

The Holy Rosary Choir 1982-2012

In Genesis 31:27, Laban complained that Jacob had stolen away secretly: *Why did you make a secret of your flight, not giving me word of it, so that I might have sent you away with joy and songs, melody and music?* From earliest times music has been part of celebration. King David was responsible for hundreds of songs and he danced before the Arc of the Covenant. He must have danced to music! At the birth of Jesus- suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying '*Glory to God in the highest and peace amongst men of goodwill*' Luke 2:23.

Choirs have sung in the Holy Rosary Church since it's opening in 1910. Up to 1982, when a permanent Organist was appointed, the Holy Faith sisters from the nearby Convent often provided organists. These included Sr. M. Anthony Graham up to 1952, Sr. M Imelda Martin from 1945-1953 and 1970-1971 and Sr. M. Austin Iremonger between 1952 and 1982.

There appears to have been a particularly fruitful choral period in the 1950s under the then Parish Priest Father John Fennelly. A precursor to the present choir was a group that sang with Brendan (later Dom) Kelly. Brendan, although living in Greystones, was Musical Director in Saint Andrews Church Westland Row. This group initially included Pauline Chambers, Collette Frawley, Mary Keating, Seamus Connolly, Penny Nordell, Johnny Magee, Therese Forde, Joyce Kavanagh and Yvonne and Valerie O'Hanlon. Sister Austin was the organist. This group sang simple masses and undertook a canting roster.

The present Holy Rosary Choir was founded in 1982. Father Des O'Sullivan had attended the Irish Church Music Congress and Carlow Liturgical Centre and the idea formed in his mind that it would be possible to form a four part polyphonic choir in Greystones. He spoke with Brendan Kelly who immediately set about forming such a choir. Early members included John Aldridge, who acted as organist, Therese Forde, Penny Nordell (alto), Joyce Kavanagh (soprano), Seamus Connolly (tenor), Patricia Coleman (soprano), Nan Avery (alto), Jean Kelly (alto) and Johnny Magee (bass).

The Holy Rosary Choir (HRC) subsequently grew to having an average attendance of about thirty-five at rehearsals and masses with up to forty-five available for special occasions. The full listing of all the men and

women who sang in the HRC is available for inspection in Appendix 2. The Choir has been the parish's provider of sacred music for thirty years regularly singing at vigil mass on Saturday evening, Holy Week, Easter and Christmas ceremonies. They have also performed at the annual Carol service before Christmas each year and have provided the music for the annual mass for the deceased in Redford Cemetery. Members of the choir took a leading part in raising £26,000 to refurbish the organ in 1992.

During its thirty years as the premier choir at the Holy Rosary Church the HRC has served seven parish priests: Fr. Pat O'Sullivan, Fr. Kinsella, Fr. Bernard Brady (1988-1994), Mon. Paddy Wallace (1994-2004), Fr. Enda Lloyd (2004-2009), Fr. Paul Kenny (2009-2011) and Fr. Liam Belton (2011 to date).

Since 1982 there have been four Musical Directors: Dom Brendan Kelly, Dr. Paddy Roche, Joanna Campbell-Griffin and Derek Verso. Brendan Kelly was born and raised in the parish of Saint Andrew's Westland Row in Dublin's south inner city. He was a noted boy soprano and won the John McCormack medal at the Feis Ceoil. Later he served as first tenor in the Saint Andrew's Church Choir that he would eventually come to lead. Brendan came to live in Greystones in the 1970s and because of his excellent reputation as Musical Director of the Westland Row Choir the then Parish Priest of Holy Rosary asked him to lead a new four part choir. For eighteen years Brendan was Musical Director of both choirs.

His contribution to Sacred Music was recognised by the Church in November 1993 when he was conferred with the papal title 'Dom' at a ceremony in Saint Andrew's when both of his choirs sang. The title 'Dom' was instituted originally to honour those who had made significant contributions to the Jubilee celebrations of Pope Leo X111. Subsequently it has been used to honour those who have given distinguished service to the Church in general.

Shortly before Brendan's untimely death in August 2002 he led the HRC on an official visit to celebrate Saint Kilian's Day in Wuerzburg in Germany. The last time that his two choirs sang together was at a special memorial mass in Saint Andrew's Church to commemorate Brendan's contribution to Sacred Music in both parishes. After the mass a plaque to his memory was unveiled. Dom Brendan Kelly's memory will live on as long as the HRC continues to enrich the liturgy of Holy Rosary Church.

Major performances undertaken by the HRC during Dom. Brendan Kelly's time as Musical Director include Faure's 'Requiem' in June

1994, Gounod's 'Mass of Saint Cecilia' in May 1995, Stainer's 'Crucifixion' in April 1996, March 1997 and March 2002 and Haydn's 'Little Organ Mass' in May 1998.

The HRC's first organist was John Aldridge. John moved to Ireland from Africa with his family in 1974 and his work in the insurance sector brought to many different parts of the country. He acted as organist and choirmaster in Mervue Galway, Athlone and Headfort. From 1982 to 1991 he was Organist in the Holy Rosary Church and simultaneously Organist and Director of Music in Saint Patrick's Church of Ireland. In 1991 John and his family relocated to the West of Ireland and in 1992 John was appointed Director of Sacred Music at Knock Shrine. In 2008 John was awarded the 'Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice' medal by Pope Benedict XVI.

John was followed as Organist in 1991 by Donard Magee. Donard was born in Boyle County Roscommon where both his parents were music teachers and his father was the organist and choirmaster in Saint Joseph's Church. While still a student he played the organ for the choir in Summerhill College where he was a pupil. During a long banking career Donard got the opportunity to play the organ in churches in many parts of Ireland. He moved to Greystones 1985 and was understudy to John Aldridge until 1991 when he was appointed Holy Rosary Organist.

In September 2002, following Dom Brendan Kelly's untimely death the conductor's baton was taken up by Doctor Paddy Roche. Paddy had joined the HRC shortly after it had been formed and had acted as understudy to Brendan. A native of Tralee County Kerry Doctor Paddy received her secondary education at the Sacred Heart Convent Roscrea where her musical talents were quickly spotted. Under the tutelage of an Austrian nun she became leader of the school orchestra and played piano to performance level. Herself and her late husband Charlie settled in Greystones where they raised their family. Doctor Paddy while pursuing a medical career also found time to sing with the Irish language choir in the Holy Rosary Church and has been its conductor for the past thirty years.

One of the highlights of Doctor Paddy's time as Musical Director was the HRC's five-day pilgrimage to Poland in May 2005. Based in Krakow the choir sang Arcadelt's 'Ave Maria' in the Chapel of Krakow Castle and in the underground Saint Kinga's chapel in the Wieliczka salt mines at nearly 1,000 feet below the surface. The Choir also visited the shrine of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa and we sang at a mass in Wadowice

Pope John Paul 11's home-town. While there we visited his home in a nearby apartment building. We also spent a day in Zakopone a ski resort on the Tatra Mountains.

A rather more sombre event was the visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps a two hours drive from Krakow. This gave us an insight into the depravity to which humans can descend if evil is allowed to triumph. No words can describe the horror that silos of discarded suitcases, shoes and human hair can induce. The actual gas chambers and ovens brought tears to the eyes of all of the group. As we left on the coach our Parish Priest Father Enda Lloyd led us in prayer beginning with a passage from the Torah.

We returned to Dublin via Warsaw where we had a quick tour of the Polish Capital before heading for John Paul 11 Airport and home.

Doctor Paddy retired in 2005 to be succeeded by Joanna Campbell-Griffin. Joanna, a noted soprano, has specialised in singing sacred music and is a professional conductor and Musical Director. She is the Music Director of the Dun Laoghaire Golf Club Choir and is Resident Cantor in the Church of Mary Immaculate Refuge of Sinners Rathmines Dublin.

In 2008 our then Parish Priest Father Enda Lloyd led the choir on a pilgrimage to Lisbon and Fatima. The highlight of the pilgrimage was a private mass celebrated by Father Enda in the Capela Sagrada Familia in Fatima. The intention of the mass was dedicated to families and friends at home, particularly our sick and disabled relatives.

The last day of the pilgrimage included a visit to the priory of Corpo Santo established by the Irish Dominicans in the 17th century. This was a time of intense religious persecution in Ireland and the priory was a centre for the education and ordination of young men who would return to Ireland to minister to the Faithful. So many of them were executed that the house became known as 'The Priory of the Martyrs'.

In 2010 Joanna was succeeded by Derek Verso who is currently our Musical Director. Derek combines his love of music and pipe organs into a busy career where he is proprietor and Artistic Director of the Fine Tuning Company, Choir Director and Organist at Saint Brigid's Cathedral Kildare and Saint Paul's Church Glenageary as well as leading the HRC. Coincidentally he was also responsible for the Refurbishment and rebuilding of the organ in our own Holy Rosary Church in 1992. A graduate of UCD Derek was the first Irish person to become a member of

the Incorporated Society of Organ Builder. Derek Studied organ with Gerard Gillen, piano with Lily Huban and choral conducting with Geoffery Spratt and David Brophy.

Since 2010 the HRC has been providing four part polyphonic sacred music for the Saturday evening Vigil Mass every second week while also contributing to the Easter and Christmas liturgies.

In June 2011 the HRC was invited to sing at the Vigil Mass in the Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and Saint Nicholas in Galway City. The Sanctus, Benedictus, Amen and Agnus Dei were taken from Franz Schubert's German Mass while 'Cantate Domino' by Pitoni and 'God's Holy Gift's' by Bernard Sexton were sung at the Offertory and Communion respectively. The choir was conducted by Derek Verso while our organist was Barry Courtney from Sallynoggin Parish. The celebrant Father Whelan was kind enough to thank the HRC for participation in the liturgy of the Mass. Following the Mass Derek played the Tocatta by Dubois on the Cathedral's magnificent organ.

Over the past thirty years the HRC has sung over two hundred individual compositions in five languages. With its current membership of thirty-five the Choir looks forward to continuing the tradition of polyphonic sacred music in the years to come.