

Roman Catholic Clergy in St Munchin's Parish [Part 1]

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During the eighteenth century the people of St. Munchin's parish in Limerick were fortunate to have an unbroken line of priests to minister to their spiritual needs. The custom of celebrating Mass in the homes of the people continued even though the Masshouses of the 1730's were being replaced by more solid structures. In medieval Limerick City, there were five ancient parishes: St. John's, St. Mary's, St. Michael's, St. Munchin's and St. Patrick's. With the evolution and expansion of the city, particularly from the 1960's onwards, and the resulting increase in population, the original St. Munchin's parish was subdivided into St. Munchin's, Our Lady of the Rosary parish (formed in 1964), Christ the King parish (formed in 1970), and Corpus Christi parish (formed in 1976). These four parishes form the present Thomond Cluster.

The origins of St. Munchin's parish can be traced to the 1691 Treaty of Limerick. Initially the parish was known as St. Lelia's parish, but in 1812 it reverted back to St. Munchin's parish. St. Munchin, the patron saint of Limerick, lived in the period 650-700 AD and his feast day is celebrated on 3 January. Legend tells us that St. Munchin placed a curse on Limerick city as a result of the natives refusing to help him in building his first church in Limerick. St. Lelia (or Liadhain) was reputed to be a sister of St. Munchin and is believed to have been a Dalcassian saint.

Today there is a disused Church of Ireland church built in 1827 on the site of the original St. Munchin's Church, which is dated to medieval times. The nineteenth century church was renovated in 1980 and is currently used by the Island Theatre Group. There are two graveyards in Killeely, one being dedicated to St. Brigid which was used as a pauper's graveyard for many years and Killeely graveyard, where the renowned author, historian, surgeon and patriot Sylvester O'Halloran is buried. Among his many works are *An Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (1772) and *General History of Ireland* (1778).

O'Halloran died in 1807 and in 1976 St. Senan's Historical Society erected a memorial slab on his tomb. The Treaty Stone situated directly across the road from St. Munchin's Catholic Church is reputed to be stone on which the 1691 Treaty of Limerick was signed. This treaty was supposed to guarantee civil and religious liberty for the Irish people.

Succession of Parish Priests in St. Munchin's Parish

1704 – John Bourke was registered as P.P. of St. Munchin's parish in 1704. He lived in the city at this time and was aged 42. Dr. James Whelan, Bishop of Ossory ordained Fr. Bourke in 1686.¹ He died in 1709.

1709 – John Connellan. In 1704 he was registered as P.P. of St. Nicholas' parish, North Liberties of Limerick. He was ordained by Dr. James Whelan at Kilkenny. After the death of Fr. Bourke, Fr. Connellan became P.P. of St. Munchin's parish and acted as curate to Fr. William Ryan, P.P. of St. Mary's parish. Fr. Connellan had the reputation of being an excellent pastor. He was a native of Clare and in 1709 took the Oath of Abjuration. He is buried in St. Mary's Cathedral on the south side of the graveyard.² He died in 1722.

1722 Fr Stapleton, a Dominican friar-took ministry of the parish for a short time around this time.³

Pre-1727 – Martin Geron succeeded Fr. Stapleton. This pastor was perhaps the Fr. Matthew Geron who was indicted in the Grand Jury Book in July 1725 for celebrating Mass. At this time, Fr. Geron is described as being a working priest in the city.⁴ Fr. Geron was chosen as Coadjutor pastor of St. Mary's parish in 1727 as the incumbent there, Fr. William Ryan, was failing in health. Fr. Geron became a great favourite with the people of St. Mary's parish and retained the parish until 1730, when serious accusations were brought against him by Messrs. John Flynn and Darby Flannedy. Lawsuits ensued on both sides, and in 1732 Fr. Geron was suspended from duty by Dr. O'Keeffe, Bishop of Limerick.⁵

1727 – Daniel Flynn served in St. Michael's parish from 1725 until his appointment to St. Munchin's parish. He was a young energetic priest who died of fever on 21 July 1728.⁶

1728 – Patrick Scanlan was from the Killaloe diocese and served in St. Munchin's parish from 1728 until 1756. In 1754 Dr. Lacy, Bishop of Limerick suspended Fr. Scanlan from ministry for a year following rumours were circulated concerning his character. The controversy dragged on until 1757 when Fr. Scanlan was eventually excommunicated. He lived in Limerick until his death in 1774.⁷ In 1743 the old Masshouse at Thomondgate was falling into ruin and was given up by the people of St. Mary's parish who procured in the little island a Masshouse which was used as a chapel until 1748 when a new chapel was built. The parishioners of St. Munchin's were now compelled to build a chapel for themselves, and having obtained a lease from 1743 to 1774 of the plot where the old Masshouse stood, they erected a small but commodious place of worship which lasted for fifty years as a place of worship for the people of St. Munchin's parish.⁸

1756 – Dr. Rowland Kirby was inducted as P.P. of St. Munchin's parish by Dr. Lacy during the period while Fr. Scanlan was suspended from ministry. Dr. Kirby served as P.P. in Shanagolden from 1738 until his appointment to St. Munchin's parish. He became unwell in 1763 and retired to his mother's house at his native place, Kanturk, where he died after a lingering illness. In Kilbrin graveyard near Kanturk his headstone reads: *Here lies ye body of ye Revd. Doctor Rowland Kirby, who departed this life the 8th day of April, 1764 aged 61 years.* During his ministry in St. Munchin's, Dr. Kirby was placed third for the bishopric.⁹

1764 – John Creagh was C.C. of St. John's parish prior to his appointment to St. Munchin's parish. He died in 1794.

1794 – Stephen Cantillon served as C.C. in his native Dromcollogher from 1790 until his appointment to St. Munchin's parish in 1794. He died in 1798. Fr. Cantillon's father taught a classical school with great success for many years in Dromcollogher.

1798 – Gerard Herbert. During his tenure in St. Munchin's parish, Fr. Herbert built a church which was badly needed. This church, which opened for public worship in October 1799 and was built by public subscriptions, stood to the left of the present church and replaced the structure which had been erected in 1743. Mr. Owen Madden, a wealthy parishioner, supplied the altar and in 1808 presented a large painting of the Ascension by Henry Singleton. A.R.A., at a cost of fifty guineas.¹⁰ Fr. Herbert was transferred to St. Mary's parish in 1807 and he died in 1813.

1807 – Patrick MacGrath was ordained in 1797 and was one of the first students to be ordained in the College of St. Munchin, which opened on 29 September 1796 in Palmerstown. Fr. MacGrath had pursued his clerical studies on the Continent prior to 1796.¹¹ In 1812, Fr. MacGrath was transferred to St. Patrick's parish, and died there in 1823. While there, Fr. MacGrath completed St. Patrick's Church in 1816 and opened it for public worship.¹²

1812 – Richard Walsh entered Maynooth College in 1803 and was ordained around 1809. After a time on the mission, Fr. Walsh was appointed P.P. of St. Munchin's parish, which was then a poor parish without much resources for opening up a flourishing mission. The urban section of the parish was for the most part in needy circumstances, while the farm holdings on the outskirts were too sparse and scattered to provide an effective congregation. At this time, the parish was known as St. Lelia's parish. Fr. Walsh resigned the parish on 24 August 1815 in favour of Gerard Fitzgibbon, who was regarded as a future bishop of the diocese.¹³ Fr. Walsh was re-appointed in 1817 upon the death of Fr. Fitzgibbon. During his second term in St. Munchin's parish, Fr. Walsh built a substantial parochial house on the Ennis Road, but it was given up in later years as being too far ~~out~~ from Thomondgate, which was growing to be populous and prosperous. In July 1823, seven schools existed in the parish, each having its own teacher, and with a combined attendance of 324 pupils. Fr. Walsh, who was very methodical in his habits and in the execution of his duties, was appointed P.P. of Rathkeale in 1847, where many of his relatives resided. He had also served as C.C. of Rathkeale for a period prior to his first appointment to St. Munchin's parish as P.P. Fr. Walsh died in early December 1849.¹⁴

1815 – Gerard Fitzgibbon, a native of Pallaskenry, was a most successful professor in St. Munchin's College for several years prior to his appointment to St. Munchin's parish. He died on 21 March 1817 aged 39 and is interred in Mellon churchyard in Kildimo. Beside the grave is the grave of his brother, Fr. John Fitzgibbon who died in 1825 aged 23, and their cousin, Fr. James McMahon, C.C. of Croagh who died of fever in June 1846 aged 42.

1817 – Richard Walsh was re-appointed in 1817 as outlined above.

1847 – *Daniel Synan* was C.C. in Kilmallock from 1836 to 1838, and C.C. in Rathkeale until he succeeded Fr. Walsh as P.P. in 1847. While in St. Munchin's parish, Fr. Synan resided in a house near Wellesley Bridge on the Ennis Road side.¹⁵ Fr. Synan died on 3 October 1850 and was an uncle to Fr. Cornelius Conway who was P.P. of St. Patrick's parish from 1898 until his death in 1908.¹⁶ C.C. of Shanagolden in May 1832 until February 1833.

1850 – *James Moore* served as C.C. in Glenroe from 1810 until he was appointed P.P. of Mungret in 1824. Fr. Moore was transferred to Patrickswell in 1840 but returned to Mungret the following year. He was P.P. of Kilfinane from 1844 to 1848, and P.P. of Parteen until his appointment to St. Munchin's parish in 1850. He died in 1863 and an epitaph in St. Munchin's old church reads:

Rev. James Moore, P.P. St. Munchin's who departed this life on the 4th Nov. 1863 in the 80th year of his age and 54th of his priesthood. R.I.P.¹⁷

1863 – *Richard Scott*, of the Cashel and Emly archdiocese, was C.C. in Dromcollogher from 1838 to 1840 when he took up curacy duties in Kilmallock. In 1841, he was appointed C.C. in Bulgaden, and the following year was transferred to Patrickswell, where he remained until appointed P.P. of Killeedy in 1850. He held this position until 1863 when he took up parochial duty in St. Munchin's parish. In 1865, Fr. Scott was transferred to St. Mary's parish where he remained until 1870.

1865 – *Daniel O'Kennedy* is listed as C.C. Adare in 1836. As the Irish Catholic Directories only commenced publication in this year, it is unknown for how long or where he was ministering prior to 1836. In 1837 he was assigned curacy duties in Kilfinane and Ardpatrick. These two present-day parishes were at this time a combined parish. Fr. O'Kennedy was transferred to Cratloe in 1844 and remained there until his appointment as P.P. of Stonehall (which in 1960 was re-named Kilcornan) in 1850. He held this position until 1855 when he was transferred to Loughill-Ballyhahill, being the first P.P. of Loughill parish, as we know it today. Up to this time, Loughill was united with Glin parish. In 1865, he took up parochial duties in St. Munchin's parish and remained there until his death on 13 September 1878 aged 70. He is buried in Ahnid graveyard (near Croom) where his epitaph reads:

Erected to the memory of the Rev. D^l. Kennedy the respected parish priest of St. Munchin's, Limerick, who departed this life on the 13th September 1878, in the 70th year of his age, 40 of which were spent in the sacred ministry.¹⁸

1878 – *William Molony*, a native of Manister parish, was ordained on 15 July 1852, having received his clerical education in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. His first clerical appointment was to St. Munchin's parish as C.C. in 1853. In 1857 he was transferred to St. Michael's parish and in 1863 he took up curacy duties in St. John's parish. The following year Fr. Molony was appointed P.P. of Donoughmore and remained there until 25 September 1878 when he returned to St. Munchin's parish as P.P. Upon this appointment, Fr. Molony was also assigned the Chaplaincy to Limerick Workhouse, until May 1894 when he was transferred to Rathkeale, and also served as chaplain to the workhouse in that town. Fr. Molony died in Rathkeale on 7 November 1901, aged 78, and is interred there. He had been created Vicar Forane in 1887.

1894 – *Timothy Shanahan* was ordained on 19 September 1856, having pursued his clerical studies in Maynooth. His first clerical assignment was to St. Munchin's parish as C.C., a position he held until 1858 when he took up similar duties in Donoughmore. In 1859, Fr. Shanahan was transferred

to St. Mary's parish and in 1861 was appointed Administrator there. He remained in this role until 1863 when he was transferred to St. Michael's parish. On 22 July 1874, Fr. Shanahan was appointed P.P. of Ballingarry, and while there completed the present church, built in Gothic style, which was opened in 1879. Fr. Shanahan also built a convent for the Sisters of Mercy in that town. He remained in Ballingarry until 25 May 1894 when he returned to St. Munchin's parish, this time as Parish Priest. From 1894 to 1904, Fr. Shanahan also served as chaplain to Limerick City Workhouse. He was appointed Vicar Forane in 1894 and Dean of the Diocese and Vicar General of Limerick on 20 November 1905. Dean Shanahan resigned St. Munchin's parish on 26 October 1910 due to ill-health. He died on 14 May 1915 aged 86, and is interred in Mount St. Laurence cemetery. Dean Shanahan was a brother of Fr. Denis Shanahan who served as P.P. in the parishes of Askeaton, St. Patrick's and St. Mary's prior to his death in June 1924. Another brother, Gerard, served as P.P. in the parish of Thornbay-on-Tees in the diocese of Middlesbrough (England), while yet another brother, Patrick, was ordained for the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Australia) in June 1868. The Shanahans, who were natives of Limerick city, were nephews of Fr. Michael Shanahan, who was P.P. of Dromcollogher at the time of his death in 1833.

1910 – Andrew Murphy, a native of St. Munchin's parish, studied in Maynooth and was ordained in Laurel Hill Convent on 18 October 1885. After ordination he served as secretary to Bishop Edward O'Dwyer, until 9 January 1888 when he was appointed Professor in St. Munchin's College. Exactly six years later, Fr. Murphy was made President of the College and held this position until 22 October 1905 when he was appointed Administrator of St. John's parish. He had also served as chaplain to Laurel Hill Convent during his time as Professor in St. Munchin's College. On 11 November 1910, Fr. Murphy became P.P. of St. Munchin's parish. He held this role until his death, following an illness, on 18 June 1914 aged 53. He had been created Canon in 1912, but throughout his life, had never enjoyed robust health. Despite this, Canon Murphy was widely regarded as one of the most eminent clergymen of his generation. His brother, Fr. Patrick Murphy, served as curate in a number of Limerick parishes and in England until his premature death on 8 May 1899, aged 33. Another brother served as a priest in the Augustinian order.

1914 – David O'Driscoll was born on 6 December 1858 and was a native of Mount Fox, Kilmallock. He was educated in St. Munchin's College and Maynooth and was ordained in St. John's Cathedral on 1 January 1882. He served in the diocese of Clogher until June 1884 when appointed C.C. in Glin, and in September of that year he was transferred to Askeaton. In June 1888 he was assigned to St. John's parish and the following November was transferred to Bruff, until 1 July 1889 when he took sick leave. In May 1890 he was appointed to Mungret until 9 March 1892 when he returned to Bruff. While in Bruff, Fr. O'Driscoll was in charge of a classical school. On 5 September 1898 he was appointed vice-president of St. Munchin's College, until 31 January 1908 when he was appointed P.P. in St. Patrick's parish. On 29 June 1914, Fr. O'Driscoll was transferred to St. Munchin's parish, and while there built the present St. Munchin's Church in 1921. He had been appointed Vicar Forane in 1916 and Canon in 1918. Canon O'Driscoll died on 8 December 1923 aged 65 and is interred in St. Munchin's church grounds.

1924 – Canon James Cregan studied in the Irish College, Paris, and was ordained in Mount St. Vincent Orphanage on 6 June 1881. He commenced his ministry in the Limerick diocese after ordination when he took up curacy duties in Monagea. In 1886 he was transferred to Abbeyfeale, and the following May was appointed to St. Mary's parish, a position he held until October 1890

when he took up curacy duties in St. John's parish. During his time in St. John's parish, Fr. Cregan also served as chaplain to the Sisters of Mercy Convent. On 13 June 1892, Fr. Cregan was appointed curate in St. Michael's parish and remained there until 8 December 1906, with the final five years of his tenure in St. Michael's as Administrator of that parish. Fr. Cregan was then appointed P.P. of Athea and remained there until May 1918 when he returned to Abbeyfeale, this time as P.P. On 24 March 1924, Canon Cregan – who had been created Canon in 1912 and Vicar Forane in 1918 – was appointed to St. Munchin's parish and remained there until his death on 12 August 1926 aged 69. During his tenure in St. Munchin's parish, he also served as chaplain to Croom and Limerick workhouses. Canon Cregan was a nephew of Dean Denis Cregan who was P.P. of Bruff from 1866 until his death in 1892, and an uncle to Fr. James Cregan who served in Staffordshire in the archdiocese of Birmingham (England).

1926 – Canon William O'Dwyer was baptised on 27 April 1866. A native of Bruree, he was ordained in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth on 24 June 1890, having pursued his clerical education there. His first clerical assignment was in Ayr (Scotland), where he remained for a year before returning to Limerick in 1892 to take up a teaching position in St. Munchin's College. Fr. O'Dwyer also served as chaplain to Mount St. Vincent female orphanage in conjunction with his teaching duties. On 6 October 1902, Fr. O'Dwyer was appointed C.C. in Parteen, until 16 August 1905 when he was transferred to Shanagolden. On 8 September 1907, Fr. O'Dwyer returned to St. Munchin's College to resume his teaching position and remained in the college until 17 December 1910 when he took up curacy duties in Rathkeale. On 8 September 1921, Fr. O'Dwyer was appointed P.P. of Templeglantine, a position he held until 30 August 1924 when he took up parochial duties in St. Patrick's parish. On 17 September 1926 he was created Canon and Vicar Forane and was assigned to St. Munchin's parish, where he remained until his death on 14 January 1945 aged 78. He is interred in St. Munchin's church grounds. While in St. Munchin's parish, Canon O'Dwyer also served as chaplain to Limerick Workhouse Hospital.

1945 – Canon Patrick O'Neill, D.D. was a native of Fedamore parish, born on 8 February 1891. After being educated in St. Munchin's College and Maynooth, he was ordained on 20 June 1915. After ordination he returned to Maynooth to prepare for a Doctorate in Divinity. On 8 October 1918 he took up the position of Professor of Moral Theology and Lecturer in Canon Law in Maynooth College. The following year he went to Rome to take a Doctorate in Canon Law and in 1920 returned to his teaching post in Maynooth. On 13 October 1936 he became vice-president of Maynooth College until July 1941 when he was appointed to Bruff. Dr. O'Neill marked his period in Bruff with the accomplishment of many improvements in the grounds of the old Presbytery. He was transferred to St. Munchin's parish in 1945 and after a short time there was ordained Bishop of Limerick on 24 February 1946. He remained Bishop until his death on 26 March 1958 aged 67.

1946 – Canon Michael Moloney hailed from Dromcollogher and was born in 1894. He attended St. Munchin's College and the Irish College, Rome, where he was ordained in 1918. After his ordination he served as Diocesan Secretary until 1940, when he was appointed P.P. of St. Patrick's parish. In 1946 Canon Moloney took up pastoral duty in St. Munchin's parish. While in St. Munchin's parish, he built Our Lady of the Rosary church (in 1950) and also erected new national schools at Hassett's Cross and Ballynanty. He died on 23 October 1964, having been created Monsignor in 1953. Monsignor Moloney, who was a keen historian all his life, is interred in Mount St. Laurence cemetery.

1964 – *Canon Michael Breen* died on the morning of Saturday 24 November 1979, and is interred in St. Munchin's church grounds. A native of Killeedy, he attended St. Munchin's College and Maynooth prior to his ordination in 1932. After brief periods ministering in the parishes of Ardpatrik and Kilmallock, he joined the teaching staff of St. Munchin's College, and became President of the College in 1959. Canon Breen played a major part in the building of the present St. Munchin's College, which opened in 1963, the year he was created Canon. During his tenure in St. Munchin's parish, which commenced in late 1964, he built St. Lelia's church which was opened for public worship in May 1977. Prior to the erection of this church, the older St. Lelia's church was where St. Lelia's graveyard now stands. This part of the parish was known as Killeely, and stretched from the River Shannon as far as Bunratty.

1979 – *Canon Michael Manning* was born at Glanmire, Co. Cork on 23 February 1926. He was ordained in Maynooth on 17 June 1951, and after ordination taught in St. Munchin's College for a brief period. The following year, he took up a teaching position in St. Finbarr's College in Farranferris, Cork, and remained there until September 1953 when he was appointed C.C. in St. Michael's parish, becoming Administrator in 1970 and P.P. there in 1973, when it ceased to be a mensal parish (a parish which is under the control of the presiding bishop). On 18 April 1980, Fr. Manning was created Canon and Vicar Forane, and on 24 March 1993 was created Archdeacon. Archdeacon Manning, who loved Limerick city and was very interested in the well-being of its people, died on 19 October 1996 at the Regional Hospital, Limerick, aged 70 and is interred in St. Munchin's church grounds.

1997 – *Canon Micheál Liston* served as temporary curate in St. Munchin's parish from 1968 until 1969. In 1976, Fr. Liston took up a position on the teaching staff of St. Munchin's College. He was P.P. of Cratloe parish from January 1989 until his appointment to St. Munchin's parish on 15 January 1997, when he was also created Canon. In September 2002 he went to Rome for a period to pursue further studies. On 20 September 2008, Canon Liston was appointed Associate Pastor in Abbeyfeale and also worked within the Abbeyfeale cluster of parishes, becoming Administrator of Templeglantine in September 2011.

2008 – *Donal McNamara* is the present incumbent. A native of Manister, Fr. McNamara was ordained in 1973 and served as C.C. of Kildimo-Pallaskenry from then until 1977 when he took up curacy duties in St. Joseph's parish. In 1987, Fr. McNamara was appointed Administrator there. On 6 January 1999 he returned to Kildimo-Pallaskenry, this time as P.P., and held this position until his appointment to St. Munchin's parish on 20 September 2008.

NOTES:

¹ Archdeacon John Begley - "*History of the Diocese of Limerick – Volume III*". (p.162)

² *ibid*

³ *ibid* (p.564)

⁴ *ibid* (p.187)

⁵ *ibid* (p.190)

- ⁶ ibid (p.596)
⁷ ibid (p.214-217)
⁸ ibid (p.211-212)
⁹ ibid (p.225-226)
¹⁰ ibid (p.272)
¹¹ ibid (p.261)
¹² ibid (p.461)
¹³ ibid (p.524)
¹⁴ ibid (p.525-527)
¹⁵ ibid (p.525)
¹⁶ ibid (p.624)
¹⁷ ibid (p.596)
¹⁸ ibid (p.597)

SOURCES:

Archdeacon John Begley - *History of the Diocese of Limerick – Volume III.*

Diocese of Limerick Heritage Project (available on CDROM and on diocesan website).

Matthew Tobin, *Priests of the Diocese of Limerick 1878-1917* in North Munster Antiquarian Journal 1997.

John Carroll *Catholic Life in Bruff from the 18th Century* (unpublished work)