



Fr. John McGlynn (*An tAthair Seán MacFhloinn*) was a Co. Donegal-born Roman Catholic priest who served in the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle on temporary assignment from 1949 to 1958. During his time in Seattle, he was actively involved in Seattle's Irish community.

After his return to Co. Donegal, he served the remainder of his life as a priest in the local diocese, but in 2000 he took the time to write a booklet about his life as a priest. Because he was born and spent most of his life as a priest in a Gaeltacht, an Irish-speaking part of Ireland, his booklet was written in the Irish language and was called *Faoi Scath Chnoc na h-Adhmaide*.

Following are the chapters that he wrote in the booklet about his time in Seattle. They were translated from the original Irish by Mary Kelly.

West to America

I was a young priest with God's vineyards at my feet in that beautiful summer of 1949. I spent the summer at home, and gave a helping hand to the priests in my parish, Gleann Fhinne. I made many sick calls and it was good experience for a young priest. I didn't feel the time going by. As well as the work I was doing in the parish, I was also making preparations for my departure to America. I was in my final year of study at Maynooth and originally I was to go to Paisley in Scotland. However, at Christmastime Bishop Mac Chon Fhaola, God be good to him, received a letter requesting that a priest be sent out to Seattle, Washington, in the U.S. He phoned me and urged me to change my plans. I agreed, and started making my preparations to leave. I had to get permission to say Mass on the ship, and I well remember how difficult this was. Finally the letter came with permission, although whether it came from my own Bishop or the Bishop of Cork, Cobh being the port of departure, is not clear to me now.

I bade farewell to my dear parents, may God rest them, and the rest of my family. I didn't want them to have to come all the way to Cobh with me, but I had a break in my journey with my brothers in Dublin. When I arrived in Cobh, I met two of my classmates, Fr. Andy Rispin from the Meath diocese and Fr. Seán Ball from the Tuam diocese. Imagine my delight to discover that not only were the three of us heading to the US together, but to Seattle too! I felt blessed, and we were to spend many happy days together in the evergreen state. I bade farewell to my brother and we wished each other all the best for the future.

Our journey began with a ferry ride to the Mauritania which was lying at anchor in Cobh harbor. With mixed feelings we boarded, and there was a flurry of activity to find our rooms and get settled. It wasn't long before we felt the ship moving, and it dawned on us that we were leaving the Irish coast behind and on our way to America. Up on deck with the three of us to look out as long as we could on the green land of Ireland. After a couple of hours we lost sight of Sleá Head. Ireland was out of sight and America was before us to the west.

We had a pleasant trip, and met many fine people. There were many young men and women on board from the west of Ireland, Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Kerry, leaving to find work in New York or New Jersey. They were at Mass every morning, and were as happy as if they were in the church at home.

On our second day out a storm arose and the Mauritania tossed about for quite some time. One girl from Co. Leitrim was very seasick and unfortunately she was sick for the entire trip, unable to eat a bite. My two friends and I could often be found chatting with the ship's captain, a great honor indeed. He was a nice, kind man with not too much talk, but like a lot of wise people, he was a good listener. Time on board went quickly and we had lots of activities to occupy us. One day we were doing a crossword puzzle which had clues based on the passengers' names. One of the clues was "there's no end to it" and that was my friend Seán Ball's name. I often remind him of this! He's now a parish priest west of Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo. More about Seán later and the nine years we spent in Seattle.

The storm finally abated and we reached New York. Some of the passengers were still seasick, but at least we were on dry land. My cousin Pat had come to meet us at the quay and he welcomed us warmly. He took us through customs without a problem. A policeman in New York, he had everything in order.

My two friends and I then went our separate ways to spend a few days in New York with our relatives, and we arranged to meet up again at the Archbishop's office.

The next part of the trip entailed three days and three nights on a train to Seattle. We all enjoyed it thoroughly, and I still have photos of the places we passed through on the way to Seattle. Our carriage had glass windows all around, giving us an incredible view of the country. We had to change trains in Chicago, from there traveling on the Northern Pacific through the Dakotas and the Prairies, on towards the Rockies. Up to this we had been traveling by steam train, but this train was powered by an electric engine. We met a lovely couple from Butte, Montana, and they even invited us to come and stay with them for a few days. We planned to meet up with them in Seattle at a future date.

Before too long we reached the top of the Rockies, and the majestic, snow-covered peaks were a sight to behold. Onwards we traveled, and arriving in Butte, Montana, we said goodbye to our new friends. We never did meet them afterwards, though we often thought of them and the trip we had taken together. By this time we were quite far north and getting closer to Seattle. I can recall being lulled to sleep by the electric engine, and on waking in the morning, looking out on the Rockies. After three days and three nights we reached our destination. Waiting for us at the Seattle train station was Fr. O'Doherty, sent by Bishop Connolly, whose people came from Co. Monaghan. Fr. O'Doherty's father and mother were from Cill Charthain, "Leirg a'Dachain," I think. It's a small world!

Fr. O'Doherty drove us to St. James' Cathedral, where rooms had been prepared for us in the adjacent parish house. We were landed at last in a city where I was to spend almost nine years. The priest and everyone were very good to us, and we soon met the bishop as he was living there also. Another resident, former bishop Shaughnessy, passed away shortly after our arrival, and his funeral was the first service we attended. May God rest his soul.

After a few free days, we began our work. Mons. Gallagher, whose family came from Corrán, Achill, Co. Mayo, was the Archbishop. I was to remain at the archdiocese and my friend was sent to St. Therese's parish, about four miles to the north. Seán Ball spent five years there until he returned home to Ireland.

The work of the archdiocese was hard but interesting, as we ministered to five hospitals as well as doing the parish work. Any priest will know what parish work in the heart of a city is like.

Seattle

I spent two years working at the archdiocese, getting valuable experience of the ways of the Church in a new country. The other priests were very good to me and the Monsignor himself, God be good to him, could not have been kinder. Music was always an interest of mine, and soon I had collected a nice selection of records that I played in my free time. The Monsignor would always ask me to play "Cottage by the Lee" for him. His heart was in Ireland and he had occasion to return for a visit during my time at the Archdiocese. The cathedral is a beautiful church and it had some remodeling done to it while I was there. I remember the day I got the chance to go up on the scaffold, right up to the gable, and look out on an incredible view of the city. Seattle is a very beautiful city, situated in an estuary called the Puget Sound. The population is around 3.5 million, and includes quite a few Irish, Germans, Swedish, French,

English and Africans. The city has two lakes, Lake Washington which is twenty miles long and a mile wide, and Lake Union, not very big, and connected to the sea by a canal. The city is clean and filled with gardens of beautiful flowers and shrubs. Tacoma is where Seattle's international airport is located. Boeing, the big aerospace manufacturing company, is also located in Seattle. I saw the first 707 ever made as it was being flight tested, as well as the assembly of the first 707 bought by Aer Lingus. Time goes by so quickly! It only seems like yesterday, but time nor tide waits for no one.

Shortly after our arrival a young Irish couple came to visit me, and I spent a nice day out sightseeing with them in their convertible, and enjoying dinner afterwards. There were quite a few Irish in the parish; the Sullivans from Kerry, the McGees from Faoi Chnoc, Gracie Coyle from Cill Ulta, Máire McGinley from Machaire Rabhartaí, the Cunninghams from Ard a' Rátha, and Mac Luain from Gleann Fhinne.

Work in the community was hard, and we four priests were kept busy, especially with the hospitals. Marriages were plentiful, many of them between Catholics and those of other faiths, so pre-marriage religious instruction was often necessary. During Lent, I taught a class for those who were considering becoming Catholics. At Easter, there would be a large number attending, to prepare to be received into the Catholic Church. My hope is that they are still strong in their faith today.

Seattle has a variety of leisure activities, including golf, every kind of fishing, freshwater as well as ocean fishing, hill-skiing, tennis, bowling, skating; name it and they have it. The Seattle Dome is the big baseball stadium and they have another stadium for American football. I used to enjoy the big inter-state and intercollegiate basketball and baseball games. Fr. Seán Ball was relatively close at St. Therese's parish, and we met up on our free day. We played golf quite often at one of the nice golf courses that are just a stone's throw away. Snow was always visible on the Olympics and Mt. Rainier, and we often enjoyed a day of skiing, followed by a nice meal and perhaps a movie afterwards. When the weather wasn't great we went for a drive. We must have hiked every inch of Washington state, some feat considering it's bigger than the whole of Ireland! We even hiked in Montana, Oregon, and British Columbia. You can sure we had an enjoyable time, despite the hard work we did the rest of the week.

I spent over a year at the Cathedral and we were always busy. The bishop and other priests were very good to me. Bishop O'Shaughnessy passed away during that time, and I still have his golf bag and golf clubs, which he generously gave me.

Fr. O'Doherty became parish priest around the time I arrived in Seattle. Later on a new diocese, Yakima diocese, was formed and Fr. O'Doherty became the first bishop there. He did wonderful work there, but his health deteriorated and he died, God rest his soul. During my time at the cathedral his father, who hailed from Cill Chartha, visited me often to get the news from Donegal. He's gone now too, and may Christ's peace be with him.

Here is a strange but humorous account of what took place one Sunday morning at the cathedral. Sunday Mass was scheduled between 6:30 am and noon, five Masses in all. One Sunday morning, between the 10:00 am and 11:00 am Masses, a man walked up the aisle of the cathedral, carrying a door on his back. The senior curate was in the sacristy and he spotted your man and came out to see

what this was all about. The curate, Fr. Squire, was an upstanding, patient man, and he watched as the man stood motionless in front of the altar. Finally, Fr. Squire asks: "What are you doing here?" "Well," the man answers, "Our Lord told me to bring this door here." "Fine," says Fr. Squire, and back he went into the sacristy, keeping one eye on your man with the strange load. After about ten minutes he decides he'd better get this sorted out before people started arriving for the 11:00 am Mass. Out he comes and says: "You're still here! Is it how Our Lord hasn't come yet for the door?" "No," says the man. Fr. Squire replies: "Do you know something? I was talking to Him just now and He told me that He no longer needs the door." Says the man: "In that case I'd better be off." And he turned and left by the rear door and disappeared into the Seattle traffic. It was a nice ending, and I thought it was a wise handling of the situation by Fr. Squire. He has cut back on his workload now but he's still going strong in Seattle.

A priest can encounter many unusual occurrences in his work, and he has to try and do his best in every situation. Wisdom comes from experiencing every conceivable situation. I'll recount a sampling of the situations I dealt with in my work as a priest in America.

My Work in Seattle

There was a lovely couple in my parish in Seattle who were strong in their faith and wouldn't miss Mass for anything. They were great friends of mine. The husband was a vet and he had a small airplane that he would fly all over, even as far away as Seattle, to tend to an animal.

To make a long story short, one day I got a call from the wife to come to their house as her husband wasn't well. She wouldn't tell what the problem was, just to come and see for myself. When I reached the house she let me in and led me to the kitchen, where he sat, pointing a gun towards me. I asked him what the matter was but all he'd say was "I don't know." Then I saw that he had blown out the windows. "John, please put down the gun," I pleaded. To my great relief, he did so, and my request he removed the bullets and laid them on the table. I approached him with some trepidation and sat down at the table with him. I talked to him, trying my best to calm him down and get him in a safer and more sensible frame of mind. It appeared that he and his wife were having problems and this was causing a lot of arguing. I spent an hour with him until he settled, and finally I suggested that he lie down and rest for a while. He agreed to this. As I left, I promised to hear his confession and give him Communion the following day. His wife told me later that he had been drinking heavily and taking pills he got at work. Drink and drugs don't mix, and it's no wonder he went off the deep end. Things improved gradually, and I kept in close contact with them. I was back in Ireland when his wife sent me the news that he had suffered a heart attack and died while they were on a trip to Alaska. May God rest him. Afterwards she wrote a wonderful description of their life together she called "The Flying Fynns." She sent me a copy and inside she wrote: "Were it not for your kindness and thoughtfulness to us both, this book might never have been written." You can be sure that I'll treasure it always.

Another memory I have is of an airplane that failed to take off at Seatac Airport. A deadly accident resulted, and I gave holy oils to the many dead and many more injured. It was a heart-breaking sight.

On another occasion a fire occurred in a large apartment building and it was so bad that nobody could get inside. People were screaming for help and jumping from the windows. It was terrible. Again, we were there to give absolution and holy oils.

A sick call I received on another occasion will remain in my memory forever. I was called to go to a certain street where an accident had taken place. On entering the house a group of women with scared expressions guided me towards the basement. Down I went, and there I saw a pitiful sight. A woman lay there with a gunshot wound in her side. She was someone I knew from working with youth of the parish. God only knows why such a thing could have happened. May she rest at God's right hand.

Another memory I have is of something that happened on an evening I was holding choir practice. After the practice a young woman left for a meeting at Seattle University where she was a student. Not even half an hour later, I was called to administer the last rites to her. She had been killed instantly when her car was hit by a reckless driver who went through a red light. May the light of heaven shine on her soul. God save us, and may we see His mother in heaven, and may we die in Ireland.

A priest has to be ready to be dealt with dying whether it's an accident or by the bedside. Nobody is exempt from death, however it will come. I remember my father saying that if you're going to die by drowning, then you'll drown as you go out after the cows. There's good theology for you!

If you're an active person there's nothing nicer in winter than a day's skiing in the hills. Drive about an hour and a half and you'll be in the Cascades on Mount Rainier, snow all around you and the sun shining in the heavens. A week spent in Sun Valley, Idaho is even better. There are other sports and pastimes besides skiing right on your doorstep. Water-skiing on Lake Washington is another very enjoyable activity you can pursue.

Seattle Cathedral

One day while I was a curate at the cathedral I happened to be taking the lift up to my room and met the archbishop. He had just returned from a day spent fishing for steelhead on the Skagit river. "John," he says, "I hope you're taking a day off every week." I told him I was, and he urged me to keep doing this. Working hard as we all did at the cathedral we needed a break to recharge the batteries.

Many wonderful things happened at the cathedral, despite the hard work. When I first arrived there off the train and met Fr. Joe Doherty, I was delighted. Fr. Joe was chancellor of the diocese and his people were from Cill Cartha in Donegal. He was a kind man, born in Texas, and he did wonderful work as a priest in Seattle. Later he became bishop of the diocese of Yakima, when the Seattle diocese was divided up. This was where he was to spend the remainder of his life.

As I mentioned earlier, I was sent to the cathedral and Seán Ball was sent to St. Therese's parish. At that time there were five curates at the cathedral. There were five hospitals in the parish. I can remember visiting three hospitals in one night. Then there were those who wanted to learn about the Catholic faith. I held an Inquiry class once a fortnight and often had fifty attendees. There might be about

twenty or so taking instruction towards becoming Catholics. In my nine years in the diocese, I baptized about three hundred adults who converted to Catholicism.

Our Lady of the Lake

I spent two years at the cathedral and I was very happy there. I was responsible for the accounts my last year there. One time I was \$1.80 short and I couldn't figure out why. I told Fr. Squire, the most senior curate, and he called in the accountant to figure it out. That may have been a nice way of saying I couldn't add! Languages were always more my style than mathematics!

Fr. Seán was sent to St. Therese's shortly after our arrival at the cathedral and it helped dispel my disappointment that he wasn't far away, as we were able to spend our days off together. I got to know Fr. Hugh Gallagher, brother of the Monsignor at the cathedral. After two years, I went to Our Lady of the Lake parish where Fr. Hughie was parish priest. I spent seven years in that lovely parish in the city suburbs. Previously there had been a small church there, but that was replaced by a church modeled in the hispanic style. The people there were great and I got to know them well. My second Sunday there, a man came up to me after the 11:00 am Mass and said: "Father, there's a heavy cloud over Mucais hill today." It turned out he was from Inis Eoghain in Tír Chonaill! We were fast friends after that. May he rest at God's right hand.

Our Lady of the Lake was a fine parish, consisting of a mix of old and young, either from Ireland or of an Irish outlook. We all worked hard together to add some improvements to the school, and to build a convent for the nuns who were coming to teach there. Eventually we had a fine convent for the six nuns who did their best to provide a good Christian education for the children. The parish was well set up, with a mother's club, the Holy Name Society, an altar society, boy scouts and girl guides – you name it, we had it! I was getting to know the community by degrees. There were three hundred children attending the school. Many's the good night we had with card nights and the societies. I continued my "inquiry class" for those who were interested in exploring the Catholic faith. I took a day off every week as the bishop had advised, often spending it golfing with Fr. Seán, Brendan, Jimí and others. Quiet, gentle Art was another companion, as well as Ed, who was very encouraging to all of us. Brendan was a good golfer though he could be touchy at times. I well remember one time Fr. Ed and I drove up to Moose Mountain in British Columbia on vacation. We golfed up at Lake Louise on top of the Rockies. At one particular hole there were four golfers who weren't in a great hurry so they stood aside and left us go before them. Ed went first and he sent the ball onto the green, beyond the lake between himself and the green. I went next and I did exactly the same thing. Says Ed: "We're making a good impression on our friends here!" We really enjoyed that trip, especially our visit to the Indian reservation. We had some very enjoyable vacations while we were in the Seattle diocese. Many's the drive we took along the coast road and back again. It was a lovely to drive through the great redwoods of California with the moon shining through the trees. Oh it's grand to be young!

Recreation

It seems to me that there's no better place for recreational activities for old and young alike than North America. The climate is very conducive to activities both outdoor and indoor. Washington, Oregon, Idaho and British Columbia are incredibly scenic states. Calm sea, pristine beaches, mountain lakes and rivers entice you as a bee to honey. If you enjoy swimming, the beaches are excellent. If fishing is your preference, the rivers and lakes are unsurpassed for trout and salmon. Even in winter you can find steelhead salmon plentiful in the rivers and in August you can fish for salmon in broad daylight. You just need to have plenty of soaked herring with you. Could you fish like this in the Atlantic? Maybe the breed of salmon there is not the same, but it would be interesting to test it out!

I spent many good days fishing in Grayland, near Aberdeen in southwest Washington and I'm proud of the fact that once I caught a thirty two pound salmon! The same day I saw a man bringing in a forty four pound trout after a huge struggle. This was a King Salmon trout from Alaska.

Golf courses abound in Seattle and they are very widely used all year round. Tennis, basketball, badminton, volleyball and netball are popular sports enjoyed either indoors or outdoors. The most popular sports are baseball and American football, whether professional or otherwise, and they draw huge crowds. I enjoy both sports and once I learned the rules I found the games even more enjoyable.

Back Home

In 1958 I returned to Ireland, the dearest place in the world to me. We had a farewell gathering before I left and the tears ran freely. I took the train from Seattle to New York. I spent three days traveling from the west of the country that I had hiked and that I now understand well, having spent nine happy years, working and playing here. God Bless America!

I spent three days visiting relatives in New York, some of whom are now departed. Paddy Gallagher took me around to the "Donegals" of New York and Philadelphia as he did when I first arrived in 1949. Paddy has also passed on. May he sit at God's right hand.

I boarded the "Sythia" for what would be her final voyage on the Atlantic. I had come west in 1949 and here I was now, returning to the fair hills of Ireland, and indeed, to the hills and fair glens of Donegal. Three days and three nights I spent on the waves, before reaching Cobh in Cork. I hired a car and drove north, accompanied by Paddy Coyne, an elderly man from the Frasa in Donegal.

I spent seven years in Gweedore, a wonderful parish with the finest people. Then I was asked to go to Gortahork, where I had been twenty years before, and now I renewed my friendships with the people I had known there before.

In the midst of a community or a family the most amusing tales are found. It seems to me that in Ireland, the priest is closer to his community than in other places. It may be so also in South America, Spain and elsewhere, but Ireland is special in this respect.

On one occasion I was holding a “Ballroom of Romance” dance at the parish hall, and several other priests, among them Fr. Horan, God rest him, were in attendance. A fight over the theft of a bicycle pump broke out while the band was playing the “Sliabh Foy.” We sorted out the fight and Leo played on without a break in the music!

There’s no doubt that priests work hard in proclaiming the Gospel, but it’s the humor and the stories that really make it effective. A cooperative attitude is the best approach. The priest needs to be on the same level as the people. A priest who communicates with his people on their level will find it a lot easier to reach them on Sunday as he preaches to them from the pulpit.

It’s many a yarn I heard in my time, in Ráth Bhoth, Gorthahork, Baile na Finne, Glenties, and Gweedore.

Tír Chonaill

I have always had a special love and admiration for my own county. Its name is Tír Chonaill, not Donegal. If you study the county’s history, its names include Tír Chonaill, Baolach, and Tír Aoidh. Each area has an abundance of history, areas such as Ráth Maoláin, Fánaid, Gweedore, Gleann Fhinne, Glencolmcille, Gleann Bheithe, and Glenties. For example, the persecution that took place in Gweedore during the time of the Penal Laws, and the suffering in the time of Fr. MacPháidín, the “patriot priest” about whom so much has been written. The story of Gweedore is an engaging one but I don’t have the space or time here to do it justice. Nevertheless, I would like to relate the story of Gleann Bheithe some time. It’s no wonder that Lord McIlhinney bequeathed this area and the castle to the country as a national park. On the other hand, isn’t it ours by right since God created it? Gweedore’s story of suffering should also be told. It’s not surprising to find a hotel in Gweedore named after Gleann Bheithe, one of the most beautiful glens in all of Tír Chonaill, with majestic mountains all around, and a beautiful lake glistening in its midst. If you go there you will think you are in Tír na nOg. For what did she suffer? So much suffering took place at the hands of the landlords and British colonization; maybe I’m stepping into muddy waters now when I mention this, but the truth is always bitter.

In recent times, there are those in the North who would deny their neighbours houses, playing fields, and jobs. They haven’t the power or the audacity to do what the landlords did one hundred and thirty years ago.

When tenants were fighting for their land, towns and land rights, many were evicted by Lord Mayo. Nevertheless, they returned with empty pockets, and on their return, they sold out their neighbours as Judas had done. Nothing is achieved with a struggle. That’s the story of Gleann Bheithe and its origins.

(TRANSLATED FROM THE IRISH LANGUAGE BY MARY KELLY, SEATTLE)

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