

## Wexford in focus

# Two churches—a single heart

**W**EXFORD parish is in the unusual situation of having twin churches on Bride Street and Rowe Street, but this does not prevent hundreds of volunteers coming together to make the community work together as one.

During the early part of the 19th Century it was decided to build a second church when it became apparent that existing church space in Wexford town wasn't sufficient. Bishop Brennan is the parish priest of Wexford and four priests run the parish between the two churches, but working with them are over 100 people in different ministries, between sacristans, readers, Eucharistic ministers, collectors, stewards, ushers, and car park attendants.

Meeting a small sample of these volunteers over a cup of tea at the Rowe Street parochial house, the consensus of the group is that the spirit of giving in the community has a lot to do with the priests. "They are very popular and they have a good rapport with the community," says Linda Keeling. "The priests have an open door policy, we feel we can approach them and have a word," agrees Rory Gallagher.

Lay involvement starts at what you might call the beginning of parish life, with the baptismal programme, where members of the baptismal team visit parents at home to explain all about the ceremony.

Eanna McKenna started

his involvement with the parish early himself at the age of seven when he joined the junior choir in Bride Street.

He then became director of the Rowe Street children's choir at the age of 16, and he is a good example of the musical talent that Wexford is known for. "We have about 40 in the choir at the moment," he says. "We have never had so many before, and they are a good bunch of kids."

### Bell ringer

Éanna is also a bell ringer in Rowe Street, one of only two Catholic churches in the country to have bell peals. About eight people out of a group of 10 ring the bells for Mass every Sunday, and on New Year's Eve Éanna even played Auld Lang Syne on the bells at midnight.

A Sunday school also caters for the children of the parish, drawing families together in the liturgy on Sundays, which allows the kids to hear the Word of God in a language they can understand, according to Fr Jim Fegan, Adm.

A school is run in the sacristy of both churches where anything from seven to 20 children come together during the readings to experience the message at their own level.

"We keep it simple," says Daniela Simmons, a volunteer in Rowe Street. "The kids like to sit and talk. We put things in real terms so they can understand what we are talking about."

The Dun Mhuire theatre is another big hive of parish



Fr Jim Fegan (Centre) and Choir Director, Éanna McKenna (Right) with the members of the Rowe St Junior Choir in Wexford town.

activity. It's run by volunteers from around the parish, with a good blend of young and old according to the secretary Emily McCann. "There are about 30 people involved in the panto at the moment which is written and acted locally. We also have bingo every Sunday night, and a teenage discos

every six weeks or so."

Wexford Pantomime's roots stretch back to the early 1900s when the Franciscan Friars brought the tradition to the town, and it has been kept up ever since through the commitment of lay volunteers.

The folk group is another institution with a long tradi-

tion which stretches back to 1979.

"We are like a family," says the director, Linda Keeling. "It has evolved and continued over the years, which I think is a miracle. It has a great social side. We even have two girls who drive from Enniscorthy and one who comes from Rosslare to

attend, so there must be something special that keeps people coming."

When asked for one word to describe their parish all the volunteers agree it has to be "vibrant", and that is thanks to the hard work and team effort of the priests and lay volunteers who make the community possible.

# American visitors are making music in Clonard

**A** group of American university graduates are making music in Clonard parish as part of a voluntary year of service and ministry. Clarissa Ramos, Carolyn Pirtle, Patrick Duffey and Jessica Mannen are former members of the folk choir in Notre Dame University, who upon graduation volunteered to come to Ireland to make up the Teach Bhríde ministry team. This is a lay community sponsored by a American non-profit organisation called the House of Bridget Incorporated.

"The folk choir has been touring Ireland off and on for the last 20 years," Carolyn explains, "and people were saying it would be lovely to have a permanent presence. Taking that impression I worked with the Director of the folk choir, Stephen War-

ner, and we came to Ireland in 2008 to lay the ground work of this project. He approached Msgr Denis Lennon with this idea and he agreed to host a group of graduates in a year of service and ministry, primarily through music."

The pilot project was completed in 2009 and in September last year the current group arrived. "We are all from different backgrounds academically," Patrick says, "what ties us together is our work in the folk choir. For me it was a call, knowing that I had certain gifts and talents that I could share with people, and something I felt could do a lot of good."

The team work with the vigil choir and folk group choir, the children's liturgy group, and help with the Confirmation programme. They offer support with new

repertoire, planning liturgies, looking at the readings and seeing what fits best. "We try to offer some new ideas, and share back and forth on things that we think will work well together," Clarissa says.

"At least twice a year we have workshops for musicians around the whole diocese," Jessica says, "to spend an afternoon learning new music and fleshing out what the role of music ministry means for the parish. We also put on a retreat for music ministers to give them a chance to pray and reflect."

The project has been a learning process and an enriching exercise for both the Teach Bhríde team and the parish. "I was blown away by the parish," Clarissa says. "Even just to see the amount of liturgies that are offered during the day and the people attending those. We go to

the morning Rosary and Mass everyday and there are many people there. It is so wonderful to see that interest and the people who have welcomed us. That has been a strong community for us because they are like our family that we see everyday." Jessica says she has been really impressed with the lay involvement and the number of volunteers who take part. "I think it is a great model for any parish."

"I think credit should also go to the priests here," Carolyn says. "Msgr Denis, as parish priest is very adamant about involving lay people as much as possible and he is very keenly aware of the priestly population changing, and that the lay community has to take a much greater role in Church and creating community. He is really trying to foster that and it is amazing to see."



Carolyn Pirtle, Clarissa Ramos, Jessica Mannen and Patrick Duffey make up the Teach Bhríde ministry team in Clonard parish.