

# **PARISH OF MOYRAVERTY**

**by Dr Frank McCorry**

In 1966, the Matthew Report, drawn up for the Northern Ireland government, recommended that a New City should be established in the region. The site chosen was a large sweep of land, 7,000 acres in total, lying between the towns of Lurgan and Portadown. Among local people, the farming community particularly, the report received a negative reception. The vesting of land and the subsequent valuation of farms generated considerable anxiety among families dwelling on holdings for upwards of 200 years. Their dispersal elsewhere took away people who were valuable parishioners of the parishes of Shankill and Seagoe.

The promise of 1,700 jobs in a huge new Goodyear factory in the townland of Ballinamoney, near Lurgan, tempered somewhat the fear of massive dislocation, and the first segments of the new development gradually took shape. The negatives, however, soon began to build up. Displaced farmers received inadequate compensation. Some of the early housing was of inferior quality and was demolished within twenty-five years. Many of the earliest in-migrants, attracted by re-location inducements, were unsettled in their new surroundings and their departure was as sudden as their arrival.

Major building schemes and the optimistic ambience which can accompany the intent of full employment and good wages assisted in the settlement of families from Belfast, Strabane, Derry and other places. A little later, during unprecedented social unrest and population displacement, a considerable number of Lurgan families moved to some of the early housing developments, and, by so doing, added to the growing stability in the new city's community life.

From the outset, it was recognised that the proposed new urban entity would require religious leadership and pastoral care. To this uncharted territory, Father Christopher Murray, who had just spent less than one year serving in Mayobridge, was appointed to the onerous task of generating a new parish from disparate population groupings on green-field sites. The new parish was carved from the parishes of Seagoe, Shankill and Tullylish.

Wednesday 3rd. November 1971: A new parish has been formed in the new city of Craigavon, and it has been named Moyraverty. Fr. Christopher Murray, Priest-in-Charge, Craigavon, was today appointed Parish Priest of the new parish.



The Church of St. Anthony, Legahory, Craigavon, was formally opened and dedicated by Bishop Francis Gerard Brooks on Sunday 22nd. April 1979. In 1979, Moyraverty Parish had almost 6,000 parishioners, and the new church had seating for 900 people. In October 1977, Bishop Brooks, during a mid-day Mass in the nearby parochial hall, laid the foundation stone of the new church. The late Fr. Seamus Moore, C.C., Newry, bequeathed £15,000 towards the cost of erection of St. Anthony's Church.

In a plain school-type exercise Father Murray kept a meticulous record of the many trials, difficulties, setbacks and obstacles he encountered as he strove to establish a meaningful Catholic presence in the midst of an array of building-sites and conflicting interests. Not only that, but the Troubles were building up to generate great social unrest and instability throughout Northern Ireland in which the new city of Craigavon was one of the most vulnerable areas. Extra-strong Faith, nerves of steel, a supportive nucleus of population, a parish-hall which could serve as a temporary church, a temporary school, a community gathering-place and a visible landmark were required. Father Christopher Murray, through Providence, had been endowed with the first-mentioned gifts and with the support of a growing population, the new St. Anthony's Parish Hall, Legahory, was formally opened in August 1972 at a cost of £70,000. One month later, on Monday 11 September 1972, Lismore new Junior High School (first phase), catering for pupils aged 11 to 14 years, received its first pupils. In the same week, Father Gerald Powell, recently ordained, was appointed as the second curate to Moyraverty where he joined Fr. Murray and Fr. Pat McAnuff. Father McAnuff has provided a most interesting account of his work in Moyraverty as Curate, 1971-1975, and as Parish Priest, 1980-1986. Firstly, Fr. Powell's reflections:

*When appointed to the new city of Craigavon, in September 1972, I discreetly asked Fr. Christy Murray, P.P. where Moyraverty was; he replied, "Somewhere between Lurgan and Portadown; there are plenty of green fields and roundabouts". My first Mass was in St. John's. Church, Lylo, followed by another Mass on the stage of St. Anthony's Hall.*

*My years in Rome had not prepared me for this challenge. People were arriving in the parish from Belfast, Lurgan, Portadown, Strabane and Derry, either looking for employment or because they had been intimidated from their previous homes.*

*Many hours were spent visiting their homes, welcoming them and blessing their new homes. Many hours also were spent on pastoral planning long before it became fashionable. Collaborative ministry were buzz words then - finance meetings, fundraising for new schools, a hall, a church; the formation of structures, - new arrivals and old survivals to promote the wellbeing of all the parishioners.*

*The priests were paid a frugal salary for long hours of work and service in chaplaincy attendance at Craigavon Area Hospital, Lismore Comprehensive School and the two primary schools, St. Anthony's and St. Brendan's.*

*Masses were well attended. There were four hours of Confessions every Saturday. There was an early 6.45 a.m. Mass on Sundays, in the hospital, and a 6.00 p.m. Mass in Anthony's Hall, and others in-between. it was a very active parish. Like all the residents in the Brownlow sector, the priests lived in council house accommodation.*

At the formation of the new parish of Moyraverty, Saint John's Church, Lylo, and Saint Joseph's Church, Edenderry near Portadown, were transferred from Seagoe to Moyraverty. On Saturday 22nd. July 1972, a bomb was placed in Saint Joseph's, Edenderry, and the explosion virtually destroyed the building. The site of the church which served a small rural community was eventually levelled and sold. Six months later, on 5th. January 1973, a hand-grenade was thrown into the home of Father Pat McAnuff at 48, Killycomaine Road, Portadown, where he had been dwelling to serve the parishioners at Edenderry. Fr. McAnuff was not injured, but his housekeeper sustained fairly serious injuries. Later that year, the priest obtained a new parochial house at 211. Drumglass, well within the Brownlow sector and quite close to St. Anthony's parish hall and schools, the foci of the new parish. Father McAnuff recalled early days in Moyraverty:

*To supplement the increasing requirement for a church in Brownlow, Father Murray acquired an ex-army Nissan Hut which would serve as a chapel and a hall in Moylinn, beside his rented house. St. Anthony's P.S. had been opened, and with an ever-extending building programme and an ever-increasing number of mobile classrooms, this gave rise to an ever-increasing number of problems for staff and pupils whose response to the challenge was simply extraordinary.*

*What would have been a difficult challenge in normal times, namely to build up a Christian community with few resources, and people who had come from many different areas, became at times, an arduous task. Indeed, it appeared at times to be a hopeless situation.*

*The huge building programme generated many financial difficulties. At one stage, the total income from all sources was insufficient to pay the interest owed to the bank.*

*The other parishes in the diocese came to our aid, and following an appeal made within the parishes on different Sundays, we got a great response.*

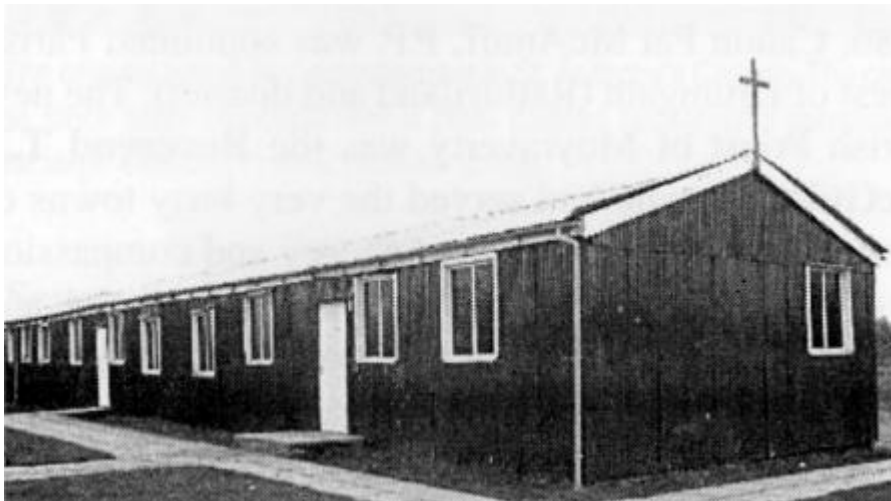
The diocesan records highlight a red-letter day in 1977 for the parishioners and priests of Moyraverty parish. For Sunday 23rd. October 1977, the records state:

*Most Reverend Dr. F.G. Brooks was the principal celebrant of the mid-day Mass in the Parochial Hall, Moyraverty, today. The other concelebrants were the priests of the parish.*

*During the Mass, His Lordship laid the foundation stone of the new Church of St. Anthony which is adjacent to the hall.*

*The church-site is part of the 1.75 acres plot allocated to the parish for a church, a parochial hall, a parochial house and a car-park. The church is being built by Laneir Ltd., Dublin, at a cost of £140,000. The late Fr. Seamus Moore, C.C. Newry, bequeathed half the residue of his estate amounting to £15,000 towards the cost of the church.*

*In the following month, November 1977, Fr. Gerald Powell and Fr. Seamus Reid, who had been working as curates in Moyraverty were transferred to Lurgan and Ballela respectively, and were replaced by Fr. Jim Kerr and Fr. Oliver Mooney. Father Pat McAnuff had gone to Cabra but other priests had come to Moyraverty as the needs and population grew greater.*

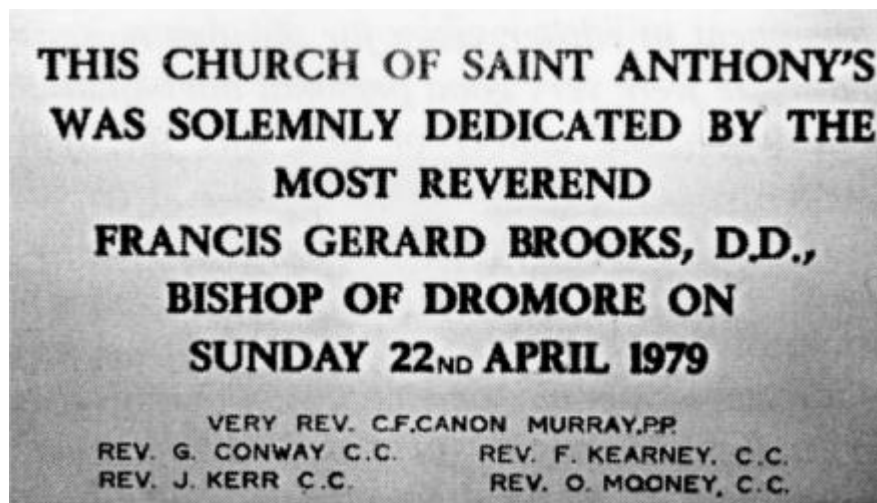


St. Martin's Chapel, the first church of the fledgling parish of Moyraverty. Reminiscent of churches built by missionaries abroad, the chapel was initially located near to where St. Anthony's Church now stands. After St. Anthony's was opened, St. Martin's was re-located to Ardowen where it served the growing number of parishioners in Drumbeg and other developments. The memory of the little chapel remains firmly fixed in the hearts of early Moyraverty parishioners.

Some twelve years after his courageous appointment as Priest-in-charge of the new fledgling Parish of Moyraverty, Canon Christopher Murray realised one of his great aims for his parishioners when the splendid new Saint Anthony's Church was formally opened and blessed. The diocesan records read:

Sunday 22nd. April 1979: The new Church of St. Anthony, Legahory, Brownlow, Craigavon, was formally opened and dedicated by His Lordship, Dr. F.G. Brooks, Bishop of Dromore, this afternoon. Saint Anthony's is the first new permanent Catholic church in the Brownlow sector of Craigavon. The Bishop was the principal

celebrant of the Mass. The concelebrants were: Right Rev. Monsignor Haughey, P.P. V.G., Very Reverend Canon C. Murray, P.P. Moyraverty, Reverend Michael Conway, Glasgow, and the following priests who are presently serving in the parish or who have served; Rev. G. Powell, Rev. G. Conway, Rev. Jim Kerr, Rev. Frank Kearney, Rev. Oliver Mooney, Reverend Pat McAnuff, Rev. Seamus Reid, and the Rev. Gerald Greene. St. Anthony's Parish has now about 6,000 parishioners, and the new church will seat 900 people.



Commemorative tablet within the entrance of St. Anthony's Church, Moyraverty. In 1979, the team of priests in the parish comprised, Canon Christopher Murray, Fr. Gerard Conway, Fr. Francis Kearney, Fr. Jim Kerr and Fr. Oliver Mooney.

In January 1980, Right Reverend Dean James Haughey, R.P. V.G. Shankill, retired, and Canon Christopher Murray was appointed as Parish Priest, Shankill. Lurgan. In the following July, he was raised to the dignity of a Prelate of Honour, and made Vicar General of the Dromore Diocese. The new Moyraverty Parish Priest was the Very Reverend Pat McAnuff, former C.C. Moyraverty. He was joined by the Reverend Francis Molloy who was serving in nearby Lurgan. Fr. Pat McAnuff was in a splendid position to adjudge the progress and well-being of the parishioners and their parish. He reflected:

*I must confess that that I was very pleased when Bishop Brooks asked me, now fully refreshed, to return as Parish Priest of Moyraverty. I noticed first and very quickly that here was now a very vibrant parish, neighbours who knew each other, a beautiful new St. Anthony's Church, a parish-hall offering a variety of pastimes from bowling to badminton to Irish dancing and many very enjoyable social gatherings. There were now five priests, living in different parts of a very large parish. I noticed too that residents who, at the beginning, liked to return to their former parishes, particularly Portadown and Lurgan, to worship, to get married, and to have their children baptised, were now readily accepting St. Anthony's as their parish church. Different societies had grown up, and the Sisters of Mercy, who had come from Lurgan at the very beginning and had given unique service in every way, were involved in the various societies, especially the St. Vincent de Paul Society and Baptism Preparation Classes. The G.A.A. Club, aptly named Eire Og, catered for the younger people and*

*I'm sure that the young club was proud to be represented in the victorious All-Ireland squad in 2002.*

*Ecumenical activity would not have been prominent in earlier years for obvious reasons but there were very good personal inter-Church relations. One aspect of this was the real friendships and frequent meetings between the Chaplains of Craigavon Hospital. The Reverend Jack Shearer (later Dean of St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, the 'Black Santa') worked tirelessly to improve community relations locally, when that was not easy for him. With him, I was cofounder of the local Samaritans, and I was very proud to return with him for the Silver Jubilee of the Society a short time before he died. Recently (2002), I had a very pleasant return visit to Moyraverty when Father Michael Hackett, the present Parish Priest, entertained me in the beautiful new spacious Parochial House, a welcome addition to the new complex of Church, church-hall, primary school, a complex which is a credit to the faithful and generous parishioners, to the Sisters of Mercy, and to the many devoted priests, past and present, who have every reason to be proud of their contribution to the Parish of Moyraverty.*

An impressive testimony to the cross-community initiatives undertaken by priests and people of Moyraverty Parish in the 1970s and '80s when denominational relationships appeared to be at an all-time low, took place at the end of Church Unity Week, 1981. The record states:

*Sunday 25th. January 1981: About one thousand people assembled at the Unity Service in Craigavon to mark the week of prayer for Christian Unity. An inter-denominational Act of Worship was held in St. Anthony's Church, Craigavon. People present included ministers and priests from the neighbouring Churches and some of these with Lay Representatives assisted in the Service. Salvation Army members were also present. Reverend David Gilettan, Anglican Minister at the Christian Renewal Centre, Rostrevor, gave the address.*

A considerable number of younger priests gained valuable pastoral experience in Moyraverty Parish within which was the Craigavon Area Hospital, almost a parish within a parish. In the early 1980s, priests serving in Moyraverty included Fr. Oliver Mooney, Fr. Patrick Murray, Fr. Jim Kerr, Fr. Joseph McConville, Fr. Frank Kearney, Fr. Brian Brown, Fr. Gregory McGivern and Fr. John Carr. In February 1986, Canon Pat McAnuff, RP. was appointed Parish Priest of Drumgath (Rathfriland and district). The new Parish Priest of Moyraverty was the Reverend T.J. McGuinness who had served the very busy towns of Lurgan and Newry with great energy and compassion as those towns bore the brunt of major social and political unrest. Fr. McGuinness continued the sterling work of his predecessors in the many spheres of pastoral work among the disadvantaged and in Craigavon Area Hospital. The relative peace and smooth running of the parish was shattered on Thursday 12th. December 1991 when a huge bomb was detonated in the Moyraverty church-school-hall complex which had the local R.U.C. Station as a neighbour.

A condensed account of the effects of the explosion read:

*Thursday 12th. December 1991: St. Anthony's School, Craigavon, was completely demolished, and St. Anthony's Church and Parochial Hall, together with very many*

*homes, were very badly damaged by a 2,000lbs, bomb left in a truck outside the R. U.C. Station in Craigavon.*

*Father Michael Farrell, C.C. Moyraverty, was conducting a Service of Peace when the bomb exploded bringing some of the timber ceiling down, and shattering many of the windows of the church. No serious injuries were suffered.*

*Bishop Brooks described the bombing as a "totally reckless act without regard for the consequences either in respect of persons or property."*



The original Sanctuary arrangement in St. Anthony's Church. The organ has since been relocated and a plain painted background substituted. The large elevated crucifix remains in situ.

Seven months later, on July 5th. 1992, Bishop Brooks concelebrated a special Mass, together with the priests of the parish, at the re-opening of St. Anthony's Church. He praised the resilience of the community and the priests and commended all the hard work undertaken to restore the church. In September 1992, Fr. Francis Molloy left Moyraverty to become Parish Priest of St. Paul's, Shankill, now a separate entity, the large Shankill Parish having been divided in two. Fr. Richard O'Connell who had served in both parts of Shankill Parish was transferred to Moyraverty to replace Fr. Molloy.

In a major round of clerical changes, Father Michael Hackett, C.C. Lurgan, was appointed Parish Priest of Moyraverty, on August 29th. 1993. Fr. Hackett's pastorate in Moyraverty was distinguished by a series of enlightened initiatives in the realms of worship and prayer, parish community expansion, building and fund-raising. The number of private housing developments within and around the Brownlow sector has increased dramatically in the last twelve years. Within the ambience of relative peace which has come to the region as a whole, a settledness, previously unknown. can be detected

throughout the new parish. There are families to turn to for the various specialisms required to sustain parish life. The growth of population has been more than matched

in Church-related social activities where the two primary schools and Lismore Comprehensive play leading roles.

Throughout all the changes imposed on the district which was set aside to accommodate the new city of Craigavon, one small population which had St. John's Church, Lylo, as its focus, remained unchanged. A nucleus of families with deep roots in the area and which were greatly disturbed in the troubles of 1975, augmented by families who had given their allegiance to the bombed St. Joseph's Church, Edenderry, remained an anchor congregation for the modest St. John's Church, Lylo. For these families, St. John's represented the visible aspects of Faith and community life, and they continued to be an integral part of parish life, providing stability in an era of change and uncertainty.



The beautiful Sanctuary and interior of St. John's Church, Lylo

The provision of cemeteries for the people of Craigavon was not addressed by the planners. Therefore, for a considerable time after the many housing developments had been occupied, Catholic funerals for the most part returned to the places of origin of the deceased, often far distant, or were brought to either St. Patrick's, Derrymacash or St. Colman's, Lurgan. To reduce this known inconvenience, a body of Lylo parishioners, with the approval of the parish priest, decided to enlarge the little cemetery attached to St. John's Church and, at the same time, refurbish the church interior, the centrepiece of which is a very beautiful white marble altar, the gift of Archdeacon Edward MacCartan, P.P. Seagoe, 1889-1920.

Today, the extended cemetery, laid out in a series of narrow green lawns and surrounded by an array of shrubs and small trees, is an oasis of peace, set well back from a quiet country road, a rural cameo not always associated with the bustle of Craigavon. The refurbishment of the interior of St. John's Church, similar to the extending of the cemetery, was undertaken completely by voluntary workers. The gift of a vivid red carpet for the sanctuary sets off the beauty of the magnificent white marble altar, and gold and brass altar fittings. Irish Catholic rural churches, mainly of mid-19th. century origin, have come to represent the emergence of the Church from centuries of repression. St. John's, Lylo, and the congregations which gather within,

represent the continuity of Faith, worship and people in an era and district of enormous change.

The decrease in the number of priests in the Dromore Diocese has affected greatly the Parish of Moyraverty. Today, three priests serve the large parish and care for the patients and staff of Craigavon Hospital. The parish pries is assisted by Fr. Torn McAteer, who devotes much time and devotion on a daily basis to the hospital, and by Fr. Heery, who has returned from missionary work abroad.

Following Fr. Hackett's appointment as Parish Priest of Kilbroney, Fr. Martin McAlinden was appointed Parish Priest of Moyraverty in August, 2004. Aged 39 years, Fr. McAlinden is the youngest parish priest in the Dromore Diocese for many, many years.



St. John's Church, Lylo, formerly one of four churches in Seagoe Parish, is now an integral part of Moyraverty Parish, serving that part of the new parish which lies towards Tullylish and Portadown. This district is on the periphery of Craigavon, comprising farmland as well as impressive new housing developments. A major extension to the cemetery adjacent to the church was undertaken by local parishioners on a voluntary basis. The same families undertook the work of refurbishment in the now beautiful church interior, resplendent with red carpet contrasting with the magnificent white marble altar.