



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**THE SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL
IN DUBLIN, 1926–1975**

by

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**THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF PhD
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MAYNOOTH**

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September 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Colm Lennon, my supervisor, provided the encouragement, wise guidance and wonderful support throughout this study that allowed it to come to completion. My sincere thanks to Professor Vincent Comerford for facilitating this work and for giving me the opportunity to meet other post-graduate students and to benefit from the richness and diversity of their work. I received great support at all times from the staff of the History Department at NUI Maynooth and from the courteous and helpful staff in the John Paul II Library. My thanks also to the staff of the National Library of Ireland, the Central Catholic Library, Dublin City Library, the Royal Irish Academy, Cabinteely Library, and to Noelle Dowling of the Dublin Diocesan Archives.

Patricia Mooney's generous assistance in locating records and in welcoming me on my many visits to the Society of St Vincent de Paul archives in Seán MacDermott Street made the task of research so much easier. I am grateful, too, to Kieran Murphy, for his interest and encouragement. The academic work of Gerry Martin on the foundation years of the Society in Ireland provided invaluable background material for this study, and his clarification of detail and perceptive comments on the Society's operations and structures were much appreciated. Larry Tuomey and Pat Lanigan gave me great assistance with primary source material, and my thanks also to Frank Casey for his helpful information. It was a joy to communicate on several occasions with two long-serving Vincentians, Columba Faulkner and Cormac Ó Broin, and to hear their personal stories and share their enthusiasm for the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

I am grateful to my family and friends for their support, especially to Margaret Burns, Tom Harris and Raphael Gallagher, whose many kindnesses sustained me throughout.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

DDA	Dublin Diocesan Archives
SVPA	Society of St Vincent de Paul Archives

In the monthly journal of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the *Bulletin*, the referencing system, including the method of pagination and the presentation of supplements, changed several times in the period of this study. The prevailing usage at the time of publication has been followed here.

The Society's Rule remained unchanged from its inception in the 1830s until the late 1960s, and is contained in the twenty-first edition of the *Manual*, published in 1958. This edition of the *Manual* has been used throughout the study. Where it was appropriate to refer to an earlier edition of the *Manual*, or where clarity is required, the date of the edition has been given.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the ideology, organisation methods and activities of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the diocese of Dublin from 1926 to 1975. It looks at how the Society expanded its range of services over this period, despite the change from conditions of great hardship in the 1920s to relative prosperity by the 1970s. As a lay Catholic organisation, whose stated aim was the sanctification of its members through works of charity, it attempted to express its identity in new ways following the Second Vatican Council. How the Society, a charity among many and often described as composed of middle-aged and middle income members, continued to survive and to maintain the goodwill and financial support of the public will also be examined. To understand the historical background to the Society of St Vincent de Paul, some detail of its foundation story in nineteenth-century Paris, and of its subsequent establishment and growth in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Dublin, is given in Chapter One.

Works by Forest,¹ Charlton,² Price,³ and Lynch⁴ provided a background for the understanding of social and religious ideas in the volatile political foundation period in France in the 1830s. Fagan's thesis was especially useful in situating the writings and ideas of Frédéric Ozanam amid other political, social and religious thinkers and writers of his time.⁵ Baunard,⁶ O'Meara⁷ and Coates⁸ supplied additional detail on Ozanam's life, ideology and social concerns. Seeley's study gave useful insights into the works of another French organisation dedicated to youth welfare in the nineteenth century.⁹

¹ Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution and the poor* (Oxford, 1981).

² D.G. Charlton, *Secular religions in France, 1815–1870* (Oxford, 1963).

³ Roger Price, *A social history of nineteenth-century France* (New York, 1987).

⁴ Katherine A. Lynch, *Family, class and ideology in early industrial France: social policy and the working-class family, 1825–1848* (Madison, 1988).

⁵ Austin Fagan, 'The political and social ideas of Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam (1813–1853) and their relation to the movement of ideas in his time' (unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1971).

⁶ Louis Baunard, *Ozanam in his correspondence*, translated from the French by a member of the Council of Ireland of the Society of St Vincent de Paul (Dublin, 1925).

⁷ Kathleen O'Meara, *Frédéric Ozanam, his life and works* (Edinburgh, 1876).

⁸ Ainslie Coates, *Letters of Frédéric Ozanam*, translated from the French (London, 1886).

⁹ Paul Seeley, 'Catholics and apprentices: an example of men's philanthropy in late nineteenth-century France', in *Journal of Social History*, 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1992), pp 531–45.

Martin's thesis provided the personal details of the Irish founders and set the new organisation in the social and religious context of Dublin in the 1840s.¹⁰ The research of Willis¹¹, a founding member of the Society, gave a graphic picture of the contemporary conditions that the first members of the Society were about to face in St Michan's parish. Burke's¹² study of the Poor Law showed up the prevailing harsh government attitude to the destitute poor, and Prunty's works give an account of how religious groups of the time tried to respond.¹³ In the twentieth century, Hartigan's detailed thesis supplied much useful background information on the range of lay organisations that were active in Dublin from the foundation of the state, and on their relationship with the hierarchy and institutional church.¹⁴ Another perspective for the understanding of devotional practices among Catholics in continental Europe was provided by Waddy's¹⁵ study of German religious culture in the early twentieth century. Donnelly,¹⁶ Gallagher¹⁷, Dunne¹⁸ and Kelly¹⁹ added to the understanding of the debates on Catholic Action and on the controversies over state intervention in welfare matters that figured prominently from the 1930s to the 1950s.

A picture of the other secular and denominational charities with broadly similar aims to the Society of St Vincent de Paul was derived from directories

¹⁰ James Gerard Martin, 'The Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon in mid-nineteenth century Ireland' (unpublished MA thesis, National College of Industrial Relations, 1993).

¹¹ Thomas Willis, *Facts connected with the social and sanitary conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin* (Dublin, 1845).

¹² Helen Burke, *The people and the Poor Law in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Littlehampton, 1987).

¹³ Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800–1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998); Margaret Aylward, *1810–1889, Lady of Charity, Sister of Faith* (Dublin, 1999).

¹⁴ Maurice Hartigan, 'The Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940' (unpublished MA thesis, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1992).

¹⁵ Helena Waddy, 'St Anthony's Bread: the modernised religious culture of German Catholics in the early twentieth century, in *Journal of Social History*, 31, no. 2 (Winter, 1997), pp 347–70.

¹⁶ James S. Donnelly Jr, 'The peak of Marianism in Ireland, 1930–60', in Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (eds), *Piety and power in Ireland, 1760–1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin* (Belfast and Indiana, 2000), pp 252–83.

¹⁷ Colette Gallagher, 'Catholic social values in action: the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Dublin, 1920s to 1950s', in *Prospect: Journal of the Irish History Students' Association* (1989), pp 21–4.

¹⁸ Éamonn Dunne, 'Action and reaction: Catholic lay organisations in Dublin in the 1920s and 1930s', in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xlvi (1994), pp 107–18.

¹⁹ Adrian Kelly, 'Catholic action and the development of the Irish welfare state in the 1930s and 1940s', in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 53 (1999), pp 105–17.

of the time²⁰ and from secondary reading of works by Lindsay,²¹ Woods,²² Ó Broin²³ An international context for nineteenth-century charities was available from Yeager's research on women's charitable works in Chile,²⁴ and from studies of organisations in the United States on patterns of association among voluntary groups by Jelen and Chandler,²⁵ and on gender and class issues by Cumbler.²⁶

The documents of the Second Vatican Council²⁷ provided the context for understanding the renewal process in the church from the 1960s, and the influences that led lay organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul to redefine its role. Whyte²⁸ provided the background to church–state relations during the period, and Fuller's²⁹ insightful study of the changing forces in Irish Catholic life from 1950 was a useful reference point for assessing similar developments within the Society. Heyck's³⁰ study provided an interesting analysis of the causes of the decline in religious practice in the late nineteenth-century Britain.

Economic and social change that had a direct impact on the works of the Society and those they assisted was documented in several sources, especially the works of Cullen,³¹ Lynch³² and Keogh.³³ An understanding of the Irish social services and of specific social problems encountered by the Society was

²⁰ *Thom's Directory; Irish Catholic Directory; Association of Charities, Dublin Charities* (Dublin 1902); *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook* (Dublin, c.1942 ed.); *Community and social services directory, greater Dublin area* (Dublin, 1970).

²¹ Deirdre Lindsay, *Dublin's oldest charity: the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society* (Dublin, 1990).

²² Audrey Woods, *Dublin outsiders: a history of the Mendicity Institution, 1818–1998* (Dublin, 1998).

²³ León Ó Broin, *Frank Duff: a biography* (Dublin, 1982).

²⁴ Gertrude M. Yeager, 'Female apostolates and modernisation in mid-nineteenth century Chile', in *The Americas*, 55, no. 3 (Jan. 1999), pp 425–58.

²⁵ Ted G. Jelen and Marthe A. Chandler, 'Patterns of socialisation: communalism, associationalism and the politics of lifestyle', in *Review of Religious Research*, 38, no. 12 (Dec. 1996), pp 142–58.

²⁶ John T. Cumbler, 'The politics of charity: gender and class in late nineteenth-century charity policy', in *Journal of Social History*, 14, no. 1 (Autumn, 1980), pp 99–111.

²⁷ Walter M. Abbot (ed.), *The documents of Vatican II* (London and Dublin, 1966).

²⁸ J.H. Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland, 1923–79*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 1980).

²⁹ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: the undoing of a culture* (Dublin, 2002).

³⁰ Thomas William Heyck, 'The decline of Christianity in twentieth-century Britain' in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal concerned with British Studies*, 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1996), pp 437–53.

³¹ L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660*, 2nd ed. (London, 1987).

³² Patrick Lynch, 'The Irish economy since the war, 1946–51', in Kevin B. Nowlan and T. Desmond Williams (eds), *Ireland in the war years and after* (Dublin, 1969), pp 185–200.

³³ Dermot Keogh et al. (eds), *The lost decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork, 2004).

obtained from official reports³⁴ and from the studies of social policy analysts and historians such as Ó Cinnéide,³⁵ Curry,³⁶ Skehill³⁷ and Bhreathnach.³⁸ Further detail was provided by newspaper sources, especially the *Irish Times*, and by figures from the Central Statistics Office.

Access to accounts of the personal experiences of those who lived through the times, who witnessed the hardships, or who experienced poverty and received aid from charities such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul, tended to be elusive, but some perspectives were available from published memoirs and recollections. These included Johnston,³⁹ Mac Thomáis,⁴⁰ and the oral recollections of Dubliners in the work of Kearns.⁴¹

Most of the research for this study was undertaken in the archives of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Seán MacDermott Street, with additional sources from the Dublin Diocesan Archives. The Byrne and McQuaid papers relating to the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the Dublin Diocesan Archives are not extensive and suggest that the Society's relationship with the hierarchy was courteous and non-confrontational. Most of the records relate to routine correspondence acknowledging donations from the archbishops, details of their forthcoming attendance at Society functions, or reports of the Society's works. The papers of Dermot Ryan, appointed archbishop of Dublin in 1972, were not available.

The archive material of the Society of St Vincent de Paul is not catalogued, but access was available to some of the early minutes, including those from the founding years in the nineteenth century, and of the council of Ireland in the mid-twentieth, which provided detail of the council of Ireland's responsibilities and activities in the immediate post-war years.

³⁴ *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927); *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin, 1963); *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems: Report* (Dublin, 1970); *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare* (Dublin, 1986).

³⁵ Séamus Ó Cinnéide, *A law for the poor: a study of home assistance in Ireland* (Dublin, 1970).

³⁶ John Curry, *The Irish social services* (Dublin, 1980).

³⁷ Caroline Skehill, *The nature of social work in Ireland: a historical perspective* (Lewiston, c.1999).

³⁸ Aoife Bhreathnach, *Becoming conspicuous: Irish Travellers, society and the state* (Dublin, 2006).

³⁹ Máirín Johnston, *Around the banks of Pimlico* (Dublin, 1985).

⁴⁰ Éamonn Mac Thomáis, *Janey mack me shirt is black* (Dublin, paperback ed., 1984).

⁴¹ Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin street life and lore: an oral history* (Dublin, 1991).

The Society's monthly journal, the *Bulletin*, was the main resource used in this study.⁴² The 600 journals in the fifty-year period revealed a rich source of information on the Society's activities, including special works and visitation, statistical data and financial outlay, and interpretation of the Rule. Its articles and addresses on social and religious topics, as well as on a wide range of administrative issues provided the basis for the chapter themes. Some caution was required, however, in interpreting the views expressed in the *Bulletin*. The views of those in leadership roles predominate and the voice of the general member is less easy to discern. Some correction to this limited perspective was available from the *Bulletin* reports of group discussions, and, in later years, the introduction of a correspondence page, where constructive criticism was invited. Another source of opinion from members was provided from reports of surveys carried out by the Society from the 1960s. The council of Ireland's *Annual Report* was also a major source for statistical data, accounts details, reports from conferences and general policy and organisational matters.⁴³

The *Manual* of the Society, containing its Rule, which was first published in 1845 and remained unaltered until the 1960s, when it was replaced by the New Rule,⁴⁴ was used to compare the official requirements against actual practice. Jubilee records,⁴⁵ that highlighted the milestones in the Society's history also provided a useful reference point over time.

Interviews and informal conversations with a number of members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, some active members since the 1940s, helped to clarify detail, and provided unique personal viewpoints and memories. In true Vincentian tradition, their identity has not been revealed. A set of minutes for a local conference were used extensively for a case study and will be considered in greater detail in Chapter Six.

⁴² *Bulletin of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, 1856–* [hereafter *Bulletin*].

⁴³ Council of Ireland, *Annual Report, 1926–75* [hereafter *Annual Report*].

⁴⁴ *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul*, 21st ed. (Dublin, 1958); *The Rule of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, 1968–1973* (Dublin, c.1968). [hereafter *New Rule*]

⁴⁵ *The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland, 1845–1945* (Dublin, c.1945); *St Vincent's, Glasnevin, Centenary Record, 1856–1956* (Dublin, c.1958).

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, 1833–1925

Although several young men are listed among the founders of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Paris in 1833, Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam is recognised as the principal co-founder. Described by Fagan as ‘exceptionally gifted, with a precocious intelligence and unusual intuition’,¹ Ozanam acquired a double doctorate, in laws and in literature, at the Sorbonne, and wrote widely on social and religious issues. He went on to become a university lecturer at the Sorbonne.² After his death in 1853, at the age of forty, his wife arranged to have his writings published, an undertaking that ran to nine volumes.³

When he arrived in Paris as a student in 1831, Ozanam found the environment difficult to come to terms with after his devout, sheltered family life in Lyons. At the university, his religious feelings were assaulted by the indifference or hostility of fellow students, who engaged him and his like-minded friends in heated debates. His introduction to the physicist, André-Marie Ampère, proved to be fortuitous.⁴ Ampère, although a man in his fifties, shared many of Ozanam’s religious and intellectual interests, and he soon became part of a circle of writers and religious thinkers that included Montalembert and Lacordaire.⁵ The Saint-Simonian cult believed that society required a new, unified philosophical and moral faith to replace the Christian religion, which had become indifferent to social progress.⁶ Although a professed secular cult, its members were unwittingly to provide the circumstances that led to the founding of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. In 1833, they challenged Ozanam and his companions to demonstrate the value of Christianity by their deeds rather than by their words.⁷

Frédéric Ozanam, with seven others, took up the challenge and began to visit a small number of poor families in the city. The original group were all

¹ Austin Fagan, *Through the eye of a needle: Frédéric Ozanam* (Slough, 1989), p. 11.

² Fagan, *Through the eye of a needle*, p. 128.

³ Coates, *Letters of Frédéric Ozanam*, p. 1.

⁴ O’Meara, *Ozanam, his life and works*, pp 344–5.

⁵ Fagan, ‘Political and social ideas of Ozanam’, p. 4.

⁶ Charlton, *Secular religions in France*, pp 65–78.

⁷ O’Meara, *Ozanam, his life and works*, p. 73.

under twenty years of age, apart from Emmanuel Bailly, publisher of the Catholic newspaper, the *Tribune Catholique*, who made his offices available for their first meeting.⁸ The activities of the Conference of Charity, as it became known, were simple: the members, called ‘brothers’, met to discuss their shared religious convictions and to put Christianity into practice by visiting a few poor families in the district every week. The fact that their activities strengthened the bonds of friendship within the group was also important to Ozanam, given his own sense of isolation during his first days as a student in the city. As others asked to join the circle, the original group expanded, split into new groups, known as conferences, and chose as their patron, Vincent de Paul, the seventeenth-century priest and founder of two religious orders and of a lay group devoted to the care of the poor.⁹

Despite his central role in shaping the ideology and constitution of the new society, Ozanam did not assume any leadership position in its early years, but did continue to engage in visitation work. Emmanuel Bailly became the first president-general of the Society in 1835. His family were custodians of the seventeenth-century records of Vincent de Paul, and he was considered largely responsible for infusing the Vincentian traditions into the rule of the Society.¹⁰ With another co-founder, law student, Francois Lallier, he drew up the Rule and formulated the practical aspects of visitation work. After some minor adjustments in its early years, the original Rule was to be used by conferences of the Society throughout the world until the late 1960s.

The civilising influence of religion was a constant theme in Ozanam’s writings.¹¹ Although initially spurred into action by the challenge of the St Simonians, the practical application of charity in the emerging group had much appeal for Ozanam, as he had not wished religion to be reduced to a series of debating points. Although his lectures and writings did consider specific social problems, such as the rights of workers and industrial conflict,¹² his concerns were less about the transitory nature of specific political systems than about the

⁸ O’Meara, *Ozanam, his life and works*, p. 74.

⁹ See Pierre Coste, *The life and works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, translated from the French (London, 1934).

¹⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 3 (Mar. 1943), p. 62.

¹¹ Fagan, ‘Political and social ideas of Ozanam’, pp 38–41.

¹² Fagan, ‘Political and social ideas of Ozanam’, pp 368–9.

broader concepts of freedom, social justice and democracy. In what Fagan described as his ‘exaggerated confidence in human goodness’,¹³ Ozanam contended that a more charitable attitude towards human suffering would provide the best remedy for social ills. Justice could not be restored entirely through legislation but required a change of heart on the part of both the giver and the receiver. The rich must be prompted by a combination of charity and justice to help the poor, and the poor must accept their generosity without bitterness.¹⁴

In describing the Society as part of the movement of Social Catholics in nineteenth-century France, Lynch sums up this philosophy of mutual benefit:

Relations between the home visitors of the Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul and ‘their’ families ... were clearly marked by basic inequalities of the social order. However, Social Catholics intended to transcend these man-made inequalities and establish a sense of moral community on the basis of renewed values of mutual obligation and reciprocity.¹⁵

Apart from the immediate spiritual and temporal relief that benefited both, Frédéric Ozanam believed that, as brothers of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, they had the opportunity to show that Christianity could have a pacifying role in the circumstances of a divided nineteenth-century France.

The question of what is agitating the world today is ... a struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much; it is the violent clash of opulence and poverty, which is shaking the ground under our feet. Our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between those two camps, in order to help to accomplish through charity what justice alone cannot do.¹⁶

Because the first members of the Society were students, they had little financial resources to give. They saw themselves neither in competition with government agencies nor with other charities. Ozanam, by then in his home city of Lyons, explained the purpose behind the Society’s work in 1838:

The alms distributed by the boards of assistance and the parochial charities ... would provoke disagreeable comparisons and perhaps complete contempt for the assistance we offer ... But the principal object of this assistance is to ensure our moral influence; our task is to put right the interior disorder of the homes of our poor; to see to the

¹³ Fagan, ‘Political and social ideas of Ozanam’, p. 52.

¹⁴ Fagan, ‘Political and social ideas of Ozanam’, pp 16–21.

¹⁵ Lynch, *Family, class and ideology in early industrial France*, p. 224.

¹⁶ Baunard, *Ozanam in his correspondence*, p. 257.

education of the children and their employment; to alleviate many sorrows and, above all, to destroy vice.¹⁷

In nineteenth-century France, little pressure for social change had emanated from the hierarchy, whose memory of the 1789 Revolution contributed to their continued suspicion of modern ideas.¹⁸ Many Catholic lay people, too, identified democracy with disorder.¹⁹ Although the clergy were frequently aware of, and concerned about, social problems, Price maintains that their theological training led them to propose traditional solutions to these problems, such as stressing the love of God, obedience to his commandments, charity on the part of the rich and resignation on the part of the poor.²⁰ While Ozanam was doctrinally orthodox, and did not propose ideas that were contrary to official church teaching, he regretted the lack of involvement by churchmen with the poor.²¹ In a letter to his brother, he wrote: 'If a greater number of Christians, and above all of priests, had but occupied themselves with the working class these last ten years, we should be more secure of the future...'²² Lynch suggests that the failure of the institutional church to attend to the needs of the working classes was the main reason why lay groups such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul became actively involved.²³

The primary purpose of the Society was firmly established from the beginning: the sanctification of its members through charitable works. The visitation of a family was seen as a means to an end, literally the opening of a door to a relationship that could offer moderate material assistance, lasting friendship and mutual spiritual benefit for both parties. Emmanuel Bailly, first president-general of the Society, instructed the original group: 'Sanctify yourselves in seeing Jesus Christ suffering in the person of the poor.'²⁴ Besides undertaking home visitation, the members began to engage in other works: establishing clothes depots, visiting prisoners, arranging apprenticeships for

¹⁷ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Ozanam letter, 1838, p. 209.

¹⁸ Price, *Social history of nineteenth-century France*, p. 267.

¹⁹ Fagan, 'Political and social ideas of Ozanam', p. 32.

²⁰ Price, *Social history of nineteenth-century France*, p. 273.

²¹ Fagan, 'Political and social ideas of Ozanam', pp 23, 50.

²² Cited in Lynch, *Family, class and ideology in early industrial France*, p. 42.

²³ Lynch, *Family, class and ideology in early industrial France*, p. 226.

²⁴ Charles Kavanagh Murphy, *The spirit of the Society of St Vincent de Paul* (Cork, 1940), pp 25–6.

young people and securing work for those who had none.²⁵ In its first ten years, more than 130 conferences had been established throughout France, with 4,000 active members.²⁶

The Society began to expand outside France, with the first conference in Italy in 1836, in Turkey in 1843 and in Scotland by 1848.²⁷ Jules Gossin, the second president-general, published the first *Manual* in 1845, containing the Rule, prayers and other instructional material, to preserve the unity of the expanding society.²⁸ Frédéric Ozanam had encouraged a young English student in Paris to submit an article on the Society to the Catholic weekly newspaper, the *Tablet*.²⁹ The article resulted in Frederick Lucas, the journal's editor, becoming a founding member of the Society in London in January 1844.³⁰

By the time of the arrival of the Society in Ireland in late 1844, many religious orders were already playing a role in feeding Dublin's poor and in providing, staffing and financing hospitals, schools and homes.³¹ The Irish Sisters of Charity worked at the temporary cholera hospital at Grangegorman during the cholera epidemic from the early 1830s, and the Sisters of Mercy staffed another cholera hospital in Townsend Street in the same period, and John Spratt, of the Carmelite order, served on several relief committees in the city.³² The Poor Law Act of 1838 provided for relief but only within the workhouse, and the Temporary Relief Act of 1847 was to restrict its outdoor relief to specific types of destitute people, such as those with infirmities, or widows with more than two children.³³ Those who were not sufficiently destitute to commit themselves and their families to the workhouse had largely to rely on charities.³⁴

²⁵ Coates, *Letters of Frédéric Ozanam*, pp 81–2.

²⁶ Report read at first general meeting of the Council of Ireland, 21 July 1845 (copy), contained in Council of Ireland minutes, 1851–66 (SVPA).

²⁷ *St Vincent's, Glasnevin, Centenary Record, 1856–1956* (Dublin, c. 1957), p. 5; *Bulletin*, xciv, no. 6 (June 1949), p. 141.

²⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 3 (Mar. 1935), pp 66–71.

²⁹ Archibald Dunn, *Frédéric Ozanam and the establishment of the Society of St Vincent de Paul* (London, 1913), p. 28.

³⁰ Dunn, *Ozanam and establishment of Society*, p. 29.

³¹ T.P. O'Neill, 'The Catholic church and the relief of the poor 1815–45', in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxxi (1973), p. 135.

³² O'Neill, 'Catholic church and relief of the poor', p. 144.

³³ Burke, *People and the Poor Law*, pp 44, 116.

³⁴ See, for example, Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, and Woods, *Dublin outsiders: a history of the Mendicity Institution*.

At the time of the establishment of the Society, Daniel Murray and Richard Whately occupied the Catholic and Anglican archiepiscopal sees of Dublin; Daniel O'Connell was an alderman; the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Association had assisted more than 27,000 people in the previous twelve months. Over 100 guardians, staff and chaplains were employed in the North and South Dublin Union workhouses.³⁵ One of the guardians was Thomas Willis, apothecary, soon to join eighteen other men as founding members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Bartholomew Woodlock, vice-rector of the newly-established All Hallows Missionary College in Drumcondra, a priest of the Dublin diocese, and later, bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, is acknowledged as the principal founder of the Society in Ireland. He trained for the priesthood at the Appoline in Rome, and was a fluent Italian and French speaker.³⁶ Although a meticulous record-keeper and letter-writer on other matters, he wrote little on the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and it is not easy to determine why he became associated with its introduction into Ireland.³⁷ Delivering a centenary paper on the origins of the Society at a general meeting in the Mansion House in 1945, a member of the council of Ireland allowed himself some speculation on Woodlock's primary motive:

How, when, or where Dr Woodlock got the inspiration to launch the Society we do not know for certain, although it is possible he may have met Ozanam himself, either in Paris or in Rome. One thing we do know is, that the low ebb to which religion had sunk amongst the majority of the Catholic laity was one of the compelling motives ...³⁸

The arrival of the Society in Ireland may also simply be part of the general trend that saw it extend beyond France to other countries in the decade following its establishment.

Woodlock was an educationalist rather than a social reformer – he was to succeed John Henry Newman as rector of the Catholic University in 1861. His condemnation in 1868 of the secular French education system that had separated the clergy from the laity, gives a clear indication of his thinking at that time. 'The danger for Ireland', he commented, 'is not Protestantism but

³⁵ *Dublin Almanac, 1844, passim.*

³⁶ Kevin Condon, *The Missionary College of All Hallows, 1842–1891* (Dublin, 1986), p. 195.

³⁷ Martin, 'Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon', p. 80.

³⁸ *Bulletin*, xci, no. 3 (Mar. 1946), p. 67.

unbelief.’³⁹ Because of his concerns over the lack of religious zeal among young men in Dublin, once expressed to a fellow bishop,⁴⁰ a lay organisation that combined opportunities for spiritual development through charitable works may have had particular appeal. Charles Kavanagh Murphy, writing a century later, added:

... following close upon Emancipation our Society accomplished much in Dublin in bringing men of position and influence in the city to a loyal practice of the faith.⁴¹

The nineteen founding members of the Society were older than their French counterparts, mostly established business and professional men, and members of the Catholic middle class. They met in the parish of St Michan’s on 16 December 1844, at the White Cross rooms, in Charles Street West, near the Four Courts, to begin the process of establishing the Society in Ireland. Many were connected through professional, family and social ties. Thomas Willis, an apothecary and doctor, lived and worked in the district.⁴² In his report on the living conditions of the poor in the city, published in 1845, he described how his research had taken him through the densely crowded districts, ‘from house to house and from cellar to garret, principally in the poor streets of St Michan’s parish’.⁴³ His son, Richard, was also a doctor and was to become the Society’s first secretary.⁴⁴ John Alcorn, a leather merchant, lived in nearby High Street.⁴⁵ Redmund Peter O’Carroll was an attorney, legal adviser to the National Board of Education, and a friend of Archbishop Murray; barrister, John O’Hagan, credited with authorship of the new organisation’s first annual report, published in 1846, was a member of the Young Ireland movement.⁴⁶ Also present at the first meeting was John O’Connell MP, son of the Liberator. Woodlock’s father, an attorney, had been a close associate of Daniel O’Connell

³⁹ Bartholomew Woodlock, *Educational dangers: the bearing of education on the future of Ireland* (Dublin, 1868), p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Memoir of the Most Rev. Dr Woodlock* (Dublin, 1903), p. 5. See also *All Hallows Annual, 1903–1904*, pp 12–14.

⁴¹ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 158.

⁴² Martin, ‘Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon’, p. 33.

⁴³ Willis, *Facts connected with the social and sanitary conditions of the working classes*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ White Cross minutes, 10 February 1845 (copy), contained in Council of Ireland minutes, 1851–66. [hereafter White Cross minutes] (SVPA).

⁴⁵ *Thom’s Directory, 1844*, p. 413.

⁴⁶ Martin, ‘Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon’, pp 65, 68, 179.

during the Emancipation campaign.⁴⁷ Another priest, Stephen Farrell, a curate in Francis Street, is listed among the co-founders.⁴⁸

The business and purpose of the committee was announced in formal terms at the second meeting, just before Christmas, 1844:

First, that having learned of the many and great advantages produced by the Society of St Vincent de Paul in France and England, we have to express our most unqualified approbation of the objects which it proposes to itself and of the means which it makes use of to attain those ends. Second, that on the one hand admiring this Society and on the other considering the situation of this country and of Dublin in particular, we are most desirous to have it established in this city.⁴⁹

That they intended to engage immediately in the active work of the Society is evident from the business of this second meeting. The minutes show that they were already planning to approach local purveyors and to procure food tickets that could be presented in exchange for groceries.⁵⁰ The tickets would be given to the poor during home visitation and used to acquire a range of provisions at designated shops, such as bread, meal, milk, tea, potatoes, butter, as well as coal and turf.⁵¹

Archbishop Murray was pleased to grant permission for the establishment of the Society in the diocese. As a recent member of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Poorer Classes in Ireland, he had been made acutely aware of the extent of poverty in the city.⁵² In 1845, he wrote:

... a source of consolation springs up within me when I find that according to one of those beneficent plans which that great Servant of God, your glorious patron, St Vincent de Paul, pointed out for the alleviation of human misery, you have been moved by divine grace to form yourselves into a society ... I approve most warmly of your holy project.⁵³

The archbishop appointed Woodlock as spiritual director of the Society in Ireland.⁵⁴ By the summer of 1845 the Society had fifty-nine members and had

⁴⁷ Condon, *Missionary College of All Hallows*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ White Cross minutes, 16 Dec. 1844 (SVPA).

⁴⁹ White Cross minutes, 23 Dec. 1844 (SVPA).

⁵⁰ White Cross minutes, 23 Dec. 1844 (SVPA).

⁵¹ Martin, 'The Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon', p. 122.

⁵² Burke, *People and the Poor Law*, p. 17.

⁵³ Daniel Murray to members of White Cross conference, 1 Feb. 1845, recorded in White Cross minutes, 3 Feb. 1845 (SVPA).

⁵⁴ White Cross minutes, 23 Dec. 1844 (SVPA).

held its first general meeting.⁵⁵ In the course of this meeting, a report was read to the members on progress of the Society in France that succinctly sums up its early development, aims and activities:

About twelve years ago, a few Parisian young men associated themselves together for purposes of general piety and charity, taking St Vincent de Paul for their model and patron. When their members increased they formed themselves into a definite society with rules and purposes, their principal objects being to encourage one another in the practice of a Christian life, to relieve the poor by visiting them in person and distributing to them alms in kind, to give them not only food but religious advice and consolation, to watch over the education of their children and to diffuse moral and religious books. These were their chief objects but at the same they excluded no work whatever of real charity.⁵⁶

Redmund O'Carroll was elected first president of the council of Ireland in February 1846,⁵⁷ but was to die the following year at the age of forty-three, the victim of a typhus epidemic.⁵⁸ Given the size of the Society in its early years – less than twenty conferences in the country as a whole by 1847⁵⁹ – it would not have been possible to mount a major relief operation during the Famine, but the council of Ireland was able to appeal directly to the council-general in Paris for aid from other countries where the Society was established.⁶⁰ Holland was the main contributor, with Italy, Turkey, France and England also giving donations. The Mexicans, although at war themselves, contributed, and within a few months, 153,000 francs, over £6,000, had been raised and sent to the Society in Ireland.⁶¹

By the end of 1850, there were twenty-four conferences in the country, seven of these within the Dublin city area.⁶² Adolphe Baudon, third president-general, paid a visit to Dublin in 1856.⁶³ Although the main work of the conferences was visitation of the poor in their homes, the Rule encouraged

⁵⁵ White Cross minutes, 21 July 1845 (SVPA).

⁵⁶ Report read at first general meeting of the Council of Ireland, 21 July 1845, contained in Council of Ireland minutes, 1851–66 (SVPA).

⁵⁷ *Annual Report, 1846*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Martin, 'Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon', p. 64.

⁵⁹ Martin, 'Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon', p. 188.

⁶⁰ *Manual*, 1850 ed., pp 313–14.

⁶¹ *Manual*, 1850 ed., p. 315.

⁶² *Manual*, 1850 ed., p. 366.

⁶³ *St Vincent's, Glasnevin, Centenary Record*, p. 9.

conferences to undertake additional ‘special works’.⁶⁴ St Vincent’s Orphanage in Glasnevin, and the Penny Banks savings scheme, became the first of these works in Ireland. In 1855, Richard Devitt, a member of the council of Ireland, proposed the establishment of ‘a male orphanage for the destitute children of Dublin’.⁶⁵ The fear of proselytism and the threat to Catholic orphans from zealous mission groups is likely to have prompted the initiative. An immediate need was also generated by the Crimean war and the Indian mutiny. In October 1856, over 3,000 soldiers who had served in Irish regiments in the Crimea were welcomed home with a banquet held in an extensive warehouse on Customs House Dock.⁶⁶ For the sons of the soldiers who didn’t return, there was the possibility of free board and education at St Vincent’s Orphanage:

... Cardinal Cullen succeeded in getting the claims of these children to Catholic education recognised and the Society erected a new orphanage at Glasnevin to provide ample accommodation for them and for the children of their own poor.⁶⁷

The Christian Brothers assumed responsibility for the running of the orphanage and educational needs of the boys in 1863,⁶⁸ while the orphanage committee looked after funding and generally oversaw its development.⁶⁹ The academic, sporting and musical achievements of the boys were to be constant themes in its reports in future years. A two-day bazaar, held in 1865, had, as one of its attractions, ‘the chorus and band of the Orphanage, mostly the sons of those who perished in the Crimean and Indian wars’.⁷⁰ During a serious epidemic of smallpox in the city in 1872, the Society was able to report that ‘not one of the little fellows fell a victim to its ravages’, attributing the success in keeping the disease at bay to good care and increased food given to the boys by the Christian Brothers.⁷¹ When the Society’s long-serving president, John Bradstreet, died in 1889, nearly 200 boys from St Vincent’s, wearing crêpe

⁶⁴ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 2.

⁶⁵ Council of Ireland minutes, 13 Dec. 1855 (SVPA).

⁶⁶ H.A. Gilligan, *A history of the Port of Dublin* (Dublin, 1988), pp 136–7.

⁶⁷ *Annual Report*, 1953, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Martin, ‘Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon’, p. 165.

⁶⁹ Council of Ireland minutes, 4 Aug. 1856 (SVPA).

⁷⁰ *Irish Times*, 8 May 1865.

⁷¹ *Annual Report*, 1872, p. 8.

rosettes and white crosses, joined the cortège in Glasnevin and accompanied it to the cemetery.⁷²

The Society's Penny Banks savings scheme was first proposed in 1860⁷³ to encourage families to save small amounts throughout the year and to draw out the accumulated amount at Christmas or in an emergency. By 1865, there were several Penny Banks established, with over 34,000 deposit-holders in Dublin.⁷⁴ Despite their popularity, the banks generated heavy administrative work for conference members at local level and the scheme, after nearly seventy years, was closed by the late 1920s.⁷⁵

As Prunty has observed, concerns about morality and religious practice were part of the slum story of nineteenth-century Dublin. Organisations of all denominations believed that the poor could be helped through education, religious practice and good habits to become decent, industrious and self-supporting men and women. Given that the population of Dublin was overwhelmingly Catholic, by definition, general visitation of the poor by Protestant mission agents meant visitation of the Catholic poor.⁷⁶ In 1856, the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul were sufficiently perturbed about the problem to invite Archbishop Paul Cullen, to attend a special meeting 'to see how conferences could cooperate with the archbishop and the clergy to check and put down proselytism in Dublin'.⁷⁷ Cullen's view was that, as the brothers were visiting poor families in their own homes, they were already providing a useful service by identifying potential dangers to children.⁷⁸ A report of the centenary celebrations for St Catherine's conference in Meath Street, published in the 1956 edition of the *Bulletin*, referred to the early history of the conference and its 'continuous effort to combat proselytism' and to make up for the lack of educational facilities for Catholic children by hiring rooms and paying teachers to instruct poor children.⁷⁹ In 1861, the Kingstown conference reported that it was seriously in debt due to 'expenses largely

⁷² *Irish Times*, 25 Nov. 1889.

⁷³ Council of Ireland minutes, 3 Sept. 1860 (SVPA).

⁷⁴ *St Vincent's, Glasnevin, Centenary Record*, pp 10–11.

⁷⁵ Minutes of the conference of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore, 7 Aug. 1928 [hereafter Inchicore minutes (in private hands)].

⁷⁶ Prunty, *Dublin slums*, pp 234–5.

⁷⁷ Council of Ireland minutes, 21 May 1856 (SVPA).

⁷⁸ Council of Ireland minutes, 8 June 1856 (SVPA).

⁷⁹ *Bulletin*, c, no. 8 (Aug. 1956), p. 202.

incurred in endeavouring to counteract the proselytising movement'.⁸⁰ Well into the twentieth century, the Society of St Vincent de Paul continued to regard with suspicion the motives of those who managed certain Protestant charities, schools or residential homes.

In 1855, the council-general requested that the Society in Ireland take responsibility for translating the *Bulletin* into English for distribution to members in the English-speaking world.⁸¹ The president-general gave a grant of £20 towards the work, and a committee was set up to oversee the translation.⁸² It was an arrangement that was to endure for over 120 years. The choice of Ireland for its English-language publications and translation work may have been prompted by a natural affinity between the two predominantly Catholic countries. Woodlock's fluency in French may also have proved beneficial in the initial negotiations.

In 1861, the Society in France suffered a crisis. Adolphe Baudon, the president-general, wrote to the council of Ireland in 1861 to report that the Society's headquarters in Paris had been cut off from its branches by government order. Although the Rule was explicit that there should be no implication of the Society in political movements,⁸³ the imperial government believed that some Society members had clerical and royalist sympathies, including Baudon.⁸⁴ Jean Persigny, the Minister of the Interior, tolerated conferences at local level, provided they registered with the mayor of the commune, but the council-general in Paris was considered less amenable to government control and was dissolved, and its powers delegated to Baudon alone.⁸⁵ He was forbidden to communicate with any of the conferences throughout France.

From the Society's offices on Essex Bridge in Dublin, Sir John Bradstreet, president of the council of Ireland, made an emotional appeal to the Emperor, Napoleon III, reiterating that the Society was completely apolitical and that its only function was to assist those in need, whether at home or abroad:

⁸⁰ Council of Ireland minutes, 6 May 1861 (SVPA).

⁸¹ Council of Ireland minutes, 28 Dec. 1855 (SVPA).

⁸² Council of Ireland minutes, 3 Mar. 1856 (SVPA).

⁸³ O'Meara, *Ozanam, his life and works*, p. 17.

⁸⁴ Price, *Social history of nineteenth-century France*, p. 277.

⁸⁵ Fagan, 'Political and social ideas of Ozanam', p. 56.

... When our country was visited in 1847 and 1848 by a famine scarcely paralleled for extent and intensity in the history of civilised countries, the Council General addressed the conferences of the world on behalf of the Irish poor. ... Contributions were sent from every country in which our conferences have been established. ... Through it we learned of the spiritual wants of the wounded American Catholic soldiers, many of them our countrymen, when prisoners of war in the hospitals of Mexico... Again, when the conferences of New Orleans had to contend with the epidemic of yellow fever raging with unusual violence, the Irish conferences had the happiness, through the Council General, of contributing to relieve their wants...⁸⁶

His appeal had no effect. The council-general in Paris remained out of contact with its conferences throughout France until 1870.⁸⁷

In Ireland, the Society had continued to expand in the years after its foundation in 1844. Its role in the relief of poverty in Dublin was recognised by the civil authorities in 1861 when it was requested to ... 'assist Mr Place with statistics and other information relating to works of the Society as he may require to make use of in giving evidence before the parliamentary committee now investigating the operation of the Poor Law in Ireland'.⁸⁸

That some of the early members were influential men who identified with the higher strata of society is suggested by the announcement in the *Irish Times* in 1865 of a two-day bazaar in aid of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The event was to include a balloon ascent and fireworks display, and was described as 'the most brilliant pyrotechnic exhibition ever attempted in this city'. The advertisement noted that the event coincided with the birthday of 'Her Most Gracious Majesty, the Queen' on 24 May, and added that 'their Excellencies, the Lord Lieutenant and Lady Wodehouse have graciously signified their intention of being present'.⁸⁹

Behind the grandeur of the occasion, the Society members were constantly under pressure to respond to the overwhelming needs of the destitute poor. The 1873 annual report stated that many conferences were largely subsidised by the Central Committee for the Relief of Irish Distress, located in the Mansion House.⁹⁰ In 1873, the grocers of the city made a donation of £500 towards

⁸⁶ Address to the Emperor, Napoleon III, Council of Ireland minutes, 16 Dec. 1861 (SVPA).

⁸⁷ Price, *Social history of nineteenth-century France*, p. 277.

⁸⁸ Council of Ireland minutes, 1 Apr. 1861 (SVPA).

⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, 8 May 1865.

⁹⁰ *Annual Report, 1873*, p. 4.

providing provisions for the poor in eighteen conferences of Dublin city and suburbs.⁹¹ The wet winter of 1879–80 and the widespread distress that followed from the failed harvest was beyond the Society’s ability to cope. Even though the council-general’s appeal raised £5,000, the Society in Ireland left funding on this occasion to the public committees, deciding to intervene only when public funds were exhausted.⁹² A fear of ‘overlapping of relief’⁹³ and the need to be provident in managing its funds for the relief of the poor’⁹⁴ are referred to in the reports of the time. Of fourteen conferences formed since 1867, three had gone out of existence within ten years.⁹⁵ A new wing to the orphanage in 1877 incurred an outlay of £3,200 and put pressure on finances.⁹⁶

Daly cites a report compiled by two members of the police force in 1886 that confirms the extent of the difficulties experienced by the Society in Dublin in the late nineteenth-century:

... The Society of St Vincent de Paul ... gives relief to a class of people who would not enter a workhouse and if possible would not let their poverty be known. A man in the office of the Society informed us that there ... [are] more people looking for charity this year than he ever had known before. The strain is so great at present on the funds of the Society that it is heavily in debt and some of their branch offices are closed for want of funds...⁹⁷

Few references to prominent, active members emerge from this period, which may be indicative of a lack of strong leadership in the Society. Sir John Bradstreet’s long presidency of the council of Ireland lasted from 1855⁹⁸ until 1889.⁹⁹ In the early foundation years, Archbishop Murray had been a supportive ally who warmly welcomed the arrival of the Society in the 1840s. Although Paul Cullen was described at the time of his death in 1878, as ‘a true friend of the Society’,¹⁰⁰ the strengthening of hierarchical authority under his episcopate may not have provided the ideal climate for the expansion of a lay organisation. Most of the founders had died by the 1870s. Thomas Willis, aged

⁹¹ *Bulletin*, xix, no. 2 (Feb. 1874), p. 51.

⁹² *Annual Report*, 1880, pp 16–18.

⁹³ *Annual Report*, 1880, p. 17.

⁹⁴ *Annual Report*, 1878, p. 9.

⁹⁵ *Annual Report*, 1876, p. 5.

⁹⁶ *Annual Report*, 1877, p. 13.

⁹⁷ Mary E. Daly, *Dublin, the deposed capital: a social and economic history, 1860–1914*, 2nd ed. (Cork, 1985), p. 101.

⁹⁸ Council of Ireland minutes, 19 Nov. 1855 (SVPA).

⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, 25 Nov. 1889.

¹⁰⁰ *Annual Report*, 1878, p. 5.

ninety-one, died in Bray in 1881.¹⁰¹ Bartholomew Woodlock outlived all the other co-founders of the Society in Ireland and died at All Hallows College in 1902 at the age of eighty-four.¹⁰²

Under the presidency of Judge Charles Waters in 1893, a decision was taken to restructure the Society, and at the annual gathering of presidents it was proposed that additional councils be established as an initial step.¹⁰³ Apart from the Penny Banks, the Orphanage, and two evening schools for boys, established in 1898,¹⁰⁴ there had been few initiatives undertaken by the Society that could be described as ‘special works’. With the coming of the new century, Matt Lalor, a member of the council of Ireland, was to provide the personal qualities and commitment that led to a surge of growth, both in the number of conferences and in the variety of new special works. The twenty-five conferences in Dublin in 1904 had increased to fifty-six in Dublin and suburbs by 1919.¹⁰⁵ This pattern of growth was reflected in conference figures for Ireland as a whole:

Table 1.1 Conferences in the cities and towns of Ireland, 1880–1925

Year	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925
Conferences	120	140	140	163	168	170	170	200	243	280

Source: *Thom’s Directory*, various, 1880 to 1925.

Several new special works were established in the city during Lalor’s active years in the Society, including the Seamen’s Institute for mariners visiting the port, and the Secretariats, later known as Advice Bureaux, which provided advice and information on legal and welfare matters.¹⁰⁶ To celebrate the centenary of the birth of Frédéric Ozanam in 1913, a fifty-bed Night Shelter for homeless men was opened in Great Strand Street, which moved to a much larger, purpose-built shelter in Back Lane, off High Street, in 1915.¹⁰⁷ Matt Lalor had been appointed first president of the council of Dublin in 1912 in a

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 18 Apr. 1881.

¹⁰² *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1903, p. 461.

¹⁰³ *Annual Report*, 1893, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Annual Report*, 1896, p. 14 and 1898, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ *The Society in Ireland, 1845–1945*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Catholic Standard*, 26 Feb. 1937.

¹⁰⁷ Pádraig Yeates, *Lockout: 1913* (Dublin, 1999), pp 333–5.

process that separated the affairs of the Dublin council from the national office of the council of Ireland. The following year brought the 1913 strike and lockout, during which the Society arranged to have 20,000 school meals served to poor families, and more than 15,000 items of clothing distributed.¹⁰⁸

A modest relaxation by the twentieth century in its attitude to publicity may also have helped to generate more public support for the Society and its works. Traditionally, Christian humility, as formulated in the Rule, forbade the members from drawing attention to their activities in any way. As far back as 1847, the brothers in Rathmines were instructed not to wear distinguishing badges when walking in Daniel O’Connell’s funeral procession.¹⁰⁹ While the annual report for 1899 stated that publicity was to be avoided in order to ‘preserve the unostentatious character of the organisation’, the archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, suggested that the Society should give some consideration to letting its works be known more generally, and it was agreed, after consultation with the council-general, that the annual report and proceedings of quarterly general meetings be sent to the press.¹¹⁰

The Society was particularly sensitive to any hint of association with political movements. With amazing restraint, the editor of the *Bulletin* managed to avoid any direct reference to the 1916 Rising, even though its offices over Mackey seed merchants, at 23 Upper O’Connell Street, were almost opposite the General Post Office. The editor simply explained that the delay in getting editorial material from France was ‘owing to postal disarrangement arising directly out of the recent disturbances in Dublin’.¹¹¹

The ‘Report on Relief of Special Distress from 29 April to 7 May 1916’ was published in the *Bulletin* because it was considered to be a ‘very exceptional’ situation that required that the Society’s role in providing relief be put on record.¹¹² The account read:

On Friday the 28th, it became evident that there was widespread destitution in the city owing to the scarcity of food in the retail shops and the total cessation of employment in the city. ... I was informed that the government had set up a food supply committee under the

¹⁰⁸ Yeates, *Lockout*, p. 465.

¹⁰⁹ Council of Ireland minutes, 4 Apr. 1864 (SVPA).

¹¹⁰ *Annual Report, 1899*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Bulletin*, lxi, no. 6 (June 1916), p. 161.

¹¹² *Bulletin*, lxi, no. 6 (June 1916), p. 165.

chairmanship of Sir Henry Robinson, and I was invited ... to join this committee.¹¹³

The report was written by the president of an unidentified Dublin conference, and described how the government set up food depots throughout the city and suburbs, principally in convents and similar institutions, and how voluntary workers helped to distribute food from the depots. The military authorities commandeered all the food supplies at the North Wall and at Kingsbridge, and ordered some of the large wholesale merchants to open their stores to allow food to be transferred to the military stores. Lorries, laden with food supplies, were sent under guard to the local depots. By Sunday, 30 April 1916, some 80,000 people had received food at the various depots. The food committee then asked the Society of St Vincent de Paul to undertake relief work in the city for a further week. The brothers began by visiting the homes of the poor to determine the level of need. Special relief tickets were issued to the value of 2s. 6d. which could be exchanged for food by any retailer in Dublin. Members used Ozanam House, north of the Liffey, and the Night Shelter in Back Lane on the south side, as headquarters for their work. Almost 40,000 tickets were distributed by house-to-house visitation. The Society finished its emergency work on 7 May, and the Poor Law authorities undertook the relief from the following day.¹¹⁴ In July 1922, the Society suffered more directly from the conflict when its premises in O'Connell Street were damaged by fire, and furniture and records destroyed.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the annual report in 1923 was happy to state that the 'very abnormal conditions which existed in 1922 and for some years prior thereto had almost completely passed away.'¹¹⁶

In contrast to the conditions that prevailed at the time of the Society's foundation in 1844, when the only statutory form of relief was the Poor Law, by the early twentieth century, a number of state welfare provisions had been introduced. The Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897, the Old Age Pension Act, 1908, and the National Insurance Act, 1911, provided some measure of protection from extreme poverty.¹¹⁷ In 1925, the Dublin Union Commissioners

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, lxi, no. 6 (June 1916), pp 162–5.

¹¹⁴ *Bulletin*, lxi, no. 6 (June 1916), p. 165.

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 12 Apr. 1924.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin*, lxi, no. 9 (Sept. 1924), p. 277.

¹¹⁷ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare* (Dublin, 1986), pp 28–32.

reported that they had expended £86,500 in poor relief during the year.¹¹⁸ The Society of St Vincent de Paul visited 8,500 families in the city, totalling 34,800 individuals, and spent £20,000 on assistance.¹¹⁹

While the founding members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, both in France and in Ireland, were motivated by the Christian call to charity, additional elements converge to form part of the foundation story. Ozanam believed that French Christians could play a crucial role as mediators in class conflicts, and saw the visitation of the poor in their homes as an example of how the giver and the receiver could engage in a harmonious relationship.

In the Irish context, it is not possible to identify a precise founding moment, or to explain why the Society was introduced into Ireland in 1844. That Bartholomew Woodlock recognised its potential for countering slack religious commitment among young professional men is the preferred explanation. It may also simply have been part of a general trend that saw the Society extend beyond France to other countries in the decade following its establishment.

The members of the Society in France avoided publicity because the Rule proclaimed that they perform their duties in the spirit of Christian humility. Another reason for this obscurity was their concern over how the government of the day might view an overtly Christian organisation. Despite the insistence that the Society remained aloof from political movements, it was not to escape suspicion during the reign of the emperor, Napoleon III.

Restriction on religious freedom was no longer an issue in Ireland in the post-Emancipation era, but the new foe for the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul was seen to be from the evangelical groups. That the Society in Ireland quickly established standing with its international counterparts is evident from the rapid response to the Famine appeal in 1847, and from the council-general's decision to entrust the Irish council with the translation and publication of its English-language journal. The moderate growth in membership under a long-serving president in the late nineteenth century, that gave way under new leadership to rapid expansion in the twentieth, suggests the

¹¹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 16 Jan. 1926.

¹¹⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 3 (1926), Mar. supp., p. 28.

vital role, for good or ill, played by the president of the voluntary organisation, an issue that will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, leadership positions in the Society remained predominantly in the hands of titled or professional men, suggesting that the historical origins for its middle-class image were well founded.

CHAPTER TWO

ORganisation and Structure

Any young man joining the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the diocese of Dublin in the 1920s would have been made aware that the primary purpose of membership was his own sanctification, achieved by service to the poor.¹ At the weekly meeting, he would be assured that more experienced brothers were there to provide friendship and support and to introduce him to the works of the conference. The prayers and publications of the Society would motivate and sustain him spiritually. Its structures, proven over time, would help to make him an effective member of the organisation. Cordiality and a sense of unity among members would be reinforced by attendance at the festival meetings. The society's *Manual* with the Rule would be his guide, and the monthly *Bulletin* would inform, interpret and provide vision and motivation. As a voluntary member who freely gave his time and services to the Society, the authority of the various higher councils would be based entirely on 'acceptance, good example and persuasion'.² This chapter will examine the leadership and administrative aspects of the Society, and how it communicated its message and organised its internal affairs. It will also consider the difficulties experienced with recruitment and retention of members, youth issues, and the introduction of women into the Society.

At the top level of the Society, the council of Ireland oversaw the work of the councils and conferences, maintained the link with the council-general in Paris, ensured that new conferences were formally aggregated, and generally upheld the interests of the Society, which in 1926 had about 5,000 Irish members. There were also up to 1,000 honorary members, who participated in the prayer life of the Society but not in its active works.³ Sir Joseph Glynn was elected president of the council of Ireland in 1917. In his earlier years, he had practised as a solicitor in Tuam and was a former member of Galway county council.⁴ He was doubly knighted: by John Hamilton-Gordon, lord lieutenant of

¹ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 1.

² *Manual*, 1929 ed., article 5 and commentary.

³ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 5.

⁴ *Who's Who, 1922*, p. 1051.

Ireland, in 1915,⁵ and by Pope Pius XII in 1944.⁶ He was also vice-president of the Catholic Truth Society in Ireland, publishers of his best-selling life of Matt Talbot in 1926,⁷ and chairman of the National Health Insurance Commission from 1911 to 1933.⁸ Glynn was a man in his fifties when he became president of the Society. He took a close interest the workings of state relief systems under Poor Law legislation, and at how they affected the lives of the poor, and the funds of the Society. His lengthy addresses and reports on the organisation's progress and shortcomings were regular features in the *Bulletin* during the 1920s and 1930s.

New recruits in the 1920s were often young men who had come to Dublin from the provinces and rural areas, joined the civil service, and involved themselves in charitable works in the evenings.⁹ The conferences had a good deal of autonomy. As long as they carried out the basic work of home visitation, funded their activities and held weekly meetings, their obligations were largely fulfilled. They might receive an annual visit from members of a higher council, whose task it was to strengthen inter-conference bonds and also to monitor the conference's progress and its conformity to the Rule:

The purpose of those visits is to bind each conference to the council by direct contact, to ensure as far as possible that the conferences are working in accordance with the practices and traditions of our Society, and to bring from one conference to another such new ideas or reports of useful activities as will further the work of the Society ...¹⁰

Each conference was obliged to submit an annual report to the council of Ireland on its work during the year, accompanied by a detailed account of income and expenditure for the twelve months.¹¹

A member joining a conference in the Dublin diocese could become affiliated to one of three distinct groups. By far the largest group of conferences was under the jurisdiction of the particular council in Dublin,

⁵ *Irish Times*, obituary, 8 Mar. 1951.

⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxix, no. 3 (Mar. 1944), p. 50.

⁷ *The Catholic Truth Society of Ireland: first fifty years* (Dublin, 1949), p. 39; Anne M. Brady and Brian Cleeve (eds), *A biographical dictionary of Irish writers* (Dublin, 1985), p. 86.

⁸ *Irish Times*, 8 Mar. 1951.

⁹ Ó Broin, *Frank Duff: a biography*, p. 28; information from a member of the Society, 14 Dec. 2007.

¹⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 4 (Apr. 1939), pp 85–6.

¹¹ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 12 and commentary.

which in 1926 had seventy conferences.¹² Most of its conferences were in city parishes or in adjacent suburbs, although major expansion would take place with the development of new housing areas from the 1930s. The much smaller particular council of south County Dublin extended along a narrow coastal belt, from the southern half of County Dublin into the northern part of County Wicklow. It had ten conferences in 1926,¹³ and its numbers rarely rose above twenty. If a member lived on the fringes of the Dublin diocese, at Athy, County Kildare, or Balbriggan in north County Dublin, his conference might be part of a third group, known as ‘isolated conferences’, which were directly under the jurisdiction of the council of Ireland (see Appendix One).

Matt Lalor, then a man in his seventies, was president of the particular council of Dublin in 1926, and in the final decade of his presidency, having served in the role since 1912. All matters relating to the conferences in Dublin city and suburbs were his responsibility. A successful businessman, Lalor had tobacconist shops in Nassau Street and in Westland Row.¹⁴ His welcoming home in Blackrock attracted many fellow Vincentians and would have been favoured by Frédéric Ozanam for its fraternal hospitality. He was a founding member of the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society, and a close friend and adviser to Frank Duff in the early days of the Legion of Mary.¹⁵ For nearly forty years, he devoted his energies to building up the Society and saw it grow during the period in Dublin and suburbs from twenty-five conferences with 500 members in the early years of the century, to nearly 80 conferences with 1,500 members by the 1930s.¹⁶

Despite the growth in conferences over the years, the difficulty in retaining young recruits was a constant preoccupation for the Society. Of all the topics aired in the pages of the *Bulletin*, matters relating to youth conferences and to young members in adult conferences, were given the most attention. Dublin had a small number of school conferences at this time, but at the annual meeting of presidents in 1927, it was maintained that boys of seventeen years of age could not be expected to follow the rules and spirit of the Society and needed

¹² *Annual Report, 1926*, pp 33–4.

¹³ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 146.

¹⁴ *Thom's Directory, 1927*, p. 974.

¹⁵ Ó Broin, *Frank Duff: a biography*, pp 26–30.

¹⁶ *Catholic Standard*, obituary, 26 Feb. 1937.

supervision from senior members; others argued that young men would not join a conference manned by older men and would quickly drop out.¹⁷ Making a plea for a probationary period before full membership, Jesuit priest, Fr Michael Kirwan, argued in 1928 that many new members had no idea of what the work entailed, that they were taught little or nothing, yet became fully-fledged members too soon, but, accustomed to a protected, hot-house environment ‘when they get the first cold blasts whistling down the tenement stairs, they die.’¹⁸ The question of recruitment was a perennial concern for Henri de Vergès, the president-general, who asked the rhetorical question in 1935: ‘Will youth ever remain insensible to the appeals addressed to it?’¹⁹

Dublin’s first youth conference of the Holy Ghost had been established in Blackrock College in 1900, not for secondary school students but for those preparing for university examinations.²⁰ Its first secretary was the young Éamon de Valera, later president of the conference from 1901 to 1904.²¹ By 1926, there were fourteen youth conferences in Dublin, mainly for schoolboys, past pupils and university students,²² and by 1929, there was a conference attached to St Patrick’s Training College in Drumcondra.²³ The students’ conference in University College Dublin had seventy-five members by 1935,²⁴ and in 1938, two new juvenile conferences were established in the Christian Brothers’ school in Synge Street and in Coláiste Mhuire.²⁵ The numbers of youth conferences grew slowly up to the 1960s.

While many of the discussions centred on tensions between new recruits and the more experienced members, Lonan Murphy, president of the council of Ireland, emphasised that the Society needed both young and older men:

It welcomes all men who will ... serve, be they rich or poor, intelligent or lacking in great formal education, energetic or the less enthusiastic, employers or workers. Vincentianism has a place and work for all.

¹⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 1 (Jan. 1938), pp 18–19.

¹⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 6 (1928), June Supp., p. 9–10.

¹⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 2 (1935), Feb. Supp., p. 1.

²⁰ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 5 (May 1966), p. 132.

²¹ Martin, ‘Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon’, p. 65.

²² *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 17.

²³ *Bulletin*, lxxiv, no. 1 (1919), Jan. Supp., p. 3.

²⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 2 (1935), Feb. Supp., p. 5.

²⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 5 (May 1939), p. 152.

Many men find the work a hobby in which they gain welcome relief from the monotonous labours of their daily job.²⁶

All conference members were expected to play their part in ensuring that new members were attracted to the Society. A speaker at a gathering in 1941 recommended that a brother approach acquaintances at work, where he should tactfully, but with precision, form a plan for enlisting them:

He should not be timid in approaching them, nor should he set too high a standard of moral or temporal worth for his candidature. ... Apart from the essential qualifications, there is only one thing we should look for in our candidate: that he should be a man likely to work in the spirit of charity and fellowship with his brother members.²⁷

A brother from the particular council of Dublin made the gloomy prediction that, with the prevailing levels of leakage in 1948, that the 'Society should be defunct in Dublin by 1960'.²⁸ The role of the president was deemed to be crucial, both in recruiting new members and in all aspects of running a conference:

Although the president is never more than an elder brother, the first among equals, experience proves that as the president is, so is the conference. ... He must, above all, have zeal ... energy of mind and ... maturity of judgement. ... He must have ... an understanding of the works of the Society so as to be able to overcome the difficulties which the exercise of the works of charity present.²⁹

Yet, because there was no restriction on the length of time a president could remain in office, major difficulties were experienced by councils and conferences, at home and abroad. The commentary to Article 9 of the Rule defined the duration of office as being for 'an indefinite period' but the precedent of president-for-life had been well established in the nineteenth century. Adolphe Baudon, third president-general, held office from 1847 until 1883, and John Bradstreet had been president of the council of Ireland from 1855 to 1889. Long-serving, elderly presidents were having a detrimental effect on the morale and efficiency of both conferences and councils, yet the council-general remained adamant that if the tradition were changed, the

²⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 6 (June 1942), pp 141–2.

²⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 9 (Sept. 1941), p. 201.

²⁸ *Bulletin*, xciii, no. 11 (Nov. 1948), p. 261.

²⁹ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 9 and commentary.

inconvenience of having to carry out frequent elections would outweigh any advantages.³⁰

Charles Kavanagh Murphy, a member of the council of Ireland from Cork, and author of a number of works on the Society, was highly critical of the practice of fixed term of office and saw it as a threat to the future of the Society.

Unless some means be found – and without delay – of terminating a president’s tenure of office, I believe the Society of St Vincent de Paul will perish. The information available shows that it is suffering extensively from the consequences of the present most unsatisfactory system of office-holding. Unfortunately the *Manual* commentary on this serious question – article 9 of the Rule – quite underestimates the gravity of the situation.³¹

Such direct criticism was unusual by a member of the Society. The *Manual* and Rule were revered as the fundamental charter and essential reading for all members. The introduction to the *Manual*’s twenty-first edition in 1958 was able to declare that the ‘Rule was scrupulously reproduced, including even details referring to situations long past.’³² While the Rule, with its instructions on practical details such as council formation, the election of officers, and procedures at meetings, had remained unaltered since the 1830s, the accompanying commentaries in the various editions of the *Manual* did change over the years. Many of the circular letters from former presidents-general were written originally in the circumstances of nineteenth-century France, yet had continued to be reproduced into the twentieth century. Article 7 of the 1922 edition of the *Manual* referred to how a conference provided ready-made friendship and a family circle for young men in moral danger ‘who have left the paternal roof’.³³ This is a possible reference to the sense of support that Frédéric Ozanam, a lonely student in Paris, had experienced in the new group. This commentary was dropped in later editions.

When a member stood up in the Mansion House in 1932 to deliver a paper on the economic crisis affecting the Society, his audience of over 500 included thirteen members of the clergy. All these clergy were subsequently named in the *Bulletin*. In the tradition of the time, publicity for its members was not

³⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 9 (Sept. 1940), pp 271–2.

³¹ *Bulletin*, c., centenary issue (Jan. 1956), pp 24–5.

³² *Manual*, 1958 ed., p. 10.

³³ *Manual*, 1929 ed., pp 46–7.

permitted, and the speaker was simply referred to as ‘a brother’.³⁴ While the organisation had its own internal network of communications, its relationship with many outside bodies remained reserved. Even a joyful occasion was announced with a note of restraint. At a gathering in the Capitol Theatre on North Prince’s Street, in 1945 to celebrate the centenary of the first Irish conference, the president of the council of Ireland warned:

We must be sure that no circumstances will lead us to stray from the path of detachment and anonymity in which our traditions have been laid and in which our works have grown up. Corporate pride is just as alien to us as individual pride. Our purpose in these national celebrations ... is not to take pride in the past but to learn from it; and not to rest on the present, but to build from it.³⁵

Nonetheless, such reserve was known to have its disadvantages, both in terms of recruitment and in the promotion of the works of the Society. If members, it was suggested at a meeting of presidents in 1947, were known in their places of business to be associated with the Society of St Vincent de Paul, ‘more young men would flock to our ranks’.³⁶ Yet, Radio Éireann’s request in 1954 for permission to make a programme on the boys’ clubs was granted only on the condition that the participating members remained anonymous.³⁷

Sir Joseph Glynn was in his eighties and in poor health when he stood down after twenty-four years as president of the council of Ireland. The election of his much younger protégé, Joseph Lonan Murphy, in 1941 was hailed as an opportunity for an infusion of new energy and youthfulness into the Society.³⁸ Murphy was a grandson of one of the founding members of the Society in Ireland in 1844, James Baldwin Murphy,³⁹ and was a solicitor, with offices in Nassau Street.⁴⁰ Despite the age difference of nearly fifty years, the older man was to outlive the younger. During a cycling holiday to France in 1947, Lonan Murphy became ill with appendicitis and died following surgery. He was forty years of age. His unexpected death was a particular shock to younger

³⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxviii, no. 1 (1933), Jan. Supp., p. 3

³⁵ *Bulletin*, xc, no. 10 (Oct. 1945), pp 225–6.

³⁶ *Bulletin*, xcii, no. 12 (Dec. 1947), Ir. Supp., p. xxii.

³⁷ Inchicore minutes, 19 Oct. 1954.

³⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 10 (Oct. 1942), p. 233.

³⁹ Martin, ‘Society of St Vincent de Paul as an emerging social phenomenon’, p. 69.

⁴⁰ *Thom’s Directory*, 1945, p. 1222.

members.⁴¹ Following his death, Joseph Flood, a much older man, was unexpectedly cast in the role of president of the council of Ireland. A member, who was a young man at the time of his election in 1947, recalled that he worked diligently to preserve what his predecessor had accomplished but he did not remember Flood as a great motivator, or for any inspirational addresses.⁴²

Growth in the number of conferences was viewed as an essential indicator of the health of the organisation. The particular council of Dublin had seventy-eight conferences in 1931, rising to 100 ten years later, and to 122 by 1950.⁴³ Signs of poor performance were highlighted at gatherings of the Society or were commented upon in the annual reports. The average weekly attendance by members in 1942 was 64 per cent, which was not considered satisfactory.⁴⁴ A paper read 'by a member of the council of Ireland' at a festival meeting in Dublin in 1954 referred to 'certain disquieting features' in the Society in Dublin. Members' contributions to the secret collection had not risen in line with expenditure; there were difficulties in recruiting young members. Other 'alarming symptoms' were falling numbers at the general meetings and even attendance levels at the annual retreat.⁴⁵

General meetings of members were seen as the principal means of keeping the conferences in 'fraternal communion with the Society in general'.⁴⁶ The Mansion House on a Sunday afternoon was a regular venue for the quarterly meetings, where members would gather to hear a long address from a guest clergyman or a detailed report on the Society's activities. New members were formally introduced on these occasions, but the ordinary member took no personal part in the proceedings. Poor attendance was a regular source of complaint:

It was very strange that the recent ceremonies in commemoration of the centenary of the death of our founder [Ozanam] did not attract as many as one-half of our members. That peculiarly disturbing form of indifference definitely furnished food for thought ...⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Bulletin*, 127, no. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 8.

⁴² *Bulletin*, 127, no. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 8.

⁴³ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 7; *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 47; *Annual Report, 1950*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ *Bulletin*, xcix, no. 5 (May 1954), pp 104–5.

⁴⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (May 1935), p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Bulletin*, xcix, no. 5 (May 1954), pp 104–5.

Although the *Manual* stated that a potential member's socio-economic background was of no relevance, nevertheless, as has been shown, those in leadership positions had standing and influence in the Society in Ireland from its earliest years. This middle-class image continued to be maintained through social contacts and methods of recruitment. In 1942, a member of the Society addressed students at two of the country's well-established boarding schools for boys, Clongowes and Castleknock colleges.⁴⁸ Writing to inform Archbishop McQuaid of the Society's annual appeal meeting in the Mansion House in October, 1944, Edward Duffy, president of the council of Dublin, referred to those who would be attending:

His Honour Judge Davitt is acting as secretary to the meeting and the following have kindly agreed to speak: Messrs P.J. Little, T.D., Minister for Posts and Telegraphs; C.S. Lavery, S.C; Liam Cosgrave, T.D; Rory Henderson (Secretary, National Health Insurance Society); James Clune (Managing Director, Messrs. Todd Burns & Co. Ltd.), and Dr J.A. Harbison, M.O.H., Dublin County.⁴⁹

In 1948, all the twenty Dublin-based members of the council of Ireland lived in settled residential areas, within easy reach of the city (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Council of Ireland members: places of residence, 1948

Ballsbridge Booterstown Dalkey Donnybrook Drumcondra	Glasnevin Glenageary Monkstown Rathfarnham Rathgar	Rathmines Sandycove Sandymount Stillorgan Terenure
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Source: Council of Ireland Minutes, 1945–1948, appended list (SVPA).

Five other members of the council of Ireland lived outside Dublin at this time: in Cork, Donegal and Waterford, and two in Galway.⁵⁰

The Society's 24-page monthly journal, the *Bulletin*, was the principal means of disseminating information, both at home and abroad. Popularly known as the 'Irish' *Bulletin*, the editor's task was to translate the most important items in the French *Bulletin* and to add reports submitted from Irish, English, American, African, Australasian, Indian, Canadian councils and conferences.

⁴⁸ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ E.J. Duffy to John Charles McQuaid, 14 Oct. 1944 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

⁵⁰ Council of Ireland minutes, 1945–1948, appended list (SVPA).

In an address to members at a quarterly meeting in Dublin in 1926, the editor of the *Bulletin* explained its general purpose and international role:

Apart from the French matter, it reports on the activities of conferences and councils throughout the world and articles on charitable or social activities complete the *Bulletin*, which circulates in the English-speaking countries. A diligent reader is therefore assured of being kept in close touch with the council-general, the fountain head of the Society; with the development of the Society in various foreign areas and the papers on general social subjects are calculated to excite thoughts for the more perfect attainment of our objects.⁵¹

During the Second World War, when news was interrupted from occupied France, the president of the council of Ireland declared that it had been a source of consolation that, through the *Bulletin*, the Irish had been able to keep the Society in touch with Vincentian activity over a greater part of the world.⁵² Yet, Dublin members of the Society were not known to be avid readers of their journal. At a quarterly meeting in December, 1942 the president of the council of Dublin declared himself to be:

...astonished and, indeed, horrified to learn recently that there were 20 conferences in Dublin that did not subscribe to the *Bulletin*, and 38 that subscribed for one copy only. Out of 1,600 brothers in Dublin city there were only 249 subscribers. That was not a creditable record for a paper that was the official journal of the Society. The subscription was only 4s. a year, less than one penny per week.⁵³

When Joseph Flood resigned in 1954, he was succeeded by Michael Christie as president of the council of Ireland. Christie was editor of the *Bulletin*, before, during and after his term as president, and had been Clerk of the Seanad until his retirement in 1953.⁵⁴ His daunting task in editing the Society's journal every month and seeing to its international distribution was often acknowledged. Because of his editorial role, he may have felt precluded from expressing personal views in the pages of the journal, and there is little to indicate his official stance on Society matters during his time as president.

By 1954, when the particular council of Dublin had 130 conferences,⁵⁵ the question arose of dividing the council into smaller units. The particular councils of Dublin and of south County Dublin were replaced by five particular

⁵¹ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 9 (1956), Sept. Supp., p. 4.

⁵² *Bulletin*, lxxxviii, no. 3 (Mar. 1943), pp 60–61.

⁵³ *Bulletin*, lxxxviii, no. 2 (Feb. 1943), p. 44.

⁵⁴ *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1971.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 28.

councils under the new central council of Dublin in 1957.⁵⁶ (See Appendix Two). The practice of visitation of conferences by higher councils receives little mention in the *Bulletin* from the 1950s. A member recalls that, apart from the time and travel involved, many of those appointed to carry out the visitation work did not find the task congenial, with its implication that the visitors were in some way monitoring the performance of fellow members.⁵⁷

The Society in Ireland was to enter a period of major development with the election of the Cashman brothers as presidents of the council of Ireland: Bill from 1960 to 1969, and his younger brother, Bob, from 1969 to 1975. Both men were energetic, visionary and articulate, and their addresses at meetings and reports played a large part in how the Society shaped its structures and expressed its changing identity in the 1960s and 1970s. Bill Cashman's influence saw the *Bulletin* take on a new role from the 1960s: as disseminator of the official drafts from international meetings of the Society and of the documents arising from the Second Vatican Council:

The council of Ireland shares the view that the triennial plenary meetings of recent times have given a tremendous fillip to the Society and it has, therefore, strained every effort to make the *Bulletin* play its part in publicising the plenary meeting of 1963, so that the utmost benefit could be realised by every member of the Society in the countries where our *Bulletin* circulates.⁵⁸

A small Irish newsletter, containing news of purely local interest, came into being at this time, allowing the *Bulletin* to expand its coverage of international affairs. Yet, despite its significance, the *Bulletin* continued to have financial problems.⁵⁹ The annual subscription for the first issue in 1856 had been 4s., and it had remained at that price until 1965, when rising costs forced the price to 6s.⁶⁰ The editor remarked that there tended to be more expressions of appreciation from readers abroad than from Irish members. His suggestion that the Irish *Bulletin* might no longer be relevant was met by 'a howl of anguish' from overseas members.⁶¹ A response to complaints about the dowdy appearance of the *Bulletin* from younger members led to an invitation from the

⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, ciii, no. 10 (Oct. 1958), p. 236.

⁵⁷ Information from a member of the Society (Feb. 2008).

⁵⁸ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 1 (Jan. 1964), p. 24.

⁵⁹ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 6 (June 1969), pp 153–5.

⁶⁰ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 6 (June 1969), p. 153.

⁶¹ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 6 (June 1969), p. 155.

editor for suggestions on how content, particular features, even the title, could be improved. He asked if a quarterly, containing the most important council-general statements and news, and significant world news generally, with a few good and carefully selected articles, would meet current needs, national and international. Perhaps, he suggested, the title 'Bulletin' was a bit old-fashioned? Other journals seem to be going for snappy contemporary titles such as 'Reality' and 'Phoenix'. Most respondents wished the *Bulletin* to remain a monthly publication and were prepared for a reasonable price increase.⁶²

Despite these efforts to engage the members directly in the future of the *Bulletin*, only half the readers had paid their annual subscription by October 1970. At this time, the journal was hit by a 100 per cent increase in printing costs, and a rise in postage rates by 50 per cent.⁶³ It was no longer possible to produce a monthly publication at the current subscription rate, yet the journal could not be subsidised out of the Society's charitable funds. The editor asked for views on whether the members felt that the only solution was a substantially increased subscription rate for 1971.⁶⁴

A New Zealand reader raised the question as to why the journal could not be subsidised. The Irish *Bulletin*, he argued, was looked upon as the principal publication of the society in the English-speaking world. 'If the primary purpose of the *Bulletin* is to make us better informed so that we can be better Vincentians, surely that justifies the spending of the Society's funds on it, for indirectly, it is the needy who will benefit ultimately', he maintained.⁶⁵ It was the direction that the Society would subsequently take. Its survival in the past had depended on the commitment of unpaid editors who had to contend with the uncertainties of production costs and fluctuating circulation levels. In the future it would become a journal that had as its sole purpose the promotion of the Society's aims and works.

Attitudes to publicity in the Society also underwent a major change from the 1960s. An American delegate at an international gathering of the Society in

⁶² *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 11 (Nov. 1969), pp 275–6.

⁶³ *Bulletin*, 115, no. 10 (Oct. 1970), p. 228.

⁶⁴ *Bulletin*, 115, no. 11 (Nov. 1970), editorial, n.p.

⁶⁵ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 5 (May 1971), pp 117–18.

Paris in 1960 had tentatively referred to the positive role that public relations could play in the future of the Society:

If we recognise as valid this spiritual desire for growth, our Society must also recognise the validity of employing those human means and techniques that are consistent with this objective. While we will, naturally, remain cautious about human means ... we shall be less than wise if we completely ignore the modern media for communicating our message in our parishes and in our communities.⁶⁶

In 1964, the council of Ireland announced the publication of an eight-page, illustrated brochure that was designed to bring the Society to the notice of both clergy and laity, especially young people. Authors of articles in the *Bulletin* began to be referred to by their names. When a member enquired whether it was in order for councils and conferences to give accounts of their activities and expenditure to their local newspapers, he was given this reply:

Not only is it permissible, but it is most desirable. It is the best possible way of rendering an account of how we use the money given to us by the charitable public. Identifiable details of persons assisted should not, of course, be given.⁶⁷

The New Rule acknowledged that if members concealed their good works too diligently, they were in danger of being misunderstood. It was also recognised that the media were reluctant to deal with material from an organisation where neither a contact name nor a photograph were supplied:

Therefore, such personal publicity is often unavoidable in the interests of the Society and must be accepted. The essential point is that it is not being personally sought by those involved. In any event, we should not give the impression that we are a secret society.⁶⁸

A key international meeting of the Society had taken place shortly after Bill Cashman's accession to office in 1960. With its stress on spirituality, youth, universality and adaptability, it provided him with a base for the policies he was to introduce during his presidency.⁶⁹ A major impetus to the development of youth conferences was given at this meeting when the president-general, Pierre Chouard, urged that presidents of councils do all in their power to establish more youth conferences, consisting entirely or mainly of schoolboys up to

⁶⁶ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 5 (May 1961), p. 97.

⁶⁷ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 5 (May 1966), p. 135.

⁶⁸ New Rule, p. 63.

⁶⁹ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 8 (Aug. 1971), p. 182.

eighteen years of age.⁷⁰ Cashman responded by establishing a permanent youth committee at council level and by appointing three young men in their twenties to the council of Ireland.⁷¹ Major growth in the number of youth conferences followed. Of the eight hundred conferences in Ireland in 1967, 25 per cent had been formed in the previous four years and most were youth conferences.⁷² The 1960s heralded a decade of youth congresses at home and abroad. In 1961, seven young Irish brothers were in Amsterdam for a European youth congress.⁷³ Later the same year, the first national youth congress was held in Dublin, with more than 200 young brothers participating.⁷⁴ Guests at the third national youth congress in 1968 included young people representing the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, visitors from England and Scotland and a number from other national organisations.⁷⁵ The following year, the Dublin particular council for youth clubs organised a seminar for its members on the drug problem.⁷⁶

Members of junior conferences were considered capable of carrying out all the traditional works of the Society, such as visiting hospitals and old people, painting and papering, chopping up firewood, collecting and distributing clothes, helping on children's outings, and organising fundraising events.⁷⁷ In the first year of its existence, a Bray youth conference took seventy-five children from an orphanage in Rathdrum, accompanied by five nuns, on a day's outing to the seaside.⁷⁸ Yet, young members of adult conferences often complained that they were not given their fair share of work.⁷⁹ Church collections and the delivery of the Catholic papers were all that some youthful members were allowed to do, a factor that may have caused many to abandon the Society after a short period.⁸⁰

⁷⁰ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 10 (Oct. 1960), p. 217.

⁷¹ *Annual Report, 1960*, p. 5.

⁷² *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 9 (Sept. 1967), p. 223.

⁷³ *Annual Report, 1961*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Annual Report, 1961*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 12 Oct. 1968.

⁷⁶ 'Review of 1969', typewritten report from the Council of Ireland to John Charles McQuaid (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

⁷⁷ *Annual Report, 1959*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, cvii, no. 9 (Sept. 1962), p. 209.

⁷⁹ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 5 (May 1964), pp 118–19.

⁸⁰ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 5 (May 1966), p. 134.

The speed of growth in the youth conferences was not without difficulties. A survey by the Society's youth committee in 1963 showed that many of the young people were not in touch with the broader aims or activities of the Society. Weekly attendance rates at conferences were low and few went to Society functions or read the *Bulletin*. Many dropped out and few transferred to adult conferences. A more sympathetic, guiding hand from senior members while allowing youth conferences to operate independently and in a spirit of trust was advised.⁸¹ The National Youth Congress held in Dublin in 1964 recommended that each youth conference should have a close liaison with a neighbouring adult conference:

... resulting in fraternal contact and mature guidance, while in no way leading to domination or infringement of the essential independence of the youth conference, is essential if the huge wastage of members from the youth conference at the traditional period is to be reversed.⁸²

A woman member of the Society who joined while at school, gave her views on why young people joined and why they dropped out.

What seems to happen is that many young people join the Society because a friend of theirs is joining ... I remember this happening when I was at school. A gang of us joined ... it was marvellous. ... It made us less self-satisfied and middle class, and for many of us was the beginning of any serious thinking on social or political lines. ... it welded those of us who had joined, both to the group and to each other. Which, as it turned out, was a double-edged sword. Groups of pals tend to break up very quickly if one or more members go away...⁸³

Bill Cashman also viewed the introduction of young people to the works of the Society as having an impact beyond the immediate advantages to the organisation:

... we have always held that it is a very good thing for young people to know that there is poverty and suffering in the world, that they can do something about it and that, in so doing, they can help themselves. ... nobody can read the decrees of the Vatican Council without being struck by the number of references to young people and the responsibilities of their elders to help them to exercise an apostolate.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Bulletin*, cx, no. 2 (Feb. 1965), pp 35–42.

⁸² *Bulletin*, cx, no. 6 (June 1965), p. 171.

⁸³ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 3 (Mar. 1973), p. 58.

⁸⁴ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 5 (May 1966), p. 133.

By 1966, there were eighty-three conferences of boys and girls in Ireland under the care of the Society's national youth committee.⁸⁵ At the 1968 annual meeting of Irish presidents in All Hallows College, the Society's traditional image as a predominantly middle-aged group of men had been significantly transformed:

It could almost be described as the 'swinging' Society of St Vincent de Paul! The attendance of nearly 600 was the largest ever, and ranged from boys and girls in their early teens to men who had spent long lifetimes in the Society. Never before were there so many 'minis' in evidence, or so many 'mod' hair styles and beards!⁸⁶

Women were not admitted as active members of the Society in Dublin until the late 1960s.⁸⁷ Traditionally, they had played a strong support role in the Society's activities. When the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society were re-organising their fundraising in 1919, the Society of St Vincent de Paul supplied them with the names of 500 women who had collected money on its behalf.⁸⁸ Women were particularly active during and after the Second World War, when clothing was scarce and needlework skills in demand. John Lennon, the president of the council of Dublin, thanked the dean of residence in University College, Dublin in 1943 for setting up a ladies' auxiliary conference whose members were able to call 'where visitors from male conferences were not suitable'.⁸⁹ In the new district of Crumlin in the 1940s, ladies were visiting the homes at the request of conferences and were considered 'very helpful in ascertaining the exact requirements of our families'.⁹⁰

There were two international societies open to women who wished to associate themselves with the Vincentian works of charity. The Ladies' Society of St Vincent de Paul, founded in Bologna in 1856, shared the same aims and structures as its male counterpart but was run as an entirely independent association. After the First World War, women university students in France began forming their own conferences, but felt little attachment to the Society in Bologna. For an experimental period in the 1930s, women conferences became

⁸⁵ *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 12 (Dec. 1967), p. 291.

⁸⁶ *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 9 (Sept. 1968), p. 193.

⁸⁷ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 77 and commentary.

⁸⁸ Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, p. 86.

⁸⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxviii, no. 2 (Feb. 1943), p. 43.

⁹⁰ *Annual Report, 1945*, p. 45.

aggregated to the Society in Bologna for the purpose of gaining indulgences, but remained under the direction of the male Society in Paris.⁹¹ In 1968, both societies were formally merged under the council-general in Paris.⁹²

The Ladies' Association of Charity had been founded in 1617 by Vincent de Paul, and by the 1960s, had half-a-million members in forty countries.⁹³ There was a branch in Dublin by 1843 and the Association became active in the visitation of the homes of the poor.⁹⁴ However, the Association was numerically weak in Dublin by the mid-twentieth century. In 1936 the Society of St Vincent de Paul had seventy-nine conferences in the city, whereas the Ladies of Charity had only eight branches.⁹⁵ The *Bulletin* makes a small number of references to shared activities. In 1945, the Ladies of Charity organised a sale of work for the benefit of Westland Row conferences, and in 1950, held a Christmas party for children in Blackrock with the wives, sisters and relatives of conference members.⁹⁶ Their entry in the *Catholic Directory* for 1961 refers to their work among the sick poor but gives no indication of the number of branches still in existence at that time.⁹⁷

Acceptance of women into the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland had begun by the 1960s but depended on the approval of the bishop of the diocese. The first women's conference was established in Galway diocese in 1962. A second, in Ballina in 1963, was 'warmly approved' by the bishop of Killala. By the end of 1963, there were eight women's conferences in six dioceses.⁹⁸ A report from the plenary meeting of the council of Ireland in 1964 suggests that these new developments had produced positive results:

Some of these conferences are visiting people in their own homes; others are engaged in wardrobe work, hospital visitation ... a seamen's club ... a girls' club. It was clear that the councils which have so far formed conferences are extremely pleased with them, and the reporting

⁹¹ *Bulletin*, lxxviii, no. 9 (Sept. 1932), p. 259.

⁹² *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1968), p. 254.

⁹³ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 6 (June 1963), p. 135; *Bulletin*, cx, no. 3 (Mar. 1965), p. 93.

⁹⁴ See *Prunty, Margaret Aylward, Lady of Charity*, pp 22–34.

⁹⁵ Hartigan, 'Catholic laity', p. 133.

⁹⁶ *Annual Report, 1945*, p. 64; *Annual Report, 1950*, p. 70.

⁹⁷ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1961*, p. 131.

⁹⁸ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 3 (Mar. 1963), p. 68; *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 3 (Mar. 1966), p. 73.

council presidents strongly recommend that all councils should have such conferences.⁹⁹

However, one member, writing in the 1980s, recalled that there was initially some opposition to women conferences:

Ladies were tolerated on certain occasions, particularly when their culinary skills could be turned to good advantage, but the idea of their participating as full members was completely repugnant to members of the Society who had a traditional outlook.¹⁰⁰

While all-women conferences generally came to be accepted, the question of mixed conferences of men and women led to additional debate, both at home and abroad. In 1963, the council-general asked for views from around the world on the issue. The superior council of Japan, where such conferences were numerous, replied that, as far as they were concerned, a conference was a conference. Southern Africa was resolutely opposed, maintaining that it was contrary to the traditions of the Society. It also pointed out that the law or customs of the country did not permit mixed associations. The superior council of India gave the same reason. Many other countries were happy to continue with the informal assistance from women's associations and family members. The council of Ireland did not object to the idea of mixed conferences but felt that, in some instances, ecclesiastical permission 'might not be forthcoming'.¹⁰¹ Ecclesiastical permission had not been forthcoming in the diocese of Dublin. In March 1961, Bill Cashman wrote to Archbishop McQuaid outlining a proposal to establish five women's conferences, one in each Dublin region:

Your Grace very kindly told me last year that you did not object in principle to women's conferences but desired to be consulted in regard to any specific proposals for their establishment in Dublin. ... On behalf of the council of Ireland and the central council of Dublin, I ask your Grace's approval of our proposals. In doing so, I beg to assure your Grace that, if approval is given, the councils and I myself will keep the conferences and their activities under constant and objective supervision.¹⁰²

McQuaid's reply was short. The establishment of women's branches was a major affair, which he had referred to the council of the diocese. He added:

⁹⁹ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 7 (July 1964), pp 152–3.

¹⁰⁰ *Bulletin*, 127, no. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 2 (Feb. 1964), pp 25–6.

¹⁰² William Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 24 Mar. 1961 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

I am very unwilling that any step should be taken that would interfere with the existing Ladies' Association of Charity which predates even the Sisters of Charity.¹⁰³

In his reply, Cashman assured the archbishop that there would be no competition with the work of the Ladies' Association of Charity as the women proposed for the new conferences would not be attracted to that Association.¹⁰⁴ A further plea by Cashman in December 1961 was met again with refusal.¹⁰⁵ P.J. Kilcullen, president of the council of Dublin, entered into direct correspondence with McQuaid in February 1963. He described how a number of ladies had set up a club for old people in the Pro-Cathedral parish, and how another group, from University College, Dublin, were visiting poor women in St Kevin's Hospital. He asked:

I know that you have informed the president, council of Ireland, that the diocesan council does not favour the establishment in the archdiocese of conferences of women's societies of St Vincent de Paul ... yet here are two works in which the assistance of ladies is essential and are crying out to be done. Is there any hope that the decision regarding women and the Society could be amended ...?¹⁰⁶

McQuaid quickly disposed of the issue of women's conferences by stating that there had been a 'unanimous refusal' by the council of the diocese, and then added:

May I point out that it has not escaped the notice of the council that you have, in my own parish and in St Kevin's, organised groups of women visitors without any reference whatever to the Archbishop, and then pressed for the formation of conferences of the women's Society of St Vincent de Paul.¹⁰⁷

As Kilcullen was taken ill and hospitalised, it fell to Bill Cashman to respond to this letter. He attempted to clear up any misunderstanding about the formation of the two groups without McQuaid's permission. Women had worked as informal auxiliaries in Ireland for years and it had never been thought necessary to inform the ordinaries. Now, however, women were unhappy about their

¹⁰³ John Charles McQuaid to William Cashman, 7 May 1961 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁰⁴ William Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 24 May 1961 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁰⁵ John Charles McQuaid to William Cashman, 18 Jan. 1962 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁰⁶ P.J. Kilcullen to John Charles McQuaid, 16 Feb. 1963 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁰⁷ John Charles McQuaid to P.J. Kilcullen, 8 Apr. 1963 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

status and wished to be eligible for the indulgences attached to membership. Since the proposed activities of the Pro-Cathedral and St Kevin's groups were special works, they would not be in competition with the visitation work of the Ladies of Charity. He concluded:

I should also like to ask your Grace not to regard the organisation of these two groups without reference to your Grace as an act of discourtesy. All Irish council presidents are very conscious of their responsibility to their bishops ...¹⁰⁸

By 20 May, an irate Kilcullen had been discharged from hospital and wrote to McQuaid in less deferential tones:

... As to the charge that it has not escaped the notice of the council that I have, in your own parish, and in St Kevin's, organised groups of women visitors without any reference whatsoever to the Archbishop and then pressed for the formation of conferences of the women's Society of St Vincent de Paul, I feel bound to say, with respect, that both personally and as president of the Society in Dublin, I deeply resent the implication of sharp practice and of having ordered my actions in such a way as to endeavour to force an issue.

I did not press for the formation of these groups into conferences of the women's society. I confined myself to asking whether consideration could be given to a request that the two conferences might be formed. My only reason for asking was that the ladies concerned might have the benefits, which they desire, of the indulgences granted to members of the Society, and to their families.

I note and accept the decision that these groups may not be formed into conferences of the women's society of St Vincent de Paul.¹⁰⁹

McQuaid's secretary, in 'acknowledging with thanks the courtesy of your letter', stated that the archbishop had only learned of the two initiatives after they had been established, and he neither denied nor disapproved of the good being done.¹¹⁰ There the exchanges ended. In June 1964, Bill Cashman wrote to the archbishop to thank him for his kind expression of sympathy on the death of P.J. Kilcullen.¹¹¹ Three years later, McQuaid informed Bill Cashman:

Now that the ladies working for the Society of St Vincent de Paul have, in effect, been coordinated in one Society under the control of Paris, I

¹⁰⁸ William Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 19 Apr. 1963 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁰⁹ P.J. Kilcullen to John Charles McQuaid, 20 May 1963 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹¹⁰ J. A. MacMahon to P.J. Kilcullen, 24 May 1963 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹¹¹ William Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 3 June 1964 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

have pleasure in sanctioning in this diocese the formation of ladies' conferences and of mixed conferences in special works.¹¹²

At the end of 1967, the Society's annual report showed that it had 11,000 members in Ireland and 836 conferences.¹¹³ Commenting on the increasing numbers of young representatives, men and women, now appearing at the annual meeting of presidents, Bill Cashman asked them to note that there were members present who were up to eighty years of age and who had given most of their lives in the service of the Society. The fact that the Society could retain members from youth to old age was an indication that it had something to offer, he said.¹¹⁴

Those who had joined the Society as young men in the 1920s would have witnessed several major organisational changes over the years: the restructuring of the geographical divisions in Dublin, the establishment of several special committees by the council of Ireland with responsibility for recruitment, training, public relations, and research and development; the huge increase in youth conferences, the introduction of women. Ciaran King, who joined the Society on leaving school in 1919, was celebrating his golden jubilee as a member in 1969. In his recollections of his fifty years with the Society, he referred to his reservations about the traditional practice of shunning publicity because of the misunderstandings that could ensue:

Whether the Society failed in not spot-lighting the living conditions of the poor is a matter of debate. It has been alleged that the Society played the role of persuading the poor that 'it was the will of God' and encouraged them to accept their lot with resignation. This, of course, was completely false – but then, from a public point of view, the Society was not seen to be doing anything else.¹¹⁵

In 1967 a trial rule was being prepared that would replace the Society's original Rule, nearly 130 years old. The original eighty articles were reduced to fifty-three. The circular letters of long-dead presidents-general were dropped, and each national council was asked to prepare its own commentary that would reflect its unique cultural and social emphasis.¹¹⁶ The new national Rule was

¹¹² John Charles McQuaid to William Cashman, 22 June 1967 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹¹³ *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968.

¹¹⁴ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 9 (Sept. 1966), p. 217.

¹¹⁵ *Bulletin*, 115, no. 4 (Apr. 1970), p. 92.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 1 (Jan. 1967), p. 14.

formally approved in 1974.¹¹⁷ In September 1973, the Society in Ireland hosted an international plenary meeting that brought delegates from sixty-five countries.¹¹⁸ Cormac Ó Broin was elected president of the central council of Dublin in succession to John Ryan in 1969, and Bob Cashman succeeded his brother as president of the council of Ireland.¹¹⁹ The following year, the Society at national level was divided into seven administrative regions, with a vice-president responsible for each.¹²⁰

After much deliberation, the contentious issue of tenure of office for presidents had been finally resolved, when a limited term of office became a requirement in 1970.¹²¹ Yet, some of the Society's traditions were slow to change. Commenting on discussions at an international meeting in Paris in 1968, Bill Cashman said that recruitment was still mainly done by personal contact, and that middle-class, middle-aged conferences would invariably continue to recruit from the same social background and age groups.¹²² Research carried out by the Society's research and development committee in 1970 would support this view. Its survey of 121 nation-wide adult conferences showed that 49 per cent of members were professional employers, managers, senior salaried or farmers; only 11 per cent were classified as manual workers.¹²³

That tensions between youth and age in the Society were not easily resolved is clear from Bob Cashman's comments at the fourth annual youth congress in Kerdiffstown in 1972. Addressing complaints from some of the young that they were being constrained by older members, he criticised their own lack of engagement with the Society in general:

... when I go around the country to diocesan meetings, I don't see you. It is good to have uninhibited meetings of this kind for young people, but it is also important that you should be part of a Society. It is not our fault that we grow old ... this Society has, like every other organisation, people who are young, rather young, oldish and old, and they all form

¹¹⁷ *Bulletin*, 120, nos 5–6 (May–June 1975), p. 2.

¹¹⁸ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 11 (Nov. 1973), p. 236.

¹¹⁹ Robert Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 13 Jan. 1970 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹²⁰ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 11 (Nov. 1971), p. 248.

¹²¹ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 1 (Jan. 1973), p. 2.

¹²² *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 1 (Jan. 1968), pp 7–8.

¹²³ *Bulletin*, cxv, vols 5–6 (May–June 1972), p. 142.

the Society. So unless we all act as one, we are not acting as a community.¹²⁴

While the focus in this chapter has been on the internal organisational aspects of the Society in Dublin, those in leadership positions in the council of Ireland from the late 1960s had additional pressing concerns. In the December 1969 issue of the *Bulletin*, the council of Ireland reported:

The council of Ireland is most grateful for all the messages of concern and offers of help in connection with the troubles in Northern Ireland. Our Society has been and is deeply involved, particularly in Belfast and Derry, in conjunction with a number of organisations. So far, its financial resources have stood up to the demands. The council of Ireland established a special Society fund which is at the disposal of our members in the North when they need it.¹²⁵

This chapter examined how the Society of St Vincent de Paul was structured and governed, and how its leaders attempted to convey the spirit of its Rule to motivate large numbers of voluntary men and women. The recruitment of young men received much attention throughout the period, and even though youth conferences experienced a huge surge of growth from the 1960s, difficulties with retention persisted. The growth in youth conferences and the admission of women resulted in a shift in the gender and age balance, but how many new recruits stayed, and for how long, is difficult to discern in the transitional period of the 1960s and 1970s. Problems with tenure of office of the president were not resolved until 1970. Despite the perceived importance of motivating members and of keeping them informed of developments in the Society and in the church, at home and abroad, the lack of interest in the *Bulletin* was a continuous source of puzzlement and disappointment, especially as members in other countries appeared to be more appreciative of the journal. Unlike their overseas counterparts, however, Irish members received ample coverage of Catholic news in general from the national press and may have felt less need for an additional source. While the Society enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in its activities at all levels, from conference to the council of Ireland, nevertheless, as has been shown, its operations in the Dublin diocese depended ultimately on the approval of the bishop.

¹²⁴ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 4 (Apr. 1972), p. 84.

¹²⁵ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 12 (Dec. 1969), p. 312.

CHAPTER THREE

HOME VISITATION

On 1 January 1926, the *Irish Times* reported on the festivities in the capital the night before:

New Year's Eve was a mild night, in contrast to the severity of the previous week. Large crowds gathered around Christchurch Cathedral or attended gala functions at the Metropole, La Scala and Clery's ballroom.¹

By the end of the year, the Society of St Vincent de Paul would report that its 1,250 members in Dublin had paid 75,000 visits to the homes of the poor.² This chapter describes how the brothers carried out their visitation work, the assistance they gave, and their relationship with those they visited. As social and economic conditions improved, it examines how new types of service were promoted for the families on their lists. It also looks at how its internal review system and training methods were applied in an attempt to maintain standards and to provide a more professional visitation service.

The high levels of employment in Ireland in the 1920s were the result of both the impact of the world economic depression,³ and of local factors, such as the lay-off of labourers on completion of housing and road-making schemes, and army demobilisation.⁴ Of the 1,372 families assisted by the Dublin conferences in one week in August 1928, 82 per cent were in need because of unemployment.⁵ By the following year, there was such pressure on the Society's funds that families with even a small income from unemployment insurance or home assistance 'or the meagre earnings of the charwomen and juveniles' had to be passed over in order to relieve the 7,000 cases of absolute destitution.⁶

In 1927, the president-general, Henri de Vergès, reminded the members worldwide that the essential condition for formal aggregation of a conference to the Society was that the brothers undertake visitation of the poor in their

¹ *Irish Times*, 1 Jan. 1926.

² *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 34.

³ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare*, p. 32.

⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxv, no. 2 (1930), Feb. Supp., p. 3.

⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxiv, no. 1 (1929), Jan. Supp., p. 5.

⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 2 (1930), Feb. Supp., p. 5.

homes.⁷ Ozanam had stressed the practical advantages of personal contact through visitation:

The knowledge of social well-being and of reform is to be learned, not from books ... but in climbing the stairs of the poor man's garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secret of his lonely heart and troubled mind.⁸

The practice that had grown among Society members in Ireland during the nineteenth century of assisting families for a short period only was not considered in conformity with the spirit of the Rule, and was the subject of a number of communications from the president-general who pointed out the faulty visitation procedures. Families were to be 'adopted', he stressed, which meant the brothers were expected to stay in contact with them for an extended period of time, regardless of their need for material assistance, and to offer friendship and support in other ways.⁹ Although Joseph Glynn, president of the council of Ireland, noted with satisfaction in 1932 that the old, hurried fashion of limiting a family to two or three visits appeared to have ceased,¹⁰ the evidence would suggest that time-limited visits, bearing relief during a crisis only, continued to be the norm for many conferences.¹¹

Conference members did not make the initial approach to a family in need. A call for assistance might come from a number of sources: through a neighbour, a priest, a relative, or by direct application by a family to a conference member.¹² The Rule advised the president of a conference to make the first call on a family to assess needs, and subsequently to select two members who were best suited to continue visiting.¹³ In an urgent case, a brother could issue a discretionary food ticket, a coal voucher or a cash amount immediately and have his decision ratified at the subsequent conference meeting.¹⁴ Visiting in pairs was advised, but not insisted upon by the Rule.¹⁵ Two callers had the practical advantage of ensuring that one did not have to

⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxii, no. 12 (1927), Dec. Supp., p. 2.

⁸ Baunard, *Ozanam in his correspondence*, p. 279.

⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 8 (Aug. 1939), p. 253.

¹⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxviii, no. 8 (Aug. 1933), p. 255.

¹¹ See Gallagher, 'Catholic social values in action', pp 21–4.

¹² Interview with a member of the Society (11 Feb. 2008); *Manual*, 1958 ed., p. 85.

¹³ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 5 (May 1942), p. 112.

¹⁴ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 11 (Nov. 1960), p. 263.

¹⁵ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 2 and commentary.

make the assessment alone on how a family was to be assisted.¹⁶ It was recommended that one brother should not dominate the conversation, especially if the other was a comparatively new member:

If one of the pair, who knows the families of old and gets along with them, does all the talking ... the other may begin to wonder what good he is doing at all – he will lose interest and drop away.¹⁷

Charles Kavanagh Murphy, in his address to the quarterly meeting in Dublin in April 1941, urged that those visiting the poor be particularly sensitive to the difficulties they have in expressing their problems:

Few situations cause more pain than to have sought out a friend to tell one's difficulties to and to find that he will not as much as stay to hear the story. The suffering and dissatisfaction caused in this way to the poor is much intensified in their case. For they generally lack the alternative opportunities of seeking advice and help possessed by others.¹⁸

Another sensitive area was the approach to the 'new poor', who had unexpectedly fallen on hard times. It was recognised that these people could not be treated by the ordinary method of visitation, and would loath to have their financial affairs discussed at the local conference meeting. Discreet ways of helping could be resolved locally, perhaps through engaging the president of the conference or the parish priest to make the contact. Jacques Zeiller, president-general in the 1940s, referred to the particular misery experienced by middle class people when their economic fortunes declined.

To seek out and help them we need new methods. We need to free ourselves from that excessive respect for the use of the food ticket which amounts almost to obsession. Use of the food ticket is clearly incompatible with sparing the feelings and the pride of such people.¹⁹

Food, clothing and fuel were the main material requirements of the families visited in Dublin. To stimulate Irish industry in the 1920s, the Free State had imposed import duty on foreign manufacturers of footwear, clothing, blankets and furniture.²⁰ This action would have little effect on the families visited by the Society as such items were already well beyond their reach. Ladies' coats in the January sale in Clery's were priced at 32s. 6d,²¹ while most of those on state

¹⁶ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 2 (Feb. 1959), p. 36.

¹⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 2 (1938), Feb. Supp., p. 5.

¹⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 7 (July 1941), pp 159–60.

¹⁹ *Bulletin*, xci (Oct. 1946), p. 224.

²⁰ Ronan Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922–58* (Dublin, 1978), p. 204.

²¹ *Irish Times*, 4 Jan. 1926.

assistance were receiving less than 10s. a week.²² Families relied heavily on the Society to provide clothing, footwear and bedding material, either through local conference stores of second-hand clothing, or from the Society's central wardrobe in Ozanam House on Mountjoy Square, where stock was purchased in bulk and made available to conferences or their clients at reduced prices.²³ The distribution by the Society of 5,700 stretcher-type beds, used for pilgrims in the Phoenix Park during the Eucharistic Congress in 1932, provided an unexpected windfall for families with numerous children.²⁴ A report from the central wardrobe committee in 1939 spoke of how poor mothers came to select first communion outfits from the stock at Ozanam House.²⁵ Bedding was a particular problem, especially when a family was on relief for a long time, as blankets were often pawned.²⁶

During the war years, boots and clothing were both scarce and expensive, and second-hand clothes were in short supply. Despite the severe shortages, the particular council of Dublin managed to secure clothing and footwear in 1943 to the value of £2,500 for distribution during the winter months, as well as 3,000 blankets.²⁷ A government scheme in 1944 provided shoes, either free or at reduced cost, to needy children, but this did little to reduce the demand on conferences for clothes, bedding and beds.²⁸ Although ladies' sewing guilds had been of great support to the conferences in making and repairing garments,²⁹ the demand for clothing remained a major problem into the early 1950s, and some conferences reported that expenditure was exceeding what was spent on food. Solutions suggested included increased efforts at gathering second-hand clothing from family and friends, or even following the example of the Society in Australia and the United States, where members organised house-to-house collections for unwanted furniture and clothes. A special work along these lines, it was suggested, would meet a long-felt want in Dublin.³⁰ In 1960, the Society in Dublin established a salvage bureau at Ozanam House, purchased

²² *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p. 150.

²³ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (1935), May Supp., p. 5.

²⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no. 3 (1934), Mar. Supp., p. 8.

²⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 6 (1939), June Supp., p. 4.

²⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no. 5 (1934), May Supp., p. 5.

²⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxix, no. 6 (June 1944), p. 133.

²⁸ *Bulletin*, xc, no. 9 (Sept. 1945), p. 210.

²⁹ Purcell, *Fifty years of the Catholic Social Service Conference*, pp 2–6.

³⁰ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 7 (July 1952), p. 135.

a van to pick up furniture, clothing and other goods, hired a seamstress, and was able to offer a range of household items to conferences at reduced cost.³¹

Coal was essential for poor families who relied exclusively on fires for warmth and food. During the coal strike in Britain in 1926, the civic authorities had asked the Society to undertake the sale of coal at fixed prices. The Society engaged all the members in Dublin in the work and paid for 1,500 bags of coal to be distributed free in the first week to the very poor. Members then visited the houses of the working people in their localities, and distributed 8,000 vouchers that would allow them obtain a bag of coal for 3s. 6d.³² A resident of Dublin's Liberties recalled that electricity and gas were unknown in the tenements where he lived during his childhood in the 1930s and 1940s, and that this situation remained until they were pulled down as unfit for human habitation in the mid-1950s. The open fire was in use all the year round.³³ The Mansion House Coal Fund, which itself depended on donations from the public, announced in 1949 that it had distributed nearly £2,000 in the previous twelve months³⁴ through charities such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The Society also had its own coal funds, one of which operated out of its offices in Myra House, Francis Street, where people could pay a few pence a week, and when it had accumulated, have something towards the cost of fuel for Christmas.³⁵ The price of fuel continually rose. Between November 1950 and March 1951, it increased in a number of stages from £6 10s. to £9 5s. a ton.³⁶ Coal by 1974 was costing nearly £27 a ton.³⁷ Diversification into other fuels in the 1960s and 1970s had little impact on the Society's financial outlay because most poor families relied exclusively on coal for heating. Often those who acquired electric fires were unable to pay their bills, and arrears had to be negotiated through the intervention of Society members.³⁸

The practice of giving vouchers rather than cash for food had its origins in nineteenth-century Paris and was continued when the Society was founded in

³¹ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 12 (Dec. 1961), pp 268–70.

³² *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 11 (1926), Nov. Supp., pp 18–19.

³³ Tommy Phelan, *Hanbury Lane from whence I came: memories of growing up in Dublin's Liberties* (Maynooth, 1998), p. 12.

³⁴ *Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 1949.

³⁵ *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c.1942 ed., p. 65.

³⁶ *Irish Times*, 9 Mar. 1951.

³⁷ Inchicore minutes, 10 Jan. 1974.

³⁸ Inchicore minutes, 8 Aug. 1970.

Dublin. Vouchers were issued to families after their needs were assessed, the amount allocated being at the discretion of the conference. Criticising the practice in some conferences of issuing tickets at a flat rate – in one case as low as 2s., regardless of need – the president of the council of Dublin in 1939 urged greater variation ‘according to the dictates of charity’.³⁹ The client brought the voucher to a designated shopkeeper, where it could be exchanged for food. The traditional procedure was for the shopkeeper to list the types of food selected on the back of the voucher and to return it to the conference for payment. An active member of the Society could not be a designated purveyor. It was also against the spirit of the society for the poor to present their tickets in premises licensed for the sale of alcohol.⁴⁰ Conferences often issued supplementary food tickets, or supplied milk to young or delicate children.⁴¹ Due to food scarcities during the Second World War, the Food Allowance Order, 1941, gave weekly allowances for milk, butter and bread to the value of 1s. 8d. per dependant. They were issued in Dublin city and other urban areas to those who were in receipt of unemployment assistance, or old age or widows’ and orphans’ pensions.⁴² Nevertheless, these increases did not mean that the poor were in a better financial position:

... at first sight it would seem that most of ... [the recipients] would cease to be in need of assistance from our Society. We ought to be slow, however, to jump to this conclusion, because a large proportion of the increase in benefits or allowances has been accounted for already by the rise in the price of certain commodities which has take place since the beginning of the emergency.⁴³

By the late 1950s the food voucher system had fallen from favour. It was not a practice that was unique to Ireland, but it was widely applied in Dublin and had an historical context. In pre-welfare times of severe poverty, conferences specified that the vouchers be used for bread, oatmeal, milk or other nutritious food instead of allowing the poor to choose whatever foodstuffs they wished. When the Society itself was suffering a shortage of funds, the itemised list on the back of the voucher enabled treasurers to check that the purveyors were not overcharging. However, by 1958, the *Manual* stated:

³⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 9 (1939), Sept. Supp., p. 11.

⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 8 (Aug. 1939), p. 252.

⁴¹ *Bulletin*, lxxvi, no. 4 (1931), Apr. Supp., p. 5.

⁴² *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c.1942 ed., pp 57–8.

⁴³ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 11 (1941), Nov. Supp., p. 15.

The system of tickets is ceasing to be the exclusive method and often yields place to other forms of help, inspired by a painstaking effort to meet the susceptibilities of the persons helped, and trusting in their capacity to discern themselves their essential needs.⁴⁴

Visiting brothers often brought food items directly to the homes, such as tinned vegetables, bread, butter, and other basic commodities.⁴⁵ Sweets were given as treats to the children.⁴⁶ One conference supplied its families with a dozen 'grade A' eggs every Easter, and the Christmas hamper included groceries, meat vouchers, sweets and toys.⁴⁷ An old lady was given a chicken for her eighty-eighth birthday,⁴⁸ and another a baby Power whiskey for her ninetieth.⁴⁹

Apart from the usual relief of food, clothing and fuel, the members could assist a family in several ways, as this report from the 1920s shows:

Young country couple come to Dublin, live in furnished room, husband secures employment, baby born. Husband after a while becomes unemployed ... Works his passage to England in hope of securing work, is away about six weeks when his wife and baby are evicted for non-payment of rent. Conference takes them off the street and pays for their board and lodging. ... still no sign of husband securing employment in England. He returns to Dublin. Accommodation is found for him in the Night Shelter, and the conference pays his partial board. After weeks of trying he is successful in securing work through the recommendation of the conference.⁵⁰

In 1929 the Society appointed a nurse to visit the sick poor in their homes,⁵¹ and a second nurse was later employed. During 1942, the nurse paid about 2,000 visits to the sick poor in Dublin, providing medical supplies, medicines, clothing, advice and guidance.⁵² Because their visitation work allowed them access to the homes of the poor, members of the Society were able to observe other health problems at close range, and in the 1940s were cooperating with the Irish Red Cross and with local hospitals during the tuberculosis campaign.⁵³ The annual report for 1943 commented:

⁴⁴ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, articles 20 and 21, commentary on.

⁴⁵ Information from a member of the Society (11 Feb. 2008).

⁴⁶ Information from a member of the Society (15 Feb. 2008).

⁴⁷ Inchicore minutes, 15 Dec. 1959.

⁴⁸ Inchicore minutes, 12 Jan. 1965.

⁴⁹ Inchicore minutes, 17 Jan. 1967.

⁵⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxii, no. 4 (1927), Apr. Supp., p. 7.

⁵¹ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 8 (1935), Aug. Supp., p. 5.

⁵² *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 65.

⁵³ *Irish Red Cross Society Bulletin*, 6, no. 3 (Mar. 1946), pp 76–7.

TB cases are noticeably on the increase, and it is very difficult even to get persons who appear to be infected to visit a doctor. There is no privacy for TB cases in any of the homes visited ... The conference is in touch with the almoners of the hospitals in the neighbourhood and cooperates as far as possible with them.⁵⁴

In 1947, the Society's hospital visitation guild of St Paschal Baylon was visiting about 100 male patients suffering from tuberculosis in Rialto Hospital.⁵⁵

The president of the council of Dublin in 1944 suggested that it might be more beneficial to give a family a larger sum for a special purpose rather than spreading the assistance in smaller amounts over several months.⁵⁶ Many conferences did give special grants to individuals to help them become self-supporting, or to further their chances of finding work through training or education. The Rathmines conference in 1927 reported that they had a case of a cabman who was earning very little due to the change in the times. The conference paid for motor driving lessons and persuaded him to dispose of his horse and cab. He subsequently found employment in one of the city garages.⁵⁷ Other conferences found innovative ways of encouraging self-sufficiency. In 1928, a cabinetmaker was supplied with wood and tools, and a coal hawker with weights and scales, plus a £2 cash grant. That same year, twelve poor girls had their technical school fees paid for a course in needlework and domestic economy.⁵⁸ Street traders who lived in the Pro-Cathedral parish were helped to renew their stocks.⁵⁹ The Greystones conference paid the bus fares and fees for two boys, whose fathers were dead, at Bray technical school.⁶⁰ Members of another conference ran a whist drive for a family in difficulty due to illness, and with the proceeds, enabled a daughter to train as a nurse.⁶¹ A bicycle was procured for a news vendor, and a ladder for a window cleaner.⁶² A conference attached to Myra House expended 22s. 6d. in 1944 on a ferret and gave it to an

⁵⁴ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report, 1947*, p. 77.

⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 12 (1944), Dec. Supp., p. 16.

⁵⁷ *Annual Report, 1927*, p. 37.

⁵⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxiii, no. 4 (1928), Apr. Supp., p. 9.

⁵⁹ *Annual Report, 1938*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ *Annual Report, 1947*, p. 87.

⁶¹ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 4 (Apr. 1931), Ir. Supp., p. 5.

⁶² *Bulletin*, xc (Sept. 1945), pp 211–12.

able-bodied man to set him up in the rabbit-catching business. The ferret escaped.⁶³

There were many other forms of non-material assistance that could be given, and the brothers were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the section in the *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook* that covered current social legislation so that they could keep families informed of their entitlements.⁶⁴ Members also helped men to write letters to prospective employers, and advised about unemployment and health insurance. It was the 1960s before the Department of Education was to give serious attention to people suffering from educational disadvantage arising from social or economic circumstances.⁶⁵ The fact that compulsory school attendance between the ages of six and fourteen only became operative under the School Attendance Act in 1926, and that the primary certificate was not obligatory until 1943, suggests that many of the Society's clients had left school with little formal education. When the brothers discovered that some of the poor in the slum areas were quite illiterate and were paying professional letter-writers if they wanted to keep in touch with their relatives in England, they began to provide a free service in 1945, which was much appreciated.⁶⁶

Even though the impact of the Second World War had strained the brothers' efforts to provide adequate fuel, food, clothing and finance for thousands of families, nevertheless the newly-elected president of the council of Ireland, Lonan Murphy, reminded them that their fundamental role was to offer friendship, not simply material relief:

No matter what the emergency or whatever the difficulty, the place of the Society is in the homes of the poor ... our work must be based on true friendship ... I am quite satisfied that notwithstanding the enormous economic changes that have taken place in the last one hundred years, a twentieth-century Frédéric Ozanam would not depart one iota from the principles laid down at the foundation of the Society.⁶⁷

On a practical level, personal visitation of the homes was traditionally considered to be vitally important because it allowed for difficult home conditions to be observed at close range, such as the need for basic household

⁶³ *Annual Report, 1944*, p. 102.

⁶⁴ See *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c.1942 ed.

⁶⁵ John Coolahan, *Irish education: its history and structure* (Dublin, 1981), pp 135–6.

⁶⁶ *Bulletin*, xc (Sept. 1945), p. 212.

⁶⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 11 (1942), Nov. Supp., pp 2–3.

items, clothing or bedding.⁶⁸ It also allowed the brothers to see beyond the immediate problems and to view the needs of a family in a wider context:

You do not know them as so many pairs of shoes, so many free meals, so many bundles of clothes. They are men and women. You know them as Seáns, Noras and Mauras. ... The frightened youngster before the juvenile court is never to you 'a young delinquent'. He is 'one of the unfortunate O'So-and-Sos from my district whose mother drinks and whose father is in England.' Yours is the knowledge of causes not effects, the knowledge that says 'there are no undeserving poor.'⁶⁹

Answering criticisms that visitation expressed an outdated concept of charity, and was a hindrance to modern social initiative, a member wrote in the French *Bulletin* in 1943:

The man who has never visited the poor nor become acquainted with them, nor seen that acquaintance ripen into true friendship ... has no real knowledge of the conditions he is trying to regenerate. ... A visit to the home of a worker's family at a time when unemployment, desertion, sickness, or death, has just created want ... is an invaluable introduction to well-informed social action ...⁷⁰

If the Society viewed the home visitation as essential for gaining a closer understanding of the needs of a family, the practice was open to a very different interpretation by the families themselves. There were those who believed that the impending arrival of the St Vincent de Paul visitors signalled that their behaviour had to be modified, and any evidence of opulence hidden, if they were to be deemed worthy of relief. O'Casey's dramatic character, Bessie Burgess, expresses this belief in *The plough and the stars*:

... it ud be fitter for some o' them to mend their ways, an' cease from having scouts out watchin' for th' comin' of th' Saint Vincent de Paul man, for fear they'd be nailed lowerin' a pint of beer, mockin' the man with an angel face, shinin' with th' glamour of deceit an' lies!⁷¹

In what she described as 'a shocking indictment of the charitable society's view of us', Máirín Johnston recalled her perception of the weekly visit of members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the 1930s:

Every Friday night the Vincent's men came around to dole out the few ha'pence or the clothes docketts. We would be posted on duty on the street, and as soon as we saw them coming, we'd dash up to whatever hall we knew they were visiting and would roar up the stairs the warning cry 'the Vincent's men are coming!' This was the signal that anything

⁶⁸ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Gossin circular letter, 1845, p. 217.

⁶⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxix, no. 10 (Oct. 1944), pp 236–7.

⁷⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxviii, no. 11 (Nov. 1943), pp 271–2.

⁷¹ Seán O'Casey, *The plough and the stars* (Dublin, 1926), p. 58.

in the line of food, clothes or ornaments was to be hidden ... We were expected at all times to project the image of total destitution. Simply being poor wasn't enough, we had to act poor ...⁷²

The Society was not averse to criticism of its methods, and review and comment on particular aspects of visitation were a constant theme in the *Bulletin* and at its meetings. At the plenary session of the Society in Paris in 1956, Pierre Chouard, the president-general, pointed out the dangers of paternalism and called for a relationship that was based, not on '...the ties of protector and protégé, but a close friendship that is a vital and fruitful exchange, so that the person visited does not feel that the presence of the visitor is a reminder of his own misfortune'.⁷³

Given that the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul were volunteers of different temperament and levels of skill, it was inevitable that difficulties and breaches of the Rule should occur. At the Dublin quarterly meeting in 1938, the speaker discussed how best to handle a situation where the two visiting brothers were not able to work together. In cases of 'incompatibility of temperament', he advised:

Too often, such a difference results in the brother giving up his visitation work altogether. Surely, the remedy for this complaint is simple and well-known – a divorce! A private chat with the president will easily produce a tactful change of co-visitor.⁷⁴

Hurried visits that allowed insufficient time for adequate contact with families was an ongoing problem in many areas:

In some conferences, brothers make a one-night job of the conference meeting and the visitation of the poor in their homes. The meeting, which is held about 8 o'clock, takes about one hour and the visitation commences after that, usually about 9 o'clock or after. Probably the pair of brothers have four or five families to visit, and in order to crush in all the visits, spend a very short time with each family.⁷⁵

The Rule entrusted the responsibility for selecting suitable brothers for particular families to the president⁷⁶ but occasionally presidents themselves came in for criticism. Some ignored the selection process and allocated families to brothers who happened to be visiting in the area already, whether suited to

⁷² Johnston, *Around the banks of Pimlico*, p. 62.

⁷³ *Bulletin*, c, no. 10 (Oct. 1956), p. 244.

⁷⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 2 (1938), Feb. Supp., p. 4.

⁷⁵ *Bulletin*, xciii (1948), Ir. Supp., p. xi.

⁷⁶ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 22.

the new applicants or not.⁷⁷ During the 1950s, many of the Dublin conferences complained of being undermanned, so brothers had to visit more families in less time than the Rule would consider desirable.⁷⁸ In other conferences, the opposite situation prevailed: there were insufficient families for the available brothers to visit. This presented a different problem for the president, who had to balance the needs of younger brothers, anxious for experience, against the competence of the older men:

It was important for the president to ensure that if there are, at any time, not enough families on the roll to enable every pair of brothers to visit, let not the new member be the person to let go, lightly. No harm will come to the older men if they are without visitation of a family for a week or two – they can re-visit some old client.⁷⁹

In the period from 1932 to 1940, Dublin Corporation built over 6,000 houses on the outskirts of the city.⁸⁰ Although the slum clearance was much welcomed, the disruption to the tight-knit urban communities and their transfer to distant estates were to have an impact on both the families and on the Society. As tenants moved out, some city conferences were left with practically no cases to visit, while conferences in the new suburban areas, if they existed at all, were often overwhelmed by work.⁸¹ Some brothers transferred to conferences in the new areas, and occasionally an entire conference followed their clients and re-located. One conference reported that the families' 'sense of isolation was soothed by the friendly visits of the brothers, to which they were accustomed in their former homes'.⁸² The new conference of Christ the King, Cabra was founded in 1934, and in Crumlin, the conference of St Agnes had seventy families on its list, with thirteen new active members and a further eight who had been transferred from other conferences.⁸³ The conference of Corpus Christi in Glasnevin was already drawing appeals for help from large numbers by 1936.⁸⁴ The council of Dublin's annual report for the year 1938 referred to the concerns that were arising from the growth of the new housing areas:

⁷⁷ *Bulletin*, xciii, no 12 (1948), Ir. Supp., pp xxxiv–xxxv.

⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, cii, no. 9 (Sept. 1957), p. 209.

⁷⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 11 (Nov. 1941), p. 259.

⁸⁰ Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910–1940: shaping the city and suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 220.

⁸¹ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 10 (1935), Oct. Supp., p. 31.

⁸² *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (1936), May Supp., p. 6.

⁸³ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (1935), May Supp., p. 4.

⁸⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (1936), May Supp., p. 2.

Many of the families are called upon to pay higher rents and other charges – such as lighting and coal – than formerly. Those out of work have merely the usual allowances of home assistance, out of which they must meet all needs, so that where families are large or in case of illness, or where the people require clothing or bedding, or coal, the aid of the Society is invoked.⁸⁵

The conference of St Bernadette, established in the Crumlin district in 1940, remarked that there ought to be ‘some prospect for them of being able to find work and earn a living.’⁸⁶ To add to the difficulties, newly-formed conferences in these areas were under-funded, and the Society made a plea to neighbouring conferences to lend their assistance.⁸⁷

The suspension of house-building during the war years led to heavy arrears and an intense demand for houses after 1945. The immediate needs were estimated at about 110,000 new dwellings, of which 70,000 were to be provided by local authorities.⁸⁸ Despite improved accommodation, many of the poor families from the tenements, who had been assisted for years by the Society, simply transferred their problems to their new surroundings.⁸⁹ In 1953, the council of Dublin reported on the difficulties it was experiencing with the demands for its assistance from the new districts:

... the centre of gravity is changing from the old city areas to the new, a fact which can be gleaned from recently published figures regarding Ballyfermot ... which consists of 3,000 houses with an estimated 4–5 young children in each. Only one conference existed in Ballyfermot until 1952 ... and although a university conference undertook in addition to its own work, to visit a number of families in the area, many calls on our charity remain unanswered.⁹⁰

Launching its annual appeal in 1959, the council of Dublin said that funds in the Society were never at such a low ebb, giving as the reason the fact that there were twenty additional conferences operating in new housing areas. In these areas alone, more than 27,000 visits had been paid to 1,300 families.⁹¹

Although the brothers were continuing to encounter much hardship during visitation in the post-war years, the poverty was not of the same degree as that experienced by the visitors of the 1920s. The president of the council of

⁸⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., p. 4.

⁸⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 6 (1940), June Supp., p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., p. 4.

⁸⁸ Lynch, ‘Irish economy since the war’, p. 192.

⁸⁹ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 5 (May 1952), p. 96.

⁹⁰ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 7 (July 1953), p. 154.

⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 12 Oct. 1959.

Ireland, Joseph Flood, a district justice, who had spent many years of his working life out of Dublin, recalled in 1948 the changes that he noted in the city after twenty-five years' absence. The number of conferences had almost doubled, and special works had increased. Particularly striking was the improvement in the state of the poor due to social welfare benefits and better housing compared to when he was an active member in the 1920s:

I visited in a very congested and poor area, and sometimes the poor people had to wait – we generally visited on Thursday night – until the St Vincent de Paul brothers arrived for the very bread or other material help the brothers brought with them. All that has changed.⁹²

With less extreme poverty being encountered in the homes, and the claim by some that the poor were now being adequately provided for by the state, the president of the council of Ireland, quoting the *Manual*, asked in 1950: 'Who, in fact, is not aware that physical want is often the least of their misfortune?'⁹³ Members were being advised to reconsider the fundamental purpose of visitation. The president of the council of Ireland in 1953 felt that some conferences did not quite understand the principle of adoption, with its emphasis on establishing a helping relationship that went beyond mere financial assistance. 'Were there not widows and children, sick and infirm, old and blind people living on the margin of poverty, lonely or neglected', he asked, 'who could be adopted and visited each week?'⁹⁴

President-General Chouard, in an often-quoted address in 1955, stressed the need to 'awaken the creative imagination' and to use the combined experience and skills of all conference members to deal with modern, less defined forms of poverty:

I am frightened to see that every time a conference is established in a modern residential district, it imagines that there are no local poor ... Nevertheless, the poor are present there, but they have changed their appearance: the distress of the former rich, the miseries of sickness and sufferings, homes broken up ... It must be approached with all one's capacity for feeling and discretion and all one's accumulated experience, and the making use of all the opportunities for mutual aid and the knowledge available amongst the various members of the conference...⁹⁵

⁹² *Bulletin*, xciii, no. 4 (Apr. 1948), p. 26.

⁹³ *Bulletin*, xcv, no. 12 (1950), Ir. Supp. p. xi.

⁹⁴ *Bulletin*, vol xcix, no. 8 (Aug. 1954), pp 190–1.

⁹⁵ *Bulletin*, 127, no. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 15.

With improved economic conditions and social benefits from the 1960s, the concern was not only with whether the families were experiencing hardship but whether they were living in reasonable comfort:

Have they adequate bed-clothing, including a change of sheets? Are the beds themselves comfortable, or do they need repair? Are the parents and the children well-clad, especially in relation to weatherproof garments?⁹⁶

Problems associated with the elderly were to occupy the Society to an increasing degree from this period onwards. Approximately one in eight of Ireland's population had emigrated during the 1950s. An unusually high number of these were older men and women: over 77,000 would have reached the ages of between thirty-five and fifty-four years by the year 1961.⁹⁷ This was to have serious implications for the elderly relatives they left behind. Many of those on the Society's books were not in any serious financial distress, but had needs associated with old age. Suggestions as to how the Society could help included the proposal that sons or daughters overseas be contacted to request that they keep in closer touch with their aged parents.⁹⁸ By 1964 several conferences were engaged in draught-proofing windows and doors and in installing heating and lighting, beds and furniture for frail, elderly people who lived alone.⁹⁹

The results of a small survey carried out by the Society on the problems and needs of old people in 1965 came as a shock, even to the members accustomed to social deprivation. Of the 212 elderly men and women surveyed who lived alone, 148 said they would only have their neighbours to call on in urgent need. Included among the 'neighbours' were the Society of St Vincent de Paul brothers. Forty-five said they never received a visit from relatives, and a further forty-one had no living relatives to visit them. Christmas day was spent alone by 135 out of the 212. Inadequate diet, poor heating, absence of laundry facilities were all major concerns for those surveyed.¹⁰⁰ In responding to the findings, Bill Cashman, president of the council of Ireland, said that rather than focusing on what role the social services should play:

⁹⁶ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 2 (Feb. 1963), p. 35.

⁹⁷ Gerry O'Hanlon, 'Population change in the 1950s: a statistical review', Keogh et al. (eds), *The lost decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, pp 72, 76.

⁹⁸ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 10 (Oct. 1961), p. 231.

⁹⁹ *Bulletin*, cvix, no. 6 (June 1964), p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ *Bulletin*, cx, nos 10–11 (Oct.–Nov. 1965), pp 241–54.

[we should] analyse what *we as a Society* can do, especially as regards to problems of loneliness which will always have to be solved largely by people rather than by an impersonal state machine.¹⁰¹

More frequent visitation was an obvious solution, he suggested; if members visited singly rather than in pairs, the number of calls could be greatly increased. It would mean so much to the old people 'and may save conferences the remorse that they would undoubtedly feel if anything went wrong because nobody had taken trouble.'¹⁰²

With the general air of renewal evident in the Society from the late 1950s, the meeting of Irish presidents in 1959 devoted time to reviewing visitation practices and identified a number of procedures that were considered to be outmoded, offensive to families in need, or contrary to the spirit of the Rule. The first related to how those in need of help approached the Society for assistance. Some conferences insisted that they apply first in writing, a practice that was strongly condemned as humiliating and savouring of officialdom, and doing little to establish friendly relationships with a family. A simple request for assistance could be passed on through a priest, or by a friend or neighbour. There were complaints, too, that many conferences were not making regular visits, which meant that some families had to collect their food vouchers at members' homes, at their places of business, or even on the street. The reason given for not visiting was that some did not want the neighbours to see two men, known in the district to be members of the Society, arriving at their homes, especially in daylight hours. In response, it was suggested that confidentiality could be maintained in other ways, perhaps by having the president or the local priest call at the home. The old practice where conferences retained a measure of control over the type of food that families purchased by asking the shopkeeper to list their purchases on the food ticket was roundly condemned as an offence against charity and the dignity of the families. A further criticism was that conferences were not taking account of the depreciation in the value of money when assessing how much assistance was to be given. Rigid maximum and minimum amounts did not reflect the varying needs of families.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin*, cx, nos 10–11 (Oct.–Nov. 1965), p. 246.

¹⁰² *Bulletin*, cx, nos 10–11 (Oct.–Nov. 1965), pp 247–9.

¹⁰³ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 11 (Nov. 1960), pp 258–63.

The Society's research and development committee carried out a survey in 1970 of various aspects of conference activities, including visitation practices, and received responses from 121 adult conferences throughout the country. The survey showed that 45 per cent of those visited were single people, 14 per cent consisted of two-person families, and 20 per cent were families of six or more. Fifty per cent of family heads were aged sixty or more. Most visits lasted half an hour, or less. The main problems encountered were old age (36 per cent), illness (23 per cent) and unemployment (20 per cent). Some 33 per cent of families were being visited for over five years, and 70 per cent were on the list for more than two years, prompting the surveyor to ask: 'Does this indicate "adoption" or does it reflect failure to improve the lot of those we visit?'¹⁰⁴ Cash, food and fuel continued to be the main forms of assistance given to families, and although 50 per cent were found not to be receiving help of any other kind, the range of services to other families was 'as varied as the imagination can conjure up'.¹⁰⁵ Figures for 1973 show that the Society in Dublin paid 170,000 visits to 6,500 families.¹⁰⁶

That the personality of the visiting members of the Society was an important aspect in how they were perceived by their clients is suggested from Ó Cinnéide's 1970 study of families who were receiving aid from both the state and from voluntary bodies such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul. While the issue of state assistance compared to voluntary aid will be considered in a later chapter, his questions, 'Would you prefer to get all the assistance from one of them? If so, which one?' are relevant here. He concluded:

Most recipients do not have strong feelings about the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two forms of assistance. The impression got from the interviews was that where recipients did feel strongly about these things it could be attributed to the personality of the assistance officers and the visitors from the voluntary agencies, and the personality variations seemed to be between persons in both groups and not between the two groups.¹⁰⁷

With the publication of the New Rule for an experimental five-year period in 1968, new attitudes to visitation practices became apparent. The president-general, Pierre Chouard stated:

¹⁰⁴ *Bulletin*, cxv, nos 5–6 (May–June 1972), pp 139–43.

¹⁰⁵ *Bulletin*, cxv, nos 5–6 (May–June 1972), p. 143.

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 2 (Feb. 1974), p. 298.

¹⁰⁷ Ó Cinnéide, *A law for the poor: a study of home assistance*, p. 77.

The visitation of poor families in their homes and the gift of bread tickets were Ozanam's fine instruments; for his time and as lay action they were prophetic. Nowadays, the old tools of charity can no longer be used save in exceptional cases.¹⁰⁸

Even the revered practice of visiting the poor in their homes came to be interpreted in a new way. Personal contact with people in need was the important factor, not the location of the encounter. If they could not be visited in their homes without embarrassment to them, other ways must be found 'related to their dignity and not to the convenience of the members'.¹⁰⁹ Speaking in Belfast in 1972, Bob Cashman, president of the council of Ireland, stressed that there were many areas of personal contact other than regular visitation. 'We can meet people in the streets, in our homes, in our headquarters, in pubs, in restaurants ... But personal contact is vital.'¹¹⁰ The traditional requirement of visitation in pairs also came under scrutiny:

Very often visitation in pairs may be injurious to their dignity if only because – and this is stressed by experts – they may find it easier to reveal their problems and needs to one than to two.¹¹¹

That members would benefit from better training in visitation methods than the unofficial apprenticeship to experienced brothers had become evident from the 1950s. The Vincentian school of charity, initiated in the United States, had provided a training course for new brothers since the early 1950s, and a similar programme was subsequently adopted in Dublin. During a course in 1958, the tutor referred both to the contrasting qualities of those assisted and of the visitors themselves.

In most of the houses you have visited, I imagine you have been met with a ready welcome. Sometimes, however, you have encountered indifference, perhaps even hostility. You have also had an opportunity of observing your more experienced co-visitors in action. You may have marvelled at their ease of manner and fluency of conversation or, again, you may have been appalled (but afraid to say so) by their brusqueness and overbearing demeanour.¹¹²

The tutor admitted that it was difficult to lay down precise rules for work like visitation because individual personalities differed, but referred the young brothers as a general guide to the writings of Ozanam and to the Rule. It was

¹⁰⁸ *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1968), p. 252.

¹⁰⁹ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 1 (Jan. 1969), p. 4.

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 2 (Feb. 1973), pp 34–5.

¹¹¹ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 1 (Jan. 1969), p. 4.

¹¹² *Bulletin*, civ, no. 2 (Feb., 1959), p. 30.

also unlikely that members of the Society would hold identical views on the amount of assistance that should be given to those in need. On the one hand, there was need for caution because it was through the generosity of the public that the Society had funds to distribute, but:

... the danger is that excessive prudence may lead to a grave ill and that a family genuinely in need may be left cold and hungry because of the ultra-suspicious nature of the visitor. It would be wrong, for example, to regard the possession of a few good articles of furniture by an applicant for assistance as a reason for not assisting him. ... Often the good furniture was acquired in times of affluence ...¹¹³

On the question of how to deal with an applicant seeking aid under false pretences, the tutor at the Ozanam school of charity in Massachusetts had this advice in 1963:

Don't worry about being taken in. Everyone whom you encounter will not necessarily share your good will. ... There is no room for cynicism in your work. If someone is to be taken in, it is far better that it be you for, in weighing the loss, you are better equipped to take it.¹¹⁴

Social work as a separate profession did not begin to emerge in Ireland until the 1960s; in 1971, there were only ninety-seven social workers with post-graduate training in the country. Most of these worked in hospitals and very few in the community,¹¹⁵ which meant that voluntary groups like the Society of St Vincent de Paul had to provide an informal service in this area. In 1969, the Society's national training and formation committee had been set up to plan, in the light of the New Rule, suitable training and formation programmes related to spiritual themes and social action.¹¹⁶ Peter Kaim-Caudle, of the Economic and Social Research Institute, was asked by the council of Ireland make a survey of the Society's training requirements from economic and sociological standpoints.¹¹⁷ As the availability of trained social workers was likely to fall short of requirements in Ireland for several years, he recommended that the Society of St Vincent de Paul finance the employment of professional social workers from its own resources.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 2 (Feb. 1959), pp 32–3.

¹¹⁴ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 2 (Feb. 1963), p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Skehill, *The nature of social work in Ireland*, pp 99, 156.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 12 (Dec. 1969), p. 303; New Rule, article 30.

¹¹⁷ 'Review of 1969', typewritten report from the Council of Ireland to John Charles McQuaid (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹¹⁸ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 2 Feb. 1971), pp 26–9.

Commenting on the current work being done by the Society, he said that several thousand members rendered a large variety of different social services, in their own time, without reward, and at their own expense. They did so without receiving any training other than observing more experienced colleagues. The quality of the services they provided, he stated, differed widely, as was the case with any large group of people. He added:

The members do a great deal of useful work, which, if it was not done by them, would not be done at all. Their work is widely appreciated by the beneficiaries, the clergy and the community in general.¹¹⁹

If members were to receive some training, even of a basic nature, from professional social workers, it would raise their competence, increase their morale, and encourage others to come forward to help in the work. Recognising that there might be resistance to training from men who had been active members for many years, he suggested that the Society appoint a tutor who was himself mature, with long experience of actual social work and an intimate knowledge of Irish social conditions.¹²⁰

In 1971, Liam Clarke, an Irish-born, English-trained social worker was appointed the Society's first head of training. In an article in the August 1972 issue of the *Bulletin* under the title 'First thoughts on formation', he began by quoting from the preamble to the Society's New Rule:

Effective encounter with those suffering in so many different ways is not only a question of thinking things out. There is also the need for training, knowledge of the techniques of dealing with social problems and of the psychology of those who suffer. ... The Society of St Vincent de Paul has a mission to develop this technique and, like all parts of the church, to make itself and its members available wherever they serve.¹²¹

He explained that training and formation for members of the Society was concerned with the twin aims of nurturing a belief in each member of the value of his Vincentian activity and with building up a sense of personal commitment. 'It is getting the brothers and sisters to believe that they can help people and motivate them to be so committed ... that they will naturally accept the need to be equipped in the best possible way to do their Vincentian work.'¹²² His job, he stated, was to direct the members' enthusiasm, common sense and

¹¹⁹ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 2 (Feb. 1971), p. 27.

¹²⁰ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 2 (Feb. 1971), pp 27, 29.

¹²¹ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 8 (Aug. 1972), pp 160–63,

¹²² *Bulletin*, 117, no. 8 (Aug. 1972), p. 160.

knowledge by reference to certain basic reference points or standards. Anticipating the fear among members that such training might impair the warmth, spontaneity and freedom of action which were traditionally valued in the Society, Clarke stressed that the approach would be practical and based both on the work to be done and would take into account the contribution of the experienced, active members.¹²³ His appointment was not welcomed by all. A Dublin member wrote to the *Bulletin* expressing, what the editor described as, ‘a strong but sincerely held view’ on the value of training and formation:

What on earth are we trying to do – make a science out of home visitation? ... As I see it, a new member of a visitation conference needs nothing, literally nothing, other than sympathy and ordinary common-or-garden good manners to be a completely efficient visitor right from the word go. If he goes out visiting for his first few weeks with a good experienced member (in any properly-run conference he will do just that) and if he is not by then a good visitor I don’t believe that he will ever become one – not with all the training in the world.¹²⁴

Nonetheless, the council-general of the Society was committed to training and singled out Ireland’s achievements for particular comment, where during 1971, training sessions were held on family visitation, alcoholism, youth activities, mental health, hospital visitation, and problems associated with new housing estates.¹²⁵

The experiments being made in various countries, and particularly in Ireland, are examples of great interest. The importance of members acquiring a real competence in the performance of their charitable work cannot be emphasised enough. We must also profit by the techniques and advice available from specialists outside the Society.¹²⁶

Yet, in a statement on the progress of the training programme, Bob Cashman, president of the council of Ireland, admitted in 1974:

... we have a training scheme which, after three years, has not fully got off the ground because of the unwillingness of the Society in most parts of the country to accept the implications of training.¹²⁷

He envisaged, however, that the need for training would be accepted, and even if it cost time and effort, an improvement in service would be its

¹²³ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 8 (Aug. 1972), pp 162–3.

¹²⁴ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 10 (Oct. 1972), pp 210–11.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 Dec. 1972.

¹²⁶ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 3 (Mar. 1974), p. 325.

¹²⁷ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 9 (Sept. 1974), p. 8.

justification.¹²⁸ Later that year, the national training officer resigned to take up an appointment in the UK.¹²⁹

It is clear that the Society consistently tried to maintain standards in home visitation and refined its practices and attitudes to the families over time. It is less easy to discern how the families themselves perceived the role of the visitors and or felt about the arrival of two members, most likely from a different social class, on their doorsteps. For many others in financial distress, the idea of seeking assistance, either from the state or from charity, was repugnant. In his autobiography, Seán O’Casey described how his sister, Ella, and her five children were forced to live with their mother while she looked for a job that would allow her to acquire a room of her own.

Ella was ashamed to apply for poor law outdoor relief, for had she done so, her mother would never have lifted her head again. ... However poor they were, they did not want that hell of humiliation.¹³⁰

There is evidence that some were ungrateful, or even hostile, to the Society’s interventions. Máirín Johnston’s recollections suggest that for her, visitation was a bitter and humiliating experience. While there were genuine concerns, especially in the later years, about the dangers of paternalism and the need to be alert to practices that would offend the dignity of families, these aspects tended to be approached from the perspective of members; the views of their clients on how they perceived the ‘Vincent’s’ men appear not to have been sought. For many families, home visitation was a positive experience. Members comment that those they visited over the years generally appeared pleased to see them and were in no way secretive about the visit, especially if they lived in an area where their neighbours were also on the Society’s list. A member recalled that when she happened to meet one of her clients in the street, the woman readily introduced her to her friends as being from the Society of St Vincent de Paul.¹³¹ A seminarian from All Hallows College, who spent a week working with local conferences in Dublin in a particularly disadvantaged area, commented in 1966:

... there was a very close personal relationship between the conference members and those visited. One could see that St Vincent de Paul night

¹²⁸ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 9 (Sept. 1974), p. 8.

¹²⁹ *Bulletin*, 120, no. 3 (May–June 1975), p. 1.

¹³⁰ Seán O’Casey, *Drums under the windows – autobiography*, 3 (London, 1972 ed.), p. 80.

¹³¹ Conversation with two members of the Society (11 and 15 Feb. 2008).

was a night that people looked forward to. Many of them were waiting at open doors to welcome the brothers.¹³²

That families should have the opportunity to express how they felt about their own needs was becoming a theme in the addresses of the Society from the 1960s. Henri Jacob, newly-elected president-general, stated:

The voice of the poor is generally not heard socially. Not that we are 'the voice of the poor' but we have to find some means by which they can express themselves. To use a word very fashionable now, they should participate, and participate fully.¹³³

Bob Cashman, president of the Council of Ireland raised the question in 1972 of how families might be asked to take a more active part in finding solutions to their difficulties:

We are privileged people in the sense that we act from a position of strength. ... Could we think of sharing in the sense of asking our families what they think the solutions are, how they are achieved and what part they could play in the solutions?¹³⁴

In a frank disclosure, Cashman described his own vivid memories of what being poor meant for him as a child in Cork, and of how difficult it was for middle-class members of the Society to appreciate the reality of poverty unless it was personally experienced.

As one who ... grew up as the son of an unemployed tradesman, I can tell you what poverty is. It is saying 'thank you' when you want to curse; it is smiling when you want to be angry. It is saying you are grateful when all you feel is rage. It is waking up on Christmas morning and seeing second-hand, worn toys – good enough for the poor but not good enough for the well-off. It is seeing Christmas annuals three years old when your neighbours have the current ones.¹³⁵

The more inclusive approach of engaging families in the solutions to their own problems was also suggested by Cormac Ó Broin, newly-elected president of the council of Ireland, in 1975:

Do we really know, and are we fully aware of what they really need, not just what we think they need? ... Has it ever occurred to us to ask our families how we could help them – I wonder if we would dare!¹³⁶

Apart from the stated spiritual rewards, which will be discussed in a later chapter, and the personal satisfaction derived from rendering assistance, the

¹³² *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 11 (Nov. 1967), p. 259.

¹³³ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 6 (June 1969), p. 166.

¹³⁴ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 2 (Feb. 1973), pp 345.

¹³⁵ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 4 (Apr. 1972), p. 84.

¹³⁶ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 9 (Sept. 1974), p. 17.

nature of the mutual benefits derived from the visitation experience were frequently discussed in the *Bulletin*. Speaking in 1939, Joseph Glynn, president of the council of Ireland, said that those who did not feel the happiness that visiting the poor brings had missed the spirit of the Society.¹³⁷ ‘Charity works between two poles’, declared the Capuchin priest, Fr Aloysius Travers, at a quarterly meeting in the Mansion House in February, 1939 – ‘the giver and the receiver, blessing both.’¹³⁸ The speaker at a Society gathering in the United States in 1958 looked for a deeper explanation as to why volunteers engaged in work that demanded much and offered few tangible rewards:

The conclusion, I suggest, is that an organisation like this meets an essential need of the human person. We do not want our lives to be merely mundane. We want and demand greater opportunities for loving and being loved. ... It is not enough that men give money, they must give themselves.¹³⁹

A less analytical, but more colourful, explanation was given by a brother in the 1920s, when he recounted his lasting memories of visiting an old Dublin couple who had few of the world’s goods:

... an attic in one of the foulest of our city slums, where two old people, passing down into the valley of the shadows, faced a future that was without earthly hope with a courage, a cheerfulness and a holiness, that made me realise that here indeed were God’s poor. The warm welcome is still remembered that awaited the visitors in that dreary room from an old woman who could never leave it and her old husband who could just hobble as far as the church, these two waiting for death in squalor and laughing in his face. They are dead many years, these hidden saints of Dublin’s poor but they gave to their visitors more, far more than the visitors ever could give to them.¹⁴⁰

This chapter has shown that, while the traditional forms of assistance – food, clothing, fuel and cash – continued to be the main requirements of the families visited by the Society of St Vincent de Paul throughout the period of the study, many other services were rendered. In operating its home visitation service, the Society had to meet several major challenges over the decades: economic austerity in the 1920s, the shortages of the war years, the social disruption caused by major housing development. Increased state aid prompted the

¹³⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 10 (Oct. 1939), p. 301.

¹³⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 5 (May 1939), p. 122.

¹³⁹ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 1 (Jan. 1959), p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxvi, no. 10 (1931), Oct. Supp., p. 5.

Society to seek out new areas of service, such as the care of the elderly. Better economic conditions shifted the emphasis from the materially poor to the poor in spirit. Continual self-monitoring of its methods saw the tradition of the food voucher and other practices being dropped or modified to reflect a greater respect for the dignity of the recipients of aid. The well-intentioned, if often paternalistic, approaches of the 1920s and 1930s gave way in the 1970s to the suggestion that the families themselves should be participants in the solutions to their problems. Yet, the proposed training programme to prepare members to address complex social needs and to respond with an increased level of skill to the shortfall in state-provided professional social workers was met with stiff resistance. Ironically, the insistence in the Society that the brothers were not official bearers of relief may have influenced this negative attitude, with its implied threat to the informal, friendly relationship with families that was traditionally cultivated.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECIAL WORKS

In 1942, the special works of the Society of St Vincent de Paul were described as ‘either offshoots and variations of the fundamental work of visitation of the poor in their homes, or outlets for the untapped energies of the generous member’.¹ Although the Rule emphasised that no work of charity was foreign to the Society, visitation of the poor in their homes was obligatory for all active members.² Those who engaged in special works joined a ‘guild’ dedicated to the particular activity, while continuing their visitation of families.³ The practice of giving a lesser role to special works was to prevail until the 1950s, when members were then permitted to choose whether they wished to belong to a traditional conference or to join one dedicated to a special work. For much of the period of this study, those who volunteered for special works had to make heavy sacrifices in terms of time and commitment. The principal special works of the Society in the period 1926 to 1975 are described in this chapter.

The Society’s Secretariats – or Advice Bureaux, as they later came to be known – for assisting those ‘in humble circumstances’ had been established with several other special works in the early decades of the twentieth century. The president of the Middle Abbey Street secretariat recalled the initial slack demand for its work and how this had subsequently changed:

I have been attached to our secretariat since 1912. In the early days, we sat there week after week with nothing to do. But when the National Health Scheme was set in motion ... the work started. Then the war of 1914–18 began and we had a lot to do for soldiers’ dependants. In the early days the greater part of the work came from conferences. Now it comes from every organisation in the city.⁴

The original three secretariats were located in Middle Abbey Street, in Ozanam House on Mountjoy Square, and in Myra House, Francis Street. Members helped hundreds of clients every year with their problems because ‘the poor themselves, through lack of knowledge, or faulty presentation of their

¹ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 11.

² *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 2.

³ *Annual Report, 1927*, p. 12.

⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 11 (1940), Nov. Supp., p. 13.

cases, were unable to obtain a hearing'.⁵ Where necessary, arrangements were made to provide free legal aid, as in the case of civil proceedings. Cases of a criminal nature were not dealt with.⁶ The weekly sessions only required the participation of small numbers of brothers, but those who were involved usually came from legal or business backgrounds. In 1937, three of the four brothers who operated the Myra House centre had legal qualifications. They were helped by a panel of honorary solicitors, who were indemnified against outlay by the secretariat in respect of cases undertaken on its behalf.⁷ The 1942 edition of the Society's *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook* does not list any other agency providing a similar service, statutory or voluntary.⁸ Because the compulsory notification of births in Ireland was not introduced until 1864, those born before or around this time often applied to the secretariats in the 1930s for help in establishing evidence of age to obtain an old age pension. In 1935, members were making enquiries for the birth certificate of a seventy-year-old woman who had been born on a ship off the Cape of Good Hope in 1865.⁹ A case in the 1920s shows how three separate special works of the Society – the Advice Secretariat, the Prisoners' Aid Society and the Penny Banks – had all been utilised to help one family:

He was a British army pensioner, suffering from neurasthenia ... and was subject to fits of violence. In one of these he assaulted his wife, was arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment, as a result of which payment of his pension was discontinued. The case was referred ... to the Prisoners' Aid Society, with the result that the man's pension was restored. In addition he was placed under proper treatment and supervision and a 'treatment allowance' of over £3 was granted to his wife, out of which she lodged each week in the Penny Bank ... a substantial sum for the credit of her husband while he was undergoing treatment.¹⁰

In the winter of 1937, brothers from the Abbey Street secretariat personally called at the homes of some of their elderly clients to avoid them having to make their way to the office.¹¹ With increased legislation that had an impact on

⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxviii, no. 4 (1933), Apr. Supp., p. 8.

⁶ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 5 (May 1963), p. 107.

⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1938), p. 344.

⁸ See *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c.1942 ed.

⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (May 1935), p. 147.

¹⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 4 (1926), Apr. Supp., p. 11.

¹¹ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1938), p. 343.

the lives of the poor from the 1920s, many of the cases dealt with involved the brothers acting as intermediaries between their clients and government departments. Of the 224 interviews at its centre in Middle Abbey Street in 1940, the principal cases related to the Landlord and Tenant Acts, the Old Age Pension, Unemployment and National Health Insurance, and Workmen's Compensation. Most of the queries arising from the interviews were handled by personal contact between the brothers and government or other officials, as this approach had been found more effective than correspondence.¹² The close contact with the problems of the poor alerted the Society to many other potential cases of injustice. At the annual meeting of presidents in 1938, a member of a city conference suggested that the rights of people who pawned articles should be taken up by the secretariats. If not redeemed within six months, the pawnbroker had no right to sell the article until a further six months had passed, and when sold, the owner was entitled to a share of the proceeds.¹³ The following year, the secretariat took on two cases where moneylenders had charged their clients interest at the rate of 150 per cent. A settlement was made on the recommendation of the visiting brothers by which the legal rate of 39 per cent was paid.¹⁴

Often, no legal expertise was required, but a simple explanation and reassurance, as in the case of the elderly man who was confused following the death of his sister and felt that justice had been denied her:

Our client's sister, aged 84, was admitted to hospital suffering from a cold and died shortly afterwards. The client said the certified cause of death was an accident; yet, there had been no inquest and he could get no information from the hospital as to the nature of the accident. He thought someone should be answerable to him for an accident to his sister.¹⁵

After corresponding with the hospital, the brothers were able to reassure the man that the medical term used on the death certificate, 'cerebro-vascular accident' indicated a stroke, and that no fault could be attached to anyone for his sister's death. They also advised him on insurance and funeral matters

¹² *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 4 (Apr. 1941), p. 89.

¹³ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 11 (1938), Nov. Supp., p. 16.

¹⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., pp 6–7.

¹⁵ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 5 (May 1963), p. 108.

arising on her death.¹⁶ By 1964, there was just one remaining bureau. With the growing demand for a more focused approach to specific legal issues and the establishment of community-based social service centres, the work was largely superseded. In 1969, the Society provided offices at Ozanam House for the newly-established Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC), where law students offered free advice to those who could not afford legal fees. In addition to its advice services, FLAC had the ultimate goal of pressuring the government to provide a legal aid scheme to cope with matters such as women's equality, employment rights and judicial separation.¹⁷ By 1970, FLAC had established four centres in Dublin.¹⁸

The development of the Society's clubs for boys was prompted both by a concern for the miserable existence of so many young people and the fear that their aimless lives might have long-term consequences, both for the boys and for the community in general. Richard Devane, a Jesuit priest, placed the origins of the social threat from dissatisfied youth at the time of the world depression:

... the democratic states did not 'discover' youth until the great world slump of 1929–31, when unemployment raised its ugly head, and workless youth, becoming demoralised, began to be a social menace.¹⁹

Our Lady of Lourdes club, which met in Ozanam House, had already identified more local causes in 1926. In its report on the plight of young boys in the district, it suggested the root of their problems and outlined the efforts being undertaken to find a solution.

... the district in which the club is situated is one of the most congested and poverty-stricken in the city of Dublin ... the dangers of the streets, and the consequences of evil companionship – taking the form of pitch and toss, cigarette smoking and card playing on doorsteps – are by no means limited to the families of the very poor. ... The committee have instituted numerous counter-attractions to those afforded by the streets, or the landings and doorsteps of the miserable dwellings in which so many young people have to pass their early years.²⁰

¹⁶ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 5 (May 1963), p. 108.

¹⁷ Pádraig, Ó Moráin, *Access to justice for all: the history of free legal advice centres, 1969–2003* (Dublin, 2004), pp 7–8.

¹⁸ *Community and social services directory for the greater Dublin area*, p. 40.

¹⁹ Richard Devane, *Challenge for youth: a documented study of youth in modern youth movements* (Dublin, 1942), p. 38.

²⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 1 (1926), Jan. Supp., p. 17.

These counter attractions included swimming classes under the supervision of the gymnastic instructor in Tara Street baths. In the summer, the committee secured premises on the side of the Dublin mountains at Kilmashogue, about four miles from Rathfarnham, and some of the boys who were working by day cycled out in the evenings to join the others.²¹ By the 1940s, the Society had a dozen clubs in the Dublin area (see Table 4.1). A central committee coordinated activities and had responsibility for organising inter-club sporting events, and looking after equipment for summer camps and holidays.²²

Table 4.1 Boys' clubs run by Society of St Vincent de Paul, 1942

St Anthony, Nelson Street
St Mary, attached to Seamen's Institute, rear of Pearse Street
St Francis of Assisi, Church Street
St John Vianney, Myra House
Our Lady of Lourdes, Ozanam House
Our Lady of the Rosary, Harold's Cross
Madonna House, Ranelagh Road
St Thomas Aquinas, rear of Mountjoy Square
Holy Name of Mary (Marist Boys' Club), Percy Place
Holy Name of Mary (Past section, boys 18 plus), Percy Place
St Joseph's young men's club (18 plus), Ozanam House
St Michael's, Inchicore

Source: *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook* (Dublin, c.1942 ed.), pp 17–18.

The clubs were seen as an opportunity to provide the youngsters with healthy social outlets, to address shortfalls in their education, and to assist them to find decent jobs. They were generally for boys aged thirteen to eighteen, although a number had sections for youths aged over eighteen who had graduated from the main clubs. There were about 600 boys in the clubs in 1943 'and a very much larger number is on the waiting lists'.²³ The report of

²¹ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 1 (1926), Jan. Supp., p. 19.

²² *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 4 (Apr. 1939), pp 87–8.

²³ *Bulletin*, lxxxviii, no. 5 (May 1943), p. 113.

Madonna House boys' club in Ranelagh for 1946 reveals an extensive programme of activities and gives an indication of the commitment required by those who engaged in youth work.²⁴ There were classes in leatherwork, arts and crafts, in debating and drama, and they took part in sports meetings, swimming galas, football leagues, a boxing and table tennis tournament. The boys came first in a competition for a one-act play organised by Cómhairle le Leas Óige, set up in 1942 as a sub-committee of the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee.²⁵ A club might open several nights in the week, and there were constant pressures on the brothers to supervise games, workshops, and other projects, as well as concerns with the boys' welfare. The committee of Nelson Street club commented in 1949 on the future job prospects for their boys:

The scope for placing boys in suitable employment was very limited; some were working at trades, others were boy labourers, a number attended national or technical schools, but the largest were working as messenger boys and, unfortunately, seemed to lack the initiative and opportunity to better themselves. The club is ever anxious to help the boy to improve his position.²⁶

In the 1930s, the Society took responsibility for the management of the diocesan-owned Catholic Boys' Home in Middle Abbey Street, purchased in 1886 by Archbishop Walsh to provide accommodation for Catholic working boys – newsboys, orphans, apprentices from rural areas.²⁷ The majority of these boys in 1944 had been in Artane industrial school and were assisted to find jobs as tailors, weavers, van boys and messengers.²⁸ The annual report for 1954 stated that thirty boys had been provided with all meals and accommodation for a contribution not exceeding 15s. per week.²⁹

An American priest, writing in the *Bulletin* in 1951, was impressed by the practical programme of vocational education in operation in a Dublin club, where he saw a small woodwork shop, a machine shop, a shoe-repairing shop and a clothing repairing shop. He also observed that the members of the

²⁴ *Annual Report, 1946*, p. 102.

²⁵ www.cdysb.ie/page.cfm/area/information/ (viewed 8 Aug. 2008).

²⁶ *Annual Report, 1949*, p. 86.

²⁷ Thomas Morrissey, *William J. Walsh, archbishop of Dublin, 1841–1921* (Dublin, 2000), p. 62.

²⁸ *Annual Report, 1944*, p. 190.

²⁹ *Annual Report, 1954*, p. 45.

Society were not much older than the boys themselves.³⁰ Although the boys' clubs and activities developed over the years, there was a chronic shortage of helpers, as was the general complaint with many of the Society's special works, particularly those for the young. The main difficulty in maintaining and extending the boys' club movement, the central committee reported in 1952, 'has always been the dearth of helpers and it is necessary to report that unless more active personal support is forthcoming from members of the Society, this special work for youth will decline.'³¹ In 1957, the central committee of boys' clubs severely rebuked members of the Society for their lack of cooperation in the work:

The running of a boys' club and boys' holiday home on a voluntary basis is a most difficult proposition and makes great demands on the time and patience of men who have to earn their livelihood in the ordinary competitive fashion. The members of the Society who devote themselves to this work are giving an example of self-sacrifice and zeal which is a striking object-lesson for those who contribute the absolute minimum to the exercise of charity.³²

Despite the difficulty with recruiting helpers, the Society's youth work continued to develop. In 1956, it acquired Millicent House, in Sallins, County Kildare, on about thirty acres of land, which had grounds laid out for football, cricket, basketball pitches, as well as a full-size running track and tennis court. By the following year, up to 400 boys from the various clubs had been provided with a week's holiday at the centre, renamed 'Lonan Murphy House' as a tribute to the late president of the council of Ireland.³³

Some of the boys went on to become members of the Society themselves. The conference of St John Bosco grew out of the club run by Our Lady of Lourdes youth club. In 1968, its six members carried out a survey of the needs of old people in the parish, organised a dance to raise funds, provided Christmas hampers, and every week visited an old folks' club run by another conference.³⁴ A youth conference, formed from boys belonging to St Joseph's club in Inchicore, took on the visitation of a home for the elderly.³⁵ In 1970, the *Irish*

³⁰ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 4 (Apr. 1951), pp 46–7.

³¹ *Annual Report, 1952*, p. 45.

³² *Bulletin*, cii, no. 5 (May 1957), p. 104.

³³ *Bulletin*, cii, no. 5 (May 1957), p. 105.

³⁴ *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 4 (Apr. 1968), p. 81.

³⁵ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 7 (July 1964), p. 156.

Times reported on the activities of Brugh Mhuire youth club, sponsored by Comhairle le Leas Óige and run by the Society of St Vincent de Paul ‘in a superbly beautiful house in North Great George’s Street which was once the home of the poet, Samuel Ferguson’.³⁶

Hospital visitation in the Dublin area dates to the early 1920s, when a group from Halston Street commenced visitation of the Richmond Hospital.³⁷ By 1926, the Society was visiting almost every hospital in the city and suburbs, with Monkstown Hospital, the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, and the Donnybrook Hospice being recently added.³⁸ Many of the patients they visited had travelled long distances, and once hospitalised in Dublin, had no contact with their families in rural areas and no friends in the city to visit them. The brothers were often asked to ‘to drop a line to the wife to tell her that I am still alive’ by patients too ill after surgery to write themselves. They also gave advice on insurance benefits, or responded to appeals to the Society for assistance for their families. ‘Or it may be that they only wish you to come and say a cheery word to them to help them even in that little way on the dreary road to recovery.’³⁹

At the December 1930 general meeting of the Society in the Mansion House, a brother made a plea for more members to volunteer for visitation work in the Dublin Union, which had over 3,000 residents, the vast majority of whom would not have been there if they had an opportunity of remaining at home. ‘The poor in the Dublin Union,’ he said, ‘long for friendship, more especially the large number who are almost forgotten by the outside world.’⁴⁰ In a paper read at a Dublin quarterly meeting in February 1945, the speaker noted that with the passing years, many improvements had been carried out in the Union, re-named St Kevin’s, and the patients were now receiving first-class medical attention in well-kept wards:

The total number of male patients presently accommodated is approximately 1,200. ... Some, through no fault of their own, have spent

³⁶ *Irish Times*, 6 Feb. 1970.

³⁷ *Bulletin*, 120, nos 11–12 (Nov.–Dec. 1975), p. 9.

³⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 4 (1926), Apr. Supp., p. 14.

³⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 4 (1926), Apr. Supp., pp 14–15.

⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxvi, no. 3 (1931), Mar. Supp., pp 6–7.

almost a lifetime in the institution, whilst many more who have come down in the world enter St Kevin's with little prospect of ever leaving.⁴¹

Nine members of the visitation guild were visiting St Kevin's every Sunday morning in 1945. Each year, they organised an annual entertainment for patients, male and female, distributing tobacco, snuff, cigarettes, matches and sweets, followed by a concert, 'which is greatly appreciated by the patients, who seldom, if ever, are treated to anything in this line'.⁴² A report stated:

One comes across at times in such a large institution as St Kevin's many rare and interesting old characters. ... some, who once held very high positions in the professional and commercial life of the city, after having exhausted all visible means of support, enter St Kevin's with little prospects, if any, of ever leaving.⁴³

A number registered under a different name to protect their anonymity. 'These poor folk, too decent to beg or to call on charity, preferred to enter St Kevin's and end their closing years without recourse to relatives or friends ...'⁴⁴

Skehill points out that few Catholic hospitals had trained almoners until the late 1950s or 1960s compared to their Protestant counterparts, suggesting that:

This resistance by Catholic-run hospitals to trained almoners may have been attributable to an opposition to professional charity work, similar to that reflected in earlier decades. The inherent implication was that professional social work reflected the introduction of professional and secular practices which undermined the Catholic monopoly over the moral and spiritual welfare of the Irish population through its voluntary organisations.⁴⁵

She states that when almoners began to carry out family casework training with the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau, Archbishop McQuaid made it clear to the Dublin branch of the British Institute of Almoners that the training was conditional on its principles being both Catholic and Irish.⁴⁶

A survey of hospital visitation carried out by the Society in the 1960s showed that there had been a growth in the visitation of specialised hospitals, including Cappagh Orthopaedic, the Royal Hospital, Donnybrook, and the Rehabilitation Centre at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Dún Laoghaire. Many conferences were also engaged in helping people with physical handicaps who

⁴¹ *Bulletin*, xc, no. 6 (June 1945), pp 138–41.

⁴² *Bulletin*, xc, no. 6 (June 1945), p. 139.

⁴³ *Bulletin*, xc, no. 6 (June 1945), pp 140–41.

⁴⁴ *Bulletin*, xc, no. 6 (June 1945), p. 141.

⁴⁵ Skehill, *The nature of social work in Ireland*, p. 114.

⁴⁶ Skehill, *The nature of social work in Ireland*, p. 107.

lived at home by paying for special courses at technical schools, transport to mass, school and taking them on outings. There was also a growing appreciation of the help that was available through specialised voluntary organisations.⁴⁷

Visitation of psychiatric hospitals had also developed by this time. As far back as 1951, Professor E.F. O'Doherty of University College Dublin, on the occasion of a meeting of the World Federation of Mental Health in Dublin, had pointed out that the needs of those with mental health problems was an area for charitable endeavour:

As insight into mind and mental processes grew, side by side with a better insight into social processes and conditions, another and perhaps more important field for the exercise of supernatural charity presented itself – the relief of the suffering whose source was the minds of men
...⁴⁸

Although new drugs had become available from the 1950s that made outpatient treatment the more appropriate option for many people with mental illness, a commission of inquiry in 1966 found that Irish rates of admission to psychiatric hospitals remained among the highest in the world. The numbers in psychiatric hospitals only fell slowly in the coming decade.⁴⁹ Members of the Society, who began visiting St Brendan's Mental Hospital, Grangegorman in 1964, reported:

Many of the patients are very lonely and some have not seen relatives for years, while more than seventy have no income of any kind. As an example of what can be done, a patient who was discharged recently has become friendly with one of the brothers and frequently attends social and sporting functions with him.⁵⁰

The following year, a Dublin conference took eighty-six patients from the hospital out to tea, followed by a concert and a bus tour of Dublin city and county. Some had not been outside Grangegorman for years and seldom, if ever, had visitors.⁵¹ In 1968, the *Bulletin* reported that mental hospital visitation was expanding rapidly, 'warmly encouraged by the hospital staff'.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 7 (June 1964), pp 125–7.

⁴⁸ *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1952, p. 651.

⁴⁹ Dermot Walsh, 'Mental illness in Ireland and its management', in Desmond McCluskey (ed.) *Health policy and practice in Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), p. 36.

⁵⁰ *Bulletin*, cx, no. 6 (June 1965), p. 88.

⁵¹ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 5 (May 1965), p. 135.

⁵² *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 6 (June 1968), p. 140.

In 1971, the senior medical officer at the Central Mental hospital, Dundrum wrote to the Society:

On behalf of the administration of this institution, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for the generous help given by your members to our patients. It certainly adds a dimension of enrichment to an existence, which is frequently tragic, when the patients are able to maintain contact with the outside world.⁵³

Branches of the Legion of Mary also engaged in the work of visiting psychiatric hospitals. When the organisation was celebrating its golden jubilee in 1971, it chose the grounds of Grangegorman Hospital for concelebrated mass.⁵⁴

In an interview in the *Bulletin* in 1975, Bob Graham, former president of the particular council for hospital visitation, and chairman of the Meath Hospital, Dublin, spoke about the work and the particular skills and services that the brothers were in a position to offer. There were, he pointed out, distinct differences from the Society's point of view between hospital and family visitation. Generally speaking, families were visited because they had asked for the visit and because of some material need. Hospital patients were visited simply because they were ill and happened to be occupying a particular bed on a particular evening.

In hospital we always attempt to explain to people that we are visiting them not because they are poor but because they are ill. I believe that the work, therefore, is very useful to the organisation in that it enables us to keep in contact with all social classes.⁵⁵

He admitted that he had developed a great love of hospital visitation and that the work provided more satisfaction for him than family visitation. Hospital social workers did not have the time to leave the hospital to investigate whether a worried patient had left a tap running at home, or to sort out a pension problem at the local post office. By being a good listener, he maintained, it was easy to obtain a patient's confidence and in this way to detect some matters which might be troubling him, or perhaps a domestic problem which might be worrying his family at home. While it was customary for members to come bearing magazines, newspapers, sweets and tobacco – for the comfort of the

⁵³ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 3 (Mar. 1972), p. 69.

⁵⁴ *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1972, p. 737.

⁵⁵ *Bulletin*, 120, nos 11–12 (Nov.–Dec. 1975), p. 9.

patient but also as an aid for the visitor in initiating conversation – he suggested that the more experienced a member became at the work, the less need there was for such material aids, adding that ‘cigarettes ... may no longer be a good idea for hospital visitation’.⁵⁶

The Labour Yard in Vicar Street, off Thomas Street, was already in existence when the Society took over its management as a special work in 1915. It was seen as a way of helping men with physical disabilities to earn some money while allowing them to maintain their self-respect ‘which even the most prudent charity tends to sap’.⁵⁷ By 1931 the yard was giving employment to fifty men for varying periods during the year and had paid out wages of over £1,100 during that year. So successful was trading in 1936 that the Labour Yard committee was able to make a contribution to a training project for unemployed youth. The manager of the Labour Yard purchased timber from wooded areas in the country, which was then prepared by the men for sale as fuel.⁵⁸ The war gave an unexpected boost to sales. Owing to the scarcity of coal in 1941, the demand for wood increased, allowing a much greater number of applicants for jobs to be employed at the yard.⁵⁹

Men from the Night Shelter, or those recommended by the conferences, were often given work at the yard. The wages bill was approximately £1,500 a year in 1940, and the sales realised over £2,000.⁶⁰ During 1956, a total of twenty-six men were employed and those with experience were earning up to 18s. per day on a piece-work basis.⁶¹ Members of the conferences in Dublin and suburbs were requested to order blocks and bundles of kindling wood for use in their own homes and in the homes of the poor they visited and were expected to negotiate for the sale of the wood with their local grocers and traders.⁶² The Labour Yard continued until the 1960s; growing affluence, better

⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, 120, nos 11–12 (Nov.–Dec. 1975), p. 10.

⁵⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 6 (1932), June Supp., pp 7–8.

⁵⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 11 (Nov. 1942), pp 262–3.

⁵⁹ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 132.

⁶⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 4 (Apr. 1941), p. 87.

⁶¹ *Bulletin*, 4 (Apr. 1957), p. 89.

⁶² *Bulletin*, 5 (May 1961), p. 120.

unemployment rates and the monotony of the work are suggested reasons for its eventual demise. Its final listing in *Thom's Directory* appeared in 1962–3.⁶³

The Society's first Night Shelter was located at 7 Great Strand Street, in 1912.⁶⁴ Initially, forty-four men were given shelter there in a disused store but the need for a much larger building was soon evident.⁶⁵ Dublin was a city dependent on casual labourers, many of whom came in from rural areas in search of work. The service of the night shelter in Great Strand Street had become overwhelmed within a few months. The new hostel in Back Lane, off High Street, was able to accommodate 150 men and opened in 1915 after an appeal for funds by Archbishop William Walsh and his personal donation of £500.⁶⁶ The shelter was described as 'a great boon to those men who find themselves temporarily practically penniless. It obviates a night in the open or on the floor of some tenement hallway.'⁶⁷

In Paris, the Society of St Vincent de Paul had three large refuges for homeless people, and when President-General de Vergès visited Ireland for the Eucharistic Congress celebrations in 1932, he was taken on a tour of the Dublin Night Shelter. A report from the time described the facilities available to the men.

Above a large meeting room, provided with a wireless installation are two dormitories, with one hundred beds each, and centrally heated. Tea is served in the morning, and in the evening [there is] hot cocoa, which is very much enjoyed. ... The stay at the refuge may be of fourteen consecutive days, but a large number of the poor men come in to it several times in the year. Plunge baths, showers ... running water, hot and cold, are at their disposal.⁶⁸

An account in 1938 stated that every night of the year, 'many respectable men who for one reason or another have not the means to procure a shelter and a bed without which health and life are endangered' were accommodated.⁶⁹ Free food and shelter were given for fourteen nights or longer, if necessary.⁷⁰ In the same year, expenditure of over £600 was incurred on repainting the entire

⁶³ *Thom's Directory*, 1962–3, p. 499.

⁶⁴ *Thom's Directory*, 1915, p. 1432.

⁶⁵ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 3 (Mar. 1963), pp 62–5.

⁶⁶ Yeates, *Lockout*, p. 333.

⁶⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 4 (1926), Apr. Supp., pp 8–9.

⁶⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 9 (Sept. 1932), pp 259–60.

⁶⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., p. 11.

⁷⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., p. 11.

building, the purchase and renewal of beds and bedding.⁷¹ A new wing was added in 1951 at cost of £13,000.⁷²

The committee members organised supplies of clothes, boots and underwear through appeals to the public. The men were helped to find jobs, and were often referred to the Labour Yard, or given advice on insurance, pensions and other claims. In the evenings, committee members served supper.⁷³ The obituary notice for Raphael O’Callaghan, one the founding members of the night shelters in Great Strand Street and in Back lane, reported that, despite ill-health, he had spent an average of four evenings a week at the shelter.⁷⁴ The Society employed a paid watchman for night duty.⁷⁵ A visiting brother gave the following account of the shelter in 1940:

There is a spacious dining hall ... scrupulously clean. I was shown the kitchen, which is a model of perfection in its cleanliness – to me an amazing revelation. I saw a number of men washing their shirts – the only ones they had probably – and placing them on drying racks, where they could be dry for the next morning.⁷⁶

Residents of the Night Shelter in the 1920s and 1930s were often young men from rural areas who had drifted into the city in search of work, found none, walked the streets and arrived footsore and weary at the shelter. With housing shortages and steep inflationary pressures in the post-war years,⁷⁷ the Night Shelter, by the 1950s, was reporting another type of homeless person.

We are ... getting quite a number of pensioners, old age pensioners, men who are no longer employable and who have fifteen shillings a week national health insurance or sixteen shillings a week unemployment assistance. The rising cost of living has driven them out of the ordinary lodging-houses to which they were accustomed. They cannot now live in them, and we have set ourselves to see if there is anything we can do.⁷⁸

A decision was taken to extend the shelter so that instead of asking the men to leave by day, these elderly men, no longer unemployable, could have a midday meal and be provided with accommodation ‘for as long as they were

⁷² *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1952, p. 677.

⁷³ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 2 (Feb. 1942), p. 45.

⁷⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no. 3 (1934), Mar. Supp., pp 3–4.

⁷⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 9 (Sept. 1932), p. 260.

⁷⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 6 (June 1940), pp 176–7.

⁷⁷ See Lynch, ‘Irish economy since the war’, pp 186, 192.

⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 12 (1951), Ir. Supp., p. xxi.

willing to stay'.⁷⁹ By the 1960s, the daily rhythm of life in the night shelter was described thus:

Men are admitted to the shelter every evening from 6.30 onwards and at 7.30 a hot supper is served. After the meal the men may read, write letters, sit and chat, watch television or listen to the radio. ... Each man has a cubicle, curtained off and supplied with a spring bed, night clothing, chair and mat. In the morning, breakfast is served and on Sundays as well. The nightly suppers are served by brothers of the conference.⁸⁰

In 1971, the shelter (by then known as the Hostel for Homeless Men) was accommodating thirty old and infirm men permanently and providing temporary accommodation for about eighty other men each night.⁸¹ Despite the economic and social improvements in Dublin since the 1920s, the numbers availing of the shelter remained steady over the decades, and in 1973, the demand for overcoats, jackets, trousers, shirts and shoes for the men was said to be 'unending'.⁸²

Table 4.2 Night Shelter admissions and meals, 1928–1973

<i>Year</i>	<i>Admissions</i>	<i>Meals</i>
1928	28,800	60,237
1938	27,600	55,000
1940	28,000	55,000
1947	22,700	n.a.
1952	28,600	n.a.
1963	30,800	76,900
1969	30,000	70,000
1973	29,300	74,100

Source: *Bulletin*, various, 1929–1974.

By the mid-1920s, the Society's oldest special work, St Vincent's Orphanage in Glasnevin, had been educating boys for over seventy years. The object of the original founders had been to take the place in a boy's life on the death of one or both parents and to give him the spiritual and material education

⁷⁹ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 12 (1951), Ir. Supp., p. xxii.

⁸⁰ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 3 (Mar. 1963), p. 64.

⁸¹ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 11 (Nov. 1971), p. 233.

⁸² *Bulletin*, 119, no. 2 (Feb. 1974), pp 304–6.

he would have received had they been spared. Although referred to as an orphanage, it might have better been described as a charity boarding school. Many of the children had been accustomed to comfortable homes.⁸³ The role of the orphanage committee was to identify conferences that were prepared to sponsor an orphaned boy. Two benefactors paid for the addition of a hostel in 1907 to accommodate young men who had left the orphanage and were working, but did not have a family home to return to, or had insufficient wages to allow them to live independently.⁸⁴ They contributed from their earnings towards the upkeep of the accommodation, and in return were clothed and boarded.⁸⁵ By 1926, St Vincent's was under the national school system of education and day-boys from the district were admitted and educated alongside the boarders.⁸⁶

A member in a talk on the special works of the Society in 1927 stated that the best form of charity was to help others to help themselves, and that there was no better means to accomplish this than by education.⁸⁷ By 1928, over 1,700 boys had been educated at St Vincent's, and there was 'practically no career in Ireland closed to boys educated in the orphanage.'⁸⁸ The *Bulletin* regularly reported on the academic successes of the students and on their chosen careers. Boys received primary and secondary education up to the age of sixteen or beyond. In 1931, two boys matriculated and five won Dublin Corporation scholarships, and all the nineteen boys who presented for the intermediate certificate were successful. Medals were won for football and hurling by the school team.⁸⁹ About seventy boys from the Dublin district were maintained in the orphanage, with a similar number from other parts of Ireland.

Situations were found for most boys when leaving at the age of sixteen, and the committee asked members in business to keep the boys of the orphanage in mind when they were looking for staff.⁹⁰ Although there were places for 160 boys in 1939, there were only 137 boys in residence, and disappointment was

⁸³ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 1 (Jan. 1940), pp 10–11.

⁸⁴ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 108.

⁸⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 1 (Jan. 1940), p. 11.

⁸⁶ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 107.

⁸⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxiii, no. 6 (1928), June Supp., p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxiv, no. 1 (1929), Jan. Supp., p. 6.

⁸⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 6 (1932), June Supp., pp 3–4.

⁹⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 2 (1930), Feb. Supp., pp 6–6.

expressed that deserving boys may have been deprived because conferences were unwilling to pay the annual pension of £28.⁹¹ A new hall, electrical system and flooring were installed in 1949 at a cost of £20,000, which, in the opinion of the president was money well spent. 'It is the oldest of our special works and we are very proud of it.'⁹²

In 1956, when the orphanage – by then simply known as 'St Vincent's' – was celebrating its centenary, there were 140 boys in residence. The role of residential institutions, whether boarding schools, orphanages, or psychiatric hospitals, was beginning to change at this time, with a greater emphasis on community-based services and increased outside contact, which may explain the president of the council of Ireland's plea in 1958 that boys who been 'adopted' for education in St Vincent's should be visited occasionally, taken out on excursions to the sea or to places of interest, or to the homes of the brothers homes, whenever possible.⁹³ The year 1959 brought a steep decline in the number of pupils – less than 100.⁹⁴ This drop was a major cause of concern for the Society in view of the heavy overheads. The decline continued, and while primary and secondary schools remained under the direction of the Christian Brothers, the Society's engagement with the orphanage ended in 1973 after over 110 years.⁹⁵ In addition to the financial difficulties, other factors are likely to have contributed to its closure. The Adoption Act (1952) allowed aunts and uncles or other relatives to formally adopt an orphaned child; higher standards of living and better healthcare reduced the likelihood of children losing one or both parents; the availability of free secondary education and school transport from 1967 opened up new opportunities for education. A report in the *Bulletin* in 1974 said that declining numbers and a changed attitude to the 'institution' idea had made the closing inevitable. Despite the closure, members were encouraged to watch out for alternative ways of helping such children who might in the past have gone to St Vincent's, perhaps by paying for them at a regular boarding school or by giving the family a generous grant to enable the child to be kept at home. It added:

⁹¹ *Bulletin* lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., pp 10–11.

⁹² *Bulletin*, xciv, no. 12 (1949), Ir. Supp., pp vii–viii.

⁹³ *Bulletin*, ciii, no. 9 (Sept. 1958), p. 199.

⁹⁴ *Annual Report, 1951*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 10 (Oct. 1974), p. 12.

Traditionally, the Society dealt with boys, but there is now absolutely no reason for any sex discrimination! Orphan girls will need similar assistance.⁹⁶

After a long delay due to the adverse economic climate, the property was eventually sold to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in the 1970s. Proceeds from the sale were applied to the Society's projects for children throughout Ireland.⁹⁷

Ireland had an inadequate probationary system in the early decades of the state and relied on members of voluntary organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary and the Salvation Army to act as part-time or temporary officers under the Criminal Justice Administration Act, 1914. It was not until the 1960s that probation officers were appointed on a permanent basis and welfare officers introduced into the prisons.⁹⁸ The after-care of young people from reformatories and industrial schools was found to be wholly inadequate in a 1970s report.⁹⁹ The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland had a long association with the care of young offenders and boys who had spent time in reformatories and industrial schools. As far back as 1862, the council of Ireland agreed to assist boys who had been discharged from Glencree Reformatory.¹⁰⁰ In 1928, its Catholic Male Discharged Prisoners' Aid committee drew attention to the great increase in crime among young men of 'respectable' families, and holding good positions, noting: 'Invariably, it is found that their downfall has been caused by extravagance and indulgence in the modern craze for amusement and excitement, and above all by betting.'¹⁰¹ The committee members paid weekly visits to Mountjoy prison and interviewed those 'who expressed a wish to see them'.

They also provide for the visitation of prisoners' families and their relief, if necessary, while often one of their most delicate functions is to arrange for a friendly reception of the delinquent by his relatives on his release.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 10 (Oct. 1974), p. 12.

⁹⁷ Information from a member of the Society, 11 Mar. 2008.

⁹⁸ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System* (Dublin, 1985), p. 332.

⁹⁹ *Reformatory and Industrial Schools System: Report*, pp 56–9.

¹⁰⁰ Council of Ireland minutes, 3 Mar 1862 (SVPA).

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin*, lxxiv, no. 1 (1929), Jan. Supp., p. 8.

¹⁰² *Bulletin*, lxxv, no. 2 (1930), Feb. Supp., p. 7.

Relatives were not alone in their reluctance to accept ex-prisoners. Acknowledging a subscription from the archbishop of Dublin, Edward Byrne, in 1930, a member of the Prisoners' Aid committee admitted that 'we still have difficulty getting any support from the general public'.¹⁰³ The committee's report for 1938 reveals the type of assistance that was given to these young men: 388 prisoners were interviewed at Mountjoy prison or at the committee's office; 350 letters written seeking employment for prisoners on discharge; the committee paid twenty-five steamboat, railway and bus fares; sixty men received suits of clothes and forty-seven were given cash grants; lodgings were found for thirty-three of the men and paid for by the committee.¹⁰⁴

In 1935, the Conference of St John Bosco began providing a service to 'wayward youth',¹⁰⁵ and in 1942, a conference undertook the care of boys who had returned home from Daingean Reformatory; within a year, they had eighty young people on their books. The following year, the Irish Borstal Association asked the Society to care for youths from the Borstal Institute in Cork whose families lived in the Dublin area. The conference noted with regret that while some joined the army or left for employment in England, 'others who have found employment at home are engaged in the unskilled, ill-paid, blind alley occupations'.¹⁰⁶ By 1948, another special work had been established for the after-care of boys leaving Artane industrial school.¹⁰⁷

Services for ex-prisoners and their dependants were developed over the decades. The council of Ireland established the guild of St Philip in 1948, which replaced the Catholic Male Discharged Prisoners' Aid committee. The guild had a central administrator at its offices in Berkeley Street, who attended daily to help discharged men.¹⁰⁸ Although state probationary services developed throughout the 1960s,¹⁰⁹ the Society continued its involvement with former prisoners. In 1971, a member of the guild of St Philip, who had been engaged for twenty-five years in prisoners' welfare, was instrumental in the setting up of

¹⁰³ Thomas Wall to Edward Byrne, 10 Nov. 1930 (DDA, Byrne Laity file, AB7/208/2/i).

¹⁰⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., pp 11–12; lxxxv, no. 1 (Jan. 1940), pp 23–4.

¹⁰⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (1935), Aug. Supp., pp 5–6.

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 5 (May 1942), p. 110.

¹⁰⁷ *Bulletin*, xciii, no. 7 (July 1948), p. 151.

¹⁰⁸ *Annual Report, 1952*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ *Report, Inquiry into the Penal System*, p. 333.

a half-way house for ex-prisoners, Prisoners' Aid through Community Effort (PACE). The Department of Justice and Dublin Corporation purchased the property, Priorswood House.¹¹⁰

The Catholic Seamen's Institute was another of the special works that had developed in the early twentieth century. Its purpose was twofold: to care for the spiritual and temporal needs of Catholic sailors, and to provide all the men, of whatever creed, with a social outlet while in port. Catholic seamen were given details of Sunday mass times in the local churches, and all the seamen were invited to the Society's centre on Sir John Rogerson's Quay in the evening. There, they had access to newspapers in various languages, could have a meal, or stay the night if they were temporarily stranded.¹¹¹ The Institute often paid their expenses to other ports, where there were prospects of a berth.¹¹² A report in the 1926 *Bulletin* described the procedure the brothers adopted on a Sunday morning and the reaction of the seamen to their arrival on board the ships:

They climb the gangways, swing down the ladders and amble into the men's quarters. ... Those who have never assisted in this work might think they could never do it, or that their visits would be resented. As to the first, I suggest that they should give it a trial. The second difficulty does not arise as our members are invariably welcome.¹¹³

The Institute provided food and entertainment for those who were far from home on festive occasions. On Christmas night, 1938, members organised a dinner and a concert for the sailors, and were entertained by the crew of a Greek vessel in port. A week later, there was a party for a hundred children from areas visited by the local conference, and attended by Alfie Byrne, lord mayor of Dublin.¹¹⁴ Another task for the committee was the supply of literature to the eighty-five lighthouses and lightships around Ireland's coast,¹¹⁵ and in 1939, nine lighthouses received seasonal hampers.¹¹⁶

In the difficult pre-war and wartime years, Irish sailors were assisted to find employment in Ireland and families of ill and distressed seamen were given

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin*, 116, no 8 (Aug. 1971), pp 173–7.

¹¹¹ *Bulletin*, lxxvi, no. 4 (1931), Apr. Supp., p. 7.

¹¹² *Bulletin*, lxxv, no. 2 (1930), Feb. Supp., p. 7.

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 4 (1926), Apr. Supp., pp 12–13.

¹¹⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 1 (Jan. 1939), pp 27–8.

¹¹⁵ *Annual Report, 1932*, p. 107.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 1 (Jan. 1939), p. 28.

gifts of food and clothes.¹¹⁷ Seamen could consult one of the Society's Advice Bureaux for help in obtaining their legal rights, and assistance was given to relatives in tracing missing seamen or in contacting prisoners of war.¹¹⁸ A member of the Society who visited the Institute in 1942 was touched by the subsequent fate of some of the seamen:

I saw a letter from a man whom the Institute had equipped originally to go to sea and who now is a prisoner of war in Germany. Another letter came from an Italian sailor who used to visit the Institute and who is at present in a concentration camp in the Isle of Man. A further letter was written at sea by a little Indian boy to whom the brothers had been teaching English during his stay in Dublin.¹¹⁹

The international Catholic movement for seamen, the Apostolate of the Sea, had its Irish branch at the Seamen's Institute. In 1949, nearly 300 parcels of reading material were delivered to the Apostolate of the Sea centres worldwide for the benefit of Irish seamen abroad in particular, and English-speaking seamen in general. That same year, the Institute purchased a motor car to convey seamen from their ships to mass on Sunday mornings.¹²⁰ The Institute also played a role when emergencies arose at sea. Two nights before Christmas 1957, a French trawler struck rocks at Howth, and brothers met the crew when they were brought ashore and drove them to the Institute where they remained until the new year.¹²¹

After nearly fifty years on Sir John Rogerson's Quay, the Society's new club for seamen, Stella Maris, was opened in Beresford Place in 1962.¹²² It had a chapel, a lounge with television, a café, and a billiard room. Light refreshments and dancing were available each evening from Monday to Friday. The club was staffed by twenty members of the Society, who assisted the port chaplain in visiting the ships, and by a group of forty hostesses.¹²³ A report in 1965 describes the activities in the new club.

¹¹⁷ *Annual Report, 1939*, p. 115.

¹¹⁸ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 143.

¹¹⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 9 (Sep. 1942), p. 202.

¹²⁰ *Annual Report, 1949*, p. 75.

¹²¹ *Bulletin*, ciii, no. 10 (Oct. 1958), p. 237.

¹²² *Bulletin*, cvii, no. 10 (Oct. 1962), p. 235.

¹²³ 'Apostolatus Maris in the Port of Dublin, year ending 31 Dec. 1964', typewritten report to John Charles McQuaid, by national chaplain (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

In the last four months seafarers visiting the club numbered 1,095. Many of these came to dance, some to play billiards or table tennis ... and some to read newspapers and books in their own languages. The great majority of these were merchant seafarers, as during this period only one warship visited Dublin.¹²⁴

Holidays for children as a special work of the Society can be traced to the initiative of a few brothers associated with the wardrobe committee in Ozanam House. Their first initiative was a day's outing to Kilcoole for over 1,200 poor city children in 1928.¹²⁵ By 1934, hundreds of children at a time were going by train to Gormanston, where the large stretch of strand and proximity to the railway station made it an attractive location for a day's excursion. The children were cared for by the brothers and by a group of helpers, and various Dublin firms donated the food. An estimate of the provisions required for a single outing gives an indication of the scale of the undertaking (Table 4.3):

Table 4.3 Provisions required for children's excursion, 1933

Bread	950 lb.
Butter	112 lb.
Meat	200 lb.
Sweets	300 lb.
Jam	56 lb.
Sugar	100 lb.
Oranges, apples,	3,000
Milk	30 gallons

Source: *Bulletin*, vol. lxxix, no. 6 (June 1934), pp 189–90.

The organisers of the daily excursions realised that children required more than a few hours on a beach once a year, and the idea for a week's holiday by the sea emerged. The profits from the sale of *The Advocate* – its fundraising newspaper, first published on Palm Sunday, 1935 – allowed the Society to acquire a house in Balbriggan by July of that year and to give a holiday to forty small boys.¹²⁶ The property had a good water supply, gas and electricity; it had

¹²⁴ 'Four Months': Stella Maris news-sheet, Jan. 1966 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹²⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 6 (1939), June Supp., p. 4.

¹²⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 8 (1935), Aug. Supp., pp 7–8; lxxxiv, no. 6 (1939), June Supp., p. 9.

playing fields, swings and slides and was near an ideal strand.¹²⁷ When an extension to the house was completed in early 1938, 1,450 children, boys and girls, had a week's holiday on alternate weeks.¹²⁸ A small number of paid staff were hired to carry out domestic duties and allow voluntary workers to give their whole time to the children, which included serving their meals.¹²⁹ By 1946, nearly 2,000 children, had stayed in Sunshine House over a nineteen-week period.¹³⁰ The particular council of Dublin took overall responsibility for the work in 1952.¹³¹ A visitor described his impression of Sunshine House in the early 1950s:

Everything was done to make the house a paradise for children. ... The large dining room, capable of holding 200 children, had tables and chairs specially designed. Seven shop-sized windows gave ample light to the room. ... Upstairs were eleven airy dormitories ... each with its own distinctive decoration ... pale blue, shell pink, spring green ...¹³²

The success of the holiday scheme depended on the goodwill and commitment of others. Anonymous donors gave a gift of a projector, allowing the children to enjoy the latest 'talkie' pictures. Another benefactor donated a playing field opposite the house.¹³³ However, the difficulty of recruiting sufficient stewards from within the Society for a week's summer work at Sunshine House remained a persistent problem over the years. Even in the early years of one-day trips, the committee found difficulty in involving the brothers in the work:

Members returning to their visitation work after an enjoyable summer holiday must often be struck with the contrast between their good fortune and the joyless existence of those whom they visit, particularly the children, who should have at least the common heritage of sunshine and fresh air.¹³⁴

In a paper read at a meeting of the Society in 1946, the speaker described the many facilities that were provided for the children, but added:

The committee can provide these things because money can buy them. But what use are they without the stewards to organise the football

¹²⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 6 (1939), June Supp., p. 11.

¹²⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., p. 12.

¹²⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 6 (1939), June Supp., p. 11.

¹³⁰ *Bulletin*, xcii, no. 6 (June 1947), p. 140.

¹³¹ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 6 (June 1952), p. 97.

¹³² *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 6 (June 1952), p. 98.

¹³³ *Bulletin*, xcii, no. 6 (June 1947), p. 139.

¹³⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 6 (1932), June Supp., p. 5.

leagues, push the swings, read the stories, supervise the swimming, organise the concerts and generally help the children to get the very best out of their week?¹³⁵

It was particularly difficult to get stewards for the boys' week, and the committee had to rely heavily on outside volunteers, especially students from Clonliffe College.¹³⁶ Noting the important role played by the seminarians, the Sunshine House committee said in 1969 that it was disappointing that so few of the stewards were members of the Society.¹³⁷ By the following year, it admitted that it was difficult to get members – men or women – to volunteer as stewards.¹³⁸ Those women who did volunteer for the girls' week were often members of the Legion of Mary.¹³⁹ Despite being hampered by lack of support from within, the commitment of the Society and of individual conferences to holidays for children and adults continued to develop. The conferences of the particular council of south county Dublin, organised an annual train excursion for 400 children to Avoca.¹⁴⁰ By the 1960s and 1970s the Society had acquired other holiday centres, including the Ozanam holiday home at Mornington, county Louth and Kerdiffstown House, near Naas.¹⁴¹ A group of conferences working in one of the newer Dublin corporation housing areas purchased three caravans in 1974 to provide holidays for single-parent families, with food and transport being provided by the conferences.¹⁴²

The special works of the Society reveal the exceptional level of commitment that was provided by a small number of brothers. Their work was undertaken against a background of little or no state provision in the areas of after-care for prisoners, child and youth welfare, and the needs of long-term hospital patients. Several of these works were to grow, adapt or decline over the years. The Advice Bureaux served hundreds of Dubliners when they needed assistance

¹³⁵ *Bulletin*, xci, no. 6 (June 1946), pp 134–5.

¹³⁶ *Annual Report, 1952*, p. 35.

¹³⁷ Sunshine House committee report, year ending 30 Nov. 1969 (DDA McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹³⁸ Sunshine House committee report, year ending 30 Nov. 1970 (DDA McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹³⁹ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 9 (Sept. 1960), p. 210.

¹⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 10 (Oct. 1959), p. 225.

¹⁴¹ *Bulletin*, 11, no. 3 (Mar. 1971), p. 55.

¹⁴² *Bulletin*, 119, nos 7–8 (July–Aug. 1974), pp 12–13.

with the intricacies of the social legislation introduced with the new state. They were to be superseded by more specialist agencies in later years. Statistics for Night Shelter occupancy suggest a remarkable consistency in demand over the decades. St Vincent's Orphanage, by far the Society's oldest work, which gave an education to thousands of boys for over a century, eventually succumbed to economic and social change. Hospital work evolved from the visitation of hundreds of inmates in the old Dublin Union hospital to embrace a new openness to psychiatric patients and those in institutions. The Labour Yard gave a measure of independence to unemployed men but was eventually overtaken by changing economic conditions. The Seamen's Institute, once a refuge for stranded mariners far from home, was later to become a modern facility for short-stay seamen to the port of Dublin. Services for young offenders, children, youth clubs continued to expand throughout the period.

Yet, only a minority of members of the Society involved themselves in the special works, to the disappointment and frustration of those who did. The Society had traditionally stressed that home visitation was its primary work, and many members may have joined with the expectation that this would be their sole activity. Visitation demanded a predictable time commitment, an important consideration for working men with families, whereas many of the special works demanded more. The fact that changing circumstances, such as the depletion of city conferences with the movement to the suburbs left some conferences with less visitation work, did not guarantee that the members would automatically transfer their services to special works.

Those who were accustomed to visiting the poor in their homes may not have felt inclined or suited to engaging at weekends or in the evenings with young people, with ex-prisoners or homeless men, with seamen, or with the sick and the dying. Yet, despite the difficulties in recruiting sufficient helpers, most of the special works survived over the period and the small numbers involved continued to press ahead with new developments that involved considerable personal commitment.

CHAPTER FIVE

A LAY CATHOLIC ORGANISATION

The primary aim of the Society of St Vincent de Paul was the sanctification of its members through service to the poor.¹ Frédéric Ozanam used the term ‘mutual edification’ to describe the benefits from the relationship between the brothers and those they visited: the members of the Society served the poor with temporal and spiritual aid, and the poor, in turn, offered members the opportunity for personal sanctification. It was, he stated, ‘the reconciliation of those who have not enough with those who have too much, by charitable works’.² This chapter will look at how the understanding of the Society’s Christian message, deeply ingrained in its Rule and traditions, came to find new meaning and modes of expression in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

Sir Joseph Glynn, president of the council of Ireland, was spokesman and moral voice for the Society throughout the 1920s and 1930s. At a time when the census showed that the Catholic population of Dublin city stood at over 285,000,³ his address in 1926 expressed his satisfaction with the Society’s relationship with the bishops and clergy:

The council records with very deep gratitude that the relations between the Society and the ecclesiastical authorities have been most cordial. ... From the local clergy we have received nothing but kindness and encouragement. We, on our part, have never failed to inculcate in our members a spirit of obedience and respect for our bishops and priests, by whose kindness we are permitted to work for our own salvation amongst the poor entrusted to us.⁴

Apart from the opportunity for sanctification that was available from serving the poor, spiritual benefits could be enhanced by other means. New members gained a plenary indulgence on admission.⁵ The quarterly festival meetings also attracted indulgences and all members were expected to attend.⁶

¹ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 1 and commentary.

² Coates, *Letters of Ozanam*, p. 81.

³ *Census of Population, 1926*, iii, part 1, Religion, p. 8.

⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxi, no. 8 (Aug. 1926), p. 243.

⁵ *Manual*, 1958 ed., p. 22.

⁶ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, articles 78 and 79 and commentary.

Associated with these meetings was a mass, held locally, offered for the four intentions: the church, the pope, Ireland, and the Society.⁷ There was the annual six-day retreat in Gardiner Street church. From the 1920s, enclosed retreats for members were growing in popularity, especially in the Jesuit-run houses at Rathfarnham and Milltown Park, and were earnestly recommended by the council of Ireland ‘as a sure means of achieving the objects of our membership of the Society’.⁸ Prayers, prescribed by the *Manual*, were said at the beginning and conclusion of conference meetings,⁹ and there were spiritual readings and a talk on a religious topic from the spiritual director. Members were reminded that, unlike purely humanitarian associations, it was the religious dimension of the Society that provided solace in the face of failure and disillusionment.¹⁰

The Society, like other groups such as the Catholic Young Men’s Society, the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, the Legion of Mary, and the Knights of St Columbanus, all embraced the movement known as Catholic Action from the 1920s to the 1940s, but, as Hartigan concluded, it was difficult to define their actual level of engagement.¹¹ The term had several meanings. It could describe any action by a lay person inspired by faith, or it could define a lay group that had been mandated by the local bishop for a specific task; it could also be used in the sense of defending the Church from its enemies, or in working to improve the prevailing social and economic conditions.¹² Pope Pius XI, ‘through his voluminous writings and addresses gave Catholic Action a charter, a spirit and an apocalyptic urgency.’¹³ Although the Irish hierarchy did not have to contend with the conflicts between church and state that had caused turmoil for the papacy and for the French bishops in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nevertheless they tended to imbibe the prevalent fear of secular ideologies. Addressing members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Belfast in 1931 the bishop of Down and Connor, Daniel Mageean, proclaimed:

⁷ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 12 (Dec. 1963), p. 185.

⁸ *Annual Report, 1928*, p. 5.

⁹ *Manual*, 1958 ed., pp 280–6.

¹⁰ *Bulletin*, lxxv, no. 7 (July 1930), pp 217–8.

¹¹ See Hartigan, ‘Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940’, pp 81–125.

¹² *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1967), vol. iii, ‘Catholic action’, pp 262–3.

¹³ *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, p. 262.

Catholic young men, your church expects to find you in the gap of danger. She looks to see you in the vanguard of her attack on this new paganism that, like an octopus, is throwing out its tentacles to strangle Christian civilisation.¹⁴

The archbishop of Tuam, Thomas Gilmartin, was more specific as to how this ‘new paganism’ was manifesting itself in Irish life. It was:

... like a bursting sea, expressing itself in evil literature, bad pictures, indecent dances and fashions, and immoral views on the sacred contract of matrimony. The only organised bulwark in the world against this invasion is Catholic Action ...¹⁵

The Society often used similar rhetoric to heighten the sense of urgency in its quest for new members:

Unless the youth of the country is captured for the Society there will not be much progress. ... the Society of St Vincent de Paul affords one of the best methods of carrying out the wishes of his holiness in regard to Catholic Action.¹⁶

Its work for boys might be cited as a specific example of Catholic Action that promoted social and economic progress. The evening school attached to the city conference of Saints Michael and John gave as its main objectives:

... to improve the general education of poor boys whose primary education has for some cause been neglected, and to develop in them a keener sense of their responsibilities to themselves and to the state, thus promoting in them a better moral and civic spirit and a more interesting outlook on life generally.¹⁷

Fr Aloysius Travers, Capuchin priest and spiritual director of Church Street conference, had no difficulty in describing all the works of the Society in Dublin in 1931 as ‘a splendid record of Catholic Action’.¹⁸ However, writing in the 1940s, Charles K. Murphy, professor of jurisprudence at University College, Cork, and author of several books on the Society, argued that it could not accurately be described as an agent of Catholic Action because it did not receive an express mandate from the hierarchy for a particular task; a more precise description, he believed, would be to refer to the Society as an ‘auxiliary to Catholic Action’.¹⁹

¹⁴ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1932*, pp 566–7.

¹⁵ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1932*, p. 579.

¹⁶ *Annual Report, 1930*, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Annual Report, 1928*, p. 98.

¹⁸ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1932*, p. 581.

¹⁹ Charles Kavanagh Murphy, *The spirit of Catholic Action* (London, 1943) p. 17.

While sanctification of its members was the primary aim, religious devotion and attention to duty were not confined to the brothers themselves. The Society's Rule, the writings of Frédéric Ozanam and the exhortations of various presidents-general in the *Manual*, stressed the obligation to bring about the moral and religious improvement of the poor. From their school-day knowledge of the Maynooth catechism, members would have been aware that neglect of religious duties put souls at risk. That the poor of Dublin were very devout and had close ties with their church and clergy in the early twentieth century has been well described.²⁰ In his visit to Ireland for the Eucharistic Congress, papal legate, Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri, expressed his great pleasure at the enthusiasm shown by the people of Ireland, and 'in particular by the poor classes living in the small streets of Dublin'.²¹ Although conscious that it was not easy to question poor people about whether they had been to mass or the sacraments, there was no room for complacency on the part of the members if souls were to be saved. When dealing with the neglectful minority, a cautious, tactful approach was urged:

The visitor may use his own discretion as to the best means of introducing into the poor family the love of religion and the practice of their duties.²²

The brothers distributed large amounts of reading material, especially from the 1920s to the 1940s – the *Sacred Heart Messenger*, the *Irish Catholic*, *Our Boys*, the *Catholic Standard* – both to inspire devotion and to help combat the inroads of evil literature.²³ Families were recommended to attend daily mass, sodalities, the forty hours devotion, the nine Fridays, and to have their homes consecrated to the Sacred Heart.²⁴ Mass was offered when a member of a poor family died.²⁵ Before a parish retreat in 1931, and at the suggestion of the

²⁰ For example, Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland*; Hartigan, 'Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940'; Dunne, 'Action and reaction: Catholic lay organisations in Dublin', pp 107–118.

²¹ Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican: the politics and diplomacy of church–state relations, 1922–1939* (Cork, 1995), p. 99.

²² *Visiting the poor in their homes*, (Dublin, 1932 ed.), p. 15.

²³ *Annual Report, 1932*, p. 37

²⁴ Dunne, 'Action and reaction: Catholic lay organisations in Dublin', p. 113.

²⁵ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 51.

spiritual director, the brothers visited every family, resulting in ‘a record attendance, with the church thronged each night of the four weeks’.²⁶

In its Rule-based guidelines for members, first published about 1914 but still in use in the 1930s, those considered ‘not safe’ to visit included women, still young, particularly if they lived by themselves; those living in disreputable houses; drunkards, persons of dissipated habits; those in a state of concubinage ‘except with a desire to correct them and only so long as there is hope of effecting a cure’.²⁷ It is not possible to assess how many of these restrictions were applied in the Dublin context. A report from a conference in 1929 stated that where men and women had been persuaded to take the pledge, other aspects of their lives fell into place, restoring happiness to homes where there was once squalor and misery. The report had no difficulty in identifying the root of such marital disharmony:

In such cases it was generally found that one or both parties to the dispute had been long neglectful of their religious duties, and the reconciliation was effected only when this dereliction had been rectified.²⁸

The same religious zeal applied to the activities of the Society’s special works. Boys’ clubs either had their own sodality, or the boys were encouraged to join sodalities locally.²⁹ At the Labour Yard, all the men joined in the daily recital of the Angelus at noon.³⁰ Although men of all creeds were free to avail of the facilities of the Seamen’s Institute, without interference with their religious belief,³¹ the brothers had a particular mission to those who were Catholic:

The Sunday morning visit to the ships to seek for the Catholic sailor and to bring him to mass is a perpetual reminder to all that the mainspring of the work is religious.³²

That they took this work seriously is evident from the precision with which their statistics for 1938 were compiled.

²⁶ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 67.

²⁷ *Visiting the poor in their homes*, p. 16.

²⁸ *Annual Report, 1929*, p. 37.

²⁹ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 127.

³⁰ *Annual Report, 1955*, p. 25.

³¹ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 123.

³² *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 123.

Table 5.1 Religious duties and Catholic Seamen’s Institute, 1938

Ships visited	996
Catholics on board	4,690
Catholics interviewed	816
Catholics accompanied to mass	37
Pamphlets distributed	1,842
Rosaries distributed	67
Men, boys from club, present at recital of rosary	17,527

Source: Catholic Seamen’s Institute, *Annual Report, 1938*, p. 11.

Neglect of religious duties by residents at the Night Shelter was felt to be usually due to carelessness, and many of the homeless men, it was reported, were grateful for the opportunity to put their religious affairs in order:

This work of investigation calls for the exercise of both zeal and tact, and any undue investigation into their lives would naturally be resented by the men. Experience, however, has shown that kind and sympathetic personal contact brings a ready and grateful response. The men are touched by the interest taken in them, and reply with frankness and confidence.³³

In the case of a prisoner, the return to the sacraments was seen as providing the opportunity for a fresh start:

On his release, two brothers visited him in his home, spoke kindly and encouragingly to him ... although he was a ‘hard case’... He was something like ten years away from the sacraments, and as soon as he promised to go, one of our good fathers was advised ... We have since secured for him a cobbler’s outfit so that he can earn his living honestly.³⁴

From the 1920s, the Society members shared the general enthusiasm in the country for pilgrimages, travelling to shrines and holy places, both at home and abroad. The Ozanam committee of the Society in Dublin organised its first pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1926,³⁵ and over 1,200 pilgrims from St Michan’s

³³ *Annual Report, 1927*, p. 101.

³⁴ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 66.

³⁵ Donnelly, ‘The peak of Marianism in Ireland’, in *Piety and power in Ireland*, p. 256; Catherine Rynne, *Knock 1879–1979* (Dublin, 1979), p. 131.

conference travelled to Knock in August 1929.³⁶ Over four weekends in the summer of 1942, members of the conferences attached to Westland Row parish took 746 pilgrims to Lough Derg, considered ‘highly satisfactory’ in view of the war-time restrictions on trains.³⁷ National figures for numbers going to Lough Derg rose steadily from the 1920s to the 1940s, from 12,400 in 1918, to over 25,000 by 1949.³⁸ Weekend or one-day retreats organised by the Society were also a popular method of enhancing the devotional lives of the poor. As well as the spiritual benefits, they provided a welcome change from the drab routine of their city lives for many poor men and women. For the fathers of families the one-day retreat at the Dominican house in Tallaght was referred to as ‘a treat as well as a retreat’. When forty-five poor mothers took part in a retreat in a city convent, they were served ‘a three course dinner and a meat tea’ by members of the Society.³⁹

It is not possible to measure the influence of the Society on the spiritual lives of the families by reference to their annual progress reports, nor to judge their faith commitment by external practice. Many of them lived in hopeless circumstances where it would have been difficult to see any spiritual purpose to their suffering, as this account suggests:

I am out in the street before eight. I have a bike. I make for the docks first and stand with the other men there. Every now and then I get a start. If there is no work I make the rounds of the building jobs. It’s a long time since I got anything there. And sometimes that puzzles me for my wife is never done praying to God to get work for me and the children pray for it every day, too. On my way home I sign at the labour exchange.⁴⁰

Only the non-practising ‘lost sheep’, rescued through the efforts of the brothers, were highlighted in conference reports, while the devout majority were not. The staff at the Night Shelter admitted that occasionally there were ‘difficult cases’ that had to be referred to the chaplains. Hartigan comments on whether the poor felt under pressure to deepen their devotional attachment to the church in order to benefit from material assistance. While he found no

³⁶ Rynne, *Knock*, p. 131.

³⁷ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 145.

³⁸ Alice Curayne, *Lough Derg* (Omagh, 1962 ed.), pp 144–5.

³⁹ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 52.

⁴⁰ [Anonymous], ‘I live in a slum’, in *The Bell*, 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1940), pp 46–8, at pp 46–7.

evidence to suggest any trading-off on the part of the Society of material relief in exchange for greater religious devotion, nonetheless he raises the question as to whether those assisted viewed its activities in that light.⁴¹ At the meeting of presidents in 1939 it was hoped that the holy rosary crusade would be ‘the great means of restoring something of family life in an age when only the old people are to be found at home at night’.⁴² A year later, the president of the council of Ireland admitted that the crusade ‘had fallen a little flat’.⁴³ One cautious member observed with unusual candour in a 1943 conference report:

We may ... possibly be misled into thinking that all of them are practising Catholics, whereas they may really not be. We can only do our best in this matter, without having recourse to undue inquisitiveness.⁴⁴

While the Society’s many works for Dublin’s poor had both a spiritual and temporal dimension, some had a more directly religious purpose – the free breakfasts scheme, the lodging house visitation, the Little Flower Christian doctrine guild, and the work with Traveller families. These services were generally for those whose difficult circumstances did not allow them access to the usual spiritual supports of parish and school. The Society’s suspicion of some Protestant societies that originated in its experience of the proselytising activities of evangelical groups in nineteenth-century Dublin⁴⁵ lingered well into the twentieth century. In 1913, the Society’s confidential report to Archbishop Walsh maintained that there were thirteen schools and nine other proselytising institutions catering for over 2,000 men, women and children in the diocese.⁴⁶ A barrister and member of the Society informed Archbishop Byrne in 1927 that proselytism had become ‘not uncommon amongst the families of prisoners’, with ‘at least five cases in the past twelve months’.⁴⁷ It was in situations where parents were of mixed faith that the Society was most

⁴¹ Hartigan, ‘Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940’, p. 145.

⁴² *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 8 (Aug. 1939), p. 253.

⁴³ *Bulletin*, lxxxv (1940), Jan. Supp., p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 52.

⁴⁵ See Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland 1800–70: a study of Protestant–Catholic relations between the Act of Union and Disestablishment* (Dublin, 1978); James H. Murphy (ed.) *Evangelicals and Catholics in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2005); Prunty, *Margaret Aylward*, pp 39–52.

⁴⁶ Yeates, *Lockout*, p. 261.

⁴⁷ Thomas P. Wall to Edward Byrne, 26 Aug. 1927 (DDA, Byrne Laity file, AB7/208/2/i).

concerned. In 1941, it arranged to have the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Marino give instruction in Christian doctrine to children from a Fairview family who were attending Protestant schools and whose parents were of mixed faiths.⁴⁸ The compiler of a report on ‘non-Catholic shelters in Dublin’ was concerned that the Salvation Army held an evening service in the dining room of their hostel in Peter Street, and although Catholic men were not obliged to attend, they had no option but to remain in the street or go to bed.⁴⁹ Not all Protestant societies were under suspicion. Protestants were both subscribers to the Society and recipients of its assistance. A conference report in 1941 related how a request from a Protestant family ‘was promptly attended to; eventually their own friends undertook responsibility’.⁵⁰

The Society’s free breakfasts were provided to ‘counteract the work among the poor of a similar committee of the Irish Church Missions, whose charity is conditional on a non-catholic service’:

On Sunday mornings free breakfasts are supplied to the derelict poor at two Catholic centres on the north and south sides of the city. The members of the committee also picket the proselytising centre at the Metropolitan Hall and endeavour to persuade Catholic applicants to accept relief in a form which will not endanger their faith.⁵¹

Like other works of this nature, its original purpose was to change over time. Free breakfasts were still being provided, but by the 1940s, references to proselytism had disappeared from the Society’s annual reports.⁵² Men who had lost out on schooling and religious instruction were referred to the Little Flower Christian doctrine guild in Ozanam House to be prepared for confirmation.⁵³ Crosby, in his reminiscences on his schooldays, recalled that some of the weaker boys in his class did not pass the requisite catechism exam before Confirmation. Those who failed were obliged to wait a further two years for Confirmation, but few remained on in school for the extra years.⁵⁴ Again, the original purpose of the guild would decline over the years. Even though only

⁴⁸ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Andrew Keogh to Patrick Dunne, 21 May 1933 (DDA, Byrne Laity file, AB7/208/2/i).

⁵⁰ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 65.

⁵¹ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 6 (1932), June Supp., pp 5–6.

⁵² *Annual Report, 1940*, p. 128.

⁵³ *Annual Report, 1951*, p. 49.

⁵⁴ Paddy Crosby, *Your dinner’s poured out!* (Dublin, paperback ed., 1982), p. 65.

one man was confirmed in 1951, due, it was explained, ‘to the much better school curriculum compared to the rather negligent Christian doctrine classes of thirty years ago’, the guild considered that it still had a useful function. ‘Though many of the men attended to partake of the tea and cakes provided by the brothers, the spiritual objects of the guild were constantly kept before them.’⁵⁵

The main task for the members of St Ciaran’s guild was to encourage men living in lodging houses on the south side of the city to attend Sunday mass.⁵⁶ A conference attached to St Patrick’s training college in Drumcondra did similar work on the north side. The lodgers tended to be elderly or unemployed, with no family ties and with needs beyond the spiritual. ‘Clothes and boots, holy-water fonts and other small necessities are given where required.’⁵⁷ In its report for 1930, members of the lodging house committee referred to the floating population they encountered and to the ‘lonely men who were very pleased to meet anyone who showed a sympathetic interest in their lives’.⁵⁸ A report from 1948 presents a more negative assessment of the encounters with these men:

We can give material assistance and come to know each man personally. Of ourselves we can go no further. ... Sometimes we get a ray of hope, of encouragement in the work. More often we feel as if we were groping in the dark or had come right against a forbidding stone wall.⁵⁹

Another work that had a predominantly religious dimension was the involvement with the Travelling community.⁶⁰ Early in 1931, members of the conference of the Three Patrons, Rathgar, who formed the guild of St John Francis Regis, undertook the weekly visitation of ‘gipsy’ families encamped on the Dodder bank between Milltown and Rathfarnham:

We are received with extreme courtesy, and soon gain the confidence of those we visit. Very many of the families do not practise religion and are quite illiterate. Our work consists in seeing that the very young children are baptised and that those of school going age attend the nearest convent schools for instruction for first confession and holy

⁵⁵ *Annual Report, 1951*, p. 49.

⁵⁶ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 126.

⁵⁷ *Annual Report, 1950*, p. 67.

⁵⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxvi, no. 4 (1931), Apr. Supp., pp 7–8.

⁵⁹ *Annual Report, 1948*, pp 81–2.

⁶⁰ Various described as ‘gypsies’, ‘wandering men’ and ‘itinerants’; apart from references in direct quotations, they are referred to as ‘Travellers’ or ‘the Travelling Community’ in this study.

communion. Three or four nights a week members attend the caravans and give instructions to the elder members whose religious instruction has been neglected. ... Our work being purely spiritual we do not give or offer temporal aid, nor are we asked for same.⁶¹

The conference considered itself fortunate to have a spiritual director who had worked with the Travellers for many years.

Through his untiring zeal and the wholehearted assistance of the nuns from the local convent, great moral improvement has been effected among a large number ... lapsed Catholics have been returned to the faith, neglected children baptised, and marriages regularised. Brothers cooperate in this work by visiting the encampments and assisting in giving religious instruction.⁶²

Many couples about to get married asked the visiting brothers to help them locate their baptismal certificates.⁶³ An account of the work in 1945 describes how the brothers sought out the families who lived in caravans, tents, bus bodies, huts that were located in yards, waste patches of ground, in lanes and alley ways off the main streets of the city and suburbs. They tried to help the families 'in their many and complex problems', noting that neither when sick nor unemployed were they in receipt of state or municipal assistance. The roving life of the families prevented the children attending school for more than a couple of weeks at a time.⁶⁴

January was the retreat month for Traveller families, for men and women, and for boys and girls. The Jesuit fathers conducted the retreats, and the Irish Sisters of Charity in Seville Place provided the premises. ... on the morning of the retreats, the brothers attend at the different encampments and accompany the families, paying their bus fares to the retreat house. ... Three substantial meals – breakfast, dinner and tea – are given, and if there is anything left over, it is given to the mothers to take to the children left at home. Attendance was 70–80 for women and girls, 50–60 for men and boys.⁶⁵

Despite the **guild's** primary spiritual purpose and its own meagre funds, it listed several types of material assistance that it had given to Traveller families in 1948:

They cannot obtain assistance from local authorities and eke out a sometimes precarious livelihood as best they may. The guild provides

⁶¹ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 144.

⁶² *Annual Report, 1932*, p. 56.

⁶³ *Annual Report, 1940*, p. 124.

⁶⁴ *Annual Report, 1945*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ *Annual Report, 1945*, p. 103.

food tickets and clothing when necessary. It has assisted families from time to time to obtain caravans, horses, donkeys ... Funeral expenses have also been paid. Material aid is not usually given, except in cases of great necessity, as the guild has only limited means.⁶⁶

The years immediately after the Second World War saw the beginnings of change in how the Society of St Vincent de Paul would come to see its role as a lay Catholic organisation. In 1947, the president of the council of Ireland, Lonan Murphy, attended an international meeting of the Society in Paris, where he met other national presidents from Europe, the United States and Australia. Celebrating mass on the occasion was Angelo Roncalli, papal nuncio to France, later Pope John XXIII.⁶⁷ The main purpose of the meeting was to re-establish contacts and to discuss Society needs in the aftermath of the war, but it also marked the beginning of a movement that would put the Society in Ireland in touch with new developments in the wider Catholic world. In the course of the meeting, the Irish president was to hear lively discussions on women's conferences and on the recent growth of mixed conferences of men and women in the universities in France. He was surprised to learn that, on the question of dances as a means of fund-raising, 'the council-general had a much broader attitude than is adopted by us'.⁶⁸ The subsequent reports on the meeting were to be 'greatly facilitated by speed in delivery of letters rendered possible by air-mail'.⁶⁹ The international meeting of presidents became a three-yearly event.

While international developments were taking place that would soon have a major impact on both the church and on the Society, Irish Catholics continued their involvement in church celebrations, devotional practices and pilgrimages throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The *Irish Times* reported the enthusiastic reception given to the new papal nuncio, Ettore Felici, by the people of Dublin, who 'packed along Marlborough Street and jammed inside the railings in front of the Pro-Cathedral'.⁷⁰ On a fine, mist-free July night in 1951, the *Catholic Directory* recorded that 70,000 pilgrims climbed Croagh Patrick, favoured by

⁶⁶ *Annual Report, 1947*, p. 77.

⁶⁷ *Bulletin*, xciii, no. 11 (Nov. 1948), p. 276.

⁶⁸ Minutes, Council of Ireland, 1945–48, President's report on Plenary Meeting, Paris 1947, appended (SVPA).

⁶⁹ *Annual Report, 1947*, pp 6–7.

⁷⁰ Cited in Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican*, pp 301–2.

what were described as the best weather conditions in living memory.⁷¹ The combined Westland Row conferences' pilgrimages to Lough Derg in 1954 attracted 'by far the largest number we have ever had since it began in 1926'.⁷² Many of the Society's liturgical gatherings had begun to have a greater social and festive aspect. On Ozanam Sunday, 1949, members of Myra House and the families visited attended mass together in the Church of St Nicholas of Myra, Francis Street, with a meal and concert provided later for about 100 poor men.⁷³ The choir from St Mary's church in Haddington Road in 1959 performed at a sung mass in the Night Shelter, attended by a large number of the residents, with breakfast afterwards and a sing-song.⁷⁴

In 1951, Archbishop McQuaid blessed the new oratory and wing at the Night Shelter, with the Taoiseach, John A. Costello, in attendance. The stained glass window above the altar was the work of John Hogan and a gift from St Michael's conference, Dún Laoghaire.⁷⁵ Weekend retreats for boys from technical schools were taking place at Sunshine House and were deemed to be very successful.⁷⁶ When Jesuit priest, Edward O'Connor, conducted a six-day retreat for members on aspects of the life of Frédéric Ozanam, the chapel of St Ignatius in Gardiner Street was 'packed to capacity for each talk'.⁷⁷ The Society continued to organise one-day retreats in the 1950s: a special bus transported forty men, most from the city slums and only casually employed, to Tallaght, where they were supplied with cigarettes and tobacco as well as 'ample fare' at the retreat house.⁷⁸

The Marian year of 1954 gave an added impetus to devotion among the people of Dublin. For twelve months, bricklayers, engineers, carpenters, and other employees from the Irish Glass Bottle Company volunteered their services to build an oratory in the factory yard, where mass was celebrated by the parish

⁷¹ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1952*, p. 694.

⁷² *Annual Report, 1954*, p. 46.

⁷³ *Annual Report, 1949*, p. 80.

⁷⁴ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 10 (Oct. 1959), p. 225.

⁷⁵ *Annual Report, 1951*, p. 39.

⁷⁶ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 6 (June 1952), p. 99.

⁷⁷ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 6 (June 1952), p. 113.

⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, xcix, no. 10 (Oct. 1954), p. 227.

priest of Ringsend on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, 1954.⁷⁹ The Society marked the year by distributing copies of the pope's Marian prayer to all conferences,⁸⁰ and in St Anthony's club, the boys sang the Lourdes hymn every night after prayers.⁸¹

Allowing for a certain over-exuberance in reporting, the impression given is one of the continued willing participation by the laity and by the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, in various devotional activities during these years. If there were signs of deviation from this pattern they were rarely recorded in the *Bulletin* or the annual reports. The Rathgar conference did admit in 1948 that its efforts to interest adults in membership of the local sodality 'did not meet with the desired effect',⁸² and in 1957 there were difficulties in promoting the display of the Sacred Heart image in the homes, because, 'like the family rosary crusade, members tend to blow hot and cold on it and therefore need stimulation from time to time.'⁸³

The sudden death of the youthful president of the council of Ireland, Lonan Murphy, in 1947 was a serious setback to the progress of the Society. Although new and pressing issues were emerging at international level, the tone and content of the council of Ireland's annual reports remained conservative during the 1950s. Its pessimistic, defensive comments in 1953 are reminiscent of an earlier time:

In 1933 our late Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, gave our Society a motto: 'Ever more, ever better'. Was there ever a time in the history of the Church when she was so violently attacked as at present? Is it not to be expected from a lay Society such as ours that in days of stress... our members should ... rally to the support of our priests and follow out the recommendation of the Holy Father?⁸⁴

The annual reports at this time tended to concentrate on narrow administrative matters and on perceived violations of the Rule. In the annual report for 1956, there was a warning that :

Presidents who fail to ensure that the festivals are celebrated ... are guilty of a grave breach of responsibility. Not alone do they fail in their

⁷⁹ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1955*, p. 623.

⁸⁰ *Annual Report, 1954*, p. 5.

⁸¹ *Bulletin*, c, no. 5 (May 1955), p. 103.

⁸² *Annual Report, 1948*, p. 70.

⁸³ *Bulletin*, cii, no. 11 (Nov. 1957), p. 269.

⁸⁴ *Annual Report, 1953*, p. 37.

duty, but they deprive their members of the graces and indulgences which should be their reward if the Rule were observed....⁸⁵

The following year, slackness in the delivery of Catholic literature was a cause of concern:

If conferences have not taken action so far in this direction they are now reminded of our primary duty to endeavour to seek after spiritual improvement in the families of those visited as well as in our own spiritual life.⁸⁶

A number of conferences in the 1950s continued to give support to Traveller families, but the annual report for 1959 suggests that, while those who worked closely with them felt there was need for a more radical approach to assistance, the leadership of the Society at the time distanced itself from any closer engagement with the problem:

Numerous conferences are endeavouring to help itinerants. Like many of the community at large, some conferences feel that 'something should be done about' these people. The council think that that matter had better be left to the authorities and that we should continue to assist them to the best of our ability, especially in the spiritual sphere.⁸⁷

The pessimistic outlook on Catholic life in general also continued to be a feature of episcopal statements at the time. At the centenary celebrations for the first conference in Drogheda in 1951, the Archbishop of Armagh, John D'Alton, regretted that many people seemed to have lost their bearings, as far as supernatural life was concerned.

Even the shock of two world wars, unparalleled in their barbarity, have failed to bring them to a realisation of the real purpose of life and of the duties which they owe to God and to their neighbour.⁸⁸

Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) emphasised the central place of Christian charity, rather than state intervention, in solving social problems, an emphasis that was widely promoted in Irish church circles as the foundation for social action. There were concerns that ever-growing dependence on the state would lead to loss of freedom in thought and action. Echoing the encyclical, Peter McKevitt, first holder of the chair of Catholic Sociology and Catholic Action at Maynooth, argued that the state should not do more for

⁸⁵ *Annual Report, 1956*, p. 10.

⁸⁶ *Annual Report, 1957*, p. 11.

⁸⁷ *Annual Report, 1949*, p. 10.

⁸⁸ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 1 (Jan. 1951), p. 2.

people than they could do for themselves. An unnamed member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, in a paper on ‘the church, the state and the poor’ agreed. Lamenting the fact that the message of the encyclical had been ignored, he declared:

Ozanam has given us our charter and our way of life. It is a part of the lay apostolate of the church ... and what a strong contrast with the chilling and impersonal administration of schemes, of public assistance and state doles which are measured only by the pressure of public opinion and the state of the national treasury and take little or no account of the standards of Christian charity or individual necessity.⁸⁹

Such direct comment from a member of the Society on a current debate was rare and may simply have reflected one member’s personal views or sense of loyalty to the pope. While talks from clergy on the threat from communist or Marxist ideologies were occasionally published in the *Bulletin*, there is no evidence of a general aversion to state intervention by the Society at this time. As Kelly points out, members of the hierarchy made markedly different pronouncements on this complex issue in the 1930s and 1940s.⁹⁰ Given that the Society had seen thousands of its poor families benefit from the introduction of widows’ and orphans’ pensions, and children’s allowances – developments that directly relieved the drain on its own limited funds – a pragmatic silence may have appeared the better option.

Before the Second Vatican Council, a number of European theologians had begun to explore new ways of understanding the church’s role in the contemporary world.⁹¹ In Ireland, too, from the 1950s, a new clerical intellectual circle signalled the beginnings of a move in this direction. The contributors to the *Furrow* (1950), *Doctrine and Life* (1951) and the re-launched *Irish Theological Quarterly* (1951) presented a more questioning, less legalistic, approach to church issues and reflected the changes in understanding that were occurring in Europe.⁹² The Society of St Vincent de Paul was also establishing closer links with the international church. Two members of the council of Ireland had attended the world congress of the Apostolate of the

⁸⁹ *Bulletin*, xcvi nos 10–11 (Nov.–Dec. 1951), p.173.

⁹⁰ Kelly, ‘Catholic action and the development of the Irish welfare state in the 1930s and 1940s’, p. 115.

⁹¹ See Yves Congar, *The Catholic church and the race question* (Paris, 1953) and Gérard Philips, *The role of the laity in the church* (Chicago, 1956).

⁹² Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, pp xvi, 27.

Laity in Rome in 1957, an event widely reported in the *Bulletin*. The delegates had prepared themselves for the congress by a series of study meetings held over several months. Among the speakers at the congress were American Catholic writer, Frank Sheed, and Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan, later Pope Paul VI.⁹³

Apart from the writings of Charles K. Murphy, Cork president of the particular council, there had traditionally been little intellectual discourse on social or religious issues among the members, and the Society did not, at this time, have a stated policy on poverty or on how it was to be addressed. Kavanagh's views on Catholic Action in the 1940s foretold the new role for the laity that would emerge more generally from the 1950s: the duty of the Catholic laity to take the initiative in social reform. Change must be accepted, he argued. 'The very word implies energy, life, the exercise of power related to change'.⁹⁴

In keeping with the greater reflection on spiritual meaning, a new emphasis was given to the understanding of 'charity', an important concept for a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. In various writings in the *Bulletin*, charity was broadly defined in three ways: first, charity in the sense of material help for those in crisis, a daily reality in the course of conference work; second, the scriptural meaning of charity as love (Paul, 1 Cor 13:4), which emphasised the warm and respectful qualities required of a brother in his encounters with people in difficulties; and third, charity as inseparable from social justice, which compelled the Society to seek solutions to the causes of misery and inequality.

In a talk delivered at the Vincentian school of charity, the Society's training programme for new brothers, the speaker emphasised the second meaning of charity:

If you throw a penny into a beggarman's cap because you feel sorry for him, you are doing something which is quite estimable, but how much better would your donation be if it was enlivened by real charity; charity that is not in the conventional sense of giving but in its true sense of love ... of always wishing to see Christ in the poor and to treat them accordingly.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Annual Report, 1957*, p. 6.

⁹⁴ Murphy, *Spirit of Catholic Action*, p. 41.

⁹⁵ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 2 (Feb. 1959), p. 31.

For Charles Kavanagh Murphy, writing in 1954, the old charity of almsgiving was no longer adequate; charity in the future had to have an intellectual component and be linked to justice if progress in solving social problems was to be made:

Unquestionably it brought comfort to the poor. But it was not sufficiently effectual against the causes of their sufferings. ... The members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the future will have to give careful attention to these things and to take the initiative in intellectual charity ... in devising means to meet the evils of society.⁹⁶

In an exchange of greetings in 1959 between the president-general, Pierre Chouard, and the new pope, John XXIII urged the Society to pay attention to the spiritual formation of its members.⁹⁷ Later that year, it was to be the theme at the annual meeting of presidents in Dublin. If the organisers expected an open discussion on the brothers' experience of personal holiness, they were to be disappointed. It was deemed to be 'an intimate matter about which men do not care to speak in public'.⁹⁸

... it was obvious that some felt uncomfortable at discussing the subject of personal sanctification and felt, too, that they should not be required or requested to speak about spiritual things at their conference meetings. It was interesting to note that that these feelings existed mostly amongst older presidents; it was obvious that the entire concept appealed very strongly indeed to the majority of the younger men.⁹⁹

However, a number of recommendations did emerge from this meeting that suggest some change in the traditional understanding of religious practice in the Society. Presidents of conferences were urged not to 'spend all their lives worrying about the state of the souls of their brothers'; greater emphasis should be given to scripture readings at the meetings, and, it was suggested, that all the activity of a conference – the meeting itself, routine discussions, the visitation work – be considered as forms of 'prayer'.¹⁰⁰

Bill Cashman, the recently-elected president of the council of Ireland, attended the fifth international plenary meeting of the Society in Paris in 1960. An energetic and enthusiastic disciple of the emerging developments in the

⁹⁶ *Bulletin*, xcix no. 12 (Dec. 1954), p. 268.

⁹⁷ *Bulletin*, civ, no. 4 (Apr. 1959), p. 122.

⁹⁸ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 1 (Jan. 1960), p. 19.

⁹⁹ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 1 (Jan. 1960), p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ *Bulletin*, cv, no 1, (Jan. 1960), p. 20..

church, with his brother, Bob, who succeeded him as president, they would steer the society through a period of unprecedented change over a fifteen-year period. Among its recommendations, the meeting called for spiritual, technical and social formation; a greater collaboration with the social services; and the adoption of conferences in developing lands so to give them not only material assistance but the benefit of experience and of mutual exchange.¹⁰¹ Pierre Chouard, appointed president general of the Society in 1954, was one of a group of leading scientists and intellectuals who had assembled in the post-war years to explore major international concerns. A conference in Washington, DC, in 1956 led to the establishment of the World Academy of Arts and Science in 1960, of which he was a founding member.¹⁰²

Chouard is credited with putting forward a programme of renewal at the plenary meeting in 1960 that in a number of respects anticipated the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰³ In a long, inspirational address, he outlined with broad sweeps the changes that were taking place in the world: space travel, nuclear energy, scientific and technological development, all of which had the potential to improve mankind or to increase its misery. In attempting to understand the role of the Society in this future world, he suggested a return to the permanent features of the Vincentian rule to ‘continually clothe them in the apparel and language appropriate to our changing times’.¹⁰⁴ The adoption of conferences in developing lands led to the initiative known as ‘twinning’.¹⁰⁵ Councils and conferences in wealthy countries agreed to correspond and supply material aid to their counterparts in less well-endowed countries.¹⁰⁶ Within two years, Irish conferences had established links with over eighty conferences in Africa and Asia. The particular council of south county Dublin had direct links with a council in Nigeria, and twenty-three conferences contributed to the upkeep of a

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 7–8 (July–Aug. 1957), pp 97–100, 169–74.

¹⁰² <http://www.worldacademy.org/?q=node/18>, viewed 28 Apr. 2008.

¹⁰³ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 2 (Feb. 1969), pp 33–4.

¹⁰⁴ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 11 (Nov. 1960), p. 254.

¹⁰⁵ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 9 (Sept. 1961), pp 204–5.

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 9 (Sept. 1961), pp 205.

hostel in Lusaka.¹⁰⁷ By 1970, the Irish conferences had twinned with 275 conferences.¹⁰⁸

The tercentenary commemorations in 1960 of the death of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Society's patron, generated its own impetus for renewal, with Vincentian religious congregations looking afresh at Vincent's life and times and recasting his message in contemporary language.¹⁰⁹ In a visit to Ireland in 1961, as part of the Patrician celebrations for the fifteenth centenary of the death of St Patrick, Pierre Chouard, the president-general, said that the Society, in common with other lay organisations, was preparing material for the forthcoming Ecumenical Council.¹¹⁰ The three-year deliberations of the council produced a document of particular relevance to the Society, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, which stressed the co-responsibility of the laity in the ministry of the church.¹¹¹ Another major document, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, described as 'pastoral', 'Christ-centred' and 'biblical', presented 'a Church that was subject to the force of history, but pressing forward with a goal beyond history'.¹¹² For several years to come, the *Bulletin* was give extensive coverage to council documents, encyclicals and international Society meetings. This may have been determined by the obligation of the editor of the widely-distributed 'Irish' *Bulletin* to make official documents available to members in the English-speaking world, where coverage of church issues would not have been as widespread as in Ireland. With so many international issues filling the pages of the *Bulletin*, the day-to-day activities of the Dublin conferences no longer featured in detail, and there are few indications from this source of how the members or their clients were adapting to the changes in religious practice and devotional life, or to the new understanding of the role of the laity.

¹⁰⁷ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 10 (Oct. 1963), p. 237.

¹⁰⁸ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 3 (Mar. 1971), p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ See Walter L. Willigan, 'St Vincent de Paul: the social worker', in *Thought Patterns – Tercentenary Journal*, 9 (1961) pp 32–59.

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 8 (Aug. 1961), p. 175.

¹¹¹ Martin Work, 'Introduction to the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity', in Abbot (ed.), *The documents of Vatican II*, pp 486–8.

¹¹² Avery Dulles, 'Introduction to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church', in Abbot (ed.), *The documents of Vatican II*, pp 9–13.

The Society continued its own renewal throughout the 1960s, leading to the introduction of an experimental new rule later in the decade. The 1963 plenary meeting in Paris brought delegates from Algeria, Morocco, Uganda, Argentina, India, Korea and the Fiji islands.¹¹³ At this gathering, the Society's long-honoured tradition of humility on the part of its members was questioned:

[it should] eliminate the tendency ...to keep itself to itself to a degree which is altogether undesirable in this modern world, to confuse autonomy with independence and to let the humility recommended by our founders develop into a kind of secrecy, whereas Ozanam said: 'Never be ostentatious, but let your works be seen.'¹¹⁴

It further recommended that cooperation between organisations of other faiths and secular organisations 'should be encouraged cautiously in the spirit of Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*'.¹¹⁵

Although the traditional understanding of the Society of St Vincent de Paul as a lay Catholic organisation was rapidly changing, there was no clarity emerging as to what form its new spiritual identity might take. A plea by the French president-general, Pierre Chouard, delivered in 1955, that members not lose sight of the spiritual dimensions of their work and that they reach out to those suffering from 'the sorrows of a lost faith' may not have been a realistic option in the increasingly secular Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s:

I would urge particularly charity in a moral order and the peculiarly religious domain. ... Material help is only something extra, because it would be insulting to speak only of the spirit at a time when the sufferings of the body had not been relieved. But in these days of agnosticism, or of weakened faith ... we have an immense task to accomplish bringing the Gospel to those who await it.¹¹⁶

Commenting on the results of the international plenary meeting in Paris in 1968, Bill Cashman admitted that the debate on the spirit of the Society was 'rather skimpy', with no effort being made to define its nature.¹¹⁷

However, the message that the Society was a Christian organisation committed to social justice received wide coverage in the *Bulletin*. At the annual meeting of presidents in 1969, attended by Cardinal William Conway,

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 6 (June 1963), 125.

¹¹⁴ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 6 (June 1963), p. 130.

¹¹⁵ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 6 (June 1963), p. 130.

¹¹⁶ *Bulletin*, 127, no. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 15.

¹¹⁷ *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 1 (Jan. 1968), p. 8.

the new president-general, Henri Jacob, spoke of world poverty, relative poverty and the issue of fair trade for underdeveloped countries, contained in Pope Paul VI's recent encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*.¹¹⁸ As if conscious that the discussions, however worthy, were beyond the day-to-day experience of many members, Bob Cashman put the issue of justice in a more recognisable context. The provision of first communion outfits, he said, was an act of justice because it helped families to live in dignity as human beings.

The children's dignity is upheld, and their parents, and even though they may dislike or even resent having the clothes provided for their children, they at least have the satisfaction of knowing that the children are happy.¹¹⁹

The engagement with Traveller families in this period is perhaps the clearest example of the Society's transition from a work that was 'primarily of a spiritual nature' in the 1920s to an emphasis that put the Christian demands of social justice at the centre of its approach. If the council of Ireland in the 1950s considered it unwise to get too closely involved in 'the problems of these people', this was no longer the case by the 1960s. In 1961, the Society made a written submission to the government-appointed Commission on Itinerancy.¹²⁰ Its Report, published in 1963, showed that most Travellers were completely illiterate, had poor school attendance records and restricted employment opportunities. While they were entitled to children's allowances and old age pensions like other citizens, there were difficulties in collecting what was due to them because they had no fixed abode. In its recommendations, the Report stated that it was vital that voluntary organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary interest themselves in settlement programmes.¹²¹ A subsequent comment on the Report in the *Bulletin* read:

The report ... makes sorry reading and for the Society of St Vincent de Paul it poses a serious question. Is the Society neglecting some of its next-door-neighbours in distress, while concentrating on its traditional work amongst the settled population?¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 11 (Nov. 1969), p. 287.

¹¹⁹ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 12 (Dec. 1969), p. 307.

¹²⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p. 159.

¹²¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, pp 64, 75, 107.

¹²² *Bulletin*, cix, no. 5 (May 1964), p. 103.

A report read at a meeting of presidents of councils the following year described how the Clondalkin conference responded when the parish priest became concerned about the number of cold and hungry children living at the Cherry Orchard encampment. Eighty families were living there, about ten of them destitute. The members provided meal tickets for the Catholic Social Service Conference food centre at Ballyfermot, as well as clothes and footwear. The report observed that the Society, the Legion of Mary and the spiritual directors saw the integration of Travellers into the community as likely to take ‘at least two generations’ and would be dependent on a proper system of education.¹²³

In what it described as ‘a modest contribution to the itinerancy problem’, the Society, nation-wide, stated in 1967 that, in recent years, it had provided houses for about fifty families, and also cooperated with other organisations to provide education for the children. There were now several conferences devoted exclusively to such work.¹²⁴ An account of the Society’s activities in 1969, sent to Archbishop McQuaid, illustrates what this closer involvement in the sensitive issue of resettlement entailed for members:

In a number of areas, Itinerant settlement committees were entirely composed of our members and in most places the Society was strongly represented on these committees. Our members bore the brunt of local opposition to settlement proposals and suffered vilification and threats. It was encouraging to learn that they stood up and were counted in the cause of justice for a suffering and unpopular group of people.¹²⁵

The New Rule in 1968 was to bring significant changes in the Society’s religious practices. The traditional prayers of the Society were printed in Latin and English and ran to seven pages in the 1958 edition of the *Manual*.¹²⁶ These prayers were shortened and a prayer for Christian unity added.¹²⁷ Instead of four prescribed festival meetings, there were now only two.¹²⁸ The range of indulgences, long presented as the ultimate reward for perseverance and zeal, were curtailed and simplified.¹²⁹ The spiritual director was renamed ‘spiritual

¹²³ *Bulletin*, cx, no. 6 (June 1965), pp 174–5.

¹²⁴ *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 12 (Dec. 1967), p. 291.

¹²⁵ ‘Review of 1969’, typewritten report to John Charles McQuaid (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹²⁶ *Manual*, 1958 ed., pp 280–8.

¹²⁷ New Rule, article 20.

¹²⁸ New Rule, article 50.

¹²⁹ *Bulletin*, cxiii, no. 9 (Sept. 1968), pp 212–13.

adviser'.¹³⁰ As well as the name-change, a questionnaire, sent to spiritual directors in 1969 on how they saw their role in the conferences, suggested that they favoured a less formal role, with the spiritual motivation of the brothers promoted through discussion groups and social occasions.¹³¹ Anthony Gaughan, a priest in the Dublin diocese, recalls his time as spiritual director to a conference in East Wall parish in the 1960s:

The weekly meeting I enjoyed attending most was that of the St Vincent de Paul conference. There was plenty for the members to do, as there was a great deal of poverty in the parish. The members were nearly all civil servants from the Clontarf area and had been active in the Society since leaving their secondary school, St Joseph's CBS, Marino. Their generosity with their time and genuine sympathy for those they helped was edifying.¹³²

The issue of whether personal sanctification was a selfish motive for joining the Society of St Vincent de Paul was re-examined and found wanting. When the question was raised in the *Bulletin* in 1956, a traditional reply was offered:

We are created to serve God and also to gain eternal life. ... the first and greatest commandment is to love God and the second, which is like the first, is to love one's neighbour. ... One cannot, therefore, sanctify oneself without living a life of charity.¹³³

By 1966, this explanation did not satisfy Canon Edward Gallen, spiritual director of the council of Ireland, who referred to the narrow and self-centred air that the term 'sanctification' implied and how it was a possible deterrent to young people joining the Society:

... it is clear now, as it never was before, that any idea of isolated spirituality, simply looking after one's own soul, and one's own merit and one's own sanctification without thinking of others, is out.¹³⁴

The New Rule expressed the concept of personal sanctification in simpler terms:

The Society of St Vincent de Paul is composed of Christian lay persons seeking to develop in themselves a life of charity and to manifest it by fraternal participation in works bearing witness to the love of Christ.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ New Rule, article 8.

¹³¹ *Bulletin*, cxv, no. 5 (May 1970), p. 98.

¹³² J. Anthony Gaughan, *At the coalface: recollections of a city and country priest, 1950–2000* (Dublin, 2000), p. 79.

¹³³ *Bulletin* xci, no. 7 (July 1956), p. 177.

¹³⁴ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 10 (Oct. 1966), p. 248.

¹³⁵ New Rule, article 1.

The old concerns about whether the families were performing their religious duties, such a central part of the reporting by conferences up to the 1950s, is no longer mentioned in the Society's publications. A member, active in the 1960s, recalls that the practice of enquiring if a person had been to mass may have continued to some degree, but in the context of the time, offence was neither given nor taken in most cases. 'It was like a parent enquiring in a friendly way if a son had been to mass.' However, he does recall an element of threat that those who didn't conform might not be visited again.¹³⁶ If there were any suggestion that families were being denied assistance because of non-practice, it was firmly denounced by Frank Casey, vice-president of the council of Ireland in 1971, who left no doubt that the brothers' direct spiritual interventions in the lives of families were considered intrusive and unnecessary:

... in the Society of tomorrow there must be no inquisitions into people's affairs, no bullying, no paternalistic lectures and above all no four-square efforts to shove spirituality down the throats of the recipients of our assistance. The example of our lives and behaviour is far the most effective way of getting across our message.¹³⁷

While the Christian dimensions and applications of charity were presented as limitless – 'in a sense we have to turn ourselves into a sort of public conscience on behalf of all in need'¹³⁸ – the actual involvement and commitment of the members at conference level may not have been so enthusiastic. Responding to the dissatisfaction felt by many members at the new demands, Bill Cashman said:

What we are doing in the Society, what we are asked to do, is no more than we are bound to do as Christians. The value of the Society is that we are enabled to do these things in an organised way.¹³⁹

In an effort to engage the members more fully, the editor of the *Bulletin* in 1970 invited contributions to the correspondence page – provided that letters were interesting and contained constructive criticism.¹⁴⁰ A brother wrote to lament the fact that the Rule, revered from the foundation of the Society, had

¹³⁶ Interview with a member of the Society (28 Apr. 2008).

¹³⁷ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 12 (Dec. 1971), p. 268.

¹³⁸ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 11 (Nov. 1964), pp 273–4.

¹³⁹ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 9 (Sept. 1963), pp 204–5.

¹⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 1 (Jan. 1970), n.p.

been ‘abruptly cast out the window’.¹⁴¹ Another pressed for even more change, suggesting that it would be a blessing if the ‘irritating’ use of ‘brother’ and ‘sister’, when addressing conference members were dropped.¹⁴² The speed with which changes in the church and in the Society were being suggested may have been overwhelming for the more traditional members. Before the official closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, Pope Paul VI presided at a service in Rome attended by 2,000 church leaders of various denominations that was considered ‘quite inconceivable even a few years ago’.¹⁴³ Expressing similar sentiments, Bob Cashman, at an international meeting of the Society in Dublin some years later, said that the question then being considered of admitting people of other faiths into the Society ‘would not have been possible five years ago’, but admitted that there were dangers when leaders of an organisation ‘went too far ahead of its members’.¹⁴⁴

The New Rule asked for greater collaboration with other charitable and organisations and community initiatives.¹⁴⁵ By the early 1970s, the Society had purchased its first house for conversion into five flats for young married couples with one child,¹⁴⁶ and was cooperating with the Salvation Army in providing meals-on-wheels for elderly people.¹⁴⁷ A more easy blend of the spiritual and temporal needs of clients was occurring, with members organising taxis or driving those who were feeble to mass on Sundays, and in addition to religious books and papers, supplying secular literature and newspapers.¹⁴⁸

Bob Cashman, writing to Archbishop McQuaid in 1970, referred to three resolutions passed by the Council of Ireland in January 1970 that related directly to issues of poverty and to how they were to be addressed. This statement could be described as the Society’s first specific policy statement on poverty and was sent to every member of the Society in June of that year. While reiterating the Society’s position as a non-political organisation, the

¹⁴¹ *Bulletin*, 117, nos 7–8 (July–Aug. 1973), p 170.

¹⁴² *Bulletin*, 118, no. 6 (June 1973), p. 147.

¹⁴³ *Herder Correspondence*, 3, no. 2 (Feb. 1966), p. 37.

¹⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 11 Sept. 1973.

¹⁴⁵ New Rule, article 7.

¹⁴⁶ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 3 (Mar. 1971), p. 55.

¹⁴⁷ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 5 (May 1972), p. 103.

¹⁴⁸ *Bulletin*, cvix, no. 6 (June 1964), pp 122–3.

statement outlined its commitment to promoting employment, to advocating the fair distribution of public welfare benefits, and to creating an attitude among the public 'that would ensure that less-privileged people are never treated as second-class citizens'.¹⁴⁹ In his letter to McQuaid, Cashman said:

This is a new departure for the Society and corresponds closely with the views expressed in the statement on social justice issued after the last meeting of the hierarchy.¹⁵⁰

The hierarchy, too, had been putting its social justice commitment on a more structured footing, with the establishment of agencies such as the Council for Social Welfare, the Commission for Justice and Peace, and Trócaire, the world development agency, in the late 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵¹ Bob Cashman was appointed a member of both the Commission for the Laity and the Commission for Justice and Peace.¹⁵² A conference on poverty, organised by the Council for Social Welfare in 1971, was considered innovative for its time, and the foundation for many subsequent initiatives to address the issue of poverty in a more measured way.¹⁵³ Again, the question of whether the members at local level were absorbing this new understanding of poverty was raised in 1974, by the bishop of Meath, John McCormack:

... I know that the council of Ireland has not been dozing or asleep this last decade ... But ... have [the] insights into the ramifications of poverty found their way effectively to the conferences and local councils? ... How often have new ideas and pleas for attention to particular areas of misery come up from below? There should certainly be a two-way flow of ideas on the whole question of poverty and what is needed to cope with it.¹⁵⁴

The less than enthusiastic reaction of members to abstract theories on social justice and poverty issues may have been due to the lack of evidence for their usefulness in solving concrete problems. Bob Cashman referred to a confrontation he had with a fellow member in which the man outlined to him

¹⁴⁹ Council of Ireland statement and resolutions on responding to poverty issues, June, 1970 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁵⁰ Robert Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 11 Aug. 1972 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁵¹ See *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1977, pp 22–8.

¹⁵² *Bulletin*, 116, no. 8 (Aug. 1971), p. 184.

¹⁵³ See 'Proceedings of the conference on poverty, Kilkenny, Nov. 1971', in *Social Studies* (special issue), 1, no. 4 (Aug. 1972), pp 371–498.

¹⁵⁴ *Bulletin*, 9, no. 119 (Sept. 1974), p. 2.

the frustrations of trying to help a family in a particularly depressed area of the city:

All the classic symptoms were present – unemployment, inadequate income, inability to cope, the husband in jail, the rent unpaid. ... His final words before stalking away were ‘you fellows would be better off down in — Street than wasting everybody’s time with your fine theories.’¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, Cashman argued, the Society had to be involved in the struggle against the injustices that perpetuated the situations that made short-term aid necessary.¹⁵⁶

This chapter saw the Society’s identity as a lay Catholic organisation change in unprecedented ways over the five decades under review. The preoccupation with personal sanctification and religious duty at the start of the period gave way to a less defined understanding of what it meant to be a Catholic lay person. The fusion of secular and religious values and the Christian understanding of charity linked to justice dominated the closing years.

Change to the new ways advocated by the Second Vatican Council and the Society’s own developments may not have been an easy transition for those accustomed to traditional ways. Signs of religious progress could no longer be measured by the number of seamen motored to mass on a Sunday morning. Religious progress was not measured at all. The diligent attendance to the religious duties of the poor, lauded in earlier years, was later deemed to be intrusive and offensive.

From the 1960s, the Christian and secular world gave much greater attention to universal human problems, and presented extra challenges to the Society’s members. Leaders of the Society had the advantage of being animated and attuned to these new ideas by their contacts at international conferences, whereas the majority of the members at conference level had to rely on second-hand reporting. If the leaders of the Society were often critical that the members did not engage more actively in the justice issues, it may be that they did not see their direct relevance to their conference work. As has been shown in earlier chapters, the majority of the members of the Society of St Vincent de

¹⁵⁵ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 5 (May 1973), p. 109.

¹⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 5 (May 1973), p. 110.

Paul remained committed to the traditional work of the visitation of families in their homes. In later years, many of their clients were elderly people living alone, whose needs were simple. The expectation that members adopt a more radical approach to controversial issues may have been unrealistic. Traditionally, the members were expected to be modest, self-effacing and to carry out their work on behalf of the poor in obscurity. Many were civil servants, whose training would have precluded them from overt criticism of state institutions.

If their sense of mission as a lay organisation was somewhat obscured during these years of change, they could be consoled by the fact that in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, all the good works on behalf of others were considered sanctified, that faith did not depend on external demonstrations of religious practice, and that the witness of their deeds would suffice.

CHAPTER SIX

CASE STUDY OF A CONFERENCE

The Conference of Mary Immaculate was established in the Oblate parish of Inchicore in 1890. Inchicore was then just a village beside the Grand Canal, governed by the township of Kilmainham until 1930, and dominated by the Great Southern and Western Railway Company works. The Oblate community came to Inchicore in 1856, bought a farm near the railway works and built a small, wooden church in 1857, with assistance from the railway workers.¹ This temporary church was used for over twenty years before the new church was opened in 1878.² Historic landmarks in the district included Kilmainham jail, and Richmond army barracks.³ MacThomáis provides a colourful picture of the district where he lived as a boy, and of some of its inhabitants:

The railway works and the railway workers' houses at Inchicore is nearly another city in itself with four separate towns. The town of Ring Street, where Peadar Kearney, the author of our national anthem,... lived and died. ... Fr Ring ... the Protestant boy from Derry became an Oblate priest and was the first man to lead the Oblate pilgrimage to Lourdes; the town of Inchicore north was called the Ranch, which in the ... [nineteenth] century was all fields except for the railway houses, three country mansions and a public house; the town of Inchicore south with its old tavern, the Black Lion, the meeting place for Fenians and the Invincibles; the crossing point for the ancient Camac river⁴

In this chapter, a set of minutes was examined to assess how a local Dublin conference operated over time and conformed to the general practices of the Society. The minutes of Mary Immaculate Conference, Inchicore cover most of the years between 1926 and 1975.⁵ Paper shortages during the Second World War led to a dearth of material for recording the minutes, and some of its records did not survive from this period.⁶ Information on the conference for

¹ www.OblateParishesInDublin.ie, (viewed 31 July 2008).

² Gregg Ryan, *The Works: celebrating 150 years of Inchicore Works* (Dublin, c. 1996), p. 10.

³ Séamas Ó Maitiú, *Dublin's suburban towns, 1834–1930* (Dublin, 2003), p. 42.

⁴ Mac Thomáis, *Janey mack me shirt is black*, p. 44.

⁵ Minutes of Mary Immaculate Conference of St Vincent de Paul, Inchicore [hereafter Inchicore minutes]. For reasons of confidentiality, no identifying details of members or their clients are given.

⁶ Information from a member of the conference (June 2004).

these years was supplemented from other sources, such as the Society's annual reports and the *Bulletin*.

When the conference was established in Inchicore in 1890, the vast majority of those seeking assistance were poor mothers. Of the sixty-six who received aid at Christmas, 1894, all but five were women.⁷ In 1907, it paid 4s. 6d. cab fare to convey a man from the Mater Hospital back to Inchicore,⁸ and in 1910, Frawleys of Thomas Street were paid 8s. 7d. for two pairs of boots and stockings for two girls.⁹ Matt Lalor, president of the council of Dublin, was a regular visitor to the Inchicore conference in the first decades of the century.¹⁰ The events in Easter week, 1916 receive no mention in the minutes, despite the fact that the leaders of the Rising were interrogated in nearby Richmond Barracks following their arrest.¹¹

Conference meetings were held in rooms at the Oblates' House of Retreat.¹² The weekly meeting lasted about an hour and had a set pattern and sequence. Following opening prayers, the president read from some spiritual work or Society publication, or, if the spiritual director, a member of the Oblate community, were present, he would give an instruction on a religious topic. Reports or circular letters from the Society's headquarters or other correspondence were discussed. The brothers then reported on the families they had visited in the previous week, new applications from clients were assessed and the next week's visitation planned. The treasurer's report of income and expenditure for the week was recorded. After passing around the secret bag for a donation from each brother – or, from 1972, a sister – the meeting concluded with final prayers.

Little personal information is contained in the minutes on conference members over the years. Some of the earlier records do list the names and addresses of both the officers and of the committee members,¹³ but the practice of recording such detail did not continue in the later years. Where addresses of

⁷ Inchicore minutes, 23 Dec. 1894.

⁸ Inchicore minutes, 27 Sept. 1907.

⁹ Inchicore minutes, 10 Feb. 1910.

¹⁰ Inchicore Minutes, 15 Feb. 1917.

¹¹ www.iol.ie/~smichore/history (viewed 21 July 2008).

¹² Inchicore minutes, 26 June 1928.

¹³ See Inchicore minutes, 1926 to 1941.

brothers exist, they show that most lived in the Inchicore district.¹⁴ Rarely do the minutes indicate the occupations of the brothers, but a general picture suggests that they were busy, working men. Reasons for non-attendance at meetings are frequently given as ‘owing to business’.¹⁵

The brothers’ main work as members of the conference was the visitation of the families on their lists. Records show that there could be twenty-five to thirty-five families on the books at any given time, although not all required continuous material assistance.¹⁶ In accordance with the Rule, the members visited the homes in pairs.¹⁷ A food voucher was often issued immediately or the case might be referred back to the committee meeting for further assessment of need. The client exchanged the voucher at a designated grocery shop in the district.¹⁸ Complaints from clients over the quality of food or the service received from the shopkeepers were promptly followed up, leading in one instance to the purveyor apologising for his incivility, and to the brother reminding him that ‘clients were entitled to the same consideration and attention as cash clients’.¹⁹ With the purchase of the Richmond army barracks by Dublin Corporation in the 1920s, and its conversion into living accommodation, the Society established a new conference in the neighbouring parish of St Michael in 1927 to serve the newly-arriving families.²⁰

In the 1920s, the average value of a food voucher was 3s. 6d.,²¹ but special cash payments of greater amounts were given in cases of emergency, such as sudden illness, unemployment, for first communion outfits, or in response to the immediate need for cash assistance at the time of a funeral.²² By 1955, the maximum payment for deserving cases was 10s. per weekly visit. As the practice of issuing food vouchers generally came to be discredited in the Society, with its suggestion that poor families needed supervision when choosing their food requirements, the voucher system was abolished by the

¹⁴ For example, Inchicore minutes, 14 Aug. 1973.

¹⁵ For example, Inchicore minutes, 15 Apr. 1930.

¹⁶ For example, 25 cases, 7 June 1927; 28 cases, 24 Apr. 1933; 35 cases, 21 Mar. 1967.

¹⁷ Inchicore minutes, 27 July 1934.

¹⁸ For example, Cassells, purveyor, 14 May 1929 and Scally, purveyor, 4 Nov. 1958.

¹⁹ Inchicore minutes, 18 Feb. 1930.

²⁰ *Annual Report, 1927*, p. 7.

²¹ Inchicore minutes, 18 Jan. 1926.

²² Inchicore minutes, 20 Apr. 1940; 13 Dec. 1949; 26 Mar. 1957.

conference in 1962, and all payments were subsequently made in cash.²³ In 1975 the Society proposed that no client should receive less than 15s. (75p) in assistance.²⁴

Requests for clothes and boots were constant. Where a family was in dire need and there was no suitable second-hand clothing available, the conference issued tickets for Frawleys of Thomas Street. Apart from responding to basic needs for food and clothes, a striking feature in the minutes is the variety of ways in which the brothers involved themselves with the civil authorities and with other agencies on behalf of the families. As has been shown in an earlier chapter, professional social workers were virtually non-existent until the 1960s.²⁵ The members' contacts with statutory agencies, hospitals and other bodies suggest that many possessed the experience and skills to intervene effectively on behalf of the families they served. Such intervention was encouraged by the central body of the Society, which periodically alerted the conferences to new legislation of relevance to families. When the Illegitimate Children's Act, 1930 became law, the Inchicore conference was prompted to forward a case to the Society's Advice Bureau in the hope that an unmarried father might be compelled to support his child.²⁶ The brothers were recommended to buy the *Catholic Social Workers Handbook*, priced 6d., a publication that was updated many times,²⁷ and was intended to keep the members abreast of new social legislation and helping agencies in the city.²⁸ The council of Ireland notified the conferences of the provisions of the Housing Act, 1932, and the Inchicore conference president held copies of the Widows and Orphans Acts, 1935 and 1937 for reference.²⁹ In 1956, the conference president asked the brothers to check with the families on how they were faring following an increase in social welfare benefit.³⁰ As gas and electricity came to be more widely used in later years, the conference interacted regularly with

²³ Inchicore minutes, 20 Nov. 1962.

²⁴ Inchicore minutes, 23 Apr. 1974.

²⁵ See Skehill, *The nature of social work in Ireland*.

²⁶ Inchicore minutes, 16 Mar. 1931.

²⁷ Inchicore minutes, 3 June 1930.

²⁸ See *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c.1942 ed.

²⁹ Inchicore minutes, 3 Jan. 1933; 24 Apr. 1934; 8 Nov. 1938.

³⁰ Inchicore minutes, 25 Sept. 1956.

the Electricity Supply Board³¹ and with the Gas Board³² in an attempt to come to arrangements over outstanding bills. They also acted as intermediaries with the housing department of Dublin Corporation or with private landlords when there was trouble with rent or the threat of eviction,³³ and with the health³⁴ and social welfare agencies.³⁵ Almoners and medical staff from several Dublin hospitals, including Dr Steevens', Jervis Street, St Kevin's, the Coombe and Holles Street, frequently requested the help of the conference to assist their patients with extra cash for food or clothes.³⁶ In the course of their visitation, if they considered that children were at risk, the brothers contacted the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.³⁷

The Society of St Vincent de Paul was just one of several charities to which the poor of Dublin turned for aid, especially in the first two decades covered by this study.³⁸ As will be shown in Chapter Eight, families were sometimes referred to other agencies, either because the conference at the time had not the funds available or because another agency could give more appropriate assistance. In 1926, a mother who had been helped by the conference with her child's confirmation outfit then asked for further help for another child making first communion; on the second occasion she was referred to the Red Cross for assistance.³⁹ A request to the Mendicity Institution to fund a man's fare to Sligo was 'kindly granted'.⁴⁰ Clothes for four children whose father was in hospital was considered likely from the British Legion, but failing help from that source, the conference would supply clothing through its wardrobe depot at Ozanam House.⁴¹ The Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society and the Society of St Vincent de Paul had especially close ties.⁴²

³¹ Inchicore minutes, 27 Nov. 1951.

³² Inchicore minutes, 13 Jan. 1959.

³³ Inchicore minutes, 30 June 1936; 14 Feb. 1956.

³⁴ Inchicore minutes, 23 Apr. 1940; 25 Oct. 1949; 14 Nov. 1967.

³⁵ Inchicore minutes, 8 Aug. 1967; 15 Mar. 1970.

³⁶ Inchicore minutes, 4 Nov. 1958; 11 Oct. 1962; 19 Jan. 1971.

³⁷ Inchicore minutes, 3 Nov. 1931; 19 Nov. 1940; 14 Feb. 1950; 10 Dec. 1963.

³⁸ Including the Red Cross, the Mendicity Institution, the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, and the British Legion.

³⁹ Inchicore minutes, 2 Feb. 1926.

⁴⁰ Inchicore minutes, 10 May 1927.

⁴¹ Inchicore minutes, 1 Mar. 1938.

⁴² Inchicore minutes, 2 Apr. 1929; 30 Apr. 1940; 8 Sep. 1953; 6 Dec. 1966.

Two congregations of religious sisters worked in the Inchicore district. The Little Sisters of the Poor at St Patrick's, Kilmainham provided residential care for 300 aged men and women.⁴³ The Mercy Sisters at Goldenbridge ran a school for up to 1,000 children, and an industrial school for 130 girls,⁴⁴ and were often called on by the conference to make first communion and confirmation outfits or to supply emergency meals for its families.⁴⁵

A woman who came as a young girl with her family to live in Inchicore in 1939 recalls the visible signs of poverty along the canal walk.

The original tow paths for the horse-drawn barges were lovely walks, treelined with only fields behind them. Down at the first lock was the Brickfields, a favourite place, where children played their games. ... There was a tip-head there too which was visited daily by both adults and children searching for lead, bottles, jam jars and even cinders. Times were very hard for many of them.⁴⁶

Inchicore district did not escape the impact of the war. Classes of instruction for air-raid wardens were held at centres throughout the city, including at the Oblate schools in Inchicore.⁴⁷ Peadar Doyle, the lord mayor of Dublin and a resident of Inchicore, presented Red Cross certificates in his home parish in 1941.⁴⁸ The president of the Inchicore conference during the war years was also an active member of the Mount Street Club, established to create employment for men, and in 1940, was asked to give a talk at a Society meeting on its activities. So rapidly had the club's activities expanded that it secured 150 acres of land near Clondalkin for cultivation. He explained how the men worked on the farm and for every hour's work received, what was known in the club's currency, as a 'tally'. The tallies allowed the men to purchase food and other goods for their families in the club shop, which had also served nearly 124,000 meals in 1939.

The 250 men who are normally at work in the Club and farm are the breadwinners of approximately 1,000 souls, and for these the farm produced their entire potato requirements as well as 4,000 gallons of

⁴³ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1932*, p. 215.

⁴⁴ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1932*, p. 208.

⁴⁵ Inchicore minutes, 2 Apr. 1940; 4 Mar. 1941; 28 Dec. 1949.

⁴⁶ Phyllis McGuirk, 'Canal side memories', in Michael Conaghan et al. (eds), *The Grand Canal: Inchicore and Kilmainham* (Dublin, 1991), p. 40.

⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 1 July 1940.

⁴⁸ *Irish Red Cross Society Bulletin*, 1, no. 10 (Oct. 1941), p. 118.

milk, 1,500 pounds of beef and bacon, and various other essential articles of food.⁴⁹

Possessing a job, however menial, was seen as crucial if families were to avoid sinking into destitution, and it also ensured that they did not become dependent for lengthy periods on the uncertain funds of the conference. The Society's concept of 'adoption' – long term visitation of families on their books, regardless of improvement in their financial status – did not seem to have been the practice in the conference, with most visits of short duration and related to unemployment or other crises. Financial self-sufficiency was encouraged and satisfaction expressed when men secured employment and were able to return to looking after the needs of their families.⁵⁰ The brothers supplied references for those hoping to be employed in local manufacturing industries, hospitals and institutions,⁵¹ or notified potential candidates when they became aware of vacancies.⁵² For those living in the Inchicore district, the railway works was traditionally a major employer, with up to 2,000 employed at one stage in the nineteenth century,⁵³ although fewer numbers by the twentieth. In its annual report to the council of Ireland for 1931, Inchicore conference stated that the year had been a trying one for the conference 'intensified by the very large numbers dismissed from the Inchicore Works of the Great Southern Railways'.⁵⁴ Brassington, the timber merchants, had their premises on the Tyrconnell Road, and Rowntree Chocolate and Cocoa Manufacturers were located on Inchicore Road.⁵⁵ Lamb Brothers' jam factory was a popular place of employment,⁵⁶ with local industries such as Volkswagen Motors, Cement Roadstone and Clondalkin Paper Mills being mentioned in later years.⁵⁷

The conference also assisted those who had jobs but were in temporary difficulty, perhaps where there was a delay between starting a new job and being paid,⁵⁸ or due to strike or illness. When two girls were let go from

⁴⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 11 (1940), Nov. Supp, pp. 15–16.

⁵⁰ Inchicore minutes, 12 Apr. 1927; 28 May 1940; 22 Nov. 1949; 6 Jun. 1966.

⁵¹ Inchicore minutes, 21 Feb. 1928.

⁵² Inchicore minutes, 20 Dec. 1960; 5 Feb. 1963.

⁵³ Ryan, *Celebrating 150 years of Inchicore Works*, p. 74.

⁵⁴ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 65.

⁵⁵ *Thom's Directory, 1945*, pp. 530, 968.

⁵⁶ Inchicore minutes, 21 Feb. 1928; 28 July 1936; 13 July 1965.

⁵⁷ Inchicore minutes, 29 July 1958; 12 Aug. 1958; 7 July 1959.

⁵⁸ Inchicore minutes, 29 July 1958.

Lamb's factory because there was scarlet fever in the family, assistance was provided until they returned to work.⁵⁹ Self-employed clients were supplied with the tools of their trade to help them towards financial independence. In the 1950s, the conference agreed to buy a sewing machine for a woman, a man was issued with a voucher for a shovel to enable him to obtain work, and in 1969 a power drill was supplied to another.⁶⁰

Inchicore conference came late to the Penny Banks savings scheme, operated by the Society since the 1860s. It was established at the dispensary rooms on Emmet Road in 1917, with 100 depositors listed on the first day.⁶¹ Like all the Society's other banks in Dublin, it was to close by 1930. It was common for the conference to fund the education and boarding costs for a boy, or sometimes two boys, at St Vincent's Orphanage. These fees were for children from the district whose parents or guardians were dead or unable to care for them. Such a commitment was a considerable drain on the finances of the conference. In 1938, £29 per annum was paid out for the boarding and education of a boy at the school.⁶² There were much smaller expenses incurred for other, local educational needs, but these were few in number, perhaps an indication that rarely did children during these years progress beyond primary-level schooling. Technical school fees,⁶³ the hire of a typewriter for a girl to enable her to complete her exams;⁶⁴ the bus fare for a boy who attended a special school some distance from his home⁶⁵ are mentioned in the minutes. An example of how more sophisticated needs were emerging is evident in 1969, when a boy starting technical school was supplied with sports equipment and a briefcase.⁶⁶

The procurement and distribution of fuel was an annual concern for the conference and a time-consuming aspect of the brothers' work. There are accounts of constant delays with deliveries and the conference often had to call

⁵⁹ Inchicore minutes, 28 July 1936.

⁶⁰ Inchicore minutes, 21 Feb., 7 Apr., 14 Oct. 1969.

⁶¹ Inchicore minutes, 18 Mar. 1917.

⁶² Inchicore minutes, 10 Mar. 1936.

⁶³ Inchicore minutes, 17 Sept. 1940.

⁶⁴ Inchicore minutes, 21 June 1955.

⁶⁵ Inchicore minutes, 28 Nov. 1967.

⁶⁶ Inchicore minutes, 16 Sept. 1969.

on smaller local merchants to supply the fuel to families.⁶⁷ During the Second World War, there were added difficulties. Crampton, the builders, made a quantity of wood available as an alternative to coal, but Tedcastle announced that although it had ample supplies of turf it couldn't guarantee delivery due to transport restrictions.⁶⁸ Every winter, the Mansion House Coal Fund made coal available to the conference, usually at Christmas, but this had to be supplemented from its own resources to ensure that all families on the books received adequate fuel.⁶⁹ Coal was costly and became more so over the years. The conference was paying £9. 5s. per ton in 1951,⁷⁰ and this had nearly trebled to £27.65 by 1974.⁷¹ It was customary to allocate a bag of coal to each family for five or six months over the winter, but in 1973, the final month's delivery had to be cancelled due to the poor state of finances.⁷² With rapid inflationary pressures, it was predicted in the minutes that it would cost £300 to fund coal for the 1973–4 season.⁷³

With so many demands for assistance, the generation of adequate funds was a formidable challenge for the Society of St Vincent de Paul and for a local conference such as Inchicore. In cases of serious financial difficulty, conferences could apply to the Society's headquarters for a grant,⁷⁴ but generally, they were expected to generate their own income and to make an annual contribution, usually 10 per cent, of income to central funds.⁷⁵ In June 1940, the council of Dublin reported that funds were very low and asked conferences not to pay fares for clients going to England.⁷⁶ A week later, it announced that the funds of the Society were exhausted and that conferences would have to rely on their own efforts to raise funds.⁷⁷ The Inchicore conference responded by reluctantly reducing the value of the food vouchers and distributing them only every second week.⁷⁸

⁶⁷ Inchicore minutes, 18 Mar. 1941; 24 Jan. 1961.

⁶⁸ Inchicore minutes, 10 Dec. 1940; 25 Feb. 1941.

⁶⁹ Inchicore minutes, 7 Dec. 1952.

⁷⁰ Inchicore minutes, 6 Mar. 1951.

⁷¹ Inchicore minutes, 1 Oct. 1974.

⁷² Inchicore minutes, 22 May 1973.

⁷³ Inchicore minutes, 4 Sept. 1973.

⁷⁴ Inchicore minutes, 6 July 1926.

⁷⁵ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 29; Inchicore minutes, 24 Nov. 1959; 22 Jan. 1974.

⁷⁶ Inchicore minutes, 4 June 1940.

⁷⁷ Inchicore minutes, 11 June 1940.

⁷⁸ Inchicore minutes, 11 June 1940.

The Oblate community were generous supporters of the work of the Society and facilitated appeals and collections in the parish. The main source of income came from the annual collection in the Oblate church. The timing of this collection varied over the years; it was held at Easter for several successive years, then in the summer, in September, and latterly during the Christmas period. A priest from the Oblate community made the appeal on behalf of the Society and the conference. Table 6.1 shows the amount from the annual collection for 1930 and at four successive ten-year periods.

Table 6.1 Income from annual collection, Inchicore church, 1930–1970

<i>1930</i>	<i>1940</i>	<i>1950</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1970</i>
£42. 9s.	£49. 16s.	£121. 14s.	£210. 12s.	£323. 11s.

Source: Inchicore minutes, various.

While the figures indicate nearly an eight-fold increase between the first and the last date, their impact was greatly reduced by the rate of inflation over the period. Blankets, for instance, a regular item of expenditure every winter, cost the conference 1s. 6d. each in 1929,⁷⁹ but were costing 29s. 3d. by 1950.⁸⁰

A less predictable source of income came from wills and personal donations. The amounts bequeathed generally ranged between £20 and £25 throughout the 1920s, increasing in later decades.⁸¹ From the 1940s, amounts of over £100 were being recorded.⁸² In 1958, a sum of £250 was left to the conference, the highest amount recorded in the minutes in the fifty-year period.⁸³ The two donation boxes in the Oblate church were small, but regular, sources of income. Every week, the proceeds from the St Vincent de Paul box and from the St Anthony box were presented as part of the treasurer's report. Donations lodged in St Anthony's box were consistently much higher than those in the St Vincent de Paul box, an indication that Anthony, rather than Vincent, was deemed to be the better advocate when items were lost in Inchicore. In 1957, a week's takings from St Anthony's box yielded over £8, while the St

⁷⁹ Inchicore minutes, 5 Mar. 1929.

⁸⁰ Inchicore minutes, 15 Aug. 1950.

⁸¹ Inchicore minutes, 15 Mar. 1932; 28 Aug. 1937.

⁸² Inchicore minutes, 4 Mar. 1941; 5 June 1951.

⁸³ Inchicore minutes, 27 May 1958.

Vincent de Paul box contained less than £4.⁸⁴ Additional income came from occasional fund-raising events organised by the conference, such as whist drives, jumble sales or raffles.⁸⁵ Conferences participating in the Society's annual flag-days in November were allowed to retain the proceeds from the collection in their district.⁸⁶ Other support came from local firms and individuals, either in cash or in kind. The staff of the Great Southern Railway Company, later Coras Iompair Éireann, were faithful supporters of the conference over many years through the proceeds of their donation boxes and fundraising events.⁸⁷ In 1932, 'valuable pictures' were donated by the Irish Art Publishing Company for a raffle.⁸⁸ Rowntree and Company – regular providers of sweets and chocolates for clients at Christmas – presented the conference with four stone of loose cocoa in 1933, which the purveyor agreed to make up in half-pound bags for clients.⁸⁹ Lamb Brothers, as well as providing local employment, were benefactors in other ways. In 1937 they donated 'thousands of crates and cases' for use as firewood.⁹⁰ The Metropolitan Laundry gave its unclaimed shirts in 1956.⁹¹ Inchicore cinema handed over a night's takings to the conference in 1973 and made seats available to clients of the conference.⁹²

A general impression from the minutes emerges of a tightly-organised group of men who carried out repetitive weekly tasks on behalf of poor families in an orderly and efficient manner. Apart from often-expressed concern for the plight of those visited, the human interaction between brother and client, or the range of emotions encountered and experienced in carrying out their work, are rarely discernible from these records. However, it is in the accounts of less routine activities, such as seasonal and social occasions or responses to special needs, that the minutes convey a greater sense of human warmth and imagination. Christmas was a time of particular effort on behalf of the families on their books. A typical package for each family was the doubling of the value of the relief ticket or cash; a parcel of groceries was donated by local benefactors;

⁸⁴ Inchicore minutes, 2 July 1957

⁸⁵ Inchicore minutes, 8 Aug. 1933; 22 Feb. 1938; 27 Sept. 1955; 11 May 1965.

⁸⁶ Inchicore minutes, 14 Nov. 1950.

⁸⁷ Inchicore minutes, 19 May 1931; 24 July 1934; 4 Jan. 1938.

⁸⁸ Inchicore minutes, 1 Nov. 1932.

⁸⁹ Inchicore minutes, 17 Oct. 1933.

⁹⁰ Inchicore minutes, 13 Apr. 1937.

⁹¹ Inchicore minutes, 3 July 1956.

⁹² Inchicore minutes, 3 July 1973.

clients were asked whether they would prefer chicken or meat; Rowntree supplied sweets in bulk that were made into smaller packages by the brothers, and there were toys distributed to the children.⁹³ From the 1930s, the tradition began of adding a dozen first-grade eggs at Easter to the food voucher of every family on the books.⁹⁴ Many other gestures were small, practical and immediate. Basic kitchen utensils were purchased for a woman who had very little furniture;⁹⁵ a hot water bottle was provided for a client who felt the cold;⁹⁶ a walking stick for another at a cost of 15s.⁹⁷ A mother with a new baby had a jar of Bovril added to her food voucher.⁹⁸ A client, invited to England for Christmas day by his family, was clothed for the journey;⁹⁹ when a man's canary died, the conference paid for a replacement.¹⁰⁰

Entertainment, outings and holidays for their clients became regular annual features, assisted by local firms and individuals. The staff of Great Southern Railways held a concert for poor children of the district in 1929.¹⁰¹ The conference purchased twenty tickets at 6*d.* each for a children's matinee in Inchicore cinema, to benefit the Oblate school building fund.¹⁰² In 1936, the conference agreed to sponsor ten boys and ten girls for a holiday at the Society's recently-opened holiday home, Sunshine House in Balbriggan.¹⁰³ Outings to Glencree, in County Wicklow, became a regular event for the boys from St Joseph's club, attached to the Inchicore conference,¹⁰⁴ and accounts of holiday breaks at Kerdiffstown House in Kildare for elderly clients emerge in the minutes from the 1970s.¹⁰⁵

Whereas food and fuel, boots, beds and blankets and clothing dominated the requirements of those in need from the 1920s to the 1950s, by the 1960s their range of requirements had expanded. It became common for the conference to

⁹³ For example, Inchicore minutes, 12 Dec. 1959.

⁹⁴ Inchicore minutes, 23 Mar. 1937.

⁹⁵ Inchicore minutes, 7 Mar. 1929.

⁹⁶ Inchicore minutes, 13 Nov. 1951.

⁹⁷ Inchicore minutes, 23 July 1957.

⁹⁸ Inchicore minutes, 23 Apr. 1952.

⁹⁹ Inchicore minutes, 29 Sept. 1966.

¹⁰⁰ Inchicore minutes, 9 Dec. 1975.

¹⁰¹ Inchicore minutes, 12 Nov. 1929.

¹⁰² Inchicore minutes, 20 Apr. 1937.

¹⁰³ Inchicore minutes, 23 Apr. 1936.

¹⁰⁴ Inchicore minutes, 9 Aug. 1940.

¹⁰⁵ Inchicore minutes, 13 June 1972.

buy a radio battery or even a radio for a client.¹⁰⁶ A radio at a cost of £12 was purchased for a woman who complained of loneliness.¹⁰⁷ Sheets as well as blankets began to be recorded in the minutes,¹⁰⁸ and clients were often given an order for new, rather than second-hand, clothes at designated drapers, such as Frawleys of Thomas Street.¹⁰⁹ Three electric fires were purchased at a cost of 17s.,¹¹⁰ a television was rented for a client at 24s. a month,¹¹¹ and the year 1975 saw the conference making its first application to the Society's salvage bureau for a washing machine.¹¹²

Despite the efforts of the members of the Society to assist families in need in a variety of ways, there is the impression from the minutes that the work could often be depressing and frustrating. Those who needed material help could only be partly assisted from limited funds, and not all were grateful recipients.¹¹³ In attempting to understand why this small group of volunteers were motivated to persevere, their commitment has to be seen in the context of the lay Catholic society to which they belonged and the spiritual goals presented to them. The spiritual director told five new recruits in 1961 that it was 'a wonderful asset to be a member of a society devoted to sanctification as its primary aim'.¹¹⁴ A senior brother at one of the meetings commented that some of the young men tended to get discouraged when no improvement was evident in the lives of the clients, but, he added 'if they felt better men spiritually, they could leave the rest to God'.¹¹⁵

As in all conferences, prayer opened and closed the Inchicore meetings, followed by a reading from the president or spiritual director from some devotional work.¹¹⁶ A talk or instruction was given by the spiritual director, and, in the first three decades, covered traditional and devotional topics such as the virtue of faith, the rosary, suffering, the sacraments, and sanctifying

¹⁰⁶ Inchicore minutes, 17 Dec. 1957; 7 July 1966.

¹⁰⁷ Inchicore minutes, 13 Oct. 1964.

¹⁰⁸ Inchicore minutes, 13 Oct. 1959.

¹⁰⁹ Inchicore minutes, 1 Feb. 1966.

¹¹⁰ Inchicore minutes, 10 Mar. 1969.

¹¹¹ Inchicore minutes, 9 Jan. 1968.

¹¹² Inchicore minutes, 10 June 1975.

¹¹³ For example, Inchicore minutes, 17 Jan. 1961.

¹¹⁴ Inchicore minutes, 24 Oct. 1961.

¹¹⁵ Inchicore minutes, 20 Oct. 1964.

¹¹⁶ For example, Inchicore minutes, 8 Sept. 1959.

grace.¹¹⁷ Problems of a religious nature encountered during visitation were referred to the director. The situation of a man, believed to be a communist, was discussed by the brothers at the meeting but then it was agreed 'to leave the matter in the hands of the spiritual director'.¹¹⁸

The Oblate parish of Inchicore was particularly rich in devotional practices and drew huge crowds to its processions, novenas and other church festivities from well beyond the district. The confraternity attached to the Oblate church in 1932 had 1,200 men, 1,100 women, 950 boys and 900 girls; nine Oblate priests formed part of its House of Retreat in 1932, and a further twenty-two were on mission work around the country.¹¹⁹ The Oblates had organised their first pilgrimage to Lourdes as early as 1883.¹²⁰ In the 1920s, with the help of free labour from the Great Southern Railways workers, Oblate priest, Fr Michael Sweeney, built a replica grotto that took two years to complete and cost £8,000. It was to become known as the 'Irish Lourdes' and attracted thousands of pilgrims during the annual nine-day novena in February and for other ceremonies.¹²¹ When the grotto was completed in 1930, the *Irish Times* reported that an advance guard of four men, members of the local confraternity, carried on their shoulders an eight-foot candle, weighing more than 200 pounds, and placed it before the grotto, where it was lit by the archbishop of Dublin, Edward Byrne.¹²² The *Catholic Standard* reported in 1937 that great throngs of people had attended the May processions at the Oblate church in Inchicore.¹²³ When Pope Pius XI died in 1939, up to 500 employees of Rowntree were expected to attend the 8 a.m. mass in the Oblate church.¹²⁴ Another 1,400 railway workers marched in procession in 1956 from their place of work to the church for solemn high mass to celebrate the centenary of the coming of the Oblates to Inchicore.¹²⁵

The Inchicore records show that conference members participated in activities associated with the Eucharistic Congress in 1932, the Holy Year in

¹¹⁷ Inchicore minutes, 18 Feb. 1927; 25 Sept. 1951; 28 Sept. 1959; 26 Apr. 1960.

¹¹⁸ Inchicore minutes, 22 Apr. 41.

¹¹⁹ *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1932, p. 343.

¹²⁰ Hartigan, 'Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940', p. 28.

¹²¹ Hartigan, 'Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940', p. 30.

¹²² *Irish Times*, 18 May 1930.

¹²³ *Catholic Standard*, 28 May 1937.

¹²⁴ *Irish Times*, 17 Feb. 1939.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 26 June 1956.

1950, the Marian Year in 1954 and the Patrician Congress in 1961.¹²⁶ They attended regular Society masses and religious festivals.¹²⁷ Retreats were held in the Jesuit church in Gardiner Street¹²⁸ and at the Dominican priory in Tallaght.¹²⁹ Consecration of the conference to the Sacred Heart took place every year in June.¹³⁰ In addition, the brothers participated in other devotional activities that were linked to the parish rather than to the conference, with meeting times being altered or curtailed to facilitate participation in seasonal activities such as the novena to Our Lady of Lourdes in February,¹³¹ to St Therese of Lisieux in October,¹³² and the annual Oblate retreat later in the year.¹³³

At the weekly conference meetings, devotional reading was predictable: works on the life of St Vincent de Paul or on Frédéric Ozanam, passages from the *Manual* to remind the members of what was expected of them in terms of rules and procedures, or extracts from the *Bulletin* to keep them informed of national and international Society events. On new year's day, 1939, they heard an article read from the Christmas edition of the *Irish Rosary* on the dangers of secret societies.¹³⁴ Traditional spiritual reading, such as the *Imitation of Christ*, was being recommended until the late 1950s.¹³⁵ At a training course for young brothers in 1958, they were introduced to Pope Pius XII's address on the lay apostolate.¹³⁶

Members of the conference also felt a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their clients and were expected to encourage them in fulfilling their religious obligations.¹³⁷ The emphasis on the religious duty of clients appears to have varied over the years and, the minutes would suggest, was influenced by the personality of the particular spiritual director of the time. In the 1920s, a spiritual director had insisted that those who didn't attend the local sodality

¹²⁶ Inchicore minutes, 24 May 1932; 12 Jan. 1954; 28 Feb. 1950; 28 Nov. 1961.

¹²⁷ Inchicore minutes, 12 Nov. 1957.

¹²⁸ Inchicore minutes, 16 Mar. 1926, 6 Apr. 1937.

¹²⁹ Inchicore minutes, 27 Apr. 1937.

¹³⁰ Inchicore minutes, 14 June 1955.

¹³¹ Inchicore minutes, 5 Feb. 1929.

¹³² Inchicore minutes, 26 Sep. 1939.

¹³³ Inchicore minutes, 21 Nov. 1939.

¹³⁴ Inchicore minutes, 1 Jan. 1935.

¹³⁵ Inchicore minutes, 3 Dec. 1957.

¹³⁶ Inchicore minutes, 17 Dec. 1958.

¹³⁷ Inchicore minutes, 27 Sept. 1927; 30 Oct. 1928; 19 Oct. 1939; 3 Jan. 1950; 24 May 1955.

were not entitled to assistance. When a man who promised to join a sodality didn't do so, the minutes noted that he would no longer be visited 'in accordance with the instructions of our spiritual director', suggesting a certain distancing of the brothers from his decision.¹³⁸ Another spiritual director in the 1950s warned a family that they would not be visited unless they attended to their religious duties.¹³⁹

St Joseph's club for boys from the locality was established by the conference in 1944, and the particularly zealous spiritual director of the conference at the time attended the club every night and gave the boys a weekly lecture. He also insisted that they all join the local sodality. A report in 1946 noted:

A question box was installed in the club for boys who might have religious, moral or social problems worrying them. These problems are discussed and solved by the spiritual director before all the boys. Problems of a private nature are, of course, discussed only with the boys concerned. This innovation has proved most interesting to both boys and brothers.¹⁴⁰

The brothers who volunteered to help in the new club also had to continue the obligatory visitation work at this time. Two years after its foundation, the landlady demanded 100 percent rent increase for the club meeting-place, but a benefactor came to their aid and offered a comfortable and more suitable premises rent-free.¹⁴¹ Another benefactor placed £100 with the local bank manager, which allowed for a structure to be erected in the club garden with capacity for 120 boys.¹⁴² By the late 1950s, brothers had the option of joining a conference entirely devoted to club work; some remained with the main visitation work of the Mary Immaculate conference, while others opted to join the boys' club conference of St Joseph. A new development in 1964 was the establishment of a youth conference formed from boys belonging to St Joseph's club, who took on the work of visiting in a residential home for the elderly.¹⁴³

From the late 1950s, changes in religious practice were becoming apparent. Concerns were expressed over the falling away from the faith, especially in the

¹³⁸ Inchicore minutes, 8 Jan. 1929.

¹³⁹ Inchicore minutes, 9 Oct. 1954.

¹⁴⁰ *Annual Report, 1946*, pp 101–2.

¹⁴¹ *Annual Report, 1946*, pp 101–2.

¹⁴² *Annual Report, 1947*, pp 79–80.

¹⁴³ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 7 (July 1964), p. 156.

case of those emigrating to England,¹⁴⁴ but the tone is more suggestive of sorrow than of disapproval; a woman who had returned from a holiday in England had ‘a sad story to tell’ of the lapse from the faith of most of her adult children.¹⁴⁵ On the death of the long-serving spiritual director, whose method had been to lecture the men on doctrinal matters rather than to invite their participation,¹⁴⁶ a different approach becomes evident. The new spiritual director invited the brothers to suggest themes for the weekly spiritual talks,¹⁴⁷ and in 1962, the year after the commencement of the Second Vatican Council, he announced that he would be reading short passages from the scriptures; the president of the conference responded by buying a copy of the New Testament.¹⁴⁸ Readings from the Council documents became standard practice, as well as texts on the new liturgy in English.¹⁴⁹ Open discussion among the brothers on religious topics became so popular at the meetings that a decision had to be taken to curtail their length.¹⁵⁰ With the New Rule, the spiritual ‘director’ became known as the spiritual ‘advisor’.¹⁵¹ Concerns over non-attendance at sodalities were no longer recorded.

In 1970, the Inchicore conference was eighty years old,¹⁵² and two years later the new archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Ryan, constituted the Oblate church of Inchicore as a parish of the Dublin Diocese.¹⁵³ The period coincided with a time of serious recruitment difficulties for the conference. A suggestion made at the plenary meeting of the council of Ireland in 1963, that retired members be asked to return, was taken up by the Inchicore conference later in the decade.¹⁵⁴

While the recruitment of young men is important, men of mature age are equally welcome. There is room for everyone in the Society – young, middle-aged and old. A balanced conference of youth and mature is the ideal at which to aim.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁴ Inchicore minutes, 13 Sept. 1966.

¹⁴⁵ Inchicore minutes, 17 Nov. 1959.

¹⁴⁶ Inchicore minutes, 25 Nov. 1958.

¹⁴⁷ Inchicore minutes, 29 Dec. 1959.

¹⁴⁸ Inchicore minutes, 14 Aug. 1962.

¹⁴⁹ Inchicore minutes, 25 Sept. 1962; 31 Aug. 1965; 25 Feb. 1965.

¹⁵⁰ Inchicore minutes, 29 Sept. 1970.

¹⁵¹ New Rule, article 9.

¹⁵² Inchicore minutes, 16 June 1970.

¹⁵³ *Dublin Diocesan Directory*, 1983, p. 79.

¹⁵⁴ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 6 (June 1963), p. 124.

¹⁵⁵ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 10 (Oct. 1962), p. 224.

Several former members came back to support the Inchicore conference,¹⁵⁶ and retired members were encouraged to volunteer for daytime work.¹⁵⁷ The precise number of members at any time, or of attendance at meetings, varied significantly, but there is seldom an explanation in the minutes as to why such fluctuations occurred. Minutes in April 1936 noted that there was a full attendance of fourteen members on that day, but such specific information was rare. The practice of recording the names of all the brothers present had been dropped by the 1940s, with only the numbers in attendance noted, so it is not possible in the later years to trace the individual history of a brother's membership. A reason for decline in the Inchicore conference may have been due to the growth of housing developments in the district, with new recruits being attracted to conferences in these areas. When families started to move into Ballyfermot in 1949, six members left Inchicore to form a conference in the new district.¹⁵⁸ The subsequent growth of neighbouring housing developments, such as those at Rialto and Bluebell, also had an impact. The consistent absence of some brothers from meetings was an issue in 1952.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, there appears to have been an over-supply of members at other times. Commenting on the fact that there were nineteen brothers present at a meeting in 1960, the spiritual director suggested that the conference consider taking on other work.¹⁶⁰ A year later, it was explained to a visiting delegation from the Society that the reason that there were twenty-nine brothers present was because they were making provision for a new conference to run St Joseph's boys club.

Conferences were advised to be particularly careful in the selection of new recruits. In accordance with the Rule, the president introduced the name or names of a possible new member, and the brothers were invited to reflect on those named and, if they wished, to express any reservations privately to the president before the next meeting. If they had no objection, the new member was welcomed the following week.¹⁶¹ Many new members left after a short period, however, reflecting the general trend in the Society. The deaths of

¹⁵⁶ For example, Inchicore minutes, 4 Feb. 1969; 1 Sept. 1970; 30 Nov. 1971; 18 Jan. 1972; 18 Dec. 1973.

¹⁵⁷ Inchicore minutes, 8 June 1971.

¹⁵⁸ Inchicore minutes, 25 Apr. 1950.

¹⁵⁹ Inchicore minutes, 16 Sept. 1952.

¹⁶⁰ Inchicore minutes, 7 Sept. 1960.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, 5 Sept. 1953 and 1 Oct. 1957.

several long-serving members were also noted in the later years. With falling numbers, new approaches had to be tried, and in 1969, it was suggested that a plea for recruits be made in conjunction with the annual appeal in the Oblate church.¹⁶² Despite continuous recruitment efforts, there is no evidence of improvement in attendance levels at the meetings. For the final four weeks of 1972 – a busy period for the conference – the average attendance was nine,¹⁶³ with numbers often falling as low as five or six.¹⁶⁴ Several handwriting styles are evident in the minutes for the year 1974, suggesting that the roles of recording secretary and treasurer might have been shared on a rota basis with less experienced members.¹⁶⁵

As was the case in the Society in general, women had a long association with the Inchicore conference, either as honorary members or as organisers of fundraising events. Back in 1919, a circular letter from the council of Dublin had recommended that the conference ‘secure as many ladies as possible’ for the flag-day collection.¹⁶⁶ In 1931, the brothers held a meeting with a group of women to discuss a forthcoming jumble sale.¹⁶⁷ Two years later, while writing to thank the women who organised a successful whist drive, they were also requesting their help with the Society’s forthcoming annual flag-days.¹⁶⁸ The boys’ club had a ‘very energetic ladies’ committee’, who did the catering at parties, the fundraising, and looked after the furniture and fittings in the club.¹⁶⁹ The first hint that women might some day be admitted as full members of the Society was aired at a conference meeting in 1960, but no details are recorded as to how the brothers reacted to this development.¹⁷⁰ In 1967, the president reported back from a meeting of the presidents of the Society that Archbishop McQuaid had granted permission for the admission of women to conferences in the Dublin diocese, but that mixed conferences were not to be permitted except in the case of ‘special works’.¹⁷¹

¹⁶² Inchicore minutes, 9 Sept. 1969.

¹⁶³ Inchicore minutes, 5 Dec. 1972 to 28 Dec. 1972.

¹⁶⁴ For example, Inchicore minutes, 20 Jan. 1970.

¹⁶⁵ Inchicore minutes, 2 Jan. 1974 to 30 Dec. 1974.

¹⁶⁶ Inchicore minutes, 6 Sept. 1919

¹⁶⁷ Inchicore minutes, 9 June 1931.

¹⁶⁸ Inchicore minutes, 7 Nov. 1933.

¹⁶⁹ *Annual Report, 1947*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁰ Inchicore minutes, 10 May 1960.

¹⁷¹ Inchicore minutes, 27 June 1967.

By 1972, when mixed conferences were being generally accepted, the question of inviting women to join the Inchicore conference was discussed, and the members were urged to ‘think it over’.¹⁷² The recruitment problems from the late 1960s¹⁷³ may have had an influence on their decision. There was also a greater degree of interaction with Catholic laywomen evident at this time. An all-women’s conference was working in a nearby complex of flats,¹⁷⁴ and when the Oblate superior suggested a combined retreat for men and women, there were no objections from the conference members.¹⁷⁵ In May 1973, the first woman was ‘warmly welcomed’ as a member of the Inchicore conference.¹⁷⁶

A number of reasons were likely to have contributed to the conference’s difficulty in attracting and retaining new members. The extreme poverty of former years was no longer present.¹⁷⁷ Visitation work could be difficult and thankless, especially when clients were not at home to receive the brothers when they called, a common complaint noted in the minutes.¹⁷⁸ In 1972, the problem in one area was so bad that the brothers sent out typed messages asking if families required further visits.¹⁷⁹ With the growth of community-based centres and other agencies, young people interested in voluntary work had greater choices than the traditional charities.

An article in the *Bulletin* in 1961 stressed the Society’s need to re-orientate its activities ‘in the light of modern conditions’.¹⁸⁰ Another general perception was that the Society was seen to be ‘growing too old’.¹⁸¹ Yet, despite this image of an ageing organisation with an identity crisis, the Inchicore minutes in the late 1960s and early 1970s point to significant efforts to adapt to change. At central level, the Society in Ireland was encouraging greater cooperation between the conferences themselves and with local community bodies.¹⁸² Inchicore conference responded by holding inter-conference meetings with

¹⁷² Inchicore minutes, 3 Oct. 1972.

¹⁷³ Inchicore minutes, 2 May 1967; 26 Mar. 1968; 2 Sept. 1969.

¹⁷⁴ Inchicore minutes, 27 Jan. 1970.

¹⁷⁵ Inchicore minutes, 14 Sept. 1971.

¹⁷⁶ Inchicore minutes, 29 May 1973.

¹⁷⁷ Inchicore minutes, 4 July 1961.

¹⁷⁸ For example, Inchicore minutes, 18 Oct. 1927; 16 Sept. 1952; 27 May 1958.

¹⁷⁹ Inchicore minutes, 13 June 1972.

¹⁸⁰ Inchicore minutes, 31 Oct. 1961.

¹⁸¹ Inchicore minutes, 6 Feb. 1962.

¹⁸² Inchicore minutes, 12 Nov. 1974; 21 Jan. 1975.

other conferences in the district to discuss areas of common interest,¹⁸³ the president of the conference regularly attended local meetings of community groups,¹⁸⁴ and in 1975, a woman representative from the Eastern Health Board was invited to attend the conference meeting to discuss help for families in difficult situations.¹⁸⁵ Whereas in the past, brothers had handled specific problems, such as housing or health, in comparative isolation, referring to the relevant agencies only as the need arose, by the 1970s, social problems were being debated in a broader social context. In 1972, a 'lengthy discussion' took place at a conference meeting on Dublin's housing shortage.¹⁸⁶ As the period of this study draws to a close in 1975, the minutes show that membership decline was still a major problem, but there is also evidence of a greater awareness that social problems relating to poverty extended beyond the local community.

These minutes provided an opportunity to observe the activities of a conference over a fifty-year period and to assess how closely its practices matched the Society's general objectives. The week-by-week accounts gave an insight into the dimensions of poverty and human distress experienced at local level against the general social and economic background of the times. It also showed the many ways that the conference members were able to draw on local industry and institutions for support, and to benefit from their close association with the Oblate community. The scope of the members' influence on behalf of their clients was evident from their easy interaction with statutory agencies, hospitals, local businesses, and other charitable bodies. As was evident from this study in general, an impression emerges of marked change from the 1960s. The range and quality of material relief expanded as the brothers – and the sisters – provided not only the basic necessities, but extra little comforts.

Like all conferences, its members enjoyed wide discretionary powers, whether in recruiting new members, in dealing with other agencies, or in its relationship with the families. The very visible devotional practices in Inchicore

¹⁸³ Inchicore minutes, 3 Oct. 1969; 27 Jan. 1970; 23 Feb. 1971; 30 Dec. 1975.

¹⁸⁴ Inchicore minutes, 13 May 1975.

¹⁸⁵ Inchicore minutes, 27 May 1975.

¹⁸⁶ Inchicore minutes, 22 Feb. 1972.

parish up to the end of the 1950s changed to a more muted, less defined witness of the Christian message. The abolition of the food voucher, the attempt to come to terms with wider social problems and to engage with other helping agencies in the community, and the introduction of women members, offer proof that the Inchicore conference was in step with developments in the Society in general. Although the early 1970s marked a time of particular difficulty as regards membership, this fact alone should not be taken as an indication of a general malaise in the conference and may be accounted for by a transitional period in which older members retired or passed away and before the impact of women membership became more established.

The Inchicore minutes present a vivid account of the activities of the brothers in the conference, whose hidden acts of service were delivered with speed and flexibility and with a knowledge of the personal circumstances of the families that few statutory agencies could match.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINANCE AND THE SOCIETY

This chapter will look at how the Society of St Vincent de Paul struggled to alleviate poverty in every decade over the fifty-year period, despite improving economic conditions and better welfare provision. The 1920s saw a period of such austerity in the public finances that the old age pension was cut from 10s. to 9s. a week in 1924¹ and the Society was unable to cope with the calls for help. Relief from unemployment assistance, widows' and orphans' pensions, and children's allowances, would not be introduced until the 1930s. Thousands of poor Dublin families had to depend solely on inadequate, means-tested outdoor relief or, as it was renamed in 1923, home assistance.² Stricter criteria for assessing who was entitled to relief applied, and the president of the council of Ireland, Joseph Glynn, reported that the Society had 1,900 more families on its books in 1926 than in the previous year 'largely due to the removal from the books of the home assistance officers in Dublin of persons who hitherto received public assistance'.³

In many counties the home assistance estimates are being cut down because the poor are the only class on which the public bodies can economise. In this city the home assistance is graduated so as to take into account the assistance given by our Society. The first is a cruel wrong to the poor, the second a wrong to our conferences. ... I know the trouble which faced the Dublin Union Commissioners in their endeavours to save the ratepayers from undue taxation ... Yet ... an unfair burden has been placed on our conferences by the extreme strictness with which the Poor Law regulations have been carried out, and the inadequacy of the assistance given in many cases.⁴

Government restrictions were to continue throughout the decade and affected many aspects of the Society's work for the poor. In a letter to Fr Patrick Dunne, secretary to Archbishop Byrne, Matt Lalor, president of the particular council of Dublin, acknowledged the offer received through the archbishop's office of a quantity of old clothes and boots from America, but stated:

¹ Fanning, *Irish Department of Finance*, pp 110–11.

² *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare*, p. 33.

³ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 1 (1926), Jan. Supp., p. 14.

⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 1 (1926), Jan. Supp., p. 14.

... I interviewed the Commissioner of Taxes, and he informs me that the law as it stands is rigid in prohibiting any garment, old or new, without payment of duty. We must therefore estimate the value, or the authorities will estimate their worth, so that we shall pay 15% import duty. Even though the duty must be paid, they should be of great use to our wardrobe committee, as boots and clothes are badly needed.⁵

In 1925 Glynn had been appointed a member of the Commission set up to enquire into the workings of the Poor Law under the new arrangements following Independence.⁶ The Poor Law unions had been quickly abolished throughout most of the country with the foundation of the state; relief administration became a county rather than a union responsibility under various schemes with the passing of the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923.⁷ Because of the extensive size of the operation in the capital, the Dublin Union had continued to exist until the passing of the Poor Relief (Dublin) Act in 1929. Under the interim arrangements, the Dublin Union commissioners asked the Society of St Vincent de Paul to assist in the distribution of special relief to thousands of families for a limited period. The Society undertook the task with some reluctance, not because it did not want to co-operate in helping near-destitute people, but because it did not wish to be associated with the narrow aims of relief-giving. The Society's members in Dublin were entrusted with £15,000 for distribution among families over the fifty-two weeks of 1930. They distributed a further £8,090 in the early months of 1931, before the scheme was taken over by the local authorities.⁸ When they had completed their work, Glynn remarked:

By the passing of the act, the onus of providing against actual starvation for workless families was transferred to the public authorities, and the Society was set free to select its cases in accordance with its rules and traditions.⁹

Despite the new legislation, the Society's annual report for 1930 stated:

Notwithstanding the removal from the books of our conferences in Dublin of many poor families whose needs were being attended to by

⁵ M. R. Lalor to P. Dunne, 23 Apr. 1926 (DDA, Byrne Laity file, AB7/208/2/i).

⁶ See *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor*.

⁷ *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p. 11.

⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxvi, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), p. 236.

⁹ *Annual Report, 1930*, p. 51.

the Poor Law authorities, the numbers of families assisted in Ireland during 1930 increased by a couple of hundred.¹⁰

With the change of government in 1932, a less restrictive social welfare policy was adopted. The Poor Law Commission report had highlighted the inadequacy of relief for widows who were frequently reduced to destitution on the death of their husbands, and in 1935, the widows' and orphans' pension was introduced.¹¹ Two years earlier, against a background of high unemployment in Ireland and in many other countries, the Unemployment Assistance Act had been passed. It was designed to tide people over short spells of unemployment between jobs, but proved totally inadequate in the prolonged periods of unemployment at the time.¹² Although the payments were not considered sufficient, the Unemployment Assistance Act – the dole – was welcomed by the Society, and it was relieved to find that its assistance to poor families was not regarded as 'means' for the purpose of the act.¹³ However, the operation of the dole system gave rise to other problems. Men were allowed to work part-time when they were on unemployment assistance, but, if they were unable to sign the register on their working days, they had to reapply for assistance. This led to a time-delay before they were paid and frustration for the members of the Society:

It follows that the conference has to step into the breach since the man and his family cannot live on air, and owing to the number of such cases among the unemployed, there was a constant drain on the resources of the Society, which has to come to the aid of the government in financing the poor during the 'waiting periods'.¹⁴

Delays and frustration were also experienced by those entitled to unemployment benefit, introduced under the National Insurance Act, 1911 for workers who had lost their jobs, as this case from the annual report of the Society's Discharged Prisoners' Aid committee vividly demonstrates:

Man, charged with breaking windows in a government office on two occasions. He stated it was because his unemployment benefit was not paid immediately on application. This case was sent to us by the local justice while the man was on remand. He was interviewed several times in prison by a member of our committee, who pointed out that his

¹⁰ *Annual Report, 1930*, pp 11–12.

¹¹ Mel Cousins, *The Irish social welfare system* (Dublin, 1995), p. 15.

¹² Curry, *Irish social services*, p. 31.

¹³ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no. 5 (1934), May Supp., pp 4–5 and no. 8, Aug. Supp., pp 2–3.

¹⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxv, no. 1 (1940), Jan. Supp., p. 8.

conduct would not help his case. Eventually, on his release, the committee made him a weekly grant until his benefit was paid.¹⁵

The Society could only help the poor if it had adequate means itself, and the task of fundraising proved to be a constant struggle for the councils and conferences. The annual report for 1926 noted that the secret bag collection was down from £4,906 in 1925 to £4,609 in 1926, 'perhaps due to the widespread financial restriction which no doubt affected our brothers as it did the poor they visited'.¹⁶ So concerned was the council of Dublin about its finances that it had to sell investments to provide grants for needy conferences, commenting that 'unless there is some relief from the present abnormal economic strain, the reserve fund in a short time will completely disappear'.¹⁷ Fortunately, in 1927, the proceeds of a recital given by John McCormack were a welcome boost to the reserve funds.¹⁸ Many of those engaged in special works found it extremely difficult to make ends meet in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the 'most careful management', the Night Shelter was nearly £2,000 in debt in 1927.¹⁹ The committee report in 1930 said the shelter typically catered for the casual labourers who were the first to feel the slump in foreign markets or unfavourable harvests at home, and flocked from outlying districts or rural areas in search of work in the city.²⁰ St Vincent's Orphanage had, in 1934, 'like all other old charities' suffered greatly from the loss of dividend income.²¹ Among the benefactors who offered financial support were Arnotts, Browne and Nolan, Independent Newspapers, Jacobs, Dollard Printing House, Roches Stores, the Red Bank restaurant in D'Olier Street, and Switzers.²²

The Rule and commentary gave specific instructions on how finances were to be administered by members of the Society. Every conference had the exclusive control of the weekly collection, of subscriptions and of gifts. The treasurer rendered an account of the conference's income and expenditure at the

¹⁵ Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, *Annual Report, 1936*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 34.

¹⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxiii, no. 4 (1928), Apr. Supp., p. 5.

¹⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxiii, no. 6 (1928), June Supp., p. 3.

²⁰ Night Shelter committee, interim report for 1930 (DDA, Byrne Laity file, AB7/208/2/i).

²¹ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no. 3 (1934), Mar. Supp., p. 11.

²² St Vincent's Orphanage committee annual reports, 1932 and 1933 (DDA, Byrne Laity file, AB7/208/2/i).

weekly meeting. There was to be no hoarding, and it was not in the spirit of the society for conferences to allow debts to remain overdue.²³ The secret collection, taken up at the end of all conference and council meetings, was a regular, and not insignificant, source of income. This collection was viewed as a serious undertaking; each member was expected to question himself on whether his sacrifice was in proportion to his means. Almsgiving was not, to the Christian, a simple counsel, but a 'rigorous duty'.²⁴ The particular council of Dublin received its income from donations, from secret collections at general meetings, and from the annual contribution from conferences, usually 10 per cent of their annual receipts. The council, in turn, redistributed much of this by way of grants to poorer conferences and to special works projects.²⁵

So great were the demands from the 1920s to the 1940s that the council of Dublin was often in financial difficulties itself, and it urged conferences not to rely on its cash grants but to raise as much money as they could themselves.²⁶ In 1940, the parish priest in Drumcondra was anxious that a new conference be formed in the developing Larkhill area, but as the only source available would have been from the secret bag collection, plans had to be postponed until the council of Dublin was 'in a better financial position'.²⁷ Disappointment was expressed at a quarterly meeting of members in Dublin that of the forty-one conferences applying to the council of Dublin for grants, only fifteen had engaged directly in their own fundraising activities.²⁸ The annual report for 1936 acknowledged that fundraising was difficult:

The collection of funds is, for most of us, a repellent task but it is one that lies upon us without remission and must be carried out unceasingly ... by every means which our Rule approves ...²⁹

Conferences, it was stated, had a number of opportunities open to them for bringing in cash – 'without resorting to methods of which the ecclesiastical authorities would not approve'.³⁰ Among the approved schemes for raising

²³ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 19 and commentary.

²⁴ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 25 and commentary.

²⁵ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 29.

²⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxiv, no. 1 (1929), Jan. Supp., p. 13.

²⁷ *Annual Report, 1940*, p. 41.

²⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxvii, no. 4 (1932), Apr. Supp., p. 7.

²⁹ *Annual Report, 1936*, p. 62.

³⁰ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 25 and commentary.

funds were: raffles and stop watch competitions; whist drives, jumble sales and sales of work; lectures and concerts; Christmas goose clubs and carol-singing; house-to-house and church collections, and the proceeds from organising excursions and pilgrimages to Lough Derg and Lourdes.³¹

Traditionally, dances were frowned upon as a way of raising money for the Society of St Vincent de Paul, but if a dance committee happened to have a surplus and wished to donate it to charity, the Society could accept.³² Commenting that ‘some confusion’ appeared to exist as to whether dances could be used to raise funds, a letter from the vice-president general, which first appeared in the *Bulletin* in 1924, was reprinted in the 1942 issue of the journal to clarify the matter:

Dear Brother Secretary,

... we ... refer you to the commentary on the 25th article of the Rule. It is not possible for us to authorise the holding of balls or dances as a means of raising funds for councils or conferences of our Society or for special works. We cannot consent therefore to adopting such means, even though profitable, and thus risk departing in any way, even for the best motives, from the rules of simplicity and Christian modesty, which are the very essence of our Society and the spirit which animates it.³³

In the 1958 edition of the *Manual*, no mention is made of the unsuitability of dances as a means of raising funds.

Weekly or monthly church gate collections were the most common method for most conferences to finance their activities, but a variety of other ways was employed. The conferences in Westland Row parish organised their first pilgrimage to Lough Derg in 1926, generating a profit of £27.³⁴ Many of the conference events took place around the Christmas season. To avoid having to call on the hard-pressed council of Dublin for help, a conference attached to Ozanam House organised a Christmas draw.³⁵ The Glasthule conference had a collection at the Christmas morning swim in Sandycove in 1940 to raise money to buy boots for poor children.³⁶ Carol-singing was a favourite and lucrative way of earning money – St Ciaran’s lodging house guild was able to raise £50

³¹ *Bulletin*, lxxiii, no. 4 (1928), Apr. Supp., p. 9.

³² *Bulletin*, lxxxii, no. 1 (1936), Jan. Supp., p. 4.

³³ *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 11 (Nov. 1941), p. 259.

³⁴ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 44.

³⁵ *Annual Report, 1939*, p. 49.

³⁶ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 69.

at Christmas, 1939.³⁷ However, such was the attraction for carol-singing that it became somewhat disorganised over time and the council of Dublin had to take steps to cut down on the proliferation of groups who ‘did not always sing appropriate hymns’.³⁸ As a result of the new rules, one conference failed to generate sufficient Christmas income for the year ahead, and found itself without funds by the end of June.³⁹ The wardrobe committee in Ozanam House made house-to-house collections and also purchased new clothes, which it then sold at a reduced price to conferences. Its summer excursions for poor children were financed by charging the conferences 9d. for each child selected from their area.⁴⁰ In the winter months of 1936, the central collection committee succeeded in raising £3,800 from its fundraising activities in Dublin, with its flag-day collection raising a further £1,500.⁴¹

Some of the special works had their own fundraising committees, although others could call on assistance from the council of Dublin. The Night Shelter received no grants and relied entirely on donations of cash and clothes from the public. When a fire gutted a wing of St Vincent’s Orphanage in 1943, its committee undertook to rebuild the wing to meet modern standards at a cost of £14,000, but the insurance on the destroyed building only realised £3,300.⁴² In addition, it was finding it impossible to maintain the orphanage due to the high prices prevailing in the period known as ‘the emergency’, and was forced to raise the conferences’ annual subsidy from £28 to £39 per boy from July 1944.⁴³

The Dublin public and the Society’s many benefactors came to the rescue in periods of crisis, and in 1927, the people were thanked for their great generosity in ‘a time of very great financial stringency’.⁴⁴ The annual report of 1931 recorded with gratitude the receipt of an annual donation of £150 from the governor-general of Saorstát Éireann.⁴⁵ Archbishop Byrne was a regular

³⁷ *Annual Report, 1940*, p. 122.

³⁸ *Bulletin*, xci, no. 8 (Aug. 1946), p. 179.

³⁹ *Annual Report, 1946*, p. 80.

⁴⁰ *Annual Report, 1929*, p. 11.

⁴¹ *Bulletin*, lxxxi, no. 5 (1936), May Supp., p. 11.

⁴² *Bulletin*, lxxxix, no. 9 (Sept. 1944), p. 194.

⁴³ P.J. Ward to Christopher Mangan, 28 Aug. 1944 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

⁴⁴ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 77.

⁴⁵ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 13.

contributor to the Society, especially to the Night Shelter.⁴⁶ The local conference thanked the parishioners for their generous donations at the annual charity sermon in Blackrock in 1935, which allowed it to cope with the very heavy demands on resources during the year.⁴⁷ In 1935, the Irish Rugby Union provided £300 from a charity match in Lansdowne Road.⁴⁸

State support for the work of the Society, was, generally, neither sought nor given, reflecting perhaps the Society's traditional independence from other agencies, its fear of state intervention, inherited from the French tradition and increasingly expressed by some of the Irish hierarchy from the 1920s,⁴⁹ and the government's own poor economic status and underdeveloped social system. In the 1940s, the Department of Justice gave a grant towards the cost of the Society's guild of St Philip for the after-care of prisoners, especially young offenders.⁵⁰ As a charity, a refund of income tax was available to conferences on dividend income.⁵¹ In later years, as the Society became more involved with community initiatives, health board and local authority grants were available to the Night Shelter and to the Society for subsidising meals delivered to the homes of elderly people.⁵²

Bequests were a welcome, if uncertain, source of income. Edward Martyn, founder of the Pro-Cathedral's Palestrina choir,⁵³ left £1,000 in 1924 to the choir and £3,000 to the Pro-Cathedral conferences of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.⁵⁴ When a Miss Adelaide Blake left a legacy of £50 per annum to provide clothes for the poor boys attending the Christian Brothers' schools in Dún Laoghaire, the Society was asked to administer the fund.⁵⁵

The conditions of extreme want continued throughout the 1930s. With the passing of the Public Assistance Act, 1939, which widened the scope of earlier legislation and provided both general and medical assistance to eligible people,

⁴⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no.3 (1934), Mar. Supp., p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Annual Report*, 1931, p. 77.

⁴⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 2 (1935), Feb. Supp., p. 4.

⁴⁹ See Whyte, *Church and state in modern Ireland*.

⁵⁰ *Bulletin*, xciv, no. 6 (June 1949), p. 140.

⁵¹ See V.T. Delany, *Law relating to charities in Ireland* (Dublin, c. 1956).

⁵² *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 2 (Feb. 1967), pp 52–32.

⁵³ Henry Boylan, *Dictionary of Irish biography*, 3rd ed. (Dublin, 1999), p. 274.

⁵⁴ *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1924.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report*, 1926, p. 21.

a member of the Society expressed great hopes that the new legislation would noticeably improve the lives of poor families:

The Act is an act of the widest scope. It extends and modernises what was known in the bad old times as poor relief, and it appears to me to be right to say that in the carrying out of our weekly visitation, if we know the details of what the Public Assistance officer can do, we will be able to do more for the poor⁵⁶

Such hopes were not to be realised. The act was merely a consolidating one that reiterated the old Poor Law principles and procedures and did little to alter the existing home assistance service.⁵⁷

As well as providing financial and other services to families in need, members saw it as part of their obligations to assist them to manage their paltry means and to encourage thrift. As has been shown, its Advice Bureaux helped clients with financial matters relating to unemployment, rents, compensation and state entitlements. The Society's Penny Banks, established in the 1860s, had flourished for several decades, although they provided no loan facility. By the 1920s, their administration became unwieldy and time-consuming. A brother writing in the 1950s recalls his memories of the Penny Banks and of the reason they ceased to exist:

... because, in the writer's experience, it was impossible to persuade depositors to transfer their accounts to a joint stock bank or to the post office savings bank, although the latter was eminently suitable for the purpose. Many private banks had crashed during the century, but evidently the poor had great confidence in the Society's banks. The leaders of the Society, however, became reluctant to continue to bear the responsibilities of sums of six or seven thousands at the same time being held by individual penny banks.⁵⁸

The decision of the council of Ireland to close its Penny Banks was steadily carried out in the late 1920s, although a considerable number were still in existence in Dublin in 1927 (see Appendix Three). All the banks had closed by 1931.⁵⁹ Various other savings schemes also operated in Dublin over the years. Blackrock conference had a boot and clothing club, where families subscribed between 6*d.* and 5*s.* per week and could withdraw the money at any time, with 50 per cent added from conference funds by way of an order for boots or

⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxxix, no. 12 (1944), Dec. Supp., pp 13–15.

⁵⁷ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare*, p. 34.

⁵⁸ *St Vincent's, Glasnevin, Centenary Record*, p. 11.

⁵⁹ *Annual Report, 1931*, p. 16.

clothing. The club was largely availed of at Christmas or for first communions or confirmations.⁶⁰ The Society was well aware that families had to resort to pawnbrokers or to moneylenders because of the difficulty in getting credit from other sources. In 1939, visiting brothers came to the rescue of two families who had been charged exorbitant rates of interest – more than 150 per cent per annum – by moneylenders. A settlement was agreed and the legal rate of 39 per cent was paid.⁶¹ A member of the Society recalls that pawning articles was a way of life for many families, if a costly one. Clothes were pawned on a Monday and redeemed at the end of the week, so the husband had a suit of clothes for Sunday.⁶²

The war years brought extra difficulties for city conferences, with food shortages and loss of jobs for the casual workers on Dublin's docks as shipping activity decreased. Between 1939 and 1945, Irish exports were almost halved, and imports fell more drastically still.⁶³ In 1941, the collection committee raised £8,819 from its annual postal appeal in Dublin, and Dublin tea merchants and milk producers made substantial donations in kind during the winter months.⁶⁴ Receipts were down in 1942, but this was offset by a large bequest to the council of Dublin.⁶⁵ The beneficiaries were the poor people of the Pro-Cathedral and Seville Place parishes in the heart of the city. Seville Place had been particularly badly hit during the war as many of the jobless dock workers lived there. Over a three-year period the conferences in the two parishes received more than £7,000 from the Connolly legacy.⁶⁶ Yet, despite this major bequest, a man who visited Dublin from a rural district in 1944 recorded his impressions of this city centre area. Noting both the hideous-looking air-raid shelters and the grandeur and style of the passers-by on O'Connell Street, he described how, just off the capital's main thoroughfare, he entered a very different world:

Turned a corner beside the Gresham Hotel, fifty yards and I was into a tenement area. The children ran around in droves. Hundreds of them,

⁶⁰ *Annual Report, 1946*, p. 105.

⁶¹ *Bulletin*, lxxxiv, no. 4 (1939), Apr. Supp., pp 6–7.

⁶² Recollections of a member of the Society, active in the 1940s and 1950s (10 Apr. 2008).

⁶³ Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland*, p. 180.

⁶⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 5 (May 1942), pp 112–13.

⁶⁵ *Annual Report, 1942*, pp 7, 147.

⁶⁶ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 135; *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 147; *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 179.

all in a little short street. ... they played about the street rang with gay laughter and yells of joy. I pitied them, in their miserable surroundings, closed up in this dark alley, all in torn clothes, and by the outside appearances of the houses, nothing but squalour and dirt inside. Women sitting on doorsteps with sickly little children close to their bosom, trying to enjoy the sun that broke through the gap on the opposite side of the street.⁶⁷

Another fundraising initiative, started in the 1940s, was to be a constant and significant source of income for the Society, not only in Dublin but throughout the country. In 1942, staff members in the Hibernian Bank had been so affected by the film adaptation of Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* – which told the story of a struggling London family during the Depression – that they decided to set up a charity scheme within the bank. Staff were invited to contribute 2s. a month to the Florin Fund⁶⁸ for the benefit of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The scheme spread to other banks and each year a substantial amount was sent to the council of Ireland. Within two years of its foundation, the Society was able to use £2,260 from the fund for its activities.⁶⁹

A novel scheme for raising money during the war, in the rural north County Dublin parish of Skerries, became the main source of income in the 1940s for the local conference. Young calves were bought by the conference and local farmers agreed to provide grazing without charge. The animals were sold on maturity and the proceeds went to the conference funds.⁷⁰

Assistance came from international sources too. In 1943, the archbishop of New York, Francis Spellman, gave the archbishop of Dublin a gift of \$10,000 (£2,500) for distribution, at his discretion, among the poor. Dr McQuaid passed the entire amount to the council of Ireland.⁷¹ Care, an American organisation originally founded in 1945 to provide food packages for survivors after the Second World War, was later to expand the scope of its work, and by 1948, it had distributed packages to Dublin's poor through the Society.⁷² Notwithstanding the war-time hardships, income from the secret bag collection

⁶⁷ John Sharkey, 'What I saw in Dublin', in *The Bell*, 9, no. 2 (Nov. 1944), pp 149–54, at p. 152.

⁶⁸ A florin was the equivalent of two shillings.

⁶⁹ *Annual Report, 1944*, p. 205.

⁷⁰ *Annual Report, 1946*, p. 109.

⁷¹ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 11.

⁷² <http://care.org/> (viewed 15 May 2008); *Annual Report, 1948*, p. 37.

rose in Dublin from £1,860 in 1938 to £3,550 in 1946 and was described as ‘a true test of the member’s sincerity to his conference’.⁷³

The only significant piece of social legislation introduced during the war years was the Children’s Allowance Act, 1944. The act provided for a weekly payment of 2s. 6d. for children up to the age of sixteen, but only the third and subsequent children were to benefit.⁷⁴ After its introduction, a city conference, which had spent a very large amount on clothing that year, commented that ‘the children’s allowance scheme, as far as the conference could see, did not seem to make any great difference to the number of families on the roll’.⁷⁵ The Society’s rule emphasised that the spirit of a conference was not to hoard, and in 1945, a review of how the conferences were complying was published in the annual report.⁷⁶ It stated that in some counties, receipts had exceeded expenditure for a number of years, ‘largely the result of the relative absence of unemployment in the districts covered by Northern conferences’, but that in cities such as Dublin and Cork, receipts and expenditure tended to balance at this time, and added:

... conferences must ever remain on guard against hoarding for an emergency, the arrival of which is so difficult to judge. Far better to help all cases of real misery even if it means spending to the limits of the available resources, and leave it to God to provide for the difficult times which may come.⁷⁷

Despite the difficulties during the war, a relatively high standard of living had been maintained in the country generally, helped by easy access to Britain for the thousands of Irish workers who could not obtain jobs at home. In the immediate post-war years, however, rapid growth took place but this was tempered by inflation, a standstill in wages and rising prices.⁷⁸ The annual average rate of consumer prices grew by 7.9 per cent in 1950–51 and by over 8 per cent the following year, with an average increase of 5 per cent per annum for the rest of the decade.⁷⁹ Some conferences responded by increasing the

⁷³ *Annual Report, 1946*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Children’s Allowances Act, 1944, 3 (1) i and ii.

⁷⁵ *Annual Report, 1944*, p. 108.

⁷⁶ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, Article 19, commentary.

⁷⁷ *Annual Report, 1945*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Lynch, ‘The Irish economy since the war,’ p. 185.

⁷⁹ Central Statistics Office, consumer price index tables, 1950s.

value of their food vouchers to compensate for the higher prices,⁸⁰ and, in the belief that the prevailing inflation would be temporary, the Minister for Finance introduced food subsidies to keep down the cost of essential supplies.⁸¹

The Society in Dublin was soon feeling the effects of the post-war inflation and shortages. A conference in 1950 found that the demand for clothes and bedding was so heavy, that for every 5s. spent on food, it was spending 3s. on clothes.⁸²

A local boot-maker in Marino agreed to repair a minimum of two pairs of shoes weekly, free of charge, for poor families; his kind deed was referred to as 'a blessing certainly, with the rising cost of shoe repairs'.⁸³ Bus fares had risen so steeply that a children's outing to Avoca was in jeopardy in 1952, forcing the organising committee to appeal to the railway company for special train rates.⁸⁴

Another casualty was the Myra House committee in Francis Street that found itself in serious financial difficulty due to the failure of its income to keep step with constantly-increasing expenditure. The committee had responsibility for facilitating several conferences that held their meetings in Myra House, and it also organised activities for adults and children in the district. In response, the various conferences organised a sale of work, which brought in £250.⁸⁵

The accounts of the particular council of Dublin for the year ending December 1954 noted:

It is unfortunate that the income received by the particular council of Dublin and by individual conferences from bequests continues to decline at a time when the demands on our funds grow heavier as a result of the rising cost of commodities (Table 7.1).⁸⁶

⁸⁰ *Annual Report, 1947*, p. 63.

⁸¹ Lynch, 'The Irish economy since the war', pp 195–6.

⁸² *Annual Report, 1949*, p. 71.

⁸³ *Annual Report, 1950*, p. 47.

⁸⁴ *Annual Report, 1952*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ *Annual Report, 1952*, p. 43.

⁸⁶ *Annual Report, 1954*, p. 30.

Table 7.1 Council of Dublin: bequests and grants, 1948–1954

<i>Date</i>	<i>Council income from bequests</i>	<i>Council expenditure on grants to conferences</i>
	£	£
1948	31,138	9,623
1949	10,138	12,869
1950	3,676	12,561
1951	8,765	18,940
1952	9,942	19,976
1953	5,126	17,716
1954	4,485	16,149

Source: *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 30.

The Social Welfare Act, 1952, unified various existing schemes but on the whole, the period marked a regressive phase in social expenditure, closely linked with the economic environment of the time, and with the struggle against inflation that stalled growth.⁸⁷ That same year, children's allowances became a monthly payment and the second child was entitled to benefit.⁸⁸ The decade was not entirely bleak. While on a holiday in Ireland in 1953, Cardinal Spellman had given the president, Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, a donation of £10,000 for the Society.⁸⁹ The tax relief on exports introduced in the Finance Act, 1956, was to have a fruitful effect on the pattern of future growth, and the First Programme for Economic Expansion in 1958 would point the way towards a more open and productive economy.⁹⁰

The council-general in Paris had responsibility for the overall monitoring of how the conferences around the world managed their financial affairs. In its report on the plenary meeting in March 1960, the secretary-general noted two opposing tendencies from the conference reports: on the one hand, hoarding

⁸⁷ Lynch, 'The Irish economy since the war', p. 199.

⁸⁸ Curry, *Irish social services*, p. 40.

⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, 4 Dec. 1967.

⁹⁰ Lynch, 'The Irish economy since the war', pp 199–200.

was a factor, and on the other, lack of foresight as regards future needs.⁹¹ The issues were taken up at a meeting of Irish Presidents in Dublin later that year, and the following conclusions emerged from the discussion groups:

Many conferences ... fail to realise the depreciation in the value of money and grant weekly amounts which are entirely inadequate in the circumstances of modern times. Others tie themselves to rigid minimum and maximum amounts, irrespective of the varying needs of different families.⁹²

The groups favoured the utmost generosity on the part of the conferences, and stressed the need for members to work hard in raising funds, and to increase their contributions to the secret collection.⁹³

As has been well documented, the 1960s was an expansionary phase in the history of the state, as the economy moved forward following decades of stagnation. Capital flowed into the country, aided by tax incentives. By 1966, Irish exports, mainly in manufactured goods, were 88 per cent above the 1953 level. Cullen contends that the growth in output and income was less a consequence of planning than of the remarkably high level of world activity in this period and of the move in Irish policy from a closed economic system to a more open one.⁹⁴ Yet, not all were to benefit equally. The job opportunities in the 1960s in manufacturing and services did not expand rapidly enough to absorb the high numbers leaving agriculture and migrating to Dublin.⁹⁵ Social welfare improvements for poor families were few, especially in the first half of the decade. In 1963, children's allowances were raised to offset the impact on families of turnover tax, but from 1963 to 1969, there were no increases in the rates.⁹⁶ During the same period, the consumer price index rose by 30 per cent.⁹⁷

From the 1960s, the greater availability of luxury goods from abroad also increased the temptation to acquire expensive items. A member of the Society, who was also associated with the credit union movement, contended that the

⁹¹ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 6 (June 1960), p. 128.

⁹² *Bulletin*, cv, no. 11 (Nov. 1960), p. 263.

⁹³ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 11 (Nov. 1960), p. 263.

⁹⁴ Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland*, pp 184–5.

⁹⁵ Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland*, p. 184.

⁹⁶ Curry, *Irish social services*, p. 40.

⁹⁷ Central Statistics Office, consumer price index tables, 1960s.

credit union was an ideal method for the small saver and badly needed in Ireland of the 1960s:

It is not uncommon for members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul visiting applicants for assistance to find them enjoying the modern luxuries which they (the brothers) do not [have] and could not themselves afford, and it becomes painfully obvious that the applicant has, to his own disadvantage, become yet another victim of the modern easy payments system.⁹⁸

Despite the economic growth, many Dubliners at the time continued to struggle simply to provide the basic necessities. In a survey conducted in 1965, Ó Cinnéide showed that the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Dublin had to provide additional relief for many of those relying on home assistance. Whereas home assistance expenditure amounted to £186,000 for the year 1965–6, the Society added a further £120,700 to help families in need.⁹⁹ The 1960s also saw a time of financial crisis for the Society, both in Ireland and internationally. Cardinal Spellman, a generous benefactor in 1943 and 1953, gave a further \$10,000 in 1963, through the offices of the archbishop of Dublin, in memory of Cardinal D’Alton. Writing to thank the archbishop for passing on the gift to the Society, Bill Cashman said that its funds in the cities and large towns had become depleted due to the long period of bad weather, and that it planned to use the gift for fuel and other necessities, especially for the old and for large families.¹⁰⁰ By October of that year, in an appeal reported in the *Irish Times*, the council of Dublin began with the stark statement: ‘The central council of Dublin has no funds for the first time in twenty years and is, in fact, in debt.’¹⁰¹ It had a deficit of £10,000. Total expenditure for 1962 stood at £113,000 while receipts, including £10,500 subscribed by members, amounted to £103,000.¹⁰²

The response to the appeal was encouraging, both from inside and outside the Society. Twenty-nine city conferences organised a two-day sale of work in the Mansion House. In December, the central council of Dublin acknowledged the receipt of £10,000 from ‘Mr X’. A further £2,125 was donated by Arthur Guinness, £1,000 by Archbishop McQuaid, £1,000 from the Hospitals Trust,

⁹⁸ *Bulletin*, cviii, no. 2 (Feb. 1963), p. 32.

⁹⁹ Ó Cinnéide, *A law for the poor: a study of home assistance*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ William Cashman to John Charles McQuaid, 5 Feb. 1963 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 14 Oct. 1963.

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 17 Oct. 1963.

and there were many other smaller amounts from companies and individuals.¹⁰³ Yet, the figures for 1964 show that the income received by the Society in Ireland was barely sufficient to match its outgoings. Its members contributed £27,705, which more than covered the £18,260 for working expenses.¹⁰⁴

In 1966, a cry for help came from the international offices in Paris; the president-general, Pierre Chouard, wrote to all the national councils throughout the world explaining that his office was in serious financial trouble. All the board members gave their services voluntarily but there was a small number of administrative staff in Paris. Increased costs arose from office equipment, travel outside France on Society business, publications, and there had been a serious drop in contributions from national councils – from £9,400 in 1964 to £5,800 in 1965. The council of Ireland, like other national councils, was obliged under the Rule to make a contribution, about 10 per cent of its income, to the council-general.¹⁰⁵ It responded to the request from Paris by raising its annual contribution to £1,000, and by making a special contribution of a further £1,000 towards the council-general's deficit.¹⁰⁶

The history of the Sunshine House's income and expenditure from sales of the *Advocate* in the 1960s shows a typical cash flow pattern that was reflected throughout the Society: a welcome rise in income, but a subsequent erosion of its benefits from increasing costs. The Palm Sunday *Advocate* appeal for Sunshine House brought in £4,400 in 1964 compared to £2,570 just three years earlier, the committee attributing the steep rise to higher wages. A year later, the *Advocate* appeal had increased to over £5,000 but this was quickly offset by higher running costs at Sunshine House, especially for food. Industrial unrest caused added difficulties in the 1960s, linked to the gap between wage levels and the increasing cost of living. In 1964, John Ryan, president of the council of Dublin, acknowledged Archbishop McQuaid's generous contribution towards the relief of distress caused by the building dispute.¹⁰⁷ The same year, publication of the Society's annual report was delayed owing to a printing

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, 12 Dec. 1963.

¹⁰⁴ *Annual Report, 1964*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Manual*, 1958 ed., Rule, article 59 and commentary.

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 4 (Apr. 1966), pp 101–2.

¹⁰⁷ J. Ryan to John Charles McQuaid, 16 Oct. 1964 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

dispute,¹⁰⁸ and because of the bus strike in 1965, children going for their week's holiday to Sunshine House had to be taken in private cars.¹⁰⁹

The recollections of a pawnbroker in Marlborough Street, active in Dublin from the 1930s, provide a useful insight into changes in living standards as reflected in the types of goods pawned by those in need of cash in the 1960s compared to earlier times:

In the old days it was really a weekly business – in on Monday and out on Saturday. The place was absolutely loaded with customers ... all women wearing their shawls and petticoats. Most people were living in tenement houses and they were pawning all kinds of sheets and bed-clothing, and old suits, shoes. ... The fifties were difficult years here. We ... started taking in musical instruments ... spectacles, walking sticks, knives. ... Tailors used to pawn their scissors and barbers pawned their open razors and shavers The sixties were boom years in Ireland. People weren't buying old, used clothes any more. We were the first to stop taking in second-hand clothes. We just started taking in jewellery, radios, electrical equipment ...¹¹⁰

Despite the rise in living standards, sudden misfortune due to death, illness or loss of work was identified by the Society as the greatest risk to those who lived, worked, or didn't work, in the 1960s.¹¹¹ Often the victims were people who had until then enjoyed a reasonable standard of living but suddenly had to cope with a greatly-reduced income and with rising costs for everyday items. A widow in Fatima Mansions with a large family, who had no trouble making ends meet when her working husband was alive, had less than £20 a week to live on from a widow's pension and children's allowances after his death. She received an additional 15s. a week from the Society, and some of the children had holidays in Sunshine House.¹¹²

A major aspect of the Society's finances involved the purchase, lease and maintenance of its numerous properties which had become extensive over the years, as the scope of its activities increased. Myra House was purchased in 1926 and the boys' club in Nelson Street leased the same year.¹¹³ The Society already owned Ozanam House on Mountjoy Square. Its headquarters at 23

¹⁰⁸ *Annual Report 1964*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Sunshine Fund committee, annual report, 1966 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹¹⁰ Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin street life and lore: an oral history* (Dublin, 1991), pp 97–8.

¹¹¹ *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 12 (Dec. 1967), p. 291.

¹¹² Eileen O'Brien, 'The widow of Fatima Mansions', *Irish Times*, 24 Feb. 1969, p. 12.

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no. 8 (Aug. 1926), p. 241.

Upper O'Connell Street had been destroyed by fire in 1922, as a result of which it was awarded £520 in compensation for the loss of furniture, publications and pictures in 1924.¹¹⁴ The Catholic Protection and Rescue Society offered 'temporary' accommodation in Anne Street, an arrangement that was to last for over twenty years. The Society moved in 1944 to rented offices at 64 Grafton Street.¹¹⁵ In 1945, the Frédéric Ozanam Trust was incorporated to bring the various properties owned by the Society within the same legal framework.¹¹⁶

The old Sunshine House, purchased in 1935 for £1,100, was demolished and the cost of the new building and equipment was nearly £50,000 by 1951.¹¹⁷ St Vincent's Orphanage, purchased in the mid-nineteenth century, was in such financial straits by the mid-1950s, that a professional fundraiser was hired.¹¹⁸ By 1960, it had impending expenditure of £14,000 for roof repairs and fire precautions.¹¹⁹ In the 1950s, the council of Dublin acquired Lonan Murphy house, near Sallins in County Kildare, as a holiday home for boys. The new premises for the Seamen's Institute at Beresford Place needed construction work before opening in 1962.¹²⁰ The Society in Ireland was based at its new premises in Nicholas Street by the 1960s. Lonan Murphy house, damaged by fire in 1967, was replaced by Kerdiffstown House in Naas, a property on about forty acres.¹²¹ The Society's youth clubs largely depended for finance on the particular council of Dublin. In 1958, ninety-five brothers were catering for nearly 700 boys and keeping the club premises maintained and open three nights a week. Total expenditure for the year amounted to £4,000, with the boys themselves able to contribute a mere £520.¹²² By 1965, it was costing £8,000 a year to maintain the Night Shelter for homeless men.¹²³ The strain of financing suitable premises for youth clubs was evident in the 1971 annual report, which stated that: 'consideration is being given to the large capital requirements,

¹¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 12 Apr. 1924.

¹¹⁵ *Bulletin*, lxxxix, no. 6 (June 1944), p. 121.

¹¹⁶ *Memorandum and articles of association of Frédéric Ozanam Trust Incorporated* (Dublin, 1945); *Annual Report, 1945*, pp 12–13.

¹¹⁷ Sunshine Fund committee, annual report, 1951 (DDA, McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

¹¹⁸ *Annual Report, 1956*, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ *Annual Report, 1961*, p. 10.

¹²⁰ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 9 (Sept. 1960), pp 211–12.

¹²¹ *Bulletin* cxii, no. 12 (Dec. 1967), p. 293, and cxiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1968), p. 270.

¹²² *Annual Report, 1958*, p. 6.

¹²³ *Irish Times*, 7 Dec. 1965.

bearing in mind local and state obligations to provide facilities for youth.’¹²⁴ In a new departure in 1972, the Society set up St Vincent’s Housing Company to provide ‘half-way’ flats for young couples with children who were not in a position to purchase their own homes and who were on long waiting lists for housing.¹²⁵

In a comment on the increasingly complex conditions under which the Society was operating by the 1970s, John Peacock, secretary of the council of Ireland, called for a more professional approach to the management of its affairs:

... improved social welfare benefits, rising affluence, a steady growth in membership and in the number of conferences have all meant that the Society has been able to increase the variety and scope of its work. And hand in hand with this development, the Society’s annual income and expenditure in Ireland has now risen to over one million pounds. We may wish to remain, we may still be, a simple Society, but our finances are taking us into the big business league.¹²⁶

He stressed the obligation that presidents and treasurers had to the Society’s generous benefactors and to the members themselves. Business-like accounts should be kept: books written up, the accounts audited annually, and conference annual reports forwarded promptly to the higher council.¹²⁷ He was reflecting the requirements of the New Rule, which presented a more flexible, but still prudent, approach to managing finances:

As to fund-raising efforts generally, all that needs to be said is that no method is forbidden or frowned upon, provided that it is not such as to damage the Society’s good name. Care should be taken not to indulge in financially risky projects or in projects the expenses of which are so great that only a small proportion of what is contributed by the supporters can reach those in need.¹²⁸

The New Rule, articles 19 and 34, stressed that the accounts of each council and conference be audited at least once a year by two members delegated by the council or conference for the purpose, or by a qualified person. This was a very

¹²⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 Dec. 1972.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 Dec. 1972.

¹²⁶ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 11 (Nov. 1973), pp 221–2.

¹²⁷ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 11 (Nov. 1973), pp 221–2.

¹²⁸ New Rule, p. 58.

important requirement, it insisted, and was binding in justice to those who contributed funds to the Society.¹²⁹

The year 1970 saw further social improvements in the form of the invalidity pension, the unmarried mother's allowance and the deserted wife's allowance, which brought financial relief to people who, in the past, would have relied for help on charitable organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Before the introduction of the deserted wife's allowance, home assistance was the only form of statutory income support available.¹³⁰ Inflation continued at an alarming rate. The average rise in social welfare payments in the 1974 budget was estimated at 18 per cent, yet the consumer price index for 1974–5 rose by nearly 21 per cent rise on the previous financial year.¹³¹ The price of coal increased by 61 percent between 1973 and 1975, and electricity by 55 per cent.¹³² Although the proportion of gross national product devoted to social services – housing, health, education and income maintenance – had risen sharply since the 1960s, the Society in Dublin remained under pressure to respond to demand in 1972. Contrasting the Society's annual budget at the beginning and end of his six-year term of office, the retiring president of the council of Ireland, Bob Cashman, said that the Society had raised and spent about £580,000 in Ireland in 1969, but that it was expected to raise and spend close to £2 million by the end of 1975.¹³³

Despite economic growth and various increases in social welfare payments, home visiting was still the major activity of the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and cash, clothes and fuel continued to be the main forms of assistance. It had spent £300,000 in 1972, but admitted that:

... if our material assistance is to continue to be of value, we must seek to increase our income. ... It is still very necessary for us to use a sizeable portion of our energies and resources in bolstering inadequate family budgets.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ New Rule, pp 58–9.

¹³⁰ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare*, p. 42.

¹³¹ Central Statistics Office, consumer price index tables, 1970s; *Irish Times*, 3 Apr. 1974.

¹³² E.W. Henry, *The impact of the energy crisis on the Irish economy during 1973–81*, Economic and Social Research Institute, paper no. 112 (Dublin, 1983), p. 34.

¹³³ *Bulletin*, 120, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1975), p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 Dec. 1972.

Curry points out that through most of the twentieth century, the social welfare services in Ireland developed in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion, without being accompanied by any ideological debate on the underlying principles:

In Ireland, poverty may be said to have been ‘rediscovered’ at a conference organised by the Council for Social Welfare and held in Kilkenny in 1971. The conference sparked off what was to be a growing national debate on how the plight of the underprivileged in the state could be resolved. ... Professor James Kavanagh ... pleaded for a widening of the concept of poverty to include not only bare, subsistence nutritional levels but the ordinary decencies of living ...¹³⁵

A more analytical approach to the understanding of poverty and its many dimensions was emerging. The Central Statistics Office carried out its first household budget survey in 1973 in an attempt to measure how many people were living on incomes that fell below a stated poverty line.¹³⁶ When the government set up an advisory committee to coordinate and initiate pilot schemes to combat poverty in 1974, the president of the Society of St Vincent de Paul was appointed to the committee.¹³⁷ This fact-finding project – described as ‘groundwork for further action’ – was similar to programmes in other EEC countries and was jointly financed by the Irish government and the EEC; its aim was to find solutions to poverty and to monitor the effectiveness of those helping the poor.¹³⁸

The Society, too, at this time was engaged in more focused approaches to the government on the problems of poverty and income maintenance. For several years, it had been making annual pre-budget submissions to the Departments of Finance and Social Welfare. Free travel, free electricity allowance and a free television allowance had all been introduced for pensioners in 1967,¹³⁹ and, when addressing the annual meeting of Irish presidents in 1970, the vice-president of the council of Ireland said:

... we have good reason to believe that the introduction of free TV and radio licences for old people a couple of years ago was largely as a result of pressure by our Society. We are very vocal each year in letting

¹³⁵ Curry, *Irish social services*, p. 20.

¹³⁶ Tim Callan and Brian Nolan, *Income inequality and poverty in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s*, Economic and Social Research Institute working paper, no. 43 (Dublin, 1993), pp 3–16.

¹³⁷ *Bulletin*, 120, nos 5–6 (May–June 1975), p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Irish Independent*, 16 Dec. 1975.

¹³⁹ Curry, *Irish social services*, p. 42.

the Minister for Finance know what a strong case there is for social welfare benefits, especially for the old, and our representations have been recognised, in part at least, in some recent budget provisions.¹⁴⁰

A comment by the Society on the provisions of the 1973 budget read:

In addition to general increases in social welfare rates [the budget] has provided for allowances for the families of long-term prisoners, for an adult dependant of a non-contributory pensioner and for the removal of many lower income people from the tax net. We can claim that our representations are being heeded and that our efforts in the cause of social justice are not in vain.¹⁴¹

If the 1960s had seen a constant struggle between inflationary forces and the management of money to meet future commitments, both for the Society and for those they tried to help, the trials of the 1970s were to be even more severe. There were those who believed that, with the drop in the value of money, the Society's modest contribution could make little difference to those in need, and there were others who contended that, with the growth in social services, the Society's assistance was no longer required. A member writing in the *Bulletin*, doubted that the Society was equipped to keep pace with the decreasing value of money and argued that its contributions were becoming more and more irrelevant. The prevailing rapid rates of inflation, he predicted, would mean that more people would find themselves in short-term cash crisis situations. He then quoted an English economist on the subject of inflation:

The changes being currently wrought by inflation in our society are far-reaching, totally capricious and frequently highly unjust. Those who cannot increase their incomes in line with the fall in the value of money are being impoverished, with those on pensions and other forms of fixed income doing worst of all.¹⁴²

The Society, as has been shown, did not see its role as simply that of handing out modest amounts of assistance. It was the less tangible gifts of friendship and human support that were to be valued and promoted. A 1967 report outlines the variety of ways in which conference members were able to assist families in financial crises and it also gives an indication of the extent of the goodwill for the Society and the respect with which it was held by other agencies. Responding to the suggestion that its services had no place in the

¹⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 11 (Nov. 1971), p. 234.

¹⁴¹ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 6 (June 1974), p. 12.

¹⁴² *Bulletin*, 119, no. 9 (Sept. 1974), pp 12–13.

modern Irish society with its improved welfare provisions, the report commented:

Such suggestions take little account ... of the tragedy that hits an ordinary home ... through redundancy, a strike or illness, or when a family loses the breadwinner through death. Notwithstanding the state benefits, the reduction in the household income gives rise to agonising difficulties ... with regard to rent, food, clothing, footwear, gas, and electricity, hire purchase commitments and education. Very often there is ignorance of how to go about getting social welfare entitlements and the problem of filling up complicated forms.

Here help and advice can make all the difference. A weekly grant can ensure that the rent is kept paid. ... Forms can be filled up and the appropriate authorities contacted with a request for quick and sympathetic action, which is invariably given when the Society asks. The same applies to bills and commitments of other kinds, once the Society indicates that it is helping. ... clothing, footwear and education can then be looked after. In other words, the family can be helped to hold on and not to panic.¹⁴³

In 1975, home assistance, the last remnant of the Poor Law, was replaced by the supplementary welfare allowance. Under the new scheme, a standard basic minimum income was payable of right, in place of the arbitrary and variable payments made under the home assistance scheme, and a standard means test was introduced. There was additional flexibility under the scheme for those in special need.¹⁴⁴ Introducing the Bill in the Dáil, Frank Cluskey observed:

The Poor Law was the legal embodiment of the attitudes of the last century, harsh and unfeeling attitudes which should have no place in the society of today.¹⁴⁵

The Society of St Vincent de Paul had seen many new social schemes emerge over the decades, yet the variety of calls for its assistance, and the funds needed to respond adequately, never seemed to abate. It offered an explanation for this phenomenon in its annual report for 1968, conveyed in the *Irish Times*:

Social services, no matter how good, never cover everything, if only because they are so often, of necessity, impersonal.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ *Bulletin*, cxii, no. 12 (Dec. 1967), p. 291.

¹⁴⁴ *Report of the Commission on Social Welfare* (Dublin, 1986), p. 46.

¹⁴⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Social Welfare (Supplementary Welfare Allowances) Bill, 1975: second stage, 282, 24 June 1975.

¹⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 7 Oct. 1969.

This chapter revealed a picture of constant struggle against financial adversity and economic uncertainty, that affected the state, poor families and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The early decades saw large numbers of near-destitute Dubliners depending on meagre state relief and on a little extra from the Society of St Vincent de Paul. In the latter years, such dire need was much less common but the distress caused to those accustomed to a reasonable standard of living when accosted by personal misfortune and overwhelming levels of inflation was no less acute. The Society frequently found itself with financial shortfalls, not because of a less generous public, but because of its own determination to seek out new ways of serving less privileged people. Projects, such as holiday homes and the extension of services for young people, involved significant capital outlay and high maintenance.

It might have been tempting for the Society to lapse into a state of helplessness because of uncontrollable inflationary pressures from the 1960s. Instead, it became more actively involved in pressing the government for better social benefits through its pre-budget submissions, and by engaging with agencies committed to the more precise measurement of the causes of poverty.

Some have argued that the Society of St Vincent de Paul's role had been largely overtaken by improved standards of living and better levels of social welfare in the latter years of this study. Yet, its primary purpose was not limited to financial assistance. Home visitation brought the members into close contact with those who were in financial difficulties and enabled them to experience at close range the impact of the crisis on a family. Its broader aim of personal support ensured its continuing relevance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SOCIETY AND OTHERS

That the Society of St Vincent de Paul was often perceived as a worthy organisation that carried out its work with a degree of secrecy and detachment from wider social and political concerns is understandable. Yet, this chapter will show that the Society in Dublin co-existed with other groups doing similar work; that it had several levels of connection with other organisations, religious and secular, at home and abroad, and that the brothers embraced many activities and interests beyond the obligations of membership. It will also show how other institutions and individuals began to express more critical views of the Society and how it lost some of its appeal as a lay Catholic organisation in the more secular Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s.

Several strands in the history of the Society converge to strengthen the impression of isolation. As early as 1844, President-General Jules Gossin, speaking in the context of nineteenth-century France, had described discussion on politics as ‘that incessant cause of discord’.¹ His successor, Adolphe Baudon, feared that newspapers were political organs, and their use as a means of publicising the work of the Society was to be avoided. Moreover, he stated, the publication of proceedings could be considered contrary to the spirit of humility that the Society was so anxious to preserve.² This spirit of Christian humility was firmly embedded in the Society’s Rule.³ In addition, the nature of the work with families in need demanded discretion and confidentiality. The author of an Australian article, published in the *Bulletin* in 1951, reminded members of how the spirit of the Society should be applied to other organisations:

From the earliest days the members ... have been cautioned to regard the Society as the least of those engaged in charitable works. Therefore, our Society must never vie or compete with any other organisation. Surely, the field of charity is indeed great, and in it there is plenty of room for all those who wish to labour for the harvest of charity ...⁴

¹ *Manual*, 1958 ed., p. 131.

² *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 7 (July 1969), p. 191.

³ *Manual*, 1958 ed., pp 126–8.

⁴ *Bulletin*, xcvi, no. 2 (Feb. 1951), p. 20.

That the harvest was indeed great is evident from a perusal of various directories from the early and middle years of twentieth-century Dublin. They list many other charities, church-related and secular, that had long been engaged in activities that were broadly similar to those carried out by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Lord Plunket, Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin, had opened a night shelter for men in Poolbeg Street in 1894 that was catering for 47,000 annual admissions thirty years later.⁵ The church's Fishamble Street Mission embraced 'evangelistic and temperance work' and had a coal club, a savings bank and a clothing section.⁶ It also ran a labour yard in Ringsend,⁷ established before the Society of St Vincent de Paul opened their yard in Vicar Street in 1915.⁸ The sick poor were visited in their homes by the Methodist-run Strangers' Friend Society.⁹ Charles Shiels, a wealthy Irishman who made his fortune in England in the nineteenth century, left £125,000 to provide houses for the aged poor in several parts of Ireland, including at Stillorgan in County Dublin.¹⁰ The Country Air Association had been organising a rest and a change of environment for Dublin's Protestant poor in farmhouses and rural districts since 1886.¹¹ At 19 Sir John Rogerson's Quay, the Dublin Sailors' Home was providing board and services for seamen since 1849, similar to those that the Society's Catholic Seamen's Institute would provide along the same quay from 1910.¹²

St Vincent's orphanage was just one of thirteen Catholic residential institutions for children in the diocese of Dublin in 1910, most of which were managed by religious orders.¹³ The 1942 edition of the *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook* lists nineteen lodging houses for women, including students, working girls and widows.¹⁴ Organisations such as the Legion of Mary and the Catholic Women's Federation of Secondary School Unions ran clubs for girls, and in Leeson Street, the Society of the Sacred Heart had a night

⁵ *Thom's Directory, 1927*, p. 341.

⁶ Association of Charities, *Dublin charities*, p. 182.

⁷ Association of Charities, *Dublin charities*, p. 23.

⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxiv, no. 1 (1929), Jan. Supp., p. 10.

⁹ *Thom's Directory, 1903*, p. 279.

¹⁰ Association of Charities, *Dublin charities*, p. 112; *Thom's Directory 1945*, p. 350.

¹¹ Association of Charities, *Dublin charities*, p. 27.

¹² *Thom's Directory, 1927*, p. 341.

¹³ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1910*, p. 178.

¹⁴ *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c.1942 ed., pp 34–7.

school for girls aged fourteen and over.¹⁵ The St John Bosco Society, from its headquarters in Veritas House, Lower Abbey Street, managed several boys' clubs in the city, and the past pupils of Belvedere College had their own newsboys' club.¹⁶

While the Society of St Vincent de Paul was by no means a unique provider of services to Dublin's poor, what distinguishes it from others was the size of its operations and the range of works that were being undertaken by the one organisation. The Mansion House Coal Fund, founded in 1897 by the lord mayor of Dublin,¹⁷ allocated vouchers to a number of charities and distributing agencies, and its figures for 1931 give an indication of the Society's scale of operations compared to other groups.

Table 8.1 Mansion House Coal Fund recipients, December 1931

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Tons</i>
Society of St Vincent de Paul	150
Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society	25
Dublin Parochial Association	25
Other associations	40

Source: *Irish Independent*, 1 Jan. 1932.

Just as the Society was an organisation among many, the Society's members had other interests, business, political and cultural. A Dublin member who joined a conference in Myra House after leaving school in 1919 appreciated the importance of keeping Society business and other activities separate.

Many of the young members were engaged in the national freedom struggle of the time but were careful not to involve the Society lest it might invite raids on Myra House by the police and Black and Tans. These were commonplace wherever young or middle-aged men gathered.¹⁸

If discussion on politics was banned from conference meetings, the impact of the civil conflict in Dublin in the years after independence was impossible to ignore. Property destruction and the human problems caused by the strife put an additional burden on the Society of St Vincent de Paul and brought it into

¹⁵ *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c. 1942 ed., pp 19–23.

¹⁶ *Catholic Social Workers' Handbook*, c. 1942 ed., p. 19.

¹⁷ *Dublin charities*, p. 28.

¹⁸ *Bulletin*, cxv, no. 4 (Apr. 1970), p. 89.

contact with several other agencies. When the Society's premises in O'Connell Street were damaged by fire in July 1922, the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society offered temporary accommodation.¹⁹ The White Cross Society was set up in 1921 to provide assistance for civilians who had been injured or had lost their property and livelihood through the destruction in the city. It received a huge amount of money from the American Committee for Relief in Ireland – £1.4 million by the end of August 1922.²⁰ A brother in the Society's Advice Bureau, who referred a badly injured man, by then dying from tuberculosis, to the White Cross Society for relief for his wife and children, was able to report:

... the White Cross Society very generously made a grant of 10s. per week for each child, and promised us that they would, if possible, keep up the payments until the children have reached the age of sixteen years.²¹

After the foundation of the Free State, the British Red Cross and the British Legion continued to provide services to ex-British servicemen living in Ireland. In 1928, a city conference procured a set of false teeth for an ex-soldier with the assistance of the British Legion and the British Red Cross Society.²² The Society of St Vincent de Paul was represented on the joint committee of the British Red Cross and St John's Ambulance Brigade, and in the 1930s, the positive comments by the president of the council of Ireland suggest that there was a cordial relationship between the groups:

The British Red Cross here, guided by definite rules and regulations, and subject to London headquarters, concerns itself with the welfare of British ex-service men resident in the Irish Free State. Its co-partner ... is better known amongst us as St John's Ambulance Brigade, whose excellent public service has become a feature of Dublin life.²³

Writing when the civil war was still in the recent past, Glynn commented in 1935:

Our cardinal and the archbishops and bishops have made a very earnest appeal to our people to allow no political differences to hurt the charity that [they] ... should have for one another. ... there is one great rule in the Society and that rule is – there must be no politics. As far as I am aware, we faithfully adhere to that rule. I know of no council or

¹⁹ Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, p. 80.

²⁰ Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic*, 4th ed. (Dublin, 1951), pp 435–6.

²¹ *Annual Report 1926*, p. 115.

²² *Annual Report, 1928*, p. 17.

²³ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 8 (1935), Aug. Supp., p. 3.

conferences that have in recent years been injured by political differences.²⁴

If the Rule of the Society required its members to work within a constrained set of procedures that left little room for individuality, some managed to lead lives outside the Society that gave full vent to their personalities. One such member was solicitor, Henry Dixon, a friend of Arthur Griffith and of Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, and easily recognised by his long, flowing brown beard, streaked with white. In his memoirs, Ó Ceallaigh recalls how Griffith, Dixon, himself and other nationalist enthusiasts used to have their lunch in Jenny Wyse-Power's restaurant in Henry Street. Neither Griffith nor Dixon ate much, he recalled, both preferring to talk.²⁵ Even though Dixon was not an active volunteer, Dublin Castle arrested him on suspicion – he had been a member of the first national council of Sinn Féin²⁶ – and he was interned in Frongoch and later in Reading.²⁷ He also spent time in Ballykinlar camp in County Down, as Joseph Glynn was able to remind the gathering at a meeting of the Society. Referring to the fact that Dixon's boundless energy 'had to find many exits', Glynn described his activities during his third incarceration:

... when during the political trouble he found himself in compulsory retirement in Ballykinlar ... he organised a large number of them into a conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, which he actually succeeded in getting aggregated.²⁸

In his seventieth year, Henry Dixon was knocked down and killed by a car in North Frederick Street in 1928, near the location of his law practice.²⁹ The *Irish Times* obituary described him as one of the best known solicitors in Dublin, an authority on land law, and an active supporter of Parnell, both before and after the split. It also commented that he was a deeply religious man but no bigot, and that 'nobody fought harder on the side of enlightenment and against ignorant fanaticism in the famous "Bible in Irish" struggle in the Dublin Corporation and its Libraries Committee'.³⁰ He was an Irish language and music enthusiast, a supporter of the literary movement and of the temperance

²⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 3 (1935), Mar. Supp., p. 8.

²⁵ Proinsias Ó Conlúin, ed., *Seán T: scéal a bheatha á insint ag Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1963), pp 33–6, 237.

²⁶ Macardle, *Irish Republic*, p. 66.

²⁷ Ó Conlúin, ed., *Seán T: scéal a bheatha*, pp 33–6, 237.

²⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxix, no. 1 (1929), Jan. Supp., p. 2.

²⁹ *Irish Times*, 6 Dec. 1928.

³⁰ *Irish Times*, 8 Dec. 1928.

campaign, and took a keen interest in the works of aspiring writers. The report added: ‘In philanthropic circles he played an important if inconspicuous part.’³¹ No reference was made to his association with the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Another colourful member of the Society was William Field, Nationalist MP in Westminster parliament for twenty-seven years. A victualler from Blackrock, County Dublin, where he lived all his life, his many concerns included workers’ rights, native industry, the Gaelic Athletic Association, agriculture, transport, and the humane transportation of animals. Like Henry Dixon, Field supported Parnell, and after the split became secretary of his defence fund, and later, president of the committee that organised the annual pilgrimage to Glasnevin cemetery. In parliament, he maintained that public utilities such as gas, water and transport should be operated for the community rather than in private hands. Among his several pamphlets was one on the inadequacies of the Poor Law that was considered dangerously socialistic at the time, but much of what he proposed was later adopted by the Poor Law Commission. He argued that, as a meat-producing country, Ireland had need of a department of agriculture and of a veterinary college, and when the college was established, he was elected one of its governors. He was also a member of the Blackrock Urban District Council,³² and of the Port and Docks Board for over thirty years.³³

Field was easily recognised by his distinctive dress. His thick, flowing locks were topped by a ‘Buffalo Bill’ hat – he did not, it was alleged, change his fashion style in sixty years.³⁴ In parliament, his appearance was the cause of much interest:

Talented caricaturists rivalled each other in portraying his mass of luxuriant hair, his wide expanse of shirt front, his frock coat of the mid-Victorian period and his bootlace necktie.³⁵

Reid, his biographer, writing in 1918, refers to Field’s involvement with the Mendicity Institution, with the Catholic Boys’ Home in Middle Abbey Street,

³¹ *Irish Times*, 5 Dec. 1928.

³² J.F. Reid, *William Field: a biography and character study* (London, c.1918, photocopied version, 2002). p. 7.

³³ *Weekly Irish Times*, 4 May 1935; *Irish Times*, 3 May 1935.

³⁴ *Weekly Irish Times*, 4 May 1935; *Irish Times*, 3 May 1935.

³⁵ Reid, *William Field*, pp 9, 12.

and with the Mansion House Coal Fund, but makes no reference to the fact that he was, at that time, a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul for over forty years.³⁶ It is in the pages of the *Bulletin* that some details of his long membership of the Blackrock conference are revealed. He was one of the founding members of the coal fund in the town, and spent many of his Saturday nights handing out food to the poor of the district.³⁷ When he died in 1935, in his late eighties, his large funeral was attended by Éamon de Valera.³⁸

Other members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul went on to lead very public lives. Four were to become Presidents of Ireland: Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, Éamon de Valera, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh and Mary Leneghan (McAleese). Ó Dálaigh was a member of the council of Ireland in the 1940s.³⁹ Michael Christie, president of the council of Ireland from 1953 to 1960, was Clerk of the Seanad until his retirement in 1953.⁴⁰ Patrick Fay, Irish ambassador to France, and already a member of the council of Ireland, was nominated a member of the Society's council-general in Paris in 1955.⁴¹ The account in the *Bulletin* of the Society's centenary celebrations in Notre Dame cathedral, Paris in 1933, which was attended by Éamon de Valera and Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, read:

Many diplomatic ministers, representatives of Catholic states accredited to the French Republic, amongst them being Count O'Kelly of Gallagh, the representative of Saorstát Éireann, while in a special seat of honour knelt the President and Vice-President of our own government, who had come with us as humble members of our Society.⁴²

Of the thousands of members in Dublin conferences over the fifty-year period of this study, the private lives and outside interests of the vast majority have gone unrecorded in the Society's publications. Rarely were family connections referred to, even when a prominent member of the Society died. If the brothers shed private tears for Noel Fitzpatrick, vice-president of a Dublin conference who was killed in the North Strand bombings in 1941, his death only merited a few lines in the annual report of that year. The report noted with

³⁶ Reid, *William Field*, p. 14.

³⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 6 (1935), June Supp., pp 2–3.

³⁸ *Irish Times*, 2 and 3 May 1935

³⁹ Council of Ireland minutes, 1945–48, list of council members appended (SVPA).

⁴⁰ *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1971.

⁴¹ *Bulletin*, c, no. 10 (Oct. 1955), p. 239.

⁴² *Bulletin*, lxxviii, no. 9 (Sept. 1933), p. 274.

regret his passing and stated that the brothers from his conference had attended mass for him in the Pro-Cathedral.⁴³

The constant difficulty in getting members to attend the Sunday afternoon quarterly general meetings suggests that were many brothers who valued their family life and social activities at the weekend more than Society business. The numbers at these meetings were so disappointing that, in 1935, all the conferences were asked for suggestions as to how attendance might be improved. Some said that they were entitled to have Sundays to themselves and they should not be asked to attend a meeting at four in the afternoon. The president of the council of Ireland was unimpressed by the excuses.

There are only four Sundays in the year at which you are asked to come at four o'clock. Golfers in the winter cannot play golf at four o'clock, and in the summer time they have plenty of the long evenings for that. We must rather put aside our own little personal feelings in the matter and see what is best for the Society as a whole.⁴⁴

The case of civil servant, John McGuinness, a member of the Society from the 1920s to the 1940s, appears to have been unusual. McGuinness became so involved in his work with the poor in Gloucester Street, and with the homeless and destitute men in the Night Shelter and lodging houses, that he gave up golf – he had a handicap of nine – and sold his clubs because, he said, he had to cut out something.⁴⁵

If the Society usually experienced difficulty in persuading members to attend the quarterly meetings, there were no such problems at the quarterly meeting in Lent, 1941, when nearly 1,500 members filled the Mansion House to overflowing to get a glimpse of the new archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. His presence at the meeting marked his first public appearance since his consecration the previous December.⁴⁶ Like his predecessor, Edward Byrne, McQuaid was a frequent and generous supporter of the Society and appreciative of their work for the poor in the diocese, but he kept a firm control on procedures that he considered to be within his area of authority. He insisted that permission be sought on each occasion for radio appeals on behalf of the Society, a process that generated several exchanges of correspondence. When

⁴³ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 66.

⁴⁴ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 2 (1935), Feb. Supp., p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Bulletin*, cxv no. 5 (May, 1970), p. 103.

⁴⁶ *Annual Report*, Apr. 1941, p. 91.

Carmelite priest, Eltin Griffin, agreed to make an appeal for St Vincent's Orphanage in 1962, not only had the obligatory formal letter seeking permission for the broadcast to be sought, but the script had to be forwarded in advance to archbishop's house.⁴⁷

The relationship between conferences and parish clergy in Dublin was generally positive. If some parish priests did not appear to welcome the Society, conferences were asked to consider that the fault might lie with themselves in failing to demonstrate the value of their work. Talks on the Society given to the students of St Patrick's College, Maynooth in the 1920s were deemed to be most important because of 'the advantage which may ensue from making the future ecclesiastics of the country acquainted with our organisation and method'.⁴⁸ Clergy were often asked to preside at general meetings, especially if they shared the interests of the Society. Fr Thomas Farrell, curate in the Pro-Cathedral, was introduced at a meeting as a social worker, founder of a hostel for women in Meath Street, and a founding member of the boy scouts' movement.⁴⁹ Myra House committee concluded its annual report for 1952 by thanking the priests of the parish for their attendance as spiritual directors at the conference meetings and for their encouragement, interest and practical help.⁵⁰ Conferences relied on clergy to provide accommodation for meetings and for permission to hold church-gate collections.⁵¹ If the priest also held the position of conference spiritual director, he was seen as a link between the activities of the conference and of the parish.⁵² As the Society became more engaged from the 1960s with the visitation of elderly people, conference members were urged to consult the local clergy to identify those who might be in need.⁵³ Many church leaders had direct personal involvement in the Society. Cardinal John D'Alton, in his early career, was chaplain to St Vincent's Orphanage;⁵⁴ Cardinal William Conway's father

⁴⁷ P.J. Ward, St Vincent's Orphanage to archbishop's secretary, 16 May 1962 (DDA McQuaid Laity file, AB8/b/xxi).

⁴⁸ *Annual Report, 1926*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ *Bulletin*, lxxxii, no. 5 (1936), May Supp., p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Annual Report, 1952*, p. 44.

⁵¹ Information from a member of the Society (June 2008).

⁵² *Manual*, 1958 ed., p. 12.

⁵³ *Bulletin*, cvi, no. 10 (Oct. 1961), p. 231; *Bulletin*, cix, no. 7 (July 1964), p. 54.

⁵⁴ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1910*, p. 178.

was a lifelong member,⁵⁵ and Dermot Ryan, appointed archbishop of Dublin in 1972, was a student member of the Society at Belvedere college.⁵⁶

Several religious orders also had strong connections with the Society in Dublin. A Vincentian priest was traditionally asked to preside at the quarterly general meeting that occurred on or near the feast of Saint Vincent on 19 July.⁵⁷ The Jesuits had particularly close ties with the Society and were favoured for retreats. Members attended the annual retreat in Gardiner Street church for many years, and went on private weekend retreats to the Jesuit houses in Milltown and Rathfarnham. The Dominican retreat house in Tallaght was also popular. Jesuit fathers from Milltown provided spiritual services to the Night Shelter⁵⁸ and its members often presided at the quarterly general meetings. Capuchin priest, Fr Aloysius Travers, remembered in history for ministering to Patrick Pearse, James Connolly and Thomas McDonagh before their executions,⁵⁹ had a long association with the Society of St Vincent de Paul. For fifty-two years he was spiritual director of the Church Street conference. He prepared two editions of the *Catholic social workers' handbook* and gave 'many a rousing address' at quarterly meetings of the Society. When he built Assisi Hall on Church Street, it provided a play centre for children and accommodation for several St Vincent de Paul and Legion of Mary groups in the district.⁶⁰

Religious sisters also played a significant, if often hidden, role in the Society's activities. In 1927, the conference of St Columbanus in Seville Place organised a football match and other sports for a group of boys, and thanked the Irish Sisters of Charity for making a field available and for supplying tea to supplement the catering arrangements.⁶¹ When the Society managed the Catholic Boys' Home in Middle Abbey Street on behalf of the diocese, it was to

⁵⁵ *Bulletin*, cx, no. 4 (Apr. 1961), p. 65.

⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, 117, no. 8 (Aug. 1972), p. 164.

⁵⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no 9 (1938), Sept. Supp., p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Annual Report*, 1952, p. 34.

⁵⁹ Aloysius [Travers], 'Easter week, 1916: personal recollections', in *Capuchin Annual*, 1942, pp 211–20.

⁶⁰ *Bulletin*, cii, no. 7 (July 1957), p. 168; *Irish Times*, 3 May 1957.

⁶¹ *Annual Report*, 1927, p. 34.

the Mercy Sisters in Jervis Street hospital that they turned if the boys were in need of medical attention.⁶² In the 1930s, fifty boys from Nelson Street club had Christmas dinner cooked, carved and served as usual ‘by our kind friends, the Sisters of [the Holy] Faith and of St Vincent de Paul’.⁶³ During the war years, a sewing guild attached to Loreto convent, St Stephen’s Green, helped to clothe children for first communion in St Kevin’s conference.⁶⁴ As community centres and local social services became common from the 1960s, the Society’s collaboration with parish-based sisters increased.⁶⁵

Often described as the sister organisation to the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary had its beginnings in Myra House. Frank Duff, once president of St Patrick’s conference, believed there was need for an organisation with a greater spiritual emphasis and went on to found the Legion of Mary in 1921. The Legion shared the objectives of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in that its main purpose was the sanctification of its members through works of service.⁶⁶ Many of its organisational elements were based on the Society’s model, but it differed in that it did not give material relief, its membership was open to both women and men, and its spiritual emphasis was strongly Marian.

To give to the poor is a good work. Done with a supernatural motive, it is a sublime one. The systems of many great societies rest upon this principle; notably that of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, to whose example and spirit the Legion rejoices to proclaim itself deeply indebted – so much, in fact, as to make it possible to say that the roots of the Legion lie in that Society. But to the Legion is assigned a different field of duty. Its system is built upon the principle of bringing spiritual good ...⁶⁷

Both organisations were frequently in close contact with one another because of the nature of their activities. The Legion members visited homes, distributed Catholic literature, organised retreats, ran hostels for homeless people and girls’ clubs, and engaged in prison and hospital visitation work.⁶⁸ It also directed men who hadn’t been confirmed to the Society’s Christian

⁶² *Annual Report, 1954*, p. 45.

⁶³ *Annual Report, 1939*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 73.

⁶⁵ See *Community and social services directory, greater Dublin area*, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Legion of Mary Concilium, *The official handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Dublin, 1953), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Legion of Mary, *Official handbook*, p. 271.

⁶⁸ *Catholic Social Workers’ Handbook*, c.1942 ed., p. 19.

Doctrine guild.⁶⁹ When the brothers made house-to-house clothing collections in 1926, women from the Legion of Mary helped by repairing the clothes.⁷⁰ During his visit to Ireland for the Eucharistic Congress celebrations in 1932, Henri de Vergès, president-general of the Society, was taken to see the Legion's Morning Star and Regina Coeli hostels.⁷¹ In its report for 1942, St Ciaran's lodging house guild referred to a club for unemployed men that was being 'kept going with the help of the Legion of Mary'.⁷² The committee in Sunshine House relied heavily on the women members of the Legion of Mary to act as stewards during the holiday week for girls.⁷³ By the 1960s, conferences were reporting that sick and elderly people could be visited more than once a week due to shared arrangements with the Legion of Mary and other organisations.⁷⁴ Myra House was a meeting place for both the Society and the Legion, providing facilities for thirteen conferences and for four praesidia in 1951.⁷⁵ The house was sold to the Legion of Mary when the Society moved to its new headquarters in Nicholas Street in the 1960s.⁷⁶

If Myra House in Francis Street – called for St Nicholas of Myra – was the meeting place for many of the conferences in the south city, Moira House – called for the Earl of Moira – was the centre of activity for the Mendicity Institution at Usher's Quay. Originally founded in 1818 as a house of industry to address the problems associated with the thousands of beggars in the city, the Institution later concentrated on providing free meals, breakfasts and dinners daily.⁷⁷ When it served Christmas dinner to over 1,000 men and women in 1925, the Society of St Vincent de Paul co-operated by allocating tickets to the men they visited in the lodging houses.⁷⁸ Through another service, known as its 'transmission work', the Institution paid the fares of those from rural districts who were stranded in the capital, or who needed to travel in search of work to

⁶⁹ *Annual Report, 1927*, p. 101.

⁷⁰ *Annual Report 1926*, p. 126.

⁷¹ *Bulletin*, lxxviii, no. 7 (July 1933), p. 224.

⁷² *Bulletin*, lxxxvii, no. 9 (Sept. 1942), p. 201.

⁷³ *Bulletin*, cv, no. 9 (Sept. 1960), p. 210.

⁷⁴ *Bulletin*, cix, no. 6 (June 1964), p. 122.

⁷⁵ *Annual Report, 1951*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Information from a member of the Society (11 Feb. 2008).

⁷⁷ See Woods, *Mendicity Institution*.

⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, lxxi, no 4 (1926), Apr. Supp., p. 12.

other destinations.⁷⁹ This service was availed of by other charities, including the Society of St Vincent de Paul. In 1926, an application to the Mendicity Institution produced the fare that allowed a family to be united in London,⁸⁰ and the Society's annual report for 1929 noted that many of the men who came to Dublin in search of work and stayed at the Night Shelter were either assisted to return to their homes in the country by the Mendicity Institution or had their passage paid to England or Scotland.⁸¹ The Institution was open to people of all denominations, and its board of management included both Protestant and Catholic clergy. When restructured in 1930, a place on the board was reserved for a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.⁸² In 1952, the Mendicity Institution served over 43,000 free meals at Moira House.⁸³

An even older charity with which the Society of St Vincent de Paul had close ties was the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, founded in 1790. Members were from all religious backgrounds and gave relief to all, as a sermon delivered in 1796 stated:

The truly benevolent and truly Christian spirit which animated the founders of this Society, so it would not permit them to confine ... their benevolence by the narrow restraints of religious distinctions.⁸⁴

The principal aim of the Roomkeepers' Society was to help industrious people who found themselves in temporary distress.⁸⁵ It supplied cash, fuel, blankets and bedding in the winter months, and clothing and boots when required.⁸⁶ The president of the council of Ireland, Joseph Glynn – on this occasion speaking on behalf of the Roomkeepers' Society at their annual general meeting – gave an example of a case that he had personally encountered. An unemployed man with a family of six was living on a pound a week. He was described as being a 'semi-professional' but could not look for a job because he did not have decent clothes, and could not afford to register for work. The Roomkeepers' Society provided a suit and gave him the three guineas needed to register, and he was soon earning six guineas a week. 'That',

⁷⁹ Woods, *Mendicity Institution*, pp 151–69.

⁸⁰ *Annual Report 1926*, p. 117.

⁸¹ *Annual Report, 1929*, p. 7.

⁸² Woods, *Mendicity Institution*, p. 180.

⁸³ *Irish Times*, 12 June 1952.

⁸⁴ Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, p. 18.

⁸⁵ *Thom's Directory, 1927*, p. 342.

⁸⁶ Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, p. 122.

said Glynn, ‘was the type of work in which the Roomkeepers’ Society specialised.’⁸⁷ Like the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Roomkeepers’ Society resented the fact that, because the government’s assistance was so inadequate, it was cast in the role of a long-term provider of relief.⁸⁸ Both charities often helped the same case. A conference attached to University College, Dublin reported in 1943:

The conference was entrusted with a grant of money from the Roomkeepers’ Society towards the relief of one of the families visited. This family when first visited had no bed to sleep on other than a heap of straw. They now have two beds.⁸⁹

A second conference at the college was able to purchase a pram at a bargain price for the mother of twins, thanks to its assistance, and in turn, the brothers took part in the church-door collection in aid of the Roomkeepers’ Society.⁹⁰ Another conference reported that it interceded successfully in several cases where families were threatened with eviction and arrears of rent, and acknowledged the courtesy of the Dublin Corporation officials and the generous co-operation of the Roomkeepers’ Society.⁹¹ The two charities were often joint benefactors in donations or bequests, and, because they depended on the same section of the city’s public for their funds, it was to their mutual benefit to arrange collections and appeals to avoid a clash.⁹² When Joe McGrath’s horse, ‘Windsor Slipper’, won the Irish Derby in 1942, he instructed that his winnings of over £1,600 be divided equally between the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers’ Society and the Society of St Vincent de Paul.⁹³ Because of their close associations, the two organisations were able to confer when there were suspicions that the same applicants were seeking aid from both – an important consideration for charities when their own funds were depleted and there were many appeals for their help.⁹⁴

While the British Red Cross continued to provide assistance in Ireland to former servicemen, the Irish Red Cross Society was set up under the Red Cross

⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, 2 May 1929.

⁸⁸ Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, p. 81.

⁸⁹ *Annual Report, 1943*, p. 64.

⁹⁰ *Annual Report, 1944*, p. 107.

⁹¹ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 66.

⁹² Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, pp 118–20.

⁹³ Lindsay, *Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society*, p. 113.

⁹⁴ *Annual Report, 1947*, p. 59.

Act, 1938. The Society of St Vincent de Paul was to work closely with the new organisation in bringing foodstuffs to Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. When the council of Ireland asked for a licence in 1946 to export £2,000 worth of malt and cod liver oil preparations to the Society in France, the Department of Industry and Commerce referred it to the Irish Red Cross Society, which would arrange dispatch to France.⁹⁵ Although the Department would not allow Irish conferences to send relief parcels directly to conferences in Germany or Austria,⁹⁶ the council of Ireland established direct links with the German president of the Society of St Vincent de Paul to ascertain the level of need for assistance, and on 1 January 1948 received a telegram from him, gratefully accepting the offer of cocoa, condensed milk and stewed steak, for transmission through the Irish Red Cross.⁹⁷ In March 1948, the Department of Agriculture granted the Society a licence to allow it to despatch tinned milk to Germany; the Society also arranged for an assignment of cocoa to go to Austria via the Irish Red Cross.⁹⁸ Table 8.2 shows the amount of foodstuffs sent by the Society in Ireland, and conveyed through the Irish Red Cross, to European cities.

Table 8.2 Irish Society of St Vincent de Paul, aid to Europe, 1946–8

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of aid</i>	<i>Cost (£)</i>
France	1946/7	25,000 one-pound jars of malt and cod liver oil	1,500
Austria	1948	1,200 dozen quarter-pound packets of cocoa; 640 dozen one-pound tins of stewed steak; 200 dozen fourteen-ounce tins of sweetened condensed milk (following donation to Council of Ireland of £1,000 by Central Council of Down and Connor)	1,052
Germany	1948	1,600 dozen quarter-pound packets of cocoa; 800 dozen one-pound tins of stewed steak; 800 dozen fourteen-ounce tins of sweetened condensed milk (sent in three lots: half to Cologne, quarter to Münster, quarter to Hamburg)	1,512
		Total:	4,064

Source: *Bulletin*, vol. xciii, no. 6 (1948), Ir. Supp., p. ix.

⁹⁵ Council of Ireland minutes, 2 May 1946 (SVPA).

⁹⁶ Council of Ireland minutes, 23 Jan. 1947 (SVPA).

⁹⁷ Council of Ireland minutes, 1 Jan. 1948 (SVPA).

⁹⁸ Council of Ireland minutes, 18 Mar. 1948 (SVPA).

In 1948, large quantities of mail arrived from councils and conferences in Europe expressing gratitude for the relief sent by the Society in Ireland.⁹⁹

Another major activity in the 1940s that brought the two societies together was the Irish Red Cross's anti-tuberculosis campaign.¹⁰⁰ Professor T.W.T. Dillon of University College, Dublin was a member of both organisations and an expert on tuberculosis.¹⁰¹ During their visitation work, members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul cooperated in the campaign by informing affected families of their entitlements.¹⁰² Later points of contact arose during the Red Cross-sponsored world refugee year in 1960 and the year for elderly people in the mid-1960s.¹⁰³

Another major war-time initiative in Dublin was the establishment of the Catholic Social Service Conference by Archbishop McQuaid. In January 1941, he invited forty organisations in the diocese to a meeting in the Mansion House to examine how the various charities might work together to respond to the crisis. E.J. Duffy, the Society's president of the council of Dublin, was elected a member of the organising committee, and the Central Catholic Library premises in Merrion Square became its meeting place. It began by checking out available centres for the storage of food supplies, most of which were in convents. Dublin Corporation supplied additional space. Nuns took responsibility for providing foods for large numbers, and within a year, over seven million meals, either sit-down or take-away, had been served at twenty-seven food centres. Clothing guilds were established throughout the diocese, and garments were made, altered, repaired and distributed from a central store. The Society of St Vincent de Paul got a licence to provide 1,000 tons of turf for heating primary schools and orphanages in the city.¹⁰⁴ The Society was pleased to be associated with the joint effort and benefited from the sharing of responsibilities. The annual report for 1942 stated:

During the year we maintained close co-operation with the activities of the Catholic Social Service Conference and a number of our members

⁹⁹ *Annual Report, 1948*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ See *Irish Red Cross Society Bulletin*, 6, no. 3 (Mar. 1946), pp 76–7.

¹⁰¹ See *Irish Red Cross Society Bulletin*, 6, no. 4 (Apr. 1946), pp 120–1.

¹⁰² *Annual Report, 1945*, p. 56.

¹⁰³ *Annual Report, 1960*, p. 108; *Bulletin*, cx, no. 6 (June 1965), p. 188.

¹⁰⁴ Purcell, *Fifty years of the Catholic Social Service Conference*, pp 2–6.

attended their meetings and acted on the sub-committees. Conferences are under a deep obligation to the Catholic Social Service Conference by reason of the number of ladies' sewing guilds established over the city, which make or alter garments intended for the poor ... In 1942, turf was provided by the CSSC for distribution by the conferences, which helped to lighten the burden on our poor families.¹⁰⁵

Although the council of Ireland operated independently of the national councils in England and in Scotland, councils and conferences in Britain contributed articles and news items to the *Bulletin*, and its deceased members were included in the obituary list. During the Second World War, several members of the Society in Britain were listed as missing or as having been killed in action.¹⁰⁶ Emigration was the main concern that brought councils on the two islands into contact. In 1938, a conference in Scotland wrote to the council of Ireland pointing out the disappointments that were in store for Irish workers if they did not make proper enquiries before emigrating:

Our conference has had a great deal of anxiety during the last six months on account of the number of men who have come from Ireland in the hope of getting work and instead find themselves destitute without friends or money. All these men have told us that they were led to believe that there was plenty of work to be had in this country ... Some people have been fortunate in getting employment soon after landing here but most have had a very trying experience.¹⁰⁷

Archbishop McQuaid established the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau in 1942 to care for the welfare of intending emigrants, both before and after their departure to British industrial cities.¹⁰⁸ The Society of St Vincent de Paul regularly received notices from the emigrant section of the Bureau in Westland Row, asking it to inform its members that those intending to emigrate could receive information through its offices on job opportunities, travel arrangements and other practical matters.¹⁰⁹ The uncertainty of obtaining work in Britain led to conferences in Ireland having to provide for families while men looked for jobs. One Dublin conference reported that many families were assisted in the period between the departure of the father for work in England and the arrival of money to support his family; in other cases, men returned from England and

¹⁰⁵ *Annual Report, 1942*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ See *Bulletin*, lxxxvi, no. 1 (Jan. 1941), p. 24 and lxxxvii, no. 11 (Nov. 1942), p. 264.

¹⁰⁷ *Bulletin*, lxxxiii, no. 2 (1938), Feb. Supp., pp 15–16.

¹⁰⁸ Deirdre McMahon, 'John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, 1940–72', in James Kelly and Dáire Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), p. 359.

¹⁰⁹ See *Bulletin*, xciii, no. 3 (Mar. 1948), p. 55.

the families needed financial help until they received unemployment assistance.¹¹⁰ In 1944, the Advice Bureau in Middle Abbey Street reported success in tracing a number of fathers who had gone to England for work and had lost touch with their families at home.¹¹¹ Following discussion with brothers in England in 1948, the president of the council of Ireland was disturbed to hear of the level of falling-away from religious practice that was prevalent among the emigrants and promised to keep in touch with the councils of England and Scotland ‘to ensure that the young man or woman receives adequate protection on their arrival and gets encouragement to keep the faith alive’.¹¹²

In the years after the war, Irish men were rebuilding bomb-blitzed cities and Irish women were staffing hospitals and hotels.¹¹³ In popular religious articles and publications of the time, the emphasis for those leaving Ireland tended to be on dangers to their faith in a foreign land.¹¹⁴ In 1947, the particular council of Bedfordshire was able to assure the council of Ireland that there would be facilities for attending mass for Irish workers in rural areas. A copy of the letter was forwarded to the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau.¹¹⁵ The Society’s guild of St Philip for discharged prisoners highlighted another aspect of cooperation with agencies in Britain:

... the Central After-Care Association in London communicates with the Guild headquarters in Dublin ... requesting the Guild to undertake the after-care that both organisations have been established to promote, and offering substantial contributions towards any costs that may be involved. ... The interest of the London Association does not terminate with the transfer to our care: progress reports are asked for with unfailing regularity.¹¹⁶

At least two-thirds of those emigrating in the 1950s went to Britain, mostly from rural areas, but Dublin was also affected.¹¹⁷ The 1957 annual report recorded with regret the number of the Society’s families that were emigrating,

¹¹⁰ *Annual Report, 1941*, p. 66.

¹¹¹ *Annual Report, 1944*, p. 200.

¹¹² *Bulletin*, xciii, no. 12 (1948), Ir. Supp., p. vii.

¹¹³ Purcell, *Fifty years of the Catholic Social Service Conference*, p. 22.

¹¹⁴ See *Handbook for the Catholic Emigrant to England* (Dublin, c. 1953).

¹¹⁵ Council of Ireland minutes, 6 Mar. 1947.

¹¹⁶ *Annual Report, 1950*, p. 62.

¹¹⁷ O’Hanlon, ‘Population change in the 1950s: a statistical review’, pp 75–6.

‘and even our own members’.¹¹⁸ The coadjutor bishop of Cork, Cornelius Lucey, had particular concerns about Irish people leaving the country:

To those of you who may emigrate to England, beware of the Connolly clubs you will find there, and of the monthly magazine, *The Irish Democrat* ...¹¹⁹

The Connolly clubs and the magazine were Irish and democratic only in name, he warned. Their real allegiance was to Moscow and their real aim was communist dictatorship in England and in this country.¹²⁰

In addition to the Society’s support for European countries after the war, Irish brothers contributed through special secret bag collections to the needs of the Society in other lands, and to humanitarian appeals in general. During the Hungarian revolution, the council of Ireland forwarded £100 to the Irish Red Cross in 1956 to allow food and clothing to be collected in Austria and conveyed to Hungary,¹²¹ and a further donation of nearly £1,000, was raised through the secret collection.¹²² There were also collections for humanitarian disasters, such as the floods in Bangladesh.¹²³

By the end of the 1960s, nearly 250 Irish conferences were associated through the twinning scheme with fifteen African and Asian countries, offering spiritual and material aid.¹²⁴ Referring to the twinning scheme, the speaker at the presidents’ annual meeting in 1971 said:

... it has not been entirely a one-way traffic because even though money flows from conferences in the developed countries to African, Asian and South American conferences, the wonderful spiritual bonds that are forged do much to benefit the conferences in the developed countries. ... a member of the Council of Ireland has made several visits to Nigeria, including one in the teeth of a post-civil war ban by the Nigerian authorities. Many of our young members are taking on jobs in developing countries and using all their spare time to help the local Society expand its work for needy communities.¹²⁵

The Society’s relationship over the years with the various government departments that were relevant to its work was considered to be cordial and productive. A report in the *Bulletin* in 1935 stated:

¹¹⁸ *Annual Report, 1957*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ *Annual Report, 1957*, p. 10.

¹²⁰ *Irish Catholic Directory, 1952*, p. 674.

¹²¹ *Bulletin*, cii, no. 7 (July 1957), p. 156.

¹²² *Annual Report, 1957*, p. 5.

¹²³ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 11 (Nov. 1974), p. 12.

¹²⁴ *Bulletin*, cxiv, no. 12 (Dec. 1969), p. 311.

¹²⁵ *Bulletin*, 116, no. 11 (Nov. 1971), p. 236.

The kindness and patience of the numerous officials engaged in the administration of the different Acts dealing with social legislation have been of incalculable assistance to us. Indeed, were it not for their ever ready willingness to help us our efforts could not have succeeded as they have done, and we gladly acknowledge and thank them for their courtesy and the promptitude with which they have always dealt with our enquiries.¹²⁶

It was frequently asked to respond to select committees of the Dáil on health, social welfare and other matters, and pre-budget submissions became standard from the late 1960s. A contributory factor to the good relationship with the public service was readily acknowledged to be due to the fact that many of its members were civil servants and in public administration themselves.¹²⁷

The 1960s saw the growing trend towards charities and voluntary groups collaborating at local level for the common good. The Second Vatican Council, and its own revised Rule, had encouraged the Society to extend such collaboration to those of all faiths and none. At official level, the Society was pleased and willing to be associated with such developments. In 1966, Bill Cashman, the president of the council of Ireland allowed himself to look into the future:

I see the Society advancing along particular paths, not alone but in company with others, retaining its own rule, spirit, traditions and autonomy but not too concerned about its own independence; equally ready to take the lead if that appears to be the proper course, or to act under leadership or coordination where that seems to be the right thing to do. I see the Society working in the closest association and contact with other organisations operating in the field of charity, whether Catholic, Protestant or non-denominational, doing our best to get rid of suspicion and mistrust, both our own and others.¹²⁸

The new spirit of the times brought once diverse groups in greater touch with one another. Frank Duff's publication, *True devotion to the nation*, emphasised the role that members of the Legion of Mary could play in their local community as part of their apostolate.¹²⁹ In the introduction to the *Community and social services directory*, published in 1970 by a group of clergy, social workers and others active in community affairs, the generous financial aid of the Society of St Vincent de Paul towards the cost of production

¹²⁶ *Bulletin*, lxxx, no. 5 (May 1935), p. 146.

¹²⁷ *Bulletin*, 115, no. 5 (May 1970), p. 117.

¹²⁸ *Bulletin*, cxi, no. 9 (Sept. 1966), p. 219.

¹²⁹ *Bulletin*, cx, nos 8–9 (Aug.–Sept. 1965), pp 231–2; see also Frank Duff, *True devotion to the nation* (Dundalk, 1971 ed.).

was acknowledged.¹³⁰ A charity walk, held in fifty locations throughout Ireland, and organised jointly by the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland and the Scout Association of Ireland, raised £50,000 for the benefit of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and several other charities.¹³¹

Frank Casey, vice-president of the Council of Ireland in the 1970s, spoke of the Society's engagement with the Simon community and was generous in his praise of the particular expertise of the new group:

Even though ... we have a finger in most pies, we recognise that there are certain areas where the job can better be tackled by those who have a specialist flair. ... the Simon Community, who are working for alcoholics, drug addicts and drop-outs ... have acquired new premises to accommodate these luckless members of our community. The Society has provided the wherewithal for the acquisition of these premises and is therefore providing a significant part in helping the Community to do its wonderful job.¹³²

Yet, side by side with this new collaboration, there were signs of hostility towards church-related organisations like the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The tensions in church-state relations and the growing alienation from the Catholic church of some sectors of Irish life from the 1960s has been well documented.¹³³ Marriage breakdown and its effects were beginning to be more openly discussed and opposition more vocal to the church's stance on various related issues. Years of resentment by women at the government's tardiness in dealing with equal pay, the right to work after marriage, income and property rights within marriage, was to lead to the setting up of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1970.¹³⁴ Among its recommendations, the Commission made a case for better services for widows, wives of prisoners, deserted wives, and unmarried mothers,¹³⁵ all issues of relevance to the work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Against this background, the organisation, AIM, was established in 1972 to press for legislation that would give a wife entitlement to a husband's income

¹³⁰ *Community and social services directory*, n.p.

¹³¹ *Irish Times*, 12 Oct. 1970.

¹³² *Bulletin*, 116, no. 11 (Nov. 1971), p. 236.

¹³³ See Desmond Fennell (ed.), *The changing face of Catholic Ireland* (London, 1968); Peter Connolly, 'The church in Ireland since Vatican II', in *The Furrow*, 30, no. 12 (Dec. 1979), pp 755–66; Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*.

¹³⁴ Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland, 1900–2000* (London, 2004), pp 569–76.

¹³⁵ *Commission on the Status of Women: Report to the Minister for Finance* (Dublin, 1972), pp 136–60.

where he failed to support his family. Brian Fennell – a member of AIM and a former member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul – outlined in the *Bulletin* the reasons why many of his clients, although in financial difficulty, were reluctant to approach the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The women stated that they didn't want charity from anyone; that they felt that the Society members were too middle class, too respectable and remote, and some were considered to have a 'Holy Mary' image; they were reluctant to approach a man about their problems because they felt he would not understand, however well intentioned; some maintained that Society members gave help in too public a manner, and others believed that the assistance was subject to religious criteria.¹³⁶ Fennell acknowledged that lots of women did find the Society most helpful in financial difficulties, and that many of its members had deep compassion for people in need, but added:

Why then do I appear to be so hard on the Society? Mainly, I feel, because it is necessary to examine why many women don't turn to the Society for help, and I have tried to show from the records of our group and from my own experiences why I think this is the case.¹³⁷

In a subsequent issue of the *Bulletin*, Liam Clarke, the Society's national training officer, did not dispute Fennell's claims but referred to the need for a greater awareness and additional skills on the part of members in order to respond more appropriately to new situations.

How could we, with our vast experience, have not reacted more positively to the needs of the people that AIM are now helping? Is the Society asleep, are we too complacent? Is there a need for a renewal within the Society today?¹³⁸

Such self-questioning at official level was not new in the Society, and from the 1960s and 1970s it did not shy away from efforts at renewal. It had embraced the concept of social justice willingly and was prepared to cooperate with other groups, religious and secular. Many of its submissions to government were concerned with justice and welfare issues that were of particular relevance to women. But, given the mood of change in the country at the time, and the growing negative attitude towards the Catholic church in general, the image of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, may, by association,

¹³⁶ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 4 (Apr. 1973), pp 85–9.

¹³⁷ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 4 (Apr. 1973), p. 88.

¹³⁸ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 4 (Apr. 1973), p. 88.

have suffered also. In a survey on religious practice undertaken in 1973–4 for the Irish bishops, Nic Ghiolla Phádraig found that 22 per cent of women aged between eighteen and thirty were no longer attending weekly mass, and nearly 50 per cent of young people had difficulty with the Catholic church's teaching on doctrinal, moral or disciplinary matters.¹³⁹

Fuller refers to the decline in the wearing of the Pioneer pin, 'a symbol of Catholic culture at one time' in the 1970s compared to the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴⁰ While an increase in alcohol consumption was the most obvious cause, the growing unwillingness among young people to display their religious allegiance on their lapels may have been another. An article in the *Bulletin* on the difficulties associated with retaining young members in the Society, written by a journalist, supports this:

Many young people don't want to be involved in an overtly religious activity, although they may have very active social consciences. As a journalist, reporting the activities of the Simon Community, I have always been struck by the number of former Vincent de Paul members among Simon's ranks.¹⁴¹

When one member was asked to explain why she transferred to Simon, she replied: 'I wanted to help people, fine, but I was beginning to question my old, traditional Catholicism in a way which made me unwilling to help them in the name of some saint. I just wanted to help them for their own sakes, as fellow human beings.'¹⁴²

Ferriter remarks that many young people in Ireland in the 1960s 'embraced secularisation and liberalisation with gusto'.¹⁴³ The modern organisations and pressure groups for change tended to opt for one-word titles like 'Ally', 'Cherish' and 'FLAC' and did not feel the need to include the name of 'some saint'. While the Society itself was increasingly open to co-operation with other groups at this time, not all groups may have wished to be associated with them. The president of a Dublin conference, who had attended a meeting of a local community group in 1969, withdrew when members of a tenants' association objected to 'outside interference from the St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of

¹³⁹ Máire Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 'Religious practice and belief in Ireland', in *Ten years of research and development, 1971–1980* (Maynooth, 1981), pp 34, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, p. 56.

¹⁴¹ *Bulletin*, 118, no. 3 (Mar. 1973), p. 59.

¹⁴² *Bulletin*, 118, no. 3 (Mar. 1973), p. 59.

¹⁴³ Ferriter, *Transformation of Ireland*, p. 540.

Mary'.¹⁴⁴ Even within the Society, there were those who may have had difficulties with their religious identity. Barra Ó Cinnéide, a Society member who carried out a survey among voluntary organisations as part of his research at University College Dublin, sent questionnaires to 120 branches of the Society of St Vincent de Paul throughout the country in 1974 and had a 70 per cent response rate. When asked to categorise the Society according to its activities, the vast majority of conferences opted for the 'charitable' classification rather than the 'religious/denominational' label.¹⁴⁵

If some perceived the image of the Society to be less attractive than the modern, secular voluntary bodies, there is no evidence that the financial support from the public had diminished in these years, or that the value of the Society's work was being questioned. Another survey, commissioned by the Society in 1975, produced the following results (Table 8.3) when a sample of 1,000 members of the public were asked to give their views on the Society and its work.

Table 8.3 Public's image of the Society, 1975: survey findings

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Percentage agreeing</i>
It does a great deal of good work in Ireland	76
If people gave them more money, they could do even better work to help the poor	67
They do a lot of work that isn't publicised	51
They should influence the government more	42
You have to lose your pride to go to them	31
They do a lot of good helping people around the country	30
Not many young people work for them	24
People don't have to be poor to need their help	19
They spend a lot of money helping the undeserving	18
People who work for them are mainly do-gooders	16
Only well-off people work for them	9

Source: *Bulletin*, vol. 121, no. 1 (Jan. 1976), p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Inchicore minutes, 9 Sept. 1969 (SVPA).

¹⁴⁵ *Bulletin*, 119, no. 12 (Dec. 1974), p. 12.

While official comment from the Society on the findings was generally positive, it did, however, interpret the fact that 16 per cent saw the members as ‘do-gooders’ as having derogatory connotations, and it was particularly concerned that 31 per cent of respondents felt that ‘you have to lose your pride to go to them’, commenting:

... and this of a Christian society devoted to charity ... [it] just cannot be shrugged off as ignorance on the part of the public. Is there an area here that requires examination?¹⁴⁶

An unexpected challenge to the Society’s generally positive image came in December 1975 in an editorial in the *Irish Times*. It was accused of setting limits to the parameters of social justice. Describing it as an organisation that had power and prestige that was unique amongst Irish charitable bodies, it asked if the Society’s concern with justice issues should not extend to tackling controversial issues:

... the Society ... could be accused of not stating its position publicly on many controversial issues. Conferences making ‘public issues of injustice at local level, particularly in the case of itinerants’ as the annual report says, do not indicate if the Society, as a national body, has a stance on such issues as the benefits of family planning, large concentrations of wealth, housing speculation and the wealth tax.¹⁴⁷

The Society traditionally did not comment on specific contentious issues. Where these issues involved the matters of personal morality that were engaging the country in heated debate at the time, there were added sensitivities for a Catholic organisation that relied on financial support from all sectors of the community. In the January 1976 issue of the *Bulletin*, the editor reproduced the text of the *Irish Times* editorial and asked for comments on whether the accusations were justified.¹⁴⁸ Bob Cashman, by then retired as president of the council of Ireland, responded. He said that the Society’s policy on social justice demanded that it play its part, publicly if necessary, on behalf of the less privileged members of the community. The main points from his response in the *Bulletin* were subsequently paraphrased in the *Irish Times*:

He would have thought, he writes, that this and other aspects of policy put the Society ‘on the side of the angels’ and that, by implication, it is

¹⁴⁶ *Bulletin*, 121, no 1 (Jan. 1976), p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 10 Dec. 1975.

¹⁴⁸ *Bulletin*, 121, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1976), n.p.

opposed to large concentrations of wealth and housing speculation, and in favour of the Wealth Tax. Referring to the editorial's mention of the 'benefits' of family planning, Mr Cashman writes that there seems to be an implication that the Society is opposed to family planning. 'I am not aware that it is.' What was at issue was the methods of family planning, he says, and it would be naïve to expect the Society to have a policy at variance with the Church, the legislature 'and the general body of opinion'. The conflicting views on the matter were, no doubt, reflected within the membership of the Society, he writes.¹⁴⁹

As has been shown, the Society of St Vincent de Paul was one charity among many in Dublin. Apart from its Rule and organisation structure, what distinguished it in particular from other associations in Dublin was the size and scale of its operations. Its members were capable of leading varied and colourful lives, and, it is possible to surmise, their membership of the Society may have contributed to this diversity, providing opportunities for contacts with other members who were active and influential in social and business life. In crisis situations, the Society showed its willingness to work with organisations as diverse as the British Red Cross and the Legion of Mary. The aftermath of the troubles in Ireland in the 1920s, the Second World War, and various international humanitarian disasters, strengthened these connections with other agencies, religious and secular, at home and abroad.

The 1960s marked the growth in ecumenism and greater co-operation with community groups, secular and denominational. It also marked a period of increased disenchantment among some sections of the population with organisations that were seen to be church-related, or not in tune with the complexities of modern life. In the latter period of this study, it was seen to be less able to attract or retain young people due, in part, to the greater choices for voluntary work in specialised, secular organisations. Despite the fact that the Society's concerns with devotional practice were associated with an earlier time, it may still have been perceived to be part of a religious establishment with which some no longer wished to be associated. An accusation in the press that it was selective in proclaiming its message on social justice issues in the mid-1970s suggests that this generally well-regarded institution was no longer immune from critical public comment.

¹⁴⁹ *Irish Times*, 22 Apr. 1976.

If the gospel message of charity was the motivating force behind the foundation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in nineteenth-century France, civic-minded young people in late twentieth century Ireland were more likely to see displays of religious affiliation as a deterrent rather than an attraction to membership of voluntary organisations. Some of its problems, like training, and a more professional approach to needs, were capable of being addressed from within. Others, like how to present the relevance of its Christian-inspired message to an increasingly secular society, would be more elusive. However, opinion surveys, and the more open self-analysis of its own shortcomings, only reveal part of the reality of how the Society was perceived. It continued to pass the simple test of whether the public in general believed that it did valuable work and were prepared to support it.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

The members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul had the broad objective of helping sick, poor, troubled and lonely people. This study showed how they attempted to accomplish these objectives in the middle fifty years of the twentieth century. They did so in conditions that witnessed extreme poverty in the 1920s; continuing destitution during the economic depression of the 1930s; the shortages during the Second World War; the emigration problems of the 1950s; the hopes in the 1960s for greater economic progress and for spiritual renewal following the Second Vatican Council; the sense of disappointment in the 1970s, when the reality did not match the vision.

By the 1970s, the leaders of the Society in Ireland were charged with administering and motivating an organisation that had over 10,000 members, with nearly a third of these in Dublin. As a voluntary agency, it could only refer to the spirit of its Rule and rely on moral persuasion to motivate its members and deliver its services. The Rule was flexible and set no limits to the type of works of charity, or on the level of engagement expected, great or small. With constant recruitment difficulties, it was never possible to predict how many volunteers would be available, yet it continued to expand its services throughout the fifty years.

From the foundation of the Society in nineteenth-century France, the visitation of families in their homes was the primary work, and remained so. The establishment of a supportive relationship with the families was considered much more important than any material assistance. Refinement in attitude to visitation work developed over time, as the well-intentioned, but often paternalistic, language in discussions on the poor of early years gave way to calls for greater consultation with the families in finding solutions to their problems. The fact that this relationship was based on friendship, not on officialdom, may explain the members' negative reaction to training that aimed at providing a more professional visitation service.

The Society's special works reveal a picture of great diversity and of exceptional commitment by a small numbers of members. They were prepared to undertake projects that involved heavy capital outlay, balancing prudence and good stewardship with the Rule's insistence that there be no hoarding of financial assets. It might be argued that many of the Society's works, such as those concerned with young offenders, youth work, and with the provision of advice centres, filled a gap in the social services that should have been provided by the state. The Society was more concerned with responding to need than attributing blame for shortcomings in the system. It did not play a central role in the ideological debates on state intervention in social welfare matters in the 1930s to the 1950s, nor did it commit itself publicly to specific comment on contentious issues. It did, however, become increasingly involved in influencing social policy, through pre-budget submissions and engagement with state agencies and church bodies concerned with the analysis of the causes of poverty. The image of the Society's leaders as middle-class, educated men, with influence in public and professional life, was well justified. This influence gave them a unique access to government departments and public agencies that allowed them to speak on behalf of their clients and to have an impact on social policy legislation. Given the generally non-confrontational nature of their ideology and the high regard for their work, they enjoyed a good relationship with the bishops of the diocese, and with the church and public.

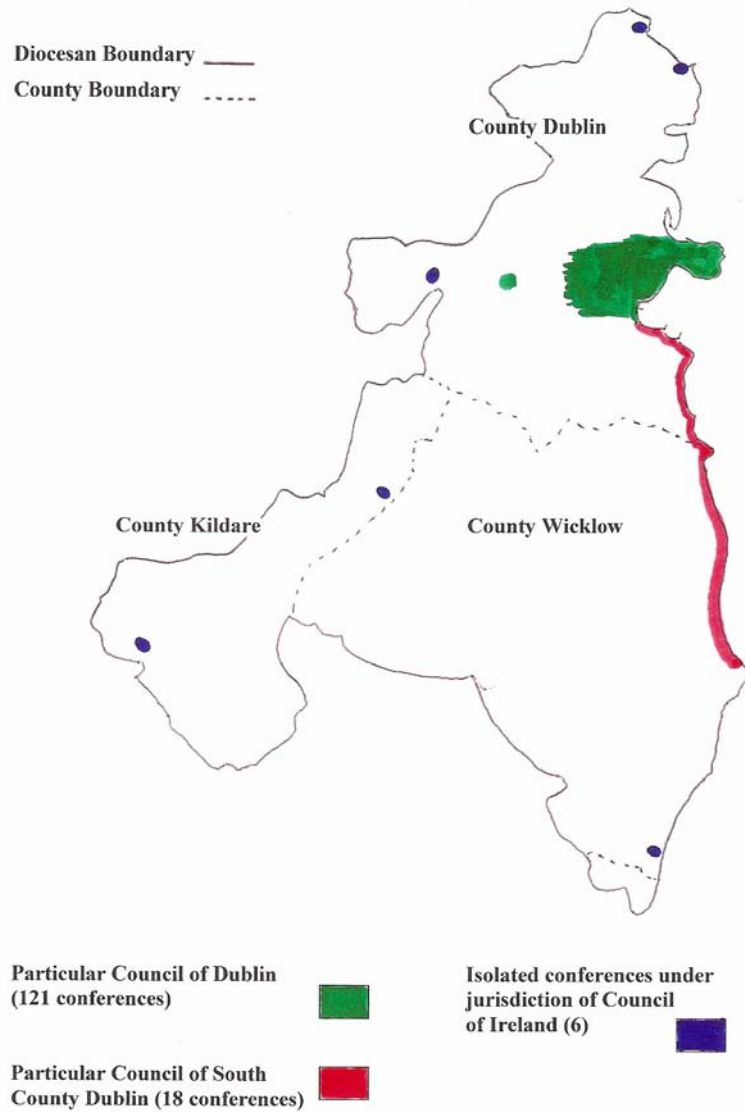
Despite the perception of the Society as a rather secret organisation that carried out its activities in isolation, this study demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with other agencies in crisis situations, even before the general trend towards community cooperation that later emerged. The 1960s marked the growth in ecumenism and increased co-operation between diverse groups, secular and denominational, to meet local needs.

The Society's understanding of its spiritual role changed in unprecedented ways in the years following the Second Vatican Council. It moved from a very visual engagement with devotional practices, in tune with the general Catholic life in Ireland of the time, to a much more muted and less defined understanding of religious obligation. Young volunteers began to chose secular, rather than religious agencies, for their humanitarian impulses. With the uncertain nature of its religious standing, the greater emphasis on charity as inseparable from the

demands of social justice provided a sharp focus for the Society's identity as a Christian organisation in these changing times. How representative within the membership of the Society were the strong voices of the leaders on the social justice issues is difficult to discern. If the leaders were often critical that the members did not commit themselves more actively to the justice causes, it may be that they did not see their immediate relevance, as most continued to engage at more modest levels in visitation work. Traditionally, members were instructed to serve with humility and in obscurity. The impact of this hidden work is difficult to measure. The recipients of aid were largely silent. Yet, the case study here gave some indication of the range of services provided in the local context, assistance that was delivered with speed and flexibility and with a unique knowledge of the personal and local circumstances of the families.

That the Society of St Vincent de Paul had outlived its usefulness with better standards of living and improved social welfare provision in the latter years of this study has been contended. Yet, the public continued to support it financially and surveys showed that they believed it did valuable work on behalf of people in need. If the members' sense of mission as a Catholic organisation had become obscured following the Second Vatican Council, there was the assurance that all good works on behalf of others were considered sanctified and that there was no longer a divide between the spiritual and the secular worlds.

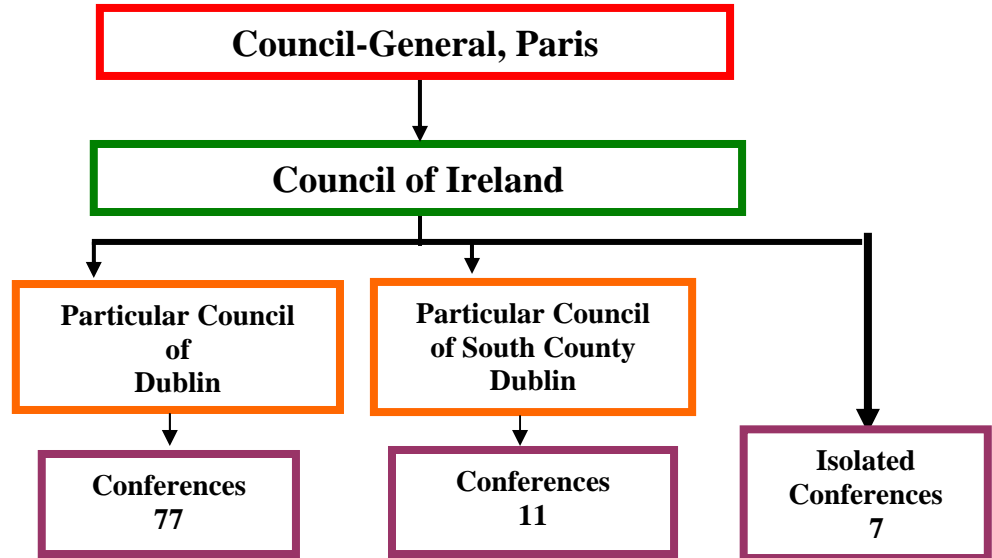
APPENDIX ONE
 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF DUBLIN CONFERENCES, 1950
 (Approximate, based on details from *Annual Report*, various)



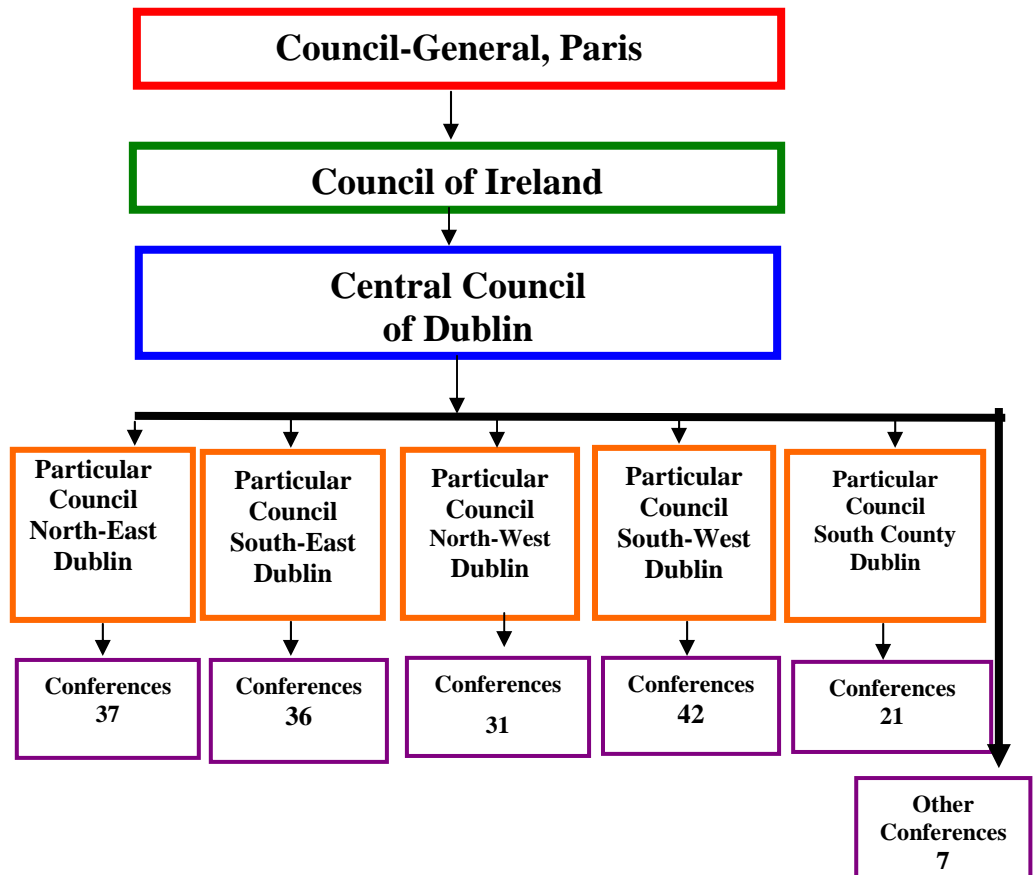
APPENDIX TWO

C. SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL ORGANISATIONAL CHARTS

1928 (Source: *Annual Report, 1928*)



1960 (Source: *Annual Report, 1960*)



APPENDIX THREE

PENNY BANKS IN DUBLIN CITY AND SUBURBS, 1927

Conference	Location	No. depositors at Dec. 1927	Value of deposits made, 1927 £
Blackrock	Schoolroom	940	455
Dalkey	National school	1,283	546
Dún Laoghaire	Hall, Eblana Avenue	611	983
Clontarf	Presbytery	121	204
Blessed Oliver	21 Nelson Street	500	561
St Catherine	33 High Street	600	1,231
St Columba	Model school, Glasnevin	105	280
St Francis of Assisi	68 N. King Street	509	665
St Gabriel	Boys' school, Harold's X	802	1,056
Inchicore	House of Retreat	436	383
Good Counsel	Ozanam House, Mountjoy Sq	970	914
Perpetual Succour	Lourdes Hse, Buckingham St	389	416
OL of the Wayside	Lourdes Hse, Buckingham St	821	538
St Patrick	Myra House, Francis St	498	764
UCD, Sacred Heart	33 High Street	608	625
Donnybrook	Boys' school	496	623
Glasthule	National school	614	931
Sandymount	National school	786	1,617
	TOTAL:	10,200	11,816

Source: *Annual Report, 1927*, p. 119, extract.

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