

## Ethos Report, Sept - Oct 2025

### 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Mary's

To celebrate the school's 90th anniversary, a variety of memorable and most enjoyable events were organised. An article submitted to the 'Leinster Leader' newspaper by our principal, Mark Dowling, captures the essence of these events. It reads as follows –

#### St. Mary's College Celebrates 90 Years of Inspiration and Hope

St. Mary's College marked its 90th Anniversary with a breathtaking concert, "Songs of Inspiration and Hope," held in the serene Church of Our Lady and St. David on October 11, 2025. The evening was a heartfelt tribute to the college's rich legacy, celebrating nine decades of nurturing minds and fostering a community of remarkable women.

Principal Mark Dowling welcomed guests, including esteemed Mercy Sisters, Bishop Denis, and former staff and students, expressing gratitude for their enduring support. "Tonight, we gather to give thanks for the vision of Catherine McAuley and the courage of the Mercy Sisters who laid the foundation of our beloved College," he stated.

The concert followed a special "Walk Down Memory Lane" event that preceded it, attended by hundreds of past pupils across generations. Among them was the indomitable Mabel Lyons, the college's oldest living past pupil at 104 years old, who regaled attendees with captivating stories of her time as a student in the late 1930s. This gathering not only celebrated shared memories but also reinforced the strong bonds forged within the St. Mary's College Community.

Earlier this month, on October 1st, the College held a Mercy Mass Celebration to commemorate its Anniversary. The event, themed "United in Faith, Strong in Community, Inspired by Mercy," brought together students, staff, and alumni in a spirit of gratitude and reflection. Mr. Dowling welcomed attendees, including the Mercy Sisters and past and present staff, emphasizing the shared legacy and unwavering commitment of the community. The Mass featured a beautiful flag ceremony representing the diverse nationalities within the student body, symbolizing unity in faith and community. During the service, significant offerings were presented, including a "Legacy Tree" created by Transition Year students and the College Register, which documents the names of every student enrolled since 1936.

The Concert of "Hope and Inspiration" featured internationally acclaimed soprano and St. Mary's alumna Celine Byrne, who wowed the audience with her stunning performances, including "Lascia Ch'io Pianga" and "Ave Maria." Celine, who made her debut at St. Mary's in a production of *My Fair Lady*, has since graced stages worldwide, performing for dignitaries such as Pope Francis and President Obama.

Joining Celine were former students Norah King and Caroline Behan, both accomplished singers with impressive accolades. The evening also showcased the Baldonnel Singers, a four-part male voice ensemble under the direction of David Lanigan, who captivated the audience with their harmonious renditions. As the night unfolded, the Baldonnel Singers performed a mix of traditional hymns and contemporary classics, including *How Great Thou Art* and Coldplay's *Fix You*. The atmosphere was filled with joy and nostalgia as former students and staff reflected on their experiences at St. Mary's, a place described as a sanctuary of learning and friendship.

In a poignant moment, Mr. Dowling highlighted the college's impact on the community of Naas, noting, "The success of St. Mary's College is intricately intertwined with the development of Naas itself." A slideshow showcasing key milestones from the college's history accompanied the musical performances, stirring emotions and pride among attendees. The School Choir, including current and past members, along with the soloists sang a stirring rendition of "The Blessing" by David Downes.

As the concert drew to a close, Celine and the performers presented a touching finale with *I'm Dreaming of Home*, a piece that resonates deeply with themes of peace and hope. The audience was invited to join in the encore, singing *You'll Never Walk Alone*, a powerful reminder of unity and resilience.

The 90th Anniversary Concert not only celebrated the past but also looked toward a hopeful future, embodying the spirit of St. Mary's College and the legacy of Catherine McAuley: "striving to do ordinary things extraordinarily well."

As guests departed, they carried with them the melodies of the night, a testament to the enduring legacy of St. Mary's College and its commitment to inspiring generations to come.

#### Open Night – Sept 18, 2025

At the Open Night on Thursday, Sept. 18, some third-year students spoke to parents and guardians of incoming first-years about how RE is delivered in St. Mary's. They focused on retreats, CEIST certification, the breadth and depth of the RE course, and how the Prayer Room is used. The students were terrific in terms of their enthusiasm and energy! They were Sophie O'Brien (3U) and the following students from 3C; Molly Aylesbury, Isabella Ferreira, Grace Mc Donald, Susannah Lee-Miller, Abbie Southgate and Taylor

White. With 3C, Ms. Gráinne Malone also decorated the Prayer Room with posters focused on the school's ninetieth anniversary, and a banner featuring the school's core values; 'Care, Courage, Community'.

### **Mercy leaders**

Led by Ray Dillon, Mercy leaders continue to meet **every Tuesday in the Prayer Room, from 1.25 - 1.40 p.m.** They were joined by several of this year's JP II leaders for prayer and treats on the final Tuesday before midterm. In preparation for a presentation at the Carlow RE teachers' seminar on Thurs., Oct 23, Katelyn Donegan (3B), Aimee Hughes (5C) and Eliseba Tomy Thomas (6K, Deputy Head Girl) were video interviewed by R Dillon. They explained how being a Mercy leader had enriched their faith, augmented the empathy they have for others and encouraged them to support works of mercy, such as 'Mary's Meals'.

### **JP II Awards**

On Sept 26, 2025, our John Paul II leaders received their JP II awards from Bishop Denis Nulty in Carlow Cathedral. They were accompanied by the Parish Team; Trish O'Neill, Grace Keevans and Caroline Quinn, who had worked closely with the students during the year. Olive Humphreys was also delighted to attend what was a memorable celebration of the students' work.

The students are as follows -

Niamh Crotty	Ellen Cowley	Saoirse Ballesty-Byrne	Onyi Amadi-Obi	Aoife O'Connell
Emma Cullen	Jillien Versoza	Aine Kavanagh	Annalee Humphreys	Alexandra Butler
Clodagh Grimes	Maria Manka	Aimee Hughes	Khloe Hughes	Eliseba Tomy Thomas
Caroline Kennedy	Eabha Healy			

### **Shoebox Appeal – Collection, Fri. Nov 7, 2025**

On Friday, Nov 7, volunteers from the Team Hope Shoebox Appeal charity will arrive to collect gifted shoeboxes from the school. Many thanks to the RE teachers who have supported the venture, and to Ms. Helen Dowling for permitting storage of the boxes in her office, in the week leading up to the collection!

### **Retreats**

On Mon. Oct 6 and Tues. Oct 7, all second years went on retreat to Glendalough with their RE teachers.

On Tues. Oct 14 and Wed. Oct 15, all third years had an in-school retreat. The retreat was delivered by the 'Shine Bright' retreat team in rooms 24, 25 and 26.

On Tues. Oct 14, Mon. Oct 20 and Tues. Oct 21, all TY students had a 'Pilgrims Path Walking retreat' led by Anita from the 'I Am' retreat team.

All retreats were evaluated by the students and described as being very enjoyable and worthwhile. Many thanks to Ms. Rosemary Morrissey for having organised these retreats.

### **Harvest Festival**

All TY RE classes celebrated a Harvest Festival in the run-up to midterm. Gathered around wonderful centrepieces comprised of autumnal fruits, vegetables, leaves, candles and individually made scarecrows, the students celebrated this special time of the year in prayer, song and readings.

### **Prayer Room and the liturgical calendar**

For the month of October, Ms. Tammy O'Callaghan organised a striking visual representation in the Prayer Room. An image of Rosary beads – and of October being the month of the Rosary - filled the room's back wall, reminding staff and students of this focus.

For November, Ms. Sinead Cleary worked with some of her RE students to prepare the room for the month in which we remember our loved ones.

### **Religion Meeting – Nov 11, 2025**

Preparations for this year's Christmas mass will begin at the RE meeting on Nov 11, 2025, with RE teachers assuming responsibility for different parts of the mass. The school's reception area and Prayer Room will also be decorated later for Advent and Christmas.

### **Inter-diocesan RE seminar, Oct 23**

On Thursday, October 23, Ray Dillon and Olive Humphreys attended an inter-diocesan seminar in the Woodford Dolmen Hotel, Carlow. Organised by diocesan advisor, Hilda Campbell, the day was a wonderfully interactive, thought-provoking and pragmatic day. Speakers at the seminar included Bishop Michael Duignan who focused on 'Education as always an act of Hope.' The following workshops were also facilitated -

1. Room 1: Sacred Spaces-facilitated by Emma Thompson
2. Room 2: An Dara Saol- Facilitated by Ruth Burke

3. Room 3: Senior Cycle Exam RE- Sharing of resources - Facilitated by Gerard Doyle and Catherine Hooban

4. 12.15 am Hannah Clarke – The Way of St James resource

From St. Mary's College, Ray Dillon and Olive Humphreys spoke to the gathered RE teachers on 'Ethos, RE and Faith Development in St Mary's College.' In a compelling Power Point, Ray Dillon presented images and recordings of our Mercy leaders, the work they do and the impact that being a Mercy leader has had on their lives. He then explained the modular approach to fifth year RE that is in its second year of delivery in the school. He particularly focused on the 'faith in action' module and referenced many of the wonderful resources used in the module.

Olive Humphreys then outlined where one can find the regular Ethos reports on the school's webpage. She explained how these reports focus on the school's liturgical moments, student leadership activities, religion teachers' CPD, faith-in-action initiatives, student retreats and so forth.

Feedback from Hilda Campbell to Mark Dowling was very positive. In an email, she referenced how 'their contribution really stood out — they spoke with such authenticity and warmth. The sense of care, faith, and community that shines through in St. Mary's was clear to everyone. Afterwards, several teachers came up to me to say how inspiring they found it — a real testament to the spirit of the school and the way the ethos is being lived out day to day.'

Ray and Olive were delighted that they could be of support to other RE teachers!

#### **Meitheal, Cairdeas, Lighthouse, Student Council and Cinnirí Team**

With first year students, **Meitheal** have been very busy since the new school year began. Activities began with a quiz in the Assembly Hall in early Sept., an 'Invisible Friends' and 'Gratitude and Appreciation' focus during Friendship Week, and a most enjoyable and energetic Hallowe'en party Thurs Oct 23 in the McAuley building. Plans are currently underway for further Christmas activities in school before the Christmas holidays. Special thanks to Margaret Humphreys and Laura Reilly who support the Meitheal leaders and their work.

With second year students, **Cairdeas** facilitated the making of Friendship 'hands' during Friendship week. All second years were delighted to receive chocolate treats at the end of the activity! Cairdeas also held a quiz in the second-year base classrooms on Thurs, Oct 23. Olive Humphreys supports the Cairdeas leaders. With first years, **Lighthouse** leaders organised that friendship bracelets were made in SPHE classes during Friendship week. Lunchtime 'Just Dance' sessions were held in the Assembly Hall – and giving everyone lollipops at the end of the week was enjoyed by all! Special thanks to Katie Honan who oversees the organisation and delivery of such valued events by the leaders.

*Olive Humphreys*

