our wonderful volunteers with warmth, kindness and Vincentian friendship. It has been both an honour and a privilege to serve in the role of Regional President and Trustee.

It was a joy for me to acknowledge members during Volunteers' Week whose energetic service and tireless giving of time has supported many thousands of people right in the heart of the local communities in which we live.

While too many to name, I would just briefly like to mention some of the personal highlights, memorable occasions when I was proud to represent the Society in the role of Regional President.

Meetings with **Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, Apostolic Nuncio; Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh; Late Archbishop Noël Treanor and Most Reverend Alan McGuckian SJ, Bishop of Down and Connor.** And, I was honoured to represent the Diocese of Down and Connor at the Maundy Thursday service in St George's Chapel, in Windsor.

I was deeply humbled to be appointed National Vice President, by our new National President, Teresa Ryan, in August 2025, and it was the honour of my life, during one of my first duties as National Vice President, to introduce the St Vincent de Paul RTE Mass on RTE One and RTE Radio 1 on 7 December.

In recognising the support of my Regional Board members, I would wish to thank them for their unwavering commitment to monthly meetings,

attendance at Regional events and Area Council meetings. The officer roles of the Regional Board are so important in ensuring good governance and accountability, all of which they embraced with good grace and vocation.

I would wish to acknowledge the tireless commitment of our Spiritual Director, **Fr Perry Gildea.** His guidance and advice has been incredible and he has always filled me with inspiration and fulfilment of the Vincentian way.

As Sean Gallagher takes on the role of Regional President I wish him well and I know that he will have the support of the membership.

Throughout my two terms as Regional President, **Pauline Brown** our Regional Manager, has been my guiding light. My right-hand woman. Ensuring I'm in the right place at the right time and saying the right things, always with a smile. She and her staff are devoted to their roles and they are a great asset to the Society.

I also believe we are to be congratulated as we have, together, raised the profile of the Northern Region through our publicity channels, monthly updates and the publication of our annual yearbook. We have witnessed a rise in the donations on an annual basis as a result.

As we look to the future I am heartened by the publication of the new Strategic Plan which has been three years in the making. It has come to fruition from consultation, listening and inclusion, and I look forward to its implementation by our members.

It is our responsibility and our duty to look to the future. We must embrace change and commit to the aims and objectives of the new Strategic Plan.

We must Journey Together.

We already know that together we are stronger. We can however, achieve much more, as we reach out to provide support to those in our local communities who need it most.

The Role of Regional President

The Regional President is responsible for the overall operations of the Society in their Region.

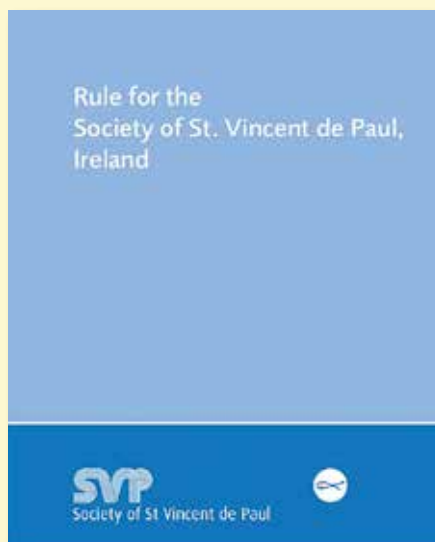
The Regional President becomes a Trustee of SVP Ireland. A trustee carries the responsibility, liability and duties of governance and good practice for the Society diligently.

The Charities Regulator, in compliance with the Charities Act, sets out clearly the Code of Governance and Obligation to ensure that all charities put robust systems and processes in place in order to achieve charitable objectives.

As Regional President, they must support the mission of the Society on a day-to-day basis, in line with key strategic and operational issues through the Regional Council.

As well as representing the Region at the National Management Council, the Regional President must develop and establish good working relationships with all members within the Region.

They carry the responsibility of ensuring all Areas and Conferences are compliant with The Rule of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.



Some key skills and requirements of the role include the Regional President having a sound knowledge of the structures of the Society, possess some experience in managing people, change management, planning and risk management.

The Regional President must also be comfortable with the ethos of the Society and be a good communicator.



New Regional President **Sean Gallagher**

We welcomed Sean Gallagher as the newly elected Regional President for SVP in the Northern Region in August 2025.



St Vincent de Paul **Regional Staff**

St Vincent de Paul Regional Staff



Pauline Brown
Regional Manager

T: 028 9075 0150
E: pauline.brown@svpni.co.uk

Pauline manages the Regional staff team and supports the Regional President, Board and Council. She is responsible, along with the Regional Board, for the strategic management of the Region including people, finances, property and projects.

Pauline also supports and provides member guidance and development. She is responsible for media, networking, lobbying and the development of external relationships.



Colm Crummey
**Regional Accountant
& Treasurer Support**

T: 028 9075 0155
E: colm.crummey@svpni.co.uk

Colm supports the Regional Manager, Regional Treasurer and Head of Finance & Shared Services. He is responsible for Regional Office accounting and payroll.

Colm prepares budgets, financial analyses and forecasts and he reports to the Regional Board and Council on all regional balances. Colm assists in capital projects, property administration and ensures legal compliance in line with charity regulations.

Christine Gaston
Membership Support Officer

T: 028 9075 0151
E: christine.gaston@svpni.co.uk

Christine works with Area Presidents in Derry City, Mid Antrim, Mid Ulster, North Belfast, North Derry, North Antrim and North East Derry, South and East Belfast and West Belfast.



Aisleain Reynolds
Membership Support Officer

T: 028 9075 0159
E: aisleain.reynolds@svpni.co.uk

Aisleain works with Area Presidents in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, East Down, East Tyrone, Fermanagh, Kilmegan, Newry and Mourne, North Down and Ards, Omagh and Strabane.

The Membership Support Officers provide support on a range of membership matters.

These include processing new member applications, Access NI checks and organising training. They also support Area Presidents in their role on quality assurance, member compliance, record keeping, and data cleansing on CRM, recruitment and retention of volunteers.



Ciaran Liggett
Special Works & Treasurer Support Officer

T: 028 9075 0156
E: agresso.support@svpni.co.uk

Ciaran is responsible for Treasurer Training and provides Agresso Support to all Treasurers across the Region.

He also processes all annual financial returns and quarterly bank balances and account information providing a report to the Regional Treasurer. Ciaran administers the Regional Oil Stamps Scheme and manages the Gift Aid, credit card donations, Blue Envelopes and all fundraising campaigns.



Anne Crossan
Regional Retail Manager

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

Anne is responsible for business development for retail. She delivers on the National Retail Strategy and oversees operations of all Vincent's shops within the Region.

Anne manages the teams of shop staff and volunteers. She is also responsible for stock rotation, recycling, customer service and satisfaction.



Mary McCaughey
Information Support Officer, Regional Office

T: 028 9035 1561 / 028 9075 0158
E: mary.mccaughey@svpni.co.uk



Thomas Reilly
Information Support Officer, Regional Office

T: 028 9035 1561/028 9075 0162
E: thomas.reilly@svpni.co.uk

The Information Support Officers manage referrals on a daily basis and provide administrative and technical support to members. They are responsible for the CRM database within the Region.

Both Mary and Thomas provide support to the Region as a whole and manage the stocks and supplies for Regional Office.



“The Ethos of The Society of St Vincent de Paul - its collective spirit and character”

Words from Fr Paschal Scallan C.M.
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 SVP.

This ethos seeks to realise in the lives of everyone the insight that there is no greater urgency than to equate love of God and love of neighbour.

The work of 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. SVP seeks to be more than a welfare agency; we serve in ways that preserve and build up the dignity of the whole person.

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.

This plan has come to fruition after three years of consultation, listening and inclusion. As Blessed Frédéric Ozanam said:

***“Do not be afraid of new beginnings.
Be creative. Be inventive.”***

Some of the aims of Journey Together are 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.

Recognising that during 2024 the Society in Ireland celebrated 180 years, we acknowledge the work of our ancestors who safeguarded our charity and who passed the stewardship of responsibility to us current members.

The strategy sets out the direction of travel for our Society across the 32 counties of Ireland. There are six priorities all of which are key to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty that affects upon so many people seeking our support.

Our Strategic Priorities 2024 - 2028



Membership Development

We will ensure membership is secured through focussing on recruitment, retention, training, support, recognition, and 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 five 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.

Alongside the priorities are of course our core values and virtues:

- Respect
- Non-judgemental
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Social justice

The Vision Ahead

An Ireland where no person or family lives in continuous disadvantage or hardship, where their support needs are met. That they live with dignity. Members of the Society will continue to demonstrate ongoing flexibility, ability and capacity to meet the multiple and changing needs of the people we support.

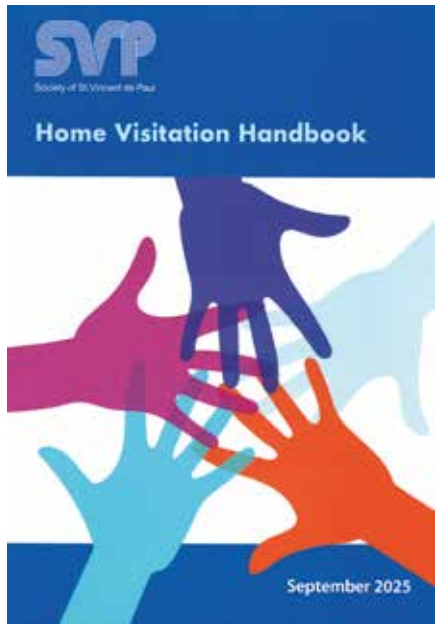
Our diverse and inclusive One SVP team will continue to play a key role in delivering consistent and effective support to those in need, to influence policy and increase public awareness of the issues we see through all of our work.

Implementing and Evaluating Our Strategic Plan

The plan will continue to be implemented using a phased approach to working on the six strategic priorities.

A mid term review will be conducted by the National Management Council in order to guide the continued progress and in preparation for a final review in early 2028.





What's new?

In September 2025 the new Home Visitation Handbook for members was launched and distributed.

Newly elected National President, Teresa Ryan, introduced the Home Visitation Handbook to support members in their continued roles of helping those within our communities seeking our assistance.

The Handbook sets out clear information on how to uphold best practice, offering advice and protection acting on behalf of the Society.

Copies are available through the Membership Support Officers in Regional Office.

Some highlights include the following articles.

What it means to be a member of SVP

Membership in the Society brings both privilege and responsibility. It calls us to be faithful stewards of time, gifts, resources and structures. It calls us to be faithful to the Society's ethos, always in service of the those most in need in our communities.

Our governance, rules and principles are not burdens but safeguards that enable us to service with integrity and humility.

Above all, our strength lies not in independence but in interdependence, for we are only as resilient as our most fragile part. If one part weakens, the vitality of the whole is diminished. It is therefore not enough to act well in isolation, we must act together, conscious that the Society's enduring impact depends on a shared sense of stewardship and solidarity.

The Vincentian Vocation

The vocation of the Society's members, who are called Vincentians, is to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. Members show their commitment through person-to-person contact. Vincentians serve in hope.





Any form of personal help

No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity.

To anyone in need

The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinions.

To seek out the poor

Vincentians strive to seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.

Adaptation to a Changing world

Faithful to the spirit of its founders, the Society strives for renewal, adapting to changing world conditions.

It seeks to be ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and the new types of poverty that may be identified or anticipated. It gives priority to the poorest of the poor and to those who are most rejected by society.

Upholding the SVP Mission Statement

Our focus is on practical approaches to dealing with poverty, alleviating its effects on individuals and families through working primarily in person-to-person contact by a unique system of family visitation and seeking to achieve social justice and equality of opportunity for all citizens.

Any assistance offered by the Society is given in a non-judgemental spirit, based on the needs of the individual or family seeking help.

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

While being mindful of our legal and rule-based responsibilities, 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. 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.

We keep 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 Frédéric Ozanam, all have that as the cornerstone of our existence.



Role of Home Visitation Member

The purpose of the role is to provide direct support to those who request assistance from the Society, by visiting people in their homes with another SVP member from their Home Visitation Conference.

In becoming a member, you agree to adhere to the Society's "Rule", spiritual ethos, mission statement, and policies and procedures.

Key skills include:

.....
Maintaining confidentiality and an ability to express empathy
.....

.....
An ability to relate to people from all walks of life
.....

.....
Treat all people with dignity and respect in a non-judgemental way
.....

.....
Be a team player as part of your Conference
.....

The Conference President, who is elected by members, will provide direct support and guidance. The Conference President will inspire the members to ensure that the work of the Conference is performed sympathetically and efficiently. On an on-going basis, the Conference President acts as the key link between Conference and the wider Society and will communicate information to members about Regional and National Society events such as training, seminars, new policies and procedures.

All Conference members must attend regular Conference meetings, which should take place weekly, and complete the home visits allocated to them at meetings.

Care and Safety of SVP Members During Home Visitation

The cornerstone of Home Visitation is visiting in pairs; this is to protect the people we visit and also for our members' safety.

Unfortunately, occasionally members may encounter difficult or dangerous situations. This could include verbal abuse, intimidation and harassment. We may witness harm to the people we are visiting, including children or adults at risk of harm.

At no time should members place themselves in positions of risk where they could be harmed. If there are indicators of risk or harm for members prior to or during a visit, the visit must be re-scheduled or terminated immediately. Any incidents of risk or harm to members must be reported to the Conference and/or Area President as soon as possible. Risk or harm relating to children or adults at risk of harm must be reported to the Regional Designated Liaison Person. Refer to the Safeguarding information on pages 20 and 21.



Always remember...

If a member has any concerns for their safety, it is OK not to visit, and discuss the situation with the Conference, Area President or Regional Office.

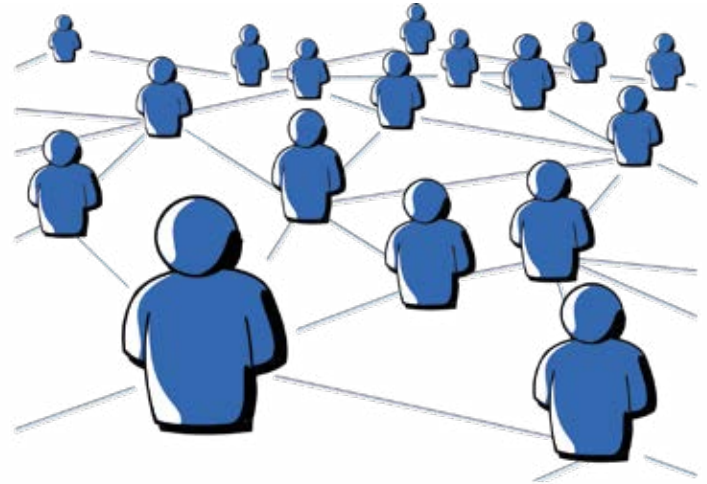
Further information is contained on pages 14 and 15 of the Home Visitation Handbook.

SVP Member Assistance Programme

This programme is a confidential support service designed to help members resolve volunteer related concerns through telephone support, face-to-face counselling and/or structured telephone counselling.

The Member Assistance Programme is available to all members.

.....
You can contact the service through a dedicated 24/7 Freephone helpline.



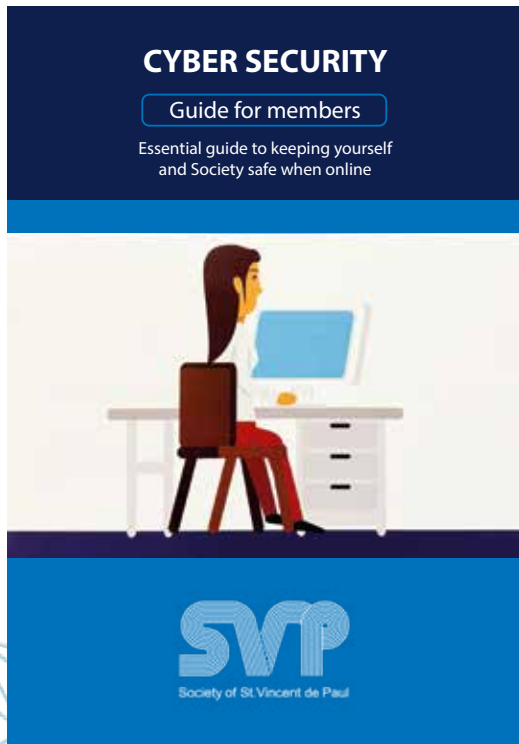
Telephone
0808 1640370
to access support



Lena by Inspire







Guide for Members

With most of us relying on the internet to communicate, manage finances and record data, it is essential that we all remain vigilant to the increasing number of cyber fraud attempts across the world.



Staying Safe Online

Below are some golden rules to follow whenever you are online. That way, you and the Society have a better chance of staying safe online.

- 1** Choose, use and protect your passwords carefully, and use different ones for your most important accounts: email, online banking and social media. 
- 2** Ensure you always have internet security software which is kept up to date and switched on. If you require help with this, always check with someone who understands IT security and software. 
- 3** Be aware of the internet connection you are using. If on free or public wifi, your information may be visible to other users. Only use secure connections when conducting private and banking transactions. 
- 4** Never reveal too much personal or financial information...you never know who might see it, or use it. 
- 5** Do not click on links or open attachments in emails if the source isn't 100% trustworthy. 
- 6** Take your time and think twice, because not everything is as it seems. 



Taking Action

What is the Society doing?

The Society takes the threat of cyber fraud very seriously and is continually monitoring IT services and systems as much as possible.

What can I do?



All Policies and Guides are available on the online SVP CRM Conference Portal (Conference System) under your Knowledge Base Tab. These outline in detail everything you need to know to keep yourself and the Society safe when online.



There is now online training available to any member who wishes to complete this.

Further information

Where to go for help in SVP

If you have any concerns about cyber fraud in relation to your SVP work contact your Data Champion.



Who is your Data Champion?

For Visitation Conferences this will be your Regional Manager.

For more information



Email the Data Protection Officer (DPO) for the Society:
svp.dpo@svp.ie

SVP Safeguarding in Home Visitation - Northern Region

SVP is committed to creating a safe, healthy and inclusive environment for everyone, particularly the children, young people and adults at risk/in need of protection we assist.

◀◀ **SVP Home Visitation members have a vital role in helping vulnerable groups in the community.** ▶▶

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is preventative action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and adults at risk/adults in need of protection. Safeguarding is an essential part of quality Home Visitation. It also provides information in case an SVP member comes across a concern.



WHO IS A CHILD? A child is any person under the age of 18

WHO IS AN ADULT AT RISK? In Northern Ireland an 'adult at risk of harm' is a person aged 18 or over whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their (a) personal circumstances, and/or (b) life circumstances.

WHO IS AN ADULT IN NEED OF PROTECTION? An 'adult in need of protection' is a person aged 18 or over whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their (a) personal circumstances, and/or (b) life circumstances, and (c) who is unable to protect their own wellbeing, property, assets, rights or other interests.

What is abuse?

ABUSE is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to another individual or violates their human or civil rights.

WHAT ARE THESE TYPES OF ABUSE?



Physical



Emotional



Sexual



Financial



Exploitation



Neglect



Institutional

What can SVP members do if they have concerns about abuse?

IT IS IMPORTANT that everyone in SVP is aware that the person who first encounters a case of alleged abuse is not responsible for deciding whether or not actual abuse has occurred.



▶▶ **SVP's role is not to investigate or form our own conclusions but to follow the SVP Safeguarding Policy - record, report and seek advice.**

SVP Safeguarding Reporting Flow Chart

Concern Arises

Concerns may arise from

A

A disclosure of harm or abuse

B

An observed incident of harm or abuse

C

A suspicion of harm or abuse

Action

Ensure the **safety** of the child/adult that you have a concern about.

If the person is in **immediate danger** report to the Health Trust or Police as appropriate.

Record your concern in writing and **report** to the Designated Liaison Person without delay.

Maintain **confidentiality** at all times.

Useful Contact Numbers

Northern Ireland Contact Details for Health Trust Gateway Teams for Children

Belfast HCC Trust	028 9050 7000*
Northern Gateway Team	(Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Portrush, Coleraine) 028 7032 5462
South Eastern Gateway Team	(Antrim, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey, Larne) 028 9334 0165
Western Trust	028 7131 4090
Southern HSC Trust	0800 783 7745* <i>*This number is for referrals</i>

HSC Trusts Adult Safeguarding Service

Belfast	028 9504 1744
Northern	028 9441 3659
South Eastern	028 9250 1277
Southern	028 3756 4423
Western	028 7161 1366

Regional Emergency Social Work Service 028 9504 9999

PSNI

Emergency 999 / Non-emergency 101 / General Enquiries 101



Northern Region
Safeguarding Officer
(Designated Liaison)

Geri McIlwaine
T: 07764 769156

E: nirc.safeguarding@svpni.co.uk

Pauline Brown
SVP Regional Manager
T: 028 9075 0150 /
07921 876230

E: pauline.brown@svpni.co.uk



See www.svp.ie/safeguarding for more information



Social Justice



In the Social Justice Group, we return again and again to one of the core statements from Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, which captures what we do as a Society.

He said:

“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...our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between these two camps, in order to accomplish by love, what justice alone cannot do.”

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam’s vision challenges us to look beneath the surface and deeply consider the causes of poverty and injustice. His emphasis on both charity and justice remains a guiding principle, reminding us that our work is not only about immediate relief, but also about advocating for lasting, systemic change in society. So, it is important to keep a watchful eye on the societal trends and political policies which cause people to experience poverty and injustice.

Inspired by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam’s words, the Social Justice Group strives to be a bridge, fostering understanding and compassion between those facing hardship and those in a position of power and who are positioned to make meaningful change. We also believe that reaching out in love is vital as justice takes a long time to come and, when it does, it often falls short.

Following the death of Pope Francis in April 2025, we have welcomed our new Pope - Pope Leo XIV. The choice of name goes beyond coincidence with poverty and human dignity both being at the forefront of his namesake Pope Leo XIII who was the author of the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.

Through *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII addressed issues of injustice eg low pay, exploitation of workers, excessive work hours, and assigned the state a role in safeguarding the weak in society. The encyclical states that Government should promote the common good, protect workers’ rights, and intervene when necessary to prevent injustice.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul works tirelessly to show love through interventions to alleviate distress caused by poverty. We know benefits are inadequate and some of the people we visit are barely surviving eg the single person whose job has come to an end and who is living on £170 twice a month, also possibly paying back a loan to Universal Credit taken to survive the 5 week wait. The young mum, who has to pay the extra for school uniforms and/or bus fares for a child to attend school which eats into money set aside for gas, electric and food. The refugee who cannot navigate the benefits system having moved over from asylum to refugee status. Then there is also the person who is not well enough to work but not deemed ill enough to get PIP (Personal Independence Payment). These are the things that we all encounter every day in homes across our Conference areas. The question is, besides offering immediate support, what can we do to change things for the better?

How does a Social Justice Group fit into this equation?

Rerum Novarum highlights the need for the Government to protect the weakest in society and to intervene to prevent injustice. In the Social Justice Group, we see it as our role to intervene when appropriate to hold Government to account. We have engaged with Government over the years in responding to consultations and remarkably; in joining our voices with others, we have seen some things change that may not have happened if we had kept quiet.

We have lobbied through the years for an end to the 2-child limit where families only receive benefits for the first two children and, in April 2026, as a result of the

ending of the 2-child limit in Universal Credit, each child will be accounted for in the Universal Credit income. This is something which we are honoured to have been part of.

In 2025, The Government issued a Green Paper called **'Pathways to Work'**, which focused on benefits for people who have disabilities and illnesses. If this Green Paper had become law, it would have been devastating for people who are ill or disabled, making many ineligible to claim the higher rate of Universal Credit called **'Limited Capability for Work'**. Also, fewer people would have been eligible for PIP. Our Social Justice Group joined with many other organisations and political groups in making a case of why this Green Paper was unjust and, as a result, the Government did a U-turn and the paper as it stood was not implemented. We also responded to the Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government 2024-2027 **'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'**, where the word poverty was striking by its absence. The result is that it was amended to a slightly improved document incorporating some mention of poverty, although leaving lots of room for improvement.

Finally, 19 years ago, the Northern Ireland Assembly agreed to the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy. When the draft strategy was produced by the Department for Communities in June 2025, it was painfully inadequate as a strategy. The Social Justice Group responded in its own right and also lent its voice to others from the Faith and Community sectors in a joint letter to ensure that a clear message was sent to Executive Ministers.

The main feedback was that in the absence of targets and measurable outcomes and in accordance with guidance from the Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee, it fell short of being a strategy. It also reminded our politicians that: ***"Our children, families and communities - your constituents - deserve better"***. It was suggested in this letter that it was better to have no strategy than a bad strategy. This letter received media coverage from the BBC, daily newspapers and some significant political podcasts.

In conclusion, for SVP, it is important that we recognise that love and justice are essential companions in fulfilling the vision of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam and indeed the message of Rerum Novarum. It remains important that through love and compassion we assist with the immediate needs to preserve the wellbeing of families and individuals. It is also important that we remain alert to the societal and political systems which are keeping people in distress and make our voice heard when required.



Mary Waide, SVP Regional President for the Northern Region, and Pauline Brown, SVP Regional Manager, met with Junior Ministers Pam Cameron and Aisling Reilly to present the ethos of The Society and discuss the work to alleviate poverty that SVP members are involved in across the Region.



Gerardine Cunningham led a group of SVP members from South and East Belfast who were warmly received by The Lord Mayor of Belfast Cllr Tracy Kelly, during a visit to City Hall, where meaningful conversations took place about the rising needs within local communities and the charity's ongoing work to provide vital support.

The meeting created an atmosphere of empathy, encouragement and shared understanding, underpinned by the Lord Mayor's own firsthand experience of community work.

SVP members briefed the Lord Mayor on the increasing pressures faced by individuals and families across Belfast and beyond.

They highlighted the charity's core work of Home Visitation and assessing the need of those reaching out for assistance with dignity. The delegation spoke about the dedication of volunteers across SVP Conferences, who give their time quietly and compassionately in response to growing demand.

Speaking after the meeting, Pauline Brown, SVP Regional Manager, said: "SVP volunteers received a warm welcome from The Lord Mayor who expressed

sincere appreciation for the commitment and resilience shown by SVP members.

"Drawing on her own experience of working closely with communities, Lord Mayor spoke about the realities faced by people living with financial strain, isolation and uncertainty. Her understanding and insight resonated strongly with our members, who were encouraged by her acknowledgment of the challenges volunteers encounter daily.

"We had a real sense that Lord Mayor could empathise deeply with the stories shared, reflecting on how frontline community work exposes both hardship and hope.

"She commended SVP for offering practical help without judgement, and for being present in homes and neighbourhoods where people often feel forgotten or overwhelmed. The Lord Mayor emphasised that such support plays a vital role in keeping families hopeful and sustaining community spirit in difficult times.

"Our members provided an insight into the values and ethos of SVP delivering help with compassion, dignity and solidarity, essential to building a fairer and more inclusive Belfast. This meeting provided a morale boost to our volunteers, many of whom are dealing with increasing requests for help."



Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council



Derry City and Strabane District Council



Fermanagh and Omagh District Council



Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mary Waide, Regional President for the Northern Region, and Pauline Brown, Regional Manager, were welcomed to meet with elected representatives across the Northern Region. These meetings provided an invaluable opportunity to share insights into the ethos of SVP and the support SVP is delivering through its members in the heart of local communities to alleviate poverty.

Call to Action to SVP Members

In 2026 we will continue to share the experience and insights of SVP members in order to call for improvements in the policies and systems that shape our lives.

***In order to do this...
we need to hear from you!***

We will keep you informed of upcoming opportunities to discuss the Society's Social Justice work, and please get in touch with:

socialjustice@svpni.co.uk

if you have something to share with us.



Clare Lodge



A Home from Home

Clare Lodge was a second home for both residents, volunteers and staff from surrounding areas of Kilmegan, East Down and Newry and Mourne Conferences.

It had been a haven and safe place from the late 1960s, accommodating families and individuals in much need of rest, respite and recuperation during troubled times in Northern Ireland. For many families their own homes and safety were under threat, and they needed to escape to feel safe. Mothers, fathers and young children enjoyed their stay by the seaside knowing they could relax. Many older people also enjoyed respite time there too. A pleasant atmosphere greeted them from the moment they walked through the door, usually on a Sunday, until their departure the following Friday. These families had this pleasure due to the help of St Vincent de Paul.

At that time Clare Lodge home was an old convent building, gifted by The St Louis Sisters who are part of the wider Vincentian Family. The former convent was a presence for faith development and retreats. The Sisters of St Louis (often referred to as St Louis Nuns), are a French order founded in 1842. The Daughters of Charity, founded by St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac, came to Ireland in 1859.

The former convent was turned into dormitory style bedrooms with multiple beds in each room. Each bed was separated by curtaining. No one ever complained but rather everyone seemed to enjoy the chat and social aspect of sleeping in the one room.

Each day guests were given a good breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper. Outside of mealtimes they enjoyed the freedom to wander around Newcastle, shop, go to the beach, adventure up the Mournes, play in the amusement

parks or mingle amongst the locals and tourists walking the promenade. Whatever the weather, good fun and a proper seaside holiday was had, with many memories and friendships made.

Clare Lodge was a place where guests felt they could talk in confidence to the duty manager or volunteers about their lives, their family, their troubles or any worries they were experiencing. The opportunities to talk and any subsequent conversations were always treated with respect and confidentiality.

Friday nights were party nights where local Conferences planned activities such as bingo, raffles or music and dance. Many of the attendees donated the prizes for the raffle. Extra food was provided and they were even offered a tippie of beer or glass of wine. These nights were very successful and were enjoyed tremendously. Some even had their wee "carry out" with them in their pocket or handbag.



be fit for purpose and enhance the experience for future family visits. An ambitious re-build of a new modern 19 bedroom facility was constructed and opened in 2016.

As the years progressed, unfortunately the building became in much need of modernisation and upgrading. A local committee was formed to evaluate and plan for a new build that would

Clare Lodge

Whilst the building was being constructed people were not left without their much-needed break. They were taken in a minibus to Bettystown, Bundoran and on one occasion to Carn. For some, these trips were a real treat and stopping off on the journey for a tea or coffee was also a highlight.

With panoramic views of the mountains and a step away from the shore, the "new" Clare Lodge contained 19 family rooms with ensuite and modern facilities, including televisions, tea/coffee making and wifi. This enhanced the stay for families and individuals, making their stay more comfortable.

For five years many more memories and experiences were thoroughly enjoyed and a warm welcome greeted everyone coming to stay. The accommodation was open all year round, rather than seasonal, and when the devastating worldwide Covid-19 pandemic hit, lockdown and closure unfortunately was inevitable.

During the years that followed, it was a sad reflection of the impact of the pandemic that closure, redundancies and the heartbreaking reality of not reopening the doors was conclusive.

Following a period of consultation, it was with much sadness and deep regret that the Regional Council of the Society in the Northern Region had to take the decision to sell the building. Exercising the code of good governance for our charitable purposes, it was essential that we limited ongoing costs.

Clare Lodge will forever be remembered with love, fondness and as a gem in the Society's history.

It is with much gratitude to all the local members, volunteers, the Friends of Clare Lodge, the committee members, the staff and all the generous donors who made this service possible. The Society is eternally grateful and continues to ensure that those families and individuals who continue to require help and support receive this, albeit in a different manner.



A special thanks to: Tom Mulholland, Area President of East Down, and lifelong member and volunteer to Clare Lodge, for his thoughts and memories contributed within this article.



Our Members - Our Greatest Strength

Volunteering Opportunities



Offering a little help at the right time can give people hope for the future

Our greatest strength is our members

"I would tell any perspective member they will get more out of volunteering than they will ever put in!"

SVP Member, George from Belfast

To find out how you can help in your community, register online at: www.svp.ie

Tel: 028 9035 1561 or Email: info@svpni.co.uk

If you would like to join SVP
call 028 9035 1561 or email info@svpni.co.uk

Members' Day



Members from the Northern Region gathered together during Volunteers' Week in June to celebrate the launch of the new Strategic Plan, Journey Together.

One hundred and fifty members met to discuss, through café conversations, the future of the Society in the Region. Engaging in topical and relevant dialogue, sharing and learning from other members.

Mary Waide, outgoing Regional President, highlighted key areas of achievements during her term of office. Mary acknowledged the tireless commitment of all members and volunteers, who go beyond their roles and surpass all expectations of the meaning of the word volunteer.



Mary thanked all members and paid tribute to the members who supported her in an advisory capacity on the Regional Board.



Mary Waide and Fr Perry



Mary voiced her special thanks to Fr Perry, SVP Spiritual Director, and Malachi Cush, Volunteer Ambassador to the Region.





Anne Irwin

Anne Irwin, Regional Board member, introduced the café conversation round table discussions and Anne McLarnon, Regional Board and Regional Retail Chair, facilitated feedback.



Anne McLarnon



Patrick Friel

Patrick Friel presented a 'special' Certificate of Commitment to members which highlighted their length of service and multiple volunteer roles, across a range of activities.



Derry City Area: Dominic Burke, St Eugene Derry
 Mid Antrim Area: Thomas McReynolds, Blessed Virgin Ballymena
 Newry & Mourne Area: Micheal Murphy, St Joseph Newry
 North Belfast Area: Denise McAlister, St James Whiteabbey
 Omagh Area: Michael Donnelly, St Columba Omagh

Members' Day provided the perfect backdrop for Fr Perry to conduct the Renewal of the Vincentian Promise which SVP members have the opportunity to do each year.

This is the Vincentian Promise as conducted by Fr Perry on Members' Day:

Lighting of the candle

Fr Perry lights a candle and says, while handing over the candle to Pauline Brown, SVP Regional Manager:

"This candle will be held by Pauline on behalf of us all."

"Receive the light of Christ which illuminates the path to those who are troubled and represents the deepening faith and love which are kindled amongst us.

"I invite you all to make the Vincentian promise."



A vocation to bear witness to Christ's love

"In response to the call of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the Poor, who invites you to follow Him, do you promise to be a witness to the Radiant Flame of His Love for those in need, the lonely, the suffering and deprived; those without faith and those who feel unloved?"

Members: "I do."

Fr Perry: Vincentian friendship and mutual enrichment

"Do you firmly resolve to treasure the warm friendship and unity, which was from the beginning, a hallmark of our Society?"

Members: "I do."

Fr Perry: Vincentian love for those in need

"Do you promise to seek and find those who are forgotten, and to devote yourselves to the personal service of those in need, to see Christ in them and to bring them hope and joy, with practical and effective love, aware that "a smile is the sunshine of God's love?"

Members: "I do."

Fr Perry: *"Do you promise to respect and not to judge, to empower and not to impose, and most of all to understand their deeper needs?"*

Members: "I do."

Fr Perry: *"Do you promise to progress in the five virtues St Vincent regarded as essential to help the suffering or deprived: Simplicity, Humility, Gentleness, Selflessness and Zeal?"*

Members: "I do"



Commitment to work for Social Justice

Fr Perry: *“Do you promise to help where possible to remove the causes of poverty and distress, ready to be a voice for those in need and to share Blessed Frédéric’s desire to build God’s Kingdom of love and compassion, of justice, peace and sharing, of unity in diversity, a Kingdom of creativity, beauty and faith?”*

Members: *“I do”*

Fr Perry: *“Do you promise to support the Society when it emulates Our Blessed Lord in confronting with non-violent resistance, domination, corruption, and all oppressive restrictions which stifle Love and joy?”*

Members: *“I do”*

Fr Perry: **Commitment to generosity and to regular visits**

“Do you promise to be generous with your time, your possessions and yourself and to persevere in regarding your home visits as a sacred trust, to be carried out faithfully each week, in the name of Christ, so far as family and other duties permit?”

Members: *“I do”*

Commitment to the Rule

Fr Perry presents the Rule to Mary Waide, Regional President, who receives it on behalf of all the members.

Fr Perry addresses Mary:

Fr Perry: *“Receive the Rule of the Society on behalf of all the members. May the Gospels and these texts continue to illuminate and guide your steps as you bring the love of Christ to those you visit.”*

“Do you promise to adhere loyally to the spirit of the St Vincent de Paul Society, as reflected in this Rule?”

Members: *“I do”*

Intercession of the Father

Fr Perry: *“God our Father, grant us the grace to entrust all our work to Your providence, as we discover Your action in the events of our lives and strive to love You by the work of our hands and the sweat of our brow, for Your glory alone.”*

“We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Patroness of our Society.”

Members: *“Hail Mary, full of grace...”*



Prayer of Blessing - Openness to the Holy Spirit and True Spirituality.

Fr Perry: *"May the Holy Spirit give us spiritual light and spiritual energy, so that our spirituality may truly be an energising vision and a driving force in our lives. May we be ever more open to the insights and gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit. We ask this through Christ our Lord."*

Members: *"Amen."*



Commissioning - Commitment to Union with Christ, and to the Society.

All Conference Presidents present: *"Blessed Frédéric Ozanam called people to the Society with these words:*

'Place yourself in the hands of Jesus and he will bless you and make use of your lives well beyond your greatest expectations.' May the Holy Spirit form Christ in us, so that we may see with His eyes, think with His mind and love with His heart. Help us to dry many tears and comfort many sorrows, whilst being aware of our own frailty and the many blessings we receive from those we visit.

In the spirit of Jesus, and in the name of our Patron, St Vincent de Paul, and our principal founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, I renew the commission of all who desire to be members of our international lay organisation 'to go to the poor with love' and to share their burdens and joys as true friends, with the help of God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Members: *"Amen"* (The candle is extinguished.)

Marie McGuigan



Marie McGuigan, guest speaker, delivered a presentation on self care for members and talked about the importance of looking after each other. Marie is a former renal nurse specialist in Belfast City Hospital. A counsellor with Colin Counselling in West Belfast, with Action Cancer and The Royal College of Nursing, UK.



The event concluded with an evening meal and recital afterwards from Malachi, accompanied by Plunkett McGartland.



Members' Day



