



*Nativity set at Drumalis  
- a gift from Zambia*

## *"Aren't there annunciations of one sort or another in most lives?"*

*- Denise Leverton*

Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter of 2021. As you will notice, it is shorter than usual. This is a reflection on the life and times of Drumalis over the past year and the lateness of our Summer Newsletter.

But, as always, we do want to make the Christmas connection with all of you and send prayers and blessings during these difficult times that we are all experiencing.

Also as we write, we have just finished our weekend Advent Retreat, which was a particularly memorable time of prayer and renewal for all of us. It was the first time that we have been able to offer our "in-house" residential event since the summer, and never before have we experienced such a hunger in the participants to be together, to pray and ponder the reality of the times we live in.

We were also a new team with "graduates", Fiona and Margaret, of the Drumalis programmes, sharing their wisdom and experience. Sr Phyllis joined us from Dublin and Fr Perry, who for over sixteen years has been an inspiration, teacher, priest, presenter and supporter for everything that is happening in Drumalis.

The theme of "Annunciation", as quoted above, carried us all through the weekend, challenging us to be open to God's voice in our lives and respond with the generosity of Mary and Joseph, even to the extent of hearing God's voice in Creation itself and caring for our common home.

## *Ecological Partnership with A Rocha continues*

"We believe that Drumalis is a place where the healing from the impoverishment through pollution and industrialisation, can happen. It is a sacred place for those who visit it or participate in its activities.

We are trying to make our environment not only healing to us humans but to many other species who co-exist on this planet with us. To this end, we have a few programmes to enhance our grounds for the good of other species.

The heronry in the tall trees gives an added dimension to the area as the birds float in and out giving their sharp calls. This feature is monitored as the herons return each year.

We also hope to increase the number of nest boxes to facilitate some of the smaller birds including the endangered swift population. Boxes will be placed throughout the wood and under eaves of the building.

There is also a small population of red squirrels nearby. These are under pressure from an expanding grey population. The proposal is to reduce and control the grey population to allow the reds to expand into the Drumalis wooded area. This project is under way.

Surveys of Macro-moths and other pollinators are planned and an extended survey of the bats.

Meanwhile, the delivery of Drumalis programmes and courses continues on various levels - in-house, via Zoom and hybrid! Adapting is the challenge, and we have kept up to date so far with help from our technical experts and flexible presenters. More poetry is in the pipeline for the new year and hopefully some retreats for later on in the year.

The partnership with A Rocha is being sustained since Emma's departure by Bertie Stirling. He outlines the hopes, dream and activities below.

Finally, we hope you enjoy the "blast from the past" from Sr Lucina OP. Her sojourn in Drumalis at the Dominican Chapter evoked interesting memories of Drumalis from bygone days.

But whatever the global situation of these times, we are still committed to keeping alive what Sr Lucina refers to from the 1930s: "warmth, welcome, elegance and spiritual nourishment too."



We don't only care for the animal population, so there is a scheme to plant 2000 more trees, some replacing storm damage or diseased trees and also expanding the existing extensive woodland.

A small exploratory investigation to find out what wildflowers might be surviving in some of the grassy areas is to be carried out. Although this will be a limited exploration it should give us an indication of the plant life that could be present and indeed the animal life that might thus be attracted. Signage will be posted so the area could be used for demonstration as well as exploration. The proposed exploration is to be in a small strip 20m long by 3m wide, alongside the fence running down to the field on the east side. This rectangular area will be divided into four, 1/4 mowed, 1/4 mowed twice annually 1/4 not mowed at all and 1/4 having the turf removed. The areas will be monitored for different species.

Also, a small section (about 2 m) of the bank on the north side of the path above the Rose Garden will be left uncut. This area would seem to exhibit good plant diversity at present. The rest of the bank would be mowed as usual. With these programmes underway it is hoped that the environment will be enhanced for the pleasure and wellbeing of all species including humans."

*- Bertie Stirling*

## Bygone Days - Memories of Mrs Magill of Drumalis

“In a casual conversation with Sr Margaret Rose during our General Chapter in Drumalis last summer, I asked if she had ever heard of Mrs Magill of Larne. My father, Patrick Montague, an estate agent in Belfast, had a business connection with her, and I had very pleasant memories of my family, parents, sister Anne and myself, being invited to tea on a few occasions in her lovely house, not far from the gates of Drumalis. Sr Margaret Rose gave me a copy of the book on the history of Drumalis, and only then did I realise Mrs Magill’s central role.

It is hard to judge now, but I think I must have been about 9 or 10 years old, my sister two years younger, when we visited her there, probably 1947 or 1948. It would seem that my father managed her property, which would have meant nothing to me at that time. My memory is of a very elegant “old” lady, with grey hair, beautifully coiffured, in a house of equal elegance.

Snippets of conversation that I recall were mention of Drumalis, of a Passionist priest, Fr Ignatius. None of it meant anything to me at that time. Tea was served, and when something was to be replenished or brought in, Mrs Magill pressed a bell under the table, just where she sat! I was fascinated. A young maid then did whatever was required. It is tempting to wonder what someone of Mrs Magill’s, to me, adventurous use of a small electric bell, would make of the technology of today. My guess is that she would use it to the full!

After tea, Hannah, the maid, properly dressed in coat, hat and gloves, brought the two of us out for a walk along the road and up to the sea. The adults remained and talked business and religion, presumably. I think we were only there on

a few occasions, but the memories are of warmth and welcome, and elegance.

In later years I learnt of my mother’s visits to Drumalis for retreats in the years before her marriage, and her great appreciation of the whole experience. We have a number of photos from those retreats, and they certainly come across as very happy occasions, with none of grimness that was so frequently part of the image of religion at that time, and for so many years to come (*one of the photos appears below*). I could not believe my eyes when, in the book on Drumalis, there is my mother in one of the retreat photos! As a teenager and pupil in St Dominic’s, I went with a small group to a retreat for the Apostolic Work. We slept in a dormitory, very exciting for day pupils, and Fr Justin was the retreat giver, a truly delightful priest.

It is great to see the Drumalis of today, the range of retreats, courses, conference facilities, ecumenical opportunities. Mrs Magill was certainly instrumental in leaving a wonderful heritage.” - *Lucina Montague OP*



**The popular Public Theology programme at Drumalis with Dr Johnston McMaster returns on Tuesday, 11 January 2022 with a new 9-part series via Zoom entitled “Living with Imperial Legacies: Empires, Slavery, Racism and Colonialism” - further details available on the Drumalis website - [http:// www.drumalis.co.uk](http://www.drumalis.co.uk)**

## New Academic Year Brings Hybrid Learning to Drumalis

Whilst in lockdown, we relied on Zoom as the only way we could continue to run adult faith development courses at Drumalis.

As we slowly re-opened to in-house guests, we discovered that a new way of learning could be applied to courses such as **Pathways** and **Certificate in Christian Thought** - a hybrid course, enabling participants to be here at the centre as well as those unable to travel to attend simultaneously via Zoom from their own homes.

Its success has been due in large part to the technical expertise of Loreto McAuley, who has worked tirelessly to make the experience as seamless as possible.

From Fermanagh to France, all are now able to benefit from

the programmes offered by Drumalis. As ever we are grateful to our staff for their willingness to adapt and “hang in” with all the demands of Health and Safety in these difficult times.

### *Friends of Drumalis...*

We do hope that all “Friends” received the annual report sent out in November. It was first and foremost a word of thanks for all the generous contributions which are helping to keep Drumalis “afloat” at present.

It was also a gentle reminder to all to renew your membership and keep in touch. If you are not already a “Friend” and would like to join, further information is available on the Drumalis website.

**A Final Word...** We close again with another Advent Retreat quotation, “*It’s in silence and stillness that we hear God’s voice speaking to us through the people, events, and surroundings of our daily lives.*” May we all experience something of the coming of God’s presence into our lives, and families. May we be able to rejoice in it and be strengthened to carry on. As this year draws to a close, we say “thank you” for all your support and friendship and may we all have a blessed and peaceful Christmas.

*With prayers and blessings and love from Sr Margaret Rose, Sr Anna and Maura*