



MEMORIES OF CASTLECORE

Sister Mary Kevin Fleming

21st April, 1991

Feast of Our Lady of the Snows.

August 5th 1987.

Forty years later, our Lord still says, ‘Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send.....’

‘I will stand on my watchtower
And take up my post on my battlements,
Watching to see what he will say to me,
What answer he will make to my complaints.

Then Yahweh answered and said,
‘Write the vision down,
Inscribe it on tablets
To be easily read,
Since this vision is for its own time only:
Eager for its own fulfilment, it does not deceive;
If it comes slowly, wait,
For it will come without fail.

See how he flags, he whose soul is not at rights,
But the upright man will live by his faithfulness.’

‘The eye of the movement was Our Lady’

Frank Duff: The Legion of Mary.

Stage 1.

I’ve been asked to write my memories of Castlecor. This, therefore, is not a history in the strict sense - yet I intend to write the truth, as I experienced it. I had often thought that if I were asked to write this story, I’d have no choice as to how I should begin it.

BORN OF A WOMAN

For me, that says it: God sent His son, born of a Woman. God in His goodness sent us Ladies of Mary/Daughters of Mary and Joseph to Ireland to an enterprise which was truly born of the intercession of Our Lady. That is how I saw it; tonight- forty years later, I see it in the same light. That was my immediate, my personal experience. I have no choice but to say it. I feel that there are other hands guiding my pen. They write with me – they are with God. I feel sure I echo their thoughts.

Foundation Day was August the 5th 1947.

We literally moved in on that day, beds, cabbages, candles, bread –the bare essentials for a day or two given to us by the Longford Mercy nuns. Permission to buy the house had been given by Dr McNamara, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, in 1946..- a year before we moved in.

PRE-HISTORY OF IRISH FOUNDATION

The current edition of Koinonia tells us that “there is never an absolute beginning ... since we are always responding to someone or something ... and ultimately to God.” This surely applies to the story of Castlecor. While the community “began” on August 5th 1947, in Rosary Convent, it is good to look back a few decades.

In the early part of this century, it seemed that Irish girls went “abroad” to be “finished” – to complete their education. And so in my travels, I’m over 50 years, I have met a few who did just that; some had become religious sisters, having rounded off their education with the Dames de Marie in Belgium; other went to England for example to Croydon: thus it was that Irish girls from Croydon entered with us. So there was an Irish connection. Now we come to the Scarborough story.

Scarborough, as elsewhere, had a boarding school. Many of these girls were non-Catholics. Catholics were few and poor. The then superior, Adeline, wanted to have a Catholic atmosphere in the boarding school and so she looked to Ireland. How she got permission to achieve her aim, you may wonder.

In Brussels – Uccle- there were two Irish “ladies”; one was a writer, a Miss Leahy. The other lady was Miss Russell. I knew both. They “lived” in Uccle, until the end of their lives. Now Miss Russell was a very close friend of the Rev. Mother General at that time – Lutgarde. And so it happened, that when Adeline asked Lutgarde for permission to go to Ireland, the way was somewhat paved for her by the influence of Miss Russell.

Adeline’s primary purpose, as already said, in bringing girls from Ireland to the Scarborough boarding school was to help create a Catholic atmosphere in it. Nevertheless, she also hoped to get postulants from among these girls. That was precisely what happened. So it came to pass that the Novitiate in Scarborough opened in 1922 approximately (according to Agatha and Aidan). Sr Adeline came to Ireland, twice, once with Sr Mary Loyola McCarthy and once with Sr Aloysius Devane – both Kerry women.

Their headquarters was the Mercy Convent, Killarney, because of Sr Peter, Mary Loyola’s sister. They recruited and some girls entered directly in Scarborough, others went to the boarding school and many of those entered later on. This continued – Irish girls coming to Scarborough until 1932/33 approximately. Then the Scarborough Novitiate closed. I was among the last in 1932. About 1934 the English Novitiate opened down South in Forest Hill – St Monica’s, a house next door to the school, St Winefride’s and the Convent. Mother Anastasia Hickey was the first Novice Mistress and some of the Postulants (Srs M William, M Anastasia, Josephine Leyne, Mary Mulcahy, Mary Cotter etc) were Scarbought girls. Thus far, the Irish connection. Irish girls continued to come to Scarborough and duly enter in

Forest Hill – Sr Duchesne, Anna O’Mahony etc. All this led up to a time when England could no longer send sisters to California. California realized that an American Novitiate was needed – and so it happened – a story on its own. I was there.

Now, California comes into the story. The schools in California needed more and more nuns so eventually the nuns there looked to Ireland, but only after Anastazia’s coming to California as novice mistress. She had been in Ireland and she knew that vocations were plentiful there at that time. Also the California nuns learned that it was possible to get a house in Ireland- subject to a Bishop’s permission. And here we came to the immediate and providential “cause” of the finding and the opening of Castlecor. So to recap, from Sr Adeline’s coming to Ireland (early 20s): the opening of Scarborough Novitiate; nuns being sent to California, Sr Anastasia arriving in California in 1943 approximately with her enthusiasm for Irish recruitment – eventually Castlecor happened in 1946.

Stage 2.

August 5th 1947. Feast of Our Lady of the Snows. On the afternoon of this day Sr M Francis and I left the Mercy Convent in Longford; called into the Mercy Convent in Ballymahon and went on to Castlecor: it was FOUNDATION DAY. It was a misty day. The car was so packed with our immediate necessities that I could hardly see where we were going. We were somewhat dazed.

Sr M Francis and I had spent the month of July 1947 in the Mercy Convent in Longford, having left Westwood (USA) for good on June 23rd. From there we recruited by letter, mostly: Sr M Francis did business with Dr McNamee; we went to Dublin to shop always returning to the Mercy Convent in Longford as our base. That was July 1947. From August 5th on Castlecor was our home.

Srs. M. Brendan and M. Brigid arrived extremely late, one night. We four were the founding community. A feast-day of our Lady was to be chosen – in this case Our Lady of the Snows – Foundation Day. To this day August 5th is regarded as Foundation Day.

I already said that permission was given to open a house in the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise by Bishop J J McNamee in 1946; that was a year before the community moved into Castlecor. This permission was not given lightly. World War 2 was over (to some extent) and communication opened up again with Europe. So, many congregations were coming to Ireland to recruit and to begin new foundations, mostly with a view to vocations. So Bishop McNamee, realizing this, was slow to allow anyone into his Diocese – for such purposes. Dr McNamee said to Sr M. Francis that it was.... “killing the goose with the golden egg” meaning – all the young girls are being taken from Ireland “who will remain?”.

Here we come to the story of the nylon stockings. It seems that Sr M Francis had been given these nylons by a lady in Los Angeles. The latter had a relative in Longford town, Agnes Donlon. Now Mary Francis was one of the delegates to the chapter in 1946 in Belgium and en route for the Mother House (Uccle) she stopped off in Ireland. She duly went to Longford to deliver the nylons, telling Miss Donlon that the Ladies of Mary were anxious to get a house in Ireland. Miss Donlon informed her of a very large house belonging to cousins of hers – a house that was up for sale at Ballymahon: Castlecor. Mary Francis went to see the

house, and slept there one night. She received a very warm welcome from the owners, the Mulvihills. Typically she dropped a miraculous medal of Our Lady into one of the electric light holders – to begin possession! At the same time, she gave a deposit of nineteen pounds to Hugh Mulvihill, all in the hope of one day buying the property. She then continued her journey to Belgium, to the chapter. Rev Mother Marie Madeleine, then Superior General, was very interested in the hoped for foundation. It was at this chapter that a decision was made to recite the Rosary daily, in each community for vocations. This community exercise went on for years, in our various houses throughout the Institute.

Mary Francis got permission to return, from Belgium, to Ireland and to continue to look for a house. She heard that Dr McNamee was on holidays in Dunlaoghaire and she risked asking for an interview. He was not pleased to do business while on holidays, but he gave her time and listened to her. There were many long meetings between them. She said that at times there were long silences as he weighed up all that might be involved. There were basic issues to be faced, he said. Where would the money come from to purchase the property? She assured him that the Institute would take care of that. Who would pay the chaplain and where could a chaplain be found? If he were full-time at Castlecor, what would be his work – to which she replied that if he did have time on his hands he could write a book!

Did the Ladies of Mary contemplate opening a school? If so, they would be refused as the Mercy nuns already ran a very good secondary school for that area. It would be an injustice to them etc. This question came up among the Ladies of Mary for quite some time – it had to be repeated again and again that the Bishop would not countenance it etc.

Sr Mary Francis, in her reminiscences, said that as the feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel approached (July 16th 1946) the Bishop seemed to be giving her hope. He questioned her about having seen the house, and then asked her if she had given a deposit. On hearing that she had, he told her she shouldn't have done that! However, negotiations went on, M Francis staying with the Mercy nuns in Longford so as to be "on call" if the Bishop came to see her. In those days, nuns in large convents had their individual "bell"; the Superior had "one". Mother Brigid, the Superior at that time announced to her community that for the time being, if the bell tolled ONE it was to be for Sr M Francis who would duly go to the parlour to see Dr McNamee! Evidently the interviews were numerous. All this went on until the Autumn of '46 – Mary Francis was still in Ireland until after the month of October. Finally once permission had been given M Francis had to set about negotiations for buying. She had no one to turn to. Rev Mother Mary Elise and Sr Mary Columba came to Ireland to see the property and approve it. Outside of that visit, she was entirely on her own and suffered deeply. According to the spirit of the time, as a nun you kept convent business to yourself. Her only advisors were Mercy nuns in Killarney and Longford, but when it came to deciding on land, and houses etc. she turned to Br Brendan and Con O'Connor. Now, with regard to advisors, Mary Francis, on leaving California for the Chapter of '46 had promised to look up my family and so she did. She was present at Fr Kevin's first Mass and so met all the members of my family. As the Castlecor story developed and she had to write very important letters to Bishop McNamee, she sought advice from Brother Brendan as to how to deal with an Irish Bishop- protocol etc. I've seen copies- first drafts- of some of those letters. One must understand the spirit of the times and the importance of a letter that could be a deciding factor in the purchasing of Castlecor. The language of the letters is formal, carefully worded, ultra-respectful and of course, with the attitude of being very dependent on the Bishop's

word. I destroyed one of those not foreseeing that this story would be written... Brother Brendan and she composed these letters in my aunt's boarding house in Killarney and also in the convent of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Waterford. The Mercy nuns' advice was invaluable in steering Mary Francis in the right direction as to how she should approach a Bishop! For example, always to have a companion when keeping an appointment with a Bishop hence Maisie O'Connor accompanied her to Dunlaoghaire etc.

Now, with regard to the purchase of the 90 acres: Brother Brendan asked a Brother Jarlath (a de la Salle Brother, whom he knew to be very knowledgeable regarding land etc) to visit Ballymahon and to vet the land. Brother Jarlath did this and helped Francis to choose the land that eventually became ours. At this time too Con O'Connor, Aquinas' brother came into the story and both he and his wife, Maisie, were great supporters at that time.

It was at this time, too, that Francis was extremely exhausted and Brother Brendan decided to risk writing to the Superior General- M. Madeline- and suggested to her that Francis be given a holiday as her health was beginning to decline- a holiday in her own home. At that time – 40 years ago – telephones were few and communications slow. Uccle was very far away and California was getting on with its school life. In addition to this this, M Francis belonged to no community – she had left Culver City and been moved to Westwood – but she had not yet taken up residence in Westwood. She only did this on her return – after her work of buying Castlecor and all it entailed, had been completed. Seeing that my family had been involved in her activities, I learned that her health was suffering and she was actually given the extraordinary permission by Rev Mother Mary Madeline of being allowed to stay in her own home for a few days.! In due time having sought advice, she agreed to buy the house and to purchase 90 acres of land. The Mulvihill family were to continue to live in it for a year, at the end of which time the property would be paid for and the Ladies of Mary would take over – all of which happened in August 1947.

Back in California, while Francis was still in Ireland and I in Westwood, Fr Pat wrote to tell me that our congregation was to get a house in a place called Ballymahon. It was recreation time and excitement was so great that Modwina had to re-re-read his letter out loud to us while we searched through our atlas and maps of Ireland for this unheard of town. We eventually found it. Up to then we had thought it would be impossible to find a big house that would be for sale in Ireland but Fr Bill, still a student, had already written me to tell me that there were such houses and that some of his fellow students knew of them. This was great news at the time and it gave us hope and a vision of possibilities! So now, here was Fr Pat's letter confirming all of this and we eagerly awaited news from Francis. This was so slow in coming that Modwina sent a telegram (to someone) saying 'No news of Francis.'

Sometime in the summer of '46 Francis had gone to see Cardinal Dalton in the North- as she was still searching for permission to enter some Diocese. According to her, he received her very graciously and they had tea and a boiled egg etc together as they discussed her request/problem! She left no stone unturned in her search.

In late autumn 1946 Francis returned to LA taking up residence in Westwood for the first time. She felt she could not teach any longer with the house in Ireland to be planned for. Mary Carmel Rosney was recuperating after an operation and to her was given the task of raising \$25,000 (8000 pounds) to buy Castlecor. We had no experience of fund-raising; we had no connections and we were few in number. Nevertheless, Mary Carmel set to work

with committees, raffles for a car, marathon, dinner events and she succeeded in raising the money. That was '46-'47.

Delicious Ham Dinner

Benefit of

The Daughters of Mary and Joseph

at

ST. MARY MAGDALEN'S HALL

8565 W. Pico
One Block West of LaCienega

SUNDAY, JUNE 8th, 1947

12:30 to 7:30 P.M.

GAMES and ENTERTAINMENT

The following **MOVIE STARS** will be present

Leslie Brooks	Tito Guizar	George O'Brien
The Crosbys	June Haver	Maureen O'Hara
Jeanne Crain	Priscilla Lane	Maureen O'Sullivan
Jeff Donnell	Carl Nash	Beverly Tyler
Peggy Ann Garner		Barbara Whiting

1947 PONTIAC TO BE GIVEN AWAY

*Fund-Raising Activities for
Rosary Convent, Ireland*

During this time there was much speculation as to who would be sent to Ireland. No one seemed to want to go. That included Mary Francis herself. She had been drained by her months in Ireland and now the planning for the take-over was constantly in her thoughts. Marie Madeline asked her to go and told her she could choose her community! England decided to send Mary Brendan and Mary Bridget. I was also sent.

At the beginning of this section, it was said that Our Lady of the Snows was chosen as Foundation Day. Our Lady's intercession figures in all this story.

After World War 2 pilgrimages to Lourdes etc. began again. Fr Peyton was beginning his life's work- still continuing today- family prayer crusade, especially through the recitation of the Rosary. He had a strong influence on Mary Francis – they corresponded for years and he visited her in Castlecor on one of his trips. Devotion to Our Lady seemed to be in the air. He prayed for our big intention- the Irish foundation. During '46-'47 Mary Francis was giving much thought to everything appertaining to the new venture even down to deciding what it would be called- who would be the patron chosen. Various titles were suggested, Our Lady's Manor being one! However, Rosary Convent was the final choice. Because the power of Our Lady's help was so strongly felt, it was decided that the first Saturdays and feasts of Our Lady would be among our special celebrations. So it was that the first Mass said there was on a Saturday; arrivals of the postulants and Juniors were on September 8th and 12th (Holy Name of Mary- feast till then kept in the Institute) respectively, and in thanksgiving we resolved that the household would go to Knock, on pilgrimage, annually. The promise was kept for the first eleven years of life at Castlecor. I left then, returning in 1970 and I thank God that I've been able to do this beautiful pilgrimage over the last 20 years. The last prayer of the day was the Gregorian Ave Maria sung at the top of the main staircase around the statue of Our Lady.

It surely was a Marian household and over the altar inscribed on a scroll were the words: 'Ad Jesus per Mariam'. Visitors, parents, friends were invited to remember us in their daily Rosary and in due time the League of Prayer was formed. The idea of the League was intercessory prayer for Castlecor. Those who were members were kept up to date with what was happening in Castlecor and they also heard about those who had gone on mission. This agreement was two- way; we prayed for them, they prayed for us. It existed until 1958- perhaps longer. In 1970 it was discussed again among the novitiate and the community then at Castlecor. The basic idea was renewed: the neighbours of the surrounding townlands were invited for a Ladies of Mary evening- the community and the neighbours offered their prayer for vocations and for our sisters everywhere. One of our nuns gave a sharing/talk on each of these occasions- a sharing on the works of our nuns. This prayer for vocations continues today on different forms.

Community Life.

Community life began on August 5th '47, Novitiate on September 7th and Juniorate on September 12th. Sister Mary Bridget stayed about 2 months: she was sacristan and did many other duties. Her health was precarious and so she returned to England. So for two years the core community numbered three: postulants and professed had meals together. Mary Brendan and I taught the Juniors, Mary Brendan being Bursar as well. Mary Francis was Novice Mistress and Superior.

Life was very regular. The timetable was along traditional lines- rising early with morning prayer, meditation, Office, Mass, breakfast being the first exercises of the day. Class, daily, of both groups began at 8.45am. For the Juniors it ended at 3.45pm. For them (Juniors) the programme followed the lines of Secondary School. Tea, games, study filled the evening. Rosary was said daily by Juniors and Novices together. The Novices followed the routine of our religious life for those times: visit and office in the afternoon. Matins, lauds, night

prayer in the evening. Recreation was as usual for the community. Mary Brendan and I took turns to remain with the Juniors outside of class times. The liturgy was a very important factor in the life of the house; choir practice was regular and frequent. The feast days were well prepared for as were Sundays.

As we saw it the core community was four for a start. In no time it was three and after two years Mary Brendan was needed in England. She was replaced by Mary Agatha for a year, followed by Mary Joachim for two years and then Mary Columba for three. Mary Stanislaus then joined us and remained till 1960.

It was evident that there was a scarcity of nuns who could be released to come to Ireland, so Peg and Annette, Bernadette and Eilis McCarthy, all as yet untrained professionally, remained to help instead of going on mission with their companions. This they found hard to take. To build community on Castlecree was a permanent concern. The set-up of the house was a new thing (from the Institute's point-of-view) from the start- a new arrangement. The traditional work of the Institute- teaching- was elsewhere i.e abroad. But here was a house, the like of which had no precedent for us. To staff it was to offer someone an opportunity for great self-sacrifice and generosity. Likewise, there was the unspoken hope that such a person had an enthusiasm for vocation work and for the religious formation of postulants and novices!

While the formation of the novices was taken care of by Mary Francis, the teaching of the Juniors by the Professed nuns for a start, and then supplemented by some novices-recruitment went on apace. Much of this was done by letter: in fact, recruitment in this way went on constantly. The nuns and sometimes the novices visited schools in various dioceses, always subject to the Bishop's permission.

Talks were given to the girls in secondary schools and some girls who were interested, gave their names with the understanding that there would be follow-up. Girls who would "come and see" spent many a weekend in Castlecree and that kept us more than busy. At times, the house was very over-crowded. Likewise, the community was always over-stretched; there were no holidays in those days. While one could say the main thrust of the household was forming the novitiate, teaching the juniors and recruiting, of course there were other aspects of running the place that were demanding and time consuming, such as: the farm, shopping, visitors and day to day hospitality, keeping up old contacts and making new ones, transport. Arranging for the novices to go to Belgium to the Mother House; on their return, arranging for their going to America etc.; keeping up contact with those who had left Castlecree – all took a lot of time.

Castlecree was a house in the country – the Big City, Dublin was hours away by car. Ballymahon was two miles away and a very small town, even though a busy one in its own way: there was no railway service, a bus service was private and infrequent. There was a constant activity of coming and going since it was a house for mission abroad. Arrivals and departures meant being taken to/picked up. Eventually we got our own van. Life in Castlecree had no let up. Christmas and Easter holidays were not holidays as such for while the juniors went home, the programme of daily life was geared to the spirit of novitiate life. Summer "holidays" were heavy going and for the most part draining; there was a constant stream of visitors, and always, vocation work was in the back-ground with its constant

demands – discerning, deciding, recruiting, interviewing. Our own sisters began to return to Ireland for holidays, to see their own people after many years away. All made a great effort to come to see Castlecor which was very much out of the way. Their interest and affirmation were a great support and encouragement.

I was in Castlecor for the first eleven years. Later on I returned at the time prior to the closing down, 1970 -1973. As I said I have been asked to share some of my memories and impressions of those first years (more than the later years.)

The summer of '47 that we moved in was a time of glorious sunshine, that is, from August on. That helped! There was no furniture in the house except a few chairs. M Brendan and M Brigid had arrived from England and M Francis and I from America and so we set to, at once, to make the house convent-like. We had to learn-we four – to live and work together as we were very different personalities. Added to this, we came from different experiences – two from America having lived a very different kind of religious life. Mary Brigid and Mary Brendan had spent all their religious life in England and while we all had Scarborough as a starting ground to our religious life and knew many of the same people, still community life had growing pains. The first days and weeks had their tensions. Things got better when we decided who was going to do what. Preparing the chapel seemed to bring us together and I have very happy memories of what this entailed. For those who know Castlecor house, you will remember St. Patrick's dining room off the front hall – a beautiful room with a uniquely beautiful floor. We debated having the chapel there – for the sake of visitors and friends who could visit the Blessed Sacrament as soon as they entered the front hall. However, Mary Brendan was very keen on the then “library” – the room that eventually became the chapel.

M Brigid busied herself with the sacristy side of things and we agreed that each one of us would work on the main altar cloth so as to be part of the first Mass. And so it was done! Mr Scollard, the farm steward, helped us move in various pieces of furniture. We borrowed the first tabernacle from the MSC's. At the first Mass we sang in parts – I can't recall Brigid's voice but we duly sang Ecce Panis etc. Mary Francis and Brendan sang well and we were quite pleased with ourselves! Fr McKeon was the celebrant and rose to the occasion. It was at one of the first Masses that he preached: “*Lord it is good for us to be here*”, a quotation that became quite a theme for years. Until the chapel was properly set up, we went to Mass in Ballymahon parish church. Mr Daly driving us in the horse and trap. This we did in GRAND SILENCE! At first breakfast and all meals were cooked on an open fire. Our first dining room as a community was the little room off St. Patrick's. I remember the first meals there, where we made great efforts to find common ground for getting to know one another. Brigid was not new in my life – she and I had been in California together in 1935. Also, I had travelled with her people to Scarborough, when I was at the age of thirteen; it was the time of her clothing. M Brendan and I had never met until then.

When I was sent to Castlecor, Marie Madeleine (Superior General) told me I was to be Mistress of Novices. Going to this new kind of foundation was really walking into the unknown, but I felt at least I knew something about a novitiate. As for the Juniorate – Recruiting – Programme, I couldn't envisage it, so I had to re-focus rather abruptly when Mere Marie Magdeleine told me I was not old enough to be in charge of the novices – I was only thirty three and seemingly it was necessary to be thirty-five!! And so it was that one evening, for many reasons in very low spirits, M Brendan and I came together literally to sort out what a Juniorate was to be all about. We decided to do our utmost to reach Secondary

School standard, while M Brigid would help with supervisions, walks, presence at meals etc. with the girls. While I say “supervision”, it was more being a presence and it worked. From the moment full life started – mid Sept – there were two groupings in the house: professed and Novitiate merged into one and the Juniors had a full academic programme. In no time Mary Brigid returned to England so Mary Brendan and I worked very closely together: we lived as much community life as possible and it was almost impossible to find time for each other except during the Juniors holiday time. At the end of each academic year some of the Juniors chose to go to England rather than staying in Castlecor where they would ultimately be destined for America. So there was a Juniorate in Merrow where the girls had full school life. It took us, all three, time and patience to understand once again, our own country and above all, the girls in the house. We were strangers. Personally it took me a year – really to get California out of my system, even though I found the new life very exciting. I felt Mary Brendan missed England and the traditional way of doing things. There were ways in which she understood Irish girls better than Mary Francis and I as she had a lot to do with Irish boarders in Scarborough; physically she was very strong and worked very hard.

She was a very kind, caring person and I feel that this came through to the girls. When she and I went for long walks in the Summer months, our conversation invariably reverted to the spiritual, for she was a most deeply spiritual woman with rock-like faith. All too soon, her two years at Castlecor came to an end. Her special subject was biology, and this she made so interesting in her classes that before she left, I asked her to make out a biology programme for me so that I could teach it to the Juniors!! This she did and with the help of Mary Annunciata (Lynch) and Mary Clement, I tried to complete what she had begun!! From then on my memory of a teaching staff re the Juniors, is that the teaching personal changed constantly: whichever nuns came to help or were kept in Ireland after first profession, to teach, did their best. Nevertheless, it was a constant uphill struggle to keep an academic standard.

In time illness struck; financial worries loomed large; England could no longer send experienced nuns to join us, so care of the house and of the Juniors was mostly left to newly professed and as yet not professionally trained sisters. The latter felt called to the missions. Instead they were asked to stay in Castlecor and help. This went on for years. My remembrance of those latter years-towards the end of my eleven years – is that of the community being drained. While Castlecor was a very “alive” house, with youth dominating, it called for great faith, constant generosity and the strength to keep going in constantly changing circumstances, M Francis’ health deteriorated after the first couple of years. She had quite a spell of time in hospital. She never again regained her full health.

Since others will be asked to share in this many-sided story, and some have already agreed to do so, I’ll tell you a little of my own feelings about it all. Once work began there, I burnt my bridges and did not look back. My remembrance of the first two years is pleasant. I believed in the work and put my whole heart into it. Things seemed to go well; relationships were good all round – inside, with farm hands, priests, the Bishop, the local Mercy nuns and the neighbours we had come to know.

Having been a boarder with our nuns in Scarborough, for all of my secondary school years, I felt a great longing to hand on a spirit that had been handed on to me. Thinking of the nuns there, I remembered them as nuns who treated us girls with great respect. There was a simplicity in their dealings with us and a happy spirit of friendliness. They welcomed

openness. A great courtesy prevailed in the whole place. One was not afraid. It was home. (Scarborough). Side by side with this, I had a very special devotion to the Founder since my novitiate days in Belgium – two years. The oldest nun in Uccle, Madam Pauline had a smile and graciousness I still remember. Actually she knew the Founder. One day she approached me – a novice – in the corridor. She told me she'd heard that I was very interested in the Founder and so she had something to give me! She gave me "Thoughts of the Founder" – his sayings. I took it as far as Westwood and gave it to the Community library there. I've never seen one like it since. However, here was my opportunity, at Castlecor, to share with others this great love of my life. So I proceeded to write a life of Canon Constant William van Crombrughe – asking the Juniors to vet each chapter. This they did with alarming honesty.

Mother Mary Anastazia, in England/California, had worked hard to inculcate devotion to the Founder. So did Mary Agnes (Beauty) as Mistress of Novices. And later, I feel that Carmel (Rosney) was the instrument to get Ruth interested in the Founder's writings during her (Ruth's) Novitiate. I was influenced by all this so I asked Marie Jean (1st Assistant to the Superior General) to get a prayer for the founder's canonization reprinted in Belgium. This prayer was said daily at Castlecor.

Regarding courtesy. I felt that as future Ladies of Mary this should be given special attention, and so every day before singing class, this topic was discussed and certain practices suggested. This was for Juniors and Novices combined. I mention this here as I've been asked to do so by someone who spent many years at Castlecor. She felt that the attitude to courtesy figured largely in the training offered those days. While I'm giving this subject but a few lines, it was very important in the daily programme.

As I began to see and to realize what Castlecor was all about, I knew that God alone could make the work succeed. The enormity of the task began to strike me and since it was to be a house for the "missions" – I began to look for special help from Above. I've always had great devotion to St Therese, patroness of the missions so I decided to write to Lisieux. I wrote to her sister (blood sister) Mother Agnes of Jesus, living at the time. I wrote a very comprehensive letter, telling her about our work as a congregation and now about the new and very important work of preparing young nuns for the missions.

The response was heart-warming; sister Genevieve, the Little Flower's younger sister, answered my letter and since I had asked for a "special thought" from Therese for our new house, Mother Agnes and Sr Genevieve chose: "Love is repaid by love alone" – (St John of the Cross.) Sr Genevieve explained that this was Therese's favourite quotation. It was framed by us and placed on the mantle-piece in the chapel, side by side with a first class relic of the saint – some of her beautiful, literally golden hair: also sent by her sisters. The relic was placed in a very attractive reliquary. From then on, the lines of communication with Lisieux have never been closed – not to this day, forty two years later. Not so long ago Sr Anne Jordan and I were sent by Middlesbrough parish, to Lisieux, to pray for vocations. We met one of the nuns who knew Genevieve well. We also got a very warm welcome at the Abbey where Therese had been at school. This search for "spiritual" help duly extended to the Carmelite Convent in Delgany, Wicklow about 30 years ago where the nuns always pray for our vocation work to this day; likewise the Carmelites here at Firhouse and Malahide, Dijon, Parey-le-monical... I have already mentioned the League of Prayer. Looking back, I feel and know that Castlecor was surrounded by the prayers of so many people – many of

them now with God. This search for “praying helpers” in the background, went on constantly and Eilis McCarthy who is gifted with the pen, could do this subject more justice than I as it was she who was responsible for contacting the members of the League and keeping them informed.

I feel it is fitting to say here that priests who came to give retreats – big events in the household then – entered into the spirit of the house at the time. On hearing the story of the Foundation, one priest gave an unforgettable sermon on: “Look to the rock from which you are hewn.”

The farm:

Running the farm was very important. We had 90 acres of land – not all arable. David McCarthy, Portmarnock knew Gerry Scollard and highly recommended him as steward. Gerry was a God-send; hard working and conscientious and above all, he came from a farming background which helped greatly. He moved in with his family very early in this story. Mr Daly living at the lodge, had worked with the Mulvihills and knew the run of the place. We had to set to and stock the land: Mrs Murphy, Mary Brendan’s sister; sent us a real Kerry cow – pure black and different looking! My brother Michael gave us a strawberry coloured cow and gradually we built up the herd to about eight. At first the Kerry cow felt lost and either she wasn’t accepted by the other cows or she missed Kerry, she stayed stolidly by herself for some time! We bought two horses, bays; we named them Tony and Brenda. Tony had some breeding and looked beautiful in the horse and trap outfit, but he got meningitis and died a slow death. We felt this keenly. Brenda was a great worker; Tony not always so. Castlecour had its share of rabbits, foxes, badgers, pheasants and in season the curlews, swans and wild geese. For a time the house was infested with rats and while every possible remedy was tried, it was all to no avail. It was through the intercession of St Francis that we finally got rid of them and by having three kittens on the premises! This may sound amusing but so it happened. The kittens were in the back corridor a bare three weeks old when the rats withdrew. One of the Novices had the job of house-training the kittens. They were called Francis, Kitty and Kevin. In time, farming became mechanized. The farm went into dairying. It had begun with mixed farming. Towards the end of our time in Castlecour, the cows got brucellosis which severely decimated the herd.

Castlecour House was really two houses, or an “old” and a “new” part, the front of the house being new. To this day it is still in excellent condition and a lovely house as well. Bord Failte has a formal history of it. From the very start I did all I could to piece together the story of the place. I understood that it was built by a landlord Bond. He is buried in the nearby cemetery and one can see his tombstone to this day. Evidently he was hard on the people. He was not a Catholic. I believe he was feared and disliked. His daughter Emily, had an Irish mother. Emily was not brought up by her mother who had been a maid in the house. In due time, Emily married a Captain Clarke. It was a happy marriage it was said, and the couple were liked by the people. In about 1920 the Clarke’s sold the house to the Mulvihill family, and they (Clarke’s) moved to Frensham Grove, Frensham near Guilford. When I learned from the people, the neighbours, that Emily loved Castlecour, I wrote to her. I told about her old home and how nuns now lived in it and thought it a beautiful house. She wrote me a very affectionate letter, telling me that the orchard was one of her favourite spots. I promised I would keep her in my prayers, for which she thanked me. At that time she was a widow and I believe never had any children. She asked me too to remember her husband in

my prayers. When in the very first days after we moved into Castlecor House I ransacked every room and corner in it. The house fascinated me and it was so beautiful, I thought, that it lifted my spirits and made me love it! I found old plans- architect's – for the house and possible additions. Also in the library (Chapel later) there were old books, beautifully bound, gold-edged with Emily's name written in her own hand-writing in many of them.

Castlecor farm, I was told, was part of an immense property of some thousands of acres, stretching into other counties. It was landlord territory at one time, before the Mulvihill family bought – I think – 200 acres (Owned by Bond, as mentioned earlier). Our 90 acres was good land, though some was wooded. A stream in one of the fields (Rems field) provided water which was duly pumped up to the house. Spring water for drinking purposes was provided from deep wells around the outside of the house. The fields had a "rath" a lime kiln, the Danes Hill (Cnoc Mhuire), an orchard walled in with fountain, green/glasshouses, the latter built by John O'Connor (Cloonteens). It was thought at one time (in my time) that the outhouses in the yard could be used as an extension of the main house, specifically for a Juniorate. The main building had a community (Novices and Juniors) of 45 at one time and since vocations seemed to be plentiful, serious thought was given to this plan. The outhouses were in very good condition and were conveniently nearer to the main road. The constant change of staff (community of professed nuns) and the lack of professionally trained sisters forced us to forget about this project and to concentrate on essentials e.g. recruitment etc.

I referred already to the "settling in" of the founding community. The beautiful avenue leading up to the house, the magnificent copper beeches, horse chestnuts, sycamores and the beauty of the house itself, lifted our spirits and gave us a spirit of unity and an enjoyment in planning, decorating and furnishing the house. The novices' families and friends enjoyed hearing the history of the house, being shown around, especially the famous Octagon room, in roaming around the yard and the orchard and in "walking the land".

Mother General, Marie Madeleine, on her first visit in 1948 to Castlecor, said, "THIS HOUSE IS ALL FOR GOD", and so it was. As she and Marie Jean (1st Asst.) stood with us outside the front door, on a lovely Summer's day, there were some ears of corn (blades of wheat) on the ground. I handed her one and I said "A symbol of the fruitful years to come..." and she took it and smiled. Two years later the first professed (first fruits) left for California and we had made our own the song

**"Go ye afar, go teach all nations
Bear witness unto Me, on earth, in every
And I with you shall be – until the end of time ..."**

At that time (towards the beginning) I asked Marie Madeleine if we could open a house in Spain – a Catholic country – especially for vocations etc. – I pursued the conversation to the point that I asked her if she really would envisage such a foundation if we ever reached the stage whereby Castlecor had 50 young professed sent out from Castlecor – as far as I can remember she said YES!

Endings

On March 31st 1973, there was a meeting of Ladies of Mary at Castlecor – on that day it was decided, definitely to sell Castlecor. On leaving the meeting, I wrote in my bible what I had said at that meeting:

What we call the beginning, is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning

To end is where we start from. (T.S. Elliot)

In connection with Castlecor I have often thought of Mordecai's words at the end of the Book of Esther-Esther had been used by God to save her people. Mordecai says:

"All this is God's doing. I remember the dream I had about these matters, nothing of which has failed to come true: the little spring (Castlecor?) that became a river, the light that shone, the sun, the flood of water. Esther (Castlecor?) is the river...."

In this year of grace, the Marian year, the Holy Father calls us to look to Mary as "a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim people of God" "Let the entire body of the faithful (he asks) pour forth persevering prayer to the Mother of God and Mother of Mankind. Let them implore that she who aided the beginning of the Church"

John Paul quoting Vatican II

These words find an echo in our hearts – she who interceded for us at the beginning of the Castlecor "dream" – whenever that was, since there is an absolute beginning! May She continue to intercede for us in this her special year, and may she help us to sing with her, with great hope, Her own song –

‘ His mercy is from generation to generation

...to our generation ..to

And to the generations of DMJs yet to come.

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Addenda

- Since I wrote the above I have not met Brother Brendan. These pages were written from what I had heard from Francis herself and also from Mary Agatha and others. Agatha was in Waterford with Francis in the weeks before the Brussels Chapter.
- Brother Brendan has a very clear picture of what took place at the time. He says that Francis came into his life as a stranger and as someone extremely anxious about the step she was taking. He, himself, didn't quite know what to do at the start. Brendan was in the throes of school life: at the same time he was very busy making preparations to go to Rome for a year. He knew nothing about the Daughters of Mary and Joseph except that his sister was one of them. About Francis he only knew that she came from his parish, Kilcummin. He knew none of her people etc.
- She told him she came to him for help because she had no-one to speak with re Castlecor. If she made a false move she wondered would she jeopardise the congregation's hope of getting into this house? Would she be taken advantage of regarding the choosing of property ie the land? Would the house and immediate surrounds be adequate? (no farm as such). Evidently she wept in desperation. As for Brendan himself he would return to the monastery equally perplexed about the whole venture and full of pity for this nun on her own. In the end he hit upon the idea of Brother Jarlath going to see and vetting the land. When the latter returned and spoke well of the fields etc evidently Francis got the courage to make a decision. She went on to Brussels much more light-hearted and more at peace. The Waterford days had been decisive- long hours of discerning and teasing out the situation. The Little Sisters of the Poor had provided the venue and the discussions took place in the

garden sitting on a very hard bench for hours on end, regardless of weather. Anyone who has experienced the Little Sisters will remember the locking up at night- it was either or. And so Francis and Brendan were duly locked out- since I've had the same experience myself, it is far from amusing. Inside, Agatha, frozen watched and waited to hear the outcome of these talks.

- I asked Brendan if my opening thought 'Born of a Woman' was an exaggeration in this story: he agreed with me that Our Lady's intercession in the story of Castlecor could not be measured...

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NB

The two scrolls in the front hall inside the front door read:

- (1) He who finds me, finds life, and will have salvation from the Lord.**
- (2) I have taken root in an honourable people: quotations taken from the Liturgy, referring to Our Lady.**

In the main hall (front), over an archway, the scroll reads:

A Mhuire dil, is tú banriogan an tighe seo

In the chapel over the altar:

Ad Jesum per Mariam

- While 'full' life began in Castlecor in September 1947, in Forest Hill in September 1946, Mary Agatha had been given the care of four young girls who wanted to be nuns. Francis Marie Bourke was one of those girls. They lived like boarders in St Monica's, Forest Hill, were taught by Miss Schmall and went to class with the senior girls in the school. This was from '46-'47. Marie Bourke then came to Castlecor in '47 and Mary Cronin entered the novitiate in Castlecor in February '48. Peggy Ryan entered in England. The fourth girl, Mary ?, got ill. Mary Agatha and Mary Francis had met these girls when they went to Waterford in the Summer '46.... It was part of their recruitment.
- I was asked by someone who had been at Castlecor for some years to write on the centrality of the liturgy in the life of the place; on the living out of one of the slogans 'it is the Mass that matters.' I was also asked to refer to the spiritual preparation for every Sunday Mass and for all feast days- the choir practices, chapel decorations etc- the festive atmosphere.

A note:

When Castlecor house was auctioned in 1920 Margaret Maguire's mother was at the auction which was held in the library (chapel). She stood on the low, very solid radiator and leaned against the shutter of the window holding on to a peg on the shutter. The peg fell off and she

hid it in her pocket with embarrassment. Years later her daughters and nieces received the habit in that auction room!

Footnote

The financial and moral support from California, England and Belgium from the beginning to the present day is like a steady stream that flows right in to the present in ways that could not be measured. Westwood was the local community that sent Francis and me and for the first two years in Castlecor, that community (Eileen Cotter, Superior) wrote and sent parcels every two weeks to let us feel we were remembered. I feel that if we forget all this basic support we'll forget 'the rock from which we were hewn, the spirit of the Institute.

THE MERCY NUNS

The place of the Mercy nuns- their influence- their help in this whole story, needs a booklet on its own. (There were three convents that figured largely in the Irish Story: they were in (1)Killarney, (2) Longford Town, (3) Ballymahon.

The Mercy Convent in Killarney was our Irish connection since 1920 approximately. It was a meeting place, a home from home, a place from which the young nuns left for California. It did all this gratis, their contribution for the "missions". It is a home, a place of welcome for us, even to this day. On one occasion, Mother Mary Joachim and I were staying there. We found ourselves down in the community room. On the wall was inscribed Mother Macauley's words: "My legacy to my order is charity". Mary Joachim, a woman of few words, turned to me and said "they certainly live it, don't they".

LONGFORD

The nuns here gave Mary Francis the encouragement, the support and the home she needed during her negotiations with the Bishop. We both stayed with these nuns during the month of July 1947 prior to moving to Castlecor: they loaded the taxi with the big and small things an empty house needed. On August 5th; they planned our meals so that we'd have enough to keep going for the first few days there! God alone knows of their goodness to us. Mother Cecelia of Ballymahon and indeed the community, were very kind to us and most generous. What was marvellous – they welcomed us to that area and did not in any way let us feel that our arrival there could be a threat to them. On one occasion, Mary Francis and I were stranded at Castlecor : no electricity, no food and we had to spend the day there, planning for the setting up of the household. The postman cycled by so I asked him to give Mother Cecilia a letter from us. In it, I asked her for a sandwich and we'd fetch it later on! In no time a car arrived: white table cloth, food galore that filled one of the cupboards after we'd had a feast etc. etc. We had our meal in the priest's parlour, on the floor!