



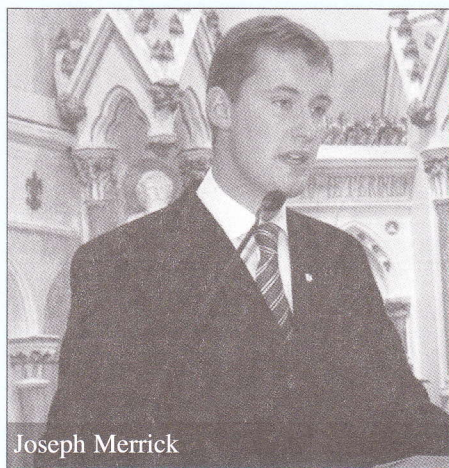
The Sheaf

ST. JOSEPH'S YOUNG PRIESTS SOCIETY



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AUTUMN 2009



Joseph Merrick

I was delighted to be asked to write a short piece for this edition of *The Sheaf*.

For those who do not know me, my name is Joseph Merrick and I am the Communications Director with the Society. In May of this year I completed a degree in Religious Education and English at the Mater Dei Institute in Dublin. I have been aware for a number of years of the Society's work; in fact since primary school when a teacher gave all of us the prayer card for vocations. At this time it is a great privilege to be able to work with the Society on a full time basis, promoting its cause and raising awareness of priesthood.

One of the most surprising elements of the Society was its foundation date. Looking at the aims of the Society, among other points one would almost automatically assume that it was born out of Vatican II. Yet St Joseph's Young Priests Society has been in existence since 1895, and it has by all accounts been a long and proud history. The legacy of Olivia Mary Taaffe is a testament to the strong will and dedication of our members to the important work which we do. In 1895 the Society funded two Irish boys who wished to become priests – fast forward to 2009 and we are at the point where 800 men benefit from the prayers of our members as well as the important financial support which we provide. Part of the success of the Society depends

hugely on the emphasis we place on prayer and devotion to the Eucharist, because without prayer we will achieve nothing. This practise is also holding very strongly to the original wish of Mrs Taaffe.

The Society is continuing to flourish, but we always need new members, because it is work that is never completed, we always need priests and therefore we must always foster these vocations through prayer. On the other hand we also promote the vocation of the laity because the church is the people of God (*Lumen Gentium*). As individuals our learning is never completed; we can always push ourselves to examine deeper the lives we live, our relationships with others as well as the important elements that shape and make up our lives. Of course the most important of these is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our whole Christian lives; it is Christ himself present, our Passover our living bread. (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). It is the greatest gift that Christ left to us. At Saint Joseph's we strive to foster a greater understanding and love of the Eucharist and to help members to be the presence of Christ in every aspect of their lives.

The first half of the last decade or so in Ireland was very discouraging, but our prayers have never stopped and the fruit of those prayers can now be seen, the last few years have seen on average 25 or 26 men enter formation. This year 37 men have commenced their formation for diocesan priesthood. I think that above all this point highlights that there is hope out there; the situation is not as bad as some of the media have claimed it to be. Jesus did not suddenly decide 'I will now stop calling men to the priesthood'. He continues to call them; and my having spoken with some of these men, they have at times remarked that something blocked them from responding to that call. It was their prayer and the prayers of their family, friends as well as our members that gave them that final push to make the final decision to enter seminary or religious life.

Within the Society we have a clear understanding that we have a responsibility to work for the fostering of vocations. In some way you could say it is like planting a seed – if planted and left alone it will simply die, it needs care, water, protection. The same can be said for a vocation, it must be cared for and protected. Our members play an important part in this process. It is a way for the ordinary Christian to respond to their Baptismal call, that also looks to the future, and the future of their children, it is handing on the faith and their love for the Mass.

Lumen Gentium notes that 'each individual layman must bear witness before the world to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a sign of the living God. All together and each one to the best of his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits'.

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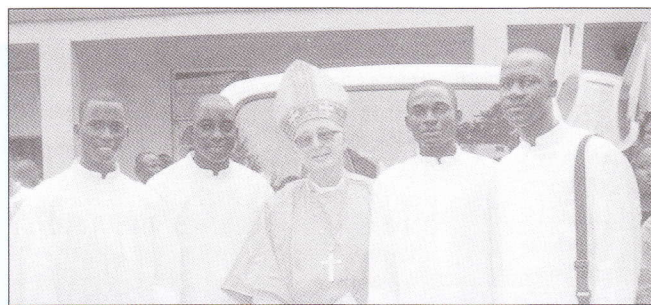
Prayer for Vocations

Loving God,
You have promised
never to leave your
flock unattended.
Send us good and
holy priests
who will desire
to give their lives
totally in your service.
Give to those whom you are
calling into ministry
the courage to say yes.
We ask this through the
intercession of
St John Vianney,
Patron Saint of priests,
in the name of Christ our Lord.
Amen.

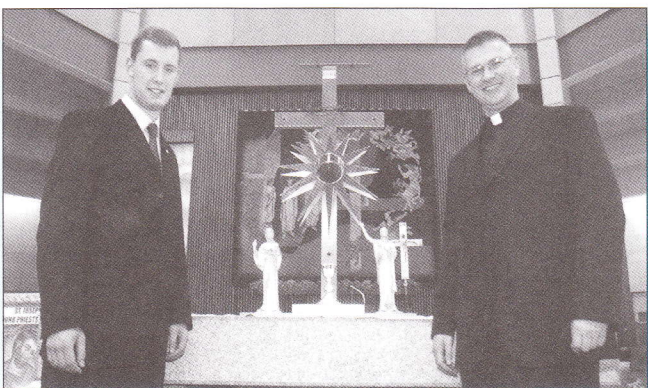




Ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Armagh, Fr Francis Coll from Drumquin Co Tyrone. Fr Coll, a chemistry graduate of Queens University Belfast and subsequently a lecturer in chemistry for 25 years in Northern Ireland, is known to many of our readers, as vice-president of St Joseph's Young Priests Society from 1991 to the Jubilee Year 2000. With him in this photo with Cardinal Brady are his sisters Anne Roche and Margaret Lamb. We wish Fr Francis every success, enjoyment and happiness in his new priestly ministry.



Courtesy caller to the Society's House in Merrion Square, Most Rev Robert P Ellison CSSp, Bishop of Banjul in The Gambia, (centre) with seminarians Victor Ndecky, Matthew Hendy, James Hendy and Joseph Colley.



Seen here with Joseph Merrick and Fr Séamus Rowland of the Tyler Diocese in Texas is the monstrance presented at Knock by Noel Ward of Muintir Bharra branch in the Diocese of Cork & Ross and used in the Basilica at the start of the Society's procession in June. The monstrance is rich in symbolism and Noel hopes shortly to have a brief explanation printed for anyone interested.



Fine weather in June enabled an outdoor procession to be held on the occasion of the Society's pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Knock. Most of the pilgrims processed and several carried banners indicating the branch of the Society to which they are attached. An indication of the numbers involved may be gauged from the length of the procession trailing away in the distance.



The Society expresses its gratitude to the priests of the Diocese of Ferns and parishioners of Our Lady's Island parish in particular, for their courtesy and assistance at its July out-of-season pilgrimage each year. Once again fair weather allowed the pilgrims to participate in the recitation of the rosary, prayers and meditation as they walked around the island following this Mass in the parish church.



The Archbishop of Dublin Dr Díarmuid Martin with Cardinal Seán Brady Archbishop of Armagh photographed prior to the celebrations in Drogheda on the Festival Day of Saint Oliver Plunkett in July. Both took part in the annual procession, which included members of the Society, through the streets of Drogheda ending at St Peter's church, where Dr Martin was this year's homilist.

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES is a DVD relating to specific vocations. It has been developed jointly by the Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors and by Vocations Ireland.

In three short (10 minute) films, three diocesan priests, two religious sisters, a religious brother and a seminarian, speak of their vocation journeys and their ministries.

How can we encourage and empower people in our parishes and communities to create a 'culture of vocations'? Only by inviting everyone to be an active participant in the vocation effort. This is a purpose of this DVD, which is available to help develop an awareness of vocation to priesthood and consecrated life; where we pray to the Lord "Grant that Christian families may desire to give to your Church, helpers in the work of tomorrow."

Please feel free to contact: Tel: 01 668 9954 www.vocationsireland.com / Tel: 04293 34259 www.vocations.ie

Festival Day of Saint Oliver Plunkett

Drogheda, 5th July 2009

Homily of Most Rev Diarmuid Martin Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland

I am sure that Saint Oliver Plunkett pondered this text from Saint John's Gospel on the Good Shepherd many times during the difficult years in which he was called to give pastoral leadership in this Primatial See of Armagh and in a troubled Ireland over four hundred years ago. I can imagine that he reflected on the call to be a good shepherd as he journeyed through Europe to Armagh after his nomination as Archbishop.

Oliver Plunkett's ministry was to be marked by many unknowns and surprises. He was consecrated Bishop in Belgium almost in secrecy. It was not for him to be consecrated in a solemn ceremony in Rome where he had lived or in Ireland where he was called to minister. The harsh situation of the Church and of the Catholic community in Ireland turned any plans for such celebrations upside down. Responding to the call of Jesus Christ, as a bishop, or as a church community or as an individual Christian is not something that can be pre-packaged and that will run exactly according to plan, then or in our days.

Our reflections on Saint Oliver inevitably take us right into the reality of the Church in Ireland today. When someone talks about the Church in Ireland today then we are almost inevitably programmed to think about what people call 'the institutional Church' and the challenges which the Church as a structure has to face within contemporary culture and the inevitable way its institutional structures change. But the Church in Ireland is always the same Church with the same mission, with the same Good News, which it is called to celebrate, live-out and transmit anywhere in the world and at any time in history.

It is the Eucharist which gives structure to the Church. Saint Oliver's ministry was one in which the normal day-to-day celebration of the Eucharist and his communion with his priests and faithful was celebration in secret and in the face of great risk. He responded to that challenge head-on. He animated a community experiencing persecution and trauma, both as regards their religious faith but also their life in society. His own courage gave his flock courage and encouragement. He persevered in that task until the end, celebrating the Mass and living the reality of the Eucharist - the mystery of Christ's saving death and resurrection - in his own body, even to the point of imprisonment and experiencing, as Jesus did, the humiliation of a criminal's death. Saint Oliver had to exercise his ministry in the context of the severe limitations of the repressive penal laws and the harsh prejudice that the Catholic community endured. But Oliver did not exercise his ministry in a limited way; in the face of all the external limitations he experienced, he exercised his ministry to the full. He led but also took example from the members of the Catholic community who in their turn exercised their Christian vocation within the same limitations and exercised it to the full.

Oliver returned to lead a community in difficult times. The history of the Church is a history of encountering difficulties and ambivalence. The Church is always a community of dedicated believers who pray and celebrate the mysteries of our redemption, who are supported by the sacraments, who prayerfully meditate the

Word of God, who teach the faith from one generation to the next, who witness to the love of Jesus in hidden yet remarkable ways. But the Church is also a community of the weak, of those who betray their faith and the trust that is placed in them, who divide the community, who are compromised through human weakness, who take the easier way, who seek their own notoriety. In the face of his challenge, Saint Oliver took the only path that is open to a true Pastor, that of renewal in the faith. Whenever the Church faces challenges either from the outward culture or through the inward weakness of its own members, the only reaction that is open is that of renewal, or re-finding in an authentic way what is demanded by the message of Jesus Christ.

Renewal in the Church does not consist in creating new structures, but in returning to the very roots of the Christian faith and allowing the perennial newness of the Gospel to set aside in our hearts what is not essential or what is even harmful and to re-find that hope which the second reading mentioned as the driving force of our Christian lives and our witness. The renewal that the Church needs today could not be better expressed than in the words of our second reading: 'having the answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have'. Renewal must come from within. A Church which thinks it might impose a message on individuals or on a society has lost its understanding of the message of Jesus Christ. On so many occasions Jesus, after working some powerful miraculous sign expressing the love and the care of God or after some manifestation of his glory, tells his disciples not to speak about what they had witnessed. Faith requires a basic disposition and openness to the action of God. God's action always surprises and is always counter conventional. A faith that seeks to align itself with a culture, which is not open to understanding the true nature and the activity of God, ends up just as an ideology or a veneer.

Renewal is opening ourselves to living that hope which our faith brings and seeking to understand what that hope says about our own lives. Faith cannot be lived superficially. Faith is not routine. Unless we daily seek a genuine understanding of the reasons for our hope we run the risk of simply transmitting formulae and norms, which have no roots in the realities of our lives. This is not to say that we should simply hide our faith within our own hearts or that faith should be sent into retirement from the public arena and be totally privatised. No, we are called and cannot but share the hope that we experience when we open our lives to the love of God. Our society needs a dialogue about hope, about meaning and as believers and as a believing community we have no alternative but to witness in the concrete realities of society to the hope that is within us and thus to bring our concrete contribution, as believers in Jesus Christ, to the way in which society understands itself.

How do we do that? What are the instruments at our disposal? The answers of our second reading surprise us. The first instrument, which the text indicates is suffering. The path of renewal in the Church

is not a path of celebrity or popularity or triumphalism; it is not a media plan; it is not simply a pastoral strategy. The path of renewal is a path of suffering, the suffering of renouncing within our hearts and our lives many attitudes dear to us and purifying our understanding of God from the many cultural accretions which would tend to create a comfortable Christianity, a smug Christianity, a domineering or patronising Christianity, all of which are founded on a false sense of what brings certainty to faith. Renewal demands conversion and conversion is always painful. It requires the pain of recognising errors and misconduct. The second instrument, which the reading indicates is that of an absolute focus on the good. 'No one can hurt you', the text tells us, 'if you are determined to do only what is right'. The renewal of the Church requires an authenticity in living out the true and the good.

The early Christians saw that it was impossible for the Christian community simply to identify itself with the pagan society in which they lived. This did not cause them to retreat from the realities of the day. They knew that they had however, to witness to the faith and the hope it brings in a particular way. Their attitude towards others, the lesson reminds us, was always to be one of 'courtesy and respect' and one which was to be lived with a clear conscience that would enable them even to suffer for doing what is right and good.

The Church today is called to renewal so that it can witness authentically to Jesus in our world. This makes some fearful. But it is not something we do on our own through our pastoral strategies and plans. The Gospel text of the Good Shepherd has certainly been an inspiration to many good priests and bishops and leaders in the Church. But it is always necessary to remember that, no matter how many times we speak of saints of the past or of good priests of today as good shepherds, the one Good Shepherd is Jesus himself and that it is he who is with the Church and who unites us and calls us to be one with him.

As we celebrate the Feast of Saint Oliver Plunkett we pray for the Church in Ireland and especially for our young people that they will encounter through our witness a Jesus who brings them hope and who redefines hope for them, away from what is superficial to what is deepest in their search for the meaning of life. We pray that we will come to know the figure of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of all our lives, through prayerful reading of the Word of God. Renewal and change in the Church must come from that personal relationship with Jesus Christ which knowledge of the scriptures can give in a unique way. We pray to Jesus the Good Shepherd that he will fill our lives with his love and that we will bring that love anywhere where harshness and indifference dominate. We pray today that all those for whom we pray at this Festive Mass will experience God's loving and healing kindness in their lives. We pray, through the intercession of Saint Oliver, reformer and renewer of the Church in his time though his ministry and his martyrdom, that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, may accompany the Church in Ireland on the painful yet liberating path of real renewal and true hope.

Around the Branches.....

BIRR: In 1996 the initiative was taken by Sr Maeve Quinlan to open a branch of the Society in Birr. I am one of the founder members and at that time we had little knowledge of the Society, its purpose and aims, but we did have a strong commitment towards vocations promotion. With the help support and encouragement of the Killaloe Diocesan Committee of the Society and of our neighbouring branch of Coolderry, we formed the branch here in Birr. We had and still have strong support from the priests of the parish and while they are unable to attend our meetings on a regular basis they are there for us when required.

Meetings are held monthly with the exception of January, June, July and August when we take a break to recharge the batteries. At our meetings we deal with the day-to-day business of the branch and we keep members who attend informed of happenings of interest. We try to have some spiritual input at each meeting - we often have a spiritual reading or extra prayer such as a decade of the rosary. We consider the spiritual dimension as a most important aspect of our meetings. The branch is usually represented at diocesan and central council meetings and also at congress. This ensures that our members are kept up to date, and their interest kept alive.

We have a close working relationship with Coolderry Branch, whose ongoing support has remained invaluable to us. In recent years we have invited them to come to us for their meetings and they have returned the compliment to us. This gives us the opportunity to pray together, to listen to each other and most importantly of all to learn from each other. In this way too, neither branch becomes isolated while maintaining our own focus and identity.

We do of course experience the same difficulties as other branches - while people are very generous with their financial contributions and in their prayer for vocations, many people today do not have the time to attend meetings or help with the work of the Society, and it can therefore be difficult to raise the profile of the Society in the parish. In order to try to achieve this we have on occasion inserted a piece in our parish newsletter and we have also spoken about the Society at our weekend Masses. While these initiatives have not seen our monthly meetings overflowing with new people, it does keep our purpose, aims and objectives in the minds of the people and if we persevere in this task new people will eventually come on board.

In the jubilee year 2000 we hosted the diocesan jubilee celebrations of the Society with Mass and a social afterwards to which all priests and religious of the diocese were invited together with the branches and representatives of the parishes in the diocese.

We arrange a Holy Hour for Vocations in our parish church around Vocations Sunday. This affords us the opportunity to reach out to the people of the parish who respond very well, and together we focus on prayer as a community. In the future we hope to collaborate with the Eucharistic Adoration Group to come together to meditate and pray on a regular basis. It is our belief that as we move forward we must bring the Society to the people through these special spiritual activities in the parish, thus keeping vocations awareness alive within the community. This we see as our task as members of St Joseph's Young Priests Society.

Helen O'Toole.

DRUMRAGH: Our branch at Drumragh meets in the Pastoral Centre on the first Monday of each month following the 10am Mass, which many of our members attend. We have grown to 50 in number since the branch was formed in 2005, and we hope to encourage many more to participate with us in running the branch.

On 28 May 2007 we arranged our first Annual Mass for the intentions of our members and benefactors. Monsignor Joseph Donnelly in his homily, reflecting on the aims of the Society, stressed the importance of supporting by our prayers those who are answering God's call to priesthood and religious life.

We joined with other branches in the diocese of Derry in visiting the National Seminary at St Patrick's College Maynooth. The college and its history impressed everyone, and we left up-lifted by the present generation of the students. There are fewer now than in previous decades, but the dedication and motivation they display is a challenge to all of us in our Society to stand with them and to respond to their commitment by our prayers and financial support.

We were represented at the provincial congresses in Armagh and Monaghan. The numbers attending these meetings is a testament to the success of this format and augers well for the ongoing development of the Society.

George Johnson

Recently Deceased

VOCATIONAL BRANCHES

Brewers & Distillers Branch

Eddie Walsh

Licensed Trade Branch

Larry O'Carroll, John Cahill, Hubert Niall, Michelle Moroney

LOCAL BRANCHES

Abbeyfeale

Margaret Madge Griffen

Ballymena

Hugh McNally

Ballymote Branch

Al Perry

Ballymun

Nora Barlow

Ballyphehane

Marsie Campion

Bessbrooke (Lwr Killeavy)

Margaret Savage

Botha/Derrygonnelly

May Hoy, Dr Patrick Porteous, Vincent Doherty, Andrew Magee, Eugene Cassidy, Susan Burns

Christ the King, Turner's Cross

Rosarie Fuller, Michael O'Riordan, Mary O'Sullivan

Curraheen Road

Michael Neville

Dundalk, (St Joseph's Branch)

Teresa Power

Eskra

Michael McGinn, Dan McGinn

Harolds Cross

Eileen O'Driscoll

Kilbarrack/ Foxfield

Ann Stafford, Matt Clune, Deirdre Brennan, Michael Gill, May Ormonde, Ant O'Kelly, Seán De Buítléar

Killorglin

Mary Sheehan, Mary Griffin, Eileen Hannon, Mary Lynch

Larkhill

Martin Good

Lordship & Ballymacscanlon

Kevin Breen, Donal Johnston, Seán McKenna, Rose Murphy, Agnes Wallace, Vinnie McArdle, Michael Meyers, Bridie McGuinness, Jackie Grey, Willie Toner, Robert Shaw, Aidan Hanlon, Veronica

Loughran, Annie McDonald, Peg Smyth, Gerry O'Riordan, Veronica Dunne, Maureen McGuinness, Brendan Gartlan, Michael Lyons, Four FMSA Sisters: Regina Brannigan, Enda McTernan, Declan Boyd and Jude Lloyd

Oldcastle

Batty McEnroe, Peter Husband, Fr Eugene Conlon,

Our Lady Crowned, Mayfield

Sr Mary Catherine, Rita Davis, Paddy Hurley, Joan Daly, William Oldridge, David Manning, Pam Finn, Breda Leahy

Portadown

Kathleen Hamill, Alice Fowler, Elizabeth Tiffney

Portlone

Peggy McGuigan

Rochfordbridge

Christy Whelehan, Jeanette Coyne, Marcella Moran

St Columba's, Long Tower

Nell Hegarty

St John Vianney, Ardlea

Anne O'Brien

St Kevin's, Harrington

St Mary Finn, Patrick Doyle, Theresa McKeown,

Margaret Fields

St Vincent's, Cork

Margaret Sutherland, Eileen Murray

Skerries

Lumena Dowling, Frances McDonough

Templeogue

Ina Heffernan, Patricia Shelly, Niall Kiernan.

Terenure

Kathleen Curtis

Tournafulla

Peter Jolley, Connie Mulcahy

Trillick

Leo McPhillips, Francis Maguire, Charlie Kelly, Johnny Harte

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Father Coll's photo:

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