

Dominican Order holds its General Chapter in Ireland for the first time

Historic visit to Limerick of Master General and delegates



The Mayor of Limerick, Clr. Gus O'Driscoll, with the Master General of the Dominican Order, Fr. Aniceto Fernandez, during the civic reception held in the Municipal Art Gallery, Pery Sq., Limerick. (LL photo)

The visit to Limerick last weekend of the 29 delegates who are attending the Dominican General Chapter at St. Mary's, Tallaght, Co. Dublin, and who were accompanied by Fr. Aniceto Fernandez, O.P., Master of the Order, and a number of advisers and translators attending the Chapter, was an historic occasion in the history of the city. On the Saturday evening they were given a civic reception by the Mayor and Corporation in the Art Gallery, and at 11 a.m. the following day the Chapter members celebrated Mass with the Prior of Limerick, Fr. Clement Lavery, in St. Saviour's Church.

First friars

The Dominicans have ministered in Limerick for over seven centuries, and the Priory of St. Saviour was founded here in 1221.

The first friars were befriended by Donagh Cairbre O'Brien, King of Munster, and a direct descendant of Brian Boru, who had decisively defeated Danish power in Ireland in 1014. Donagh Cairbre O'Brien gave the friars gifts of land and property, and was buried in their church when he died in 1241. Bishop Tarence Albert O'Brien, who was martyred by General Ireton during the Cromwellian Wars of 1651, was a member of the Limerick community. Because of conditions during Penal times, the friars had to abandon their original priory. On October 20th, 1780, they opened a house and Mass centre in Fish Lane, close to the present Mary Street, in 1816, when Fr. Joseph Harrigan was prior, the Dominicans moved to their present site in Oentworth Street.

A statue of Our Lady of Limerick is venerated in the Priory Church. This statue, a Rosary Madonna, carved in wood, was given to the Dominicans by Patrick Sarsfield in 1640, in preparation for the execution of Sir John Bourke of Brittas by his uncle, John Sarsfield. The statue was hidden during the Penal times, but its hiding place was always remembered, and in 1780, it was put out for veneration in the Church of St. Saviour.

At present there are 12 friars in the community of St. Saviour's. The Prior is Fr. Clement Lavery, who was elected to that office in May, 1970.

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The General Chapter is the supreme governing body of the Dominican Order. It consists of elected representatives, and meets every three years. Its main task is to review the life and work of the world-wide Dominican Order. Every fourth Chapter has the additional task of electing a Master of the Order, who governs the Order in the intervals between meetings of the General Chapter. The last Chapter, held in Chicago in 1968, gave Dominicans a comprehensive set of new Constitutions. The Tallaght Chapter must judge the value and success of these Constitutions on the basis of submissions already made by Dominicans throughout the world.

Never before in the seven hundred and fifty years of its life has the Dominican Order held its General Chapter in Ireland. Not since the London Chapter of 1338, has such a meeting been held in these islands. Since the Dominicans held their first General Chapter in Bologna in 1220, there have been two hundred and ninety-four such meetings in every country in Europe. At first the Chapters alternated between Bologna and Paris, which have had thirty and twenty-two Chapters each respectively. In 1245, the Chapter was held in Cologne, and since then nearly every country in Europe, except Ireland, has seen a General Chapter. Five Chapters were held in England; in London, in 1250, 1263, 1314 and 1335; and in Oxford in 1280. The first Chapter to be held in the New World was in Washington in 1949. In 1968 the Chapter went to Bogota, Columbia, and in 1968 to Chicago. Forty-four Chapters have been held in Rome, but only two of these were in pre-Reformation times.

The Chapter consists of elected delegates representing every country in the world in which Dominicans are at work; but the delegate from Hungary will not be able to attend. The Irish representative is Fr. Ambrose Duffy.

Master General

The president of the Chapter, Fr. Aniceto Fernandez, Master of the Order, is a native of Spain, and was born in 1895. Most of his life was spent as a lecturer in science and philosophy in houses of study in Spain. In 1950 he was for the first time elected Prior Provincial of Spain. In 1962 he was elected Master of the Order in succession to the late Cardinal Michael Browne, who had resigned the position of Master on being appointed a Cardinal by Pope John. Thus, he became the eighty-first successor of Saint Dominic. The function of the Master of the Order is to be the focus of unity among Dominicans, and to govern the Order in the intervals between Chapters. He must visit all the houses of the Order, and maintain contact between Dominicans throughout the world. He last visited Ireland during the winter of 1966.

In April of this year Fr. Fernandez visited Brazil, where there has been tension between the present Government and those who hope for a more just social order in the country, a number of clergy, including Dominicans, have been jailed without trial on political charges.

On 29th April, Fr. Fernandez was allowed visit the three Dominicans who are still in jail. After visiting them he commented: "I was very impressed at not finding any sadness, any lack of morale, or any shadow of resentment. They are filled with serenity, and every day are more firm in their priestly and Dominican vocations. But I must confess that I was shocked to see the inhuman conditions in which the prisoners are detained. Our brothers have been in that situation for more than eighteen months."

When Fr. Fernandez visited the imprisoned Dominicans in Brazil, he found that the three Dominicans were held with

two other prisoners in a tiny cell. While there, he celebrated the Mass with them in their cell. During the Mass one of the Dominicans, Brother Ivo, made his solemn profession into the hands of the Master of the Order. Before the end of the visit the Master and his imprisoned confreres joined together in singing the Salve Regina, the traditional Dominican night prayer.

Democratic

The Dominican Order has always been democratic in its organisation. Each house elects its own prior for a three-year term of office, and major policy decisions require the consent of the community. Priors are grouped in provinces, which are governed by provincial chapters, which meet every four years. These are attended by all the priors in the province and delegates elected from each community depending on its size, a priory may send one or two delegates. The provincial chapter deliberates and legislates for the province, and elects a Prior Provincial to govern the intervals between chapters. Each province is represented at the General Chapter, which meets every three years, and is the supreme governing body in the order.

This system of representative government has always been characteristic of the Dominicans, and seems to have had some influence on the development of European democratic institutions. Canon F. L. Cross, the Anglican historian and theologian, writes:

"There are grounds for believing that the representative system of the Dominican elections influenced the development in England of Conscience and perhaps, even of Parliament."

History

The Order of Preachers (also called Dominicans or Black Friars) is a world-wide religious society. It was founded in 1216 by Saint Dominic. Its members live in communities of life, living together according to a rule, and following the daily round of choral prayer in the Divine Office. One of their distinctive contributions is that they built their priories in populated areas, where they can be centres of prayer, study and teaching. They replaced the monastic practice of manual work with constant and careful study, and always have had a special interest in the study of theology. St. Thomas Aquinas was a Dominican. Many prominent and influential present-day theologians are members of the Order—Fr. Maire-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Herbert McCabe, Thomas Gilby.

Dominicans first came to Ireland in 1224, only three years after the death of St. Dominic. Their first foundation was in Dublin, on the site of the present-day Four Courts. Other foundations quickly followed in Drogheda, Waterford, Limerick and Cork. These foundations seem to have been linked with the influence of the Normans, but the friars soon came to be well integrated into Irish life. This can be seen from the numbers of Dominican houses there were in rural Ireland. The Irish Dominicans long hoped to become independent of the English branch of the Order, and in 1506 they did become a separate province from England.

The great 17th century poet, Padraic Haicéad, was a Dominican priest. During the 17th and 18th centuries the Dominicans had to live a scattered life. But it was during this time that they reached a peak of their population in Ireland. It is recorded that in 1645 the Irish province had six hundred members. It was only in the last century that they were able to come together again and form priories as centres of prayer, study and preaching.

The revival of the Order in Ireland arose from the opening of St. Mary's, Tallaght, in 1856, as the training centre for all Irish Dominicans. Nowadays, the Dominicans have fourteen priories throughout Ireland, at Dublin, Drogheda, Kilkenny, Waterford, Limerick, Cork, Tralee, Sligo, Athy, Dundalk, Drogheda, Nua, Galway, Tallaght and Newry. They also have houses in Lisbon and Rome, and conduct houses for retreats in Cork and in Tallaght, Co. Dublin. In the 1860s they undertook missionary work in Trinidad, West Indies, and now have sixty-nine members working there. They also work in Australasia. In 1928 they opened St. Charles' Seminary, Nagpur, India, where 28 Dominicans are now at work. They have a priory and university hostel in Tehran, Iran, and 26 Irish Dominicans are at work in Argentina. In all, they have over four hundred members at work in Ireland, and on the Order's missions.

The Prior Provincial of Ireland is Fr. Flannan Hynes, O.P. A Dubliner, he made profession as a Dominican in 1949, and was ordained priest in 1965. He served for a time in Cork and Tallaght, and was one of those who founded the Argentine mission in 1964. On 30th September, 1969, he was elected Prior Provincial for a four-year term of office. He resides at St. Saviour's, Dublin.

Tallaght

Tallaght first enters history in the eighth century with the foundation of the monastery of St. Maelruain. He was the outstanding figure of a reform movement in Celtic monasticism, and Tallaght was its most important centre.

The monastery of Tallaght was pillaged and burned by the Vikings in 811. Another monastery arose in its stead, but the golden age of Gaelic monasticism had passed.

Tallaght survived as a rural bishopric down to 1232. The

last mention of St. Maelruain's monastery is in 1125. In 1179 St. Laurence O'Toole, the last Irishman to be Archbishop of Dublin before the Reformation, received the grant of Tallaght, with all its possessions, to the See of Dublin.

After the Norman invasion Tallaght passed into the hands of foreign prelates, and it was to suffer in many an Irish raid on the Pale. In 1334 Archbishop Alexander de Bykerkore set about building a castle on the site of Maelruain's monastery. This castle was an important link in the line of forts defending the Pale. The tower is all that remains of the medieval castle, and it has been incorporated into the present Dominican Priory.

By 1449 the castle was in ruinous condition. After extensive repairs it became the country residence of Archbishop Tregury and his successors. Thus it passed into the hands of the Church of Ireland Archbishops after the Reformation.

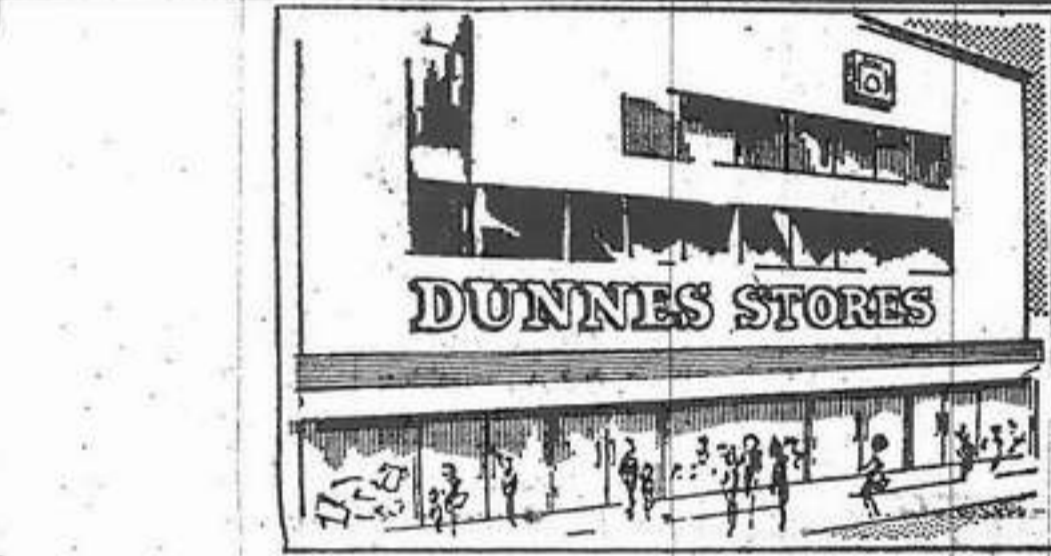
The last Archbishop of Dublin to reside at Tallaght was Lord John Beresford. In 1821 he had an Act of Parliament passed ridding the See of Dublin of the responsibility of maintaining a country seat. In the following

year Archbishop Magee leased the property to the Inspector of Irish Prisons. The palace was dismantled, except for the tower. The demesne, charred hands again, and eventually the Dominicans bought it, in 1856.

The first friars lived in Major Palmer's house (now incorporated into the Retreat House). The foundation stone of their new priory was laid in 1864. Additions were made in 1903 and 1967. Cardinal McCabe laid the foundation stone of the church in 1882. In 1886 it was dedicated as a memorial to Fr. Tom Burke, the famous Irish Dominican preacher. The church was extended and modernised in 1969. The extension is a memorial to Cardinal Michael Browne, O.P., who died on St. March, 1971, and was buried in the church cloister at Tallaght on 6th April, 1971.

The community of Tallaght Priory number seventy-one. The present prior is Fr. Paul Hynes. He was elected to serve a second three-year term in December, 1969.

In next Saturday's Chronicle the full text of the Mayor's address of welcome to the Master-General and delegates, and the history of the Dominicans in Ireland will appear.



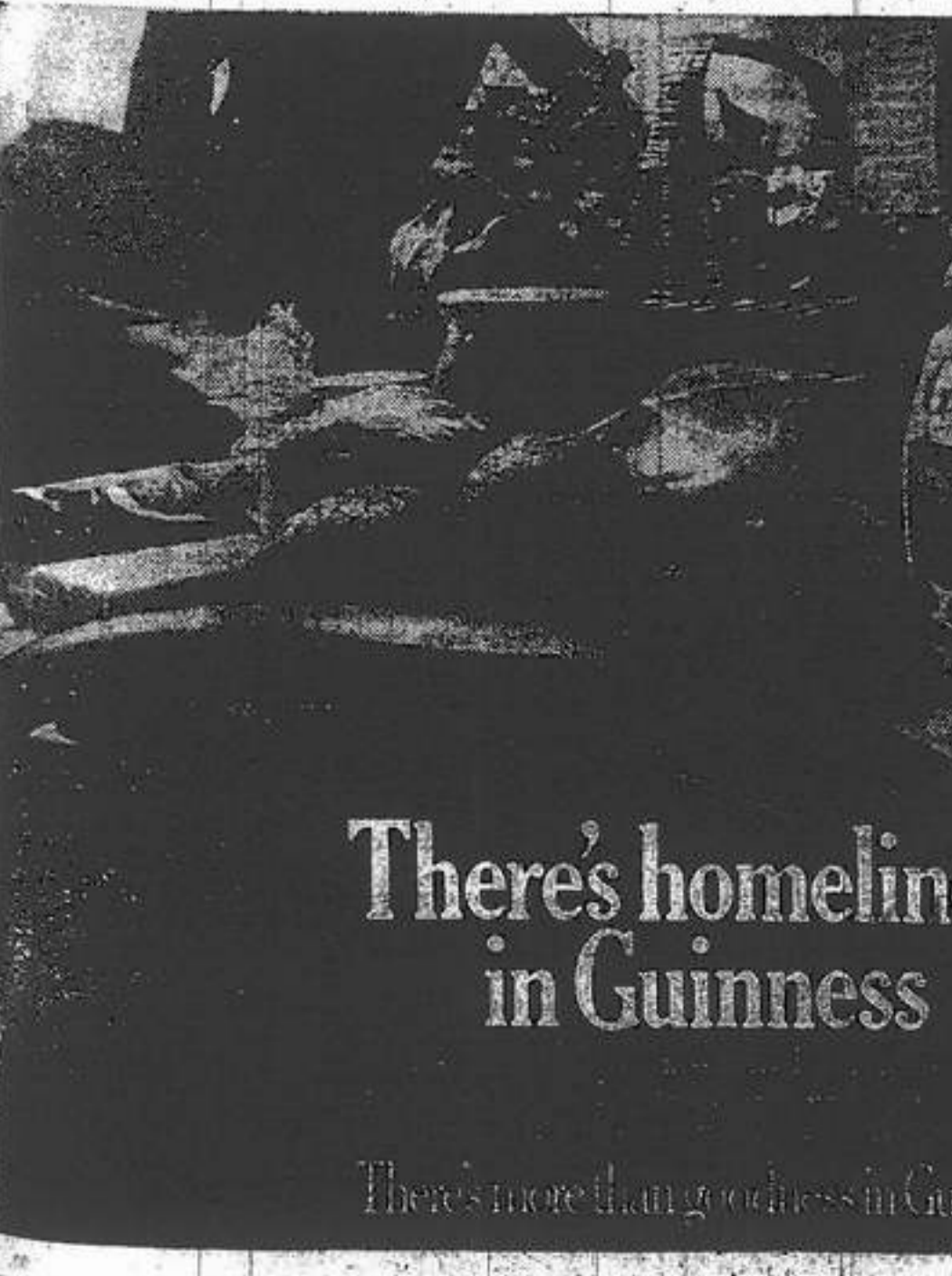
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