



Fr Adrian Egan, rector of the Redemptorists, pictured in the bell tower of St Mary's Cathedral.

PICTURE: BRIAN GAVIN / PRESS 22

Wanted: bell-ringers for city's churches

Leader Reporter

MAYOR Maria Byrne has said efforts to preserve a centuries-old tradition in the city were in part behind her hosting of a reception this week for the 15 bell-ringers of Limerick.

Campanology – to give bell-ringing its official name – has been a feature of life in the city for over 700 years and the Sunday morning reveille of the bells of St Mary's Cathedral and the Redemptorists remains familiar to thousands of city residents.

And according to the rector of the Redemptorists, Fr Adrian Egan, bell-ringing is not only an ancient "art form" but has been a longstanding force for ecumenism in the city of spires. Both Church of Ireland and Catholic traditions are keeping the practice alive, they practice together and share personnel.

"When people come up and see the belfry they are quite amazed by it so we are trying to generate an interest. It's an art form and it's a music form. They are the biggest musical instruments in Limerick and they are amazing," Fr Egan said.

"Anyone interested in getting involved can come along to St Mary's Cathedral on Monday nights and watch the ringers practice. It takes about a year to train and it develops into an art form of change ringing."

"It's not just a question of ringing one bell after another there is an absolute language and a music to it. Its an art but sadly

less and less people are getting involved," he added.

While the profile of the city's bell-ringers is aging, Fr Egan said you need a stout constitution and no little strength. And there are risks attached for the uninitiated in that any disruption in rhythm might see you carried up towards the belfry. The bells at the Redemptorists, of which there are 10, weigh up to a ton.

"I'm very fit because you would have to be especially when we have to go up checking out the bells. There are about 63 steps that we climb in Mount St Alphonsus," said Patrick Hanley, from Rosbrien and who with 63 years of service is the city's longest serving bell-ringer.

"We would love to get young people involved. We've been all over Ireland ringing and between both towers, since 1952 we have won a total of 46 southern district championships and 36 All Ireland titles in The Irish Association of Change Ringers competitions," said the 79-year-old.

Kieron Brislane from Adare, meanwhile, has clocked up a total of 40 years of bell-ringing to date and is the third generation of his family to whom the idea has appealed.

"It's a wonderful pastime and you can travel the world with it. I've rung in bell towers in Australia, South Africa and the United States. You don't know anyone when you go to any of these countries and then you walk into a bell tower and all of a sudden you have a bunch of friends," Mr Brislane said.



Fr Adrian Egan and Noel Newman ringing the bells in St Mary's Cathedral