

COLLABORATIVE PROJECT AT THE CARMELITE

PRIORY, MOATE

History of the Carmelite Order

The Carmelite Order has been on Moate since 1770 but its origins are far away on Mount Carmel in Israel. The first members of the order were called to a life of prayer, solitude and fraternity. Forced to leave Mount Carmel during the thirteenth century the Carmelites migrated to Europe. As friars, they worked in the midst of the people preaching the word of God, establishing friaries and churches in towns and cities, studying, teaching, and working among the sick and poor.

The Carmelites came to Ireland around 1271 and established their first foundations at Leighlinbridge, County Carlow and Whitefriar Street in Dublin. By 1500 there were twenty-five friaries in this country including Ardnacranny, Co. Westmeath. Though considerably weakened by the Reformation, at no time did the order disappear completely from Ireland. The members continued to serve the people through the ministry of the word and sacrament. Catholic Emancipation was granted in 1829. The Carmelites responded to the need for Catholic educators by establishing schools wherever they had friaries.

In 1845 the Prior of Moate, Father John O'Flynn established, under the direction of the National Education Board, a boys' school and a girls' school. Later the Carmelite set up St. Kyran's Academy for second level pupils, which lasted until 1880. The Carmelite Boys' National School closed in 1974 with the retirement of Mr. J. Griffin.

Carmelite College began with the enrolment of thirty pupils in 1949. As the college flourished it became necessary to provide new accommodation. No grants were available and funding had to be provided by the Carmelite Order with the support of the people of Moate and surrounding areas. In 1956 the college accepted the first boarders. The academic, sporting and cultural successes of Carmelite College are well known and recorded. It was with much regret that the college closed its doors to education in 1996 when the Department of Education decreed that the new

Community School should be located on a site at the Athlone end of the town. It was the end of an era for the Order in Moate and left us with some unoccupied buildings.

The Friary and church continue to be landmarks in the town and are centres of prayer and activity. Throughout its history the Order has sought to meet the emerging needs of people among whom the members live and work. The current Constitutions of the Order state that the members should study:

“the needs and demands, both religious and social, in every time and place, so that we may strengthen our witness to a spirit of community among all the people of God, by means of various activities, initiated and implemented in a spirit of fraternal co-operation”. (Article 94)

Homelessness and Future Plans

Homelessness is a problem everywhere in our society. The Order has vacant buildings and a garden that can be developed to provide supportive accommodation and social education for people in need of housing from the local area. Since the Order does not have the expertise to create such a project, it has been decided to collaborate with the Sophia Housing Association in bringing this about. The Sophia Housing Association was founded in 1998 when a group of lay people and religious came together to help people on the margins have a better way of living. The Association offers some residents a transitional programme, which is designed to help them develop independent living skills. Other units of accommodation will be of longer duration and the needs of each individual will be carefully assessed.

The Association has already established successful projects in Dublin and Cork and is developing more in the midlands and West of Ireland. They are recognised by government agencies and receive funding through the Department of the Environment. The Moate Project, which will involve the Newtown Buildings, the farmyard and garden, will be a collaborative development between the Carmelite Order and Sophia. The facilities within the Sophia Project such as the crèche, the meeting rooms and Wisdom Centre will be open to the wider community.

Alongside the Sophia Project the Carmelite Order is improving the Priory and its facilities as well as building a new Pastoral Centre. This Pastoral Centre will replace

the Father McDonnell Hall, which is no longer adequate or suitable for a wide range of activities. It is hoped that these new facilities together with our church so well supported – will be the focal points of the continuing presence of the Carmelite in Moate. We are very conscious and grateful for the friendship and support given to the Order by the people of Moate and surrounding areas over the past two hundred years. In collaboration and hope we recall the past, acknowledge the present and plan for the future.