

DIOCESE OF LIMERICK

VOCATIONS



NOVEMBER 2020

"If we had not the Sacrament of Orders, we should not have Our Lord. Who placed Him there, in that tabernacle? It was the priest. Who was it that received your soul, on its entrance into life? The priest. Who nourishes it, to give it strength to make its pilgrimage? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, by washing that soul, for the last time, in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest"

~St. John Vianney

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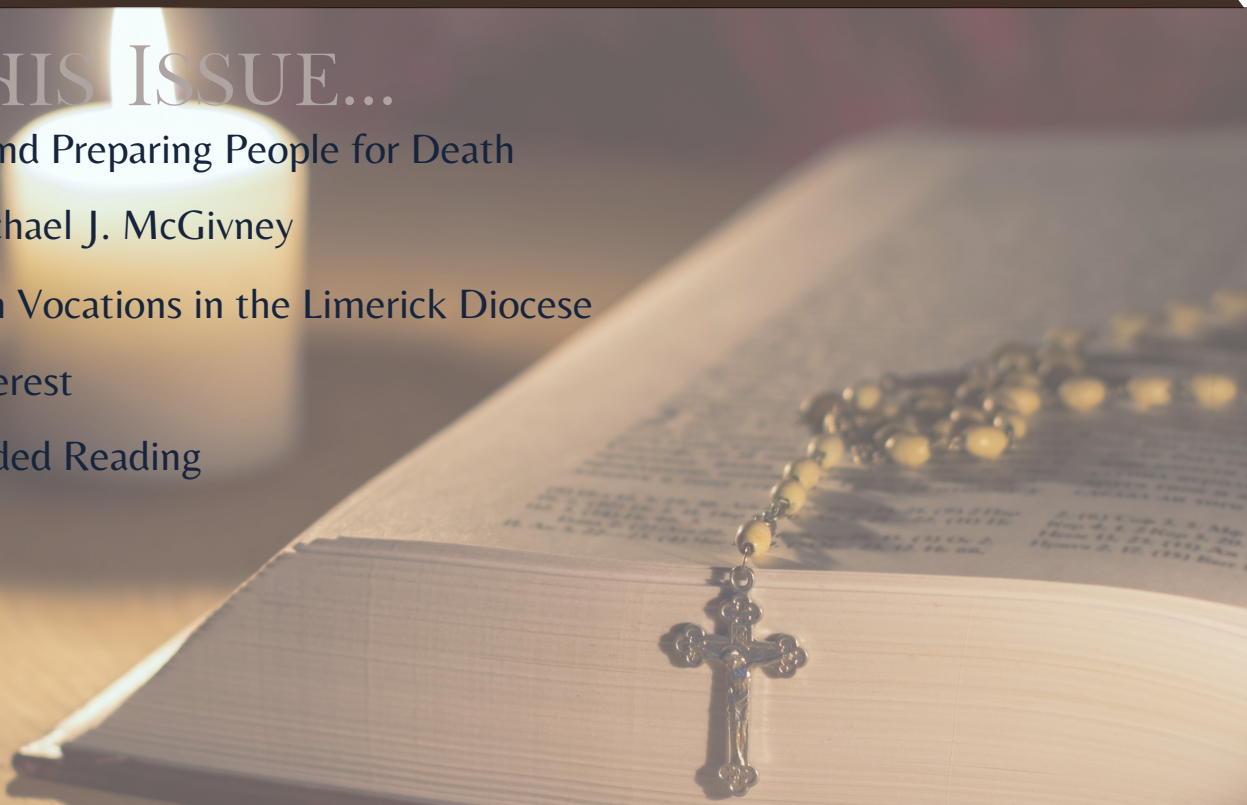
The Priest and Preparing People for Death

Blessed Michael J. McGivney

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CHURCH? I HAVEN'T BEEN TO CHURCH IN FIFTY YEARS

One of the sweet things about being a priest is being able to minister at a person's deathbed. The veil between this world and the next is very thin at that point, and you can see so much. When I say you can "see" so much what I mean is that so much is revealed. At that point the person who is dying is usually very vulnerable and open. Their worldly façade is fading. Their accomplishments and pride are forgotten. They realize that all the stuff of this world will soon be left behind.

Often the person is quietly sleeping. The family is gathered around and there is no response as the last rites are given. On the other hand, sometimes the process is very conscious. More than once I've been called to visit a man or woman who has called the parish office specifically because they know they are dying and they want to see a Catholic priest.

So I once made my way to a small apartment in a not so good part of town. I was admitted to find a man in his sixties with a haggard expression gasping for air. Call him Ralph.

"Are you a Catholic priest?"

"I am."

"It's about time. I've been calling all around town for the last three weeks trying to get hold of a Catholic priest."

"I'm sorry. It looks like you're pretty sick."

"Yep. I'm dying. Doctor says only a few more weeks. They can't do anything for me."

"What's the problem?"

"Lung cancer. It's my own damned fault. I couldn't give up smoking,"

"Uh huh. Why haven't you seen a priest up til now?"

"I was in the hospice and when I asked they sent some old guy around wearing a blue shirt. That made me suspicious so I asked him and he said he was a Methodist. I told him to get lost. I want a Catholic priest. So off he went and a few days later I asked again and they sent some woman around wearing one of those shirts priests are supposed to wear. I knew she wasn't a Catholic priest, so I told her to get out and go find me a Catholic priest."

"Why didn't you send for your parish priest? What church do you go to?"

He laughs, then starts coughing. Coughing really bad. I think he's going to cough his lungs up—what's left of them. Finally he stops laughing-coughing and says, "Hell, Father I haven't been to church for fifty years."

"Then why start now?"

"Because the nuns told me when a Catholic is dying you're supposed to call the priest. Right?"

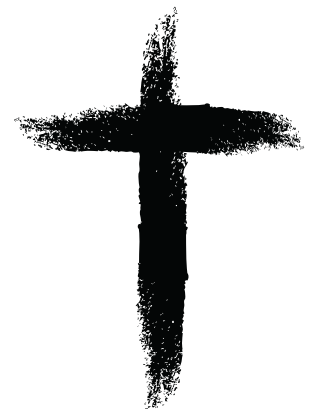
"Right."

"And I'm a Catholic and I'm dying so I called a priest. What next?"

"Well, are you prepared to make your confession and receive the sacrament of healing?"

"Is that the same as last rites?"

"Yes. Do you want to make your confession?"



“That might take a long time....” starts laughing-coughing again.

“I’ve got as much time as it takes.”

So I began to hear his sad old confession of a wasted life and tragic losses. There were tears on his side first, then on mine. I gave him absolution and promised to bring him communion the next day, and that communion was one of the sweetest things I can remember. He was like a little child. He had faith. In fact he had nothing but faith.

Then after communion and a blessing he lit up a cigarette. “You shouldn’t smoke.” I said. “Those things are going to kill you.”

He thought that was hilarious.

A week later his carer called and I went to see Ralph again. This time he was in bed in a darkened room. There were no family members there. He’d screwed his friends, alienated his kids and divorced his wife. He was alone.

I sat by his bedside. “Ralph, who is with you right now?”

“Nobody Father. Nobody, and it’s my fault. I admit it.”

I took out my rosary. “Do you remember this?”

“Sure. The nuns taught me to say the rosary.”

“That’s who is with you now. Mother Mary.” I give him the rosary. “You’re going to die soon, but I want you to hold on to this rosary as you go. She and your guardian angel will see you across the river. Are you good with that?”

He whispers, “Sure I’m good with that.”

Do you want me to say the prayers for passing?

He nods. I pray. He goes to sleep, and a few days later at his funeral his people are surprised to see a Catholic priest show up. Nobody knew Ralph was a Catholic. When I tell them how Ralph died there was total silence and reverence, and in some strange way Ralph, who was a pretty lousy Catholic in life, bore a radiant witness to Christ the King in his death.

Fr. Dwight Longenecker - blogpost January 13, 2014 - accessed 12 November 2020
<https://dwrightlongenecker.com/church-i-havent-been-to-church-in-fifty-years/>



*Life is short,
Death is certain
and the world to come
is everlasting.*

~ St. John Henry Newman

BLESSED MICHAEL J. MCGIVNEY

In a decree issued from the Vatican on Wednesday 27 May 2020, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, with the approval of Pope Francis, has acknowledged a miracle through the intercession of the Venerable Father Michael Joseph McGivney, the founder of the Knights of Columbus, thus fulfilling the requirements for his beatification.

The pope's action means that Father McGivney can be declared "Blessed," the step just prior to sainthood. An additional miracle attributed to Father McGivney's intercession will be required for his canonisation as a saint.

The miracle recognised as coming through Father McGivney's intercession involved an unborn child in the United States who in 2015 was healed in the womb of a life-threatening condition after prayers by his family to Father McGivney.

Father McGivney was a Connecticut priest who served his flock during the pandemic of 1890, before himself becoming ill and dying of pneumonia.

He is best known for founding the Knights of Columbus in 1882. Nearly a century before the Second Vatican Council, his prescient vision empowered the laity to serve Church and neighbour in a new way. Today, the Knights of Columbus is one of the largest Catholic organizations in the world with 2 million members in North and Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Europe.

Father McGivney was born of Irish immigrant parents on 12 August 1852 in Waterbury, Connecticut. His father, Patrick, was a native of Drumkilly (Crosserlough Parish) and his mother, Mary Lynch, came from Castlerahan – both in the Diocese of Kilmore.

His parents came to the United States in the great 19th-century wave of Irish immigration and were married in Waterbury. Patrick was a molder in the heat and noxious fumes of a brass mill. Mary gave birth to 13 children, six of whom died young, leaving Michael (the eldest) with four living sisters and two brothers, who also became priests.

Father McGivney was a central figure in the dramatic growth of the Church in the United States in the late 19th century. Ordained in Baltimore in 1877, he ministered to a heavily Irish-American and immigrant community in the then-Diocese of Hartford. At a time of anti-Catholic sentiment, he worked tirelessly to keep his flock close to the faith in part by finding practical solutions to their many problems – spiritual and temporal alike. With a group of the leading Catholic men of New Haven, he founded the Knights of Columbus in 1882 at St. Mary's Church to provide spiritual support for Catholic men and financial resources for families that had suffered the loss of their breadwinner.

The fledgling group soon became a major force in the areas of evangelisation, charity, racial integration, and the defense of religious freedom.

Never robust in health, Father McGivney continued to minister in the vineyard of the Lord until he fell ill during the pandemic of 1889-1890 – possibly caused by a coronavirus – and was stricken with severe pneumonia in January 1890. The young priest lost physical strength just as the Knights of Columbus were moving toward new vitality. He died on August 14, just two days past his 38th birthday.

Today, Father McGivney's body is interred in a beautiful marble tomb in St. Mary's Church in New Haven, where he founded the Knights of Columbus.

His vision and mission continue to bear fruit through the work he inspired in the more than 2 million Knights of Columbus working throughout the world. These men, these Knights, form a band of brothers dedicated to faith in action under the principles of charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism.

In March 2008, he was declared a Venerable Servant of God by Pope Benedict XVI, who during his visit to St. Patrick's Cathedral cited the "remarkable accomplishment of that exemplary American priest, the Venerable Michael McGivney, whose vision and zeal led to the establishment of the Knights of Columbus."

More information is also available at www.FatherMcGivney.org

Information accessed at <https://www.kilmorediocese.ie/american-priest-with-kilmore-connections-to-be-beatified/>



DIOCESAN VOCATIONS SPOTLIGHT

Fr. John Walsh



Ordained 1988

Parish Priest:
Our Lady of Lourdes

Recently in a socially distance interview, the diocesan vocations office was able to ask parish priest, Fr. John Walsh a few questions about his own discernment to the priesthood.

How did you discern that you had a vocation to the Diocesan Priesthood?

I discerned my vocation to the priesthood with the help of my parish priest at the time who took time to listen to me over a period of time. These chats with some spiritual reading advised by the same priest helped me greatly. With that prayer was essential to me also. Chatting with family and getting to know others in seminary helped greatly.

Who were influential role models for you in your faith life?

That priest Fr Gerard Wall was a big influence as were Frs. Austin Mc Namara, Liam Enright and Tony Kelleher all from my home parish of Fedamore were inspiration for me.

What are some of the joys and challenges of the Diocesan Priesthood?

The Joy's are obvious. Interaction with families in the community especially through the sacraments always bring life to my priestly vocation. Sharing the journey with the lay community is a relatively new initiative in our diocese and working with them and learning from them renews my spirit daily.

In recent times the Covid 19 pandemic has brought obvious challenges to living priesthood today. Being unable to interact freely with people through visitation is a real challenge. That apart the apparent disinterest when it comes to religious practice is a huge challenge in priestly life for me. People's belief of not needing religion in their lives is challenging for me.

Who are your favourite saints and why?

I have a great love for all the saints but St. Maximilian Kolbe in particular and St. John Paul the second are two that stand out. Maximilian ,because of his kindness, love and hope in every situation inspires me to reach out to people in all circumstances hopefully without prejudice.

St. John Paul inspired me by his witness as a good shepherd reaching out to all people. At a spiritual level I admire most his simple spirituality. Hope for us all.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Spare time.? What is that? Seriously though I enjoy the simple things like nature and all that it has to offer mainly by nature walks I take. Also I love to observe people. Some call it people watching. I love to watch people go about their daily lives. I learn so much from them and am in awe of how people achieve great things even in challenging situations.

What advice would you give to young men who feel that they might be called to the Diocesan Priesthood?

Firstly seek out a spiritual director, someone they can chat with. When decisions need to be taken down the road it will be a source of great confidence and self assurance that another knows your spiritual journey and gives you their blessing. Be comfortable and diligent in one's prayer life. It is essential to be a man of prayer.



"I plead with you -- never,
ever give up on hope,
never doubt, never tire,
and never become
discouraged.
Be not afraid."

Pope Saint John Paul II

FILMS OF INTEREST



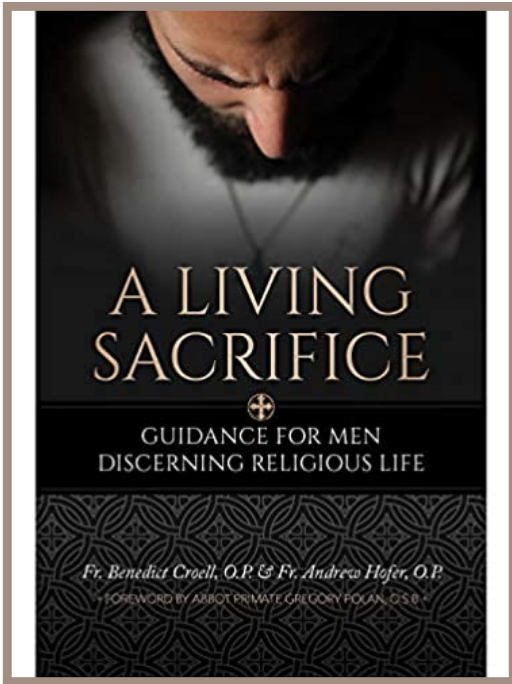
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPVXa1dIab4&feature=emb_logo

'The Calling' follows a young Catholic called Michael as he considers what to do with his life. The film explores some of the challenges of listening to God's voice in the complex and noisy world in which we live.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Xl2vssp8aw>

RECOMMENDED READING



A Living Sacrifice: Guidance for Men Discerning Religious Life
by Fr. Benedict Croell, O.P. &
Fr. Andrew Hofer, O.P.
Published by Vianney Vocations

Whether you are discerning a priestly vocation or religious vocation this book will be a tremendous guide. The first three chapters dedicated to the practical aspects of discernment. Chapters four to six discuss the Trinitarian aspects of a religious vocation. While the focus is on consecrated religious life, it provides general insight into vocations as well. In the next three chapters, what makes religious life distinct from secular priesthood and the lay state is explored. Parts four and five, chapters 10-12 and 13-15 respectively, take a closer look at the application process and life in different religious communities. Finally, the appendices offer a variety of suggestions for discernment: Lectio Divina, Rosary meditations, recommended reading, and more.

While the book is written for discerning men, spiritual directors, vocation directors, and women would also benefit from the insights in this book.

SUPPORTING VOCATIONS IN YOUR PARISH?

Please pray for holy vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life regularly. Would you consider having regular Adoration for this intention? Do you currently have any events or initiatives in your parish or schools to support the understanding and promotion of vocations? Would you like to? If we can help to organize something for you, please be in touch!

DIOCESE OF LIMERICK
VOCATION OFFICE

www.limerickdiocese.org
www.facebook.com/dioceseflimerick
vocations@limerickdiocese.org