



# GLENSTAL ABBEY CHRONICLE

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

ISSUE 26

SPRING 2025

[WWW.GLENSTAL.COM](http://WWW.GLENSTAL.COM)

PHONE: (061) 621 000



The newly installed  
refurbished widow  
above the stairway  
the castle.

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**GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND**


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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.

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**W E E K D A Y S**


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**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 (Saturday)**

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**S U N D A Y S**


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**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/](http://glenstal.com/abbey/webcam/)**

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GLENSTAL ABBEY CHRONICLE :: ISSUE 26 SPRING 2025

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DESIGN AND LAYOUT: Emmaus O'Herlihy OSB

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## Reading this

issue of the Chronicle may at times feel like a virtual tour of Glenstal Abbey, including the wonderful restoration work of our buildings and planning for sustainable energy. Moving indoors, among our updates is important news about the new configuration of our school week which includes, for the first time, the possibility of five-day boarding and a new Saturday offer. Spread the word!

In the heart of the physical world of Glenstal is the cross hanging over the altar in the Abbey church, featured in this issue. A potent sign of death and resurrection, it points beyond the transformation of buildings, no matter how venerable, to the more mysterious work of human transformation under the hand of God.

**Abbot Columba McCann OSB**







## Sacred Soundscape

The ringing of bells punctuates the day in Glenstal and creates a distinctive backdrop to the monastic routine. From 6am to 9pm the pealing of the bell marks the hour and the half hour while the start of each of the hours of the Divine Office and the daily Conventual Mass is likewise announced by bellringing.

Thrice daily the sounding of the Angelus bell reminds us of the Lord's Incarnation and, during Eastertide, of his Resurrection from the dead. Bells also accompany each monk on key moments of the monastic journey: from the joyful pealing of all the bells on the eve of his solemn profession, to the sombre tolling

**COLMÁN Ó CLABAIGH OSB**  
(WITH THANKS TO FR MARTIN BROWNE OSB)



that announces his death and burial. This 'sacred soundscape' would have been a familiar one for Christians from the early Middle Ages into the modern period when it was drowned out by the noise of traffic and made redundant by the proliferation of clocks and watches. Increasing secularization also means that the connection between prayer and bellringing

their timekeeping and liturgical functions and were invested with spiritual and apotropaic power by medieval Christians. The commissioning and casting of a bell was a major expense and indulgences were frequently granted to those who donated funds. Bells were normally dedicated to a patron saint and this was frequently inscribed on the bell itself along

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**The ceremony of blessing a bell was closely modelled on the rite of baptism after which the bell was believed to 'speak' in the 'voice' of the saint or angel to whom it was dedicated.**

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resonates less with modern people. But, for those with ears to hear, it is still there: the tolling of a funeral bell still recalls our mortality while the sounding of the Angelus on RTÉ remains for some as an invitation to prayer and reflection.

In the Middle Ages bells discharged several other duties in addition to

with an image of the saint. The ceremony of blessing a bell was closely modelled on the rite of baptism after which the bell was believed to 'speak' in the 'voice' of the saint or angel to whom it was dedicated. In St Nicholas' Collegiate Church in Galway casts of the dedication panels survive from some of the earlier bells.



These depict an Annunciation scene and another image of the Blessed Virgin and show that at least two of the medieval bells there were dedicated to the Mother of God. Likewise bells from the parish church at Howth recently donated to the National Museum of Ireland by the Gaisford-St Lawrence family have dedicatory

A copy of a medieval bell inscription from an Irish Dominican manuscript now preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, summarises these various functions: 'The nature of a bell: I worship the true God, I call the people, I gather the clergy together, I intercede for the dead, repel the plague, I am the terror of all demons'.

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inscriptions beseeching Christ's mercy and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. This close association between saints, bells and heavenly intercession meant that they were rung at times of celebration and of crisis and believed to provide protection from storms and lightening as well as repelling the onslaughts of demons in the form of plagues and diseases.

All of these elements combine in the ring of four bells that was erected in Glenstal in July 2018. Cast in Poland by the Jan Felczynski Bell Foundry in Przemysl, and the generous gift of Mrs Dolores McCall, the bells were blessed and installed on the roof of the monastery library in time for the Solemnity of St Benedict (11 July). They are dedicated to Sts Benedict

and Scholastica, as the patrons of Benedictine monastic life, and to Sts Joseph and Columba, as the patrons of Glenstal Abbey. Cast in bronze, each bell bears an image of the saint and a phrase relating to his or her life or to the bell's role in the life of the community. Thus, St Benedict's bell bears the Latin inscription *Mens concordet voci* – 'that the mind may be in harmony with the voice', a quotation from chapter 19 of the Rule of St Benedict, 'On the manner of saying the Divine Office'. St Scholastica's bell is inscribed *O potens virtus amoris* – 'Oh, the force of the power of love!', a quotation from the Vespers hymn for her feast. This commemorates her prayerful power in causing a sudden thunder storm that prevented her brother St Benedict returning to his monastery thereby prolonging their final annual meeting that occurred three days before her death. St Joseph's bell bears the text *Magnificare praecognitis* – 'To give you fitting praise', a quotation from the preface for the Mass of the Solemnity of St Joseph. The final inscription, on St

Columba's bell, is in Irish and is a quotation of the last words spoken by the saint as recorded by his biographer, St Adomnán of Iona: *Téanagí, a chlann ó, agus éistigí liom* – 'Come, children, and listen to me', a line from Psalm 33 [34] that St Benedict also quotes in the prologue to his monastic rule.

All this may seem an exercise in quaint antiquarianism but in insisting on the power of love, the primacy of prayer, the importance of listening in our relationships and the role of integrity in our lives and actions, the bells strike a counter note to much of what prevails in contemporary life and politics. It's an insight that Bob Dylan also articulates in the final verse of his song, "Ring Them Bells":

*Ring them bells St Catherine  
From the top of the room.  
Ring them from the fortress  
For the lilies that bloom.  
Oh, the lines are long  
And the fighting is strong  
And they're breaking down the  
distance  
Between right and wrong. ■*

## Receiving Guests in the Spirit of St Benedict

The presence of guests, both clerical and lay, in the monastery is taken as a given in the Rule of Saint Benedict, so much so that the Patriarch of Western monasticism finds it necessary to legislate for their care already in the early 500s. Indeed, St Benedict prescribes that the guest should be received as Christ and that all be honoured as such.

Everyone from the overnight wayfarer to the long-term visitor seems to be in the picture. It is notable that there was evidently an awareness that hospitality is not without its risks, so that there was a detailed protocol in the guest's reception, hedged about by prayer and a certain seclusion from association with the members of

**CHRISTOPHER DILLON OSB**

JEAN CAHRLLOT, TRINITY AND EPISODES OF BENEDICTINE LIFE (MURAL), ST. BENEDICT'S ABBEY, ATCHISON, KANSAS, USA, 1959 (DETAIL). PHOTO: RANDY OHC





the community. There is an obvious wisdom in this, in that there might otherwise be a danger that the guest, by trespassing where he should not, could damage the very environment which he had come to enjoy. Today, when the shape of the church and indeed society is evolving so rapidly from the familiar norms of yesteryear,

so that individualism and social isolation are regular features of our everyday. But the human spirit has not changed; the human person is still as much spiritual as he or she is physical and the human spirit needs its nourishment. Secular alternatives to traditional religious practice have been developed in disciplines of mindfulness and

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hospitality probably plays a much greater role in monasteries than it did in those early years. The norms of Christian culture and behaviour, which have served for centuries as a scaffolding for what used to be a recognizably Christian world, are no longer so regularly evident. Mobility has very largely replaced stability in what used to be experienced as the local community,

programmes of well-being in the promotion of mental health; but these can achieve only so much. Individual monastic communities have always had their friends and followers who have tended to be regular visitors and occasional guests, but this relatively intimate circle has had to make way, in recent decades, for an ever-increasing flow of people who have no prior

knowledge of the community whom they are visiting and generally no notion of what that community is about. For a wide variety of reasons, they are in search of respite from the pressure of their lives and they are looking to vitally human community, rather than a spa.

Many visitors to the monastery are practising Christians, but some are not. At the same time, every human spirit has its spiritual needs. The atmosphere of quietness, the unhurried rhythm of life, the regular times for prayer in common along with meals in common, generally in silence, combine to make for an environment which is uniquely restorative of the spirit.

Occasionally, a guest asks to meet with a member of the community for a human exchange which may bring them to a level of reflection which they have not experienced before. Some have found the experience life-changing. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for one guest to discover in another guest just the solace they were looking for. For most who come to the

guest house, however, the occasion is more of a personal retreat, in the course of which anything or nothing may happen.

A current spiritual author has suggested that this phenomenon of guests in the monastery is set to grow, as the regular shape of the local church shrinks. With the increasing diminution of parish life, the hungry soul will tend to seek out some such spiritual resort for nourishment. It is a prospect which is challenging for such monastic communities as continue to remain in existence, because they too are generally ageing and shrinking; and hospitality is demanding work. At the same time, the searching guest may seek or need skills which the community they are visiting cannot provide.

One thing is certain: the times ahead promise to be exciting and just as demanding. As St Benedict writes in his *Rule*, "Guests are never lacking in a monastery". As such, we strive to do our very best to welcome all our guests to this place. ■



## Aquathermal Energy at Glenstal

Aquathermal energy is the science of using water as a source of heat. A conference took place on 3 April under the auspices of Ballyhoura Development CLG which is the lead partner in the AquaCom project. This project aims to empower

energy communities in North-West Europe to use aquathermal energy to sustainably and efficiently heat local communities. Specialists from Leuven in Flanders, local development agencies from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany,

**LUKE MACNAMARA OSB**

France, and Ireland, and some leaders in the energy sector attended. Consultants from Extraqt Aquathermy Experts gave inputs on the technology side and the partner agencies on questions of adapting to the new technological possibilities in the development of national policies, and solutions to facilitate implementation in local communities. Glenstal has had an aquathermal

Luke. The presentations focused on Glenstal's journey with Aquathermal energy over the past twenty-one years and how we are exploring expanding its use to provide heat to more of the campus, possibly the Castle and School.

After the presentation, Fr Luke and the students conducted a site visit with the conference participants of the present installation, the heat



Presentations were made by four 5th year students from Glenstal Abbey school during the conference (L-R): Peter Purcell, Aubrey O'Toole, Michael Lee and Logan O'Connor, with the support of Mr Eoghan Maxwell (Physics teacher).

installation providing heat to half the monastic buildings since 2005 and it was expanded in 2016 to provide heat to the church. During the conference, presentations were made by four 5th year students from Glenstal Abbey School and Fr

exchanger and collection system in the chapel lake and the plant room alongside the monastery library and the sites of the proposed installation. A report of the conference will be published in the Summer edition of the Chronicle. ■



# CASTLE RENOVATION: THE SECOND PHASE

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SENAN FURLONG OSB







Since the last update in the 2023 Winter issue of *The Chronicle*, significant progress has been made on the castle renovation project. Phase 2, completed just before Christmas, concentrated on preserving the castle's stonework, installing a new roof on the castle keep, restoring and replacing all windows, and enhancing the building's waterproofing with lead damp-proof courses, flashing, and parapet guttering. In addition, the doors in the entrance archway were restored by Conservation Letterfrack, and a beautiful leaded glass window was installed in the two-arched Romanesque-style window to the right of the main entrance by Glasshaus Studio.

The external stonework received substantial attention, as the passage of time and the elements had caused significant erosion. All joints were carefully raked out and repointed with lime mortar. Damaged stones were either replaced, repaired, or descaled to ensure their stability. In a major upgrade, all PVC windows



were removed and replaced with wooden sash windows that mirror the castle's original design.

Phase 3, which will bring the project to its completion by the end of the year, has transitioned smoothly from Phase 2. Current work includes: further stonework repairs on the large tower, the installation of 'French drains' around the building to direct surface water (completed), groundworks to improve drainage on the terrace and courtyard ring (completed), resurfacing of the area (completed), and the repointing of the terrace wall (completed) and the installation of external lighting to softly illuminate the castle walls (almost complete).

Work is also underway on the monastery side of the castle. The front wall to the right of the entrance archway has been cleaned and repointed, and the concrete lintels and window sills have been replaced with stone. As with the castle, all PVC windows will be







replaced with wooden sash windows. Similar restoration efforts will take place in the monastery courtyard and around the area outside the monastery reception. The rooms above the monastic refectory, which serve as the novitiate, will also undergo refurbishment.

Looking ahead, plans include the installation of a lightning protection system, the replacement of the flagpole on the watchtower, and the reinstatement of the port-cullis in the entrance archway.

The monastic community is deeply grateful for the generous support of our donor, whose contribution has enabled us to continue our vital work of preservation. We also extend our thanks to Consarc Conservation and Una Ní Mhearáin for their expertise, to Collins Building and Civil Engineering, and to our dedicated foreman, Jerome MacCarthy, for his exceptional leadership on the project. Together, these efforts are helping us safeguard our heritage for future generations. ■

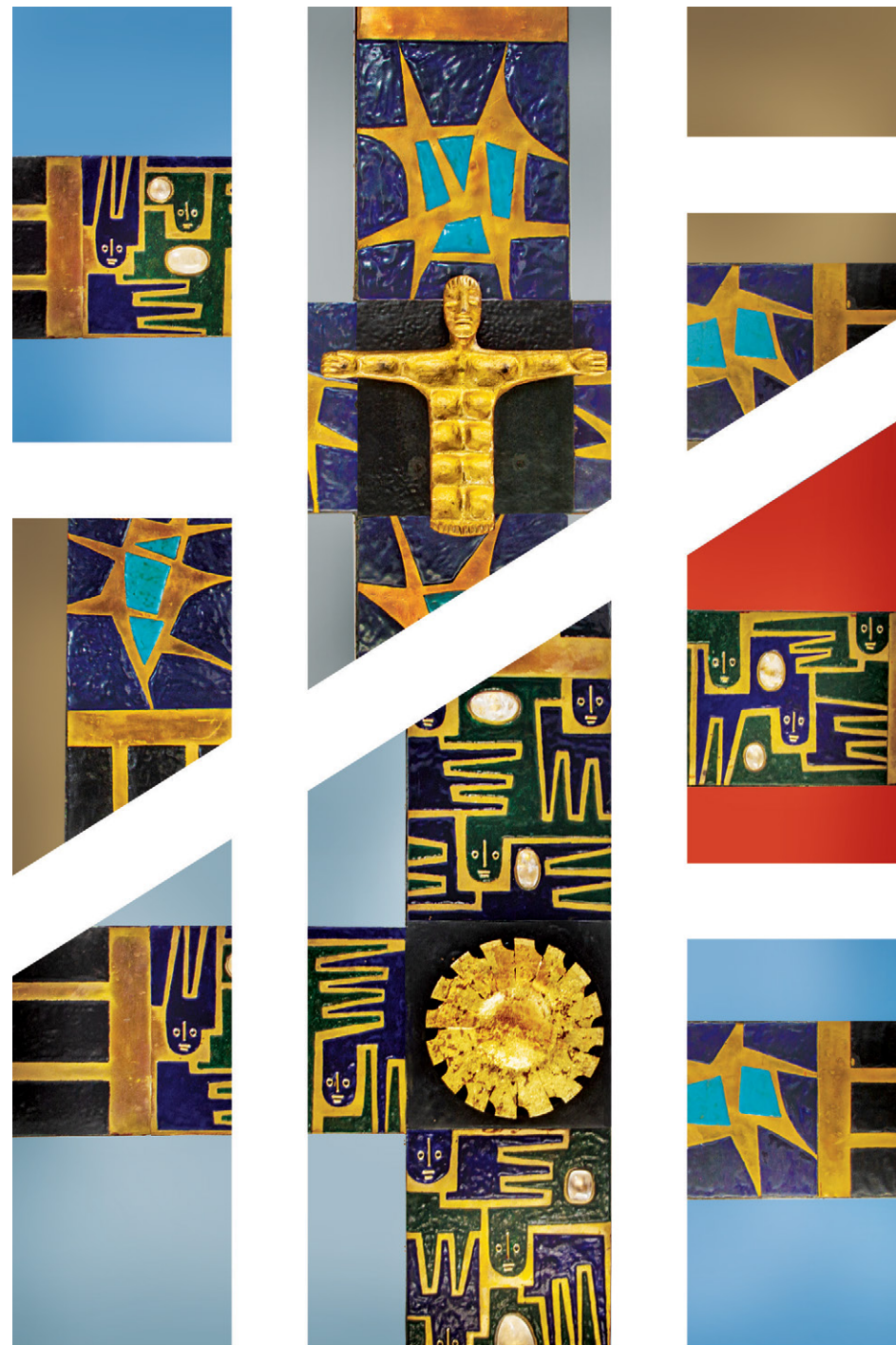


## A Call to Venerate the Cross or the Crucified Christ?

The liturgy of Good Friday includes a ceremony called the Veneration of the Cross. In it a wooden cross is in stages dramatically unveiled at the repeated words, '*Behold the wood of the cross*' and all kneel at the call: '*Come let us adore*'. Is it a call to adore the cross, or the Crucified Christ? History explains what seems an ambiguity. The ceremony has deep roots in fourth-century Jerusalem.

The Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem before her death in 329, and is reputed to have found the actual cross of Christ buried on Golgotha. A cross or its crossbeam was found and was divided between Jerusalem and Constantinople, thus beginning the practice of fragments being dispersed throughout the Christian world. In Jerusalem, veneration of the portion of the cross became a

FINTAN LYONS OSB



major devotional practice, as the Spanish pilgrim, Egeria, recounted after her visit to Jerusalem c.380-5. On Good Friday, between the second and sixth hours, the bishop was seated before a table on which an ornate box containing a portion of the cross was placed. When opened, the faithful passed in front of the table and venerated the cross by kissing it. The presence of the bishop, who also venerated the cross, made it a liturgical ceremony even though there is no record of prayers or readings being used in the ceremony. The rite obviously commemorated Christ's Passion by kissing the wood of the cross on which it was believed Christ died. That piece of wood was the prototypical relic, carrying perhaps within it traces of his blood, and worthy of special veneration. Ever since, any Christian cross has been deemed to have a special dignity and in the Liturgy of the hours during Holy Week a hymn is sung which can be translated:

*Faithful cross, above all other:  
one and only noble tree!  
None in foliage, none in blossom,*

*none in fruit thy peer may be:  
sweetest wood and sweetest iron,  
sweetest weight is hung on thee.*

One of the verses recalls the tree associated with Adam's fall:

*For when Adam first offended,  
Eating the forbidden fruit.  
Not all hope of glory ended  
With the serpent at the root:  
Broken nature would be mended  
By a second tree and shoot.*

The Jerusalem fourth-century rite is the origin of our ceremony on Good Friday, and even though we use a simple wooden cross the call, 'Come let us adore' symbolically links us to the rite which was enacted there.

Since Palm Sunday the crucifix over the altar has been covered to encourage deep reflection on the truth it symbolises, without having recourse to an image. Yet down through the centuries the faithful have attached great importance to the crucifix and from an early hesitation to show the figure of Christ's body there came a move towards ever more realistic representations

of his suffering – though there was a period in history when the crucified Christ was shown as a royal figure dressed in colourful attire. But realistic approaches prevailed especially because of the popularity of Franciscan devotion to the Five Wounds, Francis himself having carried the stigmata on his body.

The Council of Trent reaffirmed the traditional theology of the Mass as the sacrifice of Calvary made present in 'an unbloody manner' and a subsequent decree required that there be a crucifix on or near the altar so that the priest would remain mindful of what he was celebrating. Since then, over the altar a large crucifix with realistic figure has been a typical arrangement. To articulate the theology of the Mass, Vatican II used the terminology of the Paschal Mystery found in the New Testament letters, especially those of Saint Paul. This is profound and scriptural language, enabling us to describe the Mass as a rite in which the priest and faithful celebrate the saving

presence of Christ's life, death, resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of the Father, where he intercedes for us.

It retained the requirement of a crucifix on or near the altar and that it should be in full view of the people. But as the Mass celebrates the resurrection as well as the death of Christ, it came to be accepted that artistic imagination could employ a symbolic presentation that includes suggestions of the resurrection, just as the 'royal' crucifixes did.

Since the 1970s and the emergence of Paschal Mystery spirituality, Glenstal has had a small gold symbol of the crucifixion created by the late Br Benedict Tutty on one side of the cross over the altar, visible to the people, while on the other side it has a symbol of the resurrection of Christ, represented by the 'unconquered sun', the work of Fr Henry O'Shea. On both sides the cross is beautifully decorated, emphasising the sacredness of the Christian cross itself, the 'faithful cross, above all other'. ■



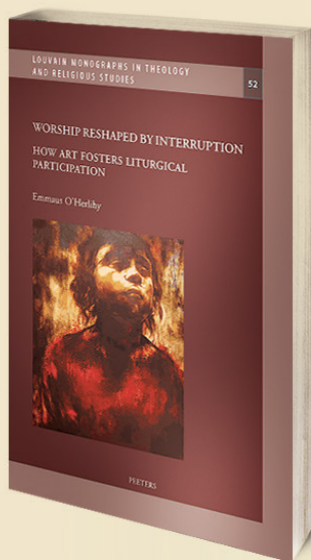
## Abbey Updates

### OBLATE DAY AT THE ABBEY

The first of six podcasts or videos have been made primarily for oblates and associaes of Glenstal Abbey. Along with the Obletter, the first of these was sent out on 28 March. Among the topics included in this series are: (1) Chapter 49 of the Rule on the Observance of Lent; (2) The Washing of the Feet; (3) Private Devotions; (4) Chapters 71,72 and 73 of the Rule; (5) Removing our Sandals; (6) Going to Confession.

### ART AND WORSHIP

Brother Emmaus' doctoral thesis has been published by Peeters Press as part of the series, *Louvain Monographs in Theology and Religious Studies*. Titled *Worship Reshaped by Interruption: How Art Fosters Liturgical Participation*, it argues for a new understanding of liturgical art, one that aims "to plunge the assembly into the waters of liturgical experience



that is always an astounding complexus of ideas and people." The book begins on an academic note by tracing the development of the liturgical principle of participation, highlighting key moments of conflict over the place of art in the liturgy during the last century. It then moves on to more recent ideas about art, culminating with a careful consideration of several works of art that feature Christian subjects by contemporary artists. *Worship Reshaped* concludes by referring to a number of paintings completed by Br Emmaus while studying theology. These artworks offer a compelling argument for how art can succeed in constructively challenging and vivifying an assembly so as to advance their full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy.

### A GREENER GLENSTAL

A Building Energy Rating (BER) and Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Survey was carried out on the Abbey guest house and the Abbey cloister in 2024 and on the castle and school in February 2025. The studies follow upon the additional insulation to the residential block of the guest house, the installation of treble glazed windows in the school refectory block, and heritage-standard double glazed windows as part of the castle restoration in 2023 and 2024. Already, with the insulation measures and judicious monitoring of energy use, there has been a year on year decrease in oil usage for the castle and the school, representing a 15% reduction in oil usage for both buildings.

### DEVELOPMENTS IN GLENSTAL ABBEY SCHOOL

At the heart of Benedictine spirituality is the goal of human transformation through life with God in prayer and community. The renovation of our buildings is transformation on the outside;

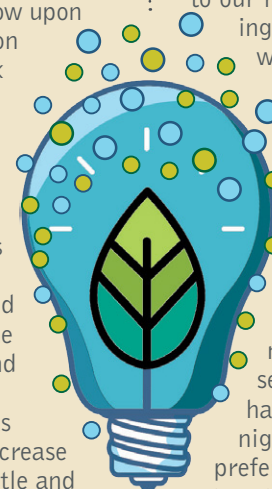
but the offer of education within our school is also evolving.

### Five-Day Boarding:

An exciting feature coming on stream next year is a newly designed school week. In addition to our regular seven-day boarding, a new option opening up will be five-day boarding, with the teaching of the State curriculum Monday to Friday. Day boarders who take up this option will be able to convert time spent travelling to and from school each day into time for study, rest, music practice, a gym session, etc. They will also have the flexibility to spend night at home midweek as preferred or to suit other interests outside school. Another flexible option for them will be to arrive back at school on either Sunday evening or Monday morning.

### Enhanced Weekend Option:

The benefits of seven-day boarding remain, as witnessed by the steady stream of day boarders who have converted to seven-day as they progressed through the school. The traditional programme will now be enhanced by new offerings at weekend. There will be a new,



unique and supplementary Saturday morning academic programme, including hands-on, STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) focused workshops for Junior and Inter houses and tutorial and focused revision courses in core Leaving Certificate subjects for Senior House students. The structured weekend study schedule complements this programme, providing full boarders with regular and routine supervised study, adding to their weekly learning time. We will continue to develop an exciting programme of social and fun off-site weekend activities, including surfing, mountain biking, the cinema, theatre, international rugby matches and more.

### INAUGURATION OF ANNUAL PETER F CUNNINGHAM PRIZE

Fifth year student at Glenstal, Jack O'Riordan, was the first recipient of the new Peter F. Cunningham Prize on Sunday, 23 March, for an award-winning piece of essay writing he produced while in Transition Year. The prize honours the memory of Peter Cunningham who died in September 1990 at the beginning of his fifth year in Glenstal. Peter is remembered for his warm personality, his sense of humour, his love of music and for his writing. It is envisaged that the prize will be awarded annually to a student in Transition Year who has made an outstanding contribution to the arts. ■



Award-winner Jack O'Riordan with members of the Cunningham and O'Riordan families.



## Glenstal Abbey Garden Cemetery

Glenstal Abbey Garden Cemetery provides a prayerful and peaceful environment for the interment of cremated remains. Each plot can accommodate one or two urns and is marked by a plaque of local grey granite for engraving individuals' names and dates.

Selecting a cemetery and space is an important decision. Advance planning gives you peace of mind and shows care and concern for your family for whom the final arrangements become less of a burden.

If you have questions or would like to arrange a personal tour, please email us at [gardencemetery@glenstal.com](mailto:gardencemetery@glenstal.com) or call the Bursar's Office at 061 621045.



# ONLINE NEWSLETTER

Bringing you the latest news, views and events from the monks of Glenstal Abbey at the start of every month.

To receive your online newsletter, please complete the form on our website via this QR code.

