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A Brief History Of The Holy Family Church, Ballyoisin.

In addition to being a place where public worship is offered to God, the local church is a visible sign of God's presence in the midst of our community. From the Rev. J. E. McKenna's history of the Parishes of Clogher Diocese, we learn that a little church stood in the townland of Knockconan from the middle of the eighteenth century dedicated to Saint Mary. It was supposed to have been a long, low thatched building with a number of wooden props to the sidewalls. The present church building was rebuilt by Fr. Charles McDermott in 1819 - 1820 at a total cost of £700. It was not until after emancipation that a tower could be built and a bell erected. This was after 1829 by Fr. McDermott's successor, Canon Mullen. (Canon O'Connor later replaced that bell by a larger one and much better one).

The church was again rebuilt by Fr. Callan. This time the church was dedicated to the service of God under the invocation of the Holy Family, by the Most Rev. Dr. Owens in 1905. How much of the masonry in the renovated Church of the Holy Family was old and how much was new is not recorded but in 1920 the Parish Priest, Rev. James Marron, was obliged to build buttresses to save the walls – the eastern one in particular – from utter collapse. His predecessor, Rev John McKenna, had to rebuild the Sacristy which was erected in 1904.

Extensive repairs to the church building were carried out in 1974. All the woodwork was riddled with dry rot – sanctuary, altar rails, pulpit, gallery and floor of the church building. The sacristy was so bad that it had to be rebuilt. Luckily the roof of the church was unharmed but as there were signs of it making its way to the ceiling and roof, the walls had to be treated for dry rot, The gallery was removed, the seats were treated and painted and the floors of the sanctuary and body of the church had been tiled. The sanctuary with its new altar, tabernacle pillar, and ambo of Wicklow granite had been arranged in accordance with the Directory from the Irish Episcopal Liturgical Commission. The total cost of the repairs was in the region of £17,000. The Church Of The Holy was rededicated by the Most Rev. Dr. Patrick Mulligan in 1974.

Planning Together

In Ireland, even in very challenging times, people have made great sacrifices to have their own local church. In Ballyoisin, before the Great Famine, they had a small thatched church building. Parishioners saw that it was too small and inadequate. In the early years of the 19th century, they decided to build a bigger, more solid chapel. So, in 1820 the Church of the Holy Family that we have been so familiar with, was dedicated and opened. For the last 200 years our ancestors gathered there through times of famine, persecution, disease and poverty. They fought the good fight; they kept the faith. They handed it on to us.

As in every parish the chapel or church building is a place of great importance. It is the place where parishioners gather to celebrate major events in their lives, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Funerals. It is here that the people gather on a Sunday as a faith community to celebrate the mass, to thank God and grow in faith. It is the place many call into during the week to share our worries with God.

Renovations took place at various times to cope with dampness, storm damage and liturgical changes. In 2007 and more recently in late 2017, builders, engineers and architects were brought in to examine the old building. A comprehensive condition report (2017) had raised the issue as a matter for health and safety concern, and the church building was closed. Architect Brian Quinn gave an overview of this report at a public meeting.

So, the stark questions arose. Do we renovate or build a new church? Do we forget about having a church in the Ballyoisin area while taking into account the decline in religious vocations at this time? After lengthy and comprehensive consultations with parishioners, the overwhelming view was that "It is up to our generation to provide a church and to be true to the faith and sacrifice of our ancestors in doing whatever is needed to have our own place of worship." It was decided to renovate the church building.

Architect Brian Quinn was asked to draw up the renovation plans. Brian is a native of Belfast and now lives in Omagh. He is a church architect with great expertise in this area of work. He has been involved with this project since 2007.

Project Summary

Restoration of Existing Building Fabric

The restoration of the existing building fabric will retain as much original fabric as possible.

Much deterioration is attributable to dampness due to sand/cement render and internal plaster. Rather than preventing dampness, these materials encourage its retention. Buildings of this type 'breathe' by absorbing moisture and allowing it to dry out before it penetrates to the interior, and by allowing moisture generated within the building to pass through its walls to the outside. These proposals will reinstate this balance of wetting and drying by replacing these materials with breathable lime-based render and natural insulation. Specifically:

Walls – drylining removed and replaced with natural breathable insulation, sand/cement render replaced with lime-based render

Windows – concrete window frames will be retained and repaired

Stained-glass windows - will be refurbished and retained.

Roof - will be reinstated with salvaged and new slates

Rainwater Goods – refurbished and retained although minor repairs required

Bell Tower – repointed with lime and stone cleaned

Trusses – to be repaired and refurbished

Refurbishment of Interior

The interior will be renewed and freshened up by redecoration and new internal finishes making the interior an inviting environment to be in. Seating will be replaced, and the sanctuary will be reorganised to provide more space to be more suitable for modern liturgy. Lighting will be completely replaced to provide new energy efficient fittings and heating will be upgraded to provide a warm interior in an energy and cost-efficient way.

Provision of a new extension

Potential for extension is severely restricted by the presence of graves in close proximity to the church building. The existing sacristy and a temporary toilet block occupy the only space available for expansion. Consequently, the replacement extension is in the same location as the existing extensions but with a slightly increased footprint of 67m² to facilitate a better internal layout and to provide for a new meeting/community room. The parish needs a dedicated meeting space for the benefit of parishioners, for their well-being and for the development of their faith. The new pastoral space will be very useful for accommodating mourners and other activities associated with specific services. It can be used as overspill seating for Easter ceremonies, Christmas, and funerals. Very importantly, it will accommodate various parish groups and community. This will be a wonderful and necessary facility to have.

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