

IRISH CHAPLAINCY

FOUNDED IN 1957

Newsletter

Easter 2020

Irish Performers Mark St Brigid's Day

Ambassador Adrian and Mrs Aisling O'Neill, together with Bishop Paul McAleenan of Westminster, were guests of honour at a 'Celebration of Irish music, poetry and dancing, on the eve of St Brigid' at St James' Piccadilly, hosted by Irish Chaplaincy.

Forty-three members of the London Celtic Youth Orchestra took to the stage first and had the audience of several hundred clapping their hands and tapping their feet. Belfast born actor Anton Thompson McCormick sang the hauntingly beautiful 'Siúil a Rún', and one-time 'Whiskey Preachers' frontman Sean Ryan mixed voice and whistles in an entertaining Celtic rock set. The Irish Pensioners' Choir, accompanied by Billy Faughnan and Jaqueline Hynes, brought the first half to a close by singing the 'Mountains of Mourne'



with the audience enthusiastically singing along, whether from memory or from their phones!

Luckpenny Ceilí band opened the second half, and Megan Davis sang and danced. There were poetry recitals from Gerry McFlynn, Rory Mac Giolla Chomhaill, and Gerry Molumby, founder of Treskellion Theatre and also MC; plus a moving tribute to Mary Black



from Rev. Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James, and former professional soprano. Eddie Gilmore finished off a varied, uplifting and memorable evening with one of his own songs, 'Fare Ye Well'.



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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.

Alana Kent: Intern



I spent the first two and a half months of 2020 working as an intern for Irish Chaplaincy. I had no experience working for a charity, but I decided that this was the perfect opportunity for me to try something new, so I moved from New York to London. Living in a different country was a huge adjustment for me, but everyone I worked with was quick to offer support and suggestions for how to make the most out of my time in England.

My day-to-day tasks were usually straightforward, like opening new client cases or answering the phone. However, I was able to do something that most people will probably never do: visit a prison. I felt anxious as I walked up to the gate of HMP Pentonville with Breda, not knowing what to expect. By the end of the day, I left feeling incredibly grounded, with a better idea of the issues that prisoners face and a new respect for what prison visitors do on a regular basis.

Whilst my internship ended early due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I left the Irish Chaplaincy with a heightened understanding of how important it is to be there for one another. Not a day went by that somebody didn't offer a hot drink to everyone in the office. (Nobody does this in the States; it's up to you to make your own beverage). When somebody felt stressed, another coworker

always came to their aid to divide work or offer ideas. This message was clearly shown to me at HMP Pentonville by Breda and in the office by Liz, both of whom have an overwhelming amount of compassion for others.

I'm back in New York, but I am incredibly grateful for the time I spent in London and for the people I spent that time with. For now, I'll be turning lemons into lemonade by taking home what I learned at the Irish Chaplaincy and supporting my neighbors during this difficult time.



Alana with Breda and Liz of ICPO

"During my 6 years in custody I have been the grateful beneficiary of help from numerous organisations but I can honestly say none have helped me quite as much as Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas." HMP Hull

Travelling Forward Resettlement Project

This project, launched in April 2019, supports Travellers in 5 selected London prisons to get out of and stay out of prison. This text message is from a man who, just before Christmas, came out of HMP Brixton (where he had been supported by our team throughout his long sentence). He is now being helped in the community by the Resettlement Project.

Good morning Fiona, I can't afford to buy you all some flowers at the moment, to say thank you. So I got you these for now! 🌸🌸🌸🌸 they don't smell too great! Lol but I was told it's the thought that

counts lol it's to say how grateful I am to you all for all you have done for me. You have all been so supportive to me. All your time, help and support means the world to me in these tuff times! It's why I keep going at times knowing that you're there in my corner with me, Helping and supporting me to fix my broken life. I feel so blessed to have you in my life. 🙏 when you used to come and see me behind my prison door it kept me going for another day and brought the light into a dark place. You have all given me the gift of HOPE when I had none. I will forever be grateful to you all for that. THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH Fiona, Breda, Ellena and Father Gerry. God bless 🙏 Big love and gratitude to you all.

A Very Different Kind of St Patrick's Day

My daughter Miran was due to fly to Seoul on March 17th, and then spend 3 months travelling in Asia. And there was to be a big party in the evening with live Irish music (John-Paul on fiddle, me on guitar) to celebrate the 60th birthday of my wife, Yim Soon. Miran didn't go to Seoul; I didn't catch the train to London to work (and won't do now for goodness knows how long); and Yim Soon spent her birthday in quarantine, having just gone down with what was probably a bad dose of the dreaded virus (thank God she's now recovered, although by now many of us will know somebody who was not so lucky).

And all the St Patrick's Day parades and events in London and elsewhere were cancelled. I was sad to miss the reception at the Irish Embassy as it's always a good do, and the Guinness there is as good as you get in Ireland. A couple of years ago they gave out little sprigs of shamrock for us to pin on. It brought me back to my childhood, when, on St Patrick's Day, my sister and I would have various green, white and gold badges and floppy bits of shamrock (it was always so floppy: it never really survived the journey from Ireland in an envelope) pinned to us by our mum and sent off to school. It was pretty embarrassing turning up to school each year on March 17th sporting a floppy bit of shamrock, even though

lots of other children were similarly adorned. There's always so much that can embarrass a child: you don't need your mum doing additional weird stuff to you! Well, 2 years ago at the Embassy I wore my floppy shamrock with pride, and it even got me into a conversation with a Cork man on the train home from London. It turned out that his wife's best friend from childhood was someone I knew.

Sadly, our conversations with random strangers, or even with friends and family, are largely confined now to 'virtual' ones. But human beings adapt: they always have done. And the human spirit is strong. Yes, some people bought more than they needed in the supermarkets (driven to that by the very real anxiety brought about by an unknown threat). But there are also many unseen acts of kindness; and some of those unsung heroes in our society are getting now the recognition they deserve. I've been touched by pictures of people in Italy, confined to their flats, standing on the balcony and singing the same song as the others in their block. And the internet is full of the creative responses that people are making to the situation.

There's no telling when all of this will end, but end it will and we'll see what we've learnt as individuals and as a society and which of these forced changes in lifestyle we may wish to continue with post-virus. We've found out already that we don't

necessarily have to pack ourselves onto a train in the morning to go to work, and that we can cut down on air travel quite easily if we really want to. We're discovering more and more ways to be connected virtually (we're dab hands now in the Chaplaincy at zooming!). But I suspect we'll find out as well that there really is no perfect substitute for face to face encounter: to be with another person in the flesh, to laugh together, to cry together, to sing together, or just to be silent together. Many isolated people are now even more isolated, and it's not just the elderly. I think as well that we'll see afresh how we need to come together as groups, whether that's singing in a choir, or cycling with a club, or attending a religious service or a lunch club, or going to a concert, or taking part in a parade whilst wearing, with great pride, a floppy bit of shamrock.

May we all look out for one another at this time, may our anxieties not overwhelm us, and may we stay as well and as safe as can be.

Belated St Patrick's Day greetings and blessings to each of you.



Eddie Gilmore. CEO

“Be excessively gentle with yourself.”

From John O'Donohue's poem 'For one who is exhausted, a blessing':

Paying it Back– My experience with the Irish Chaplaincy

A diagnosis of breast cancer in late 2015 turned my life upside down. I'd just turned forty and my daughter was just six years old. I began almost a year of intense treatment with a gruelling regime of chemotherapy, followed by surgery and radiotherapy. What shone through from this awful experience, more than the fear and the shock, was the kindness of others. I felt supported and part of a wonderful community.

It was this compassion that I experienced that prompted me to try and pay it back. I began reading with younger children in my daughter's primary school, took up running and raised funds for charity and tried my best to be a better person. Then I read about the work of the Irish Chaplaincy Seniors project and, inspired by their mission, resolved to get involved. I was delighted to

be matched with a local nursing home and I have been visiting the residents there on a fortnightly basis for almost two years now.

While I often hear a refrain of 'you're so good' when I mention my volunteering to others, I don't feel that way at all. My visits are never a chore, never a duty, never a hassle. On the contrary, it's my privilege to know these ladies. We have built wonderful friendships, ones that I value dearly. Whether it's sitting watching the tennis, debating the latest statements of Meghan and Harry or sharing photos of a recent trip back to Ireland, these are moments to be cherished.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a brutal reminder of the importance of human contact. About a week before the lockdown was initiated, I was due to visit my friends at the care home. It was with great sadness I called Matron to say that I didn't think it was safe to do so. She readily agreed and

we said goodbye, hoping that I would be coming up the following week. Sadly it was not to be. I have however kept in touch with cards and phone calls, in the hope that my dear friends know just how important and loved they are.

The work of the Irish Chaplaincy is immensely important, even more so in these uncertain times. I am proud to be part of this group and helping to make a difference.

Christine Lydon



(Chris is seen here with her daughter Phoebe, who sometimes goes with her to St Teresa's and who the ladies always love to see)

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

Or see our online Volunteer Application form and stories from volunteers. www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk



Rainbows of Hope



Each day at the moment I try and take a break from my desk at home and go outside for a walk,

following Government advice, around the neighbourhood or sometimes a bit further afield to more open space and trees and flowers! It is of course spring and despite the current issues we are all facing, the signs of spring are all around us and can't be stopped from coming out!

Each day I spot some new bud on a plant or a tree I hadn't noticed before. Each day too I spot something else and look forward to seeing them! They are the homemade rainbows

and messages of hope that have increasingly been appearing in people's windows,



responding to similar actions of people around the world, to help people look ahead beyond the current worldwide situation, to a brighter tomorrow. And amidst the fear and anxiety around at the moment and while recognising the sadness and gloom we may all feel at times, these rainbow pictures and drawings and words of hope, say a lot about the human spirit and people's kindness. It shows that people want to reach out to one another in solidarity, in support and friendship and give some comfort and encouragement to people as they pass by.

I have never been very good at art, but will make my own rainbow picture in readiness for Easter to display for people to see! It will be partly as a reminder to myself of hope and God's promise of resurrection, symbolised so powerfully at springtime; but also as a thank you to all my sisters and brothers whose pictures have made me smile, and lifted my spirits as I walked by them.

One day last week as I prepared to start my work from



home, I saw shining on the edge of the desk a beautiful rainbow reflected somehow through the window. It made me laugh and be grateful and prompted me to be thankful to the God who made it. Look out for those rainbows yourself and if you can't go out make yourself one! A blessed and hopeful Easter to you all.



Paul Raymond, Seniors' Manager

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. 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.

Irish Government DFAT
Emigrant Support Programme

Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants
City Bridge Trust

National Lottery Community Fund

Tudor Trust

Presentation Sisters

Friend of the Forgotten Irish

Caritas St John Southworth Fund

Sisters of Mercy
Irish Youth Foundation

Ireland Funds GB

Construction Workers Benevolent Fund

Benevolent Society of St Patrick

McGrath Charitable Trust

Platt Reilly

Morrisroe

Toureen Group

Merchant Taylors

Little Company of Mary



A Time to Stay Still

At some point in the 1650s, the French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal made a very perceptive comment about the human condition. "The sole cause of man's unhappiness" he said, "is that he cannot stay quietly in his room".

Well, in recent weeks most of us have been imprisoned if not in a single room, then in a house. For many of us it has not been an easy or congenial experience, given our propensity for travel and generally living life at a frenetic pace. However, Pascal's idea challenges the belief that we must always be on the move, going to new places to feel and discover fresh and worthwhile things.

But what if there is already a treasury within us? What if our own minds are not a treasure chest of awe-inspiring, calming and interesting experiences - large enough to last us ten lifetimes? What if our real problem is not so much that we are not allowed to go anywhere but that we don't know how to make the most of what is already at hand?

The truth is that being confined at home provides us with a range of benefits, the most important of which is the encouragement to think. Few of us do much of the solitary, original, bold kind of thinking that can restore our spirits and move our lives forward.

A period of quiet thinking in our room/house creates the perfect environment where the mind can order and better understand itself. Fears, memories and hopes become easier to name and deal with. "Be still and know that I am God", Psalm 46 admonishes us. Silent prayer and reflection can serve to "centre" us so that we grow less scared of the contents of our minds and calmer and clearer about our life's direction. In short, we begin to know ourselves better.

We will, no doubt, one day recover our 'lost' freedoms, and the world will once again be ours to roam around. But during our collective confinements, aside from the obvious inconveniences, we should try to appreciate some of what is granted to us when we lose our customary liberties.

It cannot be a coincidence that many of the world's greatest thinkers spent unusual amounts of time alone in their rooms. Silence gives us the opportunity to appreciate a great deal of what we generally see without properly noticing; and to understand what we have felt but maybe not adequately processed.

We have at present not only been locked away; we have also been granted the privilege to travel inside our minds and emerge refreshed, enlightened and whole. We should endeavour to make the most of such an opportunity. Who knows, we might even get to like it!



Fr. Gerry McFlynn, Manager of ICPO London

Easter Message

Conditions in prisons are especially grim at the moment, with more and more prisoners confined to their cells for up to 23 hours a day.

By the time Easter comes, we will have made individual contact with over 1,000 Irish men and women in prisons across England and Wales, assuring them of our continued support, even if we can't visit at the current time, and with these words written by Gerry:

This must surely be the strangest Easter ever, with the country in virtual lockdown and even the churches closed for the celebration of Easter Sunday! More than any other time of the year, Easter should fill us with hope and confidence for the future. So, in the words of the priest/poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Let Him 'Easter' in us, be a dayspring to the dimness in us".

Prayer

Lord Jesus, by rising from the

dead you conquered death and offered everyone the gift of eternal life. Give me the strength to cope with my time inside and keep me safe and healthy in mind and body. Bless my family and loved ones and keep us all in your care. Help me to use my time here wisely in preparation for a better life outside. Teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive, and to love. And may I know the healing, restorative power of your presence in my life. Amen.

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 Chaplaincy Traveller Events

In 'normal' times we run events in several prisons, which include live music and traditional Irish food. In November 2019 we had McCool Trad (below) perform for us at HMP Chelmsford, and received afterwards the following message from the lovely Sr P:

As always you came with your wisdom, empathy, respect and humanity but most of all your calming presence. The men had a ball and the staff are still talking about what an entertaining afternoon.



... ..Recent Messages from Seniors

"This is the first time I left the house in a year. It's only possible because you visit me. Your visits help me to know I am not forgotten. It makes up for the childhood I never had"

"Your visits are like a ray of sunshine. They brighten up my day. They are the highlight of my week."

"I just moved into the nursing home this week. I felt lonely then I was so happy someone from Ireland visits me"

"I feel so lonely and isolated at times. Knowing that someone cares for me helps me so much. I can't thank you enough."

Sr. Teresa O'Mahony : Prison Chaplain



Looking back at the 20 years I spent as Prison Chaplain in HMP Belmarsh I really could write a very interesting book. The Sisters of Mercy have had a long History of helping prisoners inside and when released. In the 1840's when women received the death penalty it was a Sister of Mercy who stayed with a woman the night before she was hanged. We read this account in the Limerick Annals.

The opportunity came for me when I retired and was discerning a change of ministry. HMP Belmarsh was newly opened and convenient. For me it was rather daunting at first, and being inside was certainly a very different experience. All prisoners had committed serious crimes, or so I used to hear on the news and read in the papers.

I was warmly received by the men who were glad to have someone to listen to them and one they could trust. Gradually I realised that what was important and appreciated by the men was being accepted as they were. At times it was not easy when their crime made the headlines in the news. How did Jesus receive sinners? No one was turned away, but He said "Go in Peace and do not sin again".

So many come to Mass and to the Chapel to pray,

to be free, to talk. Many have said it was the first time anyone listened.

If one expects to do great deeds for prisoners then forget prison ministry.

Sadly today, drugs have taken over people's lives, knife crime also. The age of prisoners is getting younger too. At the end of the day, I trust I turn them to the Heart of Jesus and keep hope alive in their hearts. If I spent another 20 years as a Chaplain I would still say ones time is best spent as a listening ear, respecting each one as an individual, accepting them as and where they are. This is what's most important.

Bishop Pat Lynch said in tribute to Sr. Teresa:

"I am writing to express my personal gratitude and that of Archbishop Peter for your tremendous ministry in HMP Belmarsh. You will be greatly missed."

And Breda Power writes:

Sr. Teresa O'Mahony has retired as a prison Chaplain after 20 years in High Security, HMP Belmarsh. She did so much for ICPO in that time and in fact since her leaving it's been difficult to gain access to this prison. Sr. Teresa was a wonderful advocate for prisoners. She may be small in stature but she is fearless and has a big heart. She had an affinity with prisoners that can only be described as 'second to none'. Kind, loving and giving, her qualities go on and on. She had the best banter with prisoners and staff alike and the respect for her had no end. I can't imagine how HMP Belmarsh are getting on without her. In tribute to Sr. Teresa and her contribution to prisoners over the past few decades, I now hope she now takes some time for herself!



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