



GLENSTAL ABBEY CHRONICLE

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

ISSUE 21 WINTER 2023 WWW.GLENSTAL.COM PHONE: (061) 621 000



Winter frost in the woods
surrounding the Abbey.

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

Prayer is the foundation of our monastic life and each day in the monastery is centred around times of prayer, together and in private. The backbone of our prayer is the Liturgy of the Hours – sometimes called the 'Divine Office' or the 'Work of God' – where the monks gather in the Abbey church to chant psalms and sing hymns to God, to listen to the Scriptures and to pray for the needs of the world. This daily round of worship consecrates the course of the day and night as the community gathers in the stillness of the morning, at the setting of the sun, and at the closing of the day.

W E E K D A Y S

6:35am: Matins and Lauds (Morning Prayer)

12:10pm: Conventual Mass

6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin)

**8:35pm: Compline (Monday - Friday: Night Prayer)
Resurrection Office/Vigils (Saturday)**

S U N D A Y S

7:00am: Lauds (Morning Prayer)

10:00am: Conventual Mass

12:35pm: Sext (Midday Prayer)

6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin)

8:35pm: Compline (Night Prayer)

Liturgies are broadcast each day as per our daily timetable:

glenstal.com/abbey/webcam/

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The Peace of Christ



This time of year, we gather in our families and communities to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord. It is our special joy to share with you this latest edition of the Glenstal Chronicle.

This Christmas we are very painfully aware of the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and the Holy Land. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those impacted by these terrible conflicts. As we celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we place before him all the war-torn regions of the earth, conscious that the only true and lasting peace is the peace that comes from him.

We remember all those who have gone to their eternal reward over these last twelve months and their families. Christmas can be a difficult time for those recently bereaved and you are particularly in our prayers. We recall with fondness our own confreres who have returned to God since we last celebrated Christmas, Br Anselm and Fr Anselm. May the Lord look kindly on all of them and take them to himself.

The work done by our community this past year, together with our life of prayer, has only been possible because of the kindness and generosity we have received. For this, we are most grateful. We wish each and every one of you the blessings of Christmas and peace in the New Year.

Abbot Brendan Coffey OSB



DENIS HOOPER OSB

Glenstal Abbey's Foundation-Cross

In the first volume of the *Annals of Glenstal (1927-1940)* is the following passage, written in the inimitable style of Dom Hubert Janssens, founding member and long-time annalist and archivist:

“ On Sunday, May 8th [1927] immediately after the solemn conventual Mass, the blessing of the foundation cross took place in the basilica of Maredsous, according to the monastic ritual...

At his afternoon conference, Father Abbot laid stress upon the meaning of that cross he had given to the parting monks: *Nisi granum frumentum cadens in terram mortuum fuerit* (Jn 12:22, 'Unless the grain of wheat

falling on the earth does not die'). The Lord Abbot had also given to the new superior a copy of the Holy Rule, which should be the basis for a new community.

The ceremonial also includes the giving of a psalter: in order to remind the Benedictines that the *Opus Dei* is the principal function of a monk, and that it has always to keep its place of honour, whatever be the work expected from outside activity.

”

HENRY O'SHEA OSB

The foundation-cross, for many years placed on one of the side-altars in the church, is now kept in the monastery chapter-room.

Some believe that this cross was originally on Abbot Marmion's desk, but if one looks at the portrait on Abbot Marmion in the abbey church here in Glenstal, it is



clear that, while the actual cross is of the same, 'celtic' pattern, the

ABOVE: Portrait of Abbot Marmion (seated at his desk). ABOVE RIGHT: (sitting from left to right: D. Mayol Lang (with the breviary), D. Gerard François (with the cross), D. Celestine Golenvaux, Abbot of Maredsous, D. Omer Van Tours (with the Rule), D. Winoc Mertens; (standing behind): D. David Maffei (from Mont Cesar) and D. Hubert Janssens.

crowned corpus of the crucified Christ is not the same as that on the foundation-cross.

The bronze corpus is one of many cast in what is known as the Beuronese style. The latter style was promoted by artists of Maredsous' founding abbey at Beuron in southwest Germany. These artists

attempted to elaborate a 'sacral' art based on the so-called Golden Rule of proportions and was heavily influenced by Egyptian cultic models. At the time of the blessing of the foundation-cross, the interior of the abbey at Maredsous was completely covered with frescos in the Beuronese style. These were painted over in the early 1960s when the basilica was being re-ordered. ■

Upcoming Events at the Abbey

THE PSALMS: TREASURES OLD AND NEW 10 FEBRUARY

The monastic day is regularly punctuated by the praying of the psalms which over time are intended to penetrate every thought, word, and deed of the monk. This day is dedicated to sharing the treasures of the psalms and to reveal their sustaining spiritual nourishment at every stage of life. The day-long programme runs from 9.45am-4.30pm on Saturday 10 February 2024. Cost €70

LENT AT THE ABBEY 2024: A NEW SPRINGTIME FOR LIFE

Every Sunday of Lent beginning on 18 February there will be a talk in the Monastery Library at 4.30pm followed by refreshments and then sung Evening Prayer at 6pm in the Abbey Church. The focus this year is on entering into the promise of new life. The talks to be presented by monks include: A New Remembering; The Son of Man must be Lifted Up; Unless the wheat grain Dies;

Entry into Jerusalem, and will all begin at 4.30pm each Sunday to be followed by refreshments and Evening Prayer at 6pm. To attend please book through events@glenstal.com or phone 061-621005. Donation €20 per Sunday. The talks will be made available as recordings from the website at a later date.

OBLATES AND ASSOCIATES 17 FEBRUARY AND 23 MARCH

Oblate meetings normally happen three times a year. The next one will take place on Saturday 17 February 2024. Our annual Lenten Retreat for Oblates and Associates will be held on 23 March, later than usual, falling on the Saturday before Palm Sunday. This can serve as a special preparation for Holy Week. (Details about all meetings will be sent to oblates/associates closer to the dates.) If you would like to be included in the list of associates for these retreat days, please write to Fr. Columba McCann OSB at Glenstal or, better still, email him at oblates@glenstal.org. ■



That They May Be One

Fr. Martin was recently appointed to the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican. Here he describes what his new role entails.

I've had many different jobs and assignments since I joined the monastery over twenty years ago and often struck me that I had never foreseen doing any of them before I joined. It had simply never dawned on me that I might one day be asked to look after the monastery shop, or to be a housemaster in the school, much less its Headmaster, or to serve as the community's Bursar. This is all the more true for the job I am currently doing, one which involves my living outside the monastery for a

few years. It is by no means a typical monastic job and I sometimes have to pinch myself to check that I'm not imagining it. I am referring to my work as an official of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican, where I have served since September 2022.

The first response of most people on hearing where I work is to ask what on earth it is! 'Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity' is certainly a mouthful to pronounce, let alone

MARTIN BROWNE OSB



understand. At its simplest, it is the Catholic Church's Department of Ecumenism, its central office for maintaining and developing relations with other Christian churches and communities. It is a small enough organisation. Headed by a cardinal and a bishop, there are just eight officials, plus various support staff. The superiors and officials come from several different countries: Colombia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland and Switzerland. Between

the Church of Ireland is a part), the Methodist World Council and the Salvation Army, as well as the preparation of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. What exactly this involves is different every day. For instance, the Catholic Church has had formal dialogues with Anglicans and Methodists for over half a century, and I am the Catholic co-secretary of those two dialogue commissions, which involves theological study and reflection, and helping to draft

The Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity is responsible for managing the Catholic Church's relations with all the major Christian traditions in the world.

us, we are responsible for managing the Catholic Church's relations with all the major Christian traditions in the world, including Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

My main responsibilities are for the Anglican Communion (of which

and edit the commissions' statements. These commissions meet for one full week each year. In 2023, these two meetings were in Cyprus and Rome and in 2024 they will be in France and South Korea. The job can also involve going to important occasions in the life of the partner churches. Over the last year or so, I have been at the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops in

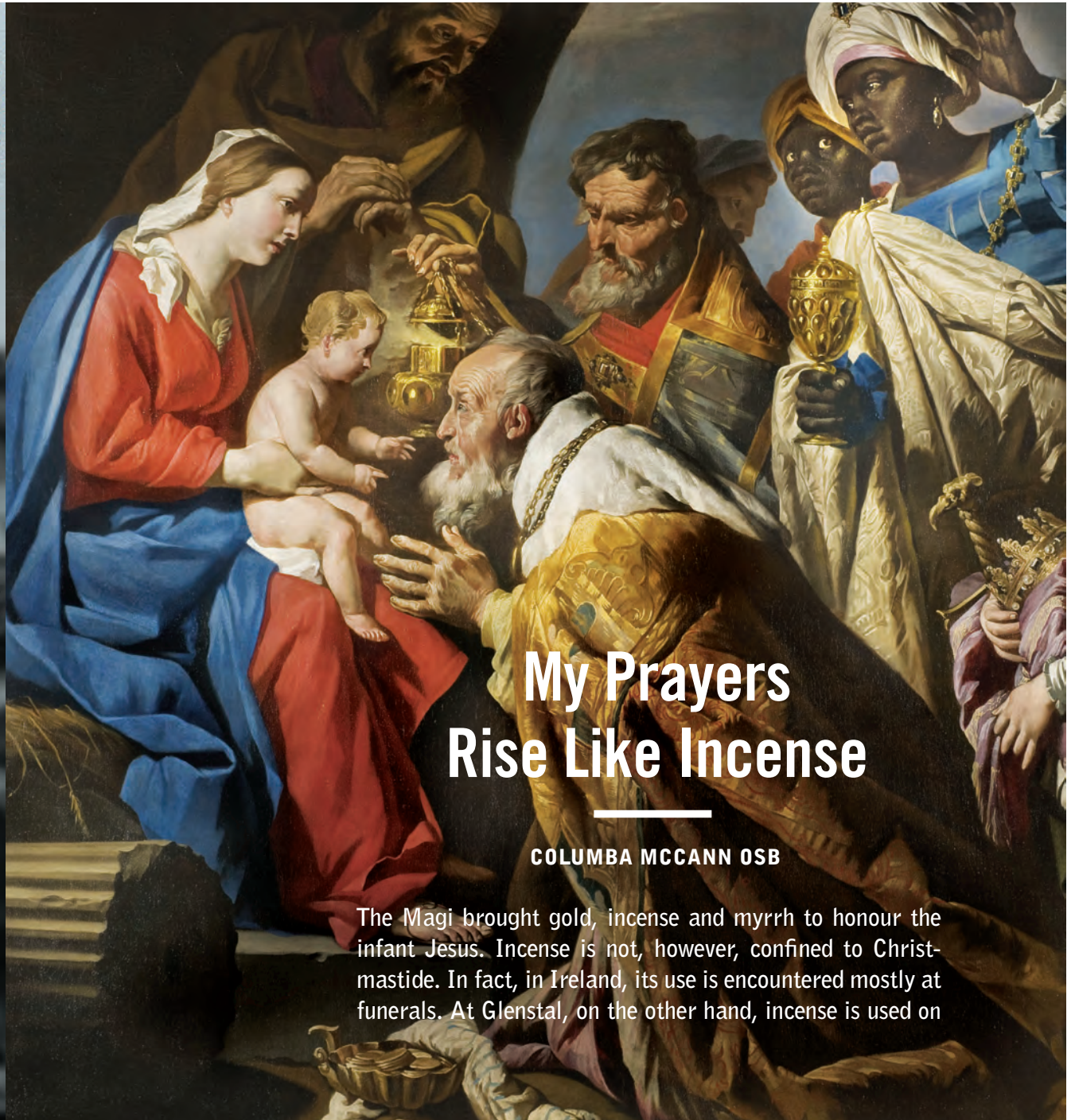
England and the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Ghana. I hope to be at the conference of the World Methodist Council in Sweden next summer.

My job also involves less exotic things like being a point of contact and information for our ecumenical partners in Rome, answering their questions or helping to put them in contact with other Vatican offices on matters of shared interest and activity. I also get to welcome Anglican or Methodist church leaders, scholars or seminarians when they visit Rome. This can simply be a matter of receiving them at our offices and spending some time in conversation with them. Or helping them with tickets for the Pope's Wednesday General Audience, Or, in the case of the Archbishop of Canterbury, speeding to the airport with a police escort to receive him in the VIP area! The job is rarely boring...

I often find myself accompanying ecumenical visitors to see the Pope or at liturgies in St Peter's

Basilica. Though they belong to churches that do not acknowledge the Pope's governing authority, I am always struck, and moved, by their respect for the office of Pope and indeed for their respect for Pope Francis personally. This was especially apparent during the unique ecumenical vigil of prayer in St Peter's Square at the end of September last, just before the opening of the Synod on Synodality. Nineteen church leaders, from East and West, joined Pope Francis in praying the final blessing. It was an incredibly beautiful moment of *communion*. Afterwards, the Archbishop of Canterbury reflected that 'with the widest group of churches one can imagine, from all parts of Orthodoxy to Pentecostal and everything between, I think I saw most clearly the Pope in his role as universal Primate'. It was a foretaste of the unity of Christians for which our Lord prayed before his passion. I am incredibly grateful to have been invited – and permitted – to spend these years working full-time on this holy task. ■





My Prayers Rise Like Incense

COLUMBA MCCANN OSB

The Magi brought gold, incense and myrrh to honour the infant Jesus. Incense is not, however, confined to Christmastide. In fact, in Ireland, its use is encountered mostly at funerals. At Glenstal, on the other hand, incense is used on

a daily basis. People who enter our church building on a Sunday afternoon will immediately sense a lingering fragrance in the air, as if the prayer and worship of the morning have left their impression on the space; and indeed they have.

Incense is a resin collected from the bases of trees, mostly in the East. When placed on burning

candles and aromatherapy oils all know about the power of scent. Little surprise then, that it has a place in our worship. The surprise might be that, aside from places like Glenstal, it is so little used. Indeed the danger in Ireland is that the scent of incense will become an evocation the sadness of funerals past, and nothing else. It doesn't have to be like that.

Since the smoke lifted beautiful perfumes heavenwards it became an obvious symbol of worship, and accompanied many of the temple sacrifices. ... What made the sacrifices a truly religious symbol was the prayer that accompanied them.

charcoal it starts to smoulder, emitting a fragrant smoke, which can fill even a large space with perfume. We know that, of all our senses, the sense of smell is the most evocative. Walk into any building associated with your childhood and the smell of it will bring you right back... The manufacturers of perfume, aftershave, scented

We read about the use of incense in many pages of the Old Testament. Since the smoke lifted beautiful perfumes heavenwards it became an obvious symbol of worship, and accompanied many of the temple sacrifices. Those sacrifices were mostly gifts of food (for example: meat, grain, oil or wine). Sharing food is always a potent sign of uni-

ty. Burning food in the temple was a symbolic way of sharing it with God, and was often accompanied by the burning of incense. Burnt food in itself is not necessarily a religious symbol, as any one knows who has ever had to struggle with a chip pan on fire! What made the sacrifices a truly religious symbol was the prayer that accompanied them. With the progression of spiritual awareness it became understood that prayer itself was a kind of sacrifice, an act of communion with God, a spiritual offering. Psalm 140 speaks of prayer rising like incense. This image is dramatically



Ancient Roman terracotta relief plaque (1 B.C. - 50 B.C.) in which female temple attendants kneel before a tall incense burner, upon which they place an offering.

taken up in the New Testament in the Book of Revelation: the celestial fireworks that herald the final triumph of God's kingdom and the end of all human woes are set off when an angel flings incense on the heavenly altar. The rising smoke is in fact the prayer of God's people.

We can participate in the final triumph of God in our world and for our world whenever we pray. Our prayers are like incense rising before the throne of God.

Incense was also used in the pagan customs and rites of the Roman Empire. Incense was burnt before pagan idols as a sign of worship. The

scent of incense could also mask the odour of the vast, unwashed crowd, and so whenever the emperor arrived in town his parade was preceded by incense. It was probably also an acknowledgment of his quasi-divine status in the religious culture of the empire.

During the era of Roman persecution, Christians resolutely resisted the use of incense. They would

the way of Christ are God's holy people, and are honoured with incense when they walk in procession (even if, much of the time, only a representative group walks in procession, the rest remaining already in place). The Book of the Gospels, carried in procession to the ambo, is the means through which the word of Christ is proclaimed, and is incensed in honour of him. The holy gifts of bread and

It was only when the era of Roman persecution was well and truly over that Christians felt confident enough to use incense in a way that would not be confused with idolatrous worship.

rather die than put even a grain of incense in front of a Roman idol. And die they did. It was only when that particular persecution was well and truly over that Christians felt confident enough to use incense in a way that would not be confused with idolatrous worship.

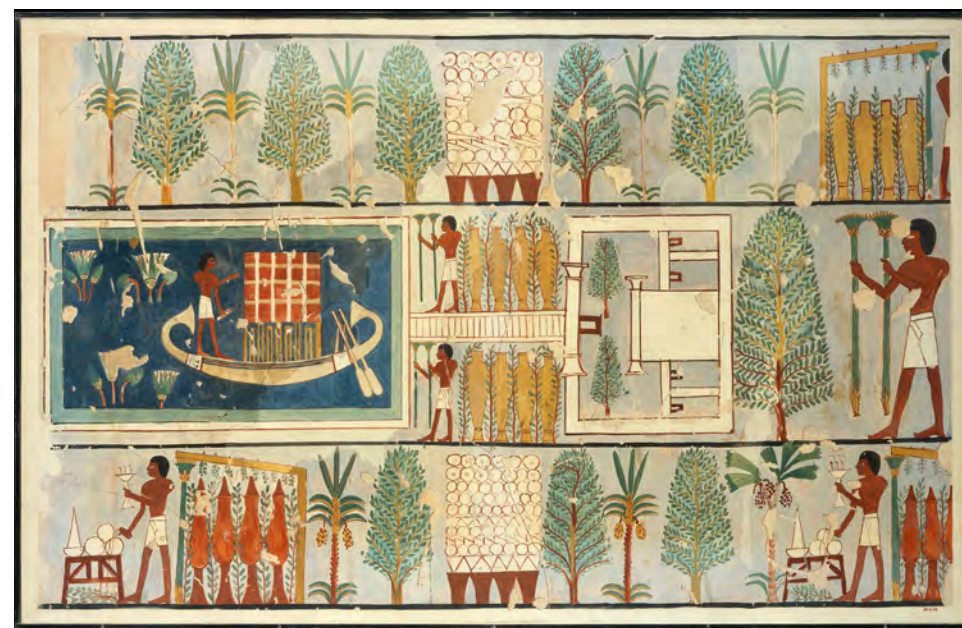
Incense made its way into Christian processions. Those who follow

wine are incensed because through them Christ becomes sacramentally present in the triumph of his death and resurrection. The sacred banquet in which this takes place is so awesome that even the table on which it takes place (the altar) is honoured with incense, and likewise the cross which recalls the Passover mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The priest is honoured

with incense because Christ acts through him in the memorial of his sacrifice. Finally, and this is the ultimate destination of all the foregoing, the whole assembly is honoured with incense, because we are members of the Body of Christ, the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. This is also why the

bodies of the baptised are incensed at their funerals.

Just as the sweet, spicy aroma of incense can linger in the air for hours after the Eucharist, so to the spiritual radiance of this celebration extends into all the other moments of the Church's prayer. This



Funeral Ritual in a Garden (early twentieth-century facsimile) from a section of wall painting in the tomb of Minnakht in western Thebes, ca. 1479–1425 B.C. In the lowest register, two men stand in front of small offering tables. Each man pours a libation with one hand and holds a brazier with burning incense in the other.

is perhaps most evident in evening, at Vespers. Monks and nuns have been singing this hour of prayer since the fourth century gatherings of the eastern deserts. Perhaps few realise that the rest of the laity also gathered regularly with their bishops in the cathedrals for their own version of the same prayer. Particularly popular in that celebration, and usually sung every evening, was Psalm 140, referred to above, because it referred to prayer as an offering akin to the evening offering of incense in the Jewish temple. People realised that their prayer

was a beautiful sacrifice pleasing to God, and even illustrated it by burning incense while this psalm was sung.

In the Benedictine office a memory of this ancient popular office

remains in a little Latin verse that is sung on ordinary evenings: *Dirigatur Domine oratio mea sicut incensum in conspectu tuo* – Let my prayer arise before you like incense, the raising of my hands like an evening oblation. It is just at this juncture that incense is burnt in our celebration of Vespers at Glenstal. ■



Erhard Altdorfer (1480-1561), 'The Altar of Incense', woodcut print, from *De Biblie uth der uthlegginge Doctoris Martini Luthers* (1534).

People realised that their prayer was a beautiful sacrifice pleasing to God, illustrating it by burning incense while Psalm 140 was sung.

Abbey Updates

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S GOLD MEDAL AWARD

Returning to Toronto to receive his PhD, Br Emmaus was presented with the Governor General's Gold Medal by the President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, on behalf of Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Governor General of Canada. Established in 1873 to encourage academic excellence across the nation, the

Governor General's Medal is the most prestigious award a student in a Canadian educational institution can receive. The gold medal is awarded to students who achieve the highest academic standing at the graduate level.

GLENSTAL CASTLE RENOVATION

The initial phase of the castle renovation concentrated on 'priority 1 urgent works' identified in a detailed condition survey carried out by *Consarc*, a conservation architectural firm. These focused on replacing roofs and halting water ingress and were completed last spring. The next phase of renovation began this summer and encompasses the remaining work necessary to maintain the external fabric of the castle, namely:

Stonework (Cunningham Stone Ltd): clean all external stonework; rake out concrete pointing between the stones and repoint with lime mortar; descale eroding stonework to make it safe; replace



KENNY L GARCIA

broken stones with new ones or, where possible, repair ('stitch') them; rebuild chimneys still in use.

Lead work (M&I Lead Contractors Ltd): install a lead damp proof course under every coping stone; replace all perimeter gutters to drain off rain water quickly and effectively; replace flat felt-covered roofs with lead.

Timberwork (Timberlane Design Ltd): repair or replace original sash windows and frames; remove PVC windows and replace; repair external doors.

The project is divided into three sections. Part 1, which is almost complete, covers the area from the main arch to the library tower.

Part 2, covers the area between the library tower and the castle keep and part 3 will deal with the keep. It is proposed to restore the gates main (in the archway) early in the New Year. This work will be carried out by Conservation Letterfrack.

The project is being managed by Una Ní Mhearáin of *Consarc*. The construction firm appointed for the project is Limerick based, Collins Building and Civil Engineering, Ltd, and the foreman is Jerome MacCarthy.

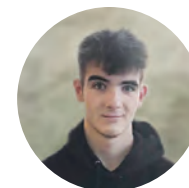
We are very grateful for the support of a generous donor, which has allowed us to continue this ongoing work of preservation. With the help of others we will, please God, bring it to completion. ■





EMMAUS O'HERLIHY OSB

Sustainable Living: Clothes Swap Shops in Benedictine Schools



JACK O'RIORDAN

(Transition Year student in Glenstal Abbey School)

Last March, students from Glenstal collaborated with students from Ampleforth College (Yorkshire, England), Egbert Gymnasium (Münsterschwarzach, Germany) and AGKM (Kromeriz, Czech Republic), thanks to our participation in the Erasmus Plus

Programme. All these schools share a Benedictine ethos, which gave us an instant link, despite initial cultural differences.

The overarching goal of our project was to explore different aspects of sustainable development

within our school environment. Students were split into five different groups, each tackling a different sector, namely, Transport, Waste, Energy, Food and Water. Groups consisted of students from across all four schools.

After brainstorming many ideas, the waste group elected to implement clothes swap shops in each school. Fast fashion is prominent in western society. We buy clothes only meant to be worn a few times before being thrown out, only to replace them with more clothes. Clothes production is a costly process to the environment, with one T-shirt requiring around 2700 litres of water to be produced, not to mention the disposal of waste clothes.



A clothes swap shop would hopefully recycle old clothes that were no longer wanted or no longer fit. Furthermore, it provides a way to get new clothes without having to go to a shop and consume more. It was decided that there would be collection days leading up to the swap shop, when people could deposit clothes that were no longer wanted. People were then free to take whatever they wanted on the day of the swap shop.

Despite it seeming like a great idea, we were apprehensive about the project, as we were unsure if the idea would catch on. Thankfully it did, and many students showed up to participate. It was both a successful environmental initiative and a display of community spirit.

Sustainable development is increasingly important to the world's health and society, and even if this project was only a drop in the ocean, it is the desire for change that brings hope. ■

A NEW SPRINGTIME FOR LIFE



LENT AT THE ABBEY 2024

Every Sunday of Lent beginning on 18 February there will be a talk in the Monastery Library at 4.30pm followed by refreshments and evening prayer at 6pm in the Abbey Church.*

EMAIL EVENTS@GLENSTAL.COM OR PHONE 061-621005

* Talks will be live streamed and made available at a later date.

THE
P S A L M S
TREASURES OLD AND NEW



ONE-DAY RETREAT
AT GLENSTAL ABBEY

10 FEBRUARY 2024
9:45AM - 4:30PM

For information and booking

events@glenstal.com

Phone: 061-621005
