



The Vincentian  
Partnership for  
Social Justice

**Working for  
social and  
economic change  
tackling poverty  
and exclusion**

Members:

The Society of  
Saint Vincent de  
Paul,  
The Vincentian  
Congregation,  
The Daughters of  
Charity  
and  
The Sisters of  
the Holy Faith

The Vincentian  
Partnership for  
Social Justice  
Ozanam House  
53 Mountjoy  
Square  
Gardiner St.  
Dublin 1

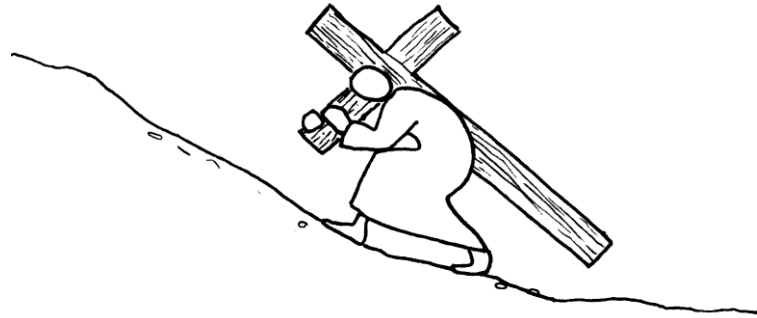
Tel: 01 8780425  
Fax: 01 8780423  
[vpj@eircom.net](mailto:vpj@eircom.net)

**Contents:**

- Irish Emigrants
- Stealth Taxes
- Reflections and Prayer

# JUST.NOW

February - March 2004 Justice Briefing



**Lent 2004**

## **Different Things to Different People**

For some people their understanding of Lent is captured in Isaiah 58:6  
*"Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me: to break unjust fetters, to undo the thongs of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free."*

For others, the words of Njongonkulu Nolungane - Archbishop of Cape Town maybe a challenge:

*" Our attitude towards giving must come from our deepest sense of relatedness, rather than obligation or guilt. We are related to one another in the strictest sense because we are created in the image of God. When we reject this human relatedness we shatter the image of God within us. Laying claim to our relatedness means recognising and upholding relationships. These acts of charity become acts that affirm Christ's own humanity"*

For still others the reflections of Paula Clifford on Lent 2004 may find an echo in their hearts:

*"The decision to use this period of Lent to reflect on our relationships with other people and to deepen our relationship with God may be both a creative and dangerous one. And we need to commit these weeks to God at the outset, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as our reflections lead us into a fresh awareness of God and those around us".*

This edition of JUST.NOW focuses on:  
Jesus as the Model of Right Relationships  
The Plight of Elderly Irish Emigrants  
The Impact of Stealth Taxes on People who are Poor.

# The Plight of Elderly Irish Emigrants in Britain

## The Plight of Elderly Irish Emigrants in Britain

The recent Prime Time Programme on Irish Emigrants had a significant effect on almost everybody who saw it. Ireland had made such enormous progress in the last twenty years that it is difficult to appreciate the situation of so many people who left these shores in the early 80s and before that in the 50s through necessity. Many of the latter generation were able to return to a good quality of life in Ireland but many who left in the 1950s are really a lost generation.

In present day terms they sent back to Ireland €3.5 billion. This money brought many Irish families out of poverty. Emigrants paid for the education of younger family members. Of the approximate 800,000 who left Ireland a large number are now elderly, and often in bad health and living in dreadful conditions.

The Report of the Task Force Ireland and the Irish Abroad - regarding emigrants recommended that an agency for the Irish abroad be set up under the auspices of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and that an increase in the level of funding for emigrant services be made available immediately. The Government has given a commitment that 18 million Euro would be made available in 2003 - 2004. To-date only 4 million Euro has been allocated.

The plight of many of these elderly Irish emigrants is insecure. Their financial support made a significant contribution to the economy of this country and, without them life for many families in Ireland in the 50s and 60s would have been more difficult than it was. We owe them the means to make their final years as comfortable as possible.

The Episcopal Commission on Emigrants continues to raise awareness on the plight of our elderly emigrants. However, much needs to be done to ensure that they do not die before practical steps are taken to improve their quality of life. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice is initiating an advocacy project to keep the needs of this vulnerable and forgotten group of Irish people at the forefront of Government action. If you would like to make a difference to the lives of our elderly emigrants please contact the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice and we will be very pleased to include you in our ministry of advocacy in their regard.

We hope to draw the attention of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Cowan, and the Minister of Finance, Mr. Mc Creevy, to two undelivered commitments:

- The establishment of an agency for the Irish abroad under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- The making available of the promised €18 million for 2004 of which only €4 million has been allocated to-date.

He left with his belongings in cardboard cases.

Will he be buried in a cardboard coffin?

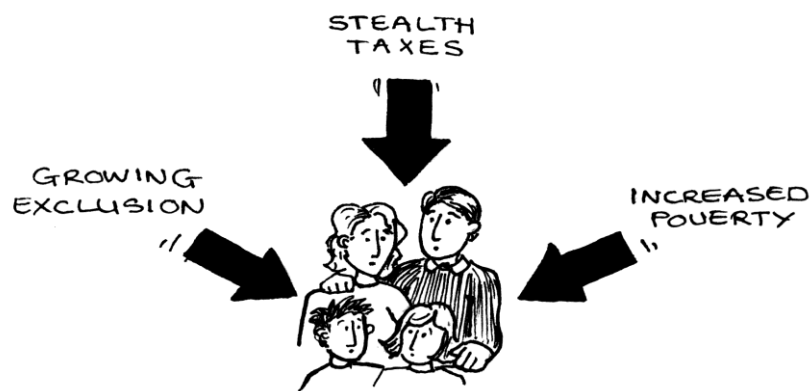


## Stealth Taxes – Fuelling Poverty, Increasing Hardship.

Ireland is now one of the richest nations in the E.U. Yet side by side with this increased wealth lies the shameful reality that many households are poorer to-day than they were a decade ago. Numerous families struggle to live on very low incomes and on social welfare payments that *sustain* rather than end poverty. Families that find themselves in this bleak situation are not passive victims. They are people who want a dignified life and a hopeful future for their children. They are willing to struggle to make their vision come true. But certain structures and systems do not allow them realise their dream. For example, Budget 2004 gave an increase of €10 to the lowest social welfare payment, which meant that a single person's (e.g. a single parent) income was raised from €124.80 to €134.80 per week.

Since Budget Day, this increase of €10 has been gobbled up in a series of stealth taxes.

These are "the biggest single factor behind increasing poverty and growing inequality" (Irish Times 2/12/03). They have affected the cost of essential services and of essential goods adding to the hardship and struggle of households on low income. What are some concrete examples of these stealth taxes?



### Some Concrete Examples of Stealth Taxes

**Transport:** The cost of taking a bus, train or DART has gone up by 3%.

**Health:** The cost of attending an Accident and Emergency Department and the hospital bed cost per night for uninsured patients rose from €40 to €45.

**Food:** Irish buyers pay up to €49 more for their weekly groceries than their European neighbours pay for the same quantity and quality.

**T.V. Licence:** The cost of a licence has increased from €150 to €152 (up by 1.3%).

**Communication:** Postage for a letter to a family member overseas rose by 12%.

**Work:** Cuts in Community Employment Schemes have affected not only those who have lost their jobs but also resulted in cut-backs in programmes in community centres, provision of meals-on-wheels to housebound people and childcare provision in local communities.

The reality of right relations which lies at the heart of justice, requires us to engage with this fact of the growing exclusion of the vulnerable families in our country. What can we do to address this issue so that all may live life with dignity and hope?

### Three Key Steps:

- Know the reality - befriend a family (or individual) that faces the daily hardship of living on an inadequate income.
- Live in solidarity. Solidarity is compassion. It is showing by our attitudes and personal conviction that we are our neighbours' helpers
- Act: work for change - become an advocate for a more just income for all.

## Prayer and Reflection

### Justice in the Harmony which Comes from Right Relationships Jesus as a model of Right Relationships.

Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Margaret Aylward, Frederic Ozanam, Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa and countless modern day people worked for a world in which there would be compassion, peace and justice. For each there was a conversion of life. While living in different places and times, it is not difficult to discover a common trait among all these people. They sought to build right relationships with people as the way of bringing about the Kingdom of God as announced by Jesus.

The four gospels reflect many of the ways Jesus went about building right relationships

- praying - alone and with others;
- loving and being self-giving;
- reaching out to all persons regardless of social status, degree of faith, or any other characteristic - his ministry is inclusive;
- bringing together people who might not think they have anything in common;
- gently inviting;
- naming, which goes to the very essence of a person;
- touching;
- forgiving and reconciling;
- healing;
- being present - not just there but *really* present;
- enabling persons to change and live as a new creation;
- honouring the fundamental dignity of each person he encountered; all people were visible to him;
- being open to others' perspectives;
- attending to the natural world which he often refers to when offering powerful images in his teachings;
- teaching about rightly ordered relationships through his parables;
- telling stories to describe the Kingdom of God and inviting his listeners to connect their stories with his stories and ultimately the Kingdom of God;
- feeding people - food for their bodies and food for their souls;
- *and celebrating!* He dined with an assortment of people.

Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world. Though we see the waves of violence threatening to drown the fire of Christian love, love must win. It is the only thing that can. We can never preach violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross .....

*Oscar Romero*

We must be saved together. We must come to God together - together we must all return to Our Father's house. What would God say to us if some of us came to help him without others.

*Charles Peguy*

#### Prayer

Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no legs but yours, yours are the eyes through which to look Christ's compassion to the world, yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good, and yours are the hands with which he blesses us.

*St. Theresa of Avila*

