



# Family Links

*Glory to God Alone in Jesus Christ, through Mary and Saint Joseph*

April 2019

Volume 5 Issue 4

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Srs. Priyanka, Charitha and Mala (hidden in the crowd) interact with their compatriots after Mass in the Pro-Cathedral

## Editorial

“Who will roll the stone away?” The women who were going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus were faced with a dilemma. Why did they continue with their plan, rather than deciding the time was not right for it? Perhaps it is because it is always the right time to do good, as it is never the right time to do evil.

Two events that have drawn worldwide attention in the past weeks are a stark indication to us that evil is a force in our world today. We cannot fail to see the parallels between the events in Northern Ireland, when a young woman was indiscriminately murdered by dissident IRA members on Good Friday, and the equally indiscriminate killing of innocent people by suicide bombers in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.



Our sincere hope is that these events will prove to be the catalyst that will bring intransigent political parties to their senses. The powerful words of Fr. Magill at the funeral of Lyra McKee echoed around the world and have had an immediate effect in re-starting talks between the British and Irish governments and politicians in the North. Dr. Lal Fernando's words after the Mass in Dublin's Pro-Cathedral on the second Sunday of Easter might also have been an attempt to call political leaders and all religious and ethnic groups to choose the path of peace and reconciliation.

But ultimately, who and what will roll the stones of violence, prejudice, mistrust, hatred... from hearts and minds? They will be rolled away when we can say to one another, “Peace be with you”, with the mind and heart of Jesus, as in last Sunday's gospel reading, like people whose lives reveal that *God is love*.

Peace was Jesus' parting gift to us (Jn. 14:27). Like any gift, we can receive it with joy and use it enthusiastically, or we can put it in a drawer to keep for a special occasion that might never come. For Peace, that special occasion is always NOW.

## Leader's Message

### Your life is hidden with Christ



fifty days of celebration until the feast of Pentecost.

On Easter Sunday the reading from Colossians 3:1-4 caught my attention – your life is hidden with Christ in God. So, I found myself thinking am I content to have my life with Christ hidden? A few months ago, I read a reflection on this scripture text and it presented the challenge: if you have a life with Christ, then act on it!! I suppose it is true to say that most of us would prefer to keep our life with Christ hidden, opt for a quieter life, go unnoticed. Somehow, now, a hidden life with Christ does not sit easy with me.

To deepen our life with Christ it is important we have the necessary conditions. I think the catalyst is silence. So, what do I understand by the term silence? Here are a few thoughts. Silence enables us to be at peace with ourselves. Silence opens our world and enables us to find joy in music, art, literature, science and nature. Silence helps us to appreciate beauty and experience awe and wonder. In silence we can pause and savour all forms of life, recognising our interconnectedness. Tagore reminds us that silence is effective in leading us down into the deeper aspects of our humanity where we can find the best of what we are and of what we can yet become. Silence is a gift we can give ourselves. When was the last time you gave yourself the gift of silence?

Michael Morwood, in a reflection on Easter, tells us “We proclaim and celebrate Easter because it links Jesus with all life, with transformation, and with possibility of life beyond our imagining. Easter offers meaning and hope to all people. We give thanks and rejoice that Jesus so clearly and courageously linked our loving and our dying with living on in God. We rejoice that Jesus lives on, as we all will, in the reality we call God.”

**T**hese April days bring with them signs of new life in all of creation. Before our eyes the buds are bursting open revealing magnificent colours. Liturgically, we have entered Eastertide,

Through our baptism we all have a life with Christ – a life that is ever changing and evolving. Nothing remains static and time seems to be moving faster than ever. How often in the last month did you hear the words, “don’t know where the time is going”. You may even have spoken them yourself. In the book of Lamentations 3:23, we read the steadfast love of God never ceases; it is renewed every morning. I think that there is a daily invitation for each of us to set time aside to nourish our life with Christ in order that others may visibly see our witness to Gospel values.

As members of the Family of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles we are reminded in Article 2 of our Constitutions and Statutes that the aim of the Association is “to spread and strengthen the faith in all milieus, to revive the witness of the first Christians who had but one heart and one mind”. This aim is as relevant today as it was 200 years ago. As an International Congregation with 1389 Apostolic Sisters and 57 women following formation programmes, 44 Contemplative Sisters, 75 Secular Members, 2633 Lay Members and 77 Priest Associates worldwide, we are a family on mission with a gift for the world. In this final year of preparation for the bicentenary we are asked to *spe*ak, *w*rite and *a*ct.

I invite you as a member of the Family of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles to pause for a moment and reflect on the following questions, enabling God to speak to you in the silence and stillness.

*What is the message that I wish to speak to others?*

*Is there a phrase that has caught my attention recently and I could pass on in writing to others?*

*What action can I take to promote communion?*

During Eastertide may we make a conscious effort to be agents of transformation, and witnesses of communion, by going out to the peripheries of the world, with courage and perseverance as our Bicentenary Prayer invites us too.

Catherine Lavery (Inter-Vocational Team Member)

## A Good Friday on an Easter Sunday

It was the first Easter away from the motherland. My companions and I had a meaningful Lent and Holy Week. We entered deeply into the celebration of Holy Week through our community prayer and services in different churches. We were deeply touched by a miming way of the cross at the Redemptoristine Monastery in Dfrumcondra, and a Camino Walk on Good Friday. We were fully involved in the Triduum and enjoyed Easter joy as a community.

But, on Easter Sunday morning we received shocking news. "Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka". This was a thunderbolt to us. It brought us back to a good Friday experience. It was a Good Friday to Sri-Lanka indeed.



There have been Pilates who wiped their hands of responsibility...

- \*There have been Judases who betrayed the own brethren...
- \*There have been Peters who regretted their denial of Jesus...
- \*There have been Veronicas who helped the dying...
- \*There have been Jerusalem women who wept with those who wept...
- \*There have been Simons of Cyrene who gave a helping hand to the needy...
- \*There have been Marys who witnessed to death of their loved ones...

These words must have echoed in the churches, hospitals, and on the streets:

- \*Forgive them for they know not what they are doing.
- \*This is your Son; this is your mother.
- \*My God My God why have you forsaken me?
- \*Today you will be in paradise.
- \*It is finished.
- \*Father into your hands I commend my spirit.

These words definitely are echoing in the hearts of people still, and will echo for their entire life without doubt.

"Easter is God's YES to Jesus, God's NO to the powers who killed him".

So, it is not Easter for Sri-Lanka. As a nation we should say NO to division, inequality and the power system which encourage discrimination. Let us pray for us in our struggle and our journey to resurrection as a nation.

This was a hard and a painful experience for us away from our people. It cannot be explained in words. We are very grateful to Síle and Claire who are always there to listen to us, and to all those who called us and sent messages to us, the staff of Misean Cara who were thoughtful and in solidarity with us as they listened to us.

We really appreciate the President of Ireland and the Archbishop of Dublin\* who showed great solidarity with Sri Lankans at the Mass celebrated in the Pro-Cathedral on Sunday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of April. We are strengthened by these acts of solidarity and friendship.

This was an unforgettable Easter indeed.

**Charitha Thandalge**

**Darina Allen, Honorary Consul General of Sri Lanka to Ireland was also present.  
For RTE coverage of the Mass, [click here](#).**

## INVITATION TO ÁRAS AN UACHTARÁIN for the 20th Anniversary of SPIRASI

**S**PIRASI (Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative) was founded in 1999 under the trusteeship of the SPIRITAN Congregation. Their aim is to help and rehabilitate survivors of torture who are asylum seekers, refugees, or other disadvantaged migrant groups. They do this by providing medical, therapeutic, social, and educational assistance to those who seek their help. A dedicated body of co-workers

and volunteers - medical doctors, psychologists, therapists, psycho-social workers, and teachers – collaborate with them in this work. To mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SPIRASI President Michael Higgins and his wife, Sabina, invited staff and clients to Áras an Uachtaráin for afternoon tea.

Visit their website: <http://spirasi.ie/>

President Michael D Higgins  
& Sabina Higgins  
are pleased to invite

**Sr. Lil Meagher and Guest**  
to a Reception to mark the 20<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary of the  
work of SPIRASI

at Áras an Uachtaráin  
on Tuesday, 26 March, 2019  
from 3.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

**S**PIRASI staff was asked to nominate an Asylum /Refugee person and their families. I invited Muhammad to come with me. Muhammad, who is known well to the Sisters in Newbridge, dictated the following to me for inclusion in our Newsletter.

**every sip of the drinks we had was full of love and sincerity.**

**It was a remarkable time and so good to be there. I am very grateful to SPIRASI and to Sr. Lil for giving me this honour”.**



Lil and Muhammad

**suffered. so much torture. I also appreciated the food which was served with a great smile. Each and**

**“What an honour it was for me to meet the President of Ireland. I received such a warm welcome and was privileged to be able to have a few words in private with him.**

**This was very consoling for me and the many other Asylum / Refugee people who have**



Sabina and President Higgins greet Sr. Lil

As each person was presented to the President and Sabina, we had a moment for a few private words followed by group photographs. From here we

moved to the reception area where all kinds of drinks and finger food were prepared for us.

President Higgins then gave a very moving, welcoming speech to all of us gathered but especially to all who had to leave their homelands due to unrest

and torture. This was followed by an inspiring speech by the Director of SPIRASI, Rory Halpin.

When all formalities were over, the president and his wife mingled with the crowd where they again spent time listening to stories and words of appreciation.

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## Rory Halpin's Response to President Higgins

**P**resident Higgins, Thank you for your kind and inspiring words to us here this afternoon. On behalf of Spirasi, I want to sincerely thank you and Sabina for inviting us here to *Áras an Uachtaráin* – to your home – to celebrate SPIRASI'S 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. And I still have very fond memories of the last time you addressed us, in Kilmainham Gaol back in 2012 – another wonderful occasion.

I admit, though, that I'm almost hesitant to say 'celebrate' as we are also marking 20 years of the need for an organisation like SPIRASI, one that works with asylum seekers and refugees who have suffered torture – unimaginable pain, inflicted deliberately and intentionally, by human beings on each other, and ultimately sanctioned by the state. That torture continues to exist in our world, is widely used by many countries, often with impunity, even by countries from which you would expect or hope for a much, much higher standard of behaviour. This, of course, has its own consequences.

But I am going to stick with the word 'celebrate' as we acknowledge that, despite the most horrendous wounds inflicted by torture that affect every dimension of the person, rehabilitation – a word we use a lot in SPIRASI – can and does happen. Healing of the whole person – physical, psychological, social and spiritual – does happen. And that's certainly an extraordinary thing and so worth celebrating.

But I also want to thank you, President Higgins, for again recognising SPIRASI. I say 'recognising' because I think that, fundamentally, that is what we try to do for our clients. Whether we are physicians, administrators, teachers, psychosocial officers or therapists, we want to recognise and see them for who they really are, to see beyond the labels – asylum-seeker, refugee, or torture victim – to the real person with a unique story. Because that recognition is ultimately empowering, enabling the person who was tortured to move beyond that self-identification with torture to realise they are human beings of infinite worth and value, with – if they are allowed and encouraged – so much to contribute.

And so, when you, President Higgins, as the person you are, - with the role that you have, the legal and moral authority you possess – when you say something, when you do something, it really matters. Welcoming this particularly vulnerable group of people into your home, recognising them and the work of SPIRASI sends out a powerful message that Ireland can truly be a place of welcome, of sanctuary, of hope and healing for the stranger or outsider, and for those most hurt by our world.

Finally, your recognition of us and our work encourages us, gives us a little more self-belief in our work, gives us more confidence in our message, gives us a greater willingness to raise our voices and to advocate on behalf of those who often have no voice, until they can do it for themselves.

I want to finish with a word of thanks to SPIRASI's staff, volunteers and interns, current and past, who have shown extraordinary dedication to the work over the last 20 years. I include those volunteers on the Board with the often-thankless task of steering the organisation on its truest course. Thanks also to the Spiritans, who listened to the signs of the times in late 1990s' Ireland, responding with generosity and foresight in founding SPIRASI, and who continue to provide much-needed support. To our funders, some of whom are represented here today, thank you for your continued support, financial and otherwise. I hope you can see at least some of the fruits of your funding here today.

Finally, a word of thanks to our clients many of whom are here in the room. You are the reason we are here today. Thank you for your courage and your trust in us, your willingness to engage in the often long and difficult healing process, and your inspiration to us in our own fragility and struggles to keep going, especially when things are at their toughest. Dare I say it, thank you for the challenge you are to us all to be better, as people, community and nation.

***Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.***

**Sr. Lil Meagher, Clane**

## ROCK FERRY LAY ASSOCIATES SHARE

This is just a flavour of what we have been doing so far this year. Our friends in Wrexham shared with us at the North West assembly that they facilitated an hour of quiet prayer in the convent chapel for Lay members and others once a month. We thought that this was something we could also do and so we started in January with quiet prayer on the 3rd Monday of the month. Thank you to our Wrexham friends for the idea!

On Sunday 3rd of February we celebrated the Feast of the Miraculous Benediction with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for 2 hours in church. A short account of the reason for this celebration was in the parish bulletin. This was very well attended and Fr. Bernard, our parish priest, prayed especially for all sisters of the Holy Family living and dead and for all Lay members. Each attendee was blessed individually with the Monstrance.

We have used the Stations of the Holy Family as a basis for our meetings but at our March meeting we



Monica Maher and Maureen Bowsley with the precious new arrival.

looked at Our Call to Holiness and we were delighted to hear Pope Francis say 'To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest' and 'This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures'

On the 19th March we and other parishioners celebrated the feast of St Joseph with Mass in the convent with the sisters. After Mass Monica and Maureen visited a family that the sisters in Bradford had put us in touch with. A refugee family who had just had a new baby, although the mum's

English was not good the joy and pride in her new son didn't need any translation!

We are now looking forward to the Biennial Assembly on the 22nd June and, on the 14th September, we are celebrating 150 years since the Holy Family Sisters came to Shrewsbury diocese. And, the first place they came to was Rock Ferry.

St. Anne's, Rock Ferry Group

## AN ONLINE ABBEY

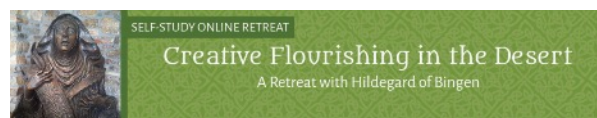
In last month's issue, I mentioned the book, *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice*, by Christine Valters Paintner. I've been finding out more about her. It is a fascinating story.

Christine is a Benedictine Oblate and the Abbess of the online Abbey of the Arts, a virtual monastery without walls offering resources, classes, and books on contemplative practice and creative expression.

She is a writer, artist, spiritual director, retreat facilitator, teacher and the author of several books including *Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire: The Christian*

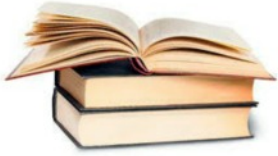
*Practice of Praying with the Elements* (Ave Maria Press 2010). Christine now lives out her lay monastic commitment in Galway with her husband who is Prior of the Abbey. It is well worth a virtual visit at <https://abbeyofthearts.com/>

An example of the type of courses offered by the Abbey



<https://abbeyofthearts.com/programs/self-study-online-classes/hildegard-of-bingen/>

Síle McGowan



## BOOK REVIEWS

### If Darwin Prayed: Prayers for Evolutionary Mystics

by Bruce Sanguin

**W**hen I first heard prayers read from this book, I was immediately touched by their depth but also how insightful and inspirational they were. They were different from anything I had read or heard before. Their beauty lies in the writer's ability to integrate the creativity of poetry with a Christian theology and the language of science, filling one with a sense of wonder and understanding. One review says of it "*When the science of evolution is held as a sacred story these prayers express it in a unique and powerful way*".

The writer, Bruce Sanguin, using as his source Scripture, the wisdom of poets and the mystics often

gives expression to a prayer or a thought we know lies deep within us but at times cannot find the words to express it. This makes them unlike anything I had used before both for personal prayer but also for use in groups. Each section of the book follows the liturgical calendar beginning with Advent through to Trinity.

He also offers prayer for the Ordinary Season which he calls, "The Season of Emergence". There are also prayers for creation, for peace and for wisdom.

Given that we are in the Easter season, I offer a section from one of his prayers for Easter.

#### *"O Holy One*

*We come this morning,  
Like the women on the first Easter morning  
prepared to sweep up after death and  
and to bring as much dignity as we can to the task:  
we come to the tomb to make peace with "reality"-  
a bruised and broken body,  
emblem of the world, our planet, our dreams,  
and the triumph of ignorance and violence.*

Claire McGrath  
Integrated Spirituality Team

## UPCOMING EVENTS

May 2019						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3 International Press Freedom Day	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 Good Shepherd Sunday Our Founder's image for Divine Providence	13	14	15 International Day of Families	16	17 World Telecommunicat ion and Information Society Day	18 Blessing of the Association and the Councillors crosses by Pius IX (1851)
19	20	21	22 International Day for Biological Diversity	23 Roots Retreat begins in Crewe	24	25
26	27	28	29	30 Retreat ends	31	