

Eight Hundred Years

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a magazine of the Irish Dominicans.

This year, the Dominican friars are celebrating being 800 years in Ireland. In 1224, three years after the death of Dominic, and not quite eight years after the foundation of the Order (December 1216), 12 members travelled from Oxford to Dublin, setting up a priory on the north bank of the Liffey, where the Four Courts now stand. Other friars followed, and such was the energy of the newly founded Order that it expanded rapidly, with a foundation in Drogheda that same year, and in Kilkenny in 1225 – the Order is still present on the same site at the Black Abbey. A foundation in Waterford followed in 1226, and in Cork in 1229, and to cities and large towns of Ireland.

Those first Dominicans, with their Franciscan counterparts, brought fresh vigour to the Irish Church. They did this principally through their preaching and hearing confessions. Their priories all being in towns gave lay people access to the choral celebration of the daily Office. Two Irish Dominicans were among the four professors involved in the short-lived setting up of a university in Dublin in 1320.

The Irish Dominicans now number 125, spread over 10 priories in Ireland, two in Trinidad and Tobago, and in San Clemente in Rome. Among the 125, two are novices and 13 are students in formation.

The Irish Province founded the Order in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, Australia becoming a separate province in 1950. Their acceptance in 1959 of a request to staff a seminary in Nagpur in India, led to gradual acceptance of Indian vocations and to the establishment, in August 1997, of an independent Dominican province in India.

When first they came to Ireland, preaching for Dominicans meant primarily speaking to a crowd of people. But as society changed other forms of sharing understanding of the faith became available. Irish Dominicans are now taking advantage of such opportunities. Besides their commitment to preaching in their churches, Dominicans in Ireland are involved in preaching retreats and missions, in education (Newbridge College, and primary schools in Dundalk and in parishes where the Order works). The St Martin Apostolate, home of the Moving Crib, is a Dominican undertaking, as is Knockadoon Camp in Co. Cork which has for decades brought young people to Christ in a vibrant way. Dominican Publications, publishers of magazines and books since 1897, launched a new bi-monthly magazine, *Conversations*. The Priory Institute, based in St Mary's, Tallaght, has, since 2000, provided the opportunity to study theology, by distance learning, to degree and master's



Saint Saviour's Dominican Priory Church Nave, Dublin

level. At the graduation ceremony of November 2023, 27 students were conferred with their degrees. As well as its certificate and degree courses, the Priory Institute offers two master's programmes, in biblical studies and in Thomistic studies.

Two Irish Dominicans have served as Master of the Order, coincidentally both at General Chapters held in Rome. Fr Michael Browne, an uncle of the poet Máire Mac an tSaoi, was elected in 1955 and had to step aside on being made cardinal in 1962. Galwayman Fr Damian Byrne served from 1983 to 1992. In line with a much-appreciated link between the Dominicans and the Jesuits, he was invited to celebrate the Requiem Mass for Superior General Fr Pedro Arrupe.

Irish Dominicans have made notable contributions to Church and society. Some examples include: Henry Gaffney (novelist and playwright); Henry Flanagan (sculptor); Fergal O'Connor

and Paul Bowe, in UCD; Conleth Kearns, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, and Wilfrid Harrington in scripture studies; Austin Flannery, in publishing (especially as editor of *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*) and in advocacy for justice; Leonard Boyle, late prefect of the Vatican Library; Liam Walsh in theology, Romauld Dodd and Thomas McInerney in RTÉ.

The celebration of the centenary began on Sunday 11 February, with Mass in St Saviour's, Dublin, celebrated by Fr Gerard Francisco Timoner, eighty-seventh successor of St Dominic as Master of the Order. After the Mass he unveiled a specially commissioned painting of the arrival of the Dominicans in Ireland, by William Nathan; a performance of Handel's *Messiah* took place in The Helix, on 14 April, with soloists Claudia Boyle, Sharon Carty, Andrew Gavin, John Molloy, and the Tallaght Choral Society.