



Abbie and Mischa Macko enjoying the celebration.



Leaders of Longford Boy Scouts who remember Fr. Tom's time as Chaplain to the Scouts.



Among the guests were Teresa Bohan, Rosaleen Cunningham and Rose Cunningham.



Christine Treacy and Lily Minnock pictured at Fr. Tom's Silver Jubilee.

Fr. Tom celebrates the Silver Jubilee of his Priesthood



■ FR. TOM HEALY

The Parish Review Committee have asked me to pen a few lines in this year of my Silver Jubilee as a priest. As I cast my mind back 25 years to June 1986 I am amazed at how quickly the years have flown by. In that time, fashions and styles have changed hugely; Irish Society has been revolutionised in many ways; and the Celtic Tiger made a hasty to visit and departed even quicker.

I recall walking up the aisle of the Cathedral on June 8th 25 years ago to be ordained on my own by Bishop Colm. In my eyes that Cathedral was a vast and beautiful space that mesmerised me and I could scarcely have known how intimately I would come to know so much of that building, the wonderful celebrations I'd be privileged to share in and in time, the massive restoration project that I would become a part of.

At the time of my ordination my family were resident in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon where we returned for a post-ordination celebration. On the next day I celebrated my first Mass (very nervously!) in St. Joseph's Church, Clonturk near Dromod, Co. Leitrim.

My first Summer as a priest was spent in St. Mary's Parish in Athlone where I consider that I learned the 'ropes' for the first time. After a number of years in Maynooth College it was here that I carried out my first ceremonies and began to learn what it was to be a priest on the ground.

My first full time appointment was to the small community of Pullough, Co. Offaly (part of Ballinahown Parish) where I arrived with little more than two chairs and a very dodgy car on Sept 16th 1986! My appointment there was quite short, lasting just a year and a half. Pullough is a small close-knit community where I was really happy, coming to know the local people well and sharing much of their lives. I have great memories of the warmth, humour and hospitality of the people.

I began my ministry in Longford parish on 18th Mar 1988 and would never have dreamt that it would continue into its third dec-

ade as I write. I recall arriving in Longford in a HiAce van and setting up home with Fr. Ciaran McGovern in Ardnacassa. I remember too the contrast between the small rural area I had left behind and the provincial town which was to become my new home. I think it took a little longer to come to know people and to put down roots.

I will always be very grateful for the wonderful experience it has been to be a priest in the Cathedral parish for so long. Life is busy and full in Longford and all of us who have ministered here over the years would say that we receive great experience in this particular appointment. I recall many Missions, Novenas, Televised Masses, Jubilee celebrations etc which it was a great privilege to be a part of. I would like to think that ours is an active vibrant community where many people play an active role in contributing to the life of the parish and I stand in admiration of them.

These are challenging times for the Church in Ireland and in Longford. Our ultimate task is to appreciate the gift of the Gospel and to try to live it generously and authentically, to keep faith relevant in the world today.

A major challenge of the moment is the aftermath of the Cathedral fire and the restoration project which is a mammoth task. Thankfully we have a great team on board and I look forward to a great re-opening in some year's time.

As I look back on my 25 years of priesthood, over 23 of then spent here in Longford, I am very grateful for the blessings of the years, for the example of Christian living, the support and encouragement we priests receive from our community. I say thanks to the Pastoral Council for the celebration of my Silver Jubilee last June. I also take the opportunity to express my gratitude to my fellow priests, staff and so many committee members and volunteers for their kindness over the years.

Longford is now where I call home; a place where I have made many friends and I look forward to continuing to minister here for as long as that may be.



Fr. Tom Healy celebrates his Jubilee Mass with Fr. Brendan and Fr. Merlyn.



Fr. Tom pictured with his parents May and Rutledge Healy.



Gerry and Mary Reilly pictured David and Ruth Keenan.



Fr. Tom pictured with Joe Burbage at the Silver Jubilee celebrations.