

# **Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit**

## **The Story from the Beginning**

We, the people of the what is popularly called Dennehy's Cross Parish on the western suburbs of Cork city, are blessed and honoured to have one of the most distinctive and architecturally beautiful churches as the centre-point of our parish.

The Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit is a treasure among the churches not only in our own Diocese of Cork and Ross but of anywhere else in Ireland. It has been so for fifty years since it was officially opened on September 25, 1960 by Most Rev. Dr. Cornelius Lucey who was Bishop of Cork and Ross Diocese at the time.

Now, fifty years later, we honour the decision to place our fine church at Dennehy's Cross, we honour the church itself and we pay tribute to the many priests, parish workers and volunteers and the wider population of dedicated and devoted parish people who supported it by their attendance in the church.

We acknowledge the commitment of our parishioners to financing and maintaining it with the same sense of pride as was evidenced on that September day – the Feast of St. Finbarr - when the doors were opened for the first time and it became, in every sense, a church for our people.

Those fifty years have seen major developments in the Catholic Church in Ireland and, indeed, worldwide.

The 50<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary of the founding of our church comes at a time when the future must be planned pondering on the present and drawing from the experiences of the past. We live in changing and challenging times.

## **CORK'S POPULATION MOVEMENT**

There were changing and challenging times, too, in the 1950's when Cork underwent a massive expansion outwards and upwards from the city as it was at the time when church-going and parish life mainly evolved around a cluster of churches centrally located and a number further out in the well-established parish areas.

This area with Dennehy's Cross as the hub, along with present Curraheen parish and the African Missions parish of Wilton, were then part of the St. Finbarr's (West) or The Lough Parish.

In May 1953, Bishop Lucey, responding to the population shifts at the time as young people moved outwards to set up home and family, announced his plan to erect what he termed a Rosary of Churches under the patronage of Our Lady of the Rosary. They would be placed strategically to meet the new population needs.

Half a million pounds of "old money" would be required to finance the entire project and even the simplest church to seat one thousand people would cost between £60,000 and £80,000, enormous money in the currency of the time when a three-bedroomed semi-detached estate house in the Dennehy's Cross area cost about £1,900.

The Bishop's appeal was centred in the Diocese but also extended worldwide and the exiles from Cork responded magnificently to support the people of Cork and Ross in their fund-raising. An innovative and widespread wastepaper collection scheme raised valuable cash for the Central Diocesan Fund of the time.

The five churches would be dedicated to the five Glorious Mysteries – the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption and the Coronation of Our Lady. Conscious of the major new housing developments outside of the traditional city area, Bishop Lucey held that

“surely it is right and proper always and everywhere to have God’s house among the houses of his people”.

In our case, what is now the Parochial House, was then owned by Mr. Michael Hurley and he donated the site. Behind his house was an old quarry and some pasture land and the present Wilton Road entrance was purchased from the well-known local businessman, Mr. Jack Dennehy.

The site was blessed on November 29, 1956, and at that time a sum of £45,000 had been subscribed and grant of £20,000 came from Central Diocesan Funds meaning that half the total cost of the project was available before work began. Today we talk casually about the Lotto and Euro millions but in those days they were dealing, in comparative terms, with very big money and huge financial sacrifice in thousands of homes.

### **MASS AT HIGHFIELD PAVILION**

As an interim measure, while our church was being built, Mass was offered each Sunday for people of the locality at Highfield Rugby Football Club Pavilion by Father Humphrey Mulcahy who was then attached to The Lough Parish. Saturday night was dance night at Highfield and then, sharp at midnight, the pavilion was prepared by Club volunteers for the 9am Mass next morning. This saved the congregation the long walk, fasting from midnight, as was the rule at the time, to either St. Joseph’s, Wilton, or to the Sacred Heart Church.

### **LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE**

The foundation stone for the new Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit was laid by Bishop Lucey on June 19, 1959 and a wooden cross was placed at the spot where the high altar would be. The first Psalm sung was Psalm 83 to express the joy of the Church because God had found a new dwelling-place which promised to become a haven of peace for the people. God’s blessing was invoked and the ceremony ended with the singing of “Veni Creator Spiritus” and a short prayer calling on

the Holy Ghost to descend upon the building and to sanctify the gifts of the people.

Bishop Lucey on the occasion was rich in his praise of priests and parishioners for their great success in raising funds. Having mentioned the zealous fund-raising by the priests he referred to the collectors and subscribers who, “week after week, hand in their shilling or half-crown” and said their reward would be in the hereafter.

### **THE OFFICIAL OPENING**

The official opening took place on Sunday, September 25, 1960, the Feast of St. Finbarr, Patron Saint of the Diocese and Dr. Lucey blessed the exterior and the interior of the magnificent new church building and then performed the ceremony of dedication. The Pontifical High Mass which followed was led by the Papal Nuncio at the time, His Excellency Dr. Riberi.

Bishop Lucey preached the very first sermon and expressed his appreciation of the architect, the builders and the contractors. He described the church as “practical, inspiring and beautiful. It is not for our glory but for God’s glory”, he said.

Dr. Lucey concluded with these words: “May the families that worship here be holy families not only in this generation but in generations to come. Let the fathers be other St. Josephs and the mothers be models of Mary, our mother. To God we dedicate another decade of the Rosary of Churches planned to encircle the city. May it ensure powerful patronage of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary now and forever.”

For the first time the families of Ballineaspaig could celebrate the First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation of their children and have their marriages solemnised without

the long journey to The Lough Church. These were times when cars were few and far between, there were no fifteen-minute buses running on the Wilton Road and bikes and the big new transport craze of scooters were the order of the day.

### **THE FIRST BAPTISM**

The first baptism took place on September 26 - the day after the church opening – of David Francis Coakley and the first wedding was on September 29 when Margaret Elizabeth Barry-Murphy married Timothy Noel Murphy. The first Holy Communion and Confirmation were in May, 1961, and on June 18 of that year a young man called Tom Clancy was ordained to the priesthood along with six of his classmates.

To date there have been more than 6,600 baptisms and more than 1,500 marriages celebrated in our church. Our parish embraces a total of 2,400 houses.

### **NEW PARISHES CREATED**

On January 19, 1970, ten years after the consecration of the Church of the Holy Spirit at Dennehy's Cross, we were designated a parish separate to the Lough Parish and the first Parish Priest was Very Rev. Timothy Canon McSweeney who served in the parish until 1984.

During Canon McSweeney's time here the Church of the Real Presence and two schools - Scoil Therése for girls and Scoil Columbáin (now St. Gabriel's) for boys - were financed and built. That involved a massive fund-raising drive by the Parish Finance Committee of the time and featured a legendary house-to-house "envelope" campaign. Bishopstown Community School and Fás, the national skills training agency, provided facilities for Sunday Mass while Curraheen Church was being build.

Ballineaspig parish as it then was further divided in September 1982 with the creation of Curraheen and the African Missions parishes.

## **EXPANSION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Our parish, with the church at Dennehy's Cross as the focal point, went on to develop and expand on its range of church and community services in the years that followed.

In all, we have had five Parish Priests and fourteen curates over the half century. We have been fortunate indeed, to have had priests who were visionary, had the ability to work together and were so committed to involving the laity. Our Pastoral Council, established in 1987, was one of the first in the Diocese. A great number of other parish organisations also evolved as ideas were turned into reality and all encouraged and promoted by dedicated and forward-thinking priests who led by example.

Father Denis O'Connor was appointed Parish Priest in 1984 and inspired the setting up of the Pastoral Council and it was a great source of pride in the parish when, in 1988, Bishop Michael Murphy who, by now, was Bishop of Cork and Ross, appointed him as Dean of the Dioceses of Cork and Ross. That huge sense of pride was evident again when Cork City Council honoured him with the Freedom of the City in 2009.

Father Tom Clancy, in 1998, returned to the parish in which he had been ordained and gave distinguished leadership for nine years until 2007 when Monsignor Kevin O'Callaghan, Vicar General of the Diocese, became Parish Priest and Dean O'Connor became Assistant Priest along with Father Clancy. In recent appointments Monsignor Kevin was transferred to Curraheen, as an Assistant Priest, and Fr. Kieran Twomey came to us from Farranree as Parish Priest. Today they all continue to minister and lead by example and commitment.

## **PROUD OF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS**

Our parishioners are enormously proud of the achievements by priests and people over the years. We have over thirty different parish organisations from the Pastoral Council down, all of

them involving people who show enormous dedication, loyalty and give of their time and energies working on behalf of the wider population.

We are, rightly, enormously proud of our church choir under its Director, Mr. Patrick Killeen. Over the years the choir has been honoured in national competition and is, today, an outstanding feature of our parish life.

In recent times the parish has adopted the Parish of Turkwell in Kenya where Cork priest, Father Ollie Noonan, ministers. That initiative arose from the work of the parish's Faith in Action Group which set out to identify a deserving Third World cause and found Father Ollie and heard of his people's urgent need of water for irrigation and personal use. The initial project produced more than enough money to finance the work.

Two years ago, our parish embarked on the second Turkwell project – building a parish clinic and supporting community facilities - and Father Ollie delightedly reported back with photographic evidence when the job was done and the staff and parishioners were attending there.

### **THE FAIR TRADE CONCEPT**

Our parish vigorously adopted the World Fair Trade concept a few years ago and was later honoured by the National Fair Trade Council with a special certificate designating ours the top Fair Trade Parish.

Some years ago, our Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit was chosen by his family for the Requiem Mass of the legendary international rock star, Rory Gallagher, born in Donegal but who went on to make Cork his home place. Following the Mass, attended by noted musicians and entertainment people from home and abroad, Rory was laid to rest at St. Oliver's Cemetery a few miles away.

Last year the requirements for Church liturgy and concern for health and safety arising out of the location of the old church gallery demanded that the parish choir be accommodated in new stalls and these were professionally designed and constructed to bring the choir into the heart of the church community.

We have outstanding schools in Mount Mercy College, Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh and St. Catherine's National School, all of which have given the highest standard of education and life's preparation to generations of children and young people.

### **OUR CELEBRATIONS**

And, so, we arrive at the moment when priests and people celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup>. anniversary of the building and dedication of our magnificent church – well described in detail elsewhere in this publication.

The people who live in this parish and the people of this parish who live elsewhere in Ireland and abroad have a close bond and deep and lasting association with our church.

We celebrate at this time because of the work and dedication and sacrifice of priests and people over fifty years. We remember our church sacristans, going back to the first, the late Tom Waldron, a retired garda sergeant whose station was located across the road from the church. It is a time for thanking the parish staff over the years - including the Parish Secretary, Anne O'Riordan – as well as the many volunteers so essential to a well-run parish such as ours. We remember all those parishioners who went to their eternal reward over the fifty years.

It is a time for looking ahead with hope and confidence and trust in the future and in our young people to carry on the wonderful work. The Father, with the Son and the Holy Spirit -

to whom our church is dedicated - will surely look after all of that in their own way and time.

Finally, in the presentation of this short history of our church and parish, I must express my indebtedness to the late Stephen Coughlan, journalist and parishioner, for his research and writing of the first 25 years of the parish story published in 1985 and to the small band of people from the Pastoral Council who gathered to refresh my memory on what had happened around me over the 50 years as a member of our parish family.

**DICK CROSS**