



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

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#### Contents:

- Budget Standards
- Environment
- Eco Congregations
- Prayer and Reflection

# JUST.NOW

Spring 2007 Justice Briefing

## 'Every Small Step is a Forward Step'

*"No person made a greater mistake than he/she who did nothing because they could only do a little".* Edmund Burke

Many people often wish that they could do something practical to bring about a more just and caring world. Springtime can be the time to take on a new or first step on the long road to justice and inclusion.



## *Every Small Step is a Forward Step*

It may seem strange to wish our readers a Happy Lent, however, in the Catholic Liturgy, Lent is called 'this joyful season'. Until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century the word Lent meant Spring. It was a time of renewal and conversion in preparation for the celebration of New Life at Easter. By our prayer and penance throughout Lent we are brought in touch with our deepest desires for justice, peace and ultimately for Jesus and His mission in which we share.

This edition of JUST.NOW offers some practical steps, which, if implemented, can help to make a difference to the lives of people who carry the burden of poverty or injustice. *"Every small step is a forward step"*. These ordinary small steps are forward steps on the road to a more just, caring world.

# The Cost of A Minimum Essential Life Style

## Minimum Essential Budget Standards for Six Households

In an effort to draw attention to the struggle of people dependent on social welfare or the minimum wage to make ends meet, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice has undertaken a number of studies. The most recent, which was launched on November 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, shows the actual cost of a minimum essential standard of living of six household types. Now that the report has been launched the challenge is to convince policy-makers that social welfare payments and the minimum wage need to be significantly increased in order to meet the cost of living. The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice acknowledges with gratitude the permission of the CORI Justice Office to print the following summary which was published in the December 2006 edition of Contact.

## Major Study produces new empirical basis for measuring poverty

A major new study Partnership for Social the challenges faced by Current debates about whether or not it can be from the absence of income standards. What amount of money a enable them to have an living? This is the new 300 - page study *Budgets for Six* this research project income needed for a essential lifestyle in



published by the Vincentian Justice casts new light on people living on low incomes. the extent of poverty and reduced or eliminated suffer agreed empirically based is the minimum essential person or household needs to acceptable standard of question addressed in this entitled *Minimum Essential Households*. The results of show for the first time the household to have a minimum modern Ireland.

Based on research by Sr. Bernadette Mac Mahon D.C., Sr. Joan Carey C.H.F. and Ms. Ann Stokes and involving hundreds of people in focus groups, the study builds on previous work done by the VPSJ. It provides detailed information on the actual cost of a minimum essential standard of living for 6 household types. It also provides the foundation for a national database for minimum essential budget standards which can be developed and modified for application to different family types.

This particular study looks in detail at the following households; two parents and two children (aged 3 and 10); two parents and two children (aged 10 and 15); lone parent and two children (aged 3 and 10); pensioner couple, single female pensioner and single adult male.

The study finds that most households on social welfare or the minimum wage do not have enough income to sustain a basic standard of living. The weekly incomes for five out of the six household types fell well short of a basic standard of living.

The gap between the basic standard of living and the actual incomes of these households varied between €10 and €150. The only group judged to meet a basic standard of living were pensioner couples on a contributory pension but without the cost of running a car.

The study has major implications for government policy if poverty is to be eliminated. These include the need to address child poverty, the income levels of adults on social welfare, the 'working poor' issue and access to services ranging from social housing to fuel for older people.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice was established in 1996 to work for social and economic change – tackling poverty and exclusion. The partnership includes the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian Congregation, The Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of the Holy Faith.

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A minimum essential standard of living is one, which meets people's physical, psychological and social needs. The following tables show what it costs for 4 households to afford such a standard of living. The Tables show the income to which the households are entitled, costs the minimum essential budget standard and the shortfall experienced by the households on a weekly basis.

The following tables taken from the VPSJ report illustrate the struggle of low-income families to exist.

<i>Lone Parent Two Children 3 and 10 year old boy</i>				<i>Two Parents Two Children 10 and 15 year old girl</i>			
	<i>Income</i>	<i>Budget Costs</i>	<i>Shortfall</i>		<i>Income</i>	<i>Budget costs</i>	<i>Shortfall</i>
<i>Dependent on social welfare</i>	€278.25	326.08	47.83	<i>Dependent on social welfare</i>	€384.59	547.42	162.83
<i>Part-time worker car owner</i>	518.19	623.18	37.55	<i>Full time worker car owner</i>	494.66	584.58	89.92
<i>Full-time worker car owner</i>	545.74	€623.18	77.44	<i>Full time worker and 1 part time worker car owner</i>	548.67	611.89	63.22
<i>Pensioner Couple 66 - 69 year old</i>				<i>Single Male over 25 years old</i>			
	<i>Income</i>	<i>Budget Costs</i>	<i>Shortfall</i>		<i>Income</i>	<i>Budget costs</i>	<i>Shortfall</i>
<i>Contributory Pension car Owner</i>	€365.70	393.70	28.00	<i>On Minimum Wage</i>	283.68	368.37	84.89
<i>Non- Contributory Pension car owner</i>	325.40	387.61	62.21	<i>Dependent on jobseekers allowance</i>	272.80	365.57	92.77

A brief and '*reader friendly*' copy of the report will soon be available for the members of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. It is hoped that it will be of practical help to members of the S.V.P. and M.A.B.s in their work with low-income families and to people who want to advocate for an income which meets the cost of a minimum essential standard of living.

### What you can do?

Become an advocate for 'minimum essential' income for all by:

- a) Obtaining a copy of the summary
- b) Writing to the Taoiseach and/or Minister for Social Welfare to advocate significant increases for the present Social Welfare Payments and the Minimum Wage.
- c) Raising it as an issue when politicians campaign for votes in the 2007 elections.

### **Ireland - not a poverty free country**

- One person in five in Ireland is at risk of poverty and lives on an income of less than €193 a week.
- Certain groups are particularly vulnerable - pensioners, lone parents, carers, people with a disability.
- Poverty means an inadequate income, poor health, inadequate housing, social isolation and shame.
- Factors such as poor health, disability, unemployment and lack of affordable childcare cause poverty by preventing people from being able to access adequate incomes.
- The causes of poverty are structural rather than irresponsibility and bad management.
- And anti-poverty strategy means that most Government Departments, not just the Department of Social and Family Affairs and Finance must be involved in any strategies and programmes to eliminate poverty.



Fuel



Food



Education



Toiletries

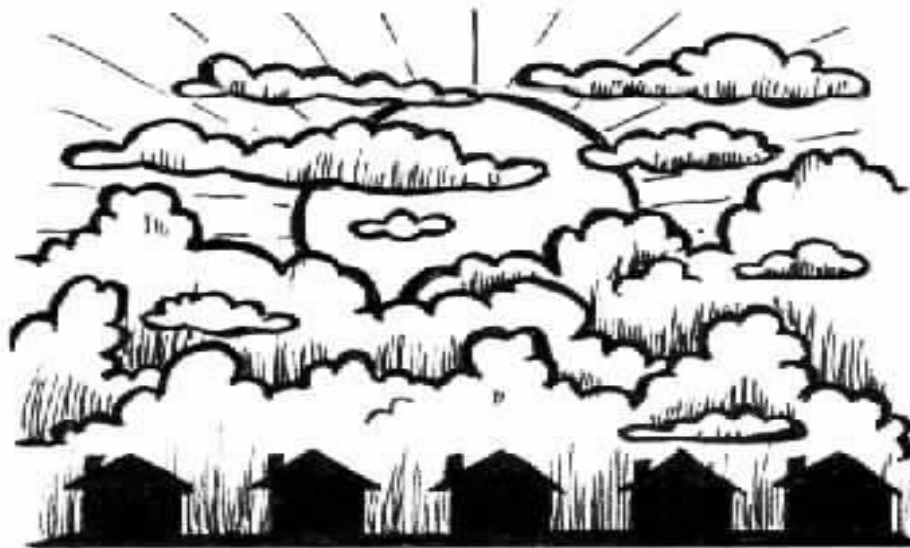


Pets



Savings

The UN Report about global warming is seen as an official warning – global warming is manmade. There will be dire consequences if we fail to act. The following extracts from the editorial of the Irish Times (3<sup>rd</sup> February 2007) provides food for thought and motives for action.



- Any remaining doubt about global warming was finally dispelled in Paris yesterday when the highly authoritative United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) delivered its latest assessment of the scale of the problem.
- It gave the strongest warning yet that our greenhouse gas emissions are likely to cause enormous damage to the earth's climate system over the next century with terrifying consequences for hundreds of millions worldwide.
- In the coming months further reports from IPCC's working groups will detail the impact of climate change and ways to mitigate its effects.
- Six years ago the IPCC published its last, more tentative assessment, but the science has hardened since then and there is now more certainty that the problem we face constitutes the most serious environmental threat in the history of humanity.
- Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, helped to heighten awareness of the issue, as did the British Government's Stern Review.
- But the evidence that climate change is happening has also been mounting from Hurricane Katrina, to Greenland's melting glaciers, the late start to the Alpine ski season and Ireland's unusually mild and wet winter.
- The prognosis is not good for a business-as-usual approach. If you carry on pumping more and more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere the scientists have warned that average global surface temperatures will rise by 3 degrees by 2100'.
- This has alarming implications – an increase in storm severity and frequency, further melting of polar icecaps, rising seas, droughts, heat waves and other devastating impacts.

- And while the IPCC's report is studiously scientific in approach, it is bound to inject a new sense of urgency into negotiations on deep emission cuts worldwide.
- Against the backdrop, it is extraordinary that Minister for the Environment, Dick Roche would have chosen this week to publish a document entitled *Ireland's Progress towards Environmental Sustainability*. Though he described it as "*objective by any standards*", the report highlights only the good news on a range of environmental achievements, such as waste recycling, water quality and measures to deal with climate change.
- But it fails to mention, inter alia, the alarming extent to which Ireland is locked into a level of car-dependent sprawl unmatched by any other EU country.
- The results are to be seen everywhere today so it is unlikely that the public will be deluded by Mr. Roche's "green-washing" exercise.
- That is particularly true in relation to the Government's response to climate change, which relies far too much on buying carbon credits abroad rather than implementing measures at home to reduce per capita CO2 emissions that are among the highest in the world.
- Going into the next round of UN talks to find a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, he must produce a revised and credible National Climate Change Strategy containing concrete measures showing that Ireland will play its part in dealing with the issue.

### Ireland – Europe and Climate Change

- If Ireland does not take immediate steps to curb carbon emissions the country will be 16% off the target set for 2010. According to the European Commission only 3 other member states are likely to perform worse – Spain, Portugal and Greece.
- Ireland has a target of reducing emissions by no more than 13%. This rise took account of the fact that the economy was still growing. Without specific measures our emissions will rise by 29.6%.
- Europeans are overwhelmingly convinced that human activity is contributing to global warming and according to the Financial Times a majority are prepared to accept restrictions 45% of the people surveyed in Germany, France, UK and Italy?? believe that climate change would be a threat to them and their families within their lifetimes.
- While 68% said that they would support restrictions on their behaviour and shopping patterns the survey found Europeans were more willing to accept restrictions in theory than in practice. (CORI)

### What you can do?

- Raise our own awareness e.g visit websites.
- Take practical steps in the areas of heating, lighting, use of electrical goods

# ECO Congregations

## ECO Congregations Ireland

ECP Congregations is an environmental programme for churches and is available to all Christian denominations in the UK and Ireland. It developed through a partnership between the 'Churches Together' in Britain and Ireland and the environmental charity 'Going for Green'. Eco Congregations Ireland is an internet initiative and all resources are free and can be downloaded from the following website [www.ecocongregationireland.org](http://www.ecocongregationireland.org)

### *The aim of ECO Congregation*

- To encourage churches to celebrate the gift of God's creation, to recognise the interdependence of all creation and to care for it through their lifestyles - personal and communal.

### *How did ECO Congregation Develop*

- From a Pilot Study involving 22 churches across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The churches were drawn from a variety of contexts (city centre, inner city, suburban and rural) and varied in size from 10 members to around 1,000. The feedback from the Pilot Study shaped the project development.

### *ECO Congregation and Small Groups*

- While Eco Congregations is concerned primarily with parishes, its goals and resources are relevant for any group committed to celebrating the beauty of creation and to promoting care of the environment.

### *What is it about?*

- Provides resources to promote care of the environment.
- Supports congregations in their efforts to care for creation.
- Links congregations with those who suffer most from the degradation of the planet.

### *How to Get Involved*

- Undertake a simple environmental audit to help assess good environmental practice and prioritise areas for development (see website for audit)
- Download the appropriate resource model to integrate environmental care into different areas of congregational and personal lives e.g. materials and resources for workshops, ideas to help congregations work with and through and for their local communities.

## Get Involved



Recycle and Cycle



Think!  
Before you turn on the Tap

## Prayer and Reflection

Leader: Come, let us praise God for the gift of Creation.

All: Creator God, we praise you for the grandeur of the universe.

We praise you for the gift of this Earth.

We praise you for the land, and we praise you for the seas.

We praise you for the great miracle of teeming life on our prolific planet.

We praise you for the cycle of growth and for the beauty of bursting blooms in the Spring time.

We praise you green growth of summer and for the holy harvest in the Fall.

We praise you for the infinity of different creatures on the land and in the sea, each unique in its own way, each fitting into the complex ecosystems you have gifted us with, each dependent on each other and the whole.

We praise you, our Creator.

Grace us with a sense of our responsibilities to preserve and protect your precious gift, this Garden, this Earth.

We praise you, Creator God, and we offer you our hearts and hands for the preservation of your Creation.

At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.

A solution to ecological challenges demands more than just economic and technological proposals. It requires an inner change of heart which leads to the rejection of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. It demands an ethical behavior which respects the principles of universal solidarity, social justice and responsibility.

*Pope John Paul II, May 2003*

### Prayer

The seas are weeping and the land is in grief.

But we are called to be signs of hope in this world,

to be co-creators with God of a global community where the earth is respected and cherished.

We ask our Creator to give us discernment and to guide us as we become active members of the human family, working with our sisters and brothers to change the destructive trends that are causing global warming. We have been given a great gift, the richness of Creation, and as we celebrate the earth on this day, we pledge to protect this gift of God. Hear us Creator, and be with us every day as we seek to restore and preserve your Creation. Amen.

#### *Acknowledgements:*

*Illustrations:* Helen Mac Mahon

Irish Times 3.2.07, Education for Justice

C.O.R.I. – Contact December 2006.