



# JUST.NOW

January – February 2010 Justice Briefing



The terrible catastrophe in Haiti dominates our thoughts and prayers at this time. Natural disasters often prompt the question 'Where is God when earthquakes/hurricanes/Tsunami strike?' The reality of life in Haiti confronts us with the truth that natural disasters are often exacerbated by the lack of basic structures and systems which help to protect life. The poorest people in the Western hemisphere have none of the defences against natural disasters which developed countries have acquired. Haiti is expected to pay 100 million dollars in debt payments to the IMF over the next 5 years. Haiti is an example of a country which has been exploited by more wealthy and powerful societies and now suffers from the consequences.

This edition of Just.Now contains material for prayer for the people of Haiti. It also includes a brief outline of the life of Margaret Aylward and a short account of the impact of the December budget on some low income households.

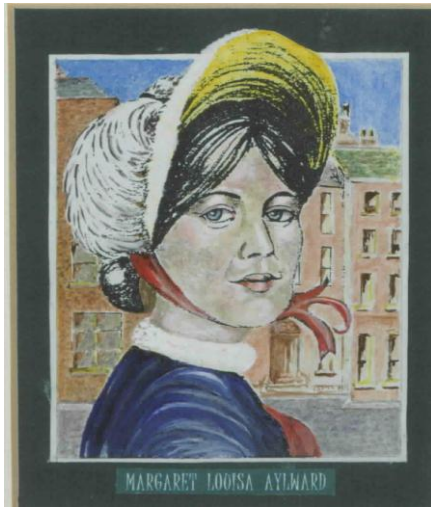
The 1<sup>st</sup> of February is the feast day of St. Brigid, patron of the Sisters of the Holy Faith who are one of the four groups forming the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. The life and work of Margaret Aylward shows the 'power of one' in the work for a more just society.

The section on Budget 2010 points to the need for 'The Poor Can't Pay Campaign' a civil society campaign that believes those earning the minimum wage or living on social welfare are not responsible for our present economic crisis.

For more information visit the website - [www.thepoorcantpay.ie](http://www.thepoorcantpay.ie)

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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## Margaret Aylward, Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Faith



Margaret Aylward was born on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1810, in Waterford city. She was the fifth child of William Aylward, a prosperous merchant and his wife Ellen Murphy. Margaret's early education was in a small local Quaker school in Waterford and she continued her education as a boarder in the Ursuline convent in Thurles where she remained until the age of twenty. An important influence during Margaret's childhood was her family's strong connection with Edmund Rice and the Christian Brother's Congregation in Mount Sion in Waterford city.

She retained high regard for the Christian Brothers throughout her life and was greatly influenced by their service to the poor and their care and education of poor and destitute boys. On leaving the Ursulines, Margaret worked as a volunteer teacher in one of the "poor schools" founded by the Presentation Sisters in Waterford. As well as her commitment to the Presentation 'poor schools', Margaret worked in a charitable pawn shop which was designed to protect people in poverty from the exorbitant rates of interest charged by regular pawn shops. Margaret entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity in 1834 but her stay there was brief. She moved to Dublin in the late 1840's uncertain of what the future had in store for her.

She was impressed by the work of the Ladies Association of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. She founded her own branch of the Ladies of Charity in the parish of Marlborough Street. By visiting people who were poor and destitute Margaret discovered the number of orphaned children in Dublin which led her to found the St. Brigid's Orphanage in Eccles Street, Dublin. This was not a residential institution but a long term family boarding-out system to provide fosterage for children who were destitute and in danger of loss of faith.

Quality schooling for young people living in poverty was another of Margaret's initiatives. This led her to the foundation of the 'Catholic Schools of St. Brigid'. In October, 1861, Margaret with the support of Father Gowan C.M. established the first school in Crow Street. This was followed by a foundation in Strand Street in 1863. A third school was opened in Park Street. Other schools were opened in the Coombe in 1865, Glasnevin 1865 and Clarendon Street in 1870. Margaret's decision to form her group into a Religious Congregation was to ensure the stability of like-minded women who would bind themselves permanently to the mission of the 'Catholic Schools of St. Brigid'. Margaret Aylward and her 15 companions were overjoyed when the Sisters of the Holy Faith received approval as a religious congregation.

Margaret died on the 11th of October 1889 aged 79 years and was buried in the convent cemetery in Glasnevin. Her personal story is one of courage, great faith and openness to the will of God. 'His will, will be your polar star, view it calmly and steadily'. Her heritage lives on to-day in the lives and ministries of the Sisters of the Holy Faith.

*Joan Carey C.H.F.*



**Feast of St. Brigid - February 1st**

## Impact of Budget 2010

The 2010 Budget was one of the most highly anticipated Budgets in recent memory and it did not disappoint! Whilst the Budget may have been heralded as a turning point on the road to economic recovery, it resulted in drastic cuts to income. However, it must be acknowledged that the Government did take some steps to reduce the impact of the budget on low income families, such as increasing the Qualified Child Dependent Allowance by €3.80 from €26.00 to €29.80 and increasing the income thresholds for Family Income Supplement by €6.00 per child.

In our work to promote an adequate income for all people the VPSJ focuses on 6 household types providing information on household income and on the expenditure necessary to achieve a minimum acceptable standard of living. This brief article focuses on 2 of the household types which suffered most from the recent cut backs.

1. The O'Connor Family: Both parents, John and Mary, are in their mid thirties and have lost their jobs. They live in local authority accommodation with their two children - Louise age 10 and Brian age 15. Their income is as follows:



- Jobseekers Benefit €385.70 (personal rate + qualified adult rate + child dependent rate) reduced from €391.90 in 2009
- They also receive Child Benefit of €150 per child per month reduced from €166 per child per month in 2009
- As both parents are out of work they are also entitled to receive the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance of €200 for Louise and €305 for Brian to help cover the cost of uniforms and footwear

As a result of changes announced in the budget, the O'Connor's total weekly income has been reduced from €478.23 in 2009 to €464.64 in 2010, a drop of €13.59 a week or €706.68 annually. These reductions create real hardship.

2. Seamus Boyle: Seamus is twenty eight. Despite his best efforts he cannot obtain employment. Due to his family circumstances Seamus is living in private rented accommodation. Seamus has the following income:

- Jobseekers Benefit €196.00 reduced from €204.30 in 2009
- Rent Supplement of €98.00 to help towards paying his rent

Seamus was already struggling to make ends meet in 2009 and the reduction in Jobseekers Benefit of €8.30 a week has made his life even more difficult. Seamus believes that he has no alternative but to emigrate. This is a situation that many others now find themselves in due the current economic downturn. In total some 133,700 extra people joined the Live Register last year (December 2008 - December 2009) and there are now a total of 426,700 people on the Live Register according to the latest figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO).



The reduction in Social Welfare payments, the cut to Child Benefit, the introduction of prescription charges and the abolishment of the Christmas Bonus will increase the level of poverty for many households. If overindebtedness is to be avoided basic necessities must be sacrificed. Budget 2010 offered little hope for many of those already experiencing poverty and exclusion. *Grainne Weld*

# For Prayer and Reflection

## Prayer for the People of Haiti

### Leader:

Compassionate Lord, we pray for those who have been devastated by recent natural disasters. We remember those who have lost their lives so suddenly. We hold in our hearts the families forever changed by grief and loss. Bring them consolation and comfort. Surround them with our prayers for strength. Bless those who have survived and heal their memories of trauma and devastation.

May they have the courage to face the long road of rebuilding ahead.

We ask your blessing on all those who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, their security and their hope. Bless the work of relief agencies and those providing emergency assistance. May their work be guided by the grace and strength that comes from You alone.

Help us to respond with generosity in prayer, in assistance, in aid to the best of our abilities. Keep our hearts focused on the needs of those affected, even after the crisis is over. We ask this in Jesus' name, **Amen**.



### Where is God when natural disasters strike?

*Though disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes and other nature-related events are often referred to as "acts of God," which test our faith, God does not will natural disasters to punish us or get our attention. The laws of nature are simply at work.*

*When such disasters wreak untold harm and loss of human life, we are challenged to find God in the midst of suffering and devastation. Such a search can reveal God's presence among us as One who suffers with us and is present to us.*

*Such moments can purify our faith by opening us more to the depths of the mystery of who God is as the source and destiny of all of creation and who calls us to journey endlessly into God.*

*When we witness small miracles, the generosity and selflessness of others, the healing comfort of strangers, God is present.*

*Prayer is our natural response to these tragedies and our concern and care for the victims reveals God's presence among us.*

Acknowledgments: - Joan Carey C.H.F.  
Grainne Weld, V.P.S.J., Education for Justice.  
Illustrations: Helen Mac Mahon  
Design: Mary Murphy

### The Calming of The Storm

With the coming of evening that same day, he said to them 'Let us cross over to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a great gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are lost!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' and the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith!' They were overcome with awe and said to one another. 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.?' *Mark 4: 35-41*

#### L: **Please Respond: Comfort your people, O God**

For those who have lost their lives  
For those who have been injured  
For those who have been orphaned  
For those who have lost their children  
For those who have lost their loved ones  
For those who have lost their homes  
For those who have lost everything  
For rescue workers and emergency personnel  
For relief workers bringing food, supplies and hope  
For all those involved in plans for rebuilding  
For the courage to go on and rebuild live and communities  
Our Father:

**L: Let us lift up the needs we have heard  
and with confidence we pray,**