



*Twenty~
five
Years*

PASSIONIST VOCATION GUILD 1949-1974



Introduction

by Fr. Christopher, C.P.

The purpose of this Brochure is to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the Passionist Vocation Guild by putting on record the story of its beginnings and of its growth throughout the twenty-five years of its existence. That story will be told by those best qualified to do so,—by the Spiritual Directors who watched over and directed the Guild from its small beginnings to its present flourishing state. As Superior of the Juniorate, I gladly avail of the opportunity to convey to the Promoters and Members of the Guild our sincere appreciation of their generous and unflinching support throughout the years.

As we try to assess the debt of gratitude we owe them, there comes to mind these words of Holy Scripture: "A faithful friend is beyond price; there is no measuring his worth." Truly, God has provided us in the members of the Guild a host of "faithful friends", whose generosity cannot be measured or put into

words. Their contributions have made it possible for us to carry on our work of preparing young people to labour in the Lord's vineyard as priests and missionaries. At present, many of the young men who studied here at Tobar Mhuire are working in the mission field, at home and abroad, some of them in Africa and in South America; and in the work they are doing for the extension of God's kingdom, every member of the Guild can justly claim a part,—a part which God recognizes, and for which He will richly reward them. To our faithful friends in the Guild we offer this assurance, and hope they will find in it something far more substantial and gratifying than our feeble expressions of gratitude.

The story of the Vocation Guild, we are happy to say, has been one of success. For that we must thank God, the Giver of all good gifts: we thank Him for the many friends He has given us in the members of the Guild, and especially for our loyal band of Promoters, to whose devotion and unceasing efforts we owe so much; and to conclude this litany of thanksgiving, we thank Him for the Spiritual Directors whose zeal inspired and directed the work of the Guild over the years, and in particular for its present Director to whose lot it has fallen to keep the Guild alive and active in these troubled times, when many of its members have been scattered, and keeping in touch with them involves so much time and labour, and even considerable risk. In conclusion, may I assure all of them that their generous assistance is deeply appreciated by all of us in Tobar Mhuire, and that they are constantly remembered in our prayers and at the Altar.

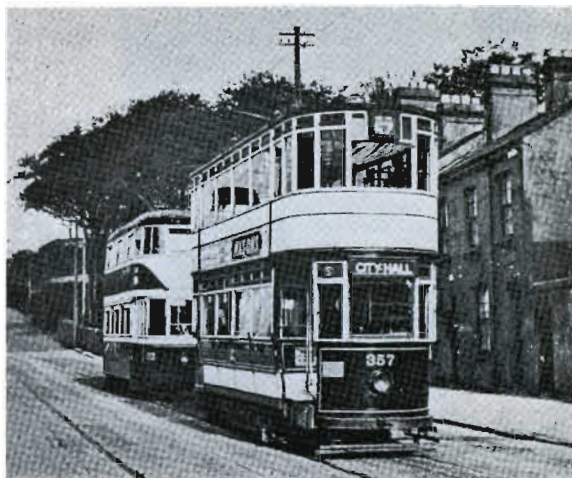
Fr. Christopher, C.P.

Those were the days!

By Fr. Gabriel Mary, C.P.

Twenty-five years ago tramcars ground their way past our Juniorate. Wheatfield House, towards Ligoniel, ration books were still in use, T.V. was virtually unknown. The war and its aftermath of austerity and utility was very much in the minds of the people. Blitzed buildings and even bomb craters could still be seen in Belfast. People still spoke of the terrible winter of 1947 when a record snowfall, severe frost and a shortage of coal recalled the worst hardships of the war.

It was against such a background that Fr. Alphonsus, Superior of the Juniorate, bravely "launched out into the deep" to provide funds for our young students to help them on their path to the priesthood. Only a man of faith and vision would have had the courage to think of such an enterprise at such a time. He had an able ambassador in the person of Fr. Sebastian Agnew, C.P. who spear-headed the attack (for it could be called little less) to raise funds on a regular weekly basis for the education and upkeep of our boys. I often wonder how Fr. Sebastian must have felt as he set out that first day to knock the first door to ask for the first subscription for the Passionist Vocation Guild, as the fund was now called. Even after eight years, I myself find it hard to ask for money—we all know how much easier it is to give than to beg. How much harder it must have been for him that first day and how generous our first friends were in Ardoyne. The few promoters he enlisted, the few coppers he collected, have grown and multiplied like the draught of fishes down the years.



This photograph of the old trams was taken near Wheatfield House, at the time the Guild was founded in 1949.

There are now 300 promoters and 3,000 members contributing to the Guild. Nearly 100 boys have been ordained and only God knows how many of them would never have reached their goal without the help of the Vocation Guild.

It must be remembered that Fr. Sebastian carried on this work in addition to all his other duties. He taught several classes a day, was Spiritual Director of the boys, conducted many Retreats and visited hundreds of schools throughout Ireland seeking boys to answer the call of Christ to become Passionists. In his lovely article in this brochure Fr. Alphonsus describes so vividly one of these school visits of Fr. Sebastian and the effect it had on a young boy's life and vocation. How true it is that on Ordination Day the thought hits one like a thunderbolt: someone somewhere has made a great sacrifice to enable this day to be mine. We Passionists owe a great deal to Fr. Alphonsus and Fr. Sebastian. May God bless them both and may He spare them for many more fruitful years in the ministry of His priesthood.

Vivid memories

I have vivid personal memories of Fr. Peter who succeeded Fr. Sebastian as Director of the Vocation Guild. He, also, has kindly contributed an article to this Silver Jubilee Brochure. Our Juniorate had been transferred to Tobar Mhuire, Crossgar, Co. Down in 1950 and I had been sent there in 1954 to teach Latin and Greek "for a month or two to help out." I did not realise that the "month" would turn out to be twenty years—but that is another story!

The move to Crossgar, wise as it was, spelt a danger to the very existence of the Guild. Personal contact with the collectors and members was now quite difficult. The journey to Belfast by bus was so different to the leisurely stroll down the road from Wheatfield House. Correspondence had often to take the place of a personal visit. Fr. Peter tried to answer all letters within a week if possible. As he was engaged on Missions and Retreats at the time, this was not an easy target to achieve. He also managed to keep up the visits and even extended the membership of the Guild in the



*Group of first Promoters and Members,
Crossgar Gardens, 1953.*



*"He needs
YOUR
hand, too"*

parishes of St. Peters and St. Pauls. We have many good friends there to this day. Another milestone was the establishment of the Guild in the parish of St. Mungos, Glasgow. The loyalty of these members in Scotland is really extraordinary. Despite the fact that the parish has been redeveloped—I think I am right in saying that not a single home was left standing—the collectors there are still amongst our staunch supporters. Many of these are now scattered miles from St. Mungos. I always look forward to visiting our good friends in Scotland. Fr. Peter continued with the famous Holy Hour Devotions for collectors which were so popular in Wheatfield House in Fr. Sebastian's time. It is a matter of regret that their very popularity eventually led to their abandonment as we could no longer cope with the numbers wishing to take part. I remember Fr. Peter's first Christmas calendar. It was a beautiful drawing, by Dan Braniff of Our Crucified Saviour extending His pierced hand to a young student. The inscription read "He needs your hand, too". The whole meaning and purpose of the Vocation Guild could be summed up in these five words. I have never heard it expressed better. "Your hand, too," is as necessary today as when that calendar was first printed nearly fifteen years ago.

The Keystones



Fr. Gabriel trying hard to spell it out!

Fr. Ninian took over the Vocation Guild in the early sixties. He grasped very quickly the importance of Fr. Peter's **meticulous book-keeping** and **regular visits** to promoters. These were, and are to this day, the keystones of the Guild. The first he strengthened by equipping a new office, tailor-made to the needs of the time and by obtaining the services of a prudent and efficient secretary in the person of Mrs. Knight who has served the Guild faithfully ever since. The second he facilitated by hiring a car on a yearly basis. This was so successful that it enabled Fr. Ninian to spread his net far and wide. He consolidated the Guild in Scotland, furthered its cause in Dublin, enlisted help in Banbridge and Laurencetown and introduced the Guild on the County Down side of Belfast with the able assistance of Mother Marius, C.P. The present list of promoters bears testimony to the hard work of Fr. Ninian. Effervescent, bubbling over with cheerful patter and practical charity—I think this would be a fair description of the inimitable Fr. Ninian. No one could have filled his shoes, least of all the present writer who was asked to do just that, in February 1966. Fr. Ninian had really overworked himself and was quite ill. Thanks to Mrs.

Knight and Fr. John Francis, the Superior at that time, the correspondence had not suffered but many visits were long overdue. In a sense this was actually easier for me than Fr. Ninian, as I knew the highways and byways of Belfast. As for the desk work, Fr. Ninian seemed to have bequeathed a system (described on another page) which ran like a well oiled machine.

I felt my first duty was to visit every promoter to consolidate his good work. One of our ways of saying thanks is to offer Mass every Saturday in honour of Our Lady for all those who help the Guild but a personal visit is also much appreciated. The age-old story of the ten lepers often comes to my mind. I would like to think that the Director of the Vocation Guild will always be with the one who returned and not with the nine who forgot to give thanks. This very article which I am writing could possibly give the impression that the success of the Guild is due to the work of the various Directors but this is far from the case. The true heroes of the Silver Jubilee are you yourselves: the promoters and members. Fr. Ninian quite rightly reminds us of this truth in his contribution to this brochure.

In 1967 I decided to resurrect the collection boxes which Fr. Sebastian had used in Wheatfield House. Some people do not feel equal to giving, or collecting, our regular weekly amount and to these a collection box in the home is an ideal way of helping us in training the boys. I suggested a new design to a commercial artist and he drew out a rather striking sketch in coloured paper. When it was finally printed in Dayglow colour it almost shouted at you! These boxes are doing well and I would like to say a sincere thank you to all my "Boxers" (I think that last line is worthy of Fr. Ninian!)

Another item which occupied my mind was to provide a suitable Christmas calendar for all the promoters. I have always felt that a picture of Our Lord or Our Lady should, in some way, be worthy of Them. None of us like to see a poor photograph of ourselves so why should we tolerate trashy Christian art. My favourite is, I think, "The Boy Jesus" by Florence Kroger—the Christmas calendar of 1967. I still have it hanging in my office.

These pleasant visits, plans for collection boxes, printing of calendars and Christmas cards were soon overshadowed by the terrible events of August 1969. The very people who had helped us most were the ones who suffered worst. Bombay Street and Conway Street were burned to the ground. Ardoyne was attacked by ravaging mobs. To those suffering so much, one-sided internment was the last straw. I set out with a heavy heart to visit all my collectors in these areas. Now, it was no longer a cheerful chat over a cup of tea. As I crunched my way through broken slates and glass the faces of the people told me all I needed to know. Terror, frustration and fatigue were written all over them.

Our school bus Gemma—who will soon be celebrating her own twenty-fifth birthday—went on three emergency runs to Donegal and one to Dublin and on one of these journeys covered the Belfast-Enniskillen leg of the run in under two hours. She arrived boiling a bit and with her silencer blowing out but she survived to tell the tale. There was a touch of the excursion atmosphere and the old Belfast humour raised its head again. An old lady kindly offered to buy the driver (myself) "a bottle of stout." At home, too, flashes of humour reappeared. Another elderly promoter struck the table with a thump, startling her husband, myself and a pussy cat purring

near the fire: "I was never a rebel before, Father," she shouted, "but by C I am one now"! They were all the elements of powerful drama: tragedy, humour, sorrow, joy. The children gradually filtered back to their haunts and could be seen swinging round the lamp posts once again. The hobbyhorse man trundled his way through the narrow streets but armoured cars and soldiers lurked near at hand. Time and time again I wished to have been gifted with the pen of Sean O'Casey or the brush of William Conor. Surely they alone could do justice to this new piece of tragic Irish history.



The Guild, the collections, how did they fare? I never mentioned them to the people unless they did. One promoter showed me a burned box containing some discoloured coins "that is all that is left of your collection, Father". She had lost everything when she was burned out. Still, the collections, like the humour and the strands of life itself, picked up again. However, a new threat appeared to harass our people already suffering so much. Private armies were formed who proffered to protect the district. It is possible—likely, even—that they had good intentions at the beginning but soon they degraded themselves to a Mafia-like regime who neither expected nor dispensed mercy. Woe betide anyone who did not, and does not, toe the line. Like an ancient Greek tragedy the new so-called liberators became more tyrannical than the oppressors they con-

trived to overthrow. "When does a defensive gunman become an offensive gunman" Jack Lynch once asked. How true his words are. "Corruptio optimi pessima" might be a fitting epitaph for these gangs who terrify our people, debase Patriotism and despise Christianity. Only recently I opened a page of the Belfast Telegraph and saw a list of 1,000 dead. Some of these helped me with the Vocation Guild. I will mention but two: Pat Crossan, shot dead at the controls of his bus and Patrick Benstead, who kept a collection box for me. He was tortured to death. May God look kindly on them all and grant them eternal rest.

There was a bright side to this sombre picture. The Guild found a niche in America with the kind help of Sergeant Ralph Lemieux of Cleveland, Ohio. Together with his fellow police officers he gave me a great welcome when I visited them in 1971. Please God I will see them again. In the same year a Covenant Scheme was founded which is doing surprisingly well. It works roughly like this: for every £20 one promises to give to the Guild, the Income Tax Authorities will give an extra £10. I would like to thank all those who have gone to the trouble to help us in this way. Another piece of good news was the timely arrival of Fr. Aidan Troy and Brother Martin Denny, later to be joined by Fr. Kenneth Brady, one of our own past pupils. They brought with them all the freshness and enthusiasm of youth (not that I'm an oul' fellow myself). With their help we have been running day Retreats for local schoolchildren. Over 1,000 have come here in the past year. The arrangement fits in well with our own plans as these children are using our buildings at the very time our boys are at school in Downpatrick.

In contrast to this youthful scene Fr. Bede, our "senior citizen", celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood just

last November. He made a rousing speech on that occasion. God bless him. As many of my Glasgow promoters will remember, he worked for several years in St. Mungos. The people there still talk of his kindness and his devotion to the sick. Other members of the Community are: Fr. Christopher, the Superior, who has helped me in so many ways especially during some difficult times, Fr. Alphonsus, Fr. Benignus and Fr. Bernard. By a happy coincidence, these were all members of our staff in Wheatfield House.

We look forward now—dare we say it—to the next twenty-five years. Whatever changes there may be in our way of life, or in the structure of the Church herself, one thing is certain: Christ will still issue His Divine challenge "Come, follow me" and His call will not go unanswered. Boys will be found with generous hearts to make the sacrifice but they will still need "your hand too". You also will have your reward. We recall the words of Pope Pius XII "If the faithful help even one candidate for the priesthood, they will fully share in all the future Masses and in all the fruits of sanctity and apostolic works that will be His".

Fr. Gabriel Mary, C.P.,
31st May, 1974.



Fr. Kenneth and Fr. Aidan having a bit o' crack!

"One decent wee soul"

By Fr. Sebastian, C.P.

My dear Promoters and Associates,

"Ach! poor wee Father Gabriel Mary, God love him, one decent wee soul if ever there was one. Give him a cup of tea and a biscuit beside the fire and you'd think you'd given him a big three inch steak, he's so simple and full of thanks. He just drops in but he's at home in two shakes of a goat's tail and puts you at your ease with his chat and fun. And him a doctor's son from the Antrim Road and awful well up in Greek and Latin and all! Ah now, it's a pity there aren't a few more hundred like him and there'd have been no need for Vatican II with all its new stuff and big words that sound like a prescription or a disease. You don't talk to someone now—you dialogue. You don't meet a person any more—you engage in an encounter. And lots of other queer notions that we can't understand at all. God knows I love to see him coming in the door, for he's one really honest-to-God, innocent, simple wee Passionist of the old type with no airs and graces".

I've heard sentiments like the foregoing imaginary sentences pronounced in the Belfast dialect around Ardoyne and the Falls; in the Tyrone and Derry accents; in the Dublin brogue and even in the Scottish idiom and "twirl". They are all a lot of nonsense and rubbish!

I'll agree that he may appear simple and combs his hair every two months whether necessary or not. It can't be contradicted that if you called at Tobar Mhuire to "encounter" him for a brief "dialogue", he is more likely to be found lying under a bus examining its intestines, clad in overalls rather than garbed in a Passionists habit and sandals. Or it may

be the innards of a tractor he'll be operating on, or else perched on some huge combine-harvester, regretting that he didn't invent the whole complicated yoke himself.

But this didn't start with his arrival in Crossgar almost twenty years ago, nor with his association with Vocation Guild members, nor with local farmers. It's an old ailment dating back to early youth. Remember, I also came from the Antrim Road and although I know very little Latin, less Greek and about enough English to pass myself in ordinary company, I have a good memory for "old forgotten far off things and battles long ago" so I can well recall Hugo O'Prey—as Father Gabriel Mary then was known—pushing a hand cart of scrap motor-parts down the Cavehill Road to the utter horror of his lady-like mother.

As regards the lament over the lack of a few hundred more wee priests like him, I'm certain if there were, we would have had Vatican VI on top of us a couple of years ago!

About his simplicity, which is the greatest misunderstanding of all, he was sufficiently "simple" to know that I had in my possession, safe among my souvenirs, several photographs of early promoters, of a sermon being preached to a group from Belfast in the old tiny



Fr. Sebastian, co-founder of the Vocation Guild.

chapel at Tobar Mhuire in 1952, as well as snaps of the first class of students to benefit from the proceeds of the Vocation Guild, and nostalgic pictures of the "Forty Hours Adoration" to which several bus loads came one after another because the chapel held less than a third of our most welcome visitors. So, in order to cadge the photographs, Father Gabriel Mary puffed me up with pride about being the Director of the Guild for the delicate first eight years of its infancy. I fell for his flattery and eventually got



In the Monastery garden! (Tobar Mhuire)

paper and pen together to fulfil my promise before that "wee innocent simple priest" tackled me for the third time. I hadn't a clue how to begin, being neither a journalist nor a writer, but I resolved that the best method of defence for daring to write at all was to attack the gentleman who persuaded me to say "yes, of course", in a moment of weakness.

In spite of all I've written about your present good and zealous Director, I haven't the slightest fear of a Libel Action, because I know enough about him to be assured that the present funds of the Vocation Guild, plus those likely to come in the next ten years, wouldn't even cover the costs against him in a High Court case!

When I first arrived in Wheatfield House in 1947 as a sick student in Second

Minor Orders, I realised that the Juniorate was in heavy debt and that my addition to the Community was anything but an asset. We had no salaries for teaching, no Government grants, no public church where weekly collections would have been a help. In fact, we simply had no regular nor steady income to support our boys or Religious who couldn't live on fresh air and the lovely view of Antrim and Down Hills embracing Belfast Lough. The Lord had granted us a wonderful increase in the number of vocations, but to provide extra accommodation, class-rooms, food, heat, light, sheets, blankets etc. etc. was a serious financial worry to successive Superiors. It cost, in those days, about £100 per year to keep one boy and the official fee was only £40, which many were unable to pay in full. Where on earth could we find some £4,000 a year to keep Wheatfield open?

Earnest, enthusiastic priests, and Brother Bernard, God rest his good soul, had organised concerts, dances, whist drives and raffles, but the income from these ventures was infrequent and minimal, as well as being out of proportion to the amount of energy and organisation involved. For example, I remember one function in St. Mary's Hall, which was



The famous 'Forty Hours', 1954

well advertised, well arranged and well produced, even to the extent of engaging Cross Channel artists, yet, when fees were paid, the printer's bill settled and the hire of the hall accounted for, we had somewhere around £50 profit—enough to keep one boy for half an academic year.

We decided to discontinue these means of fund raising but were unable to think of a suitable substitute to provide a more stable source of supplying the needs of those whom God had called to serve His Pilgrim People as Missioners at home or in Africa.

Eventually, after lots of chats and many prayers for direction on ways and means of meeting our debts and maintaining our Juniorate, Father Alphonsus, who was then Superior, brought forward the general idea of the Vocation Guild and left the working out of minor details to me. We agreed that it would be a completely spiritual appeal. We would request our friends for a small weekly alms—even three pence. We would issue collection cards to those we named Promoters and depend on them to enlist other subscribers whom we called "Associates" and, instead of material prizes or a nights entertainment, we promised to offer Holy Mass every Saturday morning in honour of the Immaculate Virgin of Fatima for the spiritual and temporal intentions of all who aided us. Deceased persons could be enrolled and active members who died, would still share in the weekly Masses. The Mass Register begun in Wheatfield and now in Crossgar shows that this promise has been faithfully fulfilled for a quarter of a century now, and almost every day, typed requests appear on the Community notice board with the petitions of some poor Promoter or Associate, who is ill or facing some trial or crisis, appealing to the Brethren and the boys for a remembrance in their Masses, Rosaries and

other prayers.

To get the Vocation Guild off the ground and on to its feeble feet was a fairly hard job. I trudged around Chief Street, Butler Street, Bombay Street, Herbert Street and most of Ardoyne parish. It would be impossible to mention even a fraction of the early Promoters, because so many were most anxious to help, once the scheme was explained to them, but I clearly recall that the very first good lady I timidly approached, who is now in Heaven, I'm sure, listened to my tale of woe and when I anxiously asked if I might dare burden her with a collection book, her reply was "Give me a dozen and I won't let you nor Wheatfield down". Nor did she until her unexpected death some ten years later.

Encouraged by the results of my efforts around Ardoyne, I tried other parts of Belfast and then set my sights on further horizons. I begged around Cookstown, Omagh, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Drogheda, Navan, Dublin etc., yet, even with the assistance of the boys and the Brethren, the total income for the first year was less than £200. Still, the seed was sown and had taken root and under Mary's patronage it continued to flourish for eight years, increasing annually, until I was changed to Scotland in 1956.



The Monastery chapel, Tobar Mhuire.



A boy's first view of Tobar Mhuire.

My place was filled by Father Peter, whose more methodical and more competent management had a stabilizing influence on the Guild, while his gracious approach towards the people, combined with his regular visitation of Promoters, his meticulous care in fulfilling requests for prayers or blessings and his conscientious attention in giving prudent guidance to Members with worries and problems, made the Guild more deep-rooted and more flourishing in its fruits. To Father Peter is due our sincere gratitude for all his expenditure of time and talents for the steady growth of the Passionist Vocation Guild. Doubtlessly he is still remembered with affection by the many good people he tirelessly helped and is not forgotten in their prayers.

Long ago a holy prophet once proclaimed that "God's ways are not our ways; nor His thoughts, our thoughts" This quotation must have entered many minds when the effervescent, exuberant and effusive little Scotsman, Father Ninian, was appointed Director of the Guild.

There are some who would claim, and firmly hold, that he started all the trouble in the North, but I wouldn't go that far. He started only some of it! Like a meteor, he flashed in to the lives of many people and had them enlisted as Members before they even knew whether he was the rent man or the fellow for the

instalment of the T.V. or the new china cabinet! Still it was this holy monk whom The Lord selected (even prior to his contact with begging Arabs or commercial Jews) to expand the Guild further afield and increase its prosperity where it was already established.

All of you, who had the pleasure of knowing him, will admit that he is neither the shyest nor the most silent of the sons of God, but his successes bear witness to the worth of the spoken word and testify to the advantages of plenty of personal contact with people. To Father Ninian also, great praise is due for his energetic efforts in promoting this charitable cause. God bless him and reward him. We can only say "thanks very much for all you did".

Since I've been out of touch with the Vocation Guild for almost seventeen years, I'll leave the account of recent events and expansions to other Fathers more conversant with current affairs and put away the pen and paper till the Golden Jubilee when I may have a type-writer instead. I feel confident that this much writing is sufficient penance to pay the price of my pride in being conscripted into contributing to the contents through the guile of Father Gabriel Mary. For so many words I hope he will be decent enough to pay for the photographs and give me my due reward—probably a stud for my collar or a new pair of laces for my old shoes!

To conclude, I wish all the Promoters and Associates many graces and blessings in this life, and as we pray each day for our benefactors after our Community Rosary;—"Grant eternal life, O Lord, to all who are good to us for Your Name's sake." And I also wish Father Gabriel Mary continued success in his great work, coupled with the unfailing ability to smile a pound out of your pocket or your purse and leave you feeling that you're better off without it!

On behalf of the entire Passionist Province of St. Patrick and in my own name too, I wish to express our deepest appreciation and sincerest gratitude to

you all and I trust that Our Crucified Saviour and His Immaculate Mother will attend to our petitions for you, so that all your intentions will be graciously granted and every desire be completely fulfilled.

May your constant fidelity and loyal support continue in the future with the same devotedness as during the twenty-five years that have fled.

Very sincerely and gratefully yours
in Christ,

Sebastian Agnew, C.P.,
St. Paul's Retreat,
Mount Argus,
Dublin. 6.

*Below: A last look at the old Wheatfield House.
The 'baby' is Fr. Ignatius, C.P., now Rector of the Graan, Enniskillen.*



Shortage of priests . . .

By Fr. Peter, C.P.

Dear Promoters and Members of the Vocation Guild,
May I, as one of your former Directors, offer you my heartfelt congratulations on having reached your Silver Jubilee.

That you have played an all important part in aiding young men to become Passionist Priests and Missionaries has been, in my experience, a note-worthy fact. Through your prayers and your contributions, so gladly and willingly made, there are now priests and religious working on the home and foreign mission who, otherwise, might never have attained to their goal.

It should be obvious to all that the Church could not continue unless men responded to the call of Christ and embraced the priesthood. What is no less obvious is that there is a great shortage of priests throughout the world. The Church has, perhaps never been in greater need of priests than at the present time. "The harvest is great but the labourers are few" and if the Church which Christ established is to prove a fruitful instrument in overcoming the materialistic and neo-pagan tendencies of our time, it is essential that vocations increase in number and that we have worthy priests to carry on successfully the work of the Master Himself.

We are all members of Christ's Church—the laity, no less than priests and bishops. We are the "People of God", the "Church Militant" and we all have an obligation to foster vocations; to provide the Church with those instruments it so direly needs for its salvific work.



Fr. Peter, at present in the Graan, Ennis-killen, who is so well remembered by all his many friends in the Guild.

That work is now momentous. Even though Christ suffered and died almost 2000 years ago and established a Church that was to teach all nations, today, less than one fifth of the human race is within the true fold of Jesus Christ. Conversion has been slow. That this condition may be remedied we should try to realise that, in the words of Pope Pius XII, "To be a Christian is to be a Missionary" and that we have each our own role to play in the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

As members of the Passionist Vocation Guild, through your prayers, your generosity and the priests and missionaries that you have assisted towards the Altar of God, you have made an effective contribution to the preaching of the Gospel.

I am confident that your good work will continue, that your efforts will be rewarded one hundred fold and that you will enjoy God's blessing.

I am,
Yours sincerely,
Father Peter. C.P.

"I remember your kindness"

By Fr. Ninian, C.P.

My Dear Vocation Guilders,

Silver Congratulations. Edge them with gold. Just imagine you being old enough to celebrate your 25th. When Fr. Gabriel asked me for this contribution, I was quite surprised to think that the Vocation Guild was 25 years old. I was even more surprised to think it's almost 10 years since I was the Director. I am happy to say that I have not forgotten the Guild or yourselves, especially those of you—and I am sure everyone will understand why—who live and suffer in "The North".

Fr. Gabriel's invitation was "tell them about the time you were in charge of the Guild". For a start, I can't even remember exactly when that was. I'm guessing that it was from about 1963 to 1965. What do I remember best? Your kindness! No doubt about that and I'll tell you why in a moment.

Before I took over the Guild, I'd been involved in all sorts of Fund Raising for Tobar Mhuire with Fr. Alphonus. These were mainly Draws—on a vast scale—and anything else that might entice people to part with their money. There was always a prize, most often a big money prize. These ventures were very highly successful—there was only one snag! To run a Draw . . . well . . . how can I say it delicately? The law lays down lots of rules and regulations and "The Authorities" interpret them very strictly. The last one we ran "They" ended up showing even more interest in it than we had—and that is saying something! Their interest put us off just a little. We didn't



exactly welcome that kind of "Competition"!

It was at that time Fr. Christopher asked me to take over the Guild. Fr. Peter had been transferred from Crossgar to Enniskillen some months previously and in the meantime there had been no Priest appointed to succeed him on the Vocation Guild. For me this was the beginning of a revelation. The Guild had been running smoothly and almost under my nose and I had hardly noticed it. I was too busy with other things. Now I discovered there was a considerable number of people who, without any thought of big money prizes, were quietly, regularly making contributions to Tobar Mhuire: helping us — doing what we couldn't with our work — of training boys for the Priesthood. Here was a thought: People wanted to help us and they were not interested in winning prizes. If there was some, could there be more? I set out to discover.

I can lay claim to "One First"—I was the Guild's first "motorised" Director. Fr. Peter and Fr. Sebastian before him, had done the job the hard way, the slow blistering way—by "bus and

shanks". Being soft—especially about the soles—and being impatient to discover how many potential Vocation Guilders were just waiting to be asked, I rented a car and began to scour and scourge the countryside.

Both the reception and response were amazing. But, I'll let you in on a secret: In those early days I was decidedly nervous about the whole business. I mean, how do you do a thing like that? Knock on a door, stick your foot in like a salesman and sell your wares? What did I have to sell? Just ask for a hearing? Suggest a paying partnership in Tobar Mhuire? I did all of them and that brings me right back to what I said about my big Guild memory—your kindness. You made it possible for me to do all these things by your welcome. No-one ever closed the door on my foot; no-one ever threw me out; no-one refused to listen. I can recall only one not-too-warm welcome, but a generous apology and full, satisfactory explanation soon followed. I'd called at a bad time. Needless to say, I knocked on ten times as many doors as we got Promoters but even those many who could not join were most kind to me. The nervousness soon wore off: you banished it.

Your response was wonderful and the community in Tobar Mhuire soon knew how many "Silver" co-workers were paying and praying for them and their students.

That word prompts another grateful thought. Living in Mount Argus. I am reminded of you daily: six of the students here at present are Crossgar "boys"—your "boys". One of them was ordained last Christmas. He's now preparing to go to our Mission in Botswana later this year. Do you need any further proof that your work "pays".

Fr. Gabriel may exclude this next paragraph. I'll take the risk. Two compliments must be made—the first is



Saving goals and saving souls!

to Mrs. Knight. From the time I took over the Guild, she "took over" the office—keeping books, accounts, correspondence and a dozen other things in good order. She deserves great praise and credit for all her hard labour. She's been of enormous service to the Vocation Guild—and she is still providing it. The next compliment . . . well, yes . . . to your own Fr. Gabriel. I'll be honest with you and I've never said this to him before! When he got the job I was sure he wouldn't stick it for six months . . . well, I ask you, does he even look the organised type? But, there he is almost ten years after, still there and still thriving, doing the job in circumstances which would have daunted—and dented—me, long before now. To him, on my own and your behalf, sincerest congratulations.

But the very best of all these sparkling Silver Congratulations are for you. What you've done in 25 years (I know that some of you are founder members) or 20, 15, or 10 or whatever it may be, can be counted up in terms of cash, but that's not the real value of your sacrifice for, and support of, Tobar Mhuire. Only God can count that. May God reward you in all the ways that my words can't. However, to put those words in

their strongest possible form; to join with the community in Tobar Mhuire in thanking you (as a once "insider" I know just how much they appreciate you). I'll offer Holy Mass for you and all your intentions on the occasion of this Publication.

May Our Lady protect and mother you. May your Silver Service turn into Gold. And why not, it'll soon be here—in 1999!

I am,
Yours sincerely and
gratefully in Christ,
Father Ninian, C.P.

Office work of The Vocation Guild



By
Fr. Gabriel
Mary, C.P.

Each week the promoter collects a voluntary subscription from the members and it is entered in the promoter's card. At the end of three months this card, together with the money, is forwarded to the Vocation Guild office where it is receipted and returned to the promoter. We try to acknowledge every subscription with a personal letter of thanks with maybe a snippet or two about the boys or even the weather. The amount is entered in a day book and also in a file under the promoter's name. Quite often promoters are kind enough to enclose Mass offerings with their collection money. Naturally, these have to be carefully separated and entered in an entirely different file in Fr. Superior's office. Prayers are often asked for special intentions. These are written out on a small white card and placed in the priest's common room to ensure that the whole Community remember these intentions in their prayers and Masses.

Experience has shown how much the members appreciate the annual Christmas card, so, every October, a blank list is sent to all collectors with the request to fill in the members' names and addresses and to return it before the

end of that month. It is extraordinary the number of changes of addresses that we record each year, especially in these troubled times. Occasionally, promoters complain that their members have been overlooked in the Christmas cards. Often the very promoters who complain are the ones who have not sent in an up-to-date list or who have given inadequate addresses. Therefore, it can be seen how necessary it is to return an accurate list each year.

The success of the Guild is due, among other things, to an efficient postal service and, in this regard, we would like to express our gratitude to Mrs. Catherine Williams and Miss Margaret Ringland of Crossgar Post Office.

There is also quite a lot of book-keeping associated with the Covenant Scheme and there is a separate file too for contributions from the boxes. My own hand-writing is not of the best. Mrs. Knight, the secretary, should get a medal for ploughing through some of my notes. It is well she can type better than I can write!

"Twenty-five years later . . ."

By Fr. Alphonsus, C.P.

"O Jesus, be a token of my gratitude—Bless those who have led me to Your Altar" (Elyard)

The date was June the 11th, the day was Saturday, the place—the Sacristy of Dublin's Pro-Cathedral. Twenty students were preparing for the slow procession to the Sanctuary where each would receive the Sub-Diaconate.

Amongst those twenty students there was one, and only God will ever know the gratitude that filled his heart. Words could not even remotely resemble his expression of 'thanks to God Who had brought him to this moment' and after God, his gratitude to the Vocation Guild, its Promoters, its members, its Director—may God reward them both here and hereafter—without them, he would not be standing with his companions—only two steps removed from the Goal of his life—The Priesthood.

This student,—the second child in a large family, born and reared in a country home—a home that was both small and poor—from his earliest years had one wish, one prayer, one goal—The Priesthood. It could only be a dream . . . as he tries to forget those around him, closing his mind to all distractions and offer God a sincere thanks—the past ten years, with the speed and brightness of lightning, seems to pass before his eyes.

He can remember as if it were yesterday, a young Passionist calling at the school—it was the first time he had ever seen the Passionist Habit. The Passionist had a chat with The Master, and all the children were given a break—except the boys in the two senior classes. He gave us a short but very

homely talk. He told us his name was Sebastian, in second year Theology, had been sent to the Juniorate "to rest and recuperate after a very serious illness". Although his talk was over in half an hour—he had taken us from that classroom to the morning of Ordination. How we would have loved if he had kept on talking. One moment the room rocked with laughter, the next, we were listening as in a trance . . . "God Bless you, boys, if any would care to know more about the life and work of a Passionist, I'll have a short time with him later, but remember, I have to walk to Morgan's Cross for the 4.15 bus."

Yes, he had an earnest talk with Father Sebastian . . . there was nothing in this life he would love more than to give himself to Christ, body, soul, intellect and will . . . working for those for whom The Son of God gave His Life . . . but how? In his home, to exist demands a really great effort . . . "Suppose we discuss that later . . . cross the bridge when we come to it . . . but remember the Priesthood — God's Greatest Gift to man, after the Gift of Himself, surely demands a sacrifice both from yourself and your home".



Fr. Alphonsus who first thought of it all!

How vividly he can remember leaving home, his first weeks in the Wheatfield House Juniorate—had he made a terrible mistake? In those first weeks his days were heavy with home-sickness, his nights made sleepless by this uncertain future. What assurance had he, that God had chosen him and blessed him with a Religious Vocation? In this completely new world the boys were friendly, helpful, understanding — they assured him that time would give the answer—but even time seemed to have slowed down—‘every day was like a year, a year whose days are long’. Of one thing he was certain—The Good God “had asked him to trade with His One Talent”—Intellectual pride would never enter his life!



*“A life of work and prayer—
his goal The Priesthood”*

In the silent Oratory, before The Divine Master to Whom he longed to give his life, the sincere prayer of a pleading heart was offered time and time again. How that prayer was intensified, when the future seemed so dark. “Dear Jesus, all I ask is the honour to share in Your Work, the privilege of living Your Life . . . give

me the courage, the Grace, the strength, the talents to persevere’. At times he seemed to almost hear the slow measured monologue of the Superior, assuring him that he was not suited to Our Life. Occasionally there was a small measure of success—a Real Gift from The Hand of God, but for weeks, months, years—that day to day grind continued.

A life of work and prayer—his goal The Priesthood, he won’t count the cost, the reward makes any Cross or suffering little more than a pin-prick . . . with a jolt he is brought back to reality . . . the M.C. has given the sign for the procession to start.

During this ceremony of Sub-Diaconate, Students were told ‘**take one step forward**’, the student of whom we are writing, takes that step, with a prayer and a promise, that, even at the cost of life, that step will never be retraced. Some months later he is made a Deacon . . . and within five months . . . the greatest Day he will ever know on this earth—from the hands of a Bishop he receives the Sacrament of Orders. The lad from the country school has reached the goal of his life. Work, prayer, self-denial, a measure of suffering and the guiding hand of his Spiritual Director have prepared him — mind, heart and soul to receive a Sacrament, transforming him into a Second Christ. A Gift God has not given to His Angels. This student is no longer a carefree young man helping in the home or on the farm during his holidays—he is a “Second Christ and like Christ he **must live and work**”.

Kneeling down to join in the Family Rosary and in preparation for the First Holy Mass he will ever offer, he slowly reads through those words of Lacordaire—‘This is Christ speaking to him’. ‘You must live in the world but never know its pleasures, you will be a member of each family yet belonging to

none, you will share all sufferings, know all secrets, heal all wounds—you will go from man to God and offer Him their prayers, you will return from God to man, bringing pardon and peace—your heart must burn with Charity, like bronze in your chastity . . . from now until We Meet in Judgment you must teach, pardon and console'. You are taking My Place on earth—this **must** be your life'. For the first time in his life as a Priest, he asks with all the fervour of his heart—O Jesus, be a token of my gratitude; bless and reward those who have led me to Your Altar—it's a long list—his Parents, his family, the Passionist Congregation; that Passionist, who, in the classroom of his little school—gave him his first ray of hope, and the Vocation Guild, its Promoters, its members and its Director—without them, he would not be preparing for His First Holy Mass. This list will grow as it becomes part of his daily life.

None of us will ever forget our Ordination Holidays—the first in seven years. Somehow, the little home looks smaller, that Welcome Home of Mother, Father, Family, the classmates of our school days—now young men, just a little bit ill-at-ease—The Priesthood has—in their minds—made you a man apart. One can notice a few added furrows in the Mother's brow. To the young Priest of whom we have been writing, more than a few surprises await him, a sister has entered the Nazareth Order in Hammersmith, two younger brothers have joined in a modest business venture, the twins have started on that long journey which he has made, while the younger members of the family have given little thought to the future.

His first Holy Mass is over, the old and the young have knelt for his blessing and kissed his anointed hands. Saying His Office as he walks along the country

road . . . he stops to look back at the little school where his future life all began . . . he will call there to-morrow . . . then he has a long hard look at the little home where his family were born and reared . . . he looks around the fields, and on that beautiful June morning, the question—dormant until this moment, now strikes like a hammer-blow . . . how did his Parents pay the many extras . . . Yes, his fees were paid by the Vocation Guild, and that must never be forgotten every day of his life. Standing there, with the beauty of God's Countryside around him—a picture of the past ten years unfolds 'what sacrifices that little home must have witnessed, that he might have the God-Given Power to offer Holy Mass this morning, where twenty-five years ago he received the Sacrament of Baptism. Clearly and unmistakably his voice of conscience reminds him of that first glaring failure . . . failure in gratitude. Has he at any time said a word of thanks to the Father



'The old and the young have knelt for his blessing . . .'
(Fr. Sebastian gives his first blessing to his parents.)

Sebastian who gave him his first words of encouragement, was with him through the Juniorate and Student days . . . but was absent during the Great Ceremony of his Ordination; had a note been sent to the Director of the Vocation Guild, with a request that his sincere thanks be conveyed to the Promoters and the Members, with a promise to remember them in his daily prayers and Holy Masses . . . was this ingratitude or just a mistake? Ah! sure only one returned to say "thanks" to Christ when He had cleansed ten of Leprosy. Christ will not condemn me for the mistake, He won't even condemn me for the act of selfish ingratitude, if I turn to Him in sorrow, and learn the lesson which my failure will teach.

In his article for this brochure, Father Sebastian mentions that I brought forward the idea of a Vocation Guild, and to the man, sent to the Juniorate 'to rest and recuperate' was given the task of working-out the ideas. For eight years, often without a rest or a holiday, Father Sebastian continued in this hard, uphill work, through Summer and Winter, working on a shoe-string budget, the building-up of the Vocation Guild continued. How many of my own age group, have ever given a thought, or said a word of gratitude to the Greatest Vocation Director of our time? After years of dedicated, self-sacrificing work for the Passionist Priesthood and for souls for whom Christ gave His Life, Father Sebastian is changed and his place as Vocation Guild Director is taken by Father Peter.

Father Cronan—God have Mercy on His Great Soul — was Provincial about the time we were starting the Vocation Guild. To many, he is little more than a name, but to those of us who worked with him on missions, or shared his life in the first months of a New Foundation—his memory will live

for a long time. He held every Office in the Province, he carried more than his share of The Cross, but remained the same unruffled, placid Father Cronan. He had a wonderful mannerism when he wished to get around a request. Once when asked for some financial aid for the Juniorate, he hummed a little ditty, had a brief soliloquy—no reference to the request. Trying to bring his mind back to Juniorate revenue, I mentioned how Our Master of Novices had said—if we pray and continued in prayer . . . the money would come in through the Church windows! "Tell that to the Bank Manager because from your Bank Account, I would say his invitation to call is on its way!!" God give you Eternal Rest, Father Cronan. In over forty years I have never known a more Christ-like Priest.

After your Parents, family and The Congregation, your greatest friends are the members of the Vocation Guild, each one of them helped you to God's Altar . . . now it's **your** turn, you must give each one a place in your daily prayers and Holy Masses, that is the only return they expect, the only reward they request. (To thank them in any other way would be like a child trying to say



Fr. Bernard and Bro. Martin with some of the senior class of '73.

“thanks” to its Mother.) Their Director—Father Gabriel Mary—you **all** know, but most of the Vocation Guild Members you will meet for the first time in Heaven—do give a special remembrance to those members who, every Friday, put aside their donation, knowing that the Promoter will call before Sunday. They have been Christ’s Helpers for a quarter of a century . . . helping The One Who has said that He will remember and reward the one who would give a drink of water. Surely their reward will be exceedingly great.

Christ loves a cheerful giver—dare one add—He loves a generous giver—Can anyone doubt the cheerfulness and generosity of those who have been members of the Vocation Guild for twenty-five years.

“O Jesus, bless and reward them, their gift is far beyond any material return”

Yes, **He** will reward them—what do they expect and deserve from each one

of us, just one thing—that in work and life I am **really a Second Christ**, that having sanctified my own life, I bring Christ’s Sanctity, His Sacred Passion, His Resurrection into the lives of others. What more can one say—as you pray for those who led you towards God’s Altar, would you give a memento for the one who has written these few lines. I won’t blame you if you say — ‘did Father Alphonsus live through the past thirty-five years as the Second Christ’—no one is happy about their past, I have had failures, more than I would care to remember—it’s for this reason that I request a share in your prayers and Holy Masses. May God Bless and keep you always, and may Mary—The Mother of The First Priest—have a special care for you, Her Chosen Son.

Fr. Alphonsus, C.P.,
St. Patrick’s Juniorate,
Tobar Mhuire,
Crossgar,
Downpatrick.

