



JUST.NOW

May – June 2009 Justice Briefing

Local and E.U. Elections 2009

'Your Vote is Your Voice'.

During the past weeks Election Posters, Campaigns and Manifestos have become much in evidence. However, since August 2008 the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice has been on its own election campaign! Our Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme which is strictly non-party political encourages people to recognise the power of their vote.

Since August 2008 we have facilitated workshops with approximately 60 groups throughout Ireland. It is most encouraging to see the enthusiasm of people who have been non-voters and who now recognise that their vote is their voice. Four of the foreign national participants in the workshops are now running as candidates in the local elections. Those of us who always voted can do so in a routine way without fully realising that our vote can be our voice for a more just and inclusive Ireland. The Local and E.U. Elections give us an opportunity to deliberately use our vote to bring about a more Gospel-like society.

This edition of JustNow gives an outline of the responsibilities of Local Government. It also presents 10 Priorities for the New E.U. Parliament (courtesy of E.A.P.N. - The European Anti Poverty Network Ireland) Europe needs M.E.P.s who are committed to promoting the rights and needs of the 78 million Europeans living in poverty and Ireland needs competent and committed Local Councillors.



Elections Workshop - Ballyfermot



Training Community Leaders - Galway

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice consists of The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, The Vincentian Congregation, The Daughters of Charity and The Sisters of the Holy Faith. Working for social and economic change - tackling poverty and exclusion.

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Local Government Elections

Choosing a Candidate

Local Government Authorities have responsibility for 8 major areas which have considerable impact on the quality of life for local communities. They are also responsible for the promotion of social inclusion in their electoral districts.

When you meet candidates there is an opportunity to be an advocate for people in your local community. Candidates can be asked questions on the areas which you believe require action e.g. social housing, environmental protection, road safety, etc

Local Government Eight Areas of Responsibility

1. Housing and Building

- management and provision of local authority housing
- assistance to persons housing themselves or improving their houses
- traveller accommodation
- enforcement of certain housing standards and controls, etc.

2. Road Transport / Safety

- road upkeep and improvement
- public lighting
- traffic management facilities
- safety education and information
- collection of motor taxation
- licensing of draws, etc.

3. Water Schemes/ Sewerage

- public water supply and sewerage schemes
- assistance towards the provision of piped water supply to existing dwellings
- sewerage facilities for same
- public toilets, etc.

4. Development Incentives and Controls

- physical planning policy
- control of new development and building
- promotion of industrial and other developments, etc.

5. Environmental Protection

- waste collection and disposal
- burial grounds
- safety of structures and spaces
- fire protection
- pollution control, etc.

6. Recreation and Amenities

- swimming pools
- libraries
- parks
- open spaces
- recreation centres
- art galleries
- museums
- theatres
- conservation
- improvement of all of the above.

7. Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare

- appointment/election of public representatives to county committees of agriculture, vocational education committees, regional health boards, regional tourism organisations, fisheries boards, harbour authorities
- joint drainage committees
- unemployment assistance
- rates/service charge waiver schemes.

8. Miscellaneous Services

- financial management
- rates/service charge collection
- elections
- courthouses
- coroners and inquests
- consumer protection measures
- markets, fairs and abattoirs
- gas works.

10 Priorities for the New European Parliament

A Challenge for all candidates

The European Union is currently facing the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The inescapable consequence is increasing poverty and social exclusion with many workers losing their jobs and people on low-incomes facing the threat of homelessness. Those who do not have jobs find themselves even further from the labour market, while families are driven further into debt, and people on the poverty line are threatened with cuts to or frozen benefits. At the same time, EU governments are financing astronomical bailout packages to financial institutions.

European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) calls for a fresh start

The new European Parliament will have responsibility for preparing and implementing the framework to replace the existing Lisbon strategy. In doing this the Parliament must respond to the needs of those who experience poverty and exclusion. This response cannot be more of the same -the current market driven agenda does not work. With 78 million people in the EU facing poverty and growing inequalities, there is a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

Across Europe EAPN is articulating 10 priorities for the new Parliament. MEPs in Ireland and the United Kingdom have a strong track record in engaging actively with the social inclusion agenda. Consequently we believe the new Irish and Northern Irish MEPs through their influence within their European parties and in the European Parliament, have an important role to play.

Ending Europe's Social Crisis: 10 priorities for the new European Parliament

1. Make social cohesion and the fight against poverty and inequality in the EU and the promotion of global equity a named EU priority.
2. Set and monitor EU and national level targets for poverty and inequality reduction as part of a highly visible EU strategy against poverty.
3. Set Benchmarks for active governance in decision-making processes at EU and Member State level, ensuring the participation of anti-poverty NGOs including people experiencing poverty.

4. Make progress on developing an EU framework to defend high level social standards and guarantee a dignified life for all.
5. Ensure access for all to affordable quality services, including social, educational, child care and health services, and housing, transportation, energy and water services.
6. Put the commitment to 'Decent and Quality Work' back at the centre of the European Employment Strategy.
7. Support the social economy and inclusive entrepreneurship as vital sources of inclusive job creation and concrete support for those furthest from the labour market.
8. Strengthen EU anti-discrimination legislation, including the fight against discrimination on the grounds of socio-economic status and enhance enforcement of existing legislation.
9. Mainstream the fight against poverty across all policies through effective and participative social impact assessments, which ensure engagement of stakeholders.
10. 2010 has been declared the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. MEPs can play a positive role as ambassadors for the Year, in doing so they can help to ensure that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is given a high profile in the first year of life of the renewed European institutions.

4 Possible Questions For M.E.P.s

- What steps would you take to help eradicate poverty in the E.U. (78 million people in poverty)?
- How would you guarantee that employment becomes a priority for the E.U. Parliament?
- What would you do to ensure greater access to affordable and quality services for all E.U. citizens? (health, education, childcare)
- The E.U. seems to focus on economic matters. How would you promote equal importance for the social agenda?

Prayer and Reflection in Preparation for the Elections

For Reflection

In the face of the great challenge to pursue greater justice and peace, to protect all of life and the human dignity of every child of God, we again reflect on the image of the table. Who has a place at the table of life? Where is there a place for the hungry families, the children who do not receive health care? We pray that our vote helps the least of these to have a real place at the table when policies and priorities are set. We pray for wisdom and discernment so that our voice may be our voice for greater justice. Amen.

Prayer to Focus

What is really important?

God, help me to focus on what is really important.
Help me to focus on what will give life.
Help me to focus on what promotes justice and peace.
Help me to let go of all the little things that don't matter.
Help me to let go of any legalism that blocks your spirit.
God, you are my Mother, my Father; You love me.
Help me to trust in your plan - your plan for life.
-your plan for the fullness of life for everyone.
God, you are the Spirit of Life for the whole world.
Remove violence from my life.
Remove violence from our world.
Teach us how to speak up for justice without violence.
Teach us how to learn from the people in poverty.
Teach us how to drop our intolerance and to learn from each other.
God, help us to focus on what is really important.
Help us to focus on what will give life.
Help me to focus on what promotes justice and peace.

Fr. John Bucki, S.J.

Prayer for the Elections

Loving and gracious God, we remember that your plan for us is fullness of life lived with love, justice and mercy. Be with us the citizens of Ireland and the citizens of Europe this year as we work together in selecting political leaders at Local and European levels. Help us keep the common good before us. Deepen in us the willingness to act in solidarity with people who are economically poor and with women seeking fullness of life in society. Help us be persistent in testing political remedies against what they will do for people, to people, with people, and what they will mean for the health of our earth home. Help us to support one another in exercising our precious responsibilities as citizens in a representative democracy. After the elections, strengthen us to continue to work with our leaders, seeking an ever more just society that acts in harmony and interdependence with all creation. We ask this in the name of Jesus in union with Your Spirit. *Amen.*

Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic Justice Office

