

IRISH CHAPLAINCY

1957-2017

Newsletter

Winter 2017

Irish Chaplaincy Celebrates 60th Anniversary

Bishop John Kirby from Clonfert Diocese in Ireland was the main celebrant at a mass in September at Quex Road, Kilburn to mark the 60th anniversary of the Irish Chaplaincy. Bishop Paul Mc Aleenan of Westminster Diocese was also in attendance. It was particularly fitting to have Bishop John with us as he chairs the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants, and it was the Irish Bishops whose decision in 1957 to send 9 priests to Britain to walk alongside the many Irish people coming over that marked the beginning of the Chaplaincy.



Bishop John Kirby with Eddie Gilmore

Bishop John spoke in his sermon about the history of the Irish Chaplaincy, and added: "Without any doubt, the care of migrants is one of the major problems to be faced by governments of the developed economies. It is also a major challenge for the Church and for all of us as individuals as we remember the parable of the Last Judgement in St Matthew's Gospel: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' or 'I was a stranger and you did not welcome me' as the case may be. (Mt 25:35,41). If we take the gospel seriously, the care of migrants has to place high on all our plans". He concluded by saying: "I congratulate the Irish Chaplaincy on its Diamond Jubilee and I give thanks for its work over a period of 60 years."



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New Irish Ambassador Visits the Chaplaincy

We were delighted to receive a visit in October from the new Irish Ambassador Adrian O'Neill, who was accompanied by Ruaidhri Dowling and Noleen Curran from the Embassy. Ambassador O'Neill stayed for over an hour and was interested to hear about the work of the Chaplaincy and about our plans for development and expansion in each of our project areas. He also congratulated the Chaplaincy on 60 years of service to the Irish in Britain.



Ambassador O'Neill with Chaplaincy members



Registered Charity No.: 1160365

...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.

Irish Chaplaincy at Wormwood Scrubs

As part of Traveller History Month in June, the Irish Chaplaincy organized an event at Wormwood Scrubs prison in London for Irish Travellers. After a competition (with cash prizes on offer for the lucky winners) I sang a few old Irish songs and was spontaneously and ably joined on guitar by one of the men who informed me that he'd worked as a session musician. There was a great atmosphere with lots of friendly banter, and this continued during the shared meal that followed. I was touched when one of the guys said to me "it's things like this that help to keep my spirits up". We promised to be back for another event near to Christmas, to which one character shouted out "well I won't be here, please God, because I'm due for release in November"!

Somebody asked me during the meal, "How do you sing Irish songs like that when you've got an English accent?" I explained that it's what I'd grown up with. My parents were two of the many thousands of Irish people who came to England in the post-war



years in search of work, and it was to minister to the needs of this wave of emigrants that the Irish Chaplaincy was founded in 1957.



Inspired by the words of Jesus "I was a stranger and you took me into your home; I was sick, and you cared for me; I was in prison, and you visited me", we will continue to walk alongside the people we meet at Wormwood Scrubs and elsewhere and with other Irish people most on the margins.

And true to our word we will be back at the Scrubs for another event at the end of November. There will be more music, this time from Hackney Folk who did a great set of traditional Irish music at our July concert; there will be a performance from Irish Theatre of the specially-commissioned 2-person play, 'Irish Chaplaincy- 60 Years on'; and we will once again finish with a meal. As Jesus showed time and again in the gospel stories, to share food with somebody is to share in an intimate and profound way something of our shared humanity. I'm sure this will be another uplifting event for everybody.

Eddie Gilmore

Bill's Story

When I first started working for the ICPO (Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas) back in early 2007, I quickly became aware of how important it was for clients to keep contact with their families. A high number of ICPO clients do not receive family visits as visiting a prison in England and Wales from overseas can be extremely difficult. Most are remote and very hard to reach, and it can be a daunting experience to say the least especially with children in tow. ICPO would sometimes send a small grant for phone credit; a telephone call to family being the next best thing to a visit.

I was soon introduced to Sarah, a young lady of 15 whose father was serving a lengthy sentence of 20 years. Sarah was being cared for by the local authority as she had no other family. Her dad Bill, as you can imagine, was very concerned for Sarah, but as she was only 15 she was unable to visit her dad without an adult. Bill could handle anything prison life could throw at him but not being able to see Sarah was very distressing for him. Although they had regular contact by phone, Bill needed to see his daughter and this was the same for Sarah; all she wanted was to see her dad.

After a discussion with Fr Gerry and Breda, it was agreed that my-

self and Breda would escort Sarah on a social visit. I remember how excited and grateful Bill was, he couldn't wait to get back to his cell and get the visiting order posted. This was the start of many visits to see Bill with his daughter and one of the best parts of my job. I know that being able to see Sarah, Bill was able to progress through his sentence and is now in an open prison and looking forward to his release.

I have not needed to escort Sarah for a visit for some years now as she has her own family and still visits her dad regularly with the 3 grandchildren. Due to ICPO Bill was able to keep up contact and have a relationship with his daughter, and both are now looking forward to the future knowing they have each other for support.

(NB Names have been changed)



Liz Power, ICPO Caseworker

Review of the Seniors' Project

"It is a lifeline for the large Irish community both in Camden and across London"

(Sir Kier Starmer, MP after a visit to the Irish Chaplaincy and Seniors')



"I would have gone downhill without the Chaplaincy. Now I'm enjoying life again and getting out"

(Client interview, 2017)

Thanks to a grant from a funder, a thorough review of the Irish Chaplaincy Seniors' Project, ICSP took place in June and July 2017. A consultant, Sharon Tuppenny interviewed many stakeholders, chief amongst them being the Seniors themselves, and she concluded: *'There is... a pressing need, both in the present and the foreseeable future, amongst frail isolated elderly Irish people. The ICSP would be well placed to address*

these needs if additional resources were in place.'

Fr. Michael O'Connor, parish priest of Sacred Heart R.C. Church, Kilburn, noted that:

"The Irish Chaplaincy offers a unique service supporting isolated older Irish, as they are aware of the particular spiritual needs of older Irish, which can be essential in supporting their clients improve their mental health."

Andy Slaughter, MP for Hammersmith says:

"I have worked closely with the Irish Chaplaincy and have always been impressed with the quality of the service and the level of care given to people who are often extremely vulnerable. The help they give not only includes emotional support, but also practical help and advocacy for people who are often going through difficult periods in their lives."

What comes across especially strongly in the report is the voices of the Seniors' themselves and their families:

"They always call every week, then they chase up others who have forgotten me. I can't keep calling social services; it makes me ill".

"It's like a bit of home every week. I see other people but none of them are Irish; they don't understand".

"You work miracles. Without you I don't know where I'd be. I would be on the streets in tears."

"I wish everyone could have a Chaplaincy caseworker- they manage to get services in place for their clients like no one I have ever worked with".

"Things don't happen without the ICSP calling, pushing, advocating."

"It is staggering the progress that has been made with the case since the Chaplaincy got involved. I could cry."

"I would love to see someone...but the phone call is a lifeline".

"People want to be treated holistically, in their totality, and this includes their mental health and spiritual needs".

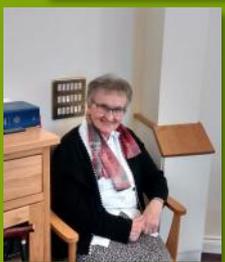
"ICSP connect with Irish elders in a way we (other provider) might not".



"Your visits are a lifeline for me"- James Connolly, seen here with Pat Delaney who visits him regularly.

In the light of the report we have made several applications for funding so that we can recruit an additional staff member for ICSP plus more volunteers. The presence of an extra staff member would also free up Paul, the ICSP Manager to develop our partnership working in a variety of areas such as dementia care, end-of-life care, hospital discharge and the interplay between spirituality, dementia and mental health.

Away Day at Clacton



Thanks to our lovely Moira, and to Kathleen and all the other wonderful sisters that we met and for the heart-warming hospitality. Go raibh maith agaibh go leir.

A Volunteer's Reflections

By Sister Mary Richardson



How do I find words to describe a rather emotional journey into the vulnerability, pain and plight, pride and resilience of our elderly Irish, often the unsung heroes or the broken survivors. I have plenty of time for reflections as I travel across the whole of London to visit the elderly in their homes, hospitals, and care homes.

I am blessed with opportunities to observe the empathy and kindness, the helpful hands, the listening ears, the reassuring promises provided by the staff team who often accompany me to these various outreaches.

Training for volunteers is provided by the Chaplaincy staff and in my case I was lucky to avail of intensive IT client database training and a familiarisation of the London Transport network, and the various support and housing agencies.

I can merely give a bird's eye view of my experience of the often unknown work of

the Irish Chaplaincy. Many people contact them when all other doors are closed or the cold winds of homelessness drive them to seek refuge. I experienced the joys and gratitude of a paralysed man when we delivered a battery for his talking watch, his only treasure to break the monotony of a long day. I was present when a frightened dependant lady sent a request to accompany her to the hospital surgery for 7 am. Office hours do not apply when need demands!

I visited a proud frail 85 year old man who was distraught by the arrival of an exorbitant BT bill. "I never owed anyone in my life, what will I do"? Immediately a kind word and a long phone call to BT from Stafford solved the problem and his peace of mind was restored. These simple acts of kindness are huge interventions for an elderly person.

Our clients are from all parts of Ireland, many lonely, disconnected from families at home and with physical and mental health issues. Their desire to be buried in Ireland is a dream for many and here the Chaplaincy have assisted in locating relatives, family graves, and have provided legal help for them to draw up wills. Ongoing support through visits, phone calls, newsletters, papers and Ireland's Own are greatly appreciated.

These are a people with great pride and their wish to remain independent despite illness is all too common. I spoke to a West of Ireland man pushing his wheelchair. "How are you?" I asked observing the absence of his legs. "Sure I'm grand, it's great to be able to get outside for fresh air. If there was a motor on this chair I'd be free to do a little shopping for myself," he casually remarked. On occasions I have visited the elderly who feel isolated and rejected, weary of waiting for appropriate

accommodation to meet their various disabilities. "Nobody listens to you when you are old", is a common remark.

A man threatened with eviction has waited 15 months for intervention from social workers and Housing officials. Many others receive letters to their requests saying their case "is closed". The Chaplaincy has intervened in many similar cases providing a voice for the voiceless and a home for those weary of waiting.

What a difference the Irish Chaplaincy, a small voluntary agency is making to the lives of so many here in London. If I were a poet perhaps I may describe it as "A Safe Haven" in the storms of life where staff and volunteers provide:

A human touch, a listening ear,

A sympathetic heart,

An open non judgemental mind,

A ray of hope, a hand of friendship,

Independence in their frailty,

Belonging in their isolation,

Healing in their pain,

A Friend in Need

As a volunteer I feel privileged to be able to dedicate a little time to these wonderful people who emigrated from Ireland. They shared the little they had in order to help rear and educate their siblings back home. The isolation and loneliness of emigration took its toll on others.

I pay tribute to the hard working staff of the Irish Chaplaincy and their volunteers who now provide a lifeline to these people in the frailty of their declining years.

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

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

Contact Declan Ganly: declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk



Thoughts in Season

The poet, T.S. Eliot once said that April was the cruellest month. I don't know what he had against April, but surely the cold dark winter months of November, December and January have a better claim. Indeed, I sometimes think that the only good thing about November is that my birthday falls then!

We are approaching the end of one year and the beginning of another. Advent starts the Church year a month earlier. It's a season for reflecting on endings and beginnings. The feasts of All Saints and All Souls which we celebrate at the beginning of November, are a reminder that our time on earth is limited – that we have here, as Scripture tells us, no lasting city but seek the one that is to come. It's a time for reflecting on our mortality – not in any morbid way but in a way that helps us make sense of the here and now and the hereafter.

The two feasts have so much in common that they might more usefully be taken as one. They celebrate the struggle of ordinary people like ourselves and what God can do for us when we turn to Him. To understand this better, we have to peel back crusted layers on perceptions about holiness that are unreal. Indeed, a closer look at some of the great saints gives us grounds for hope.

Augustine, for example, led a reckless and dissolute youth and Francis ran away from a loving and wealthy family. Paul persecuted the early Church and Therese feared that God had abandoned her. Here we see frail humanity being transformed by God. Like stained-glass windows, the light of God's love shines through unusual and unlikely people.

I used to think that holiness was only for a select few. I now believe that it is something real and solid and made of flesh and blood. The real test of holiness is a deep awareness of one's own weakness. The brighter the light, the more evident are the cracks and splinters. Holiness is not what we achieve but rather what God does to us when we let him deal with us.

And it has no favourite place or climate: we blossom where we are. And it has a human face. It walks the bedroom at night with a sick child. It is in the home with a family trying to make ends meet and the father out of work. It sits by a hospital bed. It is in the kindness and support of friends during a bereavement. It is tested in the struggle to be honest, just and forgiving.

That's why All Saints and All Souls are the right feasts for the winter season. They remind us that the people we remember during this season have gone home to God, or been "Called back" as the poet Emily Dickinson put it. And they tell us powerfully that our deceased loved ones are saints now because they were once sinners like us who just refused to give up trying to be good.



Gerry McFlynn, Manager of ICPO/ Prison Outreach

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 the following for their generous financial help:

Irish Government DFAT Emigrant Support Programme
Irish Catholic Bishops Conference Council for Emigrants
Ireland Funds, Great Britain
Sisters of Mercy
Irish Youth Foundation
Construction Workers Benevolent Fund
Benevolent Society of St Patrick
Big Lottery Awards for All

We also wish to express our gratitude to our funders who wish to remain anonymous, and to all who support the work of the Irish Chaplaincy.

Messages from Prison

"Breda, I can't ever thank you and your team enough for all the help over the years. Without your help and support myself and many other prisoners would indeed be lost. Life in prison can become very lonely when you don't hear from anyone on the outside.. Say hello to your sister; without you and her myself and many others would be lost and forgotten in prison."

(From a letter written this year from a prisoner in HMP ISIS)

"This is our chance to prove we are not what people often think we are and we can do positive things. We have to hold on to this group for that."

(participant in recent Traveller Forum in HMP Chelmsford)

A Haptic Cwtch

I am in awe of the internet and mobile technology and the evolution of smart phones and smart devices which have become the norm in modern day life. With the growth of social media, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Skype to name but a few, it is possible to be in almost permanent contact with a member of your family or a friend who is living thousands of miles away. Social media has been a blessing for families of those who have emigrated but there is also a downside. One Irish Mammy said, that while she was



regularly able to see her grandchildren on the PC through the internet, "you can't hug Skype". Social media has allowed people to be close to loved ones at difficult times and now, because of webcams in churches, you can attend a funeral in many parts of Ireland from as far away as Sydney or Boston.

I follow some crochet pages on Facebook and during one of the discussions a woman spoke of her heartache of being away from Ireland. She was an Irish lady who had emigrated to Canada in her early 20's, married there and settled down and had a family. She had reared her children and now had several grandchildren. She has now come to a point in her life where

her family were up and gone and didn't really need her anymore, leaving her sad and bitter. Even though she had been away from Ireland for 40 years she regretted ever having left. She had little hope of returning at this stage because things had changed so much in Ireland and in any case she wanted to be near her grandchildren in Canada. She felt she belonged nowhere. My heart went out to her and later I tried to reconnect with her but I was unable to do so. I have thought of her often and all the thousands who are probably in the same boat as her stuck between two countries, between two lives. My eldest sister is in a similar situation; she moved to Scotland to work, met her husband and got married, reared a family and now has grandchildren. Even though Scotland is not too far away there is an ocean dividing us and half of her heart is in Ireland and the other half is in Scotland.

There is a word I love which is used in Wales it is called a Cwtch pronounced Kutch. A Cwtch does not have a literal English translation but in Welsh it is a snuggle, cuddle or hug which can bring you back to the safety and comfort of your childhood. This links into its other definition, a place to safely store things, which is really the same thing when you think about it. When my sister arrives at Dublin airport and comes through those arrival gates we share the mother and father of a Cwtch which lasts about five minutes. While she loves to be back home and enjoys spending time with us, after a few days she is missing her own family

and needs to get back to them. She is torn between two lives.

Technology is moving at a rapid and somewhat frightening pace. When I get into my car after work it can tell me almost to the minute what time I should expect to arrive home. If I head west it reconfigures and tells me what time I will arrive in Sligo, taking into account the traffic and the odd auld tractor plodding along in the middle of the road at 40km an hour. One of the more recent technologies is Haptic technology which simulates the sense of touch and is used in medical and flight simulators and has been used in gaming for some time. In Japan teams of scientists are working on a harness that can simulate a real hug. It is still in the development stage but looks promising. I wonder what the Irish Mammy will make of that.



Bernie Martin, ICPO Maynooth

Pilgrimage Day



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

Please detach and send this page to: Irish Chaplaincy, 52 Camden Square, London NW1 9XB

Contact Details

Title _____ First name _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

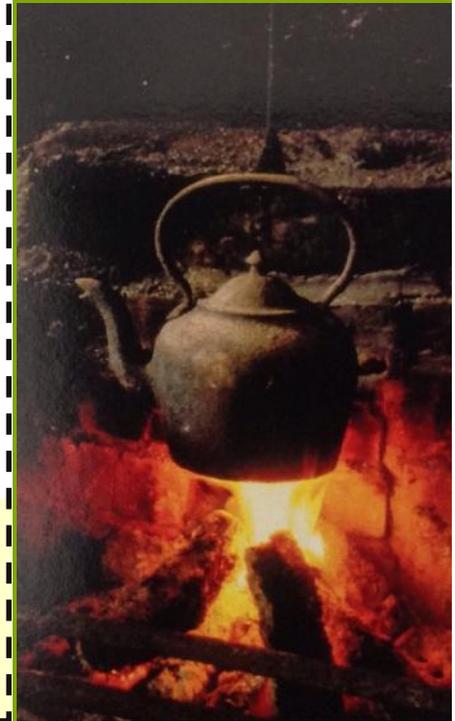
Gift Aid Declaration

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. I understand that Irish Chaplaincy can reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Irish Blessing

May the blessing of
light be on you
Light without and
light within.

May the blessed
sunlight shine on you
And warm your
heart till it glows
Like a great peat fire.



His Hardest Fight

He's sitting in the prison van
he's not long left the dock,
eleven years his sentence
his body's still in shock.
When he's passing through reception
he hears the prison calls,
and he fears, because he cannot
read or write
that he'll have no voice at all.
One thought is upmost on his mind
whilst sitting in that cell,
that if he does not learn to read and write
his sentence will be hell.

He knows if he's to make it
this will be his hardest fight,
and he knows his life will be richer
when he learns to read and write.
Now three long years have come to pass
and he's made it out that jail,
and all that hard work was worth it
for he's finally reading mail.
So you can spend your time in darkness
and you may never see the light,
or you can spend your time in learning
and know you spent your time just right.

When this man entered HMP Onley 8 years ago he was unable to read or write. He managed to learn, then became a Shannon Trust mentor, helping other prisoners learn to read and write, and now he writes poetry...

60th Anniversary Concert

Our Lady Help of Christians, Kentish Town was the venue in July for a fantastic and uplifting evening of entertainment in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Irish Chaplaincy. Performances included music from Hackney Folk, singing by the Irish Pensioners Choir, poetry recitals from Gerry McFlynn and Gerry Mulumby, a short acoustic set from Eddie Gilmore, and the premier by Irish Theatre of a 20 minute piece 'Irish Chaplaincy- 60 years on'. A great time was had by all.



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President Michael D. Higgins
Registered Charity No.: 1160365

Visit our website :
www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk



New Website

In October we celebrated the official launch of our wonderful new website. We are grateful to Rashmi Ray who worked with us in such a friendly, enthusiastic, collaborative and creative way to develop the website. And we are grateful to the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants whose generous financial support made this work possible. Come to visit...



Irish Chaplaincy...Looking Ahead with Hope