

Remembering 1916



During Easter Week 1916, priests of the Archdiocese of Dublin made themselves available to minister to all those in need, even if it meant putting their own lives in danger.

Mgr Michael Curran, secretary to Archbishop William Walsh, went to the GPO as soon as he heard the Rising had started. The first person he met was James Connolly, who informed him that all priests were free to enter. Mgr Curran asked for Padraig Pearse as he knew him. He told him he had come down after seeing the Archbishop and wondered if there was anything that he could do but Pearse simply replied, *'No, we are going to see it out'*.

Pearse also told him some of the Volunteers would like to go to Confession and Mgr Curran arranged this with Fr O'Reilly and Fr Flanagan of the Pro-Cathedral.

Fr O'Reilly, at a later stage, had to go to Wynn's Hotel to attend a wounded and dying man. He wore his soutane and biretta and had to pass through an area raked with fire on both sides. During the conflict, he was on call both day and night and ministered to the dying whenever asked.

Fr Richard Bowden, Administrator of the Pro-Cathedral, ensured a priest was always on duty at Jervis Street Hospital. He spent time there, as did Fr Joseph McArdle and Fr Edward Byrne, who became Archbishop of Dublin in 1921. They could not leave the hospital on account of the danger of passing through the streets.

Another Curate, Fr John Flanagan, spent most of Easter Week in the GPO. He was actively involved in ensuring the wounded were transported safely to Jervis Street Hospital.

Over 40 people sought refuge in the Pro-Cathedral on Marlborough Street from burning buildings and shell and rifle fire. Many stayed there for three days but as the week progressed food became scarce. Towards the end of the week, the building was in danger of burning to the ground. Fire had spread from O'Connell Street and the fire brigade had been ordered not to go out. Fire raged in Cathedral Street and pieces of burning paper and showers of sparks were carried by strong winds over the roof of the Pro-Cathedral. The building was saved by a miracle – the wind changed direction and shifted towards North Earl Street. Ten people lost their lives on Marlborough Street during Easter Week, all from gunshot wounds.

One of the priest's from Francis Street parish offered his assistance at Jacob's factory where he met with Fr Aloysius OFM Cap. While there, they heard a sound similar to a bomb exploding. In fact a crowd had broken into the office on Bishop's Street and had begun looting. Both priests went through the factory to the office area where they saw many looters leaving. They addressed the people and told them to go home, pointing out their scandalous behaviour. Many left what they had taken, which included rounds of ammunition, revolvers and clothing.

The priests in Westland Row parish spent a lot of time in Holles Street Maternity Hospital. Fr O'Reilly and Fr Fleming ran errands of mercy in various parts of the parish and all ministered to those who had been wounded during the battle at Mount Street Bridge. Fr O'Reilly also spent time at Boland's Mills, going there under cross-fire to attend to dying volunteers. Holles Street opened its doors to all casualties during the Rising and after the surrender, the Irish Automobile Club ambulances transferred patients to St Vincent's Hospital. These ambulances also brought bread and flour from Boland's Mills over a four-day period, thus ensuring people did not starve.

The church tower in Haddington Road was occupied by military, dressed in civilian clothing. They told the clergy they believed volunteers were hiding there and once there, they used it for their own purposes. One of the Curates, Fr James Doyle, was summonsed to minister to a Lieutenant Hawkins. He was brought to No. 72 Haddington Road and had to cross the road under heavy gunfire. After receiving the sacraments, Lieutenant Hawkins died. The fighting was incessant by this time and Fr Doyle had to leave by the back entrance and ran at great risk back to the church.

Almost every street around the Four Courts was occupied by snipers, both military and volunteer. Fr Patrick O'Byrne, Curate, attended to wounded people who came to the presbytery. He also went under heavy gunfire to 31 East Arran Street to attend to an unarmed civilian who had been shot in the back. He attended to two others, one of whom was a Protestant. The family later thanked Fr O'Byrne for what he had done. On the Friday he attended to two men on Capel Street but both died. Another, Christopher Lawlor, was attended to at 6 Halston Street but he too was mortally wounded. Fr Patrick Kennedy, another Curate in Halston Street, received a gunshot wound in the hand while saying Mass on 28 April. A bullet smashed through a stained glass window of the church but Fr Kennedy continued to say Mass as if nothing had occurred.

The priests at James's Street were the official clergy to Kilmainham Jail. Fr Eugene McCarthy attended each execution. His duty was to anoint each victim where he fell. On the morning of Joseph Plunkett's execution, Fr McCarthy was taken to the Jail earlier than usual to perform the marriage ceremony. Fr



Back two (left to right) Rev. John G. O'Reilly, Adm Pro-Cathedral and Rev. Augustine Farrell, CC Donnybrook Front seated (left to right) Rev. Michael Cronin, PP Rathgar; Rev. Edward Byrne, Archbishop of Dublin; Rev. James P. Nolan, PP St Columbas and Rev. Arthur Moore, CC Greystones.

McCarthy spoke about James Connolly's execution, stating that Connolly was in a bad condition and had tried to stand like the others but was unable to do so. He was tied to a chair but slumped so much he overbalanced. Finally he was strapped to a stretcher and placed in a reclining position against the wall. The sight left an indelible mark on Fr McCarthy.

After the executions, the bodies were brought to Arbour Hill Prison for burial. Fr Francis Farrington, chaplain to Arbour Hill and was one of the curates at Aughrim Street parish, was present at the funerals of Pearse, McDonagh and Clarke. The military sent a lorry to Fr Farrington's house in Aughrim Street at 3.00 am and brought him back to the barracks. He described hearing the volley of shots at Kilmainham and the arrival of the remains 'in pools of blood, still warm and limp, eyes bandaged and mouths open.' Fr Farrington read the burial service at 4 o'clock and they were buried, uncoffined, in a trench, 60 feet long.

From 'Dublin Diocesan Priests and the 1916 Rising' by Noelle Dowling Archivist, Archdiocese of Dublin. Thanks also to Annette O'Donnell, Director of Communications, Archdiocese of Dublin.

Remembrance

We remember them,
the men, the women, the children,
the Irish, of the North and of the South,
the British,
who were injured,
or who died
in,
or as a result of,
the Easter Rising of 1916.

We remember them,
of thirty nations of the world
including of Britain,
and of Ireland, North and South,
who were injured,
or who died.
in the Battle of the Somme.

We remember the living sacrifice.
We remember the lost descendants.
We remember the courage.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace!

**From the service of Evening Prayer
to mark the centenaries of the
Easter Rising, 1916
and the Battle of the Somme,
July 1-November 18, 1916**

Remembering 1916 with a vision for a just and compassionate society

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference reflect on the 1916 centenaries

The Easter Rising of April 1916, and the Battle of the Somme, which began the following July, had a profound impact on national identity and shaped the political landscape in ways that can still be felt one hundred years later. The commemorations of these events thus have the potential to stimulate much-needed reflection on where we are as a society and what we want to achieve for the future.

Historians, archivists and local historical societies have been working to make heard the voices of the past. An important theme emerging is the centrality of Christian faith in shaping people's vision for society and what it means to be a citizen. A related issue is the prominence of social justice in that vision – the values of freedom, human rights, solidarity and the common good were espoused by people from different traditions and identity.

These centenaries coincide with the Holy Year of Mercy. The challenges before us as a society today in 2016 – addressing violence and injustice, combatting poverty and social exclusion, adopting a fair and sustainable approach to the consumption of goods and resources, welcoming refugees and promoting respect for religious faith, culture and identity – will require generosity of spirit and an openness to new relationships.