



*Blessed are the Peacemakers*

# The Monks of Moyross

**In the Moyross estate of Limerick**, well-kept homes are found side by side with boarded up houses, cracked windows and graffiti. It is a corner of Ireland that has been plagued with unemployment, criminal activity and drug abuse that has, sometimes unfairly, dominated the Irish news with its stories. In 2007, the Irish Government identified areas of Limerick, including Moyross, as in need of “regeneration” and formally launched what has been called the most ambitious social project ever undertaken to address criminal activity and totally rebuild the Moyross estate.

And yet in the midst of this, Moyross has recently welcomed new neighbors. A tiny order of brothers from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal has moved straight into the troubled neighborhood with the hope of bringing a positive influence to the community. They haven't come from Rome, or even from Dublin...they've come from the Bronx in New York City.

The Ireland Funds have given a grant funded by a local donor to the Monks of St. Patrick's Friary to establish a small café where people in the neighborhood gather together for community development in a safe environment.



Q. Can you share some background on your Order?

A. The Franciscan Order obviously is one of several different religious orders in the Catholic Church. It was founded about 800 years ago by St. Francis of Assisi who basically spent his time doing hands-on work with the materially poor and spreading the gospel through simple preaching. He started as one who was inspired by God and through his example, others began to join. Slowly it has developed into what we have today and the Franciscan community has been one that, like a body with new cells, always seems to regenerate itself.

Q. So you came to Ireland from the Bronx?

A. Our friaries usually will only have eight to ten friars in them and we had grown in the Bronx to the point that it was time to expand into a new area that needed us. One of the signs that we take as God calling us to a particular place is that local people show an interest in us being there. That was the case in both the Bronx and here in Moyross.

Q. Why Moyross?

A. In order for us to consider coming to a new place, we must be first invited by the Bishop. We had a number of invitations to come to Ireland and initially we were inclined towards settling in Derry. Then just before we came, Moyross was in the news because of an incident involving two children in a car that was petrol-bombed by local youths. The kids lived but they were badly burned and the story really shook all of Ireland. The Bishop's secretary called us up and said, "You know, if you don't want to come to Moyross, we understand." Our Superior, Father Bernard, said at that moment he knew that Moyross was exactly the area where we needed to go.

We always live in the areas where we serve. It's the only really credible way that we can serve the people, and to be quite honest with you, if we've done anything since we've been here, the main thing has just been one of presence. By living here, we're not just somebody coming in from the outside, telling people what to do, and then going home to a nice house. We're members of the community.


Q. This space where you are now, was it empty when you arrived?

A. It is actually three houses here that we have merged together. One of them was burnt out and another was empty because a family had left due to neighborhood conflict. Before we came, the local people were saying they needed to clean up and knock down these houses because they were being used as drug and weapons storage. But these houses were just so far gone that they realized it would cost too much to fix them so instead, they gave us these three and actually, it has worked out well.

Q. Did you find the local community was suspicious or curious, as to why you moved here?

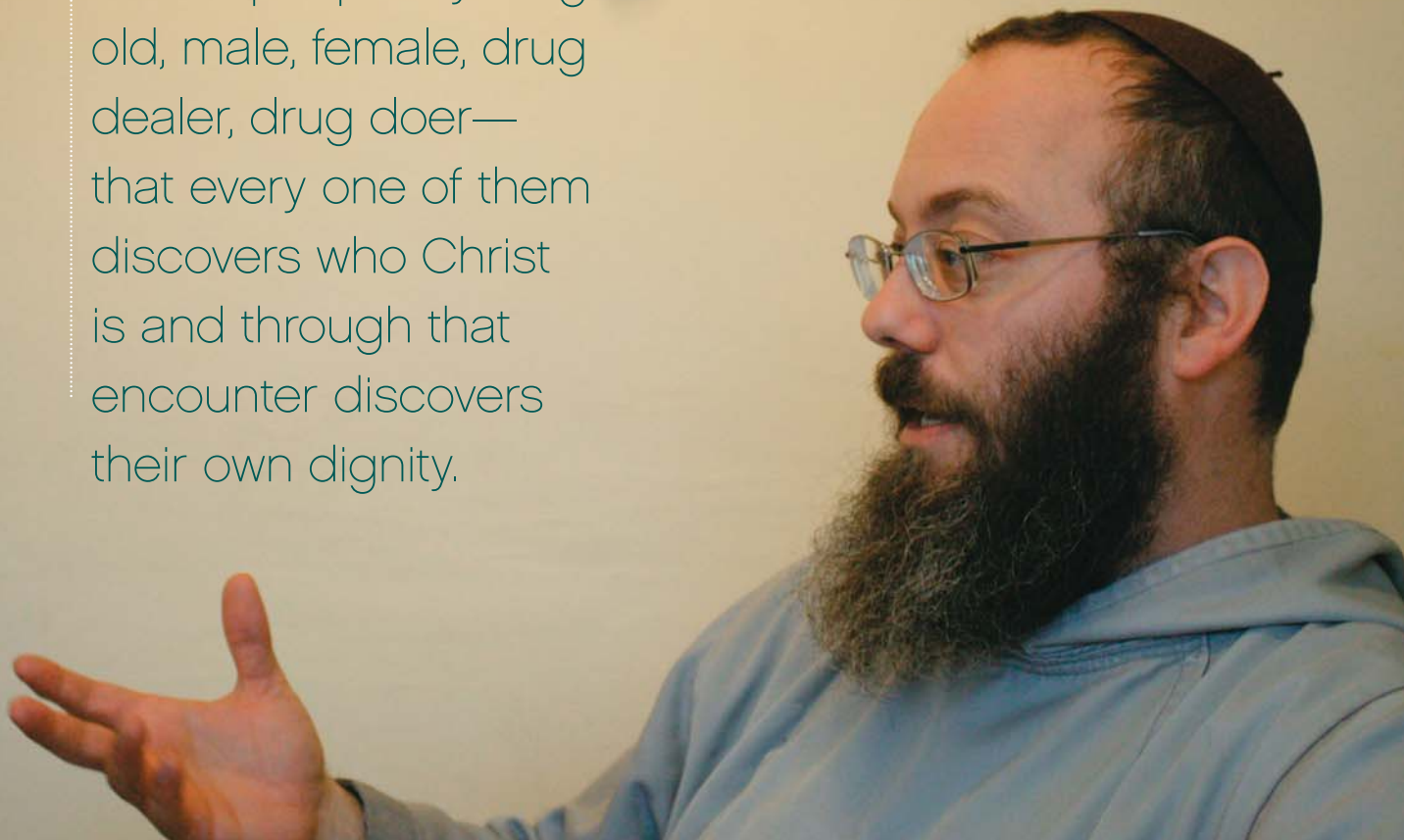
A. Well, a lot of people stopped by to welcome us, and many were curious with a friendly tone, you know. There are some people who, I'd say, are still a bit suspicious. But those would be characters who would be suspicious of anybody because of the nature of the situations that they put themselves in. By and large, the locals have welcomed us with open arms. We're here for the long haul. So as long as the area remains in need of us, so to speak, we will be here.

Q. You often visit the homes of your neighbors and recently opened a café



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just a few yards from the Friary. How did that come about?

- A. For us, the way we discern how God is moving us into the future comes from our home visits in the neighborhood. It may seem very basic and insignificant, but for us it is really the richest soil that we have to plant our roots in the community. Without a personal connection, there's a real disconnect from what the people are crying out for. Just last night we were walking through the neighborhood and visited a family that we hadn't planned to, yet they were really thankful that we popped in. You don't even know what kind of impact that can have.
- Brother Martin started a group here on Tuesday nights for families with children in prison or families with children who have drug addiction or alcoholism. I'm convinced that some good will come from that and who knows what might happen?



Q. What other influence have you had on the neighborhood?

- A. Well we had an interesting situation soon after we arrived. We heard a commotion outside our door and it turned out a group of youths were chasing down a young woman. When they caught up with her, they all began to beat her. Brother Martin witnessed this and immediately ran straight into the fray. He covered the young woman with his body and commanded the youths to stop, in the name of Jesus. He saved her life.

Q. It must seem overwhelming at times. What are your hopes for the people of Moyross?

- A. Our deepest hope is that all people—young, old, male, female, drug dealer, drug doer—that every one of them discovers who Christ is and through that encounter discovers their own dignity. Pope John Paul would say over and over, "It's only through discovering who Christ is that we discover who we are." Well, if you think about it, Jesus chose to become a human. He didn't become a dog. He didn't become a horse. God, in the person of Christ, chose to take on our humanity. Just by that simple awareness, our humanity takes on a whole new meaning.

The big buzzword in the media today is sustainability. Right? Everybody wants fuel and everything else to be sustainable, but nothing at the end of the day is completely sustainable. Everything is dust in the wind, as the song goes, except for the human soul. It's the only thing that will be sustainable and the question really is, what will its ultimate dwelling place be? Will it be, you know, a place of eternal happiness or the complete opposite? In Christ we discover that God wants us to be happy. He gives the grace to become happy and once we know that and we begin to have that relationship with Him, we find that happiness beginning here and now. And you find you don't need drugs to make you happy. You don't need money to try and make you happy. You just need Christ.

