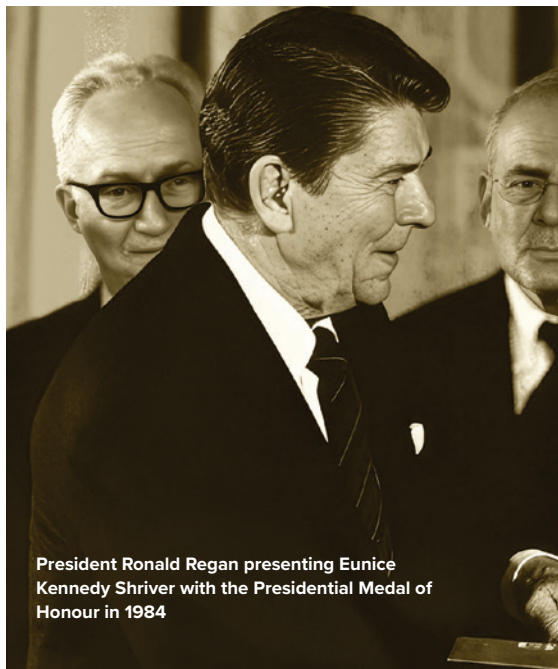


The Special Olympic Games

Deirdre Powell is a freelance journalist and frequent contributor to the *Sacred Heart Messenger*.

This summer marks the occurrence of the Special Olympic Ireland Summer Games, which take place from 18–21 June 2026. It constitutes Ireland's largest inclusive sporting event, with in excess of 1,200 athletes competing across twelve sports over four days.

You may be aware that the world-wide Special Olympics organisation, which is the world's largest sporting organisation for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, was founded on 20 July 1968 (fifty-eight years ago) by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, who was a sister of President John F. Kennedy. The games were first held in Chicago, Illinois, in the US, and there were around 1,000 athletes from the USA and Canada. International participation increased in the decades that followed. Both Summer and Winter World Special Olympic Games exist. The first Summer Games held outside the US took place in Dublin in 2003, with the inclusion of 7,000 athletes globally. In 1977, the first World Winter Games were held in Steamboat Springs in Colorado, and in 1993



President Ronald Reagan presenting Eunice Kennedy Shriver with the Presidential Medal of Honour in 1984

Austria became the first country to host the Winter Games outside the US.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver began a day camp in June 1963 at her home in Potomac, Maryland. The camp was called Camp Shriver and was aimed at children with intellectual and physical disabilities. The camp became an annual event, and similar camps were held by universities, recreation departments and community centres across the US, which were funded by the Kennedy Foundation. It is interesting to note that Shriver had a sister, Rosemary Kennedy, who was born with an intellectual disability. Rosemary's disability contributed to Shriver's vision of the Special Olympic Games. In 1971, the US Olympic Committee approved the use of the name 'Olympics' for the special games. The logo of the Special Olympics is based on the sculpture



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letes annually. This year's Irish games will feature inclusive sport, showcasing athletics, aquatics, basketball and football, among other events. From an Irish perspective, it is interesting to note that Irishwoman Mary Davis was the CEO of Special Olympics International, and she was the first non-American CEO. She held this position from May 2016 until December 2025, and was succeeded by David Evangelista, who had been the regional president and managing director of Special Olympics Europe Eurasia.

Joy and Happiness to All the Children of the World by the Georgian artist Zurab Tsereteli. The 'stick figure', intended to convey the notion of movement and activity, is meant to be a symbol of growth, confidence and joy among the disabled community.

The next Summer Special Olympics World Games will be held in Santiago, Chile, in October 2027, while the next Winter Special Olympics World Games will be held in 2029 in Zürich–Graubünden, Switzerland.

Meanwhile, in Ireland, Special Olympics Ireland was founded in 1978 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and, at that time, was one of the first European programmes of the international Special Olympics movement. The Irish organisation provides athletic competition, sports training and developmental programmes for nearly 7,000 ath-

What was the attitude of Jesus to people with disabilities in the Bible? Jesus approached people with disabilities in a compassionate way and performed many healing miracles in his ministry, by healing those who were blind and deaf, for example. When Jesus healed deaf people, he did so in order to demonstrate the compassion and love of God, helping people both physically and spiritually.

The patron saint of people with disabilities is St Giles, also known as Giles the Hermit, who was born c. 650 AD in Athens, but lived in retreats near the mouth of the Rhône. He was crippled in the leg by an arrow that was intended for his pet deer, which led to his patronage of people with disabilities. Other saints with disabilities include St Germain Cousin and St Joseph Cupertino.