

**Welcome: Ms Anne Donnelly Principal St. Dominic's College, Cabra Dublin**

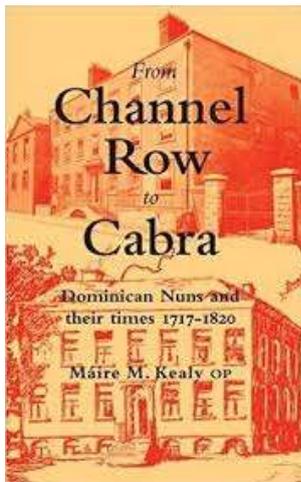
**Bi-Century Mass of Thanksgiving**

**Church of the Most Precious Blood, Cabra West, Dublin**

A cháirde uilig ba mhaith liom fáilte o chroi a chur romhaibh inniu chuig an ócáid speisialta seo. Táimid ag ceiliuradh dhá chead bliain o thainig na Dominicanaigh go Cabrach. Is cuis onoir dom bheith anseo libh inniu chun aitheantas cui a thabhairt doibh.

200 years ago in 1819 Ireland was a very poor agricultural country. Some of the Penal laws were still in force and it would be 10 more years before Daniel O'Connell achieved Catholic Emancipation. Cabra, where we are now, was in

the middle of the country, the area mostly comprised fields and open countryside on the edge of the city. There was no church, no houses, no train or buses, no Luas – just fields and countryside.



A group of Dominican sisters had moved from Galway to Dublin – firstly to Channel Row and then to Clontarf. Life was difficult at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the sisters were very poor. However, they risked what little

they had to lease a house and 7 acres in Cabra. Their lease in Clontarf would expire in December so that was when they planned to move. During the summer, one of the nuns became ill and two sisters brought her to the countryside in Cabra to help her recover but sadly, she died before the community moved to Cabra.

On 12<sup>th</sup> December 1819, 5 sisters arrived in Cabra. Little did they realise that 200 years later the Cabra Dominican Community would have grown into a

congregation with branches worldwide in places as far away as South Africa, Australia, Argentina and Bolivia. All of these communities and schools are Cabra Dominicans.

Dominican education has always had a strong focus on the education of women. Their aim was and is, to enable women to fulfil their role in society with confidence, to progress on to third level. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, formal education was not the norm for girls; they did not go to second level, never mind going to university. The prospectus for the school in Cabra at that time stated that their Cabra education would enable the students to take their place in society with “propriety, ease and dignity”.

The Dominican women of that time were brave, they were visionaries, they



were practical in responding to needs as they saw them, they were persistent and they were women of action who followed through on their beliefs. We are honoured to be continuing their tradition today.

The Dominican Sisters in Cabra over the last 200 years have been a beacon in this area. The numbers of girls who have benefitted from an education in St Dominic’s College, St Catherine’s Primary School, The School for the Deaf and Casa Caterina over that time must be in the hundreds of thousands. There are girls here today whose mother and grandmother are past pupils. That is without mention of all the Cabra Dominicans throughout the world – we have established a close link with the school in Adelaide Australia who were here in December. The convent here in Cabra has been a refuge and a place of hope in the bleakest of times – during the famine, the Rising and the War of Independence.

My experience of Cabra and the Dominican sisters has been as a teacher here and as Principal. For over 30 years, I have first-hand experience of the commitment and dedication of the sisters. They really bear witness the Gospel values they espouse. However, much more than dedication and commitment, I have experienced their care, their kindness and their love. I have been struck on numerous occasions by their great generosity. A great deal of their work goes unknown but there are many people in this area and beyond who have experience their generosity first hand.

We gather today, at the start of this bicentenary year in a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation to all the Dominican Sisters who have contributed so much over the past 200 years. We are delighted that so many sisters are able to join us here today and we remember with gratitude all those who went before us over 200 years in Cabra. On behalf of all the students and staff in St. Dominic's College, St Catherine's Primary School, Casa Caterina and Holy Family School for the Deaf I say a huge "Go raibh mile maith agaibh" and remember those 5 brave women who began it all

Sr Teresa Dalton

Sr Joseph Byrne

Sr Dominic Dillon

Sr Magdalen Butler

Sr Ann Columba Maher

