

## Inspiring Hope and Solidarity: A resource for Parishes and Religious Educators

**“The one who has hope lives differently.”**  
**(*Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI, 2007)**

### Did you know?

Some interesting and perhaps shocking facts for your parish or school newsletter:

- The worlds’ poorest countries pay more than \$100 million each day to rich countries and lenders. For every \$1 dollar poor countries receive in aid they give \$5 in debt repayments.
- 2.6 billion people lack clean water and sanitation.
- The number of hungry people in the world, now over one billion, has been rising for the past 15 years. 98% of these people live in countries of the global South.
- Tax dodging by Multi-national companies robs countries of the Global South over US\$ 160 billion per year.
- One in four children in developing countries is underweight while one in four Irish children is now overweight.
- In 2008, the Irish government collected €41 billion in tax receipts. The government of Rwanda collected €400m in tax receipts in 2008
- The average Irish person can expect to live to be 79. The life expectancy of someone living in Zambia is just 38.
- There are 44 million child labourers in India
- 8% of Bangladesh’s national income is raised through tax. 37% of the UK’s national income is raised in tax
- 78% of people living in the United States have access to the internet. 65% of Irish people are online while just 11% of Africans have access to the internet.
- The number of people living with HIV rose from around 8 million in 1990 to 33 million by the end of 2009.
- Almost 20 million children are orphaned as a result of AIDS.
- The Philippines gives \$9.9 billion each year to the rich world in debt payments.
- Due to enormous public pressure from people all around the world over US\$100 billion of unpayable and unjust debts of countries of the Global South have been cancelled.

If the world’s population was reduced to a village of 100 people,  
37 would live on less than \$2 a day  
80 would live in sub-standard housing  
50 would be malnourished  
33 would lack access to safe water  
24 would have no electricity  
1 would have a university degree

Source: 80:20 Ireland in an Unequal World

## January – A Time to Re-new our Commitment to God’s justice

- *Be the change you wish to see in the world.*

Mahatma Gandhi

### A NEW YEAR PRAYER

As we begin another year let us pause to remember all those who long for a new beginning, a fresh start, or a new life. In the Old Testament, the prophets spoke about a Jubilee year, This was a time when debts were forgiven, slaves set free, fields allowed to rest and right relationships restored. A Jubilee year is as much needed today as in biblical times.

Think of those who live in the shadow of hunger, poverty, unemployment, debt, sickness, repression, injustice. Think of those in our own community without jobs and perhaps forced to leave family and friends to find a new life in another country. Think of those who, in past years, have come here to Ireland for the same reasons.

Like the prophets of old, we, as Christians, abhor all that threatens life. We want to announce the fullness of life; where the human dignity of all is respected. Work, education, health, housing, a decent life for all.

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:  
a world where the weak are protected, and no one goes hungry;  
a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;  
a world where different cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;  
a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.  
We pray for a world renewed with your spirit.  
With the Lord of history who makes all things new. Amen

God, send us forth with your blessing that we might do your work in accordance with your will. May we be a Jubilee Congregation, a people of Christ who work for justice and peace, and who make right relationships. May we not shy away from taking the action that will save lives and make positive change. Be with us as we stand with our neighbours around the world calling for a new world, where all of your children are valued. With you Lord, we will make all things new. AMEN.

### Justice Dates for January

- 2012 is the International Year of Cooperatives, launched on January 12<sup>th</sup>. Cooperatives are based on values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity - *“it’s essentially about meeting human need, not human greed.”* <http://www.2012.coop/> - for more information on why cooperatives are so important for equality, trade and financial justice.
- January 15<sup>th</sup> is World Religion Day, emphasising interfaith understanding, spiritual harmony, human unity and true equality.

## **February - Mí na Féile Bríde, The Feast of St Brigid**

In our Christian tradition the feast of St Brigid on 1 February ushers in the springtime. It is a time of hope, of new life and rebirth. It is a good time to acknowledge God as the source of all life and to celebrate as a faith community the ways in which Brigid of Kildare challenges us in our time to be channels of hope, life, justice, peace, faith and healing in the lives of others around us. Parish Rituals, Eileen Deegan, Columba Press, 2005

Saint Brigid of Kildare, lived from 451 to 525 . She was a nun, abbess, founder of several convents and held the rank of bishop. She became known for her generosity - even as a child never refusing any poor people who came knocking at her father's door. Once having nothing else to hand, the story goes that she gave her father's precious sword to a beggar. In her life she brought peace where there was conflict, she acted justly and was a voice for the oppressed.

May Bridget inspire us to act justly and to reverence all that God has made. Brigid, you were a voice for the wounded and the weary, strengthen what is weak within us. Calm us into a quietness that heals and listens. (Solas Bhríde, Kildare 1997)

### **PRAYER**

May the arms of God be about you,  
The way of Christ guide you,  
The strength of the Spirit support you,  
And may Mary and Brigid be close to you always.

### **Justice Dates for February**

- February 4<sup>th</sup> marks Afri's annual Féile Bríde, which this year celebrates Fire and Food. The celebration will take place in Derby House Hotel, Kildare Town. See [www.afri.ie](http://www.afri.ie)
- On February 15<sup>th</sup> DDCI launch their public report card on Ireland, The Global South and the International Financial Institutions. See [www.debtireland.org](http://www.debtireland.org)

## **\*Schools\* Learn more about the story of St Brigid**

Saint Brigit of Kildare, also known as Naomh Bhríde or Mary of the Gaels, lived from 451 to 525. She was an Irish nun, abbess, founder of several convents, and so great and powerful was the wisdom and influence of Saint Brigid, that she is one of the few abbesses to be ordained and consecrated a Bishop by Bishop Saint Mel in Telcha Mide, an honour not usually conferred upon women.

St Brigit, whose feast day falls on February 1<sup>st</sup> was also a negotiator, peacemaker and early community activist. Just the kind of person we need now. Her feast day, coincides with the pre-Christian festival of Imbolc, announcing the arrival of new life. The whole month of February is called Mí na Féile Bríde (Month of the Festival of Brigit).

One aspect of Brigit seldom receives attention: Brigit the Weaver. Her cross was made of newly plucked rushes; her crios (girdle or belt), of new straw; and her cloak was of woven material. Brigit was also a “peace weaver”, the name given to distinguished women in Old European times. Such women had great negotiating skills and authority.

As with such peace weavers, St Brigit caused mists to appear between opposing sides in order to prevent bloodshed. With her nuns she accompanied protesting warriors to the battlefield, rendering them unable to fight. In historical times, the Abbesses of Kildare, who succeeded the historical 5th century Brigit, could pardon criminals encountered on their way to execution. They were revered figures of authority who were known as “Those Who Turned Back the Streams of War”.

Today’s weavers and nurturers – community activists, parents, carers, and educators – continue to weave webs of peace and justice. Like community activists and nurturers, Brigit wove the fragile threads of life into webs of community. Her passion for justice rings through her life. Her Life Story recounts 23 stories that show her concern and generosity for the poor.

Today, the old religious and political structures have crashed all around us. In any new arrangements peace weavers and nurturers must be represented and their voices heard, loud and clear. No better woman than Brigit to inspire us.

*Based on an article by Mary Condren, published in The Irish Times - Monday, January 31, 2011*