

CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

Justice never takes a holiday



Tom Kitt TD, Claire McGettrick, Dr. James Smith, Dr. Katherine O'Donnell (UCD), and Michael Kennedy TD deliver the first 1,000 online signatures to An Taoiseach.

While most of Ireland and the State itself enjoyed summer holidays, Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) continued to apply pressure in its fight for restorative justice for survivors of the Magdalene Laundries.

June saw several encouraging steps forward in JFM's campaign: the delivery of the first 1,000 online petition signatures to An Taoiseach (led by JFM ad hoc Oireachtas committee conveners Tom Kitt, T.D. [FF] and Michael Kennedy T.D. [FF]); a meeting with JFM committee members James Smith, Claire McGettrick

and the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) to discuss the group's application for an inquiry into the State's obligation to provide redress; and a positive meeting between JFM representatives and Cardinal Sean Brady. In the last, Cardinal Brady asserted that JFM's presentation was "fair and balanced," and hoped that the religious congregations would engage with the group to seek "a pathway forward."



Jim Smith and Claire McGettrick meet with the IHRC.

Dr. James Smith also presented public lectures hosted by UCD and UCC's Women's Studies Programs focusing on the State's constitutional and human rights obligations towards the survivor community. Both lectures were well-attended and received. JFM gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of Katherine O'Donnell and Mary McAuliffe at UCD, Sandra McAvoy at UCC, as well as the staff of Boston College-Ireland. We also thank Kathleen Lynch, T.D., for her efforts to insure that members of the survivor community were able to attend the lecture in Cork.



Professor Jim Smith lectures at UCD and UCC, June

In July, JFM received additional and much welcomed support when Susan McKay, Director of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC), wrote to all women TDs, Senators, and Local Councillors urging them to support JFM's call for justice. McKay's letter reminded women politicians that:

"Justice must be done and a clear and resounding message must emanate from Government that the treatment of these women and their children was a severe violation of their human rights."

Cont'd, Page 2

How to Contact Us

You can write to us at **Justice For Magdalenes**, Crocknahattina, Bailieborough, Co. Cavan, Ireland.

You can e-mail JFM at **info@magdalenelaundries.com**.

You may also contact us by phone, in Ireland at **(353) 86 4059491**, in the US at **(1) 215-589-9329**, or in the UK at **(44) 208-346-7479**

www.magdalenelaundries.com



CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

The NWCI campaign resulted in the passing of a number of resolutions at the local town and county council levels, further reinforcing a ground swelling of support for this forgotten population of women.

In August, JFM fought to reverse the decision of Galway City Council to relocate a statue memorialising the women who lived, worked and, in some cases, died at the Sisters of Mercy Magdalene laundry in the city. Dedicated in March 2009, the Mick Wilkins statue was commissioned by the same city councillors who now sought to remove it. It is located at the corner of Forster Street and Bothár Breandan O Eithir, standing in full public view close to where the laundry institution once stood.

Patricia Burke Brogan, an early and staunch supporter of Justice for Magdalenes and author of the plays *Eclipsed* and *Stained Glass at Samhain*, was one of the prime advocates for a Galway memorial and has also advocated against its removal. Her poetry adorns the plaque at the foot of the statue:

*Make visible the Tree
its branches ragged
with washed out linens
of a bleached shroud*



Galway Magdalene memorial statue

A final decision was reached in mid-September to move the statue only slightly to allow for completion of a new bus lane, while maintaining its important location and integrity.

Summer setbacks

Late summer saw some back-pedaling from the Irish State in terms of earlier admissions of complicity. The Department of Justice, who the government have designated “to take the lead role and coordinate” the State’s response to the Magdalene issue, acknowledged that abuse did take place in the laundries, and that the Government was prepared to consider issuing an apology, but that any apology would need to be vetted by the Attorney General’s office to absolutely guarantee no liability on the State. Department officials still maintain that they will assist with requests for records from women remanded through its auspices (e.g. the courts’ system). However, the Minister for Justice continues to deny full complicity in his responses to Parliamentary Questions put forward by numerous representatives, including Kathleen Lynch, T.D., the Labour Party’s point-person for JFM’s campaign.

At the end of September, JFM received disappointing news from the Catholic Church. CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) declined its offer to meet and discuss the group’s ongoing campaign to bring about an apology and a distinct redress scheme. The news came from Sr. Marianne O’Connor, CORI’s Director General, who was responding to JFM’s letter of 9 July 2010 in which the group requested the opportunity to make a presentation on its ongoing campaign before CORI’s executive board. It did so on the recommendation of Cardinal Sean Brady and the Irish Bishops’ Conference after the JFM meeting in Armagh in late June.



JFM director Mari Steed, *Irish Independent*

This news followed on the heels of a renewed interest in issues left unresolved from the Ryan Report and the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002, including vaccine trials that occurred in several mother-and-baby homes and residential institutions in the 1960s and 1970s. JFM committee director, Mari Steed, was subject to one such trial at the Bessboro’ mother-and-baby home in Cork between 1960-61. Mari and her mother Josephine were interviewed by the Laffoy Commission in 2002 and it was determined Mari was part of trial group A, a subset of some 53 children made

Cont'd, Page 3



part of the study who were given a four-in-one combination of routine childhood immunisations. The Commission investigation was shut down in late 2003. In a series of articles that appeared in the Irish Independent (21-24 August 2010), Mari and others similarly effected gave evidence that there was a very real need to reopen the investigation. Given the lack of government action, Mari has now sought legal advice.

Additional recent TV coverage on RTÉ's Primetime and TV3 highlighted the abrogation of rights of adopted adults in Ireland as well as survivors of the Laundries, many of whom are the mothers of those same adopted adults.

Press conference called



Michael Kennedy TD, Claire McGettrick, Mari Steed, and Tom Kitt TD, JFM/ARA press conference, 8 October

National and international pressure, coupled with the recent disheartening response from CORI, prompted Justice for Magdalenes and Adoption Rights Alliance (an advocacy group campaigning to ensure that the Irish government enshrines the rights of the adopted child and Ireland's more than 42,000 adult adopted people in a proposed 2009 Adoption Bill and other legislation) to hold a joint press conference on 8 October in Dublin. JFM committee director, Mari Steed – who was in Ireland filming an RTÉ *Would You Believe?* segment on the vaccine trials – joined JFM

colleague Claire McGettrick and ARA spokesperson Susan Lohan to discuss the implications of CORI's announcement and the 2009 adoption legislation with members of the media. *The Irish Times*, *Irish Examiner*, TV3 and the *Irish Independent*, among others, covered the event. JFM ad hoc committee members Tom Kitt and Michael Kennedy were also in attendance.



TV3 Ireland coverage of JFM/ARA press conference, 8 October

*Adopted adults or survivors who may have lost children to adoption in and from Ireland may contact **Adoption Rights Alliance** (right).*



Professor James Smith weighs in on CORI response



Following the response from CORI to JFM, James Smith wrote the following editorial, which appeared on www.paddydoyle.com, 16 October.

Dispatching the Magdalene Laundries and Bethany Home “under the sod.”

The government reiterated last week that there is no plan to extend the residential institutions redress scheme to survivors of the Magdalene laundries or the Bethany Home. Ministers Dermot Ahern and Sean Haughey contend that the State is not culpable for the abuses that took place in these institutions. This despite the fact that the Departments of Justice, Education, Health, Defence, Finance and Social Welfare, as well as the Judiciary, were complicit in referring women and children to these institutions and/or failed to uphold statutory provisions regulating their operation.

Now comes word that CORI's executive board is refusing to meet and listen to a presentation detailing the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) campaign to bring about (i) an apology and (ii) a distinct redress scheme. JFM sought a meeting with CORI on the advice of Cardinal Sean Brady, who characterized said presentation as “fair”

Cont'd, Page 4





and “balanced” while also encouraging the group to “continue its efforts to establish dialogue and a process of justice and healing for all concerned.” What does it mean that the Primate and CORI are on such different pages?

This is Ireland in 2010 – Ireland after the Ferns, Ryan, and Murphy Reports, Ireland after Pope Benedict’s apology, Ireland as it prepares for an apostolic visit. The continuing refusal to engage survivors of the Magdalene laundries and the Bethany Home underscores the continuing need for transparency in Church-State relations.

The deepening economic crisis is, of course, the proverbial elephant in the midst of this discussion. The government has informed JFM that it will not fund any compensation package for Magdalene survivors. The religious congregations fear further dissipation of their assets. Money is the determining factor. Consequently, there will be no apology, no admission of culpability, no access to records, no health and housing services, no memorial, no oral history project.

Banks meanwhile are bailed out. Executives in corporate and public service enterprises receive golden parachute pay-off’s. Political representatives exploit the expenses reimbursement system. But, the cost involved in making reparation to some of the most marginalized of Irish citizens will break the national coffers?

Apologies are no longer cheap. Apologies establish legal liability. And thus survivors of the Magdalene laundries and the Bethany Home are still waiting to hear the words, “we were wrong and we are sorry.”

Bertie Ahern’s apology to residential institution survivors, in May 1999, is crucially instructive on this issue. On that occasion, the apology came first; survivors came forward demanding justice in greater numbers having first been told that what happened to them was wrong. Church and State deny survivors of the Magdalene laundries and the Bethany Home the same restorative justice.

Magdalene survivors must also deal with a particular sexual stigma that, in part, contributes to their unwillingness to come forward and speak about their past. For women of a certain generation this stigma is deeply felt. And, Church and State know this to be the case. Indeed, they depend on it.

Justice for Magdalenes will persevere despite the latest obstructionist tactics. We do so, because survivors of the Magdalene laundries and the Bethany Home do exist. There are communities of former Magdalene women, for example, living in convents in Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford.

Survivors read between the lines of political gobbledygook and religious simulation. As one such survivor told me recently, “they’re hoping that in 10 years, we’ll all be under the sod and they can relax.”

Bethany Home survivors continue campaign



Survivors of the Bethany Home, led by Derek Leinster and academic Niall Meehan, increased pressure on the Irish State and Church of Ireland officials. Meehan offered the following in a recent letter to the *Irish Times* (full letter may be viewed at www.ireland.com, 14 October):

“Bethany Home survivors were surprised to read that the Church of Ireland has appealed to them to ‘disclose all information of allegations of abuse to the Government’. The only forum whereby this may be achieved is through the Schedule to the 2002 Redress Act. Former Bethany residents, like Magdalene survivors, are excluded from the Schedule by the very same Government.

It appears the church misread a recent offer from Minister of State, Seán Haughey to hear ‘allegations of abuse from any female committed to Bethany Home...on an individual basis’. The Bethany Survivors represents in the main children who were resident in a home in which unmarried mothers and women committed by the courts were resident. The offer excludes them, just as surely as it excludes the approximately 250 children who died in the Bethany Home.

The former Bethany Home children are used to being excluded. This is how they came to be born there. However, they would like it to stop.”