



## *A Tribute from Drumalis to Sr Mairead Bradley CP “A lovely lady, a beautiful smile, gentle and kind”*

In the recent bicentennial celebrations of the birth of Elizabeth Prout, foundress of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, one press report of her life and work described her as: “Mother Teresa of Manchester.” This identification of the life and work of a saintly woman with a particular place, where she made a difference, is and has always been, a way of remembering and celebrating a life of commitment, energy and compassion. This is what has been happening during the past week, since the death of Sr Mairead Bradley. The outpouring of fond memories, of gratitude and of grief from one place in particular – West Belfast - has created the climate, within which Mairead is being remembered and prayed for in these days following her death.



Mairead entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion in Maryfield in 1960. From the start she carried the dignity of a more mature woman, a few years ahead of her companions in age and experience. She quickly achieved that state of perfection which qualified her to be “mother” to the troops of younger women coming after her into the novitiate. She was strict with them and yet was always there with a helping and comforting word when times got difficult. Many of us who knew Sr Loreto in those days, respected her for her fidelity to the religious way of life, but we also had a secret admiration for the quality and style of her footwear. Throughout her long life Mairead could be depended upon to appear elegant, well-dressed from head to toe and sporting a beautiful pair of shoes.



After her professional training and a short spell of teaching at Margaret Clitherow College in Bradford, Mairead felt called back to Belfast. Officially teaching in St Monica’s by day, she spent the evenings on the streets around Bryson Street in East Belfast, where violence and disturbance were the nightly activities as the “Troubles” escalated. Along with the Parish Team, Mairead worked tirelessly to keep the young people off the streets, taking them on trips, organizing activities and befriending them. These were the days of “Brad” – the friend of the young people of East Belfast. She was the “nun” who would run the risk of missing the last bell in the convent for the sake of keeping those young people of the neighbourhood out of danger during very stressful times.

On then to West Belfast, back to where she belonged; As a teacher in Cross and Passion, Glen Road, she was described as “one of the most compassionate nuns I ever met” – “a lovely lady, a beautiful smile, gentle and kind.” Then to Poleglass, helping to set up the Parish, founding “Footprints” and setting up support systems for women, in particular. She helped them to appreciate their faith, and established prayer groups which continue to meet together to this day. This parish development work extended with her appointment to Lagmore, another infant parish stretching beyond West Belfast, and of course there was St Agnes’ where she was officially the Parish Sister, visiting homes and supporting families through good times and bad.

To help her in this ministry, Mairead took a training course in family ministry in the USA over three summers. She spent a semester in Guelph where she trained as spiritual director. Wherever she went, Mairead carried her own deep commitment to the “spiritual life” into the lives of others: prayer groups, bereavement and spiritual accompaniment activities. She led the Diocesan Prayer Guides, Cell Groups and was a team member for the Parish Retreats, Directed Retreats and Carers Days in Drumalis for many years.

To quote, “she was a wonderful, faith filled woman and I am deeply indebted to her for her guidance and support over the years”, “a walking Bible.” Always ready for a chat.



Towards the end of her life, Mairead’s health became a challenge – one which she faced with determination. It was a comfort to her friends and family that she was eventually able to return to her roots, her old “stomping ground” at the top of the Glen Road in Villa Pacis. There she was at the receiving end of the same compassion, expertise, love and care that she had given so generously throughout her life in ministry.

The tributes to Mairead have been touching, true and heartfelt. “She was a lady who influenced and inspired many lives.” “She turned my life around when I was in the depth of distress.”



Back to the beginning; it goes without saying that it was responding to the needs of the people and places where she worked that defined her life’s journey. Mairead was born in West Belfast, the best and most fruitful and happiest years of her life were those years where she walked the road, in good times and bad, with families and people where she belonged. She died a stone’s throw away from her family home - that family with which she stayed connected and she travelled the world many times to keep in touch, encourage and enjoy their company.

In her final journey to the place of rest in the family grave, she was accompanied by at least three generations of that extended Bradley family for whom she was a “friend, a sister and beloved aunt”. She will be missed, she will be remembered, and something of the effects of the work that she did will live on in the lives of those who came under her influence during her active life. May she rest in peace