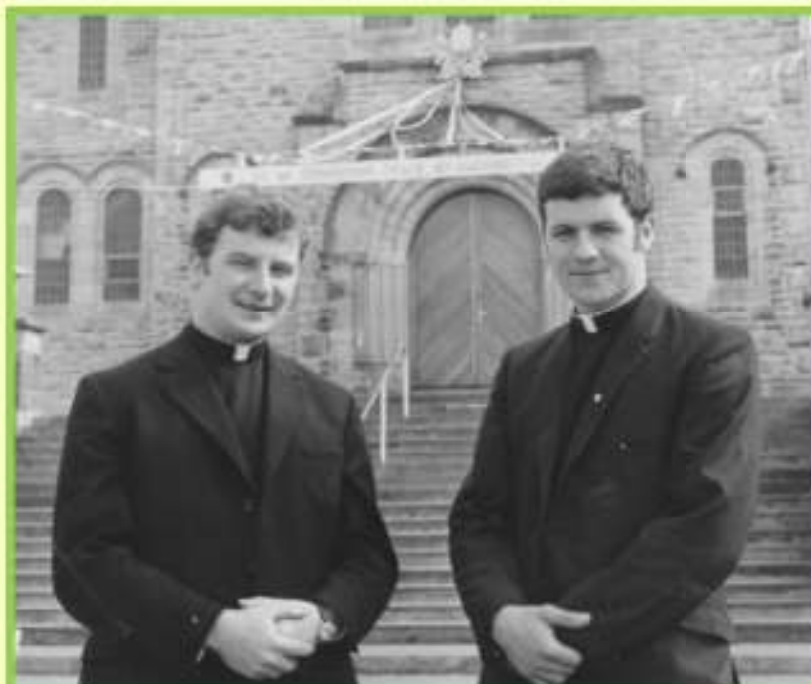


Fr Joe McVeigh

Ordained on 18th April 1971



Leathchéad Bliain í mo Shagart



Joe was ordained with his cousin, Seán McGrath, by Bishop Patrick Mulligan, in their parish church, St Joseph's, Ederney



The newly ordained Fr Joe blesses his mother, Marie, outside St Joseph's.

Fifty Years – a Reflection

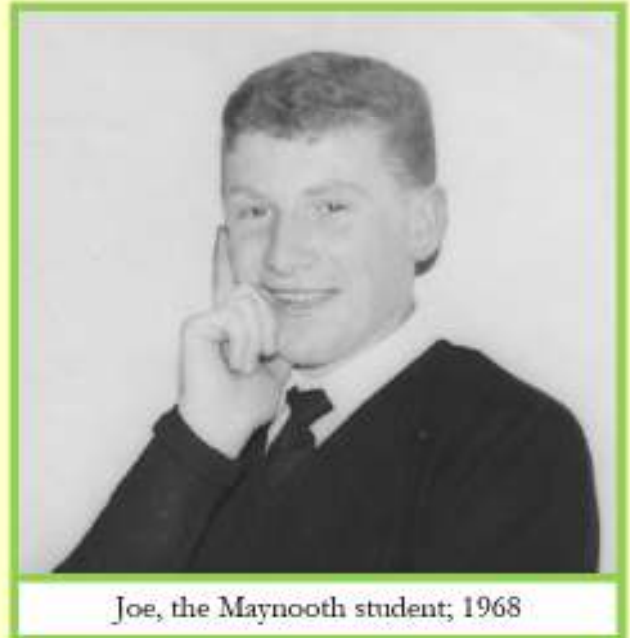
Fifty years ago, the world was a very different place.
There were no mobile phones, no Google, no emails
no talk about carbon emissions, climate change, Brexit or coronavirus.
We could hear the corncrake and the curlew
in the meadows in early summer.
There were few cars and fewer lorries,
but 'the times they were a changing'.
Yes, change has been the constant of my life.

Martin Luther King Jnr. led a revolution
for change in the USA,
for justice and civil rights
during the nineteen sixties,
that inspired people around the world,
including in Ireland
to march and campaign for civil rights.
That was 1968.

Dr. King was assassinated in 1968
as was Bobby Kennedy that same year.
The monk, poet and anti-war activist, Thomas Merton,
died suddenly that year.
The US -led war in Vietnam still raged.
The Berrigan brothers and others, including Dorothy Day,
objected to the war and went to jail –
many times in their witness for peace
to bring about change.

Fifty years ago,
the Catholic Church was a very different place.
Pope John 23rd attempted to bring the Church into the new age
With the Second Vatican Council.
He probably inspired me
to think about priesthood.
I had not heard about clerical abuse
or Mother and Baby homes.
The darker side of the Catholic church and Irish society
had yet to be revealed and it was shocking
when the stories were told.
Stories of brutality, the abuse of power and arrogance
have shaken the Irish Church
to its foundations.

Fifty years ago
the age-old conflict reignited
just as I was starting out –
a politically naïve young priest in the diocese of Clogher.
I had just spent seven years preparing
but not for the situation I now faced.
Neutrality was not an option.
To stand with abusive power or with the oppressed
That was the choice - and I made mine.



Joe, the Maynooth student; 1968



The 1970s look!



Fr Joe with his siblings, Michael, Pauline, Teresa and Helena, and his parents, Marie and Michael.

Times of laughter and of tears,
of grief and of pain,
of sickness and of health
of healing and of recovery
of mistakes and of misadventures
of falling and of getting up again
of joy and of sorrow
of forgiving and of forgetting
of singing and of dancing
of wonderful friendships.

Fifty years
of travelling and adventure,
of sharing food and wine
with friends in many places
which are now, because of Covid, out of bounds.

Fifty years
of receiving unfailing love and solidarity
from family and from friends,
from loving parents, sisters and brother,
their spouses and children;
a love that has sustained me through the years.

Thanks to the Holy One
we call God, the Creator of all,
for believing in me and calling me
to work with others in the vineyard
and for sustaining me
for all these years
especially when I met opposition or faced danger.

Thanks to God for the Joy I have known.
Thanks to the good people
who accompanied me and supported me
and inspired me
on this amazing journey.

If Pope John inspired me to think about the priesthood,
Pope Francis has inspired me
to keep going on the journey
and to re-dedicate myself to the Good News
about the sacredness of all of Creation.

Much has changed in fifty years
Some of it for the good and some not.
But there is hope that the next generation
will see what must be done
about creating a more inclusive and equal society -
and a more inclusive Church

Today, I am grateful.
Thanks to those
who lifted me up when I was down,
when I needed a helping hand.
Thank you everyone
for your kindness,
your goodness and your amazing generosity.

May God bless and keep you always.
May you never lose your joy,
And "*May you stay forever young.*"

Fr Joe