

# IRISH CHAPLAINCY

FOUNDED IN 1957

Newsletter

Spring 2023

## Celebrating St Brigid

St Brigid's church on Fleet Street is known as the 'Journalists' church' and is named after the patron saint of the Irish Chaplaincy, St Brigid of Kildare. Together with the rector, Rev. Alison Joyce, we organised a special service on February 1<sup>st</sup> to mark the feast of our patron. Or, as Alison suggested it should be, our 'matron'!

Our 'Celebration of St Brigid in word and song' had some distinguished guests in attendance. We had the Mayor of Kildare, and the CEO and the Chair of Kildare Tourism, Michael Lonergan from the Embassy of Ireland, also Lord Black and



members of the Guild of St Brigid. And there was an RTÉ film crew! There was a feature on the evening news in Ireland, which mentioned that plans are already underway for big celebrations in 2025 to mark the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Brigid.

From this year Lá Fhéile Bríde is marked by a public holiday in Ireland. This puts her on a par with Patrick, and quite right too! She was a remarkable and inspirational woman, and is a fitting patron, or matron, for the Irish Chaplaincy.



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Registered Charity No.: 1160365

**Irish Chaplaincy** supporting Irish people in Britain, including prisoners, Travellers and seniors.

...Looking Ahead with Hope...

*The work of Irish Chaplaincy is funded in part by grants from the Government of Ireland, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, and by the support of many generous Friends.*

## The Good Friday Agreement @ 25

Anniversaries can be important. They provide an opportunity to re-evaluate a situation and take stock of progress. Twenty-five years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (sometimes referred to as the Belfast Agreement) is a good time to review the most significant political event in recent Irish history.

The politics of Northern Ireland have always been volatile. The current political stalemate has yet to be resolved with the elected Assembly not having functioned now for almost a year. The 'feel good' factor which people had been getting used to following the Agreement, has had a rude awakening with the onset of Brexit and corresponding difficulties over the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Protocol, in particular, has become the trigger for an outpouring of the resentment and disenchantment felt by a section of the community which sees it as a further erosion of their British political heritage and benefiting the nationalist community at their expense.

There have been two significant changes since the Good Friday Agreement: firstly, the demographic change - with the nationalist population now the majority and secondly, the rise of Sinn Fein, which is now the largest political party in Northern Ireland with the serious ambition of exercising government in the Republic in the near future.

Whatever political progress has been

made since the signing of the Agreement, the reality is that it has not been matched by progress at grassroots community level. Attitudinal surveys carried out since have consistently revealed that the gulf between the two communities is as wide as ever.

One indication of this is the fact that more 'peace walls', segregating the two communities at interface areas in Belfast, have been built (rather than removed) since the Agreement. Political progress at ministerial level needs to be underpinned by political initiatives at grass-root community level if there is to be real trust, respect and true reconciliation. Northern Ireland still has a disaffected and alienated community, a divided Christianity, much distrust and prejudice, all posing the greatest challenge to everything we understand by terms like peace, justice and reconciliation.

A major source of grievance is the economic and social deprivation felt by both communities. Northern Ireland has one of the highest unemployment rates and some of the poorest housing conditions in the UK. Thanks to the inactivity of the Assembly, combined with a lack of funding from central government, the NHS and the education system are on their knees.

There can be little hope of building on the terms of the Agreement without radical measures to address this situation. The Agreement was never intended to be a resolution of the conflict but rather a road map towards transforming conflict through commitment to the implementation of certain arrangements. In this, it represents an important template for dealing with other conflicts. But political

templates are one thing; healing hearts and minds another. And this applies to every conflict situation.

In some ways Northern Ireland has come a long way since the Good Friday Agreement: the bombings and shootings have gone and a generation has grown up without much experience of past turmoil. However, there is still much work to be done. If we have learned anything during the past twenty-five years, it is surely that the work of peace is never truly finished and has to be constantly worked at. As the Primate of All Ireland, Eamon Martin, put it recently: 'Sadly, twenty-five years on, the trauma and hurt of those horrific years remain substantially unhealed. Wounds within, and between, our communities remain open - wounds of body, mind, spirit and heart - and the legacy of suffering continues to fuel mistrust.'

It is greatly to be hoped that in reviewing the Agreement, politicians, church people and all those involved, will commit to redoubling their efforts so that by the time the next generation comes to review the Agreement, both the political landscape and the everyday life of the people of Northern Ireland will have changed for the better.

(First published in *Justpeace*)



Fr. Gerry McFlynn, Manager of ICPO London

## Are you Interested in Volunteering for the Irish Chaplaincy....

We have many opportunities, including: befriending, prison visiting, answering the phone, casework, admin, fundraising, comms.

Contact Declan Ganly:  
[declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk](mailto:declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk)

Or see our online Volunteer Application form and stories from volunteers.  
[www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk)



## Work with Travellers

Our work has expanded recently to include an exciting partnership with the National Probation Service, delivering briefings to Probation teams and taking on referrals to support members of the GRT community when they are released from prison. We have been visiting Travellers and Gypsies in various prisons, with more due in the coming months. During these visits we are actively seeking referrals for the Probation Project. The idea is that we engage with GRT people in custody and simultaneously work with their Probation Officer to plan their release. We also provide in cell resources and general support.

We received an email from an Irish Traveller in Wormwood Scrubs recently thanking us for our support, 'Thank you so very much for everything. Just got the in cell back today, it's great. God bless you all.'

We were able to support an Irish Traveller being released as homeless from HMP Isis. We received an email the day before his release asking for help with housing as the Probation Officer had been unsuccessful. We were able to contact the Passage, a homeless charity that we have links with and were advised that they would assist him on the day of his release. We were then able to contact prison Chaplaincy who gave the man

directions to the Passage and the assurance that they would be able to help him with housing. Both this man and his Probation Officer were very grateful for our intervention, which would not have been possible without our good links with other agencies and with prison departments.



Fiona Mullen, Traveller Project Manager

## HANDS

Worn, wrinkled,  
worked and welcoming,

Hands to make and mould,  
hands to have and hold.

Hands herding and shepherding.  
Hands violating innocence.

Hands with another's blood on  
them.

Pilate washes his hands of Jesus.

Hands raised in protest:  
Hands to applaud and to write,  
to cook and to clean,  
to weave and to wash,  
to pray and play,  
and to point the way.

Hands to garden and to gather,  
to till and to tend,  
to caress and to care,  
to pray and to praise,  
to embrace and to enfold,  
to reach and to renew.

Hands to feel and to grow,  
and seek to know.  
Hands touching



with a finger-tip gentleness.

Hands that gesture  
'you know what I mean'  
'what's the word for it'?

But we have taken our hands,  
misused and abused them.  
Our hands can hurt and heal.

Hands have been squeezed too  
tight.

Hands - gone from giving to  
grabbing.

Hands cuffed and tortured.  
Hands destroyed and bruised.  
Hands fisted to fight one another.

And still the Creator loves our  
hands.

We are held close to God's heart.  
Each one unique and is viewed  
as God's work of art,

who is cherished, precious,  
irreplaceable,  
and full of potential and  
possibilities.

So much so that God has  
made them  
His Own.

Gathering heaven and earth in  
One  
healing, helping embracing Son,  
suffering for all  
until all is done.

'God's hands wipe away  
the tears from every cheek,  
everywhere on  
earth'

(Isaiah 25:8).

God gave us hands,  
beauty and opportunity:  
Creator's creativity,  
Spirit's possibility,  
Incarnate infinity,  
Tangible Divinity,  
Inviting our receptivity....

Fr John Cullen

## Hens

My granny had the cure for the pip (a disease of hens, characterised by a thick mucus discharge that forms a crust in the mouth and throat). I don't know how she discovered that she had the cure but she had. My mother tells tales of people coming from all over the place to bring their hens to her for the cure. In those days a hen was a valuable asset to any home, and you didn't need a farm or acres of ground to keep a few hens. They laid eggs for eating and for hatching new chickens and an old hen would make a nice dinner for a special occasion or for Christmas. Country women often traded eggs and chickens and this income provided extras for them like a piece of cloth for curtains or a new dress or some sugar to make a sweet cake. Hens played a vital economic role in Irish rural life so it was no wonder that someone would travel miles to cure what was a fatal disease to a hen.

My grandparents had a simple life. My granny had a prayer for everything from the moment she got up in the morning to her going to sleep at night. She had a connection with nature and like most people in rural Ireland at the time they would see the value in each blade of grass and leaf on a tree. They nurtured nature and were kind to the land on which they lived. If they grew vegetables or crops on the land, they nourished the soil with compost or manure and dug it in to get it ready for the following year. At evening when she turned on the light she would say, *"God give us the light and glory of heaven, Amen"*. If there was a storm or inclement weather she would say, *"O Lord, be between us and harm and protect us from the harm of the world."*

My grandparents lived in a cottage with a big kitchen immediately inside the front door.

The room was dominated by a big open hearth fireplace above which was an oak mantle. This was covered in a piece of oilcloth and on each end of the mantelpiece was a white china dog with a gold chain hanging from his collar and a gold snout. A picture of the Sacred Heart hung above the fireplace and red oil light burned below the picture. The fire was always lit in the fireplace, even in the summertime. Granny made bread daily and did all her cooking on the fire. In rural Ireland, it was important to keep the fire burning at all times and it was considered very bad luck to let it out. Each night the embers would be raked through, a sod or two of black turf would be put on top of them and all would be completely covered in ashes. There was a prayer said while raking the fire.

*"I save this fire, as noble Christ saves;  
Mary on the top of the house and  
Brigid in its centre;  
the eight strongest angels in  
Heaven preserving this house  
and keeping its people safe.  
Amen"*

In the morning the ashes would be gently raked through and a couple of sods of turf would be added to the embers; slowly the fire would light and soon be hot enough for the big old black kettle to boil and make the morning mug of tea.

The Celts were animists: they believed that all aspects of the natural world contained spirits, divine entities with which humans could establish a rapport. The Celts said prayers to their Gods to ward off evil and dark forces and to protect them from the forces of evil. When Christianity came to Ireland the ancient traditions of the pre-Christian religion were respected and in many cases adapted by the growing church. The Catholic faith grew up in communities around the many monasteries

throughout the country. Celtic artistry and motifs were included in the illuminated manuscripts, like the Book of Kells, and in the stone crosses and church buildings still dotted throughout the country. The monks who wrote the manuscripts had a respect for the earlier traditions and it was they who wrote down the stories and tales from early Ireland which up until then were only in oral form. Christianity in a way adapted itself to the Irish people and because of this the transition from their Celtic pagan beliefs to the belief in the one God was not awfully difficult for them.

Modern day life is hectic and chaotic, and people are looking for something deeper and more meaningful in life. Many are practicing meditation and yoga to find their inner being; others are exploring Celtic spirituality and mindfulness. Really what they are looking for is simplicity, a freedom from the complexity and intricacy of modern life. They search for the ability to be able to go into a space within, where they will find peace and tranquillity for even a short space of time. I think my granny and those of that era had it all solved in their simple lives full of hens and vegetables and ordinary everyday tasks.



Bernie Martin, ICPO  
Maynooth

## Meet the Trustees..

Tony grew up on Dublin's Northside and studied civil engineering at UCD before making a career change to become an accountant at KMPG. One of his specialisms was in aircraft leasing, through which he happened to meet Tony Ryan who founded an airline but one which almost went out of business! He also met at the firm Michael O'Leary who transformed the fortunes of said airline!

Tony still lives in Dublin and he is married with two daughters, a son, and three grandsons. Of his discovering the Irish Chaplaincy, he explained that like a lot of things in life it's the people you meet. Tony goes back a long way with John Walsh who is a previous Chair and who invited Tony to join at a time when the IC Board was being revitalised and additional skill-sets were being

sought. Some of the expertise Tony has been able to bring are in the areas of financial and legal, and corporate governance. Regarding the latter he is especially passionate that any charity raising public funds is accountable for the use of those funds and has to ensure that they are being well used in the service of those in need.

Tony is now the longest-serving trustee at five years and he has enjoyed the Board meetings and has loved the interactions. He particularly valued the strategy days he attended. For him it personalised the information that is presented at Board meetings. He found it great to meet the staff team and he was moved by the incredible effort and commitment of everyone and by the interest shown in the people that are being served by the charity.

Viewing the organisation and its environment today, Tony sees the need for the services we offer

growing, but so too the complexity of the work. Finances will always be a challenge as we seek to maintain the level and the quality and the depth of the service and perhaps also expand in some areas. The need for good people on the ground, a body of volunteers, and a Board with a range of disciplines will be ongoing.

Thank you Tony!



Tony Walsh, Trustee

## Quote from Prison

"It's people like you that give hope to those who have none." HMP Wandsworth

## Thank You for Your Support

Irish Chaplaincy receives no statutory funding for the services it provides to some of the most vulnerable and excluded Irish people in Britain.

We are grateful to those listed for their generous financial help, and to all who support our work.

Irish Government DFAT  
Emigrant Support Programme

Sisters of Mercy Assumption Sisters

The Boyle Family Garfield Weston

Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants

Ireland Funds GB Awards for All

Wexford Parish

City Bridge Trust

Construction Workers Benevolent Fund

Little Company of Mary

Tudor Trust HMPPS

Irish Youth Foundation

Cardinal's Appeal

Presentation Sisters CCLA

McGrath Charitable Trust

Merchant Taylors Platt Reilly

Campbell Securities Morrisroe

Friend of the Forgotten Irish

CICA London

Caritas St John Southworth Fund

University of Limerick Chaplaincy

Carraroe Parish Society of the Holy Child Jesus Sisters of the Holy Cross

Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood St Cecilia's Abbey



## St Brigid and the Beer

There are always new stories coming to light about St Brigid and this year I especially enjoyed the one about the beer!

I heard again on Lá Fhéile Bríde some of the more familiar tales. How she asked her father, a pagan chieftain of Leinster, to give her land in Kildare on which to build a convent. And how he replied that he would give her as much land as her cloak could cover, upon which her cloak spread out to cover acres of land. On another occasion, she gave her father's precious sword to a poor man so that he could barter it for food to feed his family.

It was on the land covered by her cloak that Brigid founded not just a convent but a double monastery, one for women the other for men, and ruled over both as Abbess. And she took her full share of the manual work of the monastery. She milked the cows, shepherded the sheep, helped with the harvest, and made large quantities of butter which she would give to the poor. She was also an expert brewer of ale and legend has it that when she working in a leper

colony she was horrified to discover that they had run out of beer.

In those days, beer was much weaker and was drunk throughout the day by children and adults alike since it was both safe from contamination (unlike water, the drinking of which could be fatal) and nutritious. Therefore, running out of beer was serious indeed. Brigid called upon a little divine intervention and succeeded in turning the bathwater used by the lepers into beer. And it wasn't just any old beer, it was a truly brilliant ale. It is said that when a group of priests was visiting the leper colony, Brigid turned the dirty bathwater into beer for them too. And another time, she ensured that a sole barrel of beer was enough to supply eighteen churches from Holy Thursday till the end of Easter.

There are parallels with this in the gospels. According to St John, the first miracle of Jesus was not the giving of sight to a blind person or the curing of a leper, important as these later miracles were. Rather it was the turning of water into wine at a wedding feast. And it wasn't just a little bit of wine; it was six enormous containers, far more than was needed. And it wasn't just any old cheap plonk; it

was the very best.

We all have perhaps our ideas of what heaven is like. One of my favourite images from the bible is that of the wedding banquet. For one of the learning-disabled men at L'Arche, whose mum had died, heaven was, "Me...and mum... down the pub." It seems that Brigid's picture of heaven was not so different, if we go by a 10<sup>th</sup> century prayer-poem which begins:

*I would wish a great lake of ale for the King of Kings;  
I would wish the family of heaven to be drinking it throughout life and time.*

From this year, Brigid has her own public holiday in Ireland, the first woman to be awarded this honour; and quite right too. Sláinte to her!

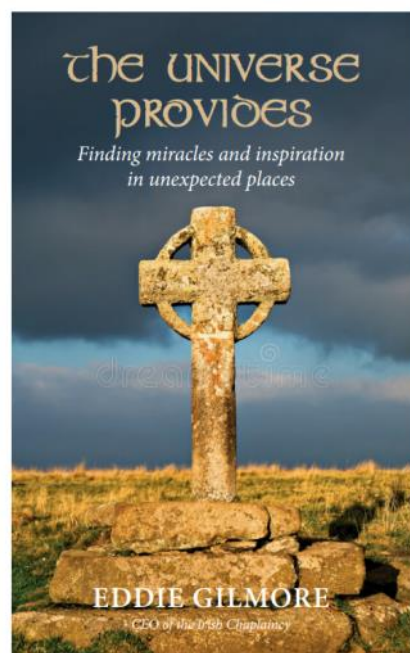


Eddie Gilmore, CEO

## COMING in APRIL 2023...

*The Universe Provides* collects stories of hope, miracles and uplifting personal encounters from Eddie Gilmore's travels around a global community rediscovering itself following the isolations of the coronavirus pandemic.

Following the course of a calendar year, gently guided by the waymarkers of the natural and liturgical seasons, Eddie records countless moments of friendship, kindness and connection, often accompanied by laughter, tears and music. Some of his encounters are planned, through his ministry as CEO for the Irish Chaplaincy;



other moments, perhaps the most fulfilling, arrive unexpectedly – gifts from the universe, which truly provides when we open our hearts.

The book is endorsed by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, who writes: '*Eddie shows us how important it is to have hope in our lives and to be connected with each other and the world in which we live. In this way, we can glimpse the miracles and opportunities that are in our midst and use them for the benefit of all – the universe does indeed provide!*'

Order direct from the publisher, DLT or from any bookshop.

# I want to support the ongoing work of the Irish Chaplaincy...

I would like to find out more about:

- Becoming a Cairde / Friend with the Irish Chaplaincy and giving regularly
- Volunteering opportunities
- I'm giving a donation & enclose a cheque for £\_\_\_\_\_ (payable to Irish Chaplaincy)
- Remembering Irish Chaplaincy in my will
- Please send me your newsletter and updates

You can also donate to Irish Chaplaincy online: [www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk)

Please detach and send this page to: Irish Chaplaincy, PO Box 75693 London NW1W 7ZT

## Contact Details

Title \_\_\_\_\_ First name \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_



*May good luck be  
with you wherever  
you go*

*And your bless-  
ings outnumber  
the shamrocks  
that grow*

## Gift Aid Declaration

Please tick to confirm: Yes, I want to Gift Aid this donation and any donations I make in the future or have made in the last 4 years to Irish Chaplaincy. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/ or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

## Quote from a Senior

"It's wonderful what you do in supporting elderly Irish people in London. You are like family for them. I really appreciate your calls and outreach. It means so much." Linda

## Quote from a care home (after our St Pat's Day concert)

"We all enjoyed it very much, its so wonderful to see the residents come alive, even Tom-sing along. Thanks so much. God bless." Sr. Pat

## SAINT BRIGID

Her habit is  
a celtic-woven costume.  
Her prayer beads are  
snow drops and daffodils.

Her abbey is  
a forest grove of oak,  
where the wind heralds a new  
springtime of whispering hope.

Her bread is  
shared with a gospel service.  
Her heart becomes a full basket  
of scraps from broken lives.

Her generosity is the  
giving away of her father's sword,  
to befriend and welcome  
the least, the last and the lost.

Her altar is clothed with  
the tattered presence of the poor.  
They are the invited guests who  
share the bread of changeless love.

Her soul is holy ground.  
All who were once forgotten,  
are called, named and welcomed.  
They chant: *Here comes everybody!*

Her faith is a currach  
setting sail in a versatile vessel,  
through stormy waters,  
to the shores of rest and renewal.

Her crozier is a beam of  
light that scatters all darkness.  
Her mitre is woven with the colours  
of compassion and healing.

Her signature smile is one  
of God's care and caress.  
She is the Shepherdess of a  
Love that knows no end.

Dear Soul-friend of Kildare,  
Saint, Abbess, Founder,  
Presence and Promise.  
You are an Anamchara to us all.

John Cullen

## EVENTS All welcome

Walk with Hope in London May 17th . Contact: [pat.gaffney@irishchaplaincy.org.uk](mailto:pat.gaffney@irishchaplaincy.org.uk)

Emigrants Walk in Mayo July 8th. Contact: [eddie.gilmore@irishchaplaincy.org.uk](mailto:eddie.gilmore@irishchaplaincy.org.uk)

Concert at St James's Piccadilly September 16th 5.30pm. Contact: [declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk](mailto:declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk)



Patron:  
President Michael D. Higgins  
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