

IRISH CHAPLAINCY

FOUNDED IN 1957

Newsletter

Summer 2020

Keeping Connected



"It's the nicest thing anyone has done for me. I felt so lonely during lockdown. Now I feel so connected".

So said Ann, who is supported by the Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Project and who is one of the first recipients of a pre-programmed Tablet, via our 'Keeping Connected' project. Rory, one of the Seniors team, explained: "Ann really loved it. I called over to her yesterday to see if she was getting on OK with it. She was there listening to LMFM, her favourite (Drogheda-based) radio station. She was thrilled with it." Ann went on to say, "With this tablet, I've been able to see my nephew, my friends in London and even my friends in Ireland. I love listening to the Irish radio and getting Mass. I can't thank

you enough."

The first recipient had been 89-year-old Mamie who has been supported by the Chaplaincy for many years. "I'm so excited to try this out" said Mamie when the Tablet came out of the box. "I can now speak to you all face to face at the Chaplaincy and plan to speak to my sister (who lives in Galway) for her 100th birthday." It was very touching to see the picture of Mamie sitting watching Pentecost mass from her local parish in Archway.



It's great that people like Ann and Mamie are seeing the possibilities that this technology can offer. We're looking now for funds to supply many more people with Tablets, and are confident that our 'Keeping Connected' project will last well beyond the lockdown.



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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.

Tom's Blessing



What comes to mind when you think of a retreat? We might think of surrender, of losing territory or something like a failure. Within a spiritual context, a retreat is a pause, a reflection and a time set aside for mindfulness, of gathering your thoughts and possibly planning

for your future.

Recently I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the summer retreat organized by the Irish Chaplaincy. This was a retreat with a difference as it was going to be entirely on-line. This novel way was a response to the Covid Virus along with realizing that, with the help of modern technological advances, new ways of communicating are taking place in the world.

Even the planning sessions of the retreat occurred on-line and in the preparation stage I wondered what it would be like to participate in an on-line retreat. My previous experience of retreat had always been in monasteries or peaceful settings. This was going to be something totally different.

A wonderful moment of the retreat was the blessings that

were offered at the end of each day. One of the blessings that were given on the retreat was an Irish blessing by one of our seniors, Tom. Tom is a native of Dublin and moved to London when he was in his 20's. He married and raised his family in London. Sadly his wife died a number of years ago but Tom has always felt the support of his family and wider community. He is an active member of his church and he was delighted to be asked to give a blessing for the retreat. He said, 'I feel it's my way of giving something back to all the people who were so good to me.' The people on the retreat felt blessed by Tom's blessing and I feel blessed to know him.

Rory Mac Giolla Comhail is a member of Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Project Team.

In Cell Resources

The lockdown has affected prisoners more than most; and Travellers in particular have missed the visits from family. At a time when people are confined to their cells for up to 23 ½ hours/day, the team has been supplying in-cell resources (books, CDs, puzzles, art materials, hobby grants etc.). A special pack (shown) was sent to 103 Irish women in prison and one of the recipients wrote from HMP

Bronzefield: *"the colouring book is so lovely, means so much, made me cry. I love felt tip pens also, really helps me with mental health side."*



JESUS AND HIS WOMEN FRIENDS

Jesus liked women. He certainly liked Martha (whose feast we celebrate this week) and her sister Mary. They and their brother, Lazarus, lived in Bethany, a small village a few miles from Jerusalem. They provided a refuge for Jesus, a sort of bolt-hole where he could retreat to for relaxation. It was probably the nearest thing to a proper family home he ever knew.

Women played a prominent role in his life. Martha, for example, appears on three important occasions in the Gospel narrative - when she receives Jesus into her house and waits on him; at the Resurrection of her brother, Lazarus, when she proclaims her faith in Jesus as the "Son of the living God"; and at the meal given to Jesus six days before the Passover. Then there was his association with prostitutes and public sinners which earned him the rebuke of the Pharisees and the leaders of society. And it was a Samaritan woman, a foreigner in the eyes of the Jews, with whom he conducted the longest and most layered conversation recorded in the Gospel. It was women, too, who remained at the foot of the cross when other disciples like Peter and James fled in fear, and who later prepared his

body for burial. Most importantly of all, it was a woman, Mary Magdalene, who was the first witness to the most tremendous event in human history, the Resurrection, the single event on which our faith is based.

It's strange that the Church down the centuries has downplayed the role and importance of women and discriminated against them, given how important they were in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of the early Church. With Jesus it was so different. He paid attention to women and their needs even to the extent of getting involved in what we might call a little "family domestic". On that occasion, Martha complained to him about her sister Mary not helping out in the kitchen and tried to get him to tell her sister off.

Jesus got involved alright, commenting that there was more to life than work and always being busy, giving both sisters something to think about. He never entered people's lives from on high, but always in the midst of where people were. And he always sought the good in people, taking them as he found them and then showing them how they could live better and more fulfilling lives. In short, he treated people as his friends and the Gospel narrative shows

just how much hope and comfort they derived from their friendship with him.

We too lead busy lives, just like Martha. But during this lockdown we are being brought closer to life in all its variety and difficulty. In particular, we are being forced to confront ourselves and find answers to searching questions. Questions like what are we doing with our lives, what about the views and values we hold, the sort of people we have become, etc. We are living through a very difficult time but then maybe it takes a difficult time to force such questions to the surface. All the Lord wants is for us to place our trust in him.

Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen the better part which would not be taken from her.

It is up to each of us to find out for ourselves what that better part might be.



Fr. Gerry McFlynn, Manager of ICPO London

"Thank you so much, I don't know how I would cope without your help. It is very difficult in lockdown, we are locked in our cells all day. It's amazing how you help people in need."

(Irish woman in HMP Bronzefield)

Meet the Volunteers...



I have been a volunteer at the Irish Chaplaincy for almost four years – but that four years has included a 2-year adventure break to cycle across the world to New Zealand with my husband, which I did from March 2018 to 2020.

Volunteering with the chaplaincy works for me on so many levels. Living in London for over 20 years, as an Irish person I love having a connection with other Irish. No matter how long ago you left, most Irish people I know still refer to Ireland as ‘home’, and having a connection to that is important. From many conversations with seniors at the Chaplaincy, they feel the same and it’s great to be able to provide that as well as chat about things that only other Irish people really understand or find funny.

I also love the support the Chaplaincy provides to seniors and the part that I can play. Shortly after I returned from travelling I became very involved in the ‘Keeping Connected’ campaign, which was designed to keep vulnerable and isolated elders connected to the outside world during lockdown. One initiative was to deliver Tablets and train seniors with the basic technology skills to have face-to-face interactions with family or Chaplaincy staff, view mass online or connect to Irish radio



– anything to help them feel less isolated in what was a frightening time for everyone. Myself and my husband cycled miles through London and beyond – from Borehamwood to Belvedere and everywhere in between, to deliver the Tablets - and we loved every

minute of it! The gratitude of the seniors, their willingness to learn and embrace new technology and to see them beaming with pride at being able to access and read their local newspaper in Tuam or listen to mass from Limerick was amazing. I learned so much from every single person I visited, despite the fact that they thought we were the smart ones because we could understand technology!

As humans we are social creatures and being able to help people who for many reasons many find themselves lonely, isolated or misunderstood makes me feel good in myself. If I can help just one person feel a bit better because of a phone call, a visit or some practical help then that more than outweighs any time commitment or effort needed from me.



Martina Doherty, Volunteer

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



The Irish Community Response to the Covid 19 crisis

As we begin to come back to some degree of “normality” after the Covid-19 lockdown, I am reminded of the resilience and resourcefulness of the Irish community in Britain, its members and its voluntary organisations. Clearly there have been many losses. Many loved one have gone before their time and others are not yet sure what the long term impact of the illness will be. Self-isolation has been lonely for everybody but especially for those unable to go to their lunch club, their church services, bingo or hug their children and grandchildren. It has hit people in care homes and the Travelling community particularly badly.

The Irish voluntary sector, not least the Irish Chaplaincy, adapted readily and flexibly to this unprecedented crisis. With additional Covid emergency grants from the Emigrant Support Programme and some mainstream funders, Irish community organisations adapted services in creative, flexible and culturally sensitive ways. The willingness of people (not always

Irish) who were furloughed or with some time to spare provided an army of volunteers to deliver shopping, medicines, food or fun parcels or calling isolated people for a chat.

Work changed for staff and volunteers but activity carried on with staff working from home, often while home schooling children or caring for dependent relatives. Team briefings were held by Zoom or other platforms and staff and volunteers checked up on isolated people by phone, email or various video applications. Community organisations excelled themselves in providing concerts, quizzes, exercise classes and a range of online leisure activities to replace those impossible in the crisis. Irish people in prison were kept in touch by email, provided with phone cards to stay in touch with their families and were given activity packs to while away the 23 hours isolation enforced during the lockdown.

While the lockdown has had many disastrous consequences, it has also had its positives. Without this crisis, it is unlikely that as many people would have had the opportunity or the confidence to use and become familiar with technology. Covid funding

allowed organisations to buy and set up Tablets and support people to connect with family and friends, to participate in Mass or online community activities. Isolated elders enjoyed being able to hear Mass from their local church, churches in Ireland or were pleased to be part of funerals or goodbyes though not physically present.

Technological change will help sustain folk in the uncertain future which faces us. Of course online can never replace human contact, face to face communication or provide the hug that is so important to all of us. But technology is only as good as its human input and the Irish community in Britain does not just talk the talk but walks the walk when it comes to caring for those in need.



Dr Mary Tilki, Chair

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

Sisters of Mercy
Irish Youth Foundation

Merchant Taylors Albert Gubay Foundation
London Community Response

Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants
City Bridge Trust

Ireland Funds GB
Construction Workers Benevolent Fund

Little Company of Mary

National Lottery Community Fund

Benevolent Society of St Patrick

Tudor Trust

McGrath Charitable Trust

Presentation Sisters

Platt Reilly

Friend of the Forgotten Irish

Morrisroe

Caritas St John Southworth Fund

Toureen Group



Keeping on keeping on

At the start of another day of lockdown I was reminded of a remark made to me by an American man called John who I met while walking on the Camino in Spain.

I'd woken up early, as I usually do in these days, and thought, without a huge amount of enthusiasm, 'oh, another day; do I really have to...'. It had been a good week up until that point, and a couple of important meetings and presentations had gone well. But I was feeling a little drained and flat in the aftermath and wondering how I was going to find some new motivation for a day in which there were no especially 'big' things happening (like a lot of days really at the moment!). I managed, somehow, to remove myself from the comfort of the bed and to get out for my morning walk. And I tried to tell myself how lucky I am to be able to do such a thing, when some of those prisoners supported by the Irish Chaplaincy are currently being allowed out of their cell for just 30 minutes a day, and are faced with the choice: to have a shower, to join a long queue for the phone (assuming they have the means to make a call), or to go into the exercise yard (where there may not be too much social distancing).

No prison visits have been allowed but the team at the Chaplaincy continue to connect with prisoners via letters, phone calls and 'e-mail a prisoner'. There was a reply from a man in HMP Garth which included the words "*Thank you for your letter. It was really appreciated, especially at this time when the prison is in turmoil*". This prisoner also said thank you for

the books which had been sent: part of a special Chaplaincy project, in response to Covid-19, to supply in-cell resources. So far, 500 people have been helped in this way, including 103 women and 176 lifers.

Along with prisoners, the elderly are especially vulnerable at the current time. The Irish Chaplaincy Seniors' Project continues to reach out to Irish people in London living alone or in care homes with weekly phone calls, also with the delivery of food parcels to some people and other things besides: CDs, DVDs, a microwave cooker for one person. There is one Galwayman who I ring every week and he was feeling lonely and isolated even before the lockdown. He is one of those who has been supplied, thanks to our 'Keeping Connected' project, with a pre-programmed electronic Tablet. Each time I call he tells me how much he enjoys using the Tablet to listen to Galway Bay FM in the evening and to speak to his friend Pat.

My own life in lockdown became a bit monastic, and there's a lot I liked about that. There was quite a nice, simple balance of work, prayer, meals, reading, recreation (much of that in the form of walking or cycling). I was a bit more tuned in than usual to the subtle but magical changes in the natural world: the colours and the smells, the times of the day when the birds sing more loudly, the wonderful sight in the sky one night of a crescent moon underneath a brightly shining Venus.

Most days I was fairly content with this simple life but any routine can also become a bit

monotonous, and it can be tempting to want to escape from the mundane and the humdrum. Although, I know deep down that if I can't be content here and now, I'll never be content in some other place with some other people doing some other thing.

It was when I'd been feeling rather out of sorts and out of energy one morning that I met John, a fellow pilgrim. Yes, feelings of lethargy can strike anywhere, even on the magical, mystical Camino to Santiago. We got chatting and John, who'd grown up in Tennessee, told me about how he'd just taken early retirement at the age of 50 from a highly stressful career in hotel hospitality in California. I asked if he had any hopes or dreams for his 50th birthday year, and beyond. "Weeelll", he replied in his slow, Southern drawl, "Aaaahh just wanna keep ooon keepin' oooon"!

My encounter with John helped lift me out of that particular little trough, and I often think of his words. May we all during this strange time of pandemic (and beyond) find somehow the strength to keep on keeping on. And may we also keep in our thoughts and prayers those for whom this will be a particular challenge.



Eddie Gilmore. CEO

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, PO Box 75693 London NW1W 7ZT

Contact Details

Title _____ First name _____ Surname _____

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Postcode _____

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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 road
rise up to meet
you.*

*May the wind be
always at your
back.*

*May the sun
shine warm
upon your face;
the rains fall soft
upon your fields*

*and until we
meet again,*

*may God hold
you in the palm
of His hand.*

"Your help is very much appreciated, more so at this real difficult time we have. I am able to phone my family more now so thank you"

(Traveller in HMP Wandsworth, recipient of phone credit)

A Place of my Own

August 3rd was a big day for Seamus. He was moving into his own flat in London, and the Irish Chaplaincy was there for him on the day, as it had been there for him throughout his 17 years in prison. Seamus's daughter Gill was also on hand to help with the move. She'd been just 14 when her dad,

originally from Dublin, had gone into custody. First Gerry and then Breda had taken her under their wing and brought her on visits to her dad. She now has 3 children of her own and as Liz explained "she has broken the cycle" (her mum had also ended up with a long prison sentence).

To achieve this great outcome for Seamus, the Chaplaincy team worked in conjunction with Margaret of the London Irish Centre, who secured the flat, and the St Patrick's Benevolent Fund, who helped, amongst other ways, with the purchase of a bed. (NB some names have been changed)

POETRY PAGE

LOCKDOWN

we should remember
this time

its days, weeks and months
the year that didn't
happen

except for the bereaved, the sick
and unemployed
victims of a habitat
of nightmares and
despair

their mountains of statistics
going up
up, as our spirits went
down

the quiet desperation
of those days

so much to remember
(and forget)

to say nothing of
this present moment

that lives on

indifferently

soon to become

time past

Gerry McFlynn

AFTER SUMMER

and then they
come
rushing tumbling
helplessly

out of the storied
past

whole thoughts
and scenes
and half-forgotten
airs

all the fair
notions of
what was summer
now injured by
time

and the mind makes
much of them
in case they

would soon be
gone forever

enlarges polishes until
they seem just
right

for its own
cold comfort

and slow progress
through the long
winter's night

Gerry McFlynn



Patron:
President Michael D. Higgins
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