



**Geoff Meagher, SVP**

## **Outgoing National President hails spirituality boost for SVP**

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) is to launch a revitalisation of its spirituality in every Conference.

Geoff Meagher, SVP, highlighted the initiative as he bid farewell in his last article for *The Bulletin*.

His five year term as National President finishes at the end of May.

“We are unique in terms of our background and heritage; the feedback from our members is that we need to revitalise our ethos. In essence the message is that the HOW we serve those in need is as important as the WHAT we do,” he stated in his farewell message.

A new approach will link SVP’s prayer to a reflection and questions that members can discuss at Conference meetings. The SVP National Council strongly endorsed this approach.

“It should set the Society apart in terms of how we work with those in need; in addition it should minimise discord within the Society at all levels. This potentially has the most far reaching positive impact on the Society of all the changes made over the past few years.”

Caroline Fahey, Social Policy Development Officer, SVP, has also written about the ethos of SVP, stating that working for social justice is as pressing now as it was almost 200 years ago for Frederic Ozanam (SVP founding father) in Paris.

She quoted the founder: “You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty

crisis. You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long-term improvement.”

SVP can look to Catholic social teaching to help understand and respond to the social injustices which SVP members are seeing on the ground.

“Catholic social teaching tells us that a basic moral test for society is how our most vulnerable members are faring. We are asked to recognise the dignity inherent in every person, to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first and to work together in solidarity for the common good,” she wrote.

Challenging poverty and inequality can bring SVP into contested spaces and into conflict with ideologies that “benefit those at the top”, she wrote, and urged SVP members to return to the words of Frederic Ozanam:

“Look after people who have too many needs and not enough rights – people who demand with reason a greater say in public affairs, freedom from poverty, access to education and security in employment.”

Geoff Meagher also highlighted the SVP’s proactive approach to social justice. The charity comments on issues that impact those it serves,

meets with relevant Government ministers and officials and does research on relevant topics.

“Despite all of this excellent work, the inequalities in our country and globally continue to widen. We have tried over the past few years to encourage wider debates on the type of society we want and have supported a number of projects in this regard. However, the problems continue,” he stated.

He would like to see the Society, both nationally and internationally, comment at least once a year on the wider issues and decisions impacting on the lives of people and make recommendations for change.

“The Society is highly regarded, both at home and abroad; we have a seat internationally at the United Nations. We need to issue measured, well thought out and researched commentary that will encourage policymakers make decisions that will improve the lives of people and create a more equal society,” he stated.

He listed other achievements of area presidents in supporting Conferences and training. He encouraged volunteers to come forward for officer roles and Conferences to attract new members every year.

He highlighted how there has been better emphasis on “quality visitation”, spending more time really understanding the needs of those served and coming up with a plan that will get that person or family back to self sufficiency.

“We need to build on that success. We owe it to our generous donors that we use their donations in the best way possible; to do this we need to both reach out to those who may be reluctant to contact us, [and] also to really understand the circumstances of those coming to us for assistance,” he stated.

He expressed his sense of privilege to serve the society as National President and thanked members and staff across the country for their courtesy and encouragement over the years.

## **Presbyterian cleric won't say if he'll join Easter show of unity**

A Presbyterian minister is remaining tightlipped over whether he plans to take part in a popular cross-community Easter procession, the Belfast Telegraph reports.



***Clergy from various churches in Lisburn at last year's Good Friday event***

Rev Michael Davidson has refused to say whether he will attend tomorrow's annual event, where the head of the Presbyterian Church Dr Frank Sellar is expected to speak.

The Walk of Witness, where a cross is carried, has become a popular way for representatives from the main Christian churches in the city and the public to mark Good Friday.

It is understood that Rev Davidson, who was installed as minister of Railway Street Presbyterian Church in September 2015, did not attend last year.

The Walk of Witness takes place through the city centre and starts at 12.30pm.

In a statement, a Church spokesman said that attendance was a matter of "personal conscience", despite it being advertised on the Church's website.

Presbyterian Moderator Dr Sellar will be at the walk, which he said he was "looking forward to".

The Church spokesman added: "It is anticipated that Presbyterians from a number of our local congregations will be attending this annual Good Friday's event in Lisburn.

"This year the Moderator, Dr Frank Sellar, has been invited to address the inter-church gathering and he is looking forward to the opportunity to speak about the sufferings of Christ on the cross leading to cleansing, forgiveness and new life to all who place their hope and trust in Him.

"No doubt some will be more comfortable with participating than others, and that ultimately is a matter of personal conscience, which no doubt we would all want to respect."

When contacted by the Belfast Telegraph, Rev Davidson said he had no comment to make.

He added: "I have plenty of Easter services and I am preparing for one at the moment."

One Railway Street Presbyterian Church member contacted the Belfast Telegraph to express their disappointment.

"We could have no representation there," they said.

It comes days after a Church of Ireland minister refused to take part in a similar event in Lambeg because of theological differences with the Catholic Church.

Rev Eddie Coulter said he held "deeply held theological disagreements" with Rome.

## **Bishop of Down & Dromore's message for Good Friday & Easter**

The Bishop of Down & Dromore, Rt Rev Harold Miller in a message for Good Friday & Easter says -

Good Friday and Easter can so easily be missed nowadays by those who are not regular church goers but these days are at the heart of the Christian faith. For believers, the physical death





and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ transform everything. They declare that God has found a way to restore our relationship with him, through the forgiveness of sins and that new life is possible through Christ, even in the most impossible of circumstances.

So, for those who were martyred in Egypt this Palm Sunday, death is not the end. They share in the resurrection of Jesus for eternity. For those who are terminally ill, knowing Jesus and the

power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings makes this year their Good Friday and Easter Day.

Might we even imagine, in a place with so many who claim to be Christ followers, that just as on that Good Friday 19 years ago, amazing things happened in the Belfast agreement, so now in 2017 the painful political process continuing after Easter might actually lead to a new chapter– of restored, joyful and sacrificial relationship here in Northern Ireland.

Have a truly godly Good Friday and Easter Day.

## **Bishop McKeown questions if Maynooth is fit for purpose in 21st Century**

The future of crisis-hit Maynooth and its suitability as a national training base for seminarians is "an important question", Bishop Donal McKeown has said.

The Irish News reports: The Bishop of Derry was responding to questions about the recent crisis at the Co Kildare seminary amid claims of inappropriate behaviour among some of the trainee priests.

Last August it was reported that some students had been using the gay dating app Grindr.

Questions were raised about the seminary's suitability by Dublin archbishop Diarmuid Martin who has since opted to send his student priests to the Irish College in Rome.

The Archbishop however played down any link between his decision and the allegations of inappropriate behaviour at the seminary saying he had made the decision before the crisis arose.

There are roughly 60 resident seminarians studying at Maynooth.

In an interview for the BBC to be broadcast on Monday, Dr McKeown said whether the Catholic church's national seminary in Maynooth was fit for purpose in the 21st century was an important question.

When asked about Dr Martin's decision, the senior Catholic cleric said: "Maybe we shouldn't send anyone to somewhere like Maynooth.

"Maynooth was formed 200 years ago. Three hundred or 400 years ago, it didn't exist," he said.

"The big question he (Dr Martin) asked, and this is the important question, what is the best way to prepare priests or prophets in this day and age?"

"This is is an important question and he may have a point".

The bishop was speaking during an interview for new four-part series, Beart is Briathar - an Irish language programme with English subtitles - to be broadcast on BBC 2.

The first programme, which goes out on Monday\*\*, sees broadcaster Eamonn Mallie interview well-known Irish-speaking personalities who have made an impact culturally, politically, religiously or musically.

Bishop McKeown was questioned on a number of issues, including abortion and education.

When asked about the possibility of women priests in the Catholic Church, he said: "If that's God's will in our day, I'm happy to accept it," but added: "There is no possibility at the present time women will be priests".

He also speaks about his training in Rome and how he faced tough times about whether he was making the right decision to join the priesthood.

"The third year was very tough. I was very tired... At the end of the year, around Easter 1975, we had to make our minds up if we wanted to continue to theology or not and when the time was right, the mist cleared for me. When the summer was over, it was very clear to me.

"When I needed it, I had that still, small voice, which said `Keep going, you are on the right path".

He also discusses how his life might have turned out had he not joined the priesthood.

"I like the company of women," he said.

"I enjoy the company of women. That's how it has always been with me. Perhaps in another life, I might have been married with children. I don't think I'd be such a bad father either but that is not my calling."

\*\*Beart is Briathar was broadcast on Monday, April 17 at 10pm BBC Two Northern Ireland.

## **Southern Loyalism in context**

On 21 and 22 July 2017, Maynooth University is hosting a conference entitled 'Southern Loyalism in context'. The conference is focused on

loyalism not just in Ireland but also in its international contexts.

The conference is supported by the Irish Research Council's New Foundations scheme, under its 'Decade of Centenaries' strand, and will contribute to the Decade of Centenaries Programme 1917-1922 ([www.decadeofcentenaries.com](http://www.decadeofcentenaries.com)).

## **Hail Gladdening Light - Cappella Caeciliana concert in Belfast**

Cappella Caeciliana presents a concert to celebrate the 50th anniversary of St. Bernadette's Church, Rosetta Road, Belfast on May 19 at 7.30 pm.

The concert includes inauguration of the rebuilt and extended organ, with guest organist Stephen Hamill.

The concert will also feature a special appearance by tenor Fr. Eugene O'Hagan, founder member of Cappella and member of The Priests, who will perform solo works and also sing jointly with the choir in some items.

The programme include Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* and Widor's *Toccata*.

Proceeds are in aid of the organ fund and Cappella's 2018 CD recording.

Tickets cost £15 are now available online [here](#). Students and under 25s will be admitted free of charge, and no ticket is required.

*St Bernadette's Church, Rosetta Road, Belfast BT6 0LL* [[map](#)]. Price: £15 (students and under 25s admitted free of charge)

<http://www.caeciliana.org/>

[get tickets st. bernadettes concert on 19th may/](#)

## Today in Church History

**April 14, 1759:** George Frideric Handel, composer of the oratorio *Messiah*, dies at age 74 in London.

**April 14, 1775:** America's first society to abolish slavery organizes in Philadelphia.