

History

Good Counsel College, New Ross – a brief history.

with Thanks to Fr Pat Codd, osa

Good Counsel College is an Augustinian School. The Augustinian Friars are a religious order of priests and brothers founded by Pope Innocent IV in 1244. The members live according to the Rule and way of life of St Augustine of Hippo, (354 – 430). Pope Innocent decreed that the new Order should have its centre of authority in Rome, presided over by a Prior General elected by the members, and be subject to the Pope alone. They would live and pray together in community and the world would be their parish. Today they are to be found in over forty countries, serving God in the people they serve, helping them in their religious, educational, pastoral and social needs. In their community life they emphasise the values of Unity, Truth and Love.

The Augustinians came to New Ross from England in 1320. It's generally believed that William de la Roche, head of a local Anglo-Norman family, invited them and gave them a site for their first Priory which was located close to where St Michael's Theatre is today. Education was part of their ministry from the beginning. In 1539, during the reign of King Henry VIII, that house was suppressed and the property sold by the suppressor. The friars went into hiding, living in disguise among the people of the town and the local countryside for many years.

In the year 1708, Fr Joseph Rossiter, o.s.a., a native of the Graignamanagh area, was able to rent a plot of land almost opposite the parish church which was then located where the Augustinian church is today. In the late 1720s he built a thatched chapel for Mass and a residence for three or four friars. His nephew, also Joseph Rossiter, was prior in 1785 and with him were his cousin Fr John Rossiter and two blood-brothers, Fr Philip and Fr John Crane. Fr John Rossiter, o.s.a., went with Fr Mathew Carr, o.s.a., to Philadelphia in 1796 and founded the Order in the USA. They also established the college which is now Villanova University, on the outskirts of Philadelphia.

A new parish church, which is now St Michael's Theatre, was built and opened in 1807. In 1808 Fr Philip Crane was able to negotiate with the landlord for the lease of the ground on which the old parish church was built. The friars used that church for over twenty years and then built the present Augustinian church which opened in 1835.

When the penal laws prevented Catholics having schools, the friars in New Ross secretly provided a basic education for young men, some of whom joined the Order. This became the usual way of providing the Order with members. In 1792, John Rice, a younger brother of Blessed Edmund Rice who founded the Christian Brothers, came to New Ross from Callan to be educated before he joined the Augustinians and went to Rome to complete his studies.

When Fr John Crane, o.s.a., reopened the school after the 1798 Rebellion, among his pupils was 14 year old James Doyle who,

on finishing school, joined the Augustinians. He studied in Portugal and having being ordained a priest taught at his old school before being asked to teach theology at Carlow College. At the age of 33 he was chosen to be bishop of the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin in 1819. He is known in Irish history as "J.K.L.", [James of Kildare & Leighlin]. Bishop James Doyle, osa, led the controversy and the negotiations with the British Government that brought about Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

In 1808, Fr John Crane, built accommodation for about 15 students on Creywell Road, on the site now the site of Creywell House. It was occupied by students for the Order and some boys gaining a secondary education. For part of the period between 1816 and 1830 it was occupied by a married couple who ran a secondary school there. In 1830, Fr James Crane, osa, re-acquired the school "for the purpose of imparting a classical education to the young men of the town". Everything went well for a while, but neither the Augustinians nor the local people could provide the funds to keep the school going and in 1843, at the onset of the famine, the Prior, Fr John Furlong, was forced to close it.

Fr John Furlong became Prior again in 1879 and, yielding to pressure from the local people, he decided to build a new college on the site beside the Augustinian church. He named it Good Counsel College, and it was opened on 8 September 1890 with 40 day-pupils. Accommodation was provided in 1897 for a few students to board. The education provided was in the Irish-Ireland cultural tradition, with the Irish language on the curriculum from the start.

In 1910, when it became necessary to expand, the Rector, Fr Dominic Nolan, osa, had new classrooms and dormitories built

and the college became a boarding school as well as a day-school. The term of the next Rector, Fr John Heavey, OSA, was cut short. He was chosen by the Pope to become the first bishop of Cairns in Australia and was ordained bishop in the Augustinian church in New Ross in 1914.

It became necessary again in 1932 to provide more classroom and dormitory accommodation. Land for playing fields and farmland to provide milk and vegetables for the boarders was acquired at the Bosheen near the Irishtown. The reputation of the college grew with the years and more and more parents wished to send their boys to be educated there. The site where the college was located had no room for further expansion, so consideration had to be given to providing a whole new campus. The Augustinian Order decided to re-locate the college on the land at the Bosheen. This took years of negotiations with the Government and the Diocesan Church Authorities before approval was gained. Funds had also to be raised. The people gave generously to provide the funds for the dormitory houses, the dining facilities, the chapel and the residence for the Augustinians. The Government provided the bulk of the funds for the school buildings.

Ever since it was established in its present form in 1256, the Augustinian Order throughout the world has always viewed involvement in education as an important part of its apostolate.

In a sense they were being true to their mentor St. Augustine, a man who always viewed learning and education as central to the Christian ministry.

Ever since the 1790's various attempts have been made by the Augustinians to establish colleges in New Ross but due to adverse political and economic circumstances their efforts met with a limited degree of success until 1890 when Good Counsel College was established.

From 1890 until 1980 the old Good Counsel College stood in the heart of New Ross. It was a small boarding school which catered for students from all parts of Ireland. With the educational revolution in the 1960's the scene changed dramatically.

Student numbers increased greatly, the great majority of them being local day-students. A greatly expanded curriculum placed increasing demands on the existing facilities.

Accordingly a new college was constructed just outside of town and opened its doors as the new "Counsel" in 1984.

Since then the college has grown further with the addition of a technology block, 'Villanova', a new classroom block, 'Cascia' and a large sports hall with gymnasium named after the past rector of the college, Fr. John Cosgrave, O.S.A.. More recently 4 floodlit astro turf pitches have been added.

Catering today for over 750 boys, Good Counsel College continues to provide an education in the Augustinian tradition of, 'In omnibus Caritas' – 'In all things love'.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TITLE "GOOD COUNSEL"

*"Woman! above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast".*

With those words the poet William Wordsworth salutes the Blessed Virgin Mary; if there's a lovelier tribute to her in English poetry, I haven't found it. The Augustinians, as educationists, named this College for Mary "Our Mother of Good

Counsel”; if there’s a more appropriate Marian name for a secondary school, it escapes me too. The Scripture source for the title, “Mother of Good Counsel” is found in the words of the Prophet Isaiah foretelling the birth of Jesus Christ:

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.
And he will be called Wonder Counsellor,*

Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace [Isaiah 9: 2, 6].

In the fifth century a church was dedicated to God in honour of “Saint Mary of Good Counsel” in Genazzano, a small town about fifty kilometres south east of Rome, in Italy. The origin of devotion to Mary as the Mother of Good Counsel is lost in antiquity. The naming of a church in honour of Mary with that title shows that the Church approved the devotion. In the year 1356 the Augustinian Friars were given charge of that church in Genazzano. A century later a picture of the Blessed Mother and Child was discovered on a wall of the church while it was being renovated and enlarged.

A local tradition claims the picture was miraculously transported from Scutari, (present day Shkrodër) in Albania, and settled on the unfinished walls on the 25th of April 1457. Contemporary documents confirm that the picture came to light on that day, but the manner of its appearance is not documented. The picture is a fresco. The popular excitement caused by the discovery of such a beautiful picture of the Madonna and Child can easily be imagined.

In time the picture took its name from the church and became

know as the Mother of Good Counsel. A great devotion to Mary developed there, causing the church at Genazzano to become a place of pilgrimage. You will find copies of the picture in Augustinian churches throughout the world. The feast of the Mother of Good Counsel is celebrated on 26 April.