

FCJ Sisters in Bruff (1856-2018): Thanksgiving and Farewell

Bruff, Ireland

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On 8th September 2018 a group of FCJs and friends gathered to celebrate 162 years of FCJ Presence and Ministry in the [parish of Bruff, Grange and Meanus](#) (1856 – 2018) and with thanksgiving terminate the FCJ presence in Bruff.

Despite the sadness this final farewell has its consoling moments. At the farewell Mass the parishioners pulled out all the stops and put on a night to remember. They prepared a memorable Liturgy which raised our hearts in thanksgiving for all the blessings we had received throughout our years in Bruff. Bishop Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, offered the Mass. His homily was full of appreciation for all the Sisters had done for the parish since [Dean Cussen first brought us to Bruff in 1856](#).

From Bishop Brendan's very lovely homily we quote:

"It's not easy to say "goodbye", especially when you've been together 162 years. So it is natural that this evening our hearts have a sadness in bidding farewell... to the FCJ sisters who have been so much part of the life and people of Bruff, Grange and Meanus over so many years...

They have given knowledge, opened their students to the wonders of truth, the ability to communicate and grow in integrity, not just in the classroom but in sports, in music, in drama, in many varied pursuits. The talents of many developed through the action of the Sisters...

Our gratitude will be expressed in our prayer. But the greatest way to express our gratitude will be to embody the FCJ charism that has touched the lives of many here. As the sisters depart, perhaps we can hear Jesus address us, saying: "The Sisters are moving on, their mission complete. I ask you now to let Bruff, Grange and Meanus be known as people who are faithful companions of Jesus" ...

And we are faithful companions of Jesus if we keep renewing our commitment to communicate the faith... Our parish has had the good fortune of the witness of a charism and now, as we bid farewell to the Sisters and wish them well in their new residence, we can take this opportunity to take up the mantle and decide in our hearts, personally and together as a community to be faithful companions of Jesus in our turn at home, in schools, in shops, on the farm, in the workplace, in the parish. This is the legacy in the form of a calling that the Sisters are leaving us. We can be grateful indeed."



FCJ Sisters after the Mass of thanksgiving and farewell

At the conclusion of the Mass Sr Brid, our Area Leader, began her address to the Congregation by saying *“It is a bitter sweet moment to stand here this evening to say these few words at the end of this Mass of Thanksgiving – for the life and mission of the FCJ Sisters here in Bruff – from 1856 to 2018 – 162 years.”*

Having thanked all present, the wonderful choir, readers, Eucharistic ministers, people in the offertory procession and the sacristan she continued:

“When I use these words “bitter-sweet” to describe this moment, it is with great sadness that we are all gathered here to say this farewell to the parish community of Bruff/Grange/Meenus.”

Outlining the history of the Sisters coming to Bruff, Brid thanked Dean Cussen, the then Parish Priest of Bruff who invited the Sisters to come here in 1856 at a time when Limerick struggled to find its religious identity in post Catholic Emancipation Ireland and shared the social problems of Ireland following the Great Famine.

“The interest and demand for education was so great that Dean Cussen, with the help of the parishioners and money sent by our Foundress Madame d’Houët, purchased the land on the left bank of the Morning Star river.”

“Speaking as one who is herself a former student, apart from the odd difficult moments in any child or teenager’s life, I think I can honestly speak for many past pupils and say ‘school life in Bruff was happy, life giving and filled with companionship. We received a solid foundation in the basics of education which opened up opportunities in science, home economics, the Arts and sports to name but a few. Our Christian faith was nourished and deepened. Most of us have warm and happy memories of our time in school and many have still remained in contact over the years – keeping long and loyal friendships with fellow students, teachers and the Sisters...”

Earlier I spoke about today being a ‘bitter- sweet’ moment. In the opening hymn we sang that ‘there is treasure in our fields.’ There is indeed great treasure here in this parish. I have outlined a little of the sadness but today is ‘sweet’ because our sadness in leaving the parish of Bruff, Grange and Meenus – finds consolation in the belief that the seeds that have been planted by the FCJ Sisters are bearing rich fruit in the lives of many people. Past pupils have taken their place in society be it local employment, volunteering in non-government organisations, religious life, teaching, sharing in the arts, music, science and the medical worlds, making a difference in professional careers, local communities and holding leadership roles of various kinds or working in the family farm or businesses. These former pupils have gone on to do greater things than we could ever have imagined...

I conclude with a quote from a former pupil of an FCJ School

*“To strengthen us, we look behind and see the pathway trod.
To cheer us on, we look ahead and put our trust in God.”*

In whose safer hands, but yours and God's, could we place ourselves today?"

Past pupils, parishioners and friends filled the Church and lifted the sadness of the occasion to one of great joy and gratitude. Memories were shared and old haunts visited until the late evening. Marie Madeleine, our Foundress, said there would be many good vocations from Bruff and this was borne out by the fact that there were thirteen FCJ past pupils of Bruff present, as well as many others who could not be there for this final celebration.

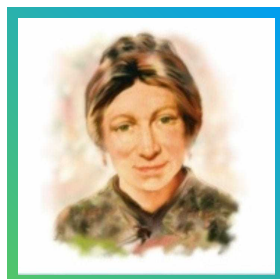
A magnificent display of the history of Bruff in pictorial form was mounted around the sides of the Church and attracted many viewers. We were overwhelmed by the huge number of people who came forward in the Church to meet and greet us and express their appreciation, gratitude and affection for all they had received in Bruff. One young mother said that she got everything she had from us including her husband and family!

At the conclusion of the Celebration in the Church all were invited to the former Convent now known as [The Kennedy Rooms](#) for refreshments. Once again we were amazed and astonished at the crowds gathered there to wish us well and partake of the mouth-watering delicacies provided by the people of the parish.

In the words of Bruff School Song:

“To those who follow after to fill the place we fill,
Who come with shout and laughter for ours that shall be still,
We trust this sacred mission pray God when we are gone
They raise the high tradition and pass it glorious on”.

Written by Srs Mary and Veronica, fcJ.



“ Chiediamo a Nostro Signore di darci lo spirito della Compagnia di Gesù. Siccome abbiamo le Costituzioni, è volontà di Dio che noi abbiamo il suo spirito. ”

Marie Madeleine d'Houët

Fedeli Compagne di Gesù

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