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Muintir na Tire is a movement which promises hope of solution to our greatest problem—the flight from the land. Here, its present leader discusses . . .

Muintir na Tire

BY P. J. MEGHEN, B.E.

(Co. Manager, Limerick, and Chairman, National Executive, Muintir na Tire).

THE nation has suffered a great loss by the recent death of Canon Hayes, founder of Muintir na Tire. For over twenty years he had worked tirelessly to spread the movement that he loved. It is fitting, therefore, on this occasion of our great national festival that we should recall the great ideal that this County Limerick priest has set before us. He wanted to see established in every rural parish a real Christian



The late Canon Hayes, a native of Murroe, Co. Limerick, founder of Muintir na Tire.

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community. To bring the people closer together, he proposed that there should be a Parish Guild of all the residents in the Parish. This Guild at its annual meeting should elect a Parish Council, with equal representation for each section of the people. Farmers, workers, business people and professional people were to have sections. He also proposed that the women of the Parish and the youth of the Parish should have special

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representation. While the whole Guild would only meet occasionally, the Parish Council is to meet regularly monthly or oftener as required. The separate sections may also meet to discuss the affairs that concern themselves and then report back to the Parish Council.

Canon Hayes felt that this simple organisation could do great things and his faith has been amply justified. Some people may sneer at the parish pump, but the small affairs of the parish are of vital importance to the people who live there. But the Parish Council does not stand on its own. It can combine with other Parish Councils to tackle larger problems. So in Muintir na Tire, we have County Federations of all the Guilds in the County. These groups can take an active interest in matters that affect the whole county. In addition there are now Provincial Federations at a higher level still and from these bodies, the members are elected to the National Executive. This body is responsible for negotiations on behalf of the movement, for the publication of the monthly journal, "The Landmark," and other publications and for the organisation of the annual Congress at Rural Week each year. Twice in the last twenty years has the movement been honoured with an invitation to hold the Rural Week in Mungret College, Limerick, and each of these Rural Weeks was an outstanding success, thanks to the help of many Limerick citizens.

However, Canon Hayes held firmly to the idea that the important work of the movement was the steady work of Parish Councils in each rural parish. Let us look, therefore, at the type of work that has been attempted by rural guilds here in County Limerick. His own native parish of Murroe was one of the first places to form a Parish Guild of Muintir na Tire. Here we find that the Parish Guild has built a fine Parish Hall and after paying off the original debt, is now preparing to extend the building. The use made of this hall indicates its value to the community. It is available for plays, concerts and dances, but in addition, it has provided a place for lectures on Agriculture and Domestic Economy and for occasional classes. It has also been available for general meeting of the Red Cross Society and other local activities. In addition, the Guild promoted food and fuel schemes during the Emergency years and kept up an allotment scheme for many years after. The Parish Council has been active in assisting forestry developments in the area and this work now provides much employment. The Parish Council has also been active in drawing the attention of the local authority to the needs of the area in roads, water supply and public lighting. They drew attention to the need for a new cemetery when land was being divided in the area.

This is some of the work attempted in a rural parish. Turn now to Hospital, County Limerick. Here the movement has been active for many years. During the Emergency years, food and fuel schemes were successfully promoted. In addition, the Parish Guild purchased farm machinery and worked it on a co-operative basis very successfully. They then organised a very successful annual Agricultural Show, which has become well established. Finally, they undertook the erection of a large Parish Hall, the funds being guaranteed by the people of the parish. The hall has been so successfully run that they have paid off much of the debt and undertaken improvements. Now a regular cinema show is given as well as the other uses of the hall. Here again we can see that the confidence inspired in the people by the smaller efforts first undertaken has proved sufficient to carry them on to bigger things.

In West Limerick also the movement has spread. We find the energetic Parish Guild at Askeaton prominent in many activities. One of the finest halls in the country has been erected here, much of the work being done by voluntary labour. This hall as well as giving accommodation for large dances, houses many parish activities as well. Plays, concerts and lectures are given here in pleasant surroundings. This Guild has taken an interest

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also in outside sporting events and runs annual gymkhana. They have tried to improve the swimming facilities available at the town. This Guild also has a good record of work done in drawing the attention of Government Departments and the local authority to various matters for the improvement of the parish.

Further out in the West Limerick area, it will be remembered that the Parish Council of Feohanagh did trojan work in the improvement of river drainage. The voluntary work thus initiated drew public attention to the needs of the area. Each rural guild generally has some particular problem to solve in its district as well as the general schemes of improvement. In the space available, however, it would not be possible to cover all the activities of the guilds in County Limerick. It is as well to mention that the building of parish halls goes on steadily. Ballygarry Parish Guild hopes to open its new hall next month. Eflin and Garrienderk Guild is also building a hall and the structure is well advanced. In other parishes, the Guilds have acquired more modest premises to serve as meeting places.

When the Muintir na Tire Parish Plan for Agriculture was mooted first, great interest was taken in the idea by a number of County Limerick Guilds. Now that the general interest in Agriculture has been awakened, it is sometimes forgotten that Father Hayes was advocating improved agricultural education and advisory methods from the first days of Muintir na Tire. We would be in a happier position to-day if his advice had been acted on twenty years ago. However, the Guilds in Limerick are co-operating with the Parish Agents of the Department of Agriculture in Galbally, Kildimo, Pallaskenry and Kilcornan.

It will be seen, therefore, that the objects of the movement cover every aspect of rural life. Canon Hayes believed that by developing the community spirit in social affairs as well as in the practical details of life, the people of the parish would be welded into a compact Christian community. As well as tackling their own problems in a better way, he felt that such parish communities would give valuable help to the educational work of the County Committee of Agriculture and the County Vocational Committee.

To conclude then, here is a list of the Guilds established in County Limerick:—Anglesboro', Ardpatrik, Askeaton, Ballygarry, Ballybricken, Ballyagran, Ballyorgan, Ballysteen, Bruff, Bulgaden, Castlemahon, Coolcappa, Croagh, Dromin, Dromcollogher, Eflin and Garrienderk, Feohanagh, Galbally, Hospital, Kilbehenny, Kilcornan, Kildimo, Kilfinane, Kilfinny, Knocklong, Knocktoosh, Martinstown, Monaleen, Murroe, Oola, Pallaskenry, Patrickswell. For a number of years during the Emergency, active associate guilds worked in the City Parishes and did excellent work.

From these Guilds, an active County Federation has been formed and it is working steadily to spread the movement into every corner of the county. We who believe in the work of Canon Hayes feel certain that every rural parish has much to gain and nothing to lose by forming a Guild of Muintir na Tire. We know that it always gave him particular pleasure to know that his work was appreciated in his native county and we believe that his prayers will hold Muintir na Tire on the right path in the forefront of the national advance.

