

## A Conversation with

# Fr. Frank Fahy

**M**Y EDUCATION started in the National School, Logboy. I attended Logboy because my mother taught there. Some of my school mates were Miko Walsh, Tom Maguire, Sean Maguire, Kitty Roache, Mick Hosty, Willie Waldron, Anne Heneghan, Paddy Heneghan, R.I.P., Martin Brennan, T.J. Ruane, Tom Fahy, Michael Killeen and Maureen Tolan. I have many memories of Cloonfad and Logboy. The Donkey Derbies, Sports Days and 7-a-side football matches were events not to be missed and provided great entertainment at the time. Some of the stars of the 7-a-side were Brod Costello, Tom Kilrane, Stephen Cosgrave, Paddy and P.J. Moran. I completed my secondary education in St. Jarlath College, Tuam. I kept up my interest in football and won an All-Ireland Minor Medal with Mayo in 1953. I did teacher training in St. Patrick's, Drumcondra. I taught in Moyard in Connemara before travelling to England to join the Salesians Order. The Salesians are a teaching order. During my time in England I obtained a degree at Oxford University. I returned to Maynooth and studied for a further four years. I was ordained in Westport on 17th June, 1973 and said my first Mass in Cloonfad on June 18, 1973.

I first went to America to work with Fr. Peyton, known as the Rosary Priest. It was a marvelous experience. He would knock on doors of millionaires requesting money for his crusade. He would tell them he was doing them a favour departing them from some of their wealth. He held a lot of rallies in the South American countries. I remember during my time with him he had heart surgery plus two other operations in the one year. He remained positive and cheerful

throughout all his illness. I commented to him the great faith that he had. "Well," he said, "Our Lady has made a big investment in me, those operations have cost thousands

### BY FRANCIS GREENE

of dollars and she's not going to let me die now. There is much more work to be done."

After America I returned to work in the Parish of Knock where I worked until 1986. The highlight of my time there was the Popes visit in 1979. So much work was carried out - Knock was transformed with the development of the grounds and the building of the Basilica plus all the facilities for the sick. The work was carried out under the very able guiding hand of Fr. Horan, R.I.P. The people of Cloonfad will remember the great improvements that Fr. Horan initiated there. He was C.C. in Cloonfad when my mother taught there. She often recalled that it was in her classroom that he discovered he had an ear for music. His father who was quite a good musician himself always insisted that he was tone deaf and had no talent. When Fr. Horan visited the school one day the children were playing a tune which he recognised as being "The West Awake." Shortly afterwards he brought an accordion which he quickly learned to play. He was soon very capable of doing his party piece. I always think that it was a great sign of his determination that he could take up music at such a late stage in life and conquer it. It's a determination that shone through his life whether it was the moving of the Cloonfad hill, the erection of the Basilica at Knock or the building of Horan International Airport.

He also made sure the Altar

Servers got their day out. One particular outing went on until the early hours of the following morning when his sense of direction went wrong. It was decided they would go for a picnic to Silver Strand in Galway. While there, Fr. Horan decided they would cover more ground and the group headed for Lisdoonvarna. Time slipped by very quickly there - it was now 8 o'clock in the evening so the convoy of cars headed quickly out of Lisdoonvarna but instead of taking the Galway Road they took the Limerick Road. You can imagine the state of the parents who were waiting anxiously in Cloonfad until 2 a.m. when they finally returned. Fr. Horan took it all in his stride. It was a great privilege to work with him in Knock.

I came to Ballintubber in 1986. My work here has been challenging and rewarding. Mass has been celebrated in the Abbey for almost 800 years. Even in the Penal Days when the church had no roof the people gathered for Mass. The restoration has continued over the years. Its a great credit to the local community that the building has not been left to decay. Work on preserving the Abbey first started 150 years ago, but it's in the last 30 years that major improvements have taken place. The latest project which President Robinson opened, was the restoration of the chapter house which will now be an interpretative centre for the thousands of visitors who travel to the area each year. We have also refurbished a 14th Century Hermitage located on Church Island on the nearby lake. This will be used as a centre for retreats. We've had a lot of help from state agencies and from all our friends scattered far and wide. Its a great example of what a community can do when they work together.