

# The Capuchin Day Centre

**Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap**, ministering in Halston St Parish and heading the Padre Pio apostolate, recounts the history of the Capuchin Day Centre.



Br. Kevin Crowley OFM Cap. driving the Co-operative Guild van in the 1960s.

In the early 1980s homeless men and women were accessing the services of the Capuchin Day Centre, began by Br Kevin Crowley, a native of Ahoghill, Enniskeneane, County Cork and a member of the Capuchin Community in Church Street in 1969. For many, alcohol was giving way to drug misuse, and there was an epidemic of heroin addiction in Dublin and further afield that was causing real chaos in many families and communities. The homeless services were on the front lines in those days and not least the day centre itself. In the early 1990s the service was expanded with a new building and the

introduction of adult education services. At this stage Br Kevin had been reassigned to different ministries in the order in Cork and Donegal. Br John Hickey, known to many as Br Luke, and later Br Des McNaboe were at the helm of the day centre as it developed and expanded the service through the 1990s.

From tea and sandwiches, hot soup and basic take-away foods, to a clothing guild, to services to help the men get on the ladder to a job and a room or a home of their own, the day centre grew. In the beginning it was homeless men, and then homeless women who

came to the centre, and then mothers and children.

Br Kevin was reassigned as director of the centre in the early 2000s. Many people from other European countries came into Ireland in the 2000s, and when it didn't work out for them, they needed the assistance of the charitable services. With recession in 2011, a 'new poor' emerged. People came to access the service of the day centre who had worked in good careers and had mortgages. The banking crisis internationally and at home left people in dire straits. Br Kevin spoke of a mother coming to him for food because her daughter was sitting her Leaving Cert exams, and they had nothing to eat for breakfast.

To this day, we are reminded of the queues, especially at Christmas time when over 2000 hampers are given to homeless service users, no questions asked. The heavy snowfall close to the Christmas of 2010 brought an added sense of emergency for people accessing the homeless services, and one prime-time radio programme broadcast its show and panel discussion from the family area of the day centre, which had just been constructed in response to child safeguarding best practice. When Hurricane Ophelia came in October 2017 and the heavy snow fall known as the 'Beast from the East' came in March 2018, the entire population were asked to stay at home for safety reasons. The day centre, which doesn't offer overnight services, opened its doors to let rough sleepers take shelter overnight.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the

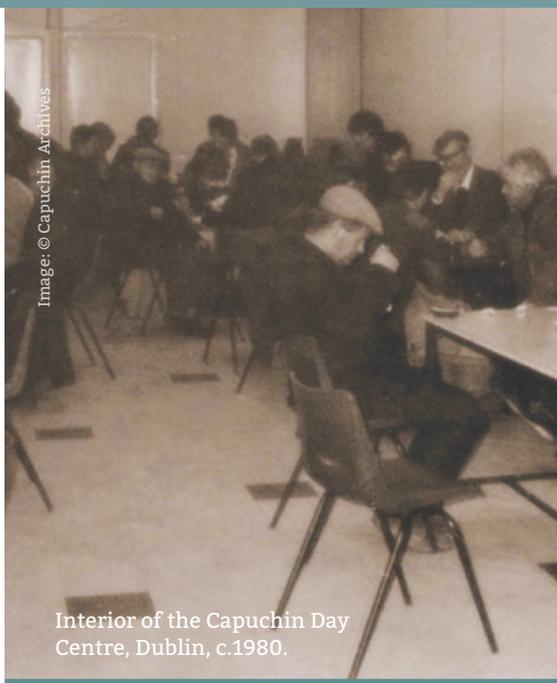


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Interior of the Capuchin Day Centre, Dublin, c.1980.

Capuchin community in Church Street opened the doors of the large church to the service users to shelter and eat the hot take-away foods distributed from the centre.

A full breakfast is now offered and full meals at mid-day, Monday to Saturday. The centre also offers shower facilities, medical services with a doctor and nurse available, counselling, dental services and translation services. There is even a bank of charge points for mobile phones and a hairdressing service weekly. Baby food and baby formula and nappies are given to mothers. Wednesday is a hamper day for the large queue which forms.

Br Kevin tries to focus on the call of Jesus Christ to 'repair my Church'. Francis of Assisi initially thought



Br. Kevin Crowley OFM Cap.  
and Pope Francis at the  
Capuchin Day Centre, Dublin,  
on 25 August 2018

that call meant repairing the church building, block by block, and stone by stone, with bricks and mortar. Later, it emerged that it was about helping people made in the image and likeness of God, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

A highlight for the day centre was the visit of Pope Francis on 25 August 2018. Going first to speak with the poor, he applauded the spirit in the Centre: 'You are especially attuned with the people of God, and indeed, with the poor. You have the grace of contemplating the wounds of Jesus in those in need, those who suffer, and those who are unfortunate or destitute, or full of vices or defects. For you, it is the flesh of Christ ... Another thing you said touched my heart. That you don't

ask any questions. You accept life as it comes, you give comfort, and if need be, you forgive.'

Br Kevin decided to step down as director of the day centre in summer 2022. At eighty-seven, he said it was time for someone younger to take the helm. It would also be appropriate to mention here the assistant director of the day centre, Teresa Dolan, who died earlier this summer. She and her siblings were the among the first volunteers to begin this great story of hope for the poor and homeless of Dublin and beyond. The next part of the story is unfolding and as Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Farrell, paying tribute to Br Kevin on his retirement, said, quoting Jesus from the Gospels, 'The poor we will always have with us'. 