

THE IRISH AND BRITISH PROVINCE

Ireland and England

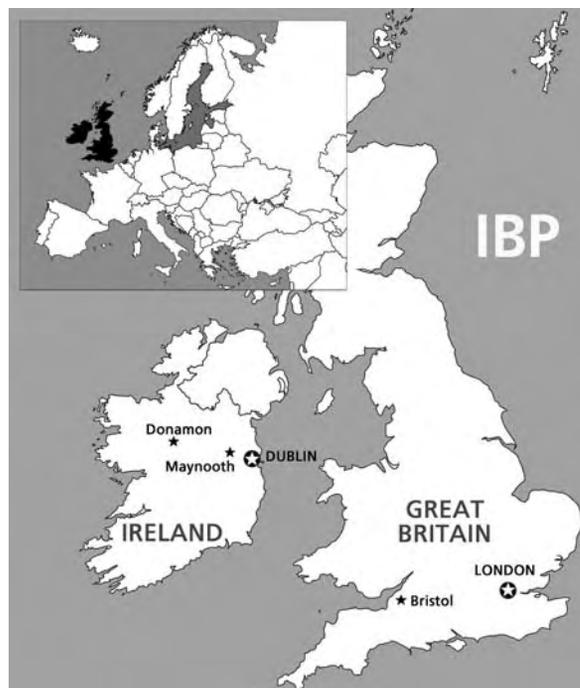
Official Languages: England – **English**, Ireland – **English and Gaelic**

Mission Statement

We Divine Word Missionaries, an international missionary Society, impelled by the love of God and nourished by Word and Sacrament, proclaim and serve his Kingdom.

1. Societal Setting

In the IBP, people's attitudes have changed over the past few years. While our economies seem to prosper, (Ireland has about \$65,144 and Britain has \$42,513 per capita income) nevertheless, there have been drastic changes in the social and religious outlook of our peoples. Due to austerity and immigration many people in our countries are getting poorer. England is impacted by its Brexit decision, which still needs to be defined. Growth in poverty and structural unemployment in Ireland has emerged, in part at least, because of debt transfers to tax payers. A quarter of a million Irish people had to emigrate, and a rapidly growing homelessness problem with a significant lack of social housing has emerged. Over the past decade we have been affected by a lack of coherence and by corruption at the core of public policy, i.e. a failure to integrate developments across



many areas of government policy ranging from education to health, from infrastructure to social services, from economic development to fiscal policy. Government had tended to resort to short-term, quick fix solutions that in many cases have moved policy away from addressing these challenges. A combination of vision and pragmatic policies and planning that can truly move the country towards a desirable and sustainable future is needed.

Figures from the 2016 census show a drop in the percentage of Catholics in Ireland, from 84.2% in 2011 to 78.3% in 2016. The number of people identifying themselves as members of the Church of Ireland dropped by 2%, while

Presbyterians dropped by 1.6% and Pentecostals dropped by 4.9%. As a result of immigration, three religions have grown. There was a 29% increase in the number of Muslims in 2016 compared to 2011. Hindus saw a 34% increase since 2011 and the Orthodox increased by 37.5%. Those with no religion account for 9.8%.

In England, figures from the 2011 census show that Christianity remains the predominant religion with 59.38%. With regard to the other religions, 5.02% are Muslim, 1.52% are Hindu, 0.79% are Sikh, 0.49% are Jewish, 0.45% are Buddhist, and 24.74% claimed no religious affiliation.

In Ireland, Gaelic culture and language form an important part of the Irish national identity. The Irish Travelers, who self-identify as an indigenous minority ethnic group, received official recognition of ethnicity by the Irish State in 2017. The most common foreign nationalities include Polish, British, Lithuanian, Latvian and Nigerian.

The 2011 census recorded that 85.4% of England's population was white, 7.8% Asian, 3.5% black, 2.3% mixed. Despite being a relatively compact country, there are many distinct dialects as a result of immigration, but none is given any official status. It is estimated that English is a second language for one in every eight school children in England. Cornish, a Celtic language in the county of Cornwall, has protected language status and is undergoing a small revival.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Secularization had been on the Irish radar screen for many years, but not recognized. As a result, it was not addressed adequately at the time and the development of a more pluralistic and thus a more secular society was embraced without much questioning. In Ireland and the United Kingdom, the Church and religious congregations have come through a very difficult period stemming from media aggressiveness towards religion in general. In the 1990's, revelations of widespread sexual abuse of children in Ireland began which damaged the 'sacred trust' of bygone years. Responding to the day-to-day demands of ministry left many pastoral agents tired, with little time to take on new tasks or address radically new ways of life and ministry. There's now an awareness that it is time for change, there is a willingness to change, and it's the pressures of "keeping the show on the road" which keep people active.

“to embrace New Evangelization in the spirit of the Roscommon Consensus”

With hindsight, thirty years ago when vocations dropped to zero, few alarm bells went off in the SVD and few questions were asked. New structures were not put in place as the old ones seemed to carry us over. These had been successful during the vocational boom and they assisted our formation houses both in Donamon and Maynooth. Our international charism was not actively courted and the Province did not invite foreign SVDs to share our missionary endeavors. This has been

rectified over the last few years as we now have thirteen expatriate confreres amongst us and more due. With their coming, we are beginning to understand that they might bring new proposals and may have a new missionary song to sing.

We were slow to embrace the Roscommon Consensus and what was missing at the time, and still is, was an analytic examination of our reality and of the forces that existed within the Church to address the change that was taking place. We were not involved with pastoral agents, who proposed a more critical and systematic approach to what was happening. Church culture of the time was inadequate to face the challenge of change and that culture was in itself, something that made realistic change more difficult. The inadequate handling of cases of sexual abuse of young people was a shock to all and deeply wounded the trust that people had in the Church. The crisis raised even deeper and more fundamental questions which were not being answered in a programmatic way. The spiritual dimension is still strong and active in many people and questions around the meaning of life, together with the broader question of the future of our planet, are being asked in different ways by so many varied groups. Our SVD charism lived out in small international communities, could give witness and be very relevant as new migrants come to our shores. Through our international charism, we have been blessed by the presence of the younger confreres from other parts of the world. We welcome them and we would like, in conjunction with our European provinces, to offer them interactive inculturation programs. We continue to welcome and invite young confreres

to share in the hope and joy of our missionary activity in the IBP. The fact that our churches are becoming increasingly side-lined in the search for meaning does not mean that the search is not still going on, even among the younger generation. So many people are still deeply committed to the Christian faith and long for a vibrant and revitalized Church. Therefore, in the IBP, we desperately need **willing, trained, educated and less self-interested** confreres to participate in a new strategic and dynamic proposal for today's mission.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

| IN ACTIVE MINISTRY | Personnel | 2018 (%) | 2012 (%) | 2005 (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Parish | 17 | 29.8 | 15.0 | 25.0 |
| Education | 0 | | 0 | 7.1 |
| Schools | 0 | - | | |
| Universities | 0 | - | | |
| Formation/ SVD Vocation | 1 | 1.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Administration/ Support | 6 | 10.5 | 20.0 | 14.3 |
| Other Apostolates | 12 | 21.1 | 30.0 | 21.4 |
| JPIC | 2 | - | | |
| Bible | 2 | - | | |
| Communication | 1 | - | | |
| Mission Animation | 2 | - | | |
| Others | 5 | - | | |

Those in Final Vows

| NOT IN MINISTRY | Personnel | 2018 (%) | 2012 (%) | 2005 (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Studies/ Orientation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Retired/Sick | 16 | 28.1 | 27.0 | 21.4 |
| Others | 5 | 8.8 | 8.0 | 8.9 |

Characteristic Dimensions

In smaller communities, we are invited with the SSpS, to be "living signs" of hope in our difficult Church/society situation. We need teams to work in the biblical, mission awareness, human rights and communications apostolates so that we can accompany the many religious and social groups that take part in shaping our world. We are aware that we are invited to plan a future where our Characteristic Dimensions reinvigorate our pastoral activities, attract lay participation and provide structures for these to develop. We are invited to live in a closer learning relationship with AMRI (the Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland) and other religious-missionary groups (they all have much the same internal problems and pastoral challenges). Our prophetic dialogue within Christianity, with other faith/religious, and non-religious groups should be included in this vision as a matter of urgency and need.

Our Characteristic Dimensions are not sufficiently developed at the heart of our efforts in the IBP. We need to become aware of and pro-

mote our SVD charism and we need to commit ourselves to continue to develop the Communications, Biblical, JPIC, and Mission Animation apostolates. This cannot be done however, if our younger missionaries who arrive are not properly trained for these activities. Past provincial assemblies had acknowledged the need for a renewed pastoral/missionary outreach. As part of our pastoral outreach, we took over two new parishes in this triennium (one in Dublin, one in London); and we augmented our involvement in the parish of Bristol. We hope to develop our Characteristic Dimensions through these.

Biblical Apostolate: One of our confreres, assigned to a diocese, helps with courses and retreats, and some other confreres working in different non-SVD parishes focus their ministry on biblical foundations. The Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, recently said that he is "convinced that one of the principal ways in which the Church can reform itself and bring its message more incisively to society is through developing a renewed biblical apostolate. The Irish Church at times in its recent history got so focused on the formulae of orthodoxy that it failed to introduce its people into a real relationship with Jesus and his life and teaching. All our pastoral structures are still poor in scriptural content and approach. Such a biblical basis for its action is also a sound basis for ecumenical collaboration." What a wonderful invitation to our younger SVD confreres, to become aware of a closer affiliation with the priorities already happening in the local Church and society.

Mission Animation: We have a fulltime Mission Secretary who works on animation and collecting funds in a diocese allotted to us each year, and others attempt to promote our SVD charism within a parish structure, giving a missionary dimension to parish life.

JPIC: Some confreres came to the IBP to specifically work with immigrants and they are still involved in this from the diocesan and or parish structure where they work.

Communication: Because of its connection with the discontinued *Word Magazine* and our important Christmas card production, Donamon Castle remains the symbol of the SVD in Ireland. It still houses our Printing Press and different types of cards are produced there; this remains a source of income for the Province. *Kairos Communications* has been very important and a forerunner over the years for youth evangelization. It works in transmitting Eucharistic celebrations, both on TV and radio, as well as doing other small religious productions. At the moment, it's at a cross roads in its future development and it needs a more developed European-Generalate communications proposal. It has the equipment to do innovative work in evangelizing our modern media, but it needs interested confreres. At the moment, we have only one confrere involved, and we'd like to see more getting involved in such an important charism of ours. The *Harp* is our colorful internal newsletter for our missionaries, benefactors

and friends, and we recently set up an editorial group of confreres to help the editor with this very important work.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

The real focus of our province is caring for the elderly and letting go of what functioned for the past, and welcoming younger missionaries and searching for ways to build smaller communities within a pastoral context. No priority was really formalized in the IBP. Our 2013 provincial assembly stated that we desire to be a sign of hope in a “society increasingly secularized”; and in order to give this sign of hope, the province has chosen “to embrace *New Evangelization* in the spirit of the Roscommon Consensus”. The same 2013 assembly acknowledged “the need for a renewed pastoral-missionary outreach” and it put at the heart of its efforts its “commitments to parishes and chaplaincies, to *migrants* and to our historical involvement in communications, the Biblical apostolate and JPIC.”

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

| MEMBERSHIP | 2018 | 2012 | 2005 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Clerics | 55 | 52 | 48 |
| Brothers (final vows) | 2 | 4 | 8 |
| Scholastics | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| Total | 64 | 58 | 56 |

| AGE AND COUNTRY | 2018 | 2012 | 2005 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Average age | 61.9 | 62.9 | 61.0 |
| Nationalities | 10 | 10 | 8 |

Spirituality: As a Province of older retired and semi-retired confreres, we have a traditional SVD spirituality. We hope to see some young confreres come to IBP, who will sing a new song amongst us and have little reticence about speaking of their own spirituality.

Community Life: We recommend that each district have a quarterly fraternal gathering to promote togetherness and spiritual renewal. Recognising our older confreres as a gift, we feel the need for a participative program of care and activity for them. Some of our older confreres need nursing home care and our communities are aware of their needs for fellowship. As part of our international charism, we have been blessed by the presence the younger confreres from other parts of the world. We continue to welcome and invite new/young confreres to share in the hope and joy of our missionary activity in the IBP.

Leadership: We are committed to a genuine openness between our provincial administration and our confreres where all pertinent decisions are communicated. We have a Provincial Plan of Action for the short and medium term as it is difficult to plan for the long term. In order

to aspire to community responsibility in leadership, it is important to have periodic meeting of communities. House community leaders and confreres are encouraged to become more involved and aware of community involvement in leadership.

Finance: At the structural level, we need to change as we plan for the future. We have set up a Finance Committee and we propose to continue the robust reviews of Kairos, the printing press, the income of our various houses of the province and our finances (PA, 2013). The Council has proposed the setting up of Limited Companies and Boards of Management to take these entities into the future. We have reviewed and restructured the Board of Kairos and set up the Boards of the Printing Press and the Student Accommodation at Maynooth (SAM). We have set up a Management Committee to project the day to day and future commitments at Maynooth and the proper utilization of our assets there.

Formation: Our few confreres in formation are non-national and they study at the National Seminary in Maynooth. The SVD Language School in Maynooth also offers international community living to the religious and other young missionaries who come to study. Today, we invite young missionaries to our province and feel the need for a stronger interactive inculturation program. Our experience causes us to ask: How do we prepare young men who

come to give gospel witness to Jesus Christ with authenticity and not to be afraid to begin their own journey of integrity, solidarity and creativity in our IBP context? How do we prepare confreres to give witness in their openness, listening and courage and to live out our community values? We must prepare confreres to live in small international communities and create a culture of col-

laborative ministry. Therefore, we feel the need to take a radical new look at the formation of future confreres. We feel that this should be a European SVD initiative, as our younger confreres need vision and need to know that they will have affective and effective SVD support at a time when people are angry about the Church.