

# PILGRIM CATHOLIC

Newsletter of the Gypsy & Traveller Support Network

ISSUE 7

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## Bishop Bernard Says Mass for Travellers at Walsingham

Bishop Bernard Longley joined us in Walsingham for the Great Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady into Heaven and to be with the Travelling Community during their Pilgrimage time.

Bishop Longley began by visiting each family and was graciously invited in for a time of sharing, encouragement and prayer. Many of the Travellers spoke of their joy at the presence of the Bishop with them. They asked for the Bishop's blessing and prayers for their families and for their particular intentions.

Other Travellers came in for the day and many the Bishop recognized as having been on Pilgrimage with him in Lourdes. Their delight at seeing him was beautiful to see.

The Bishop celebrated a Mass on the field for the Travellers amidst their Caravans and place of refuge for their Pilgrimage time.

The Mass was a joyful moment of grace and encounter with Christ for the Travelling Community and very much appreciated by them. The Bishop was

assisted by Fr. Bill Dobson Cssp (who tirelessly visited the Travellers and heard their Confessions during their stay) and Deacon Paul Strickland. The Travelling Community provided the readers – Kaitlin, Michael and John who all read beautifully. Bidding prayers were prayed from the heart at the microphone by those who wished. The Offertory procession was joyfully participated in by children from various families.

The Bishop at the end of Mass blessed a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham which some members of the Travelling Community had commissioned for the purpose of the Traveller Pilgrimage to Walsingham.

After Mass the Bishop continued to mingle and pray with the Travellers for their many needs. Many wished to kiss the Bishop's Cross and to be blessed with it.

As co-ordinator of the Pastoral Team for the Travellers' Assumption Pilgrimage time in Walsingham I was full of gratitude for Bishop Bernard's support, time and presence in Walsingham. He was a great encouragement to us all both Traveller and Settled Community alike.

We all hope he will come again next year!

**Antonia Moffat**  
**Pastoral Team Walsingham Assumption Traveller Pilgrimage.**

## Pavee Ceilidh

June is now designated Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) History Month. To celebrate this, the Irish Traveller Movement, of which Julie Joyce, Manchester, is an active member, organised Pavee Ceilidh which took place at the Friend's Meeting House, Manchester, on Tuesday 30 June, 2009.

Teachers from St. Brigid's School, Manchester and St Sebastian's, Salford brought along groups of Traveller children. Staff from Manchester and Salford EMTAS (Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Services) as well as Staff from the Irish Centre, had a variety of activities to occupy them: assemble their own bowtop wagon, colour-in pictures depicting designs from early decorative horse drawn wagons, assemble and decorate a very attractive butterfly, colour-in objects, such as water churns, used in bygone days.

Margaret, who as a young woman, 'hawked' (door to door selling) a variety of objects to contribute to the family budget, showed us how she made flowers from crepe paper. These looked real and professional and were very popular pre plastic and silk flower days.

As no Gypsy/Traveller day is complete without its own Fortune Teller, Mary sitting in the corner was a very convincing one.



*Pavee Ceilidh, at the Irish World Heritage Centre, Cheetham Hill, 20 June 2009*

Nan, a 17 year old girl, had a display of garments she had creatively worked on using paints, transfers, sequins etc.

~There was a display of photographs from the past, some taken by mobile photographers and compiled in a book. People present excitedly pointed out their parents, cousins, friends, etc...so now there are names to these faces.

In the evening groups from London, Birmingham and Wolverhampton .... joined us. They arrived in time for a wonderful buffet.

The Hall was set up Theatre style and all watched a DVD where many Traveller women gave a great insight into their History, Culture, Values, etc.

On 20 June, Manchester and Salford EMTAS, headed by Natalie Stables, held a similar event in the Irish

World Heritage Centre, Cheetham Hill.

At lunch time all took a break from their activities to enjoy some Irish Stew (a big take!). Richard O'Neill, a Traveller Story Teller, entertained us and afterwards demonstrated how clothes pegs, which the women 'hawked', were made, from willow branches. A group of Roma provided live music and dancing, as did a young group of Irish Musicians and Dancers.

Both of these events were very informative. They gave an insight into a previous way of life, one which is far removed from what the young experience today, but one which formed them and, hopefully, will make them proud of who they are: Traveller, Gypsy, Roma young people.

**Sister Carmel Clancy**  
**Manchester**

## National Gathering

Gypsy and Traveller Support Network  
31 March – 1 April 2009

**A National Gathering of the Gypsy and Traveller Support Network took place on Tuesday 31 March and Wednesday 1 April 2009 at the Focolare Centre for Unity, Welwyn Garden City.**

On the first evening there was an informal sharing and many issues and concerns were raised and explored in a wide-ranging discussion. These included: the difficulties Travellers face in negotiations with local authorities, the difficulties Travellers and others experience in the informal economy (where cold calling and knocking on doors to solicit work may be illegal), the possible importance of the 'healing Mass' in pastoral work with Travellers and the suggestion of a telephone service which Travellers can use at all hours for information, advice, support or just to talk or pray with someone.

Wednesday morning began with Mass, and the morning session was devoted to the broad theme of Education. Four speakers introduced discussions on specific topics.

### Traveller and Roma Children and Catholic Schools

Sr Petronia Williams introduced the discussion by describing the successful inclusion of **Traveller children at St Scholasticas** primary school in Hackney. The fact that the parish had been involved in the Travellers successful struggle for a permanent site

helped to build trust. The Traveller families who have children in the school appear to be delighted and parents are very involved in the school (coming to assemblies and social events). The school does not treat Traveller children differently from other children. A classroom helper has encouraged the Traveller men to get involved in the school.

Carol Mellors, Adviser for Refugee and Traveller Achievement in Kent, introduced a discussion of **Roma children** by reminding the group that 9-12 million people in Europe identify themselves as Roma. Since the fall of communism, Roma unemployment in Eastern Europe has resulted in westward migration. A significant proportion of Roma in Europe are Catholic, but some are leaving the Church. 2005 – 2015 is the decade of Roma inclusion. Roma children are too often low achievers, have low attendance and often have no school place. The DCSF currently has national strategies for raising the achievement of GRT pupils. Barriers to learning for Roma Children include parental lack of literacy and education, language, cultural differences, low expectations and racism.

Too often Roma cannot get into Catholic schools. For instance, out of 100 Roma in primary schools in the

Gravesend area, only 2 are in Catholic schools. Barriers to their inclusion in Catholic schools include admission requirements (eg letters from priests, baptismal certificates and information from previous schools), language issues, attitudes of other East European Catholics, stereotyping and the importance placed on performance targets. There have even been stories of Roma going back to Eastern Europe for sacramental preparation, however this seems to be changing.

## Home Education

Iain Campbell from the DCSF introduced this discussion. He pointed out that the law is relatively simple and straightforward. Parents have a duty to ensure children have full-time, suitable education – either in school or otherwise. There is no definition of ‘full-time’ or ‘suitable’, but there is some case law. They do not have to be taught the national curriculum. Guidelines were published in 2007. If a local authority has concerns they can intervene.

An **Independent Review of Home Education** is currently taking place. What comes through the consultation is polarised perceptions. Parents see local authorities as heavy handed and not understanding. Local authorities feel they don't have sufficient powers to intervene.

One motivation for home education among travellers is their distrust of a system of education which is both secular and at odds with their culture. There are allegations of home education being a cover for neglect, forced marriages and other matters. Travellers tend not to want to know about science. Support for parents undertaking home education is patchy. Travellers teach their children from the time they are toddlers, but they need support. In Traveller families, education of children tends to be the responsibility of the extended family. There may be possibilities of travellers on a site undertaking home education together, but there are issues such as ‘when does this become a school’?

## GRT History Month (June)

Andrew Ryder introduced a discussion of GRT history month (introduced last year by the DCSF). GRT history is diverse and rich. It is important that appropriate activities take place in schools, churches and communities. The National Association of Traveller Teachers – Consortia & Partnership was supported with funding from the DCSF. A national planning committee with representatives from 8 regions was established. There are regional forums

and a guidance booklet. Members of the Traveller community are being trained to become involved. There will be a launch in Parliament on 1 June. There is a website and a DVD on Traveller History and culture. The discussion focussed on how the Network could encourage fuller involvement in GRT History Month by church communities

## The Threat of Evictions at Dale Farm

Fr John Glynn, parish priest in Wickford, and Ann Kobayashi (a parishioner) introduced the discussion of possible evictions at Dale Farm.

Fr John recalled that he had gone to Wickford as parish priest in October 2002. It took him some time to bring about an improved relationship between the Travellers and others in the parish. Sr Catherine Reilly had been a very important help in this process.

Fr John and Ann described how the continuing threat of eviction had had a paralysing effect on those at Dale Farm. The court of appeal decision had been a shock, exacerbated by the constant media attention. With the threat of eviction becoming a reality, the churches in the area were committed to offering support to the people being evicted.

In addition, there had been efforts at **mediation**. The local MP had been in contact with Fr John, and the Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was trying to play a mediating role.

## Awareness Raising in the Catholic Community

There was a brief discussion of the possibility of producing **educational materials** - a DVD or a CD – as a means of raising awareness among Travellers or in the Catholic community or both. There may also be a need for materials for sacramental preparation. The Parish of Traveller People in Dublin have a set of resources. They don't easily translate to our situation, but they may be able to be adapted. All this was left as a possibility for the future.

The training **of people from Traveller Communities as catechists** was also briefly mentioned, as well as **ongoing formation for priests** after seminary. There was also very brief discussion of possible **links with priests from Slovakia** who work with Roma.

It was decided that, for now, the Network should focus on raising awareness in the Catholic community of **GRT History Month (June)**. Bishop Bernard

suggested that we might work with CES and CCN to get the message to schools and dioceses. CARJ will put material on its website.

## Looking Forward

There was a very brief discussion of next year's National Gathering. Bishop Bernard suggested that we attempt:

- to hold the event at a centre that is more easily accessible for those coming from the north of England and from Wales;
- to try to include a few more Travellers in the event.

It was explained to the group that CARJ had taken over organisation of the Network and the annual National Gathering, and that anyone wishing to make suggestions or needing support should be in touch with the CARJ office (020 8802 8080). Bishop Bernard thanked everyone who had contributed and closed the meeting with a prayer and blessing.

**The Next National Gathering of the National Catholic Gypsy, Roma and Travellers Support Network will take place at Wistaston Hall, Crewe, Cheshire on 9-10 March 2010. Further information about this event will be available in the new year.**

# Behind the Headlines

## Basildon District Council Starts Talks With Dale Farm Traveller Community.

Recent local press front page banner headlines read "Fears grow over new pitches for travellers", the story made it clear that local residents would strongly oppose any new sites being found for the 86 Dale Farm families facing eviction. Another issue of the same paper headlined "Bailiffs from across Europe bid for contract to evict Dale Farm travellers." The contract out for tender by Basildon District Council is reported to be worth 1.5 million GBP. So the public message is that Travellers are not wanted and bailiffs from across Europe are competing to evict them from the plots they own at Dale Farm, Crays Hill, Essex.

Behind the headlines some developments seem to signal a change in the Council's official attitude to its "Traveller problem". In late April the Equalities & Human Rights Commission facilitated a round table meeting between the Leader, CEO and officers of Basildon Council and Traveller families, organisations and local resident supporters. This meeting in Our Lady of Good Counsel Church Hall, Wickford, was the first time in 6 years that all parties had met outside the formal setting of Committee and Full Council meetings. The purpose of the meeting was for both sides to listen to each other and to carry on talking afterwards over lunch provided by the Council. All concerned pledged not to divulge the contents of the discussion. Apart from a general feeling of engagement with the Travellers as people rather than faceless "problems" the meeting ended as so many do, with agreement that the process should continue, a series of smaller meetings with another large one in August. So far just one small meeting has happened, the Leader of the Council has resigned and his successor has publicly vowed that there will be no

change in the decision to evict.

Another historic first took place in May. The local MP had written to Fr. John Glynn PP Our Lady of Good Counsel, asking him to persuade the Travellers to move out peacefully and so avoid eviction. Fr. John responded by suggesting the MP visit Dale Farm with him. Since meeting some of the Travellers the MP's stance has softened to the extent of acknowledging the trauma of eviction and proposing that the Government find a transit camp site for them outside the District.

Since February a small number of volunteers has been helping the Travellers complete the complex Homelessness forms, in August interviews with Housing officials began. Each Traveller applicant is accompanied by a volunteer who seeks to explain a process in which all the questions already asked in the forms are repeated. The Travellers are not applying for "bricks and mortar" but a site where they can live together as a community of related families, they say they would feel unsafe living in houses. They are stating strongly that any vacant accommodation should be offered to people on the Housing list, they have a lot of sympathy for the homeless. One irony is that Travellers who moved to the unauthorised part of Dale Farm have to show they didn't know it had no residential planning permission otherwise they are deemed intentionally homeless and not entitled to consideration for rehousing. Many moved to Dale Farm because of being evicted from other sites around the country so maybe the biggest headline should be "Scandal of National Shortage of Traveller Sites".

Meanwhile a meeting to mark the Changing Face of Britain programme to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) was hosted by the Diocesan Commission for Justice and Social Responsibility at Brentwood Cathedral Hall on 29th May. The theme was "Share the Story" and around 70 people gathered for an enjoyable evening aimed at celebrating Traveller culture and dispelling some myths. The Travellers greatly appreciated the

welcome and supportive words of Bishop Thomas McMahon; in their turn and in great numbers they welcomed him to Dale Farm when he visited to say Mass later in the summer. The Church's continuing support gives the Travellers hope in what often seems a very hostile world.

**Ann Kobayashi**  
Essex

## The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain together with key partners and collaborators that include Friends Families and Travellers are carrying out research to find out how some Gypsies and Travellers have secured economic inclusion (that is set up a business or got into paid/professional employment). The project is being advised by a number of respected experts including Dr Margaret Greenfields (Buckinghamshire New University), Dr David Smith (Christ Church University) and Pat Niner and is supported by Big Lottery Research. The project will be completed in October 2010.

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project (TEIP) is hoping to challenge the racism and exclusion suffered by Gypsies and Travellers by bringing together practice and research in a research partnership that is led by third sector and policy and voice groups and community members. At every level Gypsies and Travellers are involved in the coordination of the project, sitting on the

steering group and being employed as interviewers. Uniquely Gypsy and Traveller interviewees are also being invited to seminars to give their opinion on the interim analysis and are thus given an important role in shaping the themes and messages contained in the final report.

We are looking for people to be interviewed. As a token of appreciation we will give interviewees a £15 Argos voucher for the interview and a £50 voucher for attending a seminar and travel costs. We can come to people's homes or find somewhere else to interview. Interviews will be confidential and anonymised – that means names will not be mentioned in the report.

If you require more information and or would like to be interviewed then please contact the TEIP team:

0207 607 2002  
teip@irishtraveller.org.uk

### USEFUL CONTACTS

Advisory Council for the Education of Romanies and Other Travellers (ACERT), Moot House, The Stow, Harlow, Essex CM20 3AG (01 279 41 8666)

Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ). 9 Henry Road, Manor House, London N4 2LH. (020 8802 8080)

Friends, Families and Travellers, Community Base, 113 Queen's Road, Brighton BN1 3XG (01 273 234777). [fft@gypsy-traveller.org](mailto:fft@gypsy-traveller.org)

Gypsy Council for Education, Culture, Welfare and Civil Rights (GCECWCR). 8 Hall Road, Aveley, Essex RM15 4HD. (01 708 868986)

Gypsy Roma Traveller Achievement Service Leeds, West Park Centre, Spen Lane, Leeds LS16 5BE (01 13 274 8050 and 01 13 275 0445)

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, The Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA (020 7607 2002) [info@irishtraveller.org.uk](mailto:info@irishtraveller.org.uk)

The London Gypsy & Traveller Unit, 6 Westgate Street, Hackney, London E8 3RN. (020 8533 2002).

The London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1 9XB. (020 7916 2222).

Travellers Aid Trust, PO Box 16, Llangyndeyrn, Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire SA17 5BN (01 269 870621).

Traveller Law Reform Project, c/o London Gypsy & Traveller Unit, 6 Westgate St, London E8 3RN. (020 8533 2002). [info@travellerslaw.org.uk](mailto:info@travellerslaw.org.uk)