



ACAI NEWSLETTER

ASSOCIATION OF CHURCH ARCHIVISTS - IRELAND

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2004

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From the Chairman:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

History ended five minutes ago! It does not matter when you are reading this, the statement is still equally valid. Indeed, perhaps I should have written 'five seconds'. Whatever has happened, however recently, is history - and archives are the record of history.

That comment is prompted by the experience I had a few weeks ago of a discussion with the General Secretary of a youth movement whose Irish archives I manage. He drew my attention to a filing cabinet in the office, and asked what should be done with the files. They had not been opened for more than ten years.

There is, I think, a popular notion that archives are like antiques, they only have value if they are over a century old. Shops which sell old things that are less than a hundred years old tend to be called junk shops, and perhaps we have the same thought about ten year old files. Much must have been lost by the failure of many people to recognise that a file that is not likely to be in current use is ripe for the archives, however recent the last document. The same is true of artefacts, however recent the latest use, if they are not going to be used again.

It seems to me that part of the archivist's function is not just to store archives, but to help people in general to recognise the need to deal responsibly with anything that is now out of use. Preservation is always a great deal easier than restoration or recovery. That is why some years ago I asked the secretary in the office of that particular organisation to put a copy of every report and publicity announcement that she issued in a particular file where I could collect it and add it to the archives. This she has been happily doing and I hope that my successor will have less trouble scrabbling for missing material.

Every good wish.

Dudley Levingstone Cooney

James Joyce's Sister - Poppie

Any treatise on letters would not be appropriately correct in this year of 2004, without a mention of James Joyce. There were many and wonderful commemorations of his first meeting with his beloved Nora Barnacle, during the month of June this year. As well as his erudite books, during the past few months his music and songs have been made familiar to all interested aficionados. Very few people however, realise that James Joyce had a sister who was a Sister of Mercy in far off New Zealand, and that he regularly wrote letters to her.

We are indebted to Monsignor James Feehan, who now lives in Boherlahan, Co. Tipperary, for a very interesting account in his book: "AN HOURGLASS ON THE RUN" – a wonderfully readable and graphic account of his priestly life. The following is an excerpt from the book – (with his kind permission):

Margaret Joyce who was 'Poppie' to her family, should have gone to New Zealand to enter the Sisters of Mercy in 1903 – and would have done so, had her mother not died that same year. After the funeral, Margaret's brother James besought her to remain on for a few years in a mother's role to the younger members of the family. She agreed, and during the six years before she joined the Sisters of Mercy she kept house for her father and her sisters and brothers: ten Joyce children – six girls and four boys-survived infancy. James was the oldest and Margaret was next in line. There was always a close, affectionate bond between them. Two years before Margaret became a nun, Joyce wrote to her from Trieste, asking her if he could send his son Giorgio back to Dublin for a few weeks in the summer. The letter ends: *'Hoping this will find you as it leaves me at present, thank God, I am, dear sister, your most affectionate Brother'*. Many accounts of Joyce, particularly in the light of his 'Epiphany' would lead us to believe that he turned against his family, his country and his Church, but they are not substantiated by family evidence. He returned to Ireland to see Poppie off to New Zealand in 1909 and he kept in regular touch with her until he died in 1941.

I first met Poppie (now Sr. Gertrude) in the summer of 1952. I was on a visit to the Mercy Convent in Papanui, a suburb of Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand. Sr. Enda, the local superior, had been shielding Poppie from the media and university students eager for information on Joyce's family background. But Poppie never gave interviews, so I was fortunate to be one of just two people – the other was Father Godfrey Ainsworth – with whom she shared her memories of growing up with Jim, as she called him.

Our first chat was over a cup of tea in the parlour in Papanui, when she freely recreated memories of growing up with her brother. *'We were always close'* she mused, *'and, being the eldest, were sometimes in loco parentis'*. This was no doubt an allusion to the declining fortunes of the family: her mother's illness, her father's drinking and the instability produced by moving house on a regular basis.

'He had a lovely tenor voice,' she recalled, *'and we spent hours together at the piano. On one occasion, his name appeared on the same concert programme with John McCormack, though in much smaller print.'*

A note of sadness crept into her voice as she recalled her brother's spiritual odyssey. *'Jim was the most religious of us all. As a matter of fact, he scared the rest of us with the intensity of his faith and some of his religious practices. He was a daily Mass-goer and he used spend at least one hour in Thanksgiving after Holy Communion. He was an avid reader, but never read a book during Lent – outside of his studies, that is.*

Besides, she added, *he was the elected president of Our Lady's Sodality at Belvedere College*

She never read any of his works, so it is doubtful if she knew of his 'Epiphany' on Dollymount Strand, recounted in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Shortly before his epiphany, Margaret had told Joyce of her intention to enter the religious life. At the time of his fervour, he said to her, *'Why not do something really heroic and witness at the uttermost parts of the earth?'*

When asked where this might be, his reply was, *'The Antipodes – and New Zealand, in particular. You can't get much farther than there.'*

'And that,' she added, *'is how I came to be here'*.

Father Ainsworth, who had privileged access to the letters Joyce sent to Margaret, told me that the number, frequency and regularity of the letters casts serious doubts on the finality of his break with his family. His concern for his sister Margaret is a case in point. Margaret entered the Mercy Order in Greymouth on the west coast of New Zealand's South Island with two other Irish girls in 1910. Her profession took place in the Convent Chapel, Greymouth, on 13 July 1912. Greymouth was a port town and the gateway to the Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers, the Southern Alps and some of the most scenic lands in the world. She spent almost forty years of her religious life teaching music and ministering to the sick in Greymouth and nearby Rununga.

In 1929 there was an earthquake in Murchison, a hundred miles from Greymouth, which devastated the town and shattered the countryside for miles around. It made overseas news and Joyce, who was in Trieste at the time, sent an urgent cable to the convent to find out whether his sister was safe and offering to send her the fare, should she wish to come home. In 1949 Sister Gertrude moved to Christchurch, where she taught music to young boys in Loreto College, and here too I had the privilege of meeting and conversing with her.

Until the time she died, Gertrude believed that the brother she loved, and to whom, under God, she owed her religious vocation, was reconciled before he died in Zurich on 13 January 1941. She kept in touch with Nora Barnacle and befriended her on many occasions. She was particularly interested in the couple's two children, Giorgio and Lucia.

Several months after Joyce died, a Jesuit priest, whom she knew only as Father Leonard, called to the Greymouth Convent and asked to see Sr. Gertrude. The story he told her was to fill the rest of her life with serenity and joy.

On the night of James Joyce's death, Father Leonard was in Zurich. Actually, he told her, he was standing outside the door of the room in the hospital where her brother died, and he saw a priest come out of his room. He had come to New Zealand on a lecture tour but his purpose in coming to Greymouth was to see Sister Gertrude and convey this message to her: Joyce had a priest with him when he died. In retrospect, she concluded that Father Leonard himself must have been the priest. If not, why had he been standing outside Joyce's room in the early hours of the morning on that 13 January 1941?

Sister Mary Gertrude herself died on 1 March 1964. Sister Enda, who was her superior at the time of her death, was given the unenviable task of destroying all the letters she had received from Jim and Stan. It was Gertrude's express wish that everything – letters, mementoes and photographs – be destroyed. Fortunately, Godfrey Ainsworth's conversation tapes have survived and are in good condition; he has privately published transcripts of them.

THE BI-CENTENARY OF ST. CLARE'S CONVENT
IN HAROLD'S CROSS, DUBLIN - 1804 - 2004

A Bi-Centenary is always a cause for celebration. Ours is a long and interesting history, surviving many crises over the centuries.

The Poor Sisters of St. Clare or Poor Clares were founded in Assisi in 1212, by St. Clare the friend and contemporary of St. Francis. The Order spread quickly throughout Italy and most of Europe. In 1609 an English speaking group had a Convent in Gravelines, France. By the early 1620s we know that five young Irish girls joined the Convent in Gravelines intending to establish the Poor Clares in Ireland. They founded a Convent in Cook Street, Dublin in 1629. Because of religious persecution within a short time they were "marched barefooted to Dublin Castle". The authorities gave them one month to leave Dublin. One of the nuns - Sr. Cecily Dillon - a member of a landowning family secured a home for the group on the shore of Lough Ree. They called their Convent "Bethlehem". The ruin can still be visited. (It was at "Bethlehem" that the Rule of St. Clare, now in the Royal Irish Academy Dublin, was transcribed in Irish by Br. Michael O'Cleirigh, OFM, chief of the Four Masters). Within a few years the nuns were forced to cross Lough Ree. They took refuge at various locations, including Galway. (Mrs. Helena Concannon in "**The Poor Clares in Ireland**" gives a vivid account of the fortunes of the sisters in Galway and Dublin).

In 1712 the Galway Poor Clares made a foundation in Dublin. The nuns lived in various disguises and locations including a former "Benedictine Nunnery" in North King Street. (The Dominican sisters later occupied this Convent). In the 1750s the Poor Clares established themselves in "The Nunnery in the barley fields", Dorset Street, Dublin. By the early 1800's these sisters faced a crisis as they were unable to pay the rent on their Convent. It appeared that all they could do was disband and share their meagre funds.

An unexpected solution was found through their friend Maria O'Brien, daughter of Denis O'Brien a wealthy Catholic merchant. Ms. O'Brien was then the manager of an Orphanage for girls in Hendrick Street, Dublin. Archbishop Denis Troy of Dublin was well aware of the nuns' predicament. When Miss O'Brien approached him about the possibility of religious becoming involved in her Orphanage, he put the proposition to the sisters in Dorset Street. After much prayer and thought, the momentous decision was made to accept this offer as the only way of remaining together as a group following the Rule of St. Clare. The Annals tell us that during this critical time Fr. Michael Kinsella, OFM Cap was a valued advisor, and the sisters had complete confidence in the ability of their Abbess - Sr. Elizabeth Byrne - to negotiate on their behalf. Archbishop Troy was able to secure the necessary mitigation to the Rule of St. Clare and with Fr. Michael Kinsella, OFM Cap. drew up their new Constitutions.

Fr. Francis Lennon had been a priest in St. Nicholas of Myra Parish, Francis Street, Dublin and was well known to the sisters and Dr. Troy. Fr. Lennon with the help of Mr. Corballis secured property in Harold's Cross for the community.

After the Poor Clares left Dorset Street, the "Nunnery in the barley fields" continued to have an interesting history. It was the home of the Jesuit priests before their Church in nearby Gardiner Street was opened and here "Belvedere College" had its origin. After the Jesuits, it was used by the Methodist congregation in Dublin for a number of years.

The property secured in Harold's Cross in 1804 was previously owned by John Lloyd, a Button Manufacturer in the area. Tokens with "Lloyd Button Factory" were exchanged for goods and are now valued by collectors. Lloyd sold his interest in 1802 to John and Samuel Wilmont who, in 1804 sold it to "Elizabeth Byrne and Agnes Tommins" the Abbess and Vicarress of St. Clares Convent, Harold's Cross Road.

On October 8th 1804 three sisters moved to Numbers 19 and 20 (now 85 and 87) Harold's Cross Road followed soon by the remaining eleven sisters. Sr. Elizabeth Mary Clare Byrne, who had entered the Dorset Street Convent in 1772 continued as Abbess. Their first assignment was to build an Orphanage. The "Orphan House" as it became known was opened 2nd July 1806 and occupied by the first group of children.

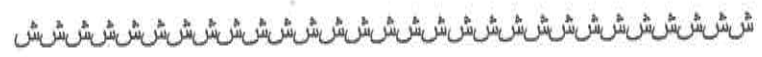
The building of the Convent and Chapel then commenced and was completed in 1817. Because of the restrictions on Religious practice before Catholic Emancipation, the Chapel Bell was enclosed in a chimney. (Later a Belfry was built). On the advice of the noted Catholic lawyer, Daniel O'Connell, the Chapel was built to look like a ball-room, with rooms on the floor over the Chapel. On moving into their newly built Convent the sisters resumed wearing the Religious habit. Because religious dress was forbidden for so long, a doll dressed in the habit was sent from a Poor Clare Convent in Rome to enable the Sisters resume wearing an authentic habit. (This doll is in St. Clares, Harold's Cross Road).

The decision of the sisters to be involved in the active apostolate led to the establishment of many Convents during the 1800s - Newry, Cavan, Kenmare, Keady, Ballyjamesduff and Australia. This trend continued in the twentieth century spreading to Wales, Scotland England, North and Central America, and Albania.

In 1963 the community of St. Clare's Convent, Harold's Cross Road was presented with a candle, at the request of Pope John XXIII, to mark the fact that St. Clares is the longest surviving community of sisters in the Archdiocese of Dublin, dating from the foundation of 1712.

We are conscious of all this and much more as we celebrate 200 years in Harold's Cross.

Sr. Marie Feely, OSC



Br. Hermes O'Connor

John O'Connor was born in Aughrim, Moyvane, near Listowel on 18 June 1923. He often said that he never found the rigidity of the novitiate difficult as he had come from a somewhat similar environment in Kerry. To this rural upbringing may be traced many of the qualities that were to mark the course of his life, such as his deep spiritual orientation, his capacity for hard work, his love for music, dancing and story-telling, his ability to recover from tragedy and a certain frugality which stood him in good stead in his life as a Brother.

He entered Castletown novitiate in 1938, received the habit in 1939 and the name Hermes Julian. He completed his teacher training in Waterford 1944 and made his final Profession in 1948. He completed his University training in 1951 and in 1954 was transferred to De La Salle College, Muine Bheag, and he will always be associated with St. Joseph's Academy there. After one year the Principal was transferred to South Africa, so Br. Hermes, though only recently released from hospital was appointed Principal at 32 years of age. He was to occupy that position for 23 years. His task was a daunting one. The ramshackle building was more than 100 years old. It was rat infested and wind and rain swept. It was almost the stuff of horror stories. There were 40+ on rolls and within five years he had acquired a staff room, a new classroom, running water and in-door toilets. He had walked or cycled to all Primary Schools in the catchment area and had knocked on the door of any house where he said he saw 'two or three tall strapping males' playing or working. In a few years the roll numbered 120. He was concerned about each one and *encouraged* them

to make the most of their abilities. His was a household name in the area, and he was admired and respected in the town and surrounding countryside.

After 23 years in Muine Bheag, he taught for a number of years in Churchtown, Dublin and then in 1991 retired to Castletown, where he was given the responsibility of organising and managing the Provincial Archives. He approached this task as he approached any new work. He attended courses, consulted experts, studied theory, purchased boxes and set out the contents in a systematic way. Even in the last few years, when his health was waning somewhat and when he was suffering both physically and psychologically from the effects of his terrible accident, he had begun to study how he could transfer each document to micro-film. He had such an avid, alert enquiring mind that he had always to be advancing, developing, progressing, being, as he used to say, 'up with the times'. Otherwise, he used to say, we will deteriorate and decay and be nothing.

One could not do justice to Br. Hermes life, especially in his post retirement years, without referring to his work in video. As archivist, it blossomed into a kind of art form. He wanted to retain for posterity, the lives of many, if not all, of our more interesting Brothers. He decided to video-interview many of them about their youth, their early lives in the classroom; he questioned them about their hobbies and interests, the teams they trained, the operettas they staged, about life in community, about their spirituality and their relationship with God. His motives were genuinely socio-historic and archival.

In spite of his reserved, quiet and unassuming manner, Br. Hermes was

one of the Province's great community men, one of the great subjects of community craic and banter, There were certain buttons which when pressed elicited from Hermes his vitriolic, sarcastic and story-telling best. One could always be certain that he would react in the same way, with the same stories, the same repeated phrases, the same mixture of sharpness, seriousness and wit that you would have to have heard to truly appreciate, and everything was in the context of great humour and without rancour.

He remained positive and jovial almost to the very end and I'm sure we will all miss his presence and the fun and spontaneous good humour and that kind of excited non-threatening anticipation which his presence always seemed to generate. In all of this I have failed to mention his generosity, his gratitude for help given, his obliging availability even when unwell, his closeness and loyalty to his family, his ability to show appreciation and give affirmation, his simple but deep, post Vatican II spirituality, his loyalty and commitment to the De La Salle family. Let us see his death not just as a release from pain and deteriorating health, but as a gentle release into the hands of a welcoming Saviour. May his gentle, always active soul rest in peace.

**We are particularly grateful to Br. Stephen Deignan, who forwarded above information for inclusion in our Newsletter. We also extend a sincere welcome to Br. Oliver Rogers, who replaces Br. Hermes as Archivist.*

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Sincere thanks to Sr. Maeve Cregan for sending the following excerpt from a letter.

Early Days in Australia:

Well dearest Liz,

We celebrated our Jubilee on the 7th last month – 25 years on that day since our arrival. The Broome and Lombidina Sisters came here for the occasion. The Frs. And Brothers had been looking forward to giving us a big day and we were not thinking of it at all and didn't know what was on but some one let the cat out of the bag, and we saw the old lorry gadding off to Lombadina etc, etc. They gave us a fine concert and a lovely framed address – only 6 of us now.

Sr. M. Patrick from Kilmacow, Kilkenny; Sr. M. Margaret of S.H. from Skibereen; Sr. Dolores from Waterford (who had the pleasure of nursing Mike Murphy as an infant); Sr. Benedict from Puckawn, Tipperary; Sr. M. Joseph, W. Australia, who is now Mother Provincial; and the Silly Ass. Johnny Walker – poor Mother Antonio and M. Bernardine (sister to J. Greene. Teacher. Rathgergough) They lie in Broome cemetery. R.I.P.

Well, we had solemn High Mass and Benediction etc. We talked of old times or the early days and all the funny things that happened in those days. (Once the boy in the kitchen came to ours by mistake, and took our dish of tripe which was ready for dinner. Another went after him calling out "Willie, you took the Sisters' stores; Give me back the Sisters' guts"!

After two days we had our Annual Retreat, and then all things were normal. Next event will be next week. Six novices will arrive here as the Noviciate is now finished.

The woman who wrote the above letter was Ellen Walker, who was born in June 1876 in Drumdurry, Bunclody, Co. Wexford. She joined the St. John of God Sisters and went almost immediately to Australia. Some time after 1907 she went to Beagle Bay in the Kimberley Region. Her letter gives an account of the celebration of the Sisters' 25 years in Beagle Bay

On the High Seas

On the afternoon of 9 April 1850, a small Belgian sailing ship – the *Oceanie* entered Waitemata Harbour and tied up near the beach front of Auckland, New Zealand. After eight months at sea the harbour and its surrounds looked most attractive to the passengers on board. Like most ships calling at Auckland, the *Oceanie* carried a mixed cargo – clothing, liquor, flour and other foodstuffs, gunpowder and other building materials; but among its passenger complement, in addition to the usual settlers, traders, military and government officials, it brought to Auckland Monsignor Jean Baptiste Francois Pompallier, Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania since 1836 and first Catholic Bishop of Auckland. He was returning to his diocese after an absence of nearly four years in Europe, gathering funds and helpers for the work of his large mission. He had been successful in attracting some young clergymen and seminarians, some German, others French, Irish and English. But the most unusual members of his party were a group of nine Sisters of Mercy, seven from the Convent of St. Leo's, Carlow, one from Dublin and one from Sydney.

Some of the letters and diaries which those Sisters wrote were preserved luckily for posterity and here I make so bold as to quote some of Sr. Philomena Dwyer's descriptions of that long sea voyage:

"It is amusing to see so many jumping up from dinner and running away. One day Mama Cecilia was obliged to flee. The sea is so rough that the soup comes hopping down from our opposite neighbour's plates by which we obtain a double portion, so we are well off. The tumblers, bottles, bread-baskets also take an occasional dance and make such a fine noise! I sometimes expect to be crushed to death by the nuns opposite me, who sometimes seem to be inclined to take a somersault over the table, the vessel being often almost on its side. You must know that fresh meat is at present rather scarce, and they do not know how to water the very salt, hard beef. Today, a tremendous wave came rolling over the vessel while we were at dinner. It gave many of the Sisters a fine bath and washed the table, meat, soup and all. The Picopo laughed and said he supposed the meat was sufficiently salt. What a kind, considerate wave!" (Picopo is the Maori word for Bishop)

Mother Cecilia Maher, the leader of the group also wrote back to Carlow, and in her letters we can recognise her concerns for both the spiritual and corporal well being of the young Sisters travelling with her:

"Mass takes place on deck, the colours red and white, with a fine cross of the same colours, serve as an awning immediately over the altar..... I can scarcely describe the feeling of sublimity caused by this tremendous sacrifice, offered under such circumstances, the extreme silence only broken by the voice of the priest, and the slight sound of the waves; the Bishop, clergy and Religious all devoting themselves to the one great object, the conversion of souls and all uniting in prayer to obtain the blessing of God on their efforts. The passengers, sailors and all, assist with great attention. After the Gospel, the Bishop preaches in French every Sunday, and speaks so distinctly that everyone who can translate French can understand him perfectly."

Sr. Philomena's description of their Patronal feast – Mercy Day – 24 September 1849 is typical of the Sisters' ability to adapt and make the best of the situations they encountered;

"This morning the Bishop said Mass in his cabin. We had the great happiness of communicating. We wore our church-cloaks..... After Mass we went on deck to make

our thanksgiving for half an hour. Our breakfast at 7.30 consisted of tea without milk, potatoes, biscuits and treacle, no butter. We could scarcely eat a bit trying to restrain our risible faculties at the contrast between our feast here and at St. Leo's. This is our usual breakfast. After this we went on deck and after Office and meditation, we studied Maori. The Epicopo came at ten to give us a lesson. Our dinner at twelve was as usual, potatoes, corned beef and a little mutton or pork. We had a rice pudding today as if the cook was inspired about our feastday. After Office, tea and recreation, we retired to the cabin, lighted our wax candle and recited the Act of Consecration, then to distinguish the day, we ate a few grapes. It was difficult for us as we dared not laugh aloud, and we were convulsed at the thought of what you would all say did you know half the events of the Oceanie, many of which are untellable. After our prayers we retired to our "coffins".

They sailed on towards the equator which was mentioned frequently. They were given straw hats to wear over their veils, and this caused them and no doubt others, much amusement. They were well, but unable to exert themselves to study or even read because of the heat. The vessel was travelling slowly and they could see phosphorus on the sea and in the air. Sr. Philomena wrote:

"It is quite beautiful, it resembles lightning. The sky is quite cloudless: a multitude of stars make their appearance every night, also the moon, and every five minutes or so, the phosphorus illumines the horizon. The litany sounds so delightful on these evenings, We are indeed very much favoured."

On 19 January 1850 they reached their first landfall on Australian territory, but the entrance of the *Oceanie* into Sydney harbour was not without drama. The rudder caught on rocks and for a time the ship was in danger, but they were not frightened as they knew the Blessed Virgin would save them. As indeed, was the case. After a Thanksgiving Mass in the Cathedral the Sisters were taken to the Benedictine Convent at Subiaco, for much needed rest and refreshment. Here they stayed for two weeks and Mother Cecilia Maher described their time there in a letter back to Carlow:

"Next morning we again came on shore where two grand carriages waited for us, four Sisters of mercy in each; are we not great personages? This lovely Convent is about 15 miles from the city; we reached it in the evening. The greatest quiet reigns around, the nuns were singing the Divine Office. It seemed to us like entering the abodes of the Blessed, so long in the vessel amidst winds and waves and noise and sailors. Oh! it was heavenly

The Bishop is all kindness and goodness; he is one of the most spiritual persons I ever met; he knows religious life perfectly. The good Archbishop takes us out to the Bush, as it is called here. It is surrounding this charming retreat which is also embellished by a river, on which a steamer passes and repasses daily."

On 18 March while still at Subiaco, Mother Cecilia received a letter from Bishop Pompallier informing her that they would depart for Auckland next day.

The two weeks sailing across the Tasman Sea passed with little incident and they sighted Auckland on the evening of 7 April 1850. The *Oceanie* anchored about 5.00 p.m. and the Bishop left the ship alone. In her first letter from St. Patrick's, Auckland, Mother Cecilia wrote: *"The Bishop stole ashore; the people were charmed to see him, and gave loud demonstrations of their happiness. Next afternoon, the clergy in one boat, the nine Sisters of Mercy in a second, quitted Oceanie and in a few minutes, landed."* Auckland, at last!

A HISTORICAL REMINDER

Rockwell College,
Cashel.
May 3rd 1894

Very Reva and Dear Fr. General,

I have been now twenty months in the Scholasticate and I ask of you the holy habit of the Congregation that I may become in a manner a sharer of all the privileges which are conferred on the Scholastics of the holy Congregation.

I like its rules and customs and particularly the great object of all its members, and for which it has been founded. I have now been a long time acquainted with the Congregation. I first learnt of it from some of my friends and now, having tried by every means in my power to find out to what life I have been called; I have concluded that I have a vocation for this Congregation, and a decided taste for the missionary and the religious state. It has always been my wish to become a priest and now that wish is stronger than ever, and it is to become, not only a priest, but a missionary and a religious.

Hoping, Very Rev and Dear Father, that you will not fail to accede to my request of being admitted amongst the Scholastics, even though I have never done anything worthy of such a favour, and humbly asking your blessing.

I remain, Very Rev and Dear Father

Your obedient child

Thomas Stanislaus McDonagh.

However, in spite of the sentiments expressed in the above letter, by 1901 circumstances had changed for Thomas McDonagh, and so the following is a different request:

Rockwell College,
Cashel
June 22nd 1901

Monseigneur Le Roi
Superior General
The Congregation of the Holy Spirit
Monseigneur

Having, after much hesitation and anxious questioning come to the conclusion that I have no vocation to religious life, with sorrow I request you to release me from the obligations contracted by me at my reception. I received the habit at Rockwell on May 24th 1894.

I am, Monseigneur,

Your Lordship's most obedient servant

Th. McDonagh.

(I am sincerely grateful to Fr. Sterling who forwarded copies of enclosed Letters. He also sent a copy of Thomas McDonagh's last letter written in Kilmainham Gaol, at midnight Tuesday 2nd May 1916, having heard of his impending execution. It is a rather lengthy document and has been copied often and so is difficult to read. We may use it at some future date.)

China Calling

We are very grateful to Sr. Rita Dooney of the Missionary Sisters of St. Columban who sent on the following extract of a letter written by Sr. M. Michael, Nancheng, China, to Sr. M. Vianney, New York, on 23 October 1943.

"It was a great joy to hear from you again. Keep up the letters. I know you are with us in "spirit" but the letter is a consolation. We are very human here, as well as very holy. I have written you a few times. We were asked for a list of what we lost during the "Occupation" [Japanese]. I sent you a copy. There were odds and ends we left out. Woollens were the biggest loss, also blankets and bed linen, though to start with, we had not a superfluity of anything. When I was coming, I brought nothing as we came by plane. Needless to say no one is complaining. There was great tension here for some weeks, alarms every day, and one night we thought they had arrived. The scare is not over yet, but we are hoping for the best. After St. Columban's Day we will feel easier until the Spring again. Please God by then the War will be over. Keep praying for us 1,000 Sterling is coming for us. The Bishop got a cable from Navan telling it was sent on to Chunking for us. I had given up worrying about money. We have special prayers to St. Joseph. I am sure he will not see us hungry. The Bishop has tremendous Faith. He seems to be getting younger with all his difficulties.

I fully appreciate you staying up at night to write. In fact I envy you. We have only rush lights using vegetable oil. It is hopeless trying to write in the daytime with all the interruptions. We have a very full Compound and there is always a call of some kind. This is not a complaint, just a kind of apology for incoherent letters.

Every one is kept busy. Sister M. Veronica is in the Dispensary and has two sick Wards for women. Sister C. Laboure has the Men's Hospital. Work is handicapped for want of equipment and medicine. We have a Doctor now. This takes a lot of responsibility off the Sisters. He is a Chinese Doctor, graduate of the Aurora in S' Hai, and a Catholic. There has been an outbreak of typhoid. It has eased off now. The weather had been very dry. All the wells had dried up. Besides, there are many Refugees camped around.

China is just as romantic as ever. We had a busy morning. A census was taken of our Compound. There was a lot of hide and seek. It was interesting to hear of the shortage of habit material. Our habits are of many colours like Joseph's coat, some a purply blue shot with red, others a smoked grey with a pearl tinge, and some variegated. Our "Friends" threw some of the medical acids on our clothing. It faded them in spots, acetylene blue, Paris green, mercurochrome, etc, etc. When the clothes were being washed one never knew what colours would be in it.

Two of your letters written in May 7th and 27th, and your recent one are the only ones that have come. Poor Sister M. Francis got no news or letter of any kind since her father died.

All the Sisters are well, D.G. All join in sending love, and in a special appeal for letters. God bless and reward you for all you are doing for us".

