



Tony Gilhooley

Another Year on my Journey to the Priesthood

■ TONY GILHOOLEY

As the old saying goes how time flies when you are enjoying yourself. I didn't realise I was enjoying myself that much - but I do realise time is flying - it seems so short since I put my few words together about my journey to priesthood for last year's review.

After I bid farewell to Longford at Easter 2011 I commenced a Clinical Pastoral Education course in St.

Vincent's Hospital in Dublin. This course lasted for twelve weeks and concluded in mid July. It can be best described as a training course in hospital Chaplaincy. It uses the model of organic learning where a small group of students work together to help and critique the experience gained by each student as they work with patients as Chaplain Interns.

In mid September I returned to

Maynooth to recommence the B.D. degree programme. My studies this year include a course in Systemic Theology regarding Creation and Grace and Mariology. In ecclesial history we examine the period from Medieval times to the Reformation. For scripture this year we study the Gospel of John and in Moral theology we take Bioethics which include topics like end of life issues, stem cell research, personal

conscience and Morality in Civil law.

My pastoral training this year will consist of a weekly visit to one of the prisons. I also have regular meetings with the Director of Formation and Spiritual Director so I have quite a busy schedule.

I have very fond memories of my time in your parish and I want to assure you that you have played a major role in my journey to priesthood.

'By Teaching We Learn'

Patsy Fitzmaurice remembers ...



On right is Patsy Fitzmaurice and eager students of St. Joseph's National School and below Patsy is pictured at her desk.

In an ever-changing world, to have served for over 46 years as a National School teacher is quiet unique and makes recently-retired Patsy Fitzmaurice one of a kind

■ BY PATSY FITZMAURICE



School). I was back in familiar surroundings... but not for long. I was offered a position in St. Joseph's in Longford, which I accepted, as my beloved daughter, Mary, was 4 years old and I welcomed the opportunity of having her attend a school in our parish.

1975, the year I was appointed to the staff of St. Joseph's, a very different scenario to the present one. I remember nearing that fine establishment on the Dublin Road that first morning with Mary (R.I.P.) feeling a pang for the little school I had left behind. However, the warm welcome afforded me by the then Principal, the late Sr. Scholastica Kenny, R.I.P. soon dispelled my fears and in no time I was settled and happy in my new surroundings.

The Sisters of Mercy made up the majority of teaching staff in those days, maybe 21/22 Sisters to 6/7 lay teachers. In keeping with the Mercy ethos the Sisters cared for under-privileged children by providing them with hot lunches and clothes and footwear where needed, all so discreetly done. They delivered a quality education with commitment and enthusiasm and for no personal financial reward. The enrolment was more than double the present number, about 800 children and every child wore slippers to keep the school clean. In the crowded yard the games of the day were 'Dusty Bluebells', Hopscotch' and 'Fox and Goose'. There was no basketball court or football training or trips to the swimming pool. There was no uniform and so the sea of colour in the yard was contrasted only by the black habit of the Sister on yard duty. Sr. Scholastica was the Principal and under her expert guidance children were taught in a caring, calm environment. There was no intercom, no photocopier and so everything was hand-written. Sewing, knitting,

crochet and cookery formed an important part of the curriculum and the sisters were particularly skilled in this area.

In 1976 a new extension to St. Joseph's was opened to accommodate the ever-increasing number of students. It was more glamorous than the existing building, having a washroom and cloakroom in each classroom, and a sports hall and a staff room too. The 'new' curriculum had been introduced in 1970 and with it many changes. The old 'buaite' of the Irish language was banished to be replaced by the present 'h' and a new style of 'peannaireacht' became compulsory. A 'holistic approach' and 'child-centred curriculum' was to replace the old methods where learning was based on repetition. Heretofore there was not much place for 'Mol an Óige agus tiocfaidh sí'. Still, teachers had been as kind as the system allowed with inspectors breathing down their necks.

Nothing is permanent and "the old order changeth...". This change came about almost imperceptibly at first. Sisters retired or resigned, to be replaced by lay teachers. Emphasis shifted further still from rote learning, from knitting and sewing, as computers and photocopiers edged their way into St. Joseph's. A new set of values evolved. Inspectors' roles became those of advisers. New religion programmes were drawn up with singing and dancing and mime and movement which would have shocked the older Sisters had they been around to witness such change. 1981 saw the retirement of Sr. Scholastica and the appointment of Sr. Beatrice Ruddy as Principal. An erudite, calm quiet-spoken lady with multi talents, she remained in this role until 1993 when she resigned and was replaced by our first lay principal, Mrs. Loretta Farrell.

Towards the end of the 1990s a revised curriculum arrived on the scene and with it the introduction of many new subjects, some of these would make former teachers despair... S.E.S.E. and S.P.H.E and I.C.T. and Drama and Visual Arts. Many days of training were held in St. Joseph's to prepare teachers for the introduction and implementation of this new curriculum. To do so it became necessary to introduce white boards and inter-active white boards and P.C.s and lap tops. Today's children, raised in this age of technology became more expert at the use of these resources than many of us 'older' members of staff, and many were like Jesus in the Temple...teaching the teachers. Gone forever is the blackboard and the 'chalk and talk'... 'all changed...changed utterly'. Still, despite the constant changes in education, under the expert guidance of the ever-smiling Mrs. Farrell the syllabus gets comprehensively covered and the standard of education in St. Joseph's is unrivalled. Her care for children from "every nation under Heaven" and her perfect understanding of her charges was, and is an inspiration to me, and her great sense of humour averted many a 'crisis'.

I derived my inspiration from the children. Their love of learning kept me going through the years. When I read to them and watched their wide eyed absorption, teacher and pupils were transported into a magical world all our own. I hope I fostered a lasting love of reading in them, a treasure throughout their lives.

My years in St. Joseph's were happy years, overall. I have a motley host of memories. I recall fondly the great occasions, Sr. Angela Bracken's production of "The Wizard of Oz", the various Christmas shows, the many performances of National Children's Choir under the direction of the very talented Miss Marie Dolan, the 50th anniversary of the opening of the present school, and who could forget the day the inspector's car went on fire? I have never seen so many willing hands help to quench that fire and send him on his merry way!

A great spirit of friendship exists in the school. I thank St. Joseph's for my livelihood as well as for happy times teaching there. I thank too the parents who entrusted their children to my care but my biggest thanks is to my students, working with them gave me such joy.

In the great tragedies of my life, when our son and daughter died, St. Joseph's, its staff and the Sisters of Mercy were a lifeline, a crutch. I am grateful to have had the privilege of being a member of staff and of teaching so many children over the years.

Ach níl in aon rud ach seal. Dá fhad'an lá tagann an oíche, ar aon nós an trathnóna - I Mí Meithimh se chaite d'fhág mé slán go deo ag Scoil Naomh Iosaf. In the words of Frodo, the old hobbit in "The Lord of the Rings"... "I will take the ring and go, even though I do not know the way".

Docendo Discimus. "By teaching we learn"
(Seneca c.4BC- 65AD)