

# Cumann na Sagart Centenary

In June 2016, Cumann na Sagart will celebrate 100 years since its foundation. Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh will be the main celebrant at a special Mass in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, on 6 June 2016, on the eve of the Bishops' meeting and of the annual Maynooth Union celebrations. The venue and the time are appropriate, since it was at the Maynooth Union in June 1916 that Cumann na Sagart was formally established. It was initially called Cumann na Sagart nGaelach.

Cumann na Sagart didn't just appear out of the blue in 1916. The Maynooth Union had already provided a platform, through its annual lectures and discussions, for the clergy to make their views known on issues of the day. There was an energy around Maynooth in the years before the First World War. Among the priests coming through Maynooth for the home mission there was a growing understanding of the value of the Irish language and of the spirituality enshrined in it.

At the Maynooth Union in June 1914, An tAthair Gearóid Ó Nualláin gave a lecture on the responsibility of the clergy in relation to the Irish language. He suggested the need for an association of priests who understood the close relationship between the language and the faith. A year later, after a similar lecture by An tAthair Séamus Mac Leanacháin from Belfast, a provisional committee was elected to explore the matter. This committee met in Dublin on St Brigid's Day, 1 February 1916.

Cumann na Sagart nGaelach was established officially at the Maynooth Union in June 1916. By that time, society in Ireland had been changed utterly by the 1916 Rebellion and its aftermath. A constitution for the new Cumann was developed during 1917. In 1918, a quarterly magazine was planned, called *An Síoladóir*, The Sower. The first issue was published in July 1920. It didn't survive long. The last issue was published in the Autumn of 1922. The Irish civil war had a devastating effect on the Irish language movement in general and on Cumann na Sagart and its magazine. Apart from the dioceses of Limerick and Kerry, little happened between 1923 and 1937.



But things began to revive, and Cumann na Sagart nGaelach was formally re-established at the Maynooth Union on 22 June 1937, with Dr Pádraig de Brún of Maynooth as Uachtarán. An annual magazine was planned, and the first issue of *An Chléir* was published towards the end of 1938. Only one other edition was ever published in 1939 – and Cumann na Sagart nGaelach succumbed once again, this time to the Second World War.

In 1954, An tAthair Eoghan Ó Frighil of Raphoe was elected Rúnaí, and he set about building up the membership. A large gathering met for the annual meeting in 1955 and elected An tAthair Tomás Ó Fiaich as Uachtarán. Ably assisted by priests like Eoghan Ó Frighil, Caoimhín de Lión, Colmán Ó hUallacháin OFM, Dr Breandán Ó Doibhlin and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, he brought a new energy to the organisation. The name was shortened to Cumann na Sagart. The magazine *An Sagart* was founded in 1958, and following Bliain Phádraig in 1961, the very successful Glór na nGael competition was founded in 1962. An tAthair Pádraig Ó Fiannachta was a power-house of energy behind Glór na nGael, and also behind the amazing publishing programme which included *An Bíobla Naofa*, *An Leabhar Aifrinn* and many liturgical and other books.

Cumann na Sagart has never been just another Irish language organisation. It has recognised in the language a huge spiritual resource, a pastoral challenge in serving the Irish-speaking community, in the Gaeltacht and increasingly all over the country, a source of energy and

community spirit, and a source of healthy national pride based on spiritual and cultural identity and not just on economic success.

**Tip for Parish Priests:** Even if you are not fluent in Irish, you can make a huge contribution to the Church's support for the language and its spirituality by buying the new Irish language Missal, *An Leabhar Aifrinn*, so that it is available in every parish, as recommended by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Le linn 100 bliain Chumann na Sagart, bhí an Cumann á shuaitheadh ar shruthlam na staire. Ach is cuma cén chor a chuir an saol de, bhí baicle de shagairt díograiseacha ar fáil in Éirinn le hairead a tharraingt ar thábhacht na Gaeilge i saol na hEaglaise.

Ach má bhí dúshlán i gcora an tsaol in Éirinn i dtús na fichiú aoise, ní dúshlán do shagairt díograiseacha é, ná dúshlán do bhaicle ar leith i measc na cléire. Dúshlán don Eaglais a bhí ann, agus dúshlán do údarais na hEaglaise, sa tír i gcoitinne, agus in achan deoise.

Tá an dúshlán céanna os comhair na hEaglaise sa lá atá inniu ann:

1. freastal ar phobal na Gaeilge, sa Ghaeltacht agus ar fud na tre;
2. saibhreas na hoidhreacht spioradálta a fágadh againn ón luath-Eaglais in Éirinn a aimsiú agus a sheachadadh;
3. saibhreas na teanga agus na spioradáltachta a cheiliúradh agus a chur i bhfriotal don ghlúin úr atá cíocrach fána choinne;
4. sagairt a ullmhú a bheas in ann freastal ar phobal na Gaeilge: sé sin, féachaint chuige go mbeidh oiliúint phroifisiúnta orthu sa teanga agus sa spioradáltacht dúchais;
5. na háiseanna agus na téacsanna atá riachtanach a chur ar fáil do na sagairt agus dá gcomhoibrithe: mar shampla, an Leabhar Aifrinn úr agus na téacsanna liotúirgeacha eile a bheith ar fáil i ngach paróiste.

*Oilibhéar Ó Croiligh  
Caisleán na Finne, Co Thír Chonaill*