

# IRISH CHAPLAINCY

FOUNDED IN 1957

Newsletter

Summer 2021

## Walk with Hope

An enthusiastic and diverse group of walkers received a blessing on the steps of Sacred Heart church, Kilburn from parish priest Fr Terry Murray before setting off in three groups of six for the Irish Embassy eleven miles away. It was one of several 'Walks with Hope' that took place in April to raise funds, and awareness of our particular work with elderly Irish, whether living alone or in care homes or in prison. The three groups met up at Wormwood Scrubs prison, where many Irish and Irish Traveller people are held and where the Irish Chaplaincy has always had a strong presence. There was a welcome lunch stop in Kensington Memorial Gardens before the final stretch through Hyde Park and a warm greeting on the steps of the Embassy from Ambassador Adrian



Other Walks with Hope during the week included 3-time All-Ireland winner Alan Brogan walking in Phoenix Park; a walk from Westminster Cathedral to Westminster Abbey with Bishop Paul



McAleenan; and the children of Holy Family Primary School in Ealing walking a combined total of 500 miles around the playground, whilst singing '500 miles with Hope', a remake of the classic Proclaimers song.



O'Neill and First Secretary Isobel O'Connor.



### In This Issue

- Walk with Hope
- Michael Bennett RIP
- A reason to Live
- Meet the Volunteers
- Fáilte roimh Sally
- Packages of Hope
- Poem



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.*

## Michael Bennett - April 2nd 1954 – February 10th 2021

Michael Bennett was one of the first prisoners I met when I started work with the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) back in 1993. He was serving a life sentence in Wormwood Scrubs prison in West London. He had a job in the prison kitchen which was where I first met him. The following is a text he sent me on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

“You came into my life at the Scrubs when I most needed it. I’ve often thought that if you hadn’t popped up in the kitchen and given me hope, I don’t know if the person you see today would even be in existence. Nuala Kelly took over nurturing me by mail. That was taken over by various people until Sr Agnes Hunt came along. You came back into my life after release and I started to meet the lovely people through your good self at the Irish Chaplaincy. I will somehow get to see and thank the ones in the country that I have the most affinity to. God bless you all within the ICPO as you are the most important part of my life.”

Michael had serious health problems following his release and

was in and out of hospital. He was settled in approved premises in Camberwell, South London and was fortunate to have helpful and understanding probation officers and social workers. Michael was worth helping as he always met you half way. I think he was happiest when he had a small cleaning job for a short time in Friends House on the Euston Road in London. He really loved it there and was so proud that he had a job and could meet with people. He soon acquired a reputation for being friendly and helpful and was well liked by the staff and the people he encountered daily. I have the happiest memories of meeting with him there for a coffee and chat and seeing how best we could help him. Michael was always grateful for the help and support he received from the ICPO and in his many texts to me always asked after the staff both here and in Maynooth. Nuala Kelly kept mailing him – even sending him a Christmas card last December. In fact, I don’t know of any prisoner who was more appreciative of the help and support offered by the ICPO.

On a personal note, I’m not likely to forget Michael because of an accident on a visit to meet him in his hostel. It happened on a very

dark winter’s night two years ago when I tripped over some tree branches which were strewn across the narrow unlit pathway and broke my left foot. The upshot was that I had to wear a foot boot for weeks afterwards and even today the foot isn’t properly healed. So every time I feel a slight twinge in my left foot, I instinctively think of Michael!

I mentioned this, to some laughter, to the gathering of six people who attended his Cremation on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021. No family members or relatives were present for the service; only those who had known him, post release, and helped him settle back into the community.

Michael was special. May he rest in peace.



Fr. Gerry McFlynn, Manager of  
ICPO London

## A Reason to Live

Our wonderful team is currently supporting a young 35-year-old woman who in February this year, was airlifted to hospital and put into a medical coma for 28 days. She had a rare but serious bacterial infection that affects the tissue beneath the skin and surrounding muscles and organs resulting in the amputation of her left leg. Her mother who is currently serving a sentence in an open prison - making it difficult for her to visit more than once a week and support her daughter as much as she would like - was told her daughter had a 2% chance of survival and was advised to turn off Life Support. She

declined! Prognosis is not fully known at this stage. She has no use in both arms and her right leg is severely damaged. She may even need more amputations. What is certain is she will need 24-hour care for months if not years and have to endure years of skin graft operations.

Thankfully, the team has been able to support both mother and daughter: practically, by advocating with the prison and other statutory bodies; financially, with small donations for telephone credit, travel assistance as well as essential sundries and a visit from two of our caseworkers; emotionally, being available at the end of the telephone anytime for either mother or daughter and spiritually,

through prayer.

Both mother and daughter are extremely remarkable and humbling; truly inspirational and doing their very best to stay positive. They are an absolute pleasure to work with and the essence of our Chaplaincy’s purpose. We would be so very grateful for your thoughts and prayers to help them get through this very difficult time and help us to continue in the work we love to do in supporting those most in need.

The young woman said to one of those who came to visit her:

“You’ve given me a reason to live.”

## Walking with Hope in London

When I began volunteering with the Irish Chaplaincy in summer 2019 little did I know that I would be creating an eleven-mile walk through London as a fundraiser in 2021!

Volunteering in 2019 was straightforward. The Chaplaincy facilitated visits to elderly Irish in their own homes, care or nursing homes keeping personal contacts and meeting practical needs. It was a different story with the onset of Covid, so too for those working with the 1000 or so Irish women and men in prisons here in England, through the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, who had the doors closed to visits.

Ever forward looking, the Chaplaincy team have found creative ways of keeping contact: regular phone calls, ordering food, involving a London school in sending Christmas and Easter cards to the isolated, setting up Tablets that the elderly could use in their own homes to find Mass, Irish radio stations and more; and creating packs of puzzle books, CDs, and drawing materials to send in to prisons are just some of the initiatives developed over the past year. All of this requires funding so the #WalkwithHope idea emerged in early spring. Could we set aside a week that would both reflect the hope-giving work of the Chaplaincy and raise funds? Of course we could.

Fast forward to 21st April and twelve of us set off from Sacred Heart Parish, Quex Road to walk

to the Irish Embassy in Belgravia, a distance of around eleven miles. The opportunity of creating a walk that would reflect something of the presence of the Irish in London was a gift for me because I love to walk. Quex Road parish, established in 1885, has been a focal point for the Irish community for generations. One of our walkers had been married in the Church which hosts a plaque to the forgotten Irish of London. On-route some walkers remembered houses lived in as newly-weds and as we stopped for a photograph of the Grand Union Canal near Harrow Road we remembered the hundreds of men who would have worked on canal and railway building.

Our most poignant stop was at Wormwood Scrubs prison where



we stopped to pray for prisoners, their families and those who work with them. We heard that since COVID-19 most prisoners have been locked in their cells for 23 hours a day. When allowed out, time restrictions create impossible choices: join the line to phone home, have a shower or sort out any problems. What a choice?

Those walking were staff, volunteers and friends from the Chaplaincy, and representatives of *Irish Radio*, the magazine 'the



*Craic is Back'* and the *Council of Irish Counties Association*. As always with walking projects, stories were shared and new friendships were formed. Arriving at the Irish Embassy – just 5 minutes late – we were warmly welcomed by Ambassador Adrian O'Neill and his team.

Lots more happened in the week as part of the #WalkwithHope project, including a walk/visit to St Bride's Church (the Journalist Church), a walk of reconciliation between Westminster Cathedral and Westminster Abbey with Bishop Paul McAleenan, Auxilliary Bishop of Westminster, and a visit to Holy Family School, West Acton who were 'walking with hope' during the week and met Chaplaincy team members and one of our seniors who had received cards and messages over the year from the school.

Keeping hope alive is core work of the Irish Chaplaincy and the week gave us an opportunity to celebrate and support this work. I raised more than £600 into the bargain!



Pat Gaffney, Volunteer

## Meet the Volunteers..

I have been a volunteer with the Irish Chaplaincy for about a year and a half now and it's one of the best decisions I have made. Before I settled in London, I had lived in San Francisco, Australia, Oman and Dubai, and every country I moved to had an Irish community which welcomed me with open arms and made living away from home that little bit easier. I think that's an incredible thing about Irish people- they look



out for each other wherever they go. When I moved to London and decided to settle here, I wanted to repay some of that kindness and hospitality that was always shown to me over the years, and that's when I decided to volunteer with the Irish Chaplaincy.

It wasn't long before I realised the incredible impact they have on elderly seniors in London, and asked if they would be interested in partnering up with the primary school I teach at, Holy Family Catholic Primary School in West Acton. Since that initial meeting with Paul, our school and charity's partnership has grown from strength to strength. At Christmas and Easter, our children made and delivered personalised cards for over 200 seniors. The response we got from the seniors was incredible and the pride the children had in knowing the impact they were making was amazing. When we

heard about the 'Walk with Hope' fundraiser, our school also decided to get involved and our children walked 500 miles around our school playground, over the course of two weeks to raise money for the charity. Our Year 4 children even recorded their own version of the song '500 Miles'.



Ann-Marie McDade, Volunteer

## Fáilte roimh Sally

We are delighted to welcome to the team Sally Murphy, who will be working two days a week supporting Irish prisoners in the North West and their families. Sally did this work previously for twelve years as part of Irish Community Care Merseyside.

Sally likes walking, reading and cycling, and she plays a mean game of cards too!

She says, "I am so happy and excited to be working with ICPO, a team who have supported and taught me a great deal during my time with ICC. I can't wait to get back into the prisons doing the job that I feel very passionate about."



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

We have many opportunities, including: befriending, prison visiting, answering the phone, casework, admin, fundraising, comms. Contact Declan Ganly: [declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk](mailto:declan.ganly@irishchaplaincy.org.uk)

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



## Packages of Hope

At Easter, 200 “Packages of Hope” were sent to Irish Chaplaincy seniors, thanks again to the wonderful work of the pupils of Holy Family School in Ealing. The cards, as well as the Chaplaincy newsletter, gave people a great lift and certainly had a significant impact on people’s wellbeing as the following quotes illustrate:

“I was so moved to receive the card at Easter. I was delighted that someone was thinking of me.”

“This really made my Easter. I thought the ceremonies went well but this was the best part, to receive the card.”

“I got a wonderful surprise this morning in the post. A beautiful card and I'm going to spend the evening reading the newsletter.”

“The card was gorgeous! There was so much effort put into it. It has pride of place on my mantlepiece.”

“Thanks a million for the lovely cards and your newsletters to the residents for Easter. They were all thrilled to get their own 'post'.”

We were delighted that the Seniors volunteers were nominated for the Westminster Diocese Social Action Awards 2020/21 for outstanding volunteering during the last year, a recognition of the incredible work carried out by our dedicated team during the challenging times of these last months.

We received many other kind messages, including this from Vera (above right) who lives in West London:

"I've got real friends for the first time in my life. It's like I have a new lease of life. You are all very dear to me. I'm so glad of the way the Irish Chaplaincy care for me. I couldn't have coped during the lockdown without your support.



Your calls are the highlight of my week.”

And Mamie (below) enjoyed this visit from Gemma who is a Caritas Red Shirt volunteer.



## Thank You for Your Support

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

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

Irish Government DFAT  
Emigrant Support Programme

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

An Cheathrú Rua

Merchant Taylors

University of Limerick Chaplaincy

Sisters of Mercy  
Irish Youth Foundation

Ireland Funds GB  
Construction Workers Benevolent Fund

Benevolent Society of St Patrick

McGrath Charitable Trust

Platt Reilly Morrisroe

CICA London

Toureen Group

Society of the Holy Child Jesus

Franciscan Missionaries of Divine Mercy

Albert Gubay Foundation  
London Community Response

Little Company of Mary

Independent Age



## 500 miles with Hope

After a year in which I'd gone to London just three times I had the prospect of four trips in one week, thanks to our Walk with Hope event.

I'd been interested to read an article in the *Guardian* the week before called 'Has lockdown given you brain fog?' It explained how the "brain is stimulated by the new, the different," and that "We have effectively evolved to stop paying attention when nothing changes and to pay particular attention when things do change." Like many people over the last year, I've been working at home, and therefore spending a lot of days on my own sitting in the same position with the same zoom background behind me, and without many of the stimuli that would occur naturally in a day when I was out and about and seeing people. It seems that our brains have begun to switch off!

It was a great joy on the Monday to meet people from the Irish Chaplaincy for the first time in over twelve months; so too to stroll through the streets of London as we chatted, to look at the buildings, the passers-by, to stop for a cup of tea. We were warmly greeted at St Bride's, the 'Journalists' church', by the Rector, Canon Alison, and even given a historical tour of the crypt, which included a perfectly preserved Roman pavement and a glimpse into a vault filled with human bones and skulls called the charnel room. Following a whole year of probable under-stimulation I was lapping it up.

I was back in London on the Wednesday. Three groups of six assembled on the steps of Sacred Heart church in Kilburn for a blessing from Fr Terry and a photoshoot, before setting off for our eleven miles to the Irish Embassy. We stopped on the way at Wormwood Scrubs prison, a place where the Irish Chaplaincy

has for many years had an especially strong presence. Again, it was a pleasure to be walking and talking with people. It felt like being on pilgrimage. There was an unexpected special moment in Kensington Memorial Park where we'd stopped for a well-earned lunch. Firstly John Giltenan of the Council of Irish Counties Association produced a bottle of rosé wine, which went down very easily and nicely. Next, he turned on Gerry Byrne's show on Irish Radio just as he was making a dedication to the Walk with Hope event. And then Gerry played the song which I'd recorded for the event, '500 miles with Hope', a slightly altered version of the Proclaimers classic, and with everyone roaring out the words when it got to the chorus.

We duly arrived at the Embassy and were warmly greeted by Ambassador Adrian and First Secretary Isobel and more photos were taken.

Thursday's walk had a decidedly ecumenical theme: going with Bishop Paul McAleenan from Westminster Cathedral to Westminster Abbey where we were met by Canon Anthony Ball. Then on Friday we were off to Holy Family Primary School in Ealing, whose children had not only made Christmas and Easter cards for many of those elderly Irish we support in London but also recorded their own version of the song '500 miles with Hope'. I was thrilled that one of the recipients of the cards, John Concannon, had been able to come. In the pre-Covid days I had been going to visit John once a month in his flat in Hammersmith and continued to enjoy weekly chats with him on the phone when visiting was no longer possible. John is originally from Galway and he grew up quite close to where my dad grew up. It was lovely to see him in the flesh again.

We were treated like royalty by the staff and children of the school.



On arrival there was tea served outside in the sun with scones made by one of the teachers, Mayo-born Sarah, and there was plenty of craic with the wonderful Ann-Marie from Donegal who is also a teacher besides being an Irish Chaplaincy volunteer; also with Thomas the Headteacher whose parents, like mine, came from the West of Ireland and Co Down, and with Chair of Governors Fiona whose mother is a Kerrywoman. It turned out that another of our wonderful volunteers Pat, who was there as well, had taught Thomas' brothers back in the 70s! And then I heard a very familiar song. Ann-Marie's Year 3 children had come out and were marching round the playground singing the song:

'And I would walk 500 miles, And I would walk 500 more.  
Just to see the smile upon your face when someone knocks upon your door.'

It was a moving and fitting end to my week in London.



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](http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk)  
Please detach and send this page to: Irish Chaplaincy, PO Box 75693 London NW1W 7ZT

## Contact Details

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

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.



*May the good  
saints protect you  
And bless you  
today.  
And may troubles  
ignore you  
Each step of the  
way.*

## Quotes from prisons...

"Thank you for the card at Christmas and the letters as every little message helps me. Keep doing what you are doing as it's an amazing thing that you guys are doing." HMP Stocken Mar 2021

"The work you do with all of us boys is great. Thank you very very very much, and God bless you all at the Irish Chaplaincy." HMP Wandsworth Mar 2021

"Your help has made a big difference as it has allowed me to have the contact I need with my family at a time I needed it most. I can't thank you enough for this." HMP Downview April 2021

"Dear Ellena, A brief but sincere thank you for the support you have given to Sev and HMP Bedford to improve outcomes for prisoners. This has been acknowledged by HMIP in their Scrutiny Visit report which has been published today." PJ Butler, Governor HMP Bedford May 2021

"Hi Breda, Brilliant service, as ever – thank you!" Director of BEST at HMP Wandsworth May 2021

## THE EUCHARIST

He was old, tired and sweaty,  
pushing his homemade cart  
down the alley, stopping now and then  
to poke around in somebody's garbage.

I wanted to tell him about EUCHARIST  
but the look in his eyes, the despair in his face, the  
hopelessness of  
somebody else's life in his cart, told me to forget it.  
So I smiled and said "Hi" - and gave him EUCHARIST.

She was cute, nice build, a little too much paint, wobbly on  
her feet  
as she slid from her barstool, and on the make.  
"No thanks, not tonight" - and I gave her EUCHARIST.

She lived alone, her husband dead, her family gone, and she  
talked at  
you, not to you, words, endless words, spewed out.  
So I listened - and gave her EUCHARIST.

Downtown is nice.  
Lights change from red to green, and back again.  
Flashing blues, pinks and oranges.  
I gulped them in,  
Said, "Thank-you, Father", and made them EUCHARIST.

I laughed at myself and told myself

"You, with all your sin and all your selfishness, I forgive you, I  
accept you, I love you".  
It's nice, and so necessary to give yourself EUCHARIST.

My Father, when will we learn - you cannot talk EUCHARIST -  
you cannot  
philosophise about it. YOU DO IT.  
You don't dogmatise EUCHARIST.  
Sometimes you laugh it, sometimes you cry it, often you sing  
it.  
Sometimes it's a wild peace, then a crying hurt, often  
humiliating,  
never deserved.

You see EUCHARIST in another's eyes, give it in another's  
hand held  
tight, squeeze it in an embrace.  
You pause EUCHARIST in the middle of a busy day, speak it in  
another's  
ear, listen to it from a person who wants to talk.

For EUCHARIST is as simple as being on time and as profound  
as  
sympathy.  
I give you my supper, I give you my sustenance, I give you my  
life.  
I give you me.  
I give you EUCHARIST.

R. Voight.

## EVENTS

Summer Retreat via zoom: August 2nd—6th.

All welcome: let us know if you're interested.

And coming soon: late Summer/ Autumn London walks. More info to follow.



Patron:  
President Michael D. Higgins  
Registered Charity No.: 1160365

### Contact Us

PO Box 75693  
London NW1W 7ZT  
020 7482 5528  
info@irishchaplaincy.org.uk

Visit our website :  
[www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk)



# Irish Chaplaincy...Looking Ahead with Hope