

# ST MARY'S ABBEY

GLENCAIRN CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER 2025



## A WORD FROM THE ABBESS

As we enter this blessed season of Christmas, our hearts are filled with gratitude for the greatest gift ever given—our Saviour, Jesus Christ. His birth reminds us of God's boundless love and the hope that continues to shine through even the darkest nights. This holy season, we pause to reflect on the miracle of the manger, the peace proclaimed by the angels, and the everlasting promise of Emmanuel—"God with us."

Together, we lift our prayers to God: for peace in our world, that understanding and compassion may grow among all people; for peace in our families, that love may fill every home; and for peace in our hearts, that Christ's light may bring comfort, healing, and hope.

We are deeply grateful for the support and kindness we have received throughout 2025—both material and spiritual—from our friends, families, and faith community. Your prayers, encouragement, and generosity have strengthened us and reminded us of the true meaning of Christian fellowship.

May this Christmas season bring you joy, love, and the abiding peace of Christ. From all of us, thank you for walking beside us this year and for sharing in the light of His love.

With warmest blessings,

*Mother Fiachra*

## THE GENERAL CHAPTER

The General Chapter took place in Assisi this year, bringing together abbots, abbesses, and delegates from monasteries of our Order worldwide. Mother Fiachra attended on our behalf, and over a 3 week period, reviewed reports, discussed formation and governance, and elected members to various commissions. The Chapter provided an opportunity to reflect on the life and direction of the Order. The experience strengthened collaboration among our communities and set priorities for the next 3 years, to ensure continued unity and shared purpose.

## MEDIA

From time to time, the secular media grow curious about life behind our walls & come to learn more. Though we approach this with caution, it is a joy to share something of the monastic way. This year we welcomed RTÉ's Maura Fay, photographer John Foley, writers Sara Baume and John Scally, producer Regan Hutchins, and RSVPLive's Shauna Bannon Ward. They came equipped, not just with mics, recorders & cameras, but with good humour and open minds. We are grateful for their interest & kindness, and *perhaps* unwitting evangelisation! - *Sr Beatrice*

## A VISIT FROM GIRL SCOUTS

In June we welcomed a group of Catholic Girl Scouts from Cork—4 leaders & 16 girls aged between 8–12 years. They camped in the field opposite the orchard, enjoying a simple experience close to nature (& blessed with fine weather!). One evening, Sr Denise and I joined them for dinner by the fire—a joyful meal of wholesome food & good company. The girls were full of curiosity about our life here & joined us for our liturgy, singing for us at Mass too. It was a delightful encounter, marked by warmth, faith and friendship. - *Sr Michele*

## SR ANGELA GRADUATES

This year I graduated with an MPhil in Christian Theology from the Loyola Institute, Trinity College Dublin. This 1 year course combined taught modules with a 15,000-word dissertation, making for an intense but rewarding experience—full of reading, writing & many cups of coffee! The programme gave me the opportunity to explore theological ideas in greater depth & to reflect on how faith and study can enrich one another. Writing the dissertation was a particular challenge, but it was satisfying to see it through to the end. I'm deeply grateful for the support and encouragement I received throughout my studies, and I look back with appreciation for the experience—and a touch of relief that it's now safely completed! - *Sr Angela*

## WELCOME TO GLENCAIRN!



At the beginning of October, we at Glencairn were in the privileged position of being able to facilitate the change of stability of Sr Kathleen Waters & Sr Anne Malcolm, both formerly of the community of N.D. de l'Assomption, New Brunswick, Canada. It was an occasion fraught with poignant emotion. A recognition of the finality of the closure of their much-loved monastery & the possibilities held within new beginnings. We pray for and give thanks for the vocations of Sr Kate & Sr Anne. - *Sr Michelle M.*

## INITIAL FORMATION

It was to the Cistercian Monastery of Tautra Mariakloster, located on a rugged fjord off Norway, that Sr Sarah (Regional Secretary for Formation), Sr Beatrice, Sr Laura and Marlena went to participate in our Region's 2025 Initial Formation Course. The theme of the course was 'Patristics: The Church Fathers,' given by Bishop Erik Varden (Bishop of Trondheim & former Abbot of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey in England).

As always, it was a week full of fun & learning. For our customary day trip, we visited a 12th century Cistercian ruin before paying a visit to our brother monks in the newly built Monastery of Munkeby, juxtaposing in a lovely way the old with the new.

Before the week concluded, it was announced that next year's course will take place in... Glencairn Abbey! While Glencairn may not seem quite as exotic as Norway, we enthusiastically look forward to it all the same! - *Sr Laura*



## NOVITIATE NEWS

On the Feast of the Annunciation, we rejoiced as Sr Laura made her First Profession, exchanging her white novice's scapular for the black scapular & leather belt of a professed sister.

We are delighted to see Sr Marlena in her newly received white novice's habit, received on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.





## TO ELECT AN ABBESS

This year marked a joyful milestone for our community with the election and blessing of our new Abbess, Mother Fiachra. Elected for a six-year term, Mother Fiachra received her Abbatial blessing on 15th August in a ceremony rich in tradition and prayer, presided over by Bishop Alphonsis Cullinan.

The role of an abbess, as described in the Rule of St Benedict, is one of both guidance and care: *“Let her strive to be loved rather than feared, always seeking the good of the souls entrusted to her.”*

## SR MARIE’S ‘SABBATICAL’!

Driving out the front gates of Glencairn I sang three Alleluias! My mandate as abbess had finished and I was heading for Our Lady of Silence monastery in Roscrea. There I had been offered a lovely apartment in the guest house, together with the use of a car. Over the next 6 weeks of summer there, I spent time reading, praying, walking and enjoying quality time with my siblings, friends, neighbours and cousins. Concluding my time there, I made a Visitation in OL Silence, then went on to make another Visitation in Genesee Abbey, in upstate New York! It was a glorious and memorable time and I returned home for the Abbatial Blessing. A big thank you to all. - *Sr Marie*



## SR JUSTINA: A RETURN

In October 1967, a Nigerian novice of the Holy Rosary Sisters arrived at Glencairn. She had come to Ireland to study medicine in Cork University, but felt called to the contemplative life. Accepted into our Novitiate, she made Solemn Profession in 1973. In 1976 she returned to Nigeria to begin a foundation, gathering postulants, raising funds, and with Bishop McGettrick’s help, acquiring a site for the monastery, which later became St Justina’s Abbey, Abakaliki.

She died unexpectedly in 1981, aged 38, and was buried in Glencairn. In May of this year, at Abakaliki’s request, her bodily remains were exhumed. Accompanied by psalmody and chant, we processed with her remains and accompanied them to the waiting hearse for their journey to Nigeria, where she now rests beside the community she worked so hard to establish. - *Sr Gertrude*

## SR LILY’S BOOK LAUNCH

In October, my autobiography was launched in the Abbey guesthouse, introduced by M Fiachra. This was followed by an engaging address by Msgr Willie Ryan, who spoke so compellingly that seventy copies were sold on the day.

As my youth work began in Newry, Fr Francis Brown invited me to stop there on my way home for a further launch. I was warmly welcomed by many from Bosco Youth & the Camogie Club, whom I had assisted in reaching an All-Ireland club semi-final. The atmosphere was one of great excitement.

We continued our journey to my home parish, where at 7pm on 29th November, the book was launched to a packed hall, with people queueing outside. I signed books until 10pm, after which I was asked to speak. It was an emotional moment. I said: *“This has been an unbelievable experience. I remember being asked at a farewell party 45 years ago, ‘Are you really going to be a nun?’ I replied, ‘I don’t know, but I’m going to find out.’ To return after all these years is deeply moving, and I am profoundly grateful—especially to my niece Marie Therese for bringing me (and the books!) from Glencairn and organising the event, and to my other niece for providing the music. It felt like the welcome of the Prodigal Son: a truly red-letter evening.”* - *Sr Lily*

## A VIEW FROM ROME: 2025

Rome in 2025 has been a place of pilgrimage for many marking the Jubilee Year of Hope. From the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica by Pope Francis on Christmas Eve 2024, and continuing until 6th January 2026, (when Pope Leo will preside at its closure), millions will have come to join in one of the many organised events. There have been special events for artists, deacons, the military, the sick, young people, canon lawyers, educators, choirs, and very many more. The organisation at the Vatican has been superb, with numerous officials and volunteers on hand to keep things organised, moving and peaceful. Groups had the opportunity to register for a special entry through the Holy Door, and group leaders received a special cross and prayed particular prayers as they processed along. It was impressive! The authorities of the City also stepped up to the mark with the provision of extra public transport (the Metro got a bit crowded sometimes!), policing, signage, security services, and much more. Some public places were especially spruced up. The words of psalm 119 were evidently applicable to Rome this year: *"It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord!"* - Sr Eleanor

## ANNUAL RETREAT

This year's Retreat was an enriching experience led by Carol Barry, an experienced 'anam cara' and theology lecturer. Carol drew from the deep wells of Scripture, the beauty of nature and the expressive language of poetry and art—all interwoven with the wisdom of her own lived experience. Throughout the retreat, she invited us to see differently—to look beyond the surface and cultivate a contemplative way of seeing. We were encouraged to recognise the presence of God in the rhythm of our daily lives, in the changing seasons, and in the beauty of the natural world. Quoting St Augustine, Carol reminded us: *"Start to see with the eyes of the heart so that God can be seen."*

Through prayer & reflection, she helped us rediscover our vocation to reveal the face of God in one another, & to mirror divine love through lives rooted in simplicity and compassion. - Sr Mairéad

## CELTIC WAYS IRELAND

Entering through the gates of Glencairn, is an experience unlike any other—something intangible draws us deeper. Over the past year, our Peace Choir and Celtic Ways Ireland Pilgrim Groups have visited several times, each visit marked by a peace the world cannot offer. Glencairn feels like a true sanctuary, a place apart that helps us pause, reflect, and be renewed. In the stillness and silence, we encounter God who cares, and Christ who walks beside us. With great warmth and simplicity, the Sisters welcome us, pausing in their work to ensure we have all we need. Their quiet joy speak of lives rooted in God. Here, by the River Blackwater, we find rest for our souls. - Phil Brennan

## AMOI MEETING

With exuberance and joy, Sr Denise and Sr Laura set out on a September morning for a 4.5 hour journey to the Dominican Monastery of St Catherine of Siena, Drogheda, for the annual AGM of the Association of Monastics of Ireland.

The communities represented at the AGM included Redemptoristines, Dominicans, Benedictines and Good Shepherd Sisters.

The day consisted of short presentations from each community on the theme of hope: *'living joyful hope in the reality of today,'* with time set aside for prayer, socialising & a tour of the house. Encouragement & fellowship were markers of the event, and we look forward to hosting the AGM next year at Glencairn.

- Sr Denise

