

## **Celebrations**

### **Celebrating 150 Years**

Representatives of Jesus and Mary Sisters and members from the community of Holy Hill, Skreen, and some former Sisters of Mercy were present. A huge congregation from across the Diocese, especially from parishes where the Sisters had ministered, attended to honour the Sisters. Sr. M. Vianney, Local Leader in Ballina Convent, welcomed everyone to the Cathedral. Regina Deasy arranged the music for the occasion. Afterwards, refreshments were served in the Downhill.

To honour the occasion, the Urban Council gave a Civic Reception to the Ballina Sisters, which was greatly appreciated. They were presented with a framed citation, which was signed by Willie Nolan, Cathaoirleach, and by Carmel Murphy, Town Clerk, dated April 26th 2002.

Life continued as usual for some time. Dedication and good Community spirit, interspersed with fun, relaxation and celebrations were the hallmarks of life in the Convent. Extra staff was employed as necessary. The Convent cut-stone building was in pristine condition. However, there were community-living issues, which the Community had addressed with partial success. A few Sisters had already gone into apartments, one to Enniscrone, another to Foxford, two to apartments in Ballina town. However, as early as 2005, the Community members were invited to project their lives some years hence as to their choices of living circumstances. This they did, not expecting any implementation of their choices in the near future. But it happened. Two groups of Sisters were accommodated in houses bought for them, one in 35 Amana Estate, and the other in a double house – 8/9 Rockwell Estate, Killala Rd. Ballina.

### **Diamond and Golden Jubilees**

The last Community celebrations in the Convent were the Diamond Jubilees of Srs. M. Bernadette Waters, Seraphina Hynes and Vianney Nealon. Sr. Marie Celine Halloran celebrated her Golden years on the same occasion in November 2008. The celebrations had been already organised by Sr. Nollaig O'Horo before the changed date of closure and they were thoroughly enjoyed by all Community members present.

## **Sisters of Mercy to be Remembered**

Speaking to a packed Cathedral in Ballina, Bishop John Fleming was chief Celebrant of Eucharist, to mark the recent closing of the Mercy Convent. More than 30 priests concelebrated. The Bishop said that he wished *“to acknowledge and place on record, the enormous contribution made by the Sisters of Mercy during 157 years of unbroken, faithful service to the Diocese of Killala.”*

The Mayor of Ballina, Mr. Willie Nolan, was present in the Cathedral for the Mass. Ms. Michelle Mulhern, a past pupil of St. Mary’s Secondary School, recalled the values that characterised the education the Mercy Sisters provided. Academic excellence, she said, was stressed, but students were challenged to develop their talents and potential.

Sr. M. Elizabeth Manning, Provincial Leader of the Western Sisters of Mercy, citing the closure of the Convent in the context of declining vocations, with no vocation in Ballina in years, said that while the record was one of service and commitment, she also asked for forgiveness for failures in the past.

Fr. Brendan Hoban PP Ballina, said that the contribution of the Sisters of Mercy to Killala Diocese, should be acknowledged *“for the work they did and the sacrifices they made. No journey was too far, no hill too high, no door ever remained shut, if by opening it, God’s Will might be done.”*

At the close of the Eucharist, Peter McLoughlin, Chairman of Kilmoremoy Parish Council, said that a Bell-Tower would be built at St. Patrick’s Parish Church, to commemorate their contribution, and that a stained-glass window would incorporate emblems of the area of Mercy works, Education, Health and Support.

During the Eucharist, music and singing were provided by St. Mary’s Secondary School, under the direction of Regina Deasy, with Organist David Caulfield, Instrumentalists, Anne and Andrew Sheeran and students from St. Muredach’s College Ballina.

## **Closure Of Ballina Convent**

### **The End of an Era for the Convent**

On October 25th 2008, the Provincial Team – Srs. Elizabeth Manning (Provincial), Mary Walsh, Martina Barrett, and Margaret Farrell came to Ballina Convent to announce its closure at Easter 2009! Sr.

Angela Forde was not present due to her mother's illness. Following a prayer service in the Community Room upstairs, Sr. Elizabeth announced that Sr. Mary Walsh would take responsibility for the closure of the convent.

The announcement was greeted with total shock, and silence, as it was not expected at that time. Each Sister was invited to meet with two PLT members to discuss/indicate where each would like to relocate. All were encouraged to start making plans immediately. Sr. Nollaig O'Horo, Local Leader in the Convent, requested that she would move temporarily, to an apartment in Castlebar.

Sr. Martina contacted the local Parish Priest, Fr. Brendan Hoban, to announce at all the weekend Masses in both St. Patrick's Church and in the Cathedral, that the Ballina Convent would close by Easter 2009.

Srs. Áine McGarty (Sligo) and Anne Glennon (Athlone) were given responsibility for items left in the Convent. PLT employed the Services of Meely's Auctioneers from Kilkenny. The PLT took charge of fulfilling monetary entitlements of the Staff. Beds became available in Cuan Chaitríona, where three Sisters were accommodated.

Around that time, a decision was taken by the PLT to close the Convent on December 19th 2008, instead of at Easter 2009! A few Sisters went to other accommodations: Árd na Gréine (Nursing Home) Enniscrone, Co Sligo; to Dún Mhuire (Assisted Living) Athlone; Carrigoran (Nursing Home), Co Clare; Árd Bhríde, (Assisted Living) Castlebar; Loughrea Convent, Co Galway; Belgarrow, Foxford; Ballisodare Convent (as a base); rented accommodation in Ballina town. Remote preparations already underway for Christmas in the Convent, had to be shelved. A thriving comfortable home-space took on a stunned silence. The townspeople gave voice to their shock. But there were no answers. The Convent was closed!

However, the Mercy Apostolate in the Killala Diocese continues to the present day, through prayer, pastoral care, Lay Associates, visitation, social work, community work, nursing, cooking, housekeeping, education, religious instruction, Spiritual Companionship, and volunteer work. Thank you God for enabling us to be your work of art!