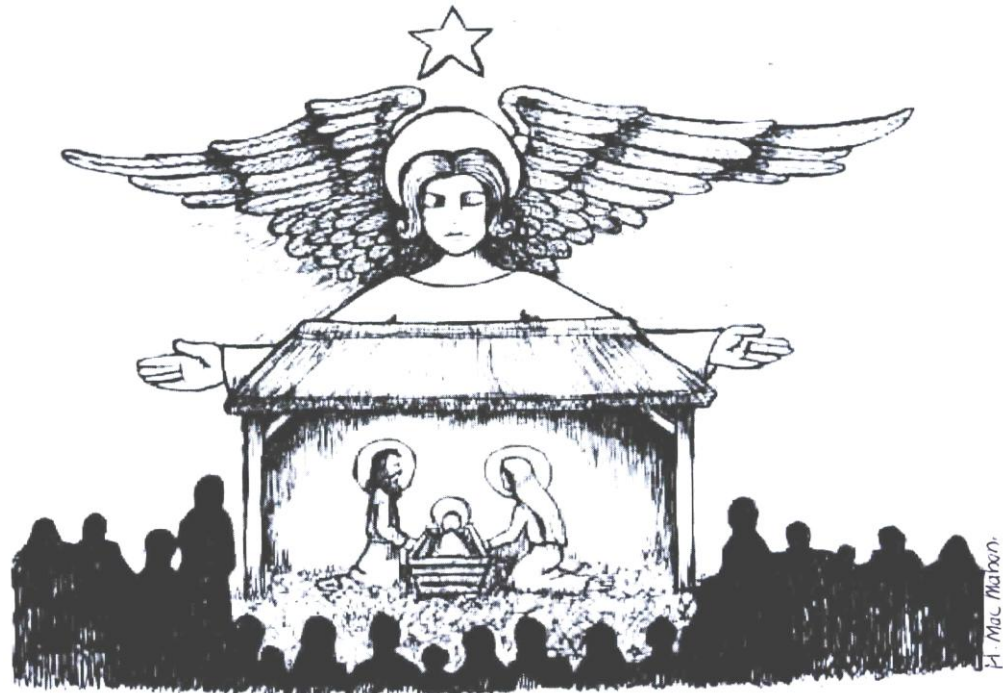


JUST.NOW

November - December 2010 Justice Briefing



Christmas 2010



We wish all our readers a truly blessed and happy Christmas

This Christmas will be a very difficult one for many Irish families. Unemployment, mortgage arrears and cutbacks will mean real hardship for parents and disappointment for children. Our economic and social systems do not sufficiently support family life.

Christmas is associated with happy families and good times together in sharing gifts and food. The challenge for all of us this year is to give hope by sharing as much as we can with people who are less well off and to celebrate the essence of family life - care and companionship.

This edition of JustNow focuses on the Family - in a time of recession and in relation to the state and Catholic Social Teaching



Recessions Affect People Not Just Markets

As Budget 2011 looms on our Advent horizon it is important that our government does not cut any more from the direct or indirect assistance it provides to people through monetary or service provision. Cut backs affect people and impact on families, especially those living on low income or social welfare provision. The teachings and values of Vincent, Louise, Margaret, and Frederick must continue to inspire us as we seek to respond to the new and increased needs arising from this recession.

In the time of St. Vincent "a poor man was someone who possesses nothing, who lacks the necessities of life, or is unable to maintain his social position."

(Roman, J.M. 1999, St. Vincent de Paul A Biography. Trans J. Howard London: Melisende. P. 261)

In these times we will see many new people unable to maintain their social position and the words spoken by Vincent to the Daughters will relate to new people, people who never found themselves asking for help before. In instructing the Daughters in relation to serving the sick, children and prisoners he added, "or any others who are too embarrassed to make their needs known" (*ibid*, p. 454). We must look anew where ever we are to see if there are people struggling who are unable to ask for assistance. Struggling with poverty behind closed doors is not just individual. If parents are in poverty so are their children. For Margaret Aylward supporting families and securing family life for children was central to her work and Frederic Ozanam began his ministry visiting poor families. Ministering to poor families is strongly rooted in our Vincentian Charism.



The recession impacts on family life in many ways:-

- Financially: Reduced income, be it wages or social welfare transfers effects a family's ability to meet the costs of living materially, physically, socially and educationally.
 - Materially: unable to pay the mortgage, rent or utility bills, unable to afford goods that enable them to live with dignity among their peers.
 - Physically: Low income can result in poor diet which will impact on the health of all members of the household. Poor diet results in low motivation and poor levels of concentration which impact on quality of life and education.
 - Socially: There is no disposable income to socialise with peers and children experience exclusion as they cannot keep up with their peers in terms of branded goods and social activities.
 - Educationally: Parents cannot meet the cost of sending children to school. Social exclusion affects a child's ability to attend school. Absenteeism results in poor literacy and numeracy ability. Difficulty in attending school increases the opportunity to engage in anti-social behaviour.
- Emotionally: Fear of poverty, stress arising from the struggle to make ends meet and trying to protect children from the impact of reduced income, loss of security if an adult child emigrates, anxiety about employment or loss of benefits, and reduced social outlets outside the family home impact emotionally. Family tensions grow and relational difficulties increase.
- Spiritually: Loss of dignity, loss of self-esteem and believing that nobody cares affects people at the core of their being, their spiritual centre. It impacts on a person's ability to trust and to consider and appreciate the transcendent. It makes it difficult for people to contemplate a loving, compassionate God or Higher Power.

Obligation of the State to the Family

The State has certain obligations to the family and children which it has undertaken to uphold. Under *Article 10#1* of the UNESCR "The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family which is the natural and fundamental group unit in society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependant children." Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) *Article 18#2* which Ireland ratified in 1992 "State parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their childrearing responsibilities" and States must ensure the development of the child (*Article 6#2*).

The essence of these articles is found in our national strategy for social inclusion NAPinclusion 2007-2016, "Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, support and services to nurture and care for the child, and foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society (p.30). Just think for a moment what it must be like for a parent not to be able to provide for their child, not to be able to give him or her that which they need to develop fully, not to be able to give them a step up on the ladder. In making decisions that will impact on the family the government needs to recognise the dignity and role of parents in providing for their children.

Catholic Social Teaching and the Family

The Church considers the family "the basic unit in society" and the "vital cell of society" (*Compendium of The Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC) #211*).

It is the "principal place of interpersonal relationships" (#211). It is within the family that people experience life and love and begin their development as a person. It is also the place where a person learns to relate to others. The Church teaches that the State and society "exist for the family" and that both must observe the principal of subsidiarity in relation to it (*CSDC #214*). It recognises that political institutions have a responsibility to "make available to persons the necessary material, cultural, moral and spiritual goods" (#166) for a family to achieve its full development. Families need resources to fulfil



their calling and the Church holds that people have a right to the wealth of their State and it places in high regard the significance of work for maintaining the family (*Laborem Exercens 1981 #10*)

The Reality

Families need back up from the State in order to fulfil their potential. However, Eurostat figures rank Ireland as the 8th lowest of the EU 27 when it comes to spending on Social Protection as a percentage of Gross Domestic Produce. (Social Justice Ireland). At present in Ireland many families with adolescent children, living in urban and rural areas on Jobseekers Benefit or the National Minimum Wage have a shortfall in their income which means they cannot meet the cost of living. If either of these are reduced in Budget 2011 how will these households survive? How will they pay their bills? How will they clothe, feed and educate their children? What extra stress will be added to family life?

From research carried out by the VPSJ it is clear that social welfare transfers, when properly targeted, do bring family households out of poverty. (*Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Households, 2008, P.7*). The government must adjust the threshold whereby families can access Family Income Supplement as many people have experienced a reduction in working hours. In protecting children the government must maintain the real value of the Qualified Child Increase if Child Benefit or eligibility to receive it is changed (SVP pre-budget submission 2011). Child Benefit for adolescents in low income households could be increased. The re-introduction of the Christmas Bonus would have a very positive impact on family life this Christmas.

Reflection for Advent

God Almighty, from the beginning, you joined man and woman together, and blessing them with children, made them a family. As we prepare for the birth of Jesus and the celebration of the Holy Family we ask you to bless families everywhere in our world, especially those experiencing poverty and suffering as consequence of war and violence.



For families bowed down by poverty:
R Lord help us to help them
For families who struggle to survive: Lord

For parents who have lost children to disease: Lord
.....
For children who miss school because of unpayable
debt: Lord
For young people growing up with no hope for the
future: Lord
For adults who work and cannot make a living: Lord
.....
For families affected by unemployment: Lord
For families who are coping with illness: Lord
For families who will find themselves in poverty for
the first time this Christmas: Lord
For families who will be living on the street, under
plastic or in hostels this Christmas: Lord

www.micahallenge.org.au/prayer (adapted)

In a world where family life is threatened in many ways, let us make our crib scene a reminder of the joy and gift of family life.

-Remembering the poor shepherds and the circumstances of Christ's birth, so marked by poverty, let us make them reminders of the poor families of our world.

-Let the Child, Joseph and Mary teach us the dignity and importance of children and families in societies so neglectful of them.

-The arrival of the Magi following their visit with King Herod, let them remind us of the families that live in fear of violence and war.

-Let the animals present in the stable remind us of families who live in poor housing or as refugees this Christmas

Wonderful Counsellor, give your wisdom to the rulers of the nations.

Mighty God, make the whole world know that the government is on your shoulders.

Everlasting Father, establish your reign of justice and righteousness forever.

Prince of Peace, bring in the endless kingdom of your peace.

Almighty Lord, hear our prayer and fulfil your purpose in and through us.

www.manxforums.com/forums (adapted)

Prayer: Lord, let the gift of your peace be at the heart of family life this Christmas. May this peace allow all to experience your love and care especially during the difficult times. Bless us all with a deeper faith and renewed generosity in serving those most in need in our communities. May we rejoice in your blessings all our days. Amen.

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