

Fathers repent for hurting city Jews

By DEARBHLA ACHESON

THE Redemptorists in Limerick have sought repentance for hurting the Jewish community in the city early this century.

At a ceremony, alive with music and dance in the Redemptorists Church at Mount St Alphonsus last Sunday, Fr Robert McNamara, while outlining the community's history in Limerick, commented how they had badly hurt the Jews in Limerick.

"Sometimes we Redemptorists put a foot wrong and badly hurt our Jewish brothers and sisters, for which we seek repentance," he said.

Fr John Creagh, a native of Limerick, was appointed director of the confraternity in 1982 at the age of 42. He was well known as a fiery preacher.

In January 1904, Fr Creagh announced that he would address an important topic, and the following week the men flocked in larger crowds than usual.

The subject of Fr Creagh's sermon was moneylending, and he identified the main culprits as the members of the small Jewish community centred around the synagogue in Colonee Street, now Wolfe Tone Street.

Jews kept small businesses in the city, and were prepared to accept payment on an installment basis. The main figures in the moneylending business in Limerick were not Jews, and Fr Creagh probably got much of his information from Christian business people who feared the Jewish peddlers as unwelcome competitors.

There can be little question that Fr Creagh's denunciation of moneylending was motivated by concern for the welfare of the poor. What has made his denunciation infamous is the way it demonised a whole community, drawing on the worst of Christian anti-Semitic legends and twisting passages from the Gospels into a vicious tirade, a spokesperson for the Redemptorists said.

The sermons were reprinted in full in the Limerick press. And his concluding warning to have nothing to do with the Jews was widely taken as a call to boycott Jewish business. The following week he preached another sermon every bit as robust as the first, this time blaming the Jews for the recent persecutions of the Church in France.

The boycott of Jewish business lasted several months. Several families were financially ruined, others were forced to leave.

At the 150th anniversary of the Redemptorist community in Limerick, the Redemptorists from all over the country and representatives from the order in many other countries.

The chief celebrant at the mass was Cardinal Vithayathil Varkey, CSsR, Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly in India. Also present was the Bishop of Limerick, Dr Donald Murray, and all 22 members of the Redemptorist community in Limerick.

Cardinal Varkey first came to Limerick in 1956, and the Limerick Leader carried a headline The Indian Priest with the Irish touch.

"I addressed the men's confraternity for three days, and I was very impressed by the full church I've been to Limerick four times since then. The church isn't as full anymore, but it is still much stronger here than in many other countries. I love Limerick. I'm always made feel very welcome here by the Redemptorists and the people I meet," he said.

His links to Limerick are particularly strong, given that Fr Willie Power, one of the senior members of the



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Cardinal Vithayathil Varkey, CSsR, Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly in India, at the ceremony with Fr Willie Power, CSsR

Redemptorist community in Limerick, was one of the first group of five student priests who were sent to Bangalore, India.

"When I went out to India with the four other student priests, one of them brought hurleys with him, and we taught Cardinal Varkey and other missionaries how to play hurling," Fr Power said.

Cardinal Varkey said: "I was told I was a good hurler and I was very fast, but I couldn't really shoulder the big Irish lads."

The cardinal said he "thoroughly enjoyed" the ceremony, and wished his Redemptorist friends in Limerick, continued strength and success for the future.

A number of significant gifts were brought up at the offertory procession of the ceremony, including the trowel which was used to lay the foundation stone of the church in 1856 and a chalice which belonged to Fr Petcherine, one of the founders of the Redemptorists.

The history of the Redemptorists in Limerick was told throughout the ceremony through music and dance, to the backdrop of The Lord of the Dance.

The Redemptorists first came to Limerick in 1851 to preach a mission in St John's Parish. They rented a house in Bank Place the following year. And in November, 1853 the house became home to the first permanent Redemptorist community in Ireland.

This first community was very international: Louis de Buggenoms, the superior, was Belgian; Fr Schneider was Austrian. John Furniss was English, and Peter Franken, the first brother to work in Ireland, was Dutch. They were joined by Bernard Hafkensheid, another Dutchman; John Theunissen, an Austrian, and Russian-born Vladimir Petcherine.

The community moved from Bank Place to the present site in the spring of 1851, where they lived in two small cottages and built a temporary church on the site. The foundation stone of the monastery, was laid in 1856 and the building was completed two years later. The foundation stone of the church was laid in 1858 and the church was dedicated in 1862.

The church and monastery were built with the support of the people of Limerick and with money earned by the Redemptorists from preaching missions and retreats.

The church was added to over the years, the first addition was the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which was dedicated on August 15, 1869. Pope Pius IX gave the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to the Redemptorists in 1866 with a mandate to spread devotion to Our Lady.

The spire, a gift of John Quin, was added in 1876. He also donated the high altar, the pulpit and the peal of bells. The Society of Bellringers was founded in 1879. The shrine of St Gerard Majella was built in 1904, the year of St Gerard's canonisation.

Music has always been an important feature of life in Mount St Alphonsus from the beginning. The organ was built in 1869. It was completely rebuilt in 1910 and again in the mid-1970s. The choir was founded in 1862 and sang at the dedication of the church.

The Men's Confraternity began in 1898 and was a huge success. Every week, thousands of men and boys gathered for a one-hour service of prayer and instruction.

The ceremony was organised and produced by prefect of the Redemptorists in Limerick, Fr Robert McNamara, CSsR.

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