



The Social Justice Movement – A Fifty Year View

A conference to mark the retirement of

Dr Seán Healy

and

Sr Brigid Reynolds

as joint CEOs of *Social Justice Ireland*

and

to celebrate their more than fifty years of public service
in Ireland and Africa.

Opening Address

Uachtarán na hÉireann, Michael D. Higgins

Wednesday, 31st January 2024

The Davenport Hotel

Dublin

Welcome

John McGeady, CEO, *Social Justice Ireland*

Opening Address

Uachtarán na hÉireann, Michael D. Higgins

Session I: Catholicism and the Social Justice Movement

Olivia O’Leary
Chairperson

Olivia O’Leary is one of Ireland’s best known and most distinguished journalists. She won three Jacobs Awards during her career with RTÉ and a Sony Award for her work with BBC Radio 4. She has been conferred with honorary doctorates by University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin and is a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Michele Dillon

An International Perspective: Catholicism and Social Justice since Vatican II

Professor Michele Dillon is Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and the UNH Class of 1944 Professor of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire, USA. Educated at University College Dublin and the University of California -Berkeley, her research focuses on autonomy and authority in the Catholic Church; moral politics; religion, spirituality and aging; and religion and cultural change. Among her many academic publications is *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Tony Fahey

Social Justice and the Secularisation of Catholic Ethics in Ireland

Tony Fahey is Professor Emeritus of Social Policy in University College Dublin. Before joining UCD in 2007, he worked for 15 years as a researcher in the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin. He has published on many aspects of social policy and social change, including social equality, housing, demography, and cultural and religious patterns. Professor Fahey is the current Chair of *Social Justice Ireland*.

Session II: The Course of Social Justice in Ireland

Mick Clifford

Chairperson

Mick Clifford is an author, an investigative journalist and a columnist with the *Irish Examiner*. He was named ‘Journalist of the Year’ in the 2016 Journalism Awards for his reporting on the Maurice McCabe Garda whistleblower case. He is a regular presenter and contributor on current affairs programmes on Irish radio and television.

Micheál Collins and Catherine Kavanagh

Income Inequality and Poverty: a fifty-year view

Dr Micheál L. Collins is an economist and Assistant Professor of Social Policy at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, UCD. His research interests and publications are in the areas of income distribution and poverty, taxation, fiscal welfare, pensions, economic evaluation and public policy. He was a member of Ireland’s Commission on Taxation (2008-2009) and the Irish Government’s Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare (2011-2014). He served as the external member of the Irish Government’s inter-departmental group examining the reform of Ireland’s income tax and social insurance system (2017-18).

Dr Catherine Kavanagh is a Lecturer in Economics at University College Cork. Her research areas include compensation in the workplace, labour market policies, the skills and qualifications of workers, income distribution and measures of progress. In her most recent research, she and Professor Charles M.A. Clark (St. John's University, New York) have developed an index to measure the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They have published many reports on the performance of the EU15 member states, including Ireland, in regard to the SDGs, a number of which have been published by *Social Justice Ireland*.

Dermot McCarthy

The Impact of Social Justice Advocacy: a policy maker's reflections

Dermot McCarthy became a public servant in 1977 and rose to occupy two of the most senior posts in the Irish civil service. He became Secretary General to the Government in January 2000 and, in July 2001, joined that role with Secretary General in the Department of the Taoiseach. Previously, in the early 1990s, he served in the Department of Health and followed with a period as Director of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). As Secretary General in the Department of the Taoiseach, he was closely involved with NESC and the social partnership process. Mr McCarthy retired in 2011.

Wine Reception

Guests of Honour

Sr Brigid Reynolds and Dr Seán Healy

The Guests of Honour

Brigid Reynolds and Seán Healy

Born and raised on a farm near Mohill, Co. Leitrim, Brigid was educated with the Marist Sisters in Carrick-on-Shannon and graduated with a science degree from University College Dublin.

Brigid entered the Marist Sisters Religious Order and after profession was assigned to Kaduna in the north of Nigeria. She spent two years lecturing in a Teacher Training College. She was also secretary to an Episcopal Commission to tackle poverty and promote social inclusion, and she served as spiritual director for women's organisations in the north of Nigeria.

Seán grew up in Blackrock in Cork city and was educated at St Nesson's Christian Brothers, Sullivan's Quay. He later received his PhD from Fordham University with a dissertation on the subject of Paulo Freire and Generating Social Change.

Seán joined the Society of African Missions and after ordination, like Brigid, was assigned to Kaduna in the north of Nigeria, where, for a period, he was parish priest in a remote parish of 2,000 square miles and 47 churches. He guided the development of, and sourced funding for, a Regional Plan to address the consequences of the Sahel drought on behalf of the Episcopal Conference. He also served as Director of Development and Justice in seven dioceses in the north of Nigeria.

In 1980, Brigid returned to Ireland. She spent two years teaching science in a secondary school in Dublin, before being recruited by The Conference of Major Religious Superiors, subsequently renamed the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI). Likewise, having returned to Ireland in 1983, Seán was also recruited by The Conference of Major Religious Superiors. Together they facilitated CORI's Justice Commission to advocate for social justice by:

- ◆ Hosting an annual Social Policy Conference and editing the conference papers each year for 35 years;
- ◆ Preparing a critique of the Annual Budget;

- ◆ Engaging with Government and civil society;
- ◆ In partnership with an Irish university, devising and implementing an MA degree programme in Social Justice and Public Policy;
- ◆ Conducting a large number of seminars and workshops on these topics.

In 2009, Brigid and Seán co-founded *Social Justice Ireland*, a secular organisation with an independent Board, which works to build a just society through developing and delivering credible analysis and policy to improve society and the lives of people.

As CEO, Deputy CEO and Company Secretary, they developed *Social Justice Ireland's* staff resources and the range and depth of the organisation's output. The activities and outputs of CORI's Justice Commission were continued and developed. In addition, *Social Justice Ireland* produces:

- ◆ An annual Socio-Economic Review (published 37 annual editions);
- ◆ An annual Sustainable Progress Index.

Additionally, since 1997, Seán has served on the Council of the National Economic and Social Council as a representative of the Community and Voluntary Sector.

In 2023, Brigid and Seán retired as CEO, Deputy CEO and Company Secretary of *Social Justice Ireland*.