

Winter 2019  
Newsletter Number 23

An   
Tairseach

# NEWSLETTER

*All of us at An Tairseach wish you a joyful  
Christmas & Peaceful New Year*



An Tairseach, Organic Farm and Ecology Centre, Wicklow Town, Ireland.  
Phone: 0404 61833 • Email: [info@antairseach.ie](mailto:info@antairseach.ie) • [www.antairseach.ie](http://www.antairseach.ie)



## From the Editor's Desk

The liturgical season of advent opens with the lone prophetic cry of John the Baptist “Prepare the way of the Lord”. John’s message was simple yet demanding and he roared it - like a lion. During the year a young prophet burst onto our screens and a global movement #FridaysForFuture was born. It began last year with a lone teenager sitting protesting outside her government buildings by not going to school. This single action has gone ‘viral’. We are now all very aware surely of the clarion call from teenager Greta Thunberg – act against climate extinction. This echoes the appeal by Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015), for ecological conversion and an understanding of integral ecology. Like John the Baptist Greta ‘walks the talk’ e.g. she does not fly between countries in order to reduce carbon emissions. Indeed she sailed across the Atlantic to New York for the UN summit. Now, Donald Trump, Jeremy Clarkson and others are trying to ‘belittle’, defame her character. She is the target of cruel attacks, her autism scrutinised and her family history picked apart.

“I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is.” - World Economic Forum, Davos. “This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you. You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. Yet I am one of the lucky ones. People are suffering”. Greta Thunberg, at UN Summit in New York, September 2019.

It was observed by some of the Sabbatical participants, that Greta is a prophet and is now receiving the

fall on deaf ears and that she does not suffer the same fate as John the Baptist. Silenced!

In this edition of our annual newsletter you will read snippets of events that have occurred over the year in An Tairseach. One highlight was the celebration of mid-summer. We were delighted to have Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim launch their biography of Thomas Berry, who died ten years ago in 2009. An address given by Berry to religious is included at the end.



The two ten-week Sabbatical Programmes occupy much of our focus and energy. Summer retreats, courses and seasonal celebrations mark the turning of the year in An Tairseach. We welcomed Dr Lorna Gold (pictured above) author of *Generation Climate* and member of Trocaire’s *Laudato Si* Working Group. She gave a presentation on Climate Action during the Sabbatical programme. A Scottish-Irish academic, climate campaigner and author, she is also a mum of two boys. She is deeply concerned about her children’s future – and especially the impact of climate change. She maintains there is no bigger question for citizens, parents and grandparents today.

The land, the farm workers and the animals have all been working hard too which we will hear about in a report by Sr. Julie.

In the Devil’s Glen there are some unusual sculptures made out of wood. Whilst out walking with Sabbatical participants Fr. Michael Rodgers often draws our attention to a piece entitled the Chrysalis. Here we ponder on the ‘imaginal’ cell. Hence the inclusion of a blog by Marc Winn on “Imaginal Cell” a helpful metaphor regarding the transformation that is necessary from a ‘technocratic’ society to an ecologically sustainable one.



Wicklow Harbour

treatment that many prophets did/do. Her clarion call is focusing attention on the truth of our times, climate extinction. It is extremely challenging and hard hitting. It has to be as we are running out of time and we homosapiens must awaken from our trance of the ‘technocratic’ ‘rapidification’ (more, quicker, faster, bigger) #101, 18, Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*. Let us hope that Greta’s call for conversion does not







Looking forward to 2020 we will mark the 150th year of the foundation of Dominican Convent Wicklow. We have included a snippet from the Archives by Sr. Theophane from 1970.

It is with genuine sadness that we have said goodbye to Br. Mark McDonnell (CB) who retired from the staff of An Tairseach as a guest speaker, pictured above with Colette Kane OP. Mark has been a true brother to us over the past ten years, presenting expertly on Cosmology. His courses formed the backbone to the programme. We wish him well as he continues his exploration of science and religion in the years ahead “Go n-éirí an bóthar leat”.

I would like to thank the management team of Sr. Helen Mary, Ms Kate Duggan and Ms Janice Codd, for all their enduring support and help in the running of the programme and An Tairseach. On behalf of the community and staffs of the Centre and the Farm I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Dominican Sisters of the Cabra Congregation for their unstinting support to this most needed ministry.

**Colette Kane OP (Director)**



## The Dominican Community

Srs Margaret Purcell, Pauline McGrath, Jeanette Kiely, Colette Kane  
Front: Julie Newman, Marian O’Sullivan, Helen Mary Harmey

## Our Mission Statement

The Mission of An Tairseach is to raise awareness of the place of the human as part of the web of life, through practice and education.

### Values

An Tairseach is a community which values:

- Truth and fairness in its relationships
- Respect for the whole community of life.
- Graciousness to all who come.
- Beauty in all its dimensions.

### Goals

To improve the long term ecological health of the farm. To manage the Farm and Centre towards economic, social and environmental sustainability.

To create awareness of good ecological practice for all those who come into contact with the farm and the Centre.

To explore spirituality in the context of an evolving universe, an endangered earth in the Christian tradition



## Sabbatical Time at An Tairseach



### Spring Participants

Dan Troy, Columban; Laura Rembold Dominican Sisters; Mary Quinn Our Lady of Charity, Good Shepherd Sisters; Gabrielle Kieran RSM; Brigid Falahe Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary; Stella Mbanu Daughter of Charity; Margaret Casey RSM; Irene Bailey Little Sisters of the Assumption; Phil Ryan Christian Brother.

Marie Brady, Loreto; Sofia Natama Missionary Sisters of St Columban; Moira Byrne former Environmental Officer; Gemma Corbett Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux; Jane Mellett Parish Pastoral Worker; Monica Ng Lay Neo Our Lady of Charity, Good Shepherd Sisters.

### Today I met my cousin.

It had been a while since we had this  
opportunity to be together.  
She was dressed in green with a splash of yellow,  
quite suitable for this day of spring sunshine.  
We didn't say too much  
but we did communicate.  
She could be described as a socialite  
because many others, other cousins,  
were also visiting.  
Barney the bumblebee hovered at her flowers,  
skillfully avoiding the thorns  
as he brought that sweet treasure into himself.

Susan, another cousin, was also there.  
That side of our family has a reputation  
for just hanging around.

She was asleep on her web,  
waiting for someone to pull the cord  
to announce that it is time to eat.

Oh please pray for my other cousin  
who will pull that cord to conclude its contribution  
to 13 billion years of history.

Perhaps in its final moment  
as this cousin breathes its last, others gathered near  
will hear those faint generous words of acceptance,  
Praised be to you, my Lord.

***Fr Dan Troy Columban Priest ministering  
in China, Spring 2019***







## From the Farm

A good walk around the farm at this time of year is always an invigorating experience on a cold, frosty December day. I love to see the sun glistening on the red stems of the dogwood growing around the wildlife pond, the water flowing into it vigorously from the stream further uphill.

The woods nearby have shed their summer foliage now but it is always heartening to see the buds which will open in the Spring beginning to swell and get bigger day by day. November just past has been one of the wettest in living memory. The rain poured down relentlessly day after day and we struggled to get our potatoes harvested because of the very wet soil. Even at this stage we have over half our crop still in the ground.

However we had a good summer with plenty of sunshine which yielded very good crops of other vegetables and which we will continue to harvest over the coming months. We sell all our produce-vegetables, pork, bacon and beef in our farm shop and at Farmers' Markets in Dublin and Bray. People are always keen to buy what we have produced on our own farm. There is a great awareness now of the importance of buying local and organic as much as possible and supporting local farmers and producers.

We have over the years stocked a variety of sustainable cleaning materials and washing-up liquids. Ecover is one of the more popular brands but unfortunately it is packaged in plastic containers. Aware of the bad press plastic is getting at present and the amount of environmental damage caused by the dumping of bottles and other plastic containers, we now have developed a re-filling station in the Farm Shop where customers come to refill their own bottles with Ecover liquid. It is proving very popular.



The “sponsored” trees on the farm are continuing to grow well. So far our Ash trees have not been affected by the “Ash Dieback” disease. Unfortunately the disease is now widespread in Ireland. Most of the trees are 20-30 feet high and it is good to know that they are providing an excellent carbon sink for the local area at this time of climate change. The many varieties of trees and hedgerows on the farm provide feed and shelter for many birds, small mammals and many varieties of insects.

It is now over a year since we erected solar panels on the rooves of some farmyard buildings and amazingly our farm electricity bills have been reduced by almost half. We hope to harvest rainwater during the wet month of Winter so as to offset drought conditions during the summer.







## From the Farm

It was a great joy for us to harvest the first jars of honey from our bees in the Autumn this year. As yet An Tairseach is not a fully registered honey producer but over the next few months we plan to erect a special log cabin for processing and labelling the honey and

hopefully when this is completed we will get permission to sell it in the Farm Shop and at the markets. Christmas is now just around the corner so we at the farm wish all our friends, customers, supporters every good wish for a happy and sustainable Christmas and may the New Year bring each of you every peace, blessing and happiness.



### The Department of Agriculture and the Marine

The Minister of the Department of Agriculture chose An Tairseach as the venue, to launch its 'Review of Organic Food Sector and strategy for its Development'.



Minister for Agriculture and the Marine  
Mr Andrew Doyle is pictured with Srs  
Helen Mary Harmey, Julie Newman Janice

Codd (Farm manager) and staff member Adele Dunne.



### Farm Shop Opening Hours

Tuesday to Saturday 9:30 am - 5:00 pm  
Market Dublin Pearse Street.:

Saturday 10 am - 3:00 pm

Contact: Tel 0404-61914

e-mail: [farmshop @ antairseach.ie](mailto:farmshop@antairseach.ie)







## Incredible Edibles

In May we began a new programme in An Tairseach. It is called “Incredible Edibles”. Perhaps after running successful Teachers’ courses during the past two summers, primary school teachers have learnt of the good work going on in the Organic Farm in Wicklow and realised it is the perfect place to bring children to experience the “Incredible Edibles” programme.

“Incredible Edibles is a healthy eating initiative for Primary School pupils. It encourages schools across the country to get busy growing carrots, lettuce, potatoes, strawberries, turnips and herbs.” Incredible Edibles also covers a number of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals!

Three classes from our neighbours in Bethlehem/ Holy Rosary Primary School took part in the pilot programme. Two senior infants and one second class. After meeting with the Farm manager, Janice Codd, Sr. Colette visited the classes in early May and helped them to plant seed potatoes (Orla) and some onions.



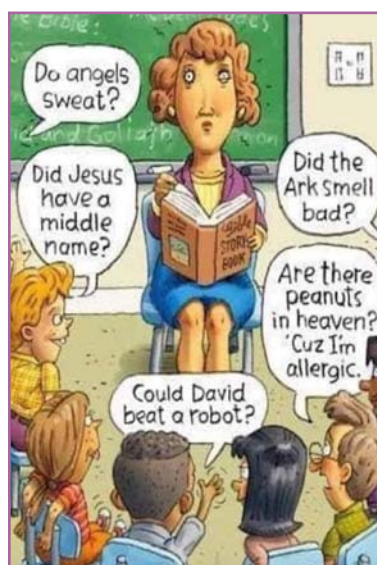
Then in late May the children visited the Organic farm in An Tairseach. During their visit, they saw the seeds of many vegetables, walked in and around the ‘seeding poly tunnel’. Out on the farm, they smelt, sensed, touched and enjoyed lettuces, kohlrabi, broad beans, peas. Then to their great delight and wonder, they ‘harvested’ some potatoes! Out of one plant many potatoes came, how generous is mother nature, they were truly astounded. Then, from the poly tunnels into the herb garden, smelling lemon balm, sage, chives, rosemary and thyme.

Comments and questions were very varied “What a beautiful place; how old is it? how old are you? I’d love to live here; when I grow up I am going to be a farmer; I’m going to bring my mummy and daddy here; you re so lucky to live in a place like this; what’s this called? why does that happen? Can I try that?”

**Colette Kane O.P.**



Sr. Colette with some very curious students



## Some Useful Resources ...

The Story of the Universe on-line course  
<https://www.coursera.org/specializations/journey-of-the-universe>

The Story of Stuff (you-tube) twenty-minute presentation/ cartoon critiquing production of ‘stuff’.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>

TED talk . “Drawing down emissions depends on rising up,” If we really want to address climate change, we need to make gender equity a reality, says writer and environmentalist Katharine Wilkinson.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/katharine\\_wilkinson\\_how\\_empowering\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_can\\_help\\_stop\\_global\\_warming](https://www.ted.com/talks/katharine_wilkinson_how_empowering_women_and_girls_can_help_stop_global_warming)





### Retreat: A Celtic Christian Journey of the Heart, Crossing the Threshold Home.

June Retreat Anne Curtis RSM,  
with presenter Deirdre Ni Chinneide



To journey through the Celtic world is to travel widely. The call to remember with this ancient civilisation, our ancestors, is to retrieve that which we have lost and longed for in these current times. During the five day retreat, Deirdre guided and explored themes of soul loss, disconnection and the return home to the Spirit of God within.

Celtic Christian Spirituality becomes our well source, as we journey through life, death and renewal, our connection to nature, the redemption of love and the splendour of creation.



“Oscail mo croi”  
“Which ever way you turn, there is  
the face of God”

### Retreat: “Laudato Si – What is mine to do?”

Presented by  
Anne and Terry  
Symens-Bucher,  
husband and  
wife team,  
Franciscans,  
who hail from  
Canticle Farm,  
California.



“Laudato Si – What is mine to do?” Terry explained that when Francis of Assisi was dying he told his companions: “I have done what was mine to do, may Christ teach you what is yours to do”. Terry and Anne, who are parents of 5 children, drew on the Scriptures, St Francis of Assisi, the poems of John O’Donoghue, Thomas Berry, and the work of current teachers Joanna Macy and Richard Rohr. After each input we were given focused open-ended questions which enabled the participants to personalize and apply the truths being taught. An integral part of the Retreat was immersion in God’s creation in the grounds of An Tairseach

The four key movements of the Retreat were 1: Gratitude [for the gifts received in Life] 2: Honoring our Pain for the World 3: Seeing with New Eyes, and 4: Going Forth. These 4 movements are called [by J Macy] “The Work that Reconnects”. The context is the world we are currently living in. For some it is “Business as usual”, others are able to see and name “The Great Unraveling”, and those who choose can become part of “The Great Turning” – to be co-workers with God’s reign in our lives and the life of the world.

**Fr. Ben Mc Kenna participant**  
**[jpictblog.maristsm.org](http://jpictblog.maristsm.org)**





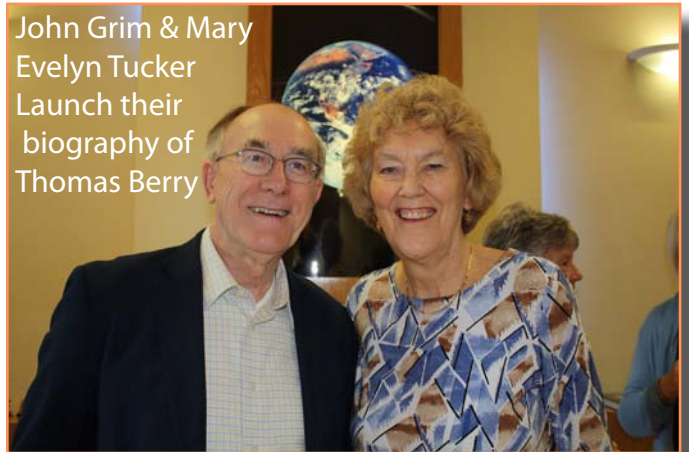


### Royal Visit Powerscourt House



Sr. Helen Mary was invited by Wicklow County Council, to a reception to celebrate the visit of 'Their Royal Highnesses, The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall'. The Duchess is pictured above

### John Grim & Mary Evelyn Tucker Launch their biography of Thomas Berry



### Summer Solstice Celebration



### Textile Art Exhibition in the Chapel

During the Mid-summer celebration a textile art exhibition of the Stations of the Cross for Kenya designed by Elizabeth Ryan was launched by her son Michael Ryan. The stations were on display in the Convent Chapel.



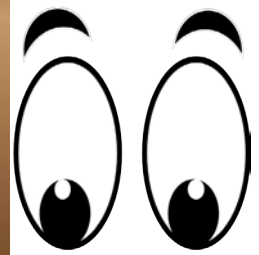




# Teachers' Summer Course

## Knowing our Place: From Stardust to Sand

This is a Department of Education approved course for primary school teachers. Continuing Professional Development



We are very grateful to the Dominican Ministry Fund for supporting this course.

“It links several subjects across the curriculum and is very relevant for schools; introducing students to the story of the earth and our role as active guardians of our fragile planet, while supporting young people’s desire to influence their politicians by raising awareness of climate justice issues”. Ms Cynthia O’Reilly

“A fantastic course, full of variety and hands on activities. Speakers were all so knowledgeable and expert communicators. A really great learning experience that I’ll be able to bring back to my school. Global warming, environmental awareness, a sense of our place on this earth and how we are all connected and inter-reliant. Geography, science, forest school, farm to fork, literacy, numeracy, art – its all there!

We also stayed ‘on-site’.

Accommodation is excellent, location is beautiful, environment is incredible and inspiring. And the food ... amazing! I can highly and whole heartedly recommend this course. It was an unforgettable week”.



Course had great variety of presentations and speakers and a good balance between listening and interactive activities. It was superb!

“I thoroughly enjoyed the course, it was an experience I would recommend it to everyone and will gladly take part in again. Thankyou!”



“Please provide more of these courses as it is so inspiring! An amazing week!”







Rhoda Curran RSM; Clare Dawson CP; Brian Ahern SDB; Bernadette Nyam MSHR; Maria Mc Carthy RSM; Ann Griffin MSHR; Ann Kambulu MSHR; Neil Loughrey M. Afr.

Fabian Han, Liaoning Diocese; Geri Murpahy RSM; Laura Boyle PBVM; Brigid Fahy OP; Maureen O'Connell OP; Ann O'Sullivan RSM; Eileen Plunkett OSF.

### What some of the participants had to say ....

"I feel that the program has greatly enriched me and prepared me to be a better person and to serve God's people better. Henceforth, I feel what I have learnt will colour all I do."



Sr. Maureen O'Connell a Dominican Sister from the USA, with Fr. Brian Ahern a Salesian Priest from Australia enjoying some sunshine on the patio with Srs. Pauline Mc Grath and Helen Mary Harmey.

"On a personal level, I feel a deeper yearning to enter more into contemplative prayer and live a more recollected and simple lifestyle. I continue to explore ways of doing this daily. I also feel challenged to continue to read and research on all I have learnt at the centre for continued growth and development. Going beyond myself, through personal interactions,"



Some of the participants meet up with members of the community of the Servants of Love

"My understanding of God has been enriched by an integration of a deeper view of the cosmological and spiritual"



## An Tairseach has given me new eyes to see!

I arrived the centre on the 8th of September 2019, not knowing what to expect! I was going to be in the centre for 10 weeks learning how to be animal friendly, no killing of flies, mosquitoes etc., or so I thought!

After a week of orientation to the Centre, farm and programme, the second week began. This was the real thing, but real what? It was nothing like what I imagined it would be and my 14 group mates echoed my thoughts. The universe began from a big bang. Big what?? Yes there was this explosion of energy, and everything flared forth from that! But the Bible said in the beginning God created heaven and earth.....and he created the heavens and earth in 6 days! Where are all these jaw breaking words coming from? Supernova, big bangs, explosions, gases, evolutions, sharing same DNA with animals?

My whole existence was in turmoil. In the fourth week during one of the classes, we were giving an opportunity to air our confusion. The presenter was bombarded with questions: what will happen to my body when I die? Do animals have souls? Did the church lie to us in presenting the Bible story? How do I explain this to people out there? How am I supposed to live henceforth? Oh, my God, I feel am going to have a faith crisis! There were no answers to the questions, but it was like a balloon finally bursting and the air was out! We felt freer. We could now joke and laugh about the possibilities of the world exploding someday like all other galaxies, we laughed when somebody referred to death as recycling!

We had finally arrived, there was greater openness to the presentations. I felt a greater openness and less anxious. Amazingly, this was reflected in our dreams that week. It was our sixth week. I had three different dreams in which my mother, younger brother as well as myself died. This was interpreted during the dream work class that week. To my amazement the dream was a mirror of all that was happening inside me. The old me was dying and a new me was been born. Interestingly, about 5 other persons in the group had almost similar dreams.

Evidently, confronted by our new knowledge and experiences, our inner selves were gently inviting us to renewal. Through the weeks, we had learnt to see our interconnectedness with the whole universe. This called forth a tenderness and gentleness to the whole of creation. We were all related, unique, unrepeated, but connected to one another hence we come from the same source. This awareness created in me a desire to tread the earth with gentleness and awe. Above all, I felt an indescribable wonder at the greatness of God, his intelligence, creativity, patience

and incomprehensible nature.

At the end of the sixth week, during the dance class, I taught my group the Tiv dance, the dance of my tribe in Nigeria. This for me is an expression of my acceptance of my unique heritage. In the Art class, I painted the rising sun on my candle symbolising a new awakening, this too was another expression of my present inner state.

In this new invitation to grow, the papal encyclical Laudato Si seemed to be a map for me. It occupies an important place here at An Tairseach, and through studying it, I am understanding interdisciplinary studies in different fields in a new light. I am an intelligent being, I could never know everything. However, this is no excuse to remain ignorant; I am challenged to engage in more personal studies and to make connections between my own fields of study and profession with the new knowledge I am acquiring. How can this new knowledge and insights help me to be a better religious woman, a missionary and a clinical psychologist?

Furthermore, I am adopting the attitude of Job, as in silence I learn to stand in awe before every creature of God, especially the least significant and see his face in them. I am understanding the spirituality and Charism of my founder (Bishop Joseph Shanahan) and Congregation in a new way. Lord that I may see thee for whichever way I turn you are present and at work. I am invited to acknowledge and honour him in each. This approach brings everything in to harmony in one awesome God the source of all life. Suddenly there is no east or west, north or south, no Jew, no Greek, no man, no woman, no insignificant creature. Everything is important, all is good, all is holy, all is one. Lord, grant me new eyes, to see you in each in all.



***Sr. Bernadette Nyam,  
A missionary sister of the Holy Rosary  
from Nigeria***





Sr. Ann Kambulu, a Holy Rosary Sister, from Kenya studies the complexity of Lesser Celandine in John Feehan's workshop.

"Science is nothing more than the open, fearless use of our God-given intellect, our reason, to confront the evidence: to look at creation and work out what it is saying to us about itself and about what lies behind it."

### Genetic Affinity—did you know

85% mouse genes are the same as ours!

We are only 1% different genetically from chimpanzees

We share 40% of our genes with fruit flies

### Biodiversity - How many species are there?

- ☐ Around 1.5 million species have been described
- ☐ 750,000 of them are insects
- ☐ 250,000 are vascular plants + bryophytes
- ☐ 41,000 are vertebrates
- ☐ ... and then the rest.

The true number is likely to be between 5 and 30 million. The *Diversity of Life* by Professor Barnes is the standard university textbook in courses on Biological Diversity. It has 345 pages of which vertebrates get only 8 pages and mammals get half a page!

**John Feehan**

"To a great extent theologians still think and write as though Darwin had never lived. Their attention remains fixed on the human world and its unique contents. The nuances of biology or, for that matter, cosmology have not yet deeply affected current thinking about God and God's relation to the world."

**John Haught (2000). *God after Darwin. A Theology of Evolution***



Ms. Kate Duggan (manager) and Sr. Helen Mary both happy in their work, some sabbatical participants are in the background.

Elizabeth (Betty) Fitzpatrick of Weston Close and late of Bridge Street in Wicklow Town passed away peacefully in her 95th year on 17th April 2019.



She was a regular here in An Tairseach attending Sr. Pauline's knit and stitch classes and many seasonal celebrations. Some of her friends and members of the community planted a beautiful rose shrub to remember her in the Cosmic garden. 'Until we meet again, may God hold you in the hollow of His hand.' *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam Betty.*





## 150 Celebrations



From the Archives (1970)  
One Hundred Years Young

150 Dominican Campus Committee members Srs Julie Newman, Jeanette Kiely, Colette Kane; Ms Mary O'Riordan, Principal and Ms Deirdre Gill Deputy Principal, Holy Rosary Primary School; Mr Neal Martin Deputy Principal Dominican College Rosary. Missing Ms Lorraine Mynes Principal DCW.

2020 will be a very important year of celebration for Wicklow Town. 150 years ago the first Dominican Sisters arrived to the town to establish a convent and school. Their legacy is Holy Rosary Primary School, Dominican College, Dominican Convent and An Tairseach Organic Farm and Ecology Centre. The celebrations will begin on Friday the 17th January with a Mass of Thanksgiving at 11:00am in St. Patrick's Church Wicklow Town. Other events are planned throughout the year: participation in the St. Patrick's Day parade, on open day in Holy Rosary Primary School and Dominican College and a Midsummer Celebration in An Tairseach on the 20th June, which also marks the actual date of Foundation Day.

If you have any old school photos and/or other school-related memorabilia that you would be willing to lend for the exhibitions on the Open Day, please contact Holy Rosary School Wicklow Town (0404) 67939 or Dominican College Wicklow (0404) 68111. They will be very much appreciated and will be returned after the Open Day.

Past-pupils and all who are or who have been associated with the Dominicans in Wicklow will be very welcome to attend the Mass and Open Days.

***Ms Mary O'Riordan***  
***Principal Holy Rosary Primary School***

On 20th June 1870 Wicklow town watched an unusual sight—the invasion of four carriages bearing six high-ranking ecclesiastics and eight Dominican nuns. The curious watched them make their way to the parish church for Solemn High Mass where they asked God's blessing on the new foundation about to be made. Then they took possession of Bay View House, a seventeenth century residence, where they were to live until it became possible to build a convent. Thus was realised the long cherished dream of the parish priest, Father Doherty, who had invited the Dominicans to provide a school for his parishioners and prepared the way for their coming.

The town of Wicklow has had a long and varied history. Originally known as Inbheardee or the mouth of the Vartry it was baptised in Christian times like its people. The (Dominican) nuns had not come to Ireland as early as the priests but during a lull in the wars of 1640's they made their first foundation in Galway. The Cromwellian persecution scattered them but after many vicissitudes a house was established in Cabra in 1819, which sent out a branch to Dun Laoghaire thirteen years later. It was to this house that Father Doherty had addressed his appeal and Mother Ursula Maher, then Prioress, agreed to give six nuns for the foundation...

Four days later (after arriving) they opened their first school, a primary one, to provide education for those families hitherto deprived of it. During the summer Mother Ursula and her companion, Mother Aloysius Purcell, foundress of Dun Laoghaire convent, had to return, leaving Mother Columba Hammond as



# Imaginal cells

Have you heard of imaginal cells? Although they are associated with insect life-cycles – for me, they are a great metaphor for the way the world is undergoing transformation at the moment.

Imaginal cells are the ones that create the incredible process of metamorphosis that occurs when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. These cells hold all the potential for the future, but initially they act separately, before combining as one to create something incredible that is a great improvement on their previous existence.

The process of this change is amazing. Within the chrysalis, the structure of the caterpillar dissolves into a soupy organic mush. Hitherto dormant cells – “imaginal cells” – from the caterpillar start to develop the new structure of a butterfly, even though there is no similarity whatsoever between the two creatures.

Initially, each of the imaginal cells operates as a single-cell organism – entirely independent of one another. The immune system of the caterpillar even identifies them as threats and attacks them. Regardless, the imaginal cells continue; they multiply, and they connect with one another, forming clusters. They start to resonate with the same frequency and communicate in the same language, passing information backwards and forwards until there is a tipping point – when they stop acting as individual, separate cells and instead, become a multiple-celled organism: a butterfly.

If we take this as an analogy for society today, it presents an exciting proposition. When systems are breaking down, you can either collapse and die or rise to the challenge of creating something better – and achieve the next stage of evolution. Leaders are the imaginal cells within their community or organisation. As ideas spread and like minds connect, the possibilities grow exponentially to transform systems, policies and processes to meet the greatest challenges in our world today.

Thought leaders – and others – can imagine a greater future and work together to make visions a reality.

We are living in an era of increasing interconnectivity. Thanks to the internet, across the globe and across different specialisms and areas of interest, people can instantly communicate with one another like never before. Ideas, news, problems and solutions can travel fast and far – within seconds. We have the capacity to take advantage of the ‘collective consciousness’ – acting in groups as a community with shared ideas, values and circumstances, instead of individually. With focus on a single intent – whether to create environmentally friendly energy, cure cancer or reduce hunger – people working together have the power to radically transform the human race and the world we live in. This heralds massive evolutionary change for us.

What if we harnessed this power? What if we worked like imaginal cells – thinking differently from the old ways, working together with others who share our values and principles – to create something wonderful in the world?

Our speedy communication networks and efficient technology means that we have the power to take collective action to identify solutions to both personal and global problems. This excites me. This is what drives me to look for imaginal cells in my own community – with the aim of connecting and empowering them to accelerate and multiply. To network, to share and work together – to produce transformational results for the future.

Just as it takes the total disintegration of the caterpillar’s structure in order to create a butterfly – it may take the complete breakdown of present systems before a better future occurs. But I am convinced that each of



us, working together to make the world a better place will produce something incredible on the other side. Let’s fly! Marc.

**Blog by Marc Winn 9/12/15 (used with permission)**

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## From the Archives continued

Prioress with a community of five sisters, S M de Pazzi Masterson, S Antonia Masterson, S Evangelist Donnellon, S Teresa Hayden and S Joseph Burke to carry on. On 22 August St. Anne’s private day school was opened, and on 8 September, a boarding school. So within the first three months these intrepid pioneers had not only catered for the town’s educational needs, both primary and secondary, but lifted their eyes beyond to wider horizons.

**Sr. M Theophane, O.P.**

Photo is Fr. Michael Rodgers beside the ‘Chrysalis’ in the Devils Glen)



## Reflection on the Shortest Day

This morning I am up in time to see first light creeping over tall buildings and spreading across the sky. I am reminded of Luke's consoling words which tell of the Loving Kindness of the heart of the cosmos 'who visits us like the dawn from on high'.

For the nine days before Christmas, this expectation and longing is summed up by the word 'O'. At the solstice, for instance, December 21st, we make this prayer, 'O rising Sun. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.' This vowel is so expressive of us. It can stretch from the anguished 'O' of Munch's iconic figure crossing the Oslo bridge to the 'O' of hushed wonder on the face of a child to the 'O' of the Advent prayer which at evening introduces our dearest wish, 'O please do come' - the heartache of the lonely person who rings someone for no reason or who asks 'can't you stay longer?' as she's tired of shadows.

This long tradition of yearning for 'the light of the world' is as urgent as ever. On the first evening our concern for planet Earth is expressed in these words: 'O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth' - a hope we share with ancestors who set their passage graves in the Boyne valley to face the rising sun.

Author Fr Hugh O'Donnell is a poet and ministers with the Salesian community in the parish of Sean McDermott Street in Dublin.

## Thomas Berry Biography



### Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

standing beside a magnolia tree dedicated to the memory of Thomas Berry addressing those who had gathered to celebrate the summer solstice in An Tairseach.

They teach at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Yale Divinity School where they direct the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. They worked closely with Thomas Berry for over thirty years as his students, editors, and literary executors and are the managing trustees of the Thomas Berry Foundation.

We were delighted to welcome them to An Tairseach, when they launched their biography of Thomas Berry, in conjunction with the celebration of the Summer Solstice. Thomas Berry (1914–2009) was one of the twentieth century's most prescient and profound thinkers. As a cultural historian, he sought a broader perspective on humanity's relationship to Earth in order to respond to the ecological and social challenges of our times. The first biography of Berry illuminates his remarkable vision and its continuing relevance for achieving transformative social change and environmental renewal.



# The Intimate Universe

## A Challenge to Religious Communities.

By Thomas Berry.

Throughout the natural world there is an intimacy of things with each other. The intimacy of the wind and the soaring raptors, the rain and the vegetation, the sea and the shore. So too the intimacy of the bee with the flower, the intimacy of the bluebird parents with the newly hatched young. Even in predator-prey relations there is a dependency established so that each has a profound need for the other. In the end it is an intimacy rather than an enmity. The ultimate test is the creativity of beings in the presence of each other. Even in the pre-life phase of things, there is the intimacy of the atoms in the molecular structures, the intimacy of the sun with the earth. The very structure and creativity of the universe depend on this intimacy of things with each other.

Every being exists in relation with the entire community of beings that compose the universe. So with the human mode of being. We come into existence through the earlier modes of being and in intimate bonding with the universe itself. Such reflection provides a profound instruction as regards our spirituality. For the intimate relations of the human with the other modes of being has been perhaps the most neglected aspect of our spiritual teaching. A neglect that has been an enormous detriment to ourselves and to the entire community of living and non-living beings on the earth.

We seem unable to recognise that there is a single sacred community of the entire universe. Not only is the human sacred. The entire universe is sacred. How wonderful. We could not ourselves be sacred except in a sacred universe. By definition to be in a natural world is to be in a sacred world, a world immediately in the presence of the divine. This intimate relation we have with the surrounding world can be appreciated if we reflect that our imagination, our emotions and our intellect would all be completely dysfunctional without the activation they receive from the outer world. If we lived on the moon our imagination would be as desolate as the moon, our emotions as dull, our intellect as empty. Our sense of the divine would reflect the lunar landscape. There would be no poetry, or music or literature. From this we can realise that the

preservation of the wilderness, the free-flowing streams, the dazzling variety of butterflies, the mockingbird and the bluebird, the deer and the wolf and the limber rattlesnake, the coastlands, the mountains, the central plains: the preservation of all this is not simply an aesthetic inspiration or recreational need or an economic urgency. It is even

more a necessity for the inner life of the soul; for the deep mystery of the divine is revealed in each of these modes of being, but in a supreme manner within the comprehensive unity of the whole. In this experience of the universe we awaken to the majesty and the awesome presence of the divine.

Just now as we are terminating 650 million years of life development on the planet, we find that spiritual persons, even deeply religious persons, seem blissfully unaware of what is happening. There is little mention of this in our spiritual teaching since our dependence on the natural world was never a significant part of our spirituality.

We find little reference in our biblical homilies, only a rare note in our religious publications, no special attention to this subject in our educational programs, no public protest. The impending death of half the living species on earth is looked at with a casual indifference. This failure of Christians to assume their responsibility for the fate of the earth is perhaps their greatest single failure in the total course of Christian history. It is especially a failure of those religious communities that are most committed to a spiritual way of life.

What is happening at present is more than a particular phase of human history or some cultural modification to be fitted in with the sequence of changes that have occurred from the Neolithic through the classical civilisations to the medieval and modern periods. What is happening is beyond any parallel with former changes in the course of human affairs or even in the life story of the planet.

For the first time in the 600 million year story of visible life on earth, a single species has the power deliberately to alter the chemistry of the planet in a deleterious way and to extinguish species at a rate and in a manner never known before.

In considering the enormity of what is happening and the consequence for every living being on the planet we might reflect on the need to establish religious communities dedicated to protecting the earth from further devastation and to guide the human community toward a period when we would be present to the earth in a mutually enhancing manner.

The setting up of model communities that would enable humans to be present to the earth in a mutually enhancing manner would surely be one of the most effective ways of fulfilling the highest Christian purposes in these times. Since the present assault on the planet is terminating the Cenozoic Era of Earth history, there is need to think in terms of a new geo-biological period such as the Ecozoic Era,

when a new integration and a new florescence of living forms would be brought into being. Establishing the Ecozoic Era is the Great Work of the immediate present, just as bringing into existence the medieval period was the Great Work of those who lived in Europe between the sixth and the eleventh centuries. This Great Work in the creation of the medieval period was led by the monastic orders of the period, especially by the order founded by Saint Benedict in the early sixth century. What needs to be done now is parallel, but at a much greater order of magnitude, with what was done in evocation of this early medieval period. There is a need for dedicated persons to lead this work, persons with the creative abilities evident in the Benedictine personalities in the monasteries and convents of the earlier period, persons such as Hildegard of Bingen and Bernard of Clairvaux.

Another parallel might be made with the development of the women's religious communities during the nineteenth century. In that century some hundreds of religious communities were founded for every imaginable purpose, for alleviation of poverty and sickness, for all kinds of human affliction, for education at every level, for missions to every part of the planet, for protection of young women working in the newly developing industrial-commercial metropolitan areas. For many of these religious communities their work has become less in demand, the resources for carrying on the work less available, or their personnel has declined due to changes in the social order. Numbers of religious communities might be terminated in the next few decades.

Just what kind of religious dedication or what life style would be appropriate for the future or what task should be chosen as the central concern is causing serious reflection. It is at least partially a question of choosing the task that is closest to the urgency of the time and to religious dedication, the task that enables younger persons of the present to feel that they are at the forward edge of life and sharing in the great adventure of the universe.

My own suggestion is that we need religious communities dedicated directly and fully to the Great Work of identifying and fostering the emerging Ecozoic Era in the geo-biological story of planet Earth. At present the general tendency

is to incorporate concern for the Earth with concern for peace and justice, thus coming up with the phrase; peace, justice and the integrity of creation. While such a phrase has its desirable aspects, it avoids the basic issue. It is a continuation of the difficulty that led to the problem in the first place, since Christians have consistently been concerned with divine-human and inter-human relations, with very little concern for human-Earth relations.. We are overwhelmed with the pathos of the human. We always begin, not with the universe before us, the primary reality in all our thinking and imagining, but with the Bible. We seem unable to deal with the universe itself as the primary revelation of the divine before there was a Bible and as the context in which the Bible needs to be interpreted. We are concerned with the Genesis story that we know through reading, not with story of the universe that we know through observation. If we cannot deal with the revelatory dimension of the universe in the immediacy of our experience then we reveal our incapacity to deal with the single greatest issue of these time.

We can expect a renewal of existing religious congregations and the rise of vigorous new congregations as soon as we recognise and dedicate ourselves to the Great Work before us, the renewal of the Earth as the presence of the Divine. The human and the entire universe exist in intimate relations with each other. Together we constitute a single sacred community.

**Thomas Berry**

Thomas Berry is the author of *The Dream of the Earth*. Together with Brian Swimme he wrote *The Universe Story: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* and numerous other works. His book *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* was written in 1999. While some progress has been made in recognising the serious threat to the planet and all its inhabitants due to climate change, much more needs to be done to promote a spirituality of inter-connectedness which alone can save the planet from utter devastation. Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si* is a cry from the heart to all people of goodwill to wake up to our responsibility as humans to care for our common home. *Laudato Si* is now official Catholic Church teaching.

**Sr. Marian O Sullivan**



# Icon Mother of Tenderness

Painted by Sr. Pauline McGrath and presented to the Parish on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception 8th December 2019.



It is with great joy on this lovely feast of Our Lady, that the icon of Our Lady of Tenderness will be blessed and carried to its home in the payer room in the Parish Pastoral Centre. The icon is a gift to the Parish Centre from the Dominican Sisters. As the artist, I painted the icon with the people of Wicklow in mind. You could say that each brush stroke was a prayer. While painting it for you all, one person stood out and I would like to mention her name. The last Mary Kavanagh was a member of this parish all her life. She loved it dearly and did a lot of work in the Parish. Mary's sister Katherine Kavanagh is here to remember Mary and all the parishioners, who have gone before us, with gratitude. And so, it is with great joy and honour that Katherine and myself are part of this blessing of the new icon. Thank you.

***Sr. Pauline McGrath 9th December 2019***

Friends, community and Fr. Donal PP, celebrate with a cup of coffee and mince pies after the installlment of the icon in the Parish Centre. Thankyou Ms Katherine Kavanagh!





# An Tairseach

## Organic Farm & Ecology Centre

### 2020 TEN WEEK SABBATICAL PROGRAMMES

Exploring Spirituality in the context of an evolving universe, an endangered earth, in the Christian tradition."

**SPRING** - March 1st to May 8th **AUTUMN** - 6th September to 13th November

**RETREAT** - June 15th to 20th 2020

**"Resting in the Arms of God"** - Facilitator Ms Deirdre Ni Chinnéide

**RETREAT** - June 29th to July 4th 2020

**"In Communion with the Sacred Universe"**

Facilitators Ms Niamh Brennan and Sr. Colette Kane OP

**TEACHERS' SUMMER SCHOOL** - July 6th to 10th 2020

(Dept of Education approved for CPD)

**"Knowing Our Place, from Stardust to Sand"** - Facilitator Sr. Colette Kane OP

Providing teachers with the confidence and competence to teach the story of the universe; the effects of global warming and the necessity of environmental awareness and care. It is also aimed at fostering the curiosity of students and developing environmental awareness and care of the environment. The main curriculum areas covered by the course are SESE.

*"A fantastic course, full of variety and hands on activities. Speakers were all so knowledgeable and expert communicators. A really great learning experience that I'll be able to bring back to my school."*

*"The course had great variety of presentations and speakers and a good balance between listening and interactive activities. It was superb!"*

### PRIVATE RETREATS

Self-catering facilities, en-suite rooms with wifi, access to library, facilities of Centre, Chapel, and beautiful grounds on an organic farm.

### CONTACT

Ms. Kate Duggan

An Tairseach, Organic Farm & Ecology Centre,  
Kilmantin Hill, Wicklow Town, Co. Wicklow A67 YX26

Email: [info@antairseach.ie](mailto:info@antairseach.ie)

Phone: 00 353 (0)404 61833

[antairseach.ie](http://antairseach.ie)



This project is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal through the Community Services Programme

