

Brother Joe Gordon, Christian Brothers, England, Retired  
Heeding the Call..... The Religious Life  
by Carol Baloglu, *By The Way* Contributor

“To serve the Church as a priest or a religious is indeed a humbling honor which no one merits but which Our Lord chooses for us. We must therefore pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers into His vineyard, and we should always pray for vocations to serve the Church in the priesthood and the religious life.”

(Pope John Paul II – Prayers for Vocations)



Brother Joe Gordon was born in Dublin City in 1942, the eldest of six children he heard the call to Religious life at the early age of 14. He left his parents and siblings behind and joined the Juniorate of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers. He entered the novitiate of the Brothers, where he took annual Religious Vows of Obedience, Poverty and Celibacy, making his Perpetual Profession in Dublin in 1967.

He gained a degree in Geography and Economics at University College, Dublin, followed by a Post Graduate Certificate in Education awarded by Manchester University, England.

In 1986 he was appointed Principal of a High School in England (Student population of 1100 boys aged 11-18).

Ten years later Joe was appointed Provincial of the England Province and retired from the classroom. He only retired from teaching!!

His new job supported Christian Brother Missionary work in Sierra Leone and Liberia West Africa. This leadership role allowed him to observe the civil wars that racked those two countries for over 20 years.

Following his term as Provincial, he studied and gained a Masters in Christian Spirituality and a Diploma in Spiritual Direction from Creighton University Omaha, Nebraska.

This led him to the next stage of his spiritual journey; which he calls “sharing the spiritual search with others” Joe believes that there is an immense spiritual hunger, both inside and outside religious traditions. God is speaking to us all, in different ways. People long for more meaning in their life, and if the Catholic Church doesn’t deliver this wholeness of self, he believes, they will seek other mediums to quench this thirst.

He is often asked: What is a Brother? The title of Brother excludes distinction or hierarchy; it is more about a relationship with God through prayer, with his fellow Brothers, and with those he ministers to. It is simply about being a brother to others, as Joe simply states: ‘You can’t spell brother without spelling ‘other’.

Today, after 40 years he finds himself back in Ireland- this time in Belfast Northern Ireland.

I asked him for his thoughts about the declining numbers of Vocations, and how the Catholic Church will face an ever increasing shortage of priests? Joe believes that there isn't a quick solution to the problem; it will probably involve a restructuring of the Church as we know it. We need to take a look at the Parish and the role it will play in the future; regrouping smaller parishes into larger units, but at what expense? Our priests are already working at full capacity, and even with the help of various parish groups, their job is much harder than it was many years ago.

He is however, optimistic about the future, and confident that the Catholic Church will ride out this storm as she has in the past. Change is inevitable; it is part of the ever changing world that we live in...How we choose to adapt to this change is within ourselves.