

PILGRIM CATHOLIC

Newsletter of the Gypsy & Traveller Support Network

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Service with Travellers at Walsingham National Shrine, 15 August 2007

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Walsingham Pilgrimage 2007

Fr Noel Wynn

A large number of Travellers usually come to Walsingham for the Feast of the Assumption. In 2006 there was a good deal of unrest in the village because of perceived bad behaviour, particularly by a group who came after the Feast and who did not attend the Shrine. One of the principal problems was that the only coach park, which is near the centre of the village, was taken over.

During the year a great deal of planning was done, initially by the Parish Council led committee (including police, Travellers liaison officers from the District and County Councils, representatives from both Shrines.) Nearer to the time of the Feast a Pastoral Outreach team was formed and this made a tremendous difference to the success of the pilgrimage. This team was composed of representatives from both Shrines, from the other Churches in the village and some who were just keen to take part. The team managed to put preparations and the handling of the event into the context of prayer. Early in the preparations a Service of Penance and Intercession was held at the Anglican Shrine, arranged by one of the Shrine priests. Sr. Catherine Reilly and Sr. Petronia Williams attended for a couple of days around the Feast.

When the Travellers began to arrive, members of this team were on hand to welcome them and to persuade them to pitch on the fields, which had been hired close to the RC Shrine, rather than on the car park. The Community Police were helpful in this matter.

During the stay of the Travellers, evening prayers were held on the fields with input from Pastoral Team and Travellers alike. Processions were organised along the Holy Mile. On the evening of the Assumption, a special Mass was held for the Travellers at which First Communion and Confirmations were celebrated. Fr David Paul, from Cambridge represented the Bishop.

At the end of the stay Pastoral Team members worked alongside Travellers to tidy the fields, which were left just as they had been found.

The villagers were certainly grateful for the efforts made by the Pastoral Team and the Travellers seemed to have found their experience prayerful and trouble free.

MINISTRY TO TRAVELLING PEOPLE

National Chaplaincy Coordinator for England and Wales - Richard Zipfel

At their meeting in November the Bishops' Conference approved an initiative to raise funds to appoint a National Chaplaincy Coordinator for its Ministry to Travelling People in England & Wales.

This decision by the Bishops reflects a recognition, on the part of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People that Travelling People have a need for specific pastoral provision and that a national chaplaincy and regional pastoral teams may be appropriate.

It is proposed that the following be part of a new structure for pastoral care of Travelling People.

- A National Chaplaincy Coordinator for England and Wales, appointed by the Bishops Conference
- Pastoral Care Teams in local dioceses
- The creation of a national Network of those involved in pastoral care and the provision of services to Gypsies and Travellers

The Chaplaincy Coordinator will be appointed and employed by the Bishops Conference and accountable to the Conference through a Bishop who would act as Chairman of the Chaplaincy Support Committee.

Thank You Bishop Bernard Sr Petronia Williams

The Travellers who have a site in Waterden Road, in the East End of London are due to be moved to three smaller sites because of the Olympic development. Bishop Bernard Longley asked to visit the site before this happened. On November 22nd 2007, together with Sr. Petronia the visit took place.

The Travellers were delighted that the Bishop went to visit them and each family showed great hospitality and welcome. They were all ready with their precious statues and other objects they wanted to have blessed, families, cars, medals, and trailers.

They asked that once they were on their new sites that he would go and visit them again and he assured them that he would. They were very proud and grateful to have received this recognition from their Bishop. Thank you Bishop Bernard

The Manchester Rose Sr Carmel Clancy

Each year there is a Festival in Tralee, Co. Kerry, Ireland, called 'The Rose of Tralee'. Young women with Irish connections from any part of the globe can enter competitions in their own towns but only one of this huge band of competitors can become 'The Rose of Tralee'.

This year 13 women, some from as far away as Lancaster and Scotland, entered in the North West. Each contestant was interviewed, by a panel of 3 judges, questioned on their Irish roots, their interests and their dreams; charm, taken and spirit were also taken into account. The final round of the Manchester Rose was held in the Irish World Heritage Centre, Manchester, where each contestant was interviewed on the public stage. The winner here would go forward to the Birmingham heat; and that winner would be the United Kingdom's representative in Tralee.

Maureen Furey, an Irish Traveller, was the winner of the Manchester Rose. Maureen, who is very proud of being Irish and a Traveller has,

as well as other desired qualities, a lovely voice; she sang 'If you get there before I do...' beautifully. It was a great night and a landmark occasion for Travellers. Maureen is the Manchester Rose for this year, during which she will be called upon to attend many Charity events. She has a great personality, is kind and caring so is well suited to this role. She wasn't successful in Birmingham but that didn't dim the pride, joy and achievement of being able to wear the Sash of the Manchester Rose.

Another big event in Maureen's life this year is her forthcoming marriage. She had booked her Reception in the Irish Centre, where she has worked for the past 4 years, but sadly, through an unfortunate turn of events, that is not to be. Two close members of her family had a row on the premises and are barred from entering it again. Maureen's family appealed but got a firm refusal. This has, understandably, devastated the family and taken from the joy, happiness and pride they had in their daughter's achievement in representing the Irish Community in Manchester and the North West.

My Worst Nightmare

(Written for Sr Carmel Clancy, Mancheser)

When my first baby was 4 months old I took him to the Doctor. She noticed a bruise on his thigh and asked lots of questions including ones about his MMR injections; she seemed annoyed that, because of fears I had about the vaccine, I had chosen not to let my baby have them. She gave me a note to take to the local hospital where I was immediately accused of Child Abuse.

Social Services were called and I was sent home without Baby. Next day my husband and I were told to report to the local Police Station; after rigorous cross-examination we were given the all clear, but that didn't convince the hospital.

My parents came with us on our next visit and explained how precious babies are to Travellers and how we love and cherish them. They were given custody while I was denied all access and warned that if I was found near him during any

of their unplanned visits to my parents' home, he would be taken into Care.

We couldn't have lived through this nightmare without the support of both our parents. We were accused of the worst possible crime and my name was on the Child Abuse Register! I had to attend Child-Care classes where we learned how to manage our babies! While the other women chatted happily to theirs I was scared to touch mine in case it would be misinterpreted.

Worse was yet to come when it was noticed that vertebrae in Baby's lower back was slightly misshapen. Specialists were called in. All were of the opinion that this was a genetic condition but we waited for the opinion of the highest Specialist in the country before rejoicing. When he confirmed the previous diagnoses we knew were exonerated, what a relief!

Finally, after 8 months and many unscheduled examinations of our trailer, we became a united happy family again!

Sadly, during that period I miscarried my next child, another boy, due to the sheer stress I was living under. However we now have 2 beautiful healthy children and are looking forward to a new arrival in the New Year.

The Travellers' pretend friends Fr Gerard Barry, RC Chaplain, HMP Full Sutton

If I asked a Traveller or anybody who has a deep love for them to tell me what word they most dislike when used to describe a member of the Traveller community, there are a few that are constantly mentioned.

The words Gyppo, Pikey, Tinker, 'as you likey', are used by ignorant bigots to try to hurt and dehumanise the Traveller Community. Indeed, the word Pikey is seen as acceptable by television programmes to describe people who are rough, common, anti-social, immoral or dishonest. Count the number of times it has been used by Jeremy Clarkson on the programme 'Top Gear' or by one of the characters on 'The Catherine Tate Show'. It is seen as being acceptable enough even to sell cars with one specialist magazine referring to a vehicle as having anti-theft features designed to stop 'Pikeys'.

Of all the phrases I most dislike though, there is none more likely to put my teeth on edge than when somebody says that they like the "traditional, old-fashioned Gypsy; the real Gypsy people". Whom are they talking about

– when in history has there been a type of Traveller who has not evoked fear and hatred in the hearts of the settled community?

To which elderly Traveller can I turn so as to enquire when these blessed and halcyon days of the traditional gypsy, welcomed and loved by all, existed?

The truth is, when you ask the person what they mean, they begin to struggle under the pressure of their own prejudice, making wild claims about the wonderful days when all Romanies (never, of course, Irish Travellers)

travelled around in Vardas, singing songs by the fireside, entertaining the country folk with their romantic tales, repairing pots and pans, picking hops and selling pegs. Ironically, many of these activities did use to happen, but the friends of the 'Traditional Gypsy' have demanded the introduction of laws that has pretty much destroyed this way of life.

Travellers have always been hated, feared, oppressed and mistreated – too many people like to fool themselves that it isn't they who are prejudiced but the Travellers themselves that have changed. What a load of bunkum – whenever you hear somebody claim to be a friend of the 'real Gypsies', take them on, challenge them, don't let them get away with it.

You might think that it'll make them worse, all I can say is that with friends like these, give me an honest bigot any day.

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Dominic West

I am in the Second year of my Seminary studies for the Priesthood at Allen Hall, and this year I have been lucky enough to have been allocated a Pastoral placement with the Traveller Community, working with Sister Petronia.

My first impressions on visiting the Sites in Clapton and Waterden Crescent, was a great sense of welcome, of love, of family, a great community spirit (I could go on...!!) I visited these Sites with Sr Petronia, and as soon as anyone saw us they immediately started chatting, making me feel very welcome. It was a great sign and witness of the Christian spirit running through life.

*When talking in one caravan,
a shout from outside came:
'Ma wants some washing*

*powder – can we use yours?’
– ‘in the cupboard’ was the
reply. Then we needed milk for
our tea: ‘I’ve just run out, I’ll go
and borrow some’. These are
just two examples that have
struck me of the easy-going,
hospitable and loving
community that is part of the
Church.*

I have been involved in Sacramental Catechesis for many years in Parishes, and so I'm looking forward to the opportunity of working with Sr Petronia and the Traveller community with Sacramental preparation after Christmas. This will be a different experience than what I am used to I'm sure – as was shown by the enrolment for the groups that I witnessed on one Site with Sr Petronia. We were walking around the Site and Sr Petronia just called to each van, 'Anyone for Confirmation or Communion here?' and the parents or elder siblings came out and signed up their younger members of the family for the Sacramental programmes. At this stage the parents put the young people forward, but through the sessions the young people themselves take the responsibility.

There have been some bad experiences that people have had with the Traveller Community in the past; there have been many bad stories of the things that have occurred, whether these are true or false. But I believe that we should not tar this part of our community all with the same brush and thus write them off or treat them with dis-trust; rather we should be aware of their great charism and gifts that they have to share with us settled people (their name for us!) I am looking forward to developing my links and my involvement and friendship with the Travellers.

A Reflection Fr Joe Browne

As we reflect at this time of the year on the story of the nativity we will readily be able to draw comparisons between the Holy Family forced to live as migrant travellers in a foreign land and the every day lives of the Traveller and Gypsy families that we minister to. Families that find there is 'no room for them' or that they are 'not welcomed here' or may attend 'by appointment only'.

As I write these few lines the words of the old ballad 'The Wind in the Willows' come to mind. In the ballad the author tells how as he is taking a walk along an old country lane he meets some travellers who invite him to sit and eat and as he does so they tell him who they are and what they are about. The words go, 'my name is Joseph and this is Mary my wife and this is our young child who smiled as he said, with the wind in the willows and the birds in the sky, there's a bright sun to warm us wherever we lie, we have bread and fishes and a jug of red wine to share on our journey with all of mankind'.

*Every encounter with our fellow human beings is
potentially an encounter with Christ.*

It is important for us to remember that our ministry to the Traveller people is not just to the Irish Traveller community. There are many British Gypsy people who are catholic and also in more recent years there is the growing number of people from Eastern Europe who are also catholic. We must begin to develop a ministry to all these people who are in need of pastoral care. We must also remember that there are other communities who are highly mobile and in need of pastoral care such as the travelling show-people who come to our towns and parishes with the fairs and also the circus people. All these people are in need of ministry and must find an understanding and a welcome from the church community where ever they find themselves.

Maybe as part of our New Year work plans we can begin to develop a greater awareness and understanding of all the various Traveller/Gypsy and Roma communities who are waiting for us to come passing by and to spend a little time with them and allow them to tell us, who they are and what they are about! With the wind in the willows...

NEWS

I. Housing and Regeneration Bill offers security of tenure for residents on local authority run Gypsy and Traveller sites

On 15 November, the Government introduced the Housing and Regeneration Bill in Parliament. Clause 272 of the Bill amends the Mobile Homes Act 1983 so that it will apply to local authority run Gypsy and Traveller sites. This will give Gypsies and Travellers living on local authority run sites the same security of tenure as residents on Mobile Home sites and is in response to the 2004 European Court of Human Rights ruling in the case of *Connors v United Kingdom*.

At present, all a local authority has to do to gain possession of a pitch on a local authority run Gypsy site is provide 28 days' notice of termination of a Gypsy's or Traveller's licence and then obtain a possession order from the court. The site resident has no defence against a claim for such an order. The court does not have to examine whether there are good reasons for eviction, though it can suspend a possession order for a period of time.

If Clause 272 is accepted, it will mean that, like tenants of other forms of accommodation, residents on local authority run Gypsy and Traveller sites cannot be evicted without good reason and without proof of an infraction of the rules. It will not give residents of local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites any special rights. It will simply give them the same rights as other people living in caravans and mobile homes. It will not prevent site residents who break the conditions of their secure tenancy from being evicted. It will not give security of tenure to anyone on an unauthorised encampment or unauthorised development.

You can register your support for security of tenure on local authority run Gypsy and Traveller sites by signing the petition at: http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk/tenure_petition.htm.

The Bill received its second reading in the Commons on 27 November. It will now be considered in detail by a Committee, and amendments can be suggested.

You can find the Bill at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmbills/008/08008.i-v.html>

Communities and Local Government has produced Explanatory Notes to the Bill. You can find them at:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmbills/008/en/index_008.htm

PDF files of both documents can be downloaded from:

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/housingandregeneration.html>

An impact assessment prepared by CLG can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/handrbill>

2. Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments can hide the truth

Communities and Local Government's Gypsy and Traveller Unit held a 'stake holders' meeting' in London on Wednesday 21 November. One of the concerns discussed was the quality of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's)

currently being carried out by local authorities in England. GTAA's are supposed to identify the actual scale of need for new pitches in the area studied. They are submitted to Regional Planning Bodies so that a Regional Spatial Strategy can be prepared, indicating how many pitches must be provided by each local authority in every region of England.

While some GTAA's have been carried out with full Traveller involvement in the planning and carrying out of the study, others have excluded Travellers and seriously underestimated the need for new provision. Some councils have acted in particularly bad faith. One case was reported of a revealed need for 88 pitches being reduced without any evidence to 15 in the council's final GTAA. There is a great deal of anger about this.

3. Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishes report on site provision

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report at the end of October on how local authorities can overcome opposition to Gypsy and Traveller site provision through good planning. The report, *Providing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Contentious Spaces*, by Dr Joanna Richardson of De Montfort University, Leicester, is available free on the JRF website, www.jrf.org.uk, or on paper at a cost of £15.95 plus £3 p&p from the Chartered Institute of Housing, Octavia House, Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8JP; tel 024 7685 1752/64, fax 024 7642 2022; email pubs@cih.org.

NATIONAL GATHERING

CATHOLIC GYPSY & TRAVELLER SUPPORT NETWORK

The Focolare Centre for Unity
Welwyn Garden City
5-6 March 2008

The 2008 National Gathering of the Catholic Gypsy & Traveller Support Network will take place at the Focolare Centre for Unity in Welwyn Garden City from Wednesday 5 March (5:00) until Thursday 6 March (4:00).

The National Gathering will bring together priests, religious and lay people who provide services to or are involved in a ministry to Gypsies and Travellers and others who are sympathetic to their concerns. It will provide an opportunity for informal sharing and for exploring issues of common interest.

To book a place, or for further information,, please contact:

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Catholic Bishops Conference
39 Eccleston Square
London SW1V 1BX

Liz Taite	020 7901 4828	liz.taite@cbcew.org.uk
Richard Zipfel	020 7226 5782	richard.zipfel@cbcew.org.uk

The cost is £60 for the full event or £25 for Thursday only. Cheques should be made payable to CATEW. Those who are unable to reclaim the cost from their parish, diocese, agency or religious order may apply for a discount, and in some cases we may be able to help with travel expenses.

All information provided will be used and maintained by the Bishops Conference only for the purposes of this event and for future Traveller related events and information.

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