



Living simply and seeking transformation

livesimply is a major new initiative to which many organisations and groups in Ireland are signing up. It challenges us to reflect, celebrate and take action for justice. Its message is clear: **God calls us to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with people in poverty**, and its intention is far reaching: to transform our communities in such a way that human dignity is respected and everyone can reach their full potential.

Far from demanding lip service, *livesimply* summons us to action. Its meaning and mission is radical, challenging us to go against widely-held cultural and economic assumptions about wealth creation - that we all aspire to have more and that economic growth should be our goal. Instead, *livesimply* asks those who have more to make do with less, to live more generously and to share more readily. It questions whether our priority is wealth or justice and invites us to make an option for the poor because the injustice of poverty impoverishes us all as human beings.

The *livesimply* challenge reminds us that true wealth is not about material possessions but about the depth of our relationships. Likewise, true progress is not just about economic growth, but about the development of the human person. Our responsibility is not only to ourselves, but to our neighbour and to creation. Each of us is precious in God's eyes, so when our behaviour - individual, communal or global - impacts negatively on another, we denigrate God in whose image we are made. As Pope Benedict XVI calls to mind in his encyclical, 'God is Love', (*Deus Caritas Est*), the love of God and the love of neighbour is indivisible.

livesimply has its roots in an earlier encyclical, 'On the development of peoples' (*Populorum Progressio*) written 40 years ago by Pope Paul VI, in response to the poverty and injustice he saw in the world. It is a prophetic document, penetrating to the heart of our human predicament - how can we develop as people in a way that is fair for all?

It is as pertinent today as it was in 1967. Many of its themes are especially relevant in an age of globalisation and climate chaos. Today we are able to access information at the press of a button and to fly round the world, yet we may never have met the person next door, or interacted with local communities on our travels. While globalisation has seemingly made our world smaller, our neighbours are, ironically, no closer. Moreover, the gulf that exists between those who have more than enough and those who have less than they need has widened. The effects of global warming and climate chaos disproportionately affect the poorest people, those least responsible for the environmental damage.

livesimply picks up the themes of *Populorum Progressio* and calls us back to our biblical heritage. It reminds us that God made the earth and the goods of creation for everyone to share and confronts us with an uncomfortable truth: that no one may appropriate surplus goods while others lack the bare necessities of life. Such wisdom flies in the face of popular rationale which urges us to have more and more because enough is never enough.

The message of *livesimply* is counter-cultural: the accepted is unacceptable. Justice demands that we change.

So how are we to respond to *livesimply*? Doing nothing is not an option. If we remain unmoved, we ignore the demands of our faith, which has as its principal precept the call to love God and our neighbour. Furthermore, to walk away is to take the path of self-destruction: for now, more than ever before, the world urgently needs to be nurtured, not exploited and our neighbours need our support and understanding, not our indifference and ignorance. Peace goes hand in hand with justice.

Now is the chance to make a difference and to transform the world in which we live. We can respond to *livesimply* individually, by making a pledge to change our lifestyles, as a community, by collectively making changes in our behaviour through community challenges, and globally, by putting pressure on our governments to negotiate laws which affect those who live in poverty.

This resource pack contains articles, guides for reflections and talks, and ideas for action that will help you to reflect upon your relationship to the world. It is meant to aid community leaders bringing *livesimply* to their groups, but anyone can find its contents useful. Hopefully, it will begin to inspire you to live more fully, recognizing the wonderful world we are all a part of and the relationships we share and create.

If we all take little steps toward living more simply, sustainably, and in solidarity with people who are poor, we can slowly change our world.

Adapted from an article by Annabel Shilson-Thomas originally published in Mission Today.