



## Christmas



This Christmas of 2009 is being celebrated at a time of severe economic recession, of horrendous flooding in many parts of Ireland and in the aftermath of the reports on child abuse. In this context it would be easy to forget that the message of Christ's coming among us is "News of Great Joy Today ---- a Saviour Has Been Born to You"

In preparing this edition of Just.Now it was decided to focus on stories of hope, compassion and good news.

Three people were asked to write a brief article to show the connection between what they do and the significance of the incarnation for them. We are very grateful to Sr. Margo Delaney, C.H.F. for agreeing to write about Sr. Maria Hogan's commitment to the care of the earth. (*Sr. Marie died in October*). Mr. Tim Sheehy (*Board Member of Daughters of Charity Service*) about a special Christmas meal in Dublin and Mr. Muiris MacCarthaigh about his advocacy work as a member of the SVP.

*"Fear Not, I Bring You News of Great Joy"*

**We wish our readers a Blessed and Happy Christmas  
May the mystery and wonder of God among us strengthen us  
to live in firm hope, steadfast faith and joyful love.**



## Sister Maria Hogan - Holy Faith Sister

On the evening of October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009 Maria who produced the Bulletin "Caring for Creation" moved gently and in great trust into the heart of the Divine Mystery.



In the course of the last six years or so Maria prepared and distributed over 40 editions of the Bulletin. Respect for people particularly for those who struggle with poverty or any kind of suffering was at the core of Maria's personality and service. This respect for people extended to all of creation. Maria had a profound awareness of the sacredness of all of creation and of the interconnectedness of all forms of life. She qualified as a facilitator of the workshop 'Be the Change' and trained many others to see the sacredness of creation and the need to care for the planet. 'Caring for Creation' Bulletin and the booklet '101 Ways to Care for the Earth' were practical expressions of her deep commitment to caring for the planet and evidence of her advance computer skills. A delightful sense of humour characterised Maria's practical commitment. During the last months of her life Maria sent away for a large number of egg timers. These she distributed to friends and to people she met as a reminder to save water while showering etc! Maria's love, respect and compassion for people and for all forms of life witnessed to her understanding of Christ's coming amongst us.

Her death came within a month of our celebration of her Golden Jubilee. On that occasion and again as we gathered for our farewell rituals - Evening Prayer and Eucharist - Maria's life became distilled into the clarity of simplicity. It is from that perspective that this short account seeks to "witness to Maria's understanding of Christ's coming among us".

The following points, gleaned from her reflective notes, jottings and writings attempt to capture the stance from which she strove to align herself with the mystery of God among us, the core message of Christmas.

- Jesus is the incarnational face of God, the one who embodied in his human life that divine energy which enlivens, nourishes and sustains all of life and the entire cosmos
- Jesus actively sought a new way of being and acting, one that placed right relationship as the essence of this new way of living
- Our identity in this dispensation comes from our capacity to relate in respect, justice, love and acceptance of all life forms
- Like Jesus, it is our privilege and responsibility to cultivate all our mental, physical and sensory powers to help the Divine unfold in us as we seek to experience the divine in all creatures
- Like Jesus, we too can change humanity by allowing ourselves be changed and so live life more abundantly as we allow the Divine energy unfold in us
- Then we come to know that the Divine Mystery is the inner essence of that fullness of life for which all long; that the same radiant life that pulsed though Jesus pulses through us. This is the gift of the Incarnation.

As we celebrate this Christmas, may the mystery and wonder of God among us strengthen us to live in firm hope and steadfast faith, confident of being held in the heart of the compassionate and tender love of the Divine Mystery.

Readers of JustNow have frequently expressed their appreciation of the Bulletin 'Caring for Creation' which has been enclosed over the years with JustNow. The most recent edition is the last to be produced.

## Christmas Day

150 Turkeys - 110 Hams - 600 Sandwiches - 1600 foil trays -  
500 Christmas Puddings ----- where will we get them for Christmas Day;  
and what can we get by way of donations ?

Since Christmas Day 1967, these are some of the thoughts occupying my mind at this time of year as final details and planning occurs for our Christmas Day Dinner at The Royal Dublin Society up to seven years ago it was held at The Mansion House. Why do we, on Christmas Day, provide an excellent dinner and entertainment for 460 guests who join us in person and 1600 meals for delivery by our friends in various St. Vincent De Paul Conferences and Simon to homes of people who are not in a position to prepare Christmas Dinner for themselves? If we believe that the pursuit of social justice is an integral part of our Faith if we reflect on what Christ might want us to do in relation to our homeless fellow persons and if we believe that an essential element in experiencing the real joy of Christmas Day is serving those who are in real need of sustenance and friendship we are privileged, enriched, joyful and the major beneficiaries from what contribution of time and effort we make. The annual Christmas Day Dinner for homeless people is managed by The Knights of St. Columbanus to motivate people to participate in the pursuit of Catholic Action / Social Justice in our community. We work hard in the planning and organization ----- and because we share the true joy of Christmas with our Guests, we return to our families a little tired but very, very happy believing that Christmas values are much more about people and service and less about commercial superficial pursuit of self indulgence.

Mr. Tim Sheehy

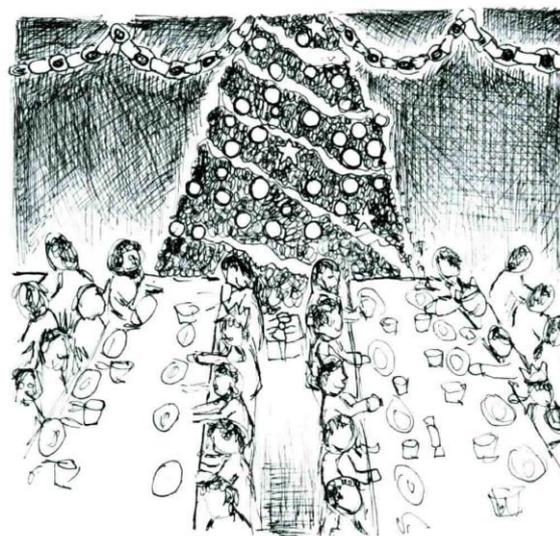
### Advocacy

Like many other members, I joined SVP out of a belief that the circumstances in which the weakest in our society live are as much my responsibility as others, and that as Christians we have a duty to help those who have not been as fortunate as we have. After a number of years of volunteering I became involved with the Society's National Social Justice and Policy Committee which seeks to have the mission of the Society reflected in the actions of government and wider Irish society. Members of the Committee, which I now chair, are committed to helping the poor and vulnerable through the pursuit of social justice. As you can imagine, this is no easy task. At this time of year, however, I am reminded in a more direct way of the importance of the good news of Christ's coming and our duty to undertake the difficult work asked of us to help others.

Though the SVP holds a particular position in Irish society the environment for faith-based or 'uncosted' policies is currently poor. The money is simply not there we are told. This does not deter us however from seeking to identify and tackle the problems faced by vulnerable individuals and families who have turned to SVP in increasing numbers this year. While the Society and its members traditionally operate 'below the radar' of publicity, one of the most striking things I have discovered is the power individual stories of struggle and triumph in the face of adversity can have. These stories galvanise both me and members of the Committee to seek to change the broader structural inadequacies of a system that causes people to struggle in a country that remains one of the world's wealthiest. It reflects in a contemporary and direct way the simple but profound news of Christ's coming and the ability we have to change our world to reflect His message.

*Policy Committee*

*Muiris MacCarthaigh, SVP National Social Justice and*



# Advent Prayer and Reflection

## Longing for Light in the Darkness

**Leader:** During the season of Advent, we are called to seek the light of Christ, even in the midst of darkness. We are invited to face the darkness in our own lives and in the world around us. The prophets assure us that the darkness will not overcome us. They call us to watch for the light. We are called to wait, to hope, to trust in promises made.

As we make this Advent journey in faith, we invite God's light to dispel the darkness. We ask for the grace to set down all those burdens that darken our hearts as we search for the light. We ask for the gift of attentiveness that we may truly see God's loving presence within and among us. And we ask for renewed faith that we might be light for others.

## The Advent Wreath

**Reader 1:** As we light the Advent Wreath we bring to mind all the people and the places in the world that are in need of light this day: (pause)

**Reader 2:** We bring to mind those places in the world where families and countries are torn apart by conflict, violence, or war, and ask for the light of peace to break through the darkness. (pause)

**Reader 1:** We bring to mind the people in our country who this Christmas suffer because of the impact of the recession, the severe flooding and the scandal of child abuse. We ask for the light of hope to break through to their lives. (pause)

**Reader 2 :** We bring to mind all those places in the world where people are suffering from disease or illness, and ask for the light of healing to break through. (pause)

**Reader 1:** We bring to mind all those places in the world where people are held captive by poverty, hunger, and isolation and ask for the light of freedom and abundant life to break through. (pause)

**All:** May our prayers encircle the world and offer light in places of darkness. May we work as one body to bring justice for all people. Enkindle hope in our darkened world and announce the dawn of your kingdom once again. We ask this in Jesus' name.

**Amen**

## A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah

The days are coming, says the LORD,  
when I will fulfill the promise I made to the  
house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in  
that time, I will raise up for David a just  
shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the  
land. In those days Judah shall be safe and  
Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they  
shall call her: "The LORD our justice."  
The Word of the Lord

## Concluding Prayer

**Leader:** Let us Pray:

**All:** God who dispels all darkness,  
Come to be with us, in each one of our situations;  
Come to live among us, live with us and in us;  
Come to fill the distances that divide and separate  
us;  
Come to reconcile us with You and with one another.  
God of Light, open our hearts to the mystery of  
your love and the invitation of your grace.  
Let our complacency give way to conversion and our  
judgments to compassionate acceptance of others.  
Turn oppression to justice and transform conflict  
to peaceful accord.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus, who draws near,  
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever.

**Amen**



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