



## The Irish soldier who became an orthodox priest

Father Thomas Carroll is a 70-year-old priest in Dublin, Ireland.

He grew up rural county Tipperary, in a family with strong military ties. His father fought in Gallipoli, while his great uncle was at the battle of Thessalonica during the first World War.

Growing up in a Catholic secondary school, he felt called to take holy orders but was told he

was not ready, so he followed the family tradition and joined the military.

“We seem to be a family that was always involved militarily. There was discipline among us, but the rules were not too strict. Yet, I could never consider myself a free spirit,” he recalls.

It was while serving in Cyprus with the UN in the 1960s that Father Carroll’s life, vocation and future were set on a path that led him to a narrow brick-built church in the centre of Dublin. A church which stands out from others in the city because of richly gilded decorated screen which separates the altar from the nave, but also because it is orthodox.

To prevent its servicemen being influenced in anyway, the UN did not permit any interaction between them and either communities. However, Father Thomas could not entirely follow the discipline, that both the peace keeping forces and his family have edified him.

“I had a few acquaintances with Cypriots, but the only person that I had a lot of communication with, was a Greek orthodox priest in a village,” he recounts. Father Thomas would meet up with him on a regular basis, to talk about theology and argue regarding everything around it.

“We often could not agree on anything, but he left a lasting impression on me,” he continues.

That prompted him to explore the Orthodox religion further, but when he returned to Ireland there were only a handful of Greeks and Cypriots living in the country. They did not have an established community, so nobody could help him.

It was only when the Archbishop of Great Britain Methodios, established the first parish in Ireland in 1981, that became possible for him to talk to people with the same interest.

Prior to this he had contacted the Greek Orthodox archdioceses in London, but nobody responded to his letters. “They probably thought that I was some guy seeking only information,” Father Thomas says.

When the parish has been established by Methodios, a friend happened to mention it to him by chance. He then got around there straightaway, but it took him another 5 years before he decided to make the “big jump” and convert.

“I eventually became an Orthodox in 1986, so I do not do anything in a hurry as you see,” he jokes. “But after that, I was committed. I took

early retirement from my job in 1996 and went to study theology for 5 years.”

After the conclusion of his studies, he initially served as a deacon for four years in his new parish, before eventually becoming a priest. And to him it is a vocation, not his profession.

Ultimately, it was the outward portrayal and the beautiful liturgies of the orthodox dogma, that attracted him to it. “I came from the tradition that initially the Catholic Church came from, with many similarities in liturgy and rituals. But after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in the ‘60s, everything changed and became more simplified,” the priest explains.

For Father Thomas, the traditional poignant ceremonies had been stripped from the Catholic faith. Services had become to some extent “protestantized” in the method of worship, minimalised. So, he realised that it was not for him.

This inevitably left a big hole in his spiritual life, that he couldn’t relate to this new situation in the Catholic Church. “This is where Orthodoxy entered my life and gave me something tangible to hold on to. Something about the church itself, its layout, the rituals even the smell of incense, would grab you straight away,” he describes.

At the time, among the Orthodox community in Ireland, there were about 20 nationalities. The original parish was founded for all orthodox Christians within the island of Ireland, regardless of any jurisdictions.

As immigration increased into Ireland, many of these new arrivals established their own communities and Father Thomas' parish eventually became primarily Greek. The community has grown in recent years due to the increasing emigration from Greece, thus the future of his parish looks secure.

For Father Thomas, a church is a living thing and must adapt to society, rather than society adapting to it. Another reason why he admires the Greek Orthodox Church, is because it reaches out to every nationality.

“All Greek orthodox archdioceses in the UK, have up to 30% clergy that is non-Greek, thus the liturgies are commonly English speaking. Other jurisdictions like the Romanian or Russian, are operating in their language solely for their own people,” he says.

The priest believes that breaking down language and nationality barriers is very important for a modern religion, especially when attracting young individuals.

Otherwise they could be at the mercy of fundamentalist evangelical churches, while others may become attracted to radical Islam. “They are giving them something to live for, when often they have nothing,” claims Father Thomas.

He is the only one who converted to Greek orthodoxy in his family. “It did not make any difference to most of them, but I think today they would be happy with my choices,” he says.

“If you asked me how Ireland is responding to a church of different dogma about 50 years ago, there would be quite hostile reaction to it. Now nobody cares. At the last count, there were about 130 different religions the country, most of them established during the past 15 years,” Father Thomas explains.

About 50% of those are ethnic African churches. “But the people of Ireland are accepting all religions in their country now. Maybe the reason is that most of them do not go to the church themselves,” he continues.

“Young people particularly, who are carrying on the catholic faith in Ireland, have absolutely no animosity to anybody outside this tradition,” he concludes.

Father Thomas is one example of a man, who did not just follow a religion due to family, community or national traditions. He researched, reached out and when the time was right, he found what was best for him.

## **Magical evening as children sing out at first Dublin National Schools Choir Competition**

Almost 300 children filled Christ Church Cathedral with magical music on Sunday evening (April 2) for the inaugural Dublin & Glendalough National Schools Choir Competition 2017. The cathedral was packed to capacity for the event which saw 10 national school choirs taking part from all corners of the dioceses. Every child put their heart and soul into their performance and the choirs sang a wide variety of music from traditional airs and sacred music to Queen, Frank Sinatra and Coldplay.

The overall winners of the first ever Diocesan National Schools Choir Competition were Sandford National School directed by Aishling Bridgeman. They sang 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' (Trad) and 'Fix You' (Coldplay). They



also won the part-singing section of the competition.

The category for choirs singing in unison was won by St Patrick's National School, Greystones, directed by Linsey Dempsey. They sang 'Wade in the Water' (Trad) and Hope of Heaven (Johnson). Both choirs were presented with Dublin Crystal vases.

The Curate's Prize was presented to St Catherine's National School, Donore Avenue who sang 'Don't Stop Me Now' (Mercury) and Panis Angelicus (Franck). They were directed by school principal, April Cronin.



All the choirs taking part were presented with a certificate signed by the Patron, Archbishop Michael Jackson.

The standard and quality of all the choirs were extremely high which presented the judges, Dr Kerry Houston, Head of Academic Studies in the DIT Conservatory of Music and Ian Keatley, Director of Music at Christ Church Cathedral, with some very difficult decisions to make.

Announcing the winners, Dr Houston praised the initiative which was part of the Dublin & Glendalough 800th anniversary celebrations. He said singing was the most important part of the primary school music curriculum. "Everyone can sing. Singing is the aspect of music that is most connected to yourself. You are using your own body to connect to yourself," he said. "There were excellent performances this evening. There was really good communication between the conductors and the children and it has been a very difficult decision... We were so impressed."

Archbishop Michael Jackson thanked the Revd Eugene Griffin for coming up with the idea for the Dublin & Glendalough 800 celebrations. "The idea of hearing the voices of the present for the future while celebrating the past was a wonderful one. This cathedral lies at the heart of Dublin &

Glendalough and the children have come here and made it theirs. I am delighted at the range, enthusiasm, concentration and the sheer power of the voices that came through this evening and the discipline that lies at the heart of it. It was joy to behold. They have shown us something of the enthusiasm that lies at the heart of their schools and the life of these dioceses.

The Revd Eugene Griffin explained the background to the competition which is part of a series of celebrations marking the 800th anniversary of the uniting of the dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough. “We are celebrating 800 years together by not only looking back but looking forwards,” he said. “Some of the schools taking part formed their choirs specially for this competition and this alone is validation enough. They all sang wonderfully and with their own individual style.”

The other schools taking part were Primrose Hill National School, Celbridge; Rathfarnham Parish National School; Whitechurch National School; Glenageary and Killiney National School; Jonathan Swift National School, Dunlavin; Taney National School; and the Glebe National School, Wicklow.

## Connor youth gather at Jordanstown

On Saturday March 25 the whole of Connor Youth Forum hosted an event in Jordanstown for other young people in the diocese to lead them through sessions, activities and share dinner.

Matthew Cairns was among the young people who attended. Here he writes about his experience:

*“When we arrived we had the hard choice between quite a few seminars. The decision was difficult with a range of seminars from amazing speakers as well as talented members of the Connor Youth Forum to choose from.*

*“The first seminar I chose was about stereotypes, and the second was around temptations, both of these were brilliant and very relevant to us all.*

*“Then, probably my favourite part, the Freakshakes. Milkshakes topped with 1,000,000 calories, meanwhile football was happening outside which was great fun! After that we all sat and awaited the arrival of Sharon Hamill’s famous curry.*



***In the frame at the Connor Youth Forum event in Jordanstown on March 25.***

*“When we’d finished, we set off on an adventure to find out as much as we could about the building we were in, only to come back and do a quiz on it, unfortunately our team came out last but I guess we tried and it’s the taking part that counts...”*

*“On to the end of the day and our final session: Identity, girls and guys with Graham Hare. This was probably my favourite session, an opportunity to ask questions and break off into groups to have a discussion about things we*

*rarely get the opportunity talk about. On the whole it was a fantastic event!"*

Christina said: "We would like to thank all the young people involved in this incredible event, from the audio visuals to prayers, from introductions to biblical sessions, from hospitality to registration, it has been all thought through and planned by young people.

"Thank you also to our adult contributors, Phil Howe, Graham Hare, Sam Neill, Stephen Whitten, Simon Henry and to Sharon Hamill for providing dinner."

If you would like any more information about Connor Youth Forum please contact Christina at [christina@connor.anglican.org](mailto:christina@connor.anglican.org) or 07753 312405.

## **The Big Story World in Lisburn Cathedral**

Children love stories, so what better place to be during the Easter Break than The Big Story World, hosted by Lisburn Cathedral.

The Big Story World is open daily from 12pm-4pm on Wednesday April 12 to Saturday April 15. This is a free event for all the family.



Come and walk through the Big Story World. Some of your favourite stories, such as Jack and the Beanstalk, Snow White, Toy Story and Narnia, will help us to understand the Greatest Story ever told.

There will be crafts, activities and story times throughout the day. Why not plan to come along?

This event is supported by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

## **New report: Religious orders are complying with Irish Catholic Church's safeguarding body**

The last four child safeguarding reviews have indicated that three religious orders showed “substantial wrongdoing”, according to the Irish Catholic Church’s safeguarding body.

Published on 5 April 2017, the reviews were of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Brothers), Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré (Norbertines), Sisters of Nazareth (Irish Region) and Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

The first three orders were involved in wrongdoing which the safeguarding body said was in line with the findings of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI) in Northern Ireland. Also in those three cases the records relied upon were not well maintained, making the work of the reviewers challenging, according to the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI).

“Our goal here was not to replicate the work of the HIAI, though, of course, there is some overlap,” explained Teresa Devlin, CEO, NBSCCCI. “The reviews of the De La Salle Brothers, Norbertines and Nazareth Sisters highlight concerns relating to weak or, on occasion, poor practice which they are now working with us to correct.”

The two congregations that amalgamated to create “Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd” showed an evolving and proactive approach to child safeguarding.

All four Church bodies have now adopted the revised Safeguarding Children Policy 2016, with three (De La Salle Brothers, Norbertines and Nazareth Sisters) having signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Board committing them to following the Church’s standards. The fourth, Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, is in the process of doing so.

The final four Child Safeguarding reviews, assessed against the Church’s 2009 Safeguarding Standards contained in *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland (2009)*, were conducted in 2015/2016, but publication was deferred due to the statutory



HIAI taking place in Northern Ireland. The National Board agreed not to release the four reports back to the religious orders in question until the HIAI had reported.

The review describes how the two amalgamated congregations, now Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, were previously involved in the 'Magdalene Laundries', but no longer run services for children in Ireland except as part of parishes or other organisations. Their compliance was good.

The Norbertines and Nazareth Sisters have also ceased work with children, except in public ministry, which comes under the remit of Diocesan safeguarding policy.

These two orders and the De La Salle Brothers had significant ministry with children in the past and had many issues raised with regard to poor case management and record keeping, response to allegations driven by legal rather than pastoral approach, failure to report or delayed reporting of allegations to statutory agencies, and missed opportunities to safeguard children, particularly in the case of Brendan Smyth.

In the case of current ministry with children, there was an absence of any commitment to

understand or adopt good child safeguarding practice (Norbertines).

Separately, in response to the assertion that religious orders have a moral responsibility to pay millions more to share equally with the Government the cost of redress, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have stated that there is no case to answer.

In a 12-page response published on its website and titled 'The moral challenge posed to religious about the cost of redress', the order responds to Minister of Education Richard Bruton's statement in the Seanad in March that it is the mission of religious orders to protect and uphold moral values and that many ordinary Catholics are dismayed that such commitments are not being honoured.

The Oblates' response outlines the many misconceptions around the redress scheme, the indemnity agreement of 2002 between the Government and some religious orders, and the findings of the Ryan Report.

It highlights the moral responsibility of the people and organisations involved, such as government departments, judiciary, Garda, school authorities and all the integral parts of the state system.

The scheme to compensate victims of institutional abuse was set up to meet the government's own obligations. The religious orders then came on board to make a contribution to the scheme of €128m in cash, counselling, costs and property.

The Oblates state that “There has been a delay in the legal conveyance of some properties whose value is included in the agreement. The delay is understood to be due to a legal difficulty which it is hoped can be resolved.”

The Ryan report did not suggest that congregations should be responsible on a fifty-fifty basis.

The government has sought to ‘coerce’ orders to act as if they had “corporate and moral responsibility for assuming the government’s financial burden”.

## **News briefs & Upcoming events**

**+++ Connor magazine online** - The latest edition of the diocesan magazine Connor Connections can now be downloaded via the Connor Connections link on the website, or just click [here](#). Articles include the Black Santa 40th anniversary sit-out, an introduction to the new

Connor team following restructuring of administration at Church House, an outreach project in Greenisland which helps families at home and in Africa, and a look back to the visit of Irish President Michael D Higgins to Donegore.

There is all the latest news from our ministries to children and young people, a summary of the various institutions which have taken place in recent months, and a feature on a St John's Malone parishioner who is highlighting the availability of cancer screening. A team from Lisburn Cathedral reflect on their experiences drilling wells in Burkino Faso, Africa. To request a print copy of this edition of Connor Connections, please email [dco@connor.anglican.org](mailto:dco@connor.anglican.org).

**+++ Dublin Chrism Eucharist** - Archbishop Michael Jackson will preside at the Chrism Eucharist in Christ Church Cathedral on Maundy Thursday (April 13) at 11.30 am.

**+++ Annual pilgrim walk to Clonmacnois** - Saturday April 15. 11.00 am Assemble at Clonbonny. Walk across bog (16km) to Clonmacnois led by an experienced Leader from Athlone Walking Club. Directions to Clonbonny: Take the road by Aldi, Athlone. Drive 5km to "T junction". Turn left and park by railway

crossing. Bring walking shoes/boots; backpack; waterproof clothing; water and picnic lunch.  
3.00pm Inter church service at Clonmacnois.  
3.30pm Bus to Kileen's, Shannonbridge for refreshments and onward to Clonbonny, eta 5.30. To book seat on bus text 087 212 8842.  
Cost for bus €5 - €10 depending on numbers.

## Today in Church History

**April 7, 1199:** England's King Richard I, the "Lionhearted," dies at age 41. Richard, as one of the three leaders of the Third Crusade, negotiated Christian access to Jerusalem.

**April 7, 1498:** Franciscan friars arrange an "ordeal by fire" in Florence to settle the dispute between reforming preacher Jerome Savonarola and Pope Alexander VI. Alexander had excommunicated Savonarola for preaching against papal corruption; Savonarola responded by calling for the pope to step down. If Savonarola's friend Fra Domenico could walk safely between two walls of fire, God was supposedly on the Florentine city-manager's side. But Savonarola never sent Domenico out. The crowd rioted, Savonarola's power crumbled, and he was soon arrested, tortured, and executed.

**April 7, 1541:** On his thirty-fifth birthday, Francis Xavier, cofounder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), sets sail from Lisbon, Portugal, for Goa, India. The first Roman Catholic missionary there, he also traveled to Japan, Sri Lanka, and other countries in Asia. It is hard to say how many people Xavier, the Roman Catholic patron saint of all missions, converted; the figure goes as high as 1 million, but modern scholars peg the number around 30,000. Jesuits claim 700,000.

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