Welcome
Welcome to our spring and St Patrick’s Day newsletter.
You will find some of the highlights, remembering and looking forward, some stories from volunteers and staff, inspiration and ideas to motivate us to keep going and inspiring us to reach out to others.

Spring is a time of getting up and showing our new brightest colours as the grey and cold of winter is left behind. Of course for the Irish all around the world it is a time for remembering and giving thanks for our heritage in our celebrations of St. Bridget and St. Patrick.

An exciting part of our work at the moment is mapping out how we see the challenges and successes of our work with elderly Irish people around London. We want to be able to tell the world of the real challenges people face and overcome. Often we need support, company and friendship as we go through the difficult times we experience. May St Bridgid and St. Patrick’s bring some brightness to us all. Happy Saint Patricks Day. Lá Fheile Padraig, from us all at the Irish Chaplaincy.

Celebrating St. Bridgid
St Bridgid was well and truly celebrated by us this year at a wonderful event supported by well over a hundred people in St. James’ Church Piccadilly. We really hope to make this an annual event and the audience and participants had only great praise and admiration for the venue and songs, music, dance and poetry. Great performances especially from Irish Pensioners Choir tribute to #saintbrigid and Feith on Choil school of traditional music.

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.
Remembering our past and considering our future in a changing world

As we approach St Patrick’s Day we look back to years of celebrations in many different ways. Known as the Scattering, the Irish diaspora is one of the largest in world history: 80 million worldwide are said to be of Irish descent – amazing for such a small island as Ireland.

Irish emigration worldwide is well documented but the first-recorded public celebration was in New York in 1762 with Irish exiles remembering their homeland and patron saint. One memory of mine is Aer Lingus sending out their air hostesses (women only then!) travelling to the U.S. parades, all smiling but shivering in their uniforms, when rivers were dyed green and everyone claimed a link to Ireland.

Closer to my own history 4 out of 5 people born in the 1930s emigrated – London being the preferred destination. Life was hard; this group have been called the ‘disaffected Irish’; they have claims on rebuilding London after the destruction of WW2, public transport system, and many, many more areas. We have such a close connection, in that so much of our history happened in London.

Great writers, great names of the Irish National cause, all spent a significant amount of time here enacting some of the most pivotal moments in Irish political history.

Acceptance

We’re an action-oriented society, but we also think a lot. My experience is that feelings often get left out – it’s easier to resolve things logically rather than emotionally. However, there’s potential value to reconsider our pasts because our experiences then are what have made us the people we are today. It’s important to accept where we are now in the moment.

The current generation of Irish immigrants, especially those who arrived since the downturn of 2009 are seen differently. Educated and skilled they can take advantage of the opportunities that London offers the clever and ambitious. They may not stand out as those of us who came in the 60s.

A fantastic play I saw in 2015 called ‘My English Tongue, My Irish Heart’ left a great impression on me ever since. What it felt like to be Irish in Britain and how emigration changes the lives of modern day people. We are still arriving here from Ireland with different dilemmas and challenges that confront the diasporic Irish which provide a focal point for comparing past experiences of emigration with more recent ones. Emigration changes our lives in a positive way and it’s learning to be part of the great diversity of people we have here in London which has so much to offer. This positive outlook seems to be felt by the new Irish who have come to settle and start up a home.

Lifestyles / Social Isolation

We, as Seniors, may suffer Social isolation – what we remember when we settled here is that Neighbours came to introduce themselves and clung together, like for like. These days we can be weirdly lonely and need to make that huge effort to reach out to people. We can look after each other and do what we can to help other people. This is not an Irish problem – it’s felt by everyone. Who can we say hello to immediately we leave our front door? Do you talk to the person who gives you coffee? …you meet someone walking a dog, postman passing by. Eye contact is one of the most invaluable communications we have – gentle eyes connecting shows acceptance of others’ point of view. If we reach to each other we get back a hundredfold.

Start by being proactive; volunteering in any area, be it in a hospital or charity shop is much appreciated. Visit the local library and ask about ‘what’s on locally’ – you can find everything there from weekly walks, lunches, to local classes. We get and give support when we’re with an activity group; at the same time we’re mentally happy doing something in which we’re interested. We have a sense of Place.

Back to London and St Patrick’s celebrations which will be a 3 day festival in London. There will be a carnival atmosphere with floats, dancers and bands ending with entertainment from the stage in Trafalgar Square. Happy times to all.

Anne Harding, Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Volunteer
St Patrick and St Bridgid

The response to the psalm on St Patrick’s Day invites us “go out to the whole world, proclaim the good news”. We might not be able to go to all the world but in St Patrick and St Brigid we honour two people who went out throughout the world in which they inhabited.

For different reasons people, especially Irish people and people connected to Ireland, honour these two great people, great saints in fact. And they do so possibly for different reasons.

I imagine we all have our favourite stories and legends about Patrick and Brigid but I reckon that some of the themes of their lives we can all identify with - their outreach to the poor, neglected, isolated, the lonely, the marginalized, to people who were discriminated against. We think also of their care and compassion, their concern for the world of nature, of the beauty of God’s creation that surrounds us, their healing presence, their gentleness and kindness. Possibly these are the values that we can reflect on as we go forth in the world in which we live.

We can ask ourselves, ‘how do I proclaim the good news in the world in which I live?’ Following the example of Patrick and Brigid we can reflect on how we live our lives in union with the people we meet. We might consider being a volunteer in the work of the Irish Chaplaincy.

If you would like to volunteer feel free to contact us. If you have reached the wisdom of years and can no longer leave your home you can feel very much part of the work of the Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Project by remembering us and our work in your thoughts and prayers. In this way we are connected to each other.

I think that celebrating St Patrick and St Brigid can take on an added significance when we are out of Ireland. We also remember Irish people with whom we celebrated St Patrick’s Day and St Brigid’s Day with over the years and have sadly died. We give thanks for their friendship, their kindness and for helping us to rejoice in our Irishness. Críost liom, Críost romham, Críost i mo dhíadh, Críost istigh ionam (Christ with me Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me)- Lúireach Phádraig- Traditional Prayer of St Patrick.

Rory Mac Goilla Comhaill — Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Pastoral Outreach Worker
Croagh Patrick

As a native of Co. Mayo, there’s a great pride in the having what is considered the holiest mountain in Ireland right on our doorstep, standing as a most imposing force on the landscape.

Croagh Patrick overlooks Clew Bay and is 5 miles from Westport town. It rises to a height of 2,510 feet/765 m above sea level. On a clear day you can see Croagh Patrick from miles away, its near perfect conical shape soars majestically above the surrounding countryside.

Its summit is austere. A small chapel was built in 1905 by a crew of 12 who hauled sand and cement up the mountain by donkey. Also at the summit there is a rectangular bed of stones where St Patrick slept when he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in 441 AD. Legend has it that Croagh Patrick is the mountain from which St Patrick banished snakes from Ireland forever.

Gold was discovered on the mountain in the 1980’s, estimated to be enough to produce 700,000 tonnes of gold worth over 365m euros. However, due to local resistance by the Mayo Environmental Group, Mayo County Council decided not to allow mining.

Croagh Patrick is one of Ireland’s top tourist attractions with visitors coming from all over Ireland and across the world to climb to the peak. Normally it takes about two hours for the average person to reach the summit and one and a half hours to descend.

It is not an easy ascent, in fact the mountain is very difficult to climb as there is a small rivulet running down the hill making the surface very slippery and with piles of shale and loose rock progress is difficult. Once at the top and especially on a good day there’s little to beat the outlook from the summit. The Atlantic stretches to the horizon. The bay below is scattered with islands – called drumlins – left over from the last ice age. There are said to be 365 of them, one for every day of the year. John Lennon owned one once, wanting to start up a commune. But then the infamous rain and mist of the west of Ireland arrived and the Beatle and his entourage left!

Each year, ‘The Reek’ as it is colloquially known, attracts about 1 million pilgrims and on Reek Sunday, (the last Sunday in July) over 25,000 pilgrims climb the reek to honour the country’s patron saint, some climb in bare feet as an act of penance. This tradition of pilgrimage stretches back over 5,000 years from the stone age to the present day. It’s religious significance dates back to the time of the pagans, when people are thought to have gathered here to celebrate the beginning of the harvest season.

During the pilgrimage on 31st July 2005, a plaque commemorating its centenary was unveiled by the Archbishop of Tuam. It was decided in 2005 to open the church every day during the summer, rather than only on holy days and Mass is celebrated in the Church on Reek Sunday and on 15th August (the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven).

In 2015, for the first time, the annual pilgrimage was cancelled on safety
I want to support the ongoing work of the Irish Chaplaincy...

I would like to find out more about:

- Becoming a Cairede / 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.

Bernadette Hennigan, a native of Ballina Co. Mayo, Irish Chaplaincy Seniors volunteer

‘running’ down the mountain and told us he was off to climb Nephin! (another landmark mountain in Mayo). We met a few others climbing in their bare feet, this being an act of penance, they expressed no complaint or regret. As John said ‘I’m really in awe of those guys’!

We found the descent was as hard as the climb but eventually we made it back and both John and Anita had some lovely memories and pictures to take back to Boston and tell their friends.

It has been claimed that the sheer volume of visitors to Croagh Patrick has led to erosion and has made the mountain more dangerous for climbers. The paths leading to and from the mountain are being worn away and with rocks getting looser and looser the risk to climbers has increased; not surprisingly there are many incidents of injuries to climbers each year. Indeed erosion is changing the whole shape of the mountain. Everyone, the Church, the tourist authorities and Mayo County Council all agree that something has to be done to safeguard Croagh Patrick’s future. Exactly what is the big question. Perhaps only St. Patrick himself knows the answer!
Life Cyclers

My name is Martina Doherty. I am originally from Buncrana Co. Donegal and lived in London for 20 years before leaving last year on Easter Monday (April 2nd) to cycle to Auckland, New Zealand with my husband.

We are now almost half-way through our 2 year adventure and so far have visited 18 countries and 11 capital cities. We have covered more than 10,000 miles in 11 months, averaging about 45 miles a day - and have only had 1 puncture! Our biggest cycling day was in Romania in September when we covered 84 miles.

Among our many experiences we have visited Norwegian fjords, camped on beaches in Greece, seen tigers, bears and leopards in the wild, visited schools in India to talk to the children about our journey, visited tribal communities in central India and eaten amazing food throughout our entire journey.

Our reason for doing this at 47 years old (and my husband is 49) is that we wanted to travel at a speed that would let us see a different side of the world other than just tourist attractions. It also lets us interact with local people much easier than if we were travelling by car or public transport. Everywhere we have travelled we have been fortunate to meet the most incredible people who have just stopped to chat outside a supermarket, beeped their car horns at us to encourage us along or invited us into their homes as strangers and looked after us so well. The human interactions have definitely been among our highlights so far and it has given us plenty to think about in terms of how we live our lives and how we will interact with people in the future - family, friends, neighbours and strangers alike! It has also changed our unfounded negative perceptions of many countries and their people.

We are currently in central India and by St Patrick’s day will probably have reached Bangladesh, which will be a different experience to my normal St Patrick’s day I’m sure! I have an Irish flag on the back of my bike so maybe someone will recognise it!

From Bangladesh we will go back into Northern India, then Myanmar, Thailand and south-east Asia before flying to Australia and then New Zealand.

If you would like to follow our adventure you can read updates on www.thelifecyclers.com.

In the meantime, La Fheile Padraig to you all!  

Martina Doherty, Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Volunteer

Looking after our mental health

One in four people will experience mental ill health at some point in their lives, this is a stark reality and there is no doubt that as we get older, loneliness and isolation can feel a constant in our lives. Long winter nights, bad weather, ill health and/or poor mobility can prevent many people from leaving their homes and become the key elements to feelings of isolation and depression. As we grow old, we will have seen many of our close friends and family pass away and we may even find that we are the last surviving member of our generation or family, no doubt this brings with it a great sense of loss which can lead to bouts of anxiety and depression.

Yet, growing old brings with it the benefit of life experience – where we have learned through various life encounters how to cope and deal with a host of issues which life has thrown at us. However, nothing prepares us for old age itself. One of the greatest challenges as we reach old age is to keep a positive perspective to our lives,
especially when we find we cannot do things we use to do, we don't have the energy or mobility we used to have and people around us, especially the young do not appreciate our strife, we can become almost invisible. It is important, although hard as it may seem, to not let negative thoughts penetrate our minds and take over our thinking making us feel down, annoyed or even angry. When we have negative thoughts about friends, family, or acquaintances it is important not to give in to them, don’t dwell on them, as they have no real purpose in our lives and only make us feel bitter and angry. It is best to turn our minds to positive things so that we simply just let go of the negatives. You will find that you feel much better for doing so.

We are in control of most situations in our everyday life no matter what our circumstances. It is important therefore that we all have strategies to help us cope with whatever our situation or what life throws at us.

If you are housebound and cannot leave your home, try to plan your day and how you will spend it. If your day is centred around watching TV, listening to the radio or music, then plan what you will watch or listen to. If you can phone a relative or friend look forward to making that call and beforehand make a list of the things you want to talk about. Make an effort to keeping your conversations as positive as you can so that you both enjoy talking to each other. You will find that you can share experiences and laugh together, all of which will leave you feeling happier at the end of the call. Similarly, if you are expecting visitors to come to see you, look forward to their visit and hearing the news they bring – welcome them to your home and again try to be positive in your conversations. This will take you away, even for that short time, from the pain and suffering in your own life.

It is good to talk to others about how we feel, there is no doubt it can bring some comfort but be mindful that others too have their issues and are maybe looking to the time with you as their release from their own worries and strife, even for a short time. It is important that we balance the negatives in our lives with the positives and in that way we will get more from our relationships.

If you are able to leave your home try to involve yourself with activities that mean meeting others, for example getting involved in your local church or in voluntary work, if you can, these things can give you a sense of purpose and something to look forward to. It is up to each of us to make the effort and take steps to enhance and fulfil our lives, no matter how small they may be.

The University of the 3rd Age (U3A) is an organisation set up for people in their later years to come together and get involved in a range of activities such as art, book clubs, social events such as playing cards or board games, having a cup of tea and cake and outings etc. There will definitely be a U3A group in your area, contact your local library or search the internet to find information on the U3A group near you and don’t be afraid to sign up, there will be something of interest for you.

Here are a few useful quotes about life which are food for thought:

‘In the end it’s not the years in your life that count, it’s the life in your years’. Abraham Lincoln

‘Be happy in the moment, that’s enough. Each moment is all we need, not more’. Mother Teresa

‘Make the most of every moment, we are not evolving, we are not going anywhere’. David Bowie

Good mental health can be achieved by living each day as it comes and trying to enjoy every moment. Don’t make the mistake of comparing your situation or life to that of others, it will only bring you down and remember, they too have their own stresses, worries and issues. So whatever you see on the outside may not be the whole story. We shouldn’t expect too much of life and then we won’t be disappointed. But most importantly, try to be happy, whatever your circumstances.

Written by Bernadette Hennigan – A mental Health professional and a volunteer with the Senior Project at the Irish Chaplaincy in Camden
Safe Home Ireland is a Co. Mayo based not-for-profit national organisation. We were set up in 2000 to facilitate the desire for elderly Irish emigrants abroad to return home to live in their native area. Over the years, the organisation has evolved from simply providing a housing option for older Irish born emigrants. We now provide a range of other services including information and guidance to all emigrants abroad and outreach and advocacy support to those who return home regardless of age, circumstances or geographical relocation on return.

‘Moving Home’ is a prospect that many people reflect upon at some point throughout their time living abroad. While the process of returning to Ireland can be straightforward in some cases, particularly for people who have lived overseas for no more than a few years, others can face more challenging decisions when factors such as age, family circumstances, health condition, housing and income become factors to contemplate. The decision to ‘stay or go’ can then become more complex with multiple factors and people to consider.

To anyone considering returning or moving to Ireland i: ‘do your homework first’, plan your move well in advance, get as much information as possible and be prepared for the emotional challenges involved in returning home. This is particularly important if you have lived abroad for a long time or if you were not born in Ireland.

Safe Home Ireland provide a range of supports and services.

We offer an information and advocacy service to anyone (contemplating returning or moving to Ireland.

We assist qualifying older Irish born emigrants to return home, primarily to social housing schemes back in their native areas.

As part of our outreach work, where it is feasible we carry out home visits and Information clinics throughout the UK. We can meet with Safe Home housing applicants in their own homes, go through the application process in detail, answer any questions they may have and assess their situation.

We provide an outreach and advocacy service to people who have returned home (regardless of age, geographical location or circumstances) and who need assistance with general adaption and re-integration in Ireland. This could include assistance with paperwork involved in applying for services, accessing rights as well as sign-posting on to other relevant agencies that may be of assistance.

Finally, Safe Home Ireland acts as a link with home for emigrants who decide to remain on in their adopted countries. We do this primarily through our monthly Newsletter, which is disseminated widely as well as through the various social media platforms. We realise that ‘Coming Home’ is not for everyone but we know that staying connected with Ireland is particularly important for most emigrants.

If you or someone you know is thinking about returning or moving to Ireland you can also get in touch by email at info@safehomeireland.com; by phone +353 96 36036 or by post: Safe Home Ireland, St. Brendan’s Village, Mulranny, Westport, Co. Mayo. Also, check out our website www.safehomeireland.com and you can follow us on Facebook and Twitter

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