

# IRISH CHAPLAINCY

FOUNDED IN 1957

Newsletter

Autumn 2021

## Launch of on-line Prayer Room

### Prayer of the Day



Irish Chaplaincy is excited to announce the launch of an on-line prayer room, with a short daily prayer/reflection written each week by a different person. To coincide with Prisons week, which is October 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> the first week's prayers were written by Mercy Sisters Moira and Kathleen, Moira having worked for many years with Irish people in prison in Britain. In recognition of her great work Moira was named as Irish in Britain Volunteer of the Year in 2019.

There is also a 'Prayer Board' where anybody can post a prayer or intention or a picture. We hope this can become a peaceful place to come to with any concerns and also

view and join with the concerns and prayers of others: a place to remember loved ones, to mark special events, to be grateful for something happening or to bring any worries and receive blessings and solidarity from each other. Enjoy your time of prayer with us. Go mbeannai Dia duit. May God bless you.

To find the prayer room you just need to go to the homepage of our website ([www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk)) and click on 'Prayer Room' in the top right hand corner! See you there!

All intentions will be prayed for every week by the Irish Chaplaincy.



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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.*

## THE PRISONS WE DESERVE

“Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them” (Hebrews, 13:3)

Prisons are sacred places. There, our society claims control over the lives of men and women; there, we assume the role of God. And whether the prison is a huge one covering acres of ground, or compresses inmates on high landings, the air within holds a particular density, a palpable weight created not only by the crimes the prisoners have committed, but also by the ownership we have taken of them, whether we acknowledge it or not.

The great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky in his novel *Crime and Punishment* wrote: “The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by entering its prisons”.

Prisons are, in a real sense, anti-social. They take the people who do not fit well into responsible society and make them even less fit to do so. That’s why any worthwhile reform programme should concentrate on reminding the prisoner that he or she remains a citizen, a son or daughter, a partner, and equip them to make a better job of these relationships.

However, too many people still think about criminal justice in ways that reinforce the human drive to punish and to heighten their own sense of moral superiority. Sadly, this approach has deep roots in the Christian tradition. Just think of the theological orthodoxies that separate ‘us’ from ‘them’, ‘saint’ from ‘sinner’, ‘damned’ from ‘blessed’ and ‘criminal’ from ‘innocent’.

The problem with such a bi-polar

division is that it fails to account for the radical interconnectedness of all creation, including those deemed ‘criminal’ among us. Then there is the Old Testament symbol of the scapegoat, the one who is exiled bearing the guilt of the community. The ‘bad theology’ implicit in this practice has a long history and, sadly, continues to this day in one form or another.

However, while the idea of prison as a place of exile may be convenient, it is no longer morally acceptable. If society takes upon itself the right to punish people by depriving them of their liberty, it must also accept the obligation to welcome them back when they have paid their debt. This means that we have to accept that prison is an integral part of the community which has an obligation to prepare both the prisoner and itself for that return.

The Christian community should surely be at the forefront of attempts to turn prisons from places of punishment into places of redemption. In light of this, then, what are we to take from what one might call a theology of suffering presence? How should people of faith, hope and love deal with the ‘criminals’ among us?

It goes without saying that living out a Christlike ‘suffering presence’ with prisoners when they have committed violent crimes is difficult. Think of some testimonies like the the mother who can’t sleep, tormented by wondering if her slain daughter’s last cry was “Mum”; the jogger who can’t forget the crack of her nose bleeding just before her rapist beat her to unconsciousness; or the prisoner who died in custody without disclosing the burial place of his victim, thereby ensuring lasting

torment for the victim’s family.

Anyone contemplating the Christian values of penance, forgiveness and reconciliation, must face head-on the memory of such acts. In short, we must embody the difference that Jesus’ theology makes in the service of humanity’s intimate social connectedness. Furthermore, this theological difference should then lead us to oppose, politically, the grotesque divisions produced and maintained by the modern day prison complex that routinely deals in the currency of lost human connections.

It has been said that prisoners are the last acceptable prejudice in society. They are certainly among its most marginalised and often despised people. I’ll conclude with a quotation from the great theologian, Karl Rahner SJ, which I often reflect on: “When you go from your surroundings into a prison, you do not go out of a world of harmony, light and order into a world of guilt and unfreedom; you stay where you have been all the time. It is merely made clear to your bodily sense what has been surrounding you all the time”. (*The Prison Pastorate in Mission and Grace*, Sheed and Ward, 1966).



Fr. Gerry McFlynn, Manager of  
ICPO London

“I’ve been very lucky to have you to contact. I’ve been in communication now for 12 years and I consider you family.” HMP Norwich, Sept 2021

“The map of Ireland has its proud place on my cell wall...without charities such as yourselves things would certainly become far more bleak.” HMP Wandsworth, Aug 2021

## The Changing Face of Chaplaincy

There are 450 choir stalls in Maynooth College Chapel. When I was a young seminarian there (briefly) in the early 1970s every place was filled for the College Mass on Sunday mornings. These days are a distant memory. There are few seminarians in today's Maynooth. Still fewer make it to ordination.

The Irish Church of the last century ordained hundreds more priests than it could use at home. Many were sent to the English mission. In my own diocese of Killaloe, Brentwood was a particular favourite. Some came home after several years as men transformed. They had developed pastoral flair and a taste for social activism. One thinks of Fr James McDyer who served in the Blitz before becoming a campaigner for the rights of rural communities in his native Donegal, or of the young Fr Eamon Casey who co-founded the housing charity Shelter.

Although the diocesan priests from Ireland are almost all gone, the work of the Irish Chaplaincy continues. What is striking is that you get no sense of a few people

staying behind to put the lights out. This is a singular case of a Catholic organisation which has renewed itself, while remaining Catholic to its core.

When I joined the board six years ago it had a strong flavouring of 'Irish in Britain', by which I mean those of us – like me – who think of going 'home' to Ireland on holidays. That has changed. Today's Board is increasingly characterised by the successor generations, women and men who are young, successful, compassionate, and comfortable with being simultaneously Irish and British.

They are activists, just as the priests of the 1950s were. It's very striking how socially engaged they are – men and women who have no hesitation in following Pope Francis's advice to "go to the margins".

There is a difference between the work of the Chaplaincy then and now. The priests of the last century were mostly engaged in an extension of Irish parish ministry. We still see traces of this in the large social centres (as in my own parish in Chiswick) that characterised those parishes where Irish migrants had settled in large numbers.

The ministry of today's chaplaincy is not to the Irish in parishes, but to the marginalised, to men and women who have been forgotten by time, or who have been swept aside; to the elderly Irish, to Travellers, to those in prison. Men like Gerry Mc Flynn with his sterling work for prisoners continue to stand for the best of the Irish priesthood (He is now one of just two priests working in the chaplaincy).

Today's Irish chaplaincy is in superb hands; Eddie Gilmore is an excellent CEO with an engaged and hard working staff. Clare Coffey is an inspirational chair. There is a sense that the mission has been renewed, and the baton handed on. I hope that the Chaplaincy retains a living link with the Irish Catholic priesthood (as indeed it does with Fr John Deehan's membership of the Board). And I hope that it retains its sense of being explicitly Catholic. It is from these connections that the Chaplaincy will continue to draw its sense of unique purpose.



Brendan McCarthy, Trustee

## Summer Retreat 2021

Our second annual Summer Retreat via zoom was a great success again, with lots of great feedback from participants:

"A little oasis in the day for peace and reflection"

"Special to come together each day"  
"What a blessing this week has been"

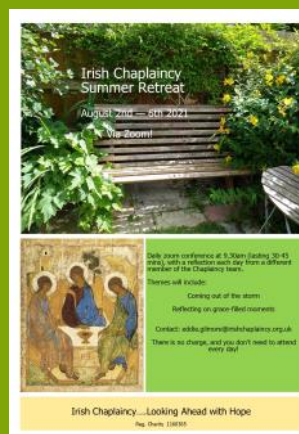
"Thank you for the relaxed and restful nature of the retreat"

"Lovely week, and each day was different"

"I've really enjoyed the time and the simple act of being together"

"Really inspirational"

"Thank you to all the Irish Chaplaincy team"





## Meet the Volunteers..

For some years now I have been a volunteer in the Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Project. There are many different roles needed when volunteering and the volunteer must remember that the main focus will be the needs and progress of the other person. My preference was to become a telephone listener to any number of people who found themselves in need of a friendly chat. It became apparent to me when making calls that they must be regular; the volunteer should be a good listener and try to offer some word of encouragement on how to 'keep going' when things are going wrong for them - giving words of encouragement with something to look forward to until our next call. So many of our friends have lost loved ones, both here and at home in Ireland. When people die, it takes time to work through the grief and be able to move forward. Chats with us at the Chaplaincy can help to ease the grief and accept the loss. Our Seniors often feel they would like to return home to Ireland-remembering the 'good old days' and forgetting that time changes all of us, as time has changed the home they left. At the Chaplaincy we will work through these ideas with them, allow time to make a decision and help if they decide to resettle.

In the regular telephone calls confidences are exchanged and

over a period of time one can detect the 'mood' of a person. If I am unable to offer words of encouragement, or indeed, if that is not sufficient in cases of particular difficulties, I then discuss the problem with staff and decide the best ways to help. As volunteers we must think of our own 'self care' and not take on the burden of problems alone. Relationships are formed between the volunteer and the Seniors who confide their worries and fears, knowing that they have a sympathetic listener at the other end of the phone. Sometimes the volunteer's call is the only call they have in any given day.

During lockdown, the Irish Chaplaincy quickly became aware that so many of our Seniors were experiencing new feelings of loneliness and isolation in their homes. They could not visit family or friends and they were restricted to a short walk and local shops for their exercise and food. Being cut off from daily outings brought increased fears. Our phone calls became more important to them and we were able to get help to those in need. Clients living alone have had to ask for support from those around them, often speaking to neighbours for the first time. They have had to get used to wearing masks for protection, get covid and flu injections, and this has affected the confidence of many and there is a hesitancy to move out again into society as things improve.

Now that lockdown is lifting, visits to our Seniors by volunteers will hopefully begin again.

### ***What have I learned as a volunteer?***

Kindness, whether given or received, is precious. For our Irish Seniors the extended family is no longer nearby and by doing an act of kindness daily - saying hello to a neighbour or complimenting a neighbour- one has no idea how any person will react to your gesture of kindness. Saying hello one day may lead to having a conversation and this is something that makes you both feel good.

### ***What do I try and pass on to the people I call?***

Remembering that most calls start with their immediate problems, I then try and steer my chat with them to draw support and friendship from people around them and allow themselves to become close. Finishing on a positive thought has always been important to my calls.



Anne Harding, 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](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)



## Made in Prison!

Two of those supported by our Traveller Equality Project and our Traveller Resettlement Project have, during lockdown, made these incredible Vardos. The one with the blue roof has been named after our TEP officer, Ellena and has been gifted to the Irish Chaplaincy.



## 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

Sisters of Mercy  
Irish Youth Foundation

Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants  
City Bridge Trust

Ireland Funds GB  
Construction Workers Benevolent Fund

National Lottery Community Fund  
Tudor Trust

Benevolent Society of St Patrick  
McGrath Charitable Trust

Presentation Sisters

Platt Reilly Morrisroe

Friend of the Forgotten Irish

CICA London

Caritas St John Southworth Fund

Toureen Group

An Cheathrú Rua

Society of the Holy Child Jesus

Merchant Taylors

Franciscan Missionaries of Divine Mercy

University of Limerick Chaplaincy

Wexford Parish

Albert Gubay Foundation  
London Community Response

Little Company of Mary

Independent Age





## Keeping Connected Across the Irish Sea



One of the most uplifting images I've seen recently was of a 100-year-old religious sister in Dublin looking at and listening to, via a screen, her 90-year-old sister in London.

Mamie, who lives in Archway in North London and who has been supported by the Irish Chaplaincy Seniors' Project for many years, was one of the first recipients of a pre-programmed Tablet as part of our 'Keeping Connected' campaign. Back at the start of the pandemic I'd had a conversation with Paul, the Seniors manager, about how we might be able to use technology to help people who were going to become even more isolated in lockdown. We were both a bit dubious about it initially but it became clear that there was a need for something, with people telling us they would find it a comfort to attend Mass or to listen to their favourite Irish radio station. Along came Joe who had been involved in a project in his native USA whereby senior banking executives who were not very computer literate were enabled to use devices like Tablets. Declan was also instrumental in the project by, amongst many other things, helping us to get around

the issue of no wifi facing most of those we were supporting by means of dongles and Giffgaff-activated SIMS!

The key, as with so much of life, is to keep it simple! And that's precisely what 'Keeping Connected' has done. All that's needed is a swipe or a touch of the screen and somebody can be watching Mass from anywhere in the world, or tuning into the radio, or speaking to a familiar face. Anne told us how she loved listening to her favourite (Drogheda-based) LFMF; and John from Galway told me every week when I called how he loved hearing Galway Bay FM in the evening and how the Tablet had changed his life!



Mamie was equally delighted with her Tablet and was far quicker than me to see the possibilities it offered. She declared that she was going to attend Mass at St Gabriel's in Archway, as well as in Ireland, and she was going to speak via Google Duo to Fr Ugo, her parish priest. She also, in the event, joined Facebook on her own initiative. And she, a then 89-year-old woman who had never previously used a computer.

Mamie had said as well at the outset, "I'll be able to speak to my sister in Dublin next September when it's her 100th birthday." She was true to her word. Joe was with Mamie in her flat on the big day, and a carer in the home where Sr. Joseph lives was on hand at the



other end. I listened to a recording of the call, in which Mamie says to her sister, "I wish I could hold your hand. I love you; I always have, and I always will." Sr. Noreen in Dublin wrote, "Sr Joseph's niece and the four Good Shepherd Sisters who celebrated her 100th birthday with her yesterday all agreed that the highlight for Sr. Joseph was the video call which you facilitated with her only living sibling Mamie Williamson. Sr. Joseph (Rita to her family) became more animated when she saw Mamie and though she did not speak it was evident that she was touched."

Whether it's supplying phone credit and writing materials to prisoners so they can keep in touch with family in Ireland or by providing seniors with easy-to-use technology like Tablets, I'm so proud of how the Irish Chaplaincy team has, in spite of a pandemic, helped people to keep connected across the Irish Sea.



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.

## In-Cell Resources Continue to Bring Comfort...

"This (POCKET HISTORY BOOK OF IRELAND) was the first ever hardback book I have ever had of my own and I love the feel of it. It is heavy and my mate reads it to me. He is not Irish but he likes it too. It's good to read. Passes the time."

"I am able to do some of the word search and I am helping my friends. We all love it cos it keeps us happy and stops us thinking about being locked up."

"I showed the Govs the pictures I coloured and they all liked them. The Govs asked me: how did I do it so well."

"A real treat for me. I sent my little girl a picture I coloured in and she was happy."

"I listen to the meditation cd and it helps me to sleep and to pray. It's good and I feel happy when listening to it."

"I have the prayer book on my desk and I read a bit every day. It cheers me up. I like praying now. Nice to know someone is thinking about us."

"Our children like our drawings and they want more."

"Presents were very good for us behind bars, they stop us feeling sorry for ourselves. Loved everything; all of them."

Sr Philomena said of the day the packs were distributed, "It was the most joyful and really happy occasion of my 18 years as chaplain in HMP Chelmsford."



**We are currently looking for funds to continue sending these vital resources to Irish/Irish Traveller people in prison.**

## IRISH BLESSING

May the blessings of light be upon you,

Light without and light within.

And in all your comings and goings,

May you ever have a kindly greeting

From them you meet on the road.





## Looking Ahead with Hope

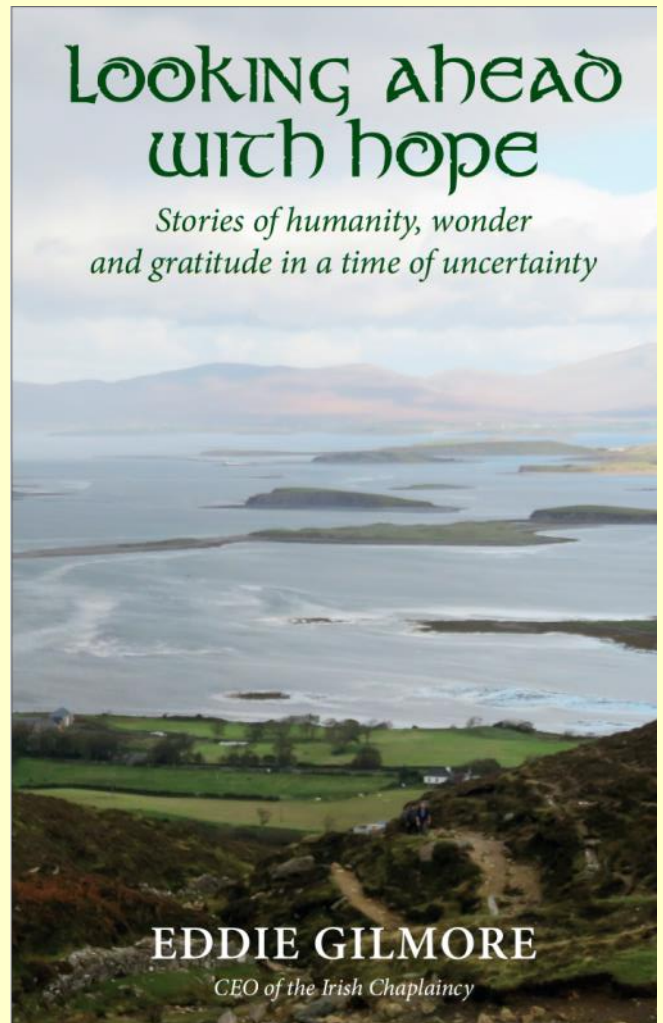
### Stories of Humanity, Wonder and Gratitude in a Time of Uncertainty

'Looking Ahead with Hope' is a collection of short and distinct yet inter-connected pieces written by Eddie Gilmore over a three-year period in the course of his work for the Irish Chaplaincy. The book is a weaving together of visits to such places as prisons, care homes and monasteries with travels further afield: pilgrimage on the Camino in Spain, walking retreats in the French Alps, and meetings and events in Ireland. There are various ascents: of Ireland's holy mountain; of Korean mountains to visit remote Buddhist temples; and, by bike, of the steepest road in the world.

At the heart of the book are the encounters with a host of characters, which touch and transform and which reveal our deep connections with one another. The natural world features prominently; so too the part that food and music can play in the sharing and celebration of our common humanity. There are stories of wonder, reflections on faith and on the human condition, and a frequent refrain of gratitude, and of hope.

The author finds joy and meaning whilst playing guitar to a large gathering of people in an Alpine cave, or to a group of Travellers in a prison; but equally whilst sitting on a bench at the bottom of the garden drinking a cup of tea and watching the sunset, and in the many small and hidden moments of encounter or discovery.

The final chapters are written against the backdrop of the huge impacts to our lives of the coronavirus and the resulting uncertainty but it ends with a surprising and simple, and yes hopeful, conclusion.



The Book is released on October 29th and can be pre-ordered directly from the publisher, DLT: <https://www.dartonlongmantodd.co.uk/titles/2342-9781913657420-looking-ahead-with-hope>

Or from any bookshop (ISBN: 978-1-913657-42-0)

## EVENTS

November 11th 3pm. Service with Bishop Paul McAleenan to mark the feast of All the Saints of Ireland. Westminster Cathedral, St Patrick's chapel: followed by tea and cake in the café. All Welcome.



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

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# Irish Chaplaincy...Looking Ahead with Hope