



When I think of Fr Michael Ross, I think of a whirlwind, a blizzard, and a hurricane all rolled into one! As was often said, you'd get tired just looking at him – he was engaged in so many things, running here and there like a mad man, yet charming and with a heart in which goodness ran free, and he never seemed to know how to say 'no' to a request for help, no matter from whom it came or where it took him.

From his early days he was into speed, and this was reflected in his driving! On one occasion in the old Salesian House in Maynooth, Michael was told to take it easy and not to be inspecting the back axle of the truck in front of him as his windscreen had been broken several times when chips were thrown up off resurfaced roads! Imagine his embarrassment that evening when he returned with yet another shattered windscreen!

On top of that he was a spiritual man, who believed that the Spirit spoke through the most ordinary man or woman you'd come across in a day's activities, and also through those extraordinarily religious folk that he'd meet on occasion, people like Sr Briege McKenna OSC and Fr Kevin Scallon CM at the Intercession for Priests, Mr Josip Loncâr, Croatian-born co-director of the Charismatic Community Dobri Pastir (the Good

Shepherd), Promotion Officer for the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) and many other giants of the Spirit. Michael's life pilgrimage took him to many places marked by the sacred, Lourdes, Fatima, Rome, Medjugorje and Knock, all with a typical Marian aspect.

According to *A Brief Biography of Fr Michael Ross* written by himself as he prepared the proposal for his doctoral thesis and dated 11 April 2008 (his 50th birthday), Michael was born in Dunmanway, Co. Cork in 1948 and attended the local primary schools. His father William was a butcher and the family moved from Cork to Clane, Co. Kildare in 1958 and it was there Michael completed his primary schooling. He then attended the Christian Brothers secondary school in nearby Naas.



Michael's mother Rita and father William above.
Right: Michael and friend in Dublin July 1965.



In 1966 he emigrated to Canada and lived in Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver Island, British Columbia for three years. His siblings Maureen (and husband Austin), and George (with wife Joan) followed him.

On his return to Ireland, he went to the Salesian Horticultural College, Warrenstown in 1969 where, as he significantly noted himself, he met the Legion of Mary and became president of the local praesidium. That Marian line ran all through his life.

After the year in Warrenstown, he began studies for the priesthood in St Patrick's College, Thurles, Co. Tipperary. There he met Fr Robert Bradshaw who became his spiritual director for two years. During that time Michael expressed an interest in joining the Salesians and Fr Michael Egan the then Irish provincial and cleric Michael Duggan called to the college in Thurles to discuss the Salesian vocation with him.

In 1972, Michael joined the novitiate of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Beckford (Glos.) along with his younger companions Gerard Dowd and Tim Wrenn. Their novice master was Fr Martin McPake. They were all professed as Salesians the following year.

Michael worked in Ballinakill (1973-74) and Pallaskenry (1974-75) and then began his study of theology for the priesthood at St Patrick's College, Maynooth along with the late Fr John Kirby. In his student days in Maynooth, Michael was president of one of the College praesidia of the Legion of Mary. He ran a youth work project, *True Devotion to the Nation*, over a number of summers. Later in the 1970s he also produced several issues of a magazine,

Good News for Youth, which proved very popular with teenagers; unfortunately the magazine had to close in 1981, because of the unsustainable pressure of its method of distribution around Ireland.

Both Joe Lucey and Michael were encouraged by Fr Jackie Butler in the setting up of Baita Bosco in Spanish Point, near Milltown Malbay, Co. Clare, bought in 1978 and run as an Irish Taizé-type Prayer Camp / House of Welcome, involving Salesians, Salesian Sisters and young people in a collaborative young adult ministry, that sought to understand and provide for the faith and human development needs of young people. It provided a sense of community and belonging; welcome and friendship; support; a 'lace to 'get away' and relax; an opportunity to reflect on the priorities of life; an atmosphere to experience closeness to God; an opportunity for development of one's faith and oneself.



Summer Project 1977, Rialto (Dublin)

At the end of his studies in Maynooth, Michael was ordained a priest on the feast of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady on 15 August 1978 by Bishop Jeremiah Newman of Limerick at Salesian College, Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick. In the booklet he had printed for the occasion, Michael quoted from the last testament of now Saint Pope John XXIII: "*Love one another, my dear children! Seek rather what unites, not what may separate you from one another. As I take leave, or better still, as I say "till we meet again" let me remind you of the most important things in life: Our blessed Saviour Jesus; his good news; his holy church; truth and kindness... I shall remember you all and pray for you.*"

The newly ordained Michael spent two years in his Alma Mater of Warrenstown during which he headed up a very successful Retreat Team which was in huge demand by secondary schools all over the country.

Michael's impact on young people can be seen in the vocation stories of two future



Cardinal John O'Connor greets clergy outside Holy Family Church, East 47th Street, on his visit to the East Manhattan vicariate, 11 June 1989. Fr Michael Ross is on the extreme left of the picture.

Saleians: as a cleric and a priest Michael had visited the home of his friend from Thurles seminary days, Fr Ciaran McDonnell from Strabane. Ciaran's brother Eunan had been thinking of a vocation to the Carmelites; Michael's Salesian spirit so impressed Eunan, he decided on the Salesians instead. Likewise thanks to a chance meeting with Michael while he was doing summer work in the Holy Family parish in New York, Thomas Clowe was encouraged to join the Irish province of the Salesians.

In 1981 Michael moved to Salesian House, Maynooth when he was appointed chaplain to the lay students in NUI Maynooth, a work he carried out for eight years, encouraging many apostolic groups in the college. In 1982 he established a Chaplaincy pastoral group called the Friends Committee, to coordinate and develop the pastoral activity of the various small apostolic groups operating on the campus. This was typical of his *modus operandi* - he would surround himself with generous and willing helpers, young and older, and thus had a huge circle of friends, benefactors and supporters.

In his time as Chaplain, he was also tasked with the position of Provincial Councillor for six years (1984-90) during which he was Delegate for Youth Ministry (1985-87). He put much thought into the lack of student accommodation in the Maynooth area and the unemployment faced by the majority of those graduating from college.

1985 was a year of great expansion. With Warrenstown past pupils John Hogan and Sean Boylan and Salesian Cooperator Marie Cashin, Michael established the Don Bosco Trust and invested a sum of money inherited from his mother Rita who had died in 1982 to acquire St Catherine's Hostel in the middle of the Maynooth university campus from the Sisters of Mercy, Carlow.

The Trust developed the Don Bosco Voluntary Service as one answer to the chronic state of unemployment and began with a group of 25 volunteers in June 1985 with an intensive week of training. It helped restore hope to young people and planned to provide interest free loans for young people setting up co-operatives and small businesses. It also planned to provide scholarships to help young people develop themselves.

The following year Michael extended the same work to Northern Ireland by establishing The Anchor Trust with a North, South Cross-Community group of trustees. Unfortunately that trust had to be wound up within five years, but its very existence spoke of the vision that inspired Michael.

Michael got the De Sales School of English up and running and its numbers grew from 500 in 1986 to 625 in 1990. In conjunction with UPS, the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, Michael developed the school as a service to the Salesian Congregation and particularly for confreres destined to go as missionaries where English would be needed for their work.

That same year (1985) Michael chaired the team that prepared the Salesian Past Pupils Congress *Eurobosco '85* held in St Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra 11-15 September 1985 on the topic of *Unemployment among the Youth in Europe*. It was attended by the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò, Fr Sergio Cuevas, General Councillor for the Salesian Family and for Social Communication, and Fr Charles Cini, Salesian Delegate for the Past Pupils World council. Mr Peter Sutherland, grand nephew of Fr Aloysius Sutherland who brought the Salesians to Ireland, to Pallaskenry, in 1919, was guest of honour.



For the centenary of the death of Don Bosco in 1988 Michael was asked to chair the preparatory committee. It ran a range of activities under the banner of "Touch the future - Invest in youth" and included Mass on RTÉ radio and TV and Raidio na Gaeltachta, an art/painting competition, a pilgrimage to Knock with Cardinal Tomás O'Fiaich, a seminar on youth in Maynooth with Michael Warren, Fr Luc Van Looy, and Fr Michael T. Winstanley, and concluded with a hugely successful Don Bosco Youth Awards ceremony in the National Concert Hall, Dublin, on 28 January 1989 to end the centenary.

The first Salesian House in Maynooth remained as the House of Studies until 1992. It catered for students from the home province (Ireland, Malta and Southern Africa) and

for others from many parts of the Salesian world (including Italy, Spain and India). It was sold to the University in 1996 but thanks to the determination of Michael and the late Fr Denis Corcoran, the Salesians continued to maintain a presence on the Campus through the varied ministries in St Catherine's Centre which nowadays include chaplaincy in a local secondary school, provision of English language services to Project Europe, outreach to Maynooth University Students, sacramental support to local parishes and nursing homes and prayer ministry.

For some time Michael had it in mind to do a doctorate and then head off to work in some house of formation in Africa. To this end he did postgraduate studies in Spirituality at Fordham University in New York (USA) and in the Angelicum (University of St Thomas Aquinas) in Rome 1998-99. He enrolled to do a doctorate on the spirituality of Frank Duff with Fr Paul Murray OP in 2001. While still running the De Sales School of English, Michael tried to dedicate himself to the books, but he found himself constantly torn away to answer the many calls made on his time.

November 2004 Michael moved from Maynooth to Rathnew, Co. Wicklow, to a house made available to him for his studies. While there he visited St Catherine's in Maynooth regularly, initially weekly and there after once a month. One evening in St Catherine's in mid January 2005 he met Josip Loncâr, Promotion Officer for the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, whose centre is in the Vatican. Josip prayed with him from 8pm to 11.30pm. Michael had planned to go to his brother George in Naas for supper as he was expecting the prayer to last 10 to 15 minutes! He did not get to his brother's until after midnight.

To help him lessen his many commitments and concentrate on his studies, in October 2005 Michael was appointed to Crumlin. February 2006 found him in Fatima for the transfer of the body of Sr Lucy. Studies were fighting a losing battle. That same month he changed from the Angelicum in Rome to the Milltown Institute in Dublin. It was agreed that Fr Jack Finnegan SDB would work with Michael to the presentation stage



**Frank Duff, Dublin 1978.
Michael was the first priest at
Frank's deathbed,
7 November 1980.**

and then Fr Chris O'Donnell O.Carm. would be free to follow Michael as a doctoral student. The proposal for the doctorate was submitted on 20 June and the presentation was set for 4 August 2006. His proposal was approved and he went to France to study French in Lourdes from 19 August to 10 September but this was not such a good idea as there were too many people speaking English.

He registered as a PhD student in Milltown on 29 September 2006 and this completed all the necessary process (including all paper work and documentation, presentations and evaluations and approval of the proposal) and he decided to register as an NUI PhD student.

At the end of November 2006 he went to the USA to the International Marian Research Institute / Library (IMRI) at Dayton, Ohio for 3 to 4 weeks research work as requested by the staff/authorities in the Milltown Institute. The visit proved to be an excellent experience and increased his resources greatly. On completion of his time at the IMRI, he went on to Dallas and Toronto and visited some more libraries which again proved useful regarding resources.

On returning to Ireland on 10 January 2007 he spent ten intense days preparing his application for the Government scholarships (IRCHSS). In February there was further pressure generated by some unthinking comments from a certain academic to some of the Concilium Officers. The misunderstanding was eventually straightened out after a long meeting (two hours) between Michael and the man concerned. Michael continued with recording his Frank Duff contacts. He had difficulties getting the interviews typed.

In May 2007 he was informed that his scholarship application had been unsuccessful but that an evaluation of the project would be given. The evaluation arrived in June and was an excellent help in planning the way forward. The evaluation/assessment by the external examiner on behalf of the Board of IRCHSS raised two questions: firstly, the methodology was mixed and was difficult to follow: a simpler and straightforward approach would be better; secondly, as there was a lot of use of the term 'influence' it was surprising that there was no definition of the term. This led to a whole new area of research and gave new insights.

In June 2007 Michael went to Lourdes for a week on a Peregrinatio Pro Christo project with young legionaries. He attended the Marian Movement of Priests retreat in Collevallenza (Italy) and returned to France for a month to study French, spending a few weeks in Paray-le-Monial and then going north by car.

The new academic year started with registration day early in September 2007 and an input on writing their thesis. In October Michael went to Rome to celebrate the wedding of a friend. He also paid a visit to the Pontifical Theological Faculty "Marianum" in Rome. Getting the interviews typed continued to be a problem. He continued his work on researching and studying the term 'influence'.

From the end of December 2007 to 2 January 2008 he went to Geneva with a small group to join the 40,000 young adults attending the 30th European Taizé Youth meeting.

Later that summer, Michael was appointed rector of the Crumlin community and threw himself wholeheartedly into his new role, while still attempting to progress his doctoral studies. Deadlines came and went, and many despaired of ever seeing the doctorate completed. As ever typical of Michael, friends rallied around and helped with the typing, proof-reading, and revision.



**Celebratory Meal to honour
Doctor Michael Ross PhD**

8 October 2014

**Dropping Well,
Milltown Road.**

Below: (left to right)

**John Corrigan, Austin Walshe,
Maureen Corrigan, Denis Ross,
Fr Michael Casey, Joan Ross,
Fr Michael Ross.**



Finally the big day arrived on 8 October 2014 and surrounded by family and friends, Michael was conferred in Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy with his Doctorate of Philosophy for his thesis on *A Marian Spirituality. The Active Lay Spirituality of Frank Duff 1889-1980, Founder of the Legion of Mary in 1921*, with Dr Jack Finnegan as his Supervisor for what was in all truth a team effort.

Ever open to popular piety, Michael was drawn to the Kingdom of the Divine Will as taught by the Italian Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta (1865-1947), and the personal prayers he added in his celebration of the Mass spoke of his desire to give God the freedom to 'operate' in him, allowing himself to be animated by God in every way, his thoughts, words, glances, steps, movements, in his all.

Michael was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus in February 2016. From May he showed a big loss of weight, underwent five doses of chemotherapy to little avail, and spent his days between his community in Crumlin and St James's Hospital, Dublin.

Michael spent the last two weeks of October in the hospital and slipped into a coma. On Sunday afternoon, 30 October, as Michael's eldest brother Denis from Toronto who had lovingly cared for him over the previous two weeks, his sister-in-law Joan from Naas, a nurse friend, Provincial Fr Michael Casey and the author of these lines, were chatting about the playful antics Michael and his siblings had got up to in his childhood, Michael slipped away quietly at 3.25 just as the monthly prayers were ending in Glasnevin cemetery at the graveside of the Venerable Frank Duff on whom Michael had done his PhD doctoral thesis in 2014.

On the evening of Michael's death, his long time friend June Vause said of him: He loved the work he was doing, and loved meeting people... Michael was a Salesian priest with a vast outreach to thousands of people through healing, prayer and endless initiatives for young people. He was also the priest Director of Radio Maria Ireland and Director to the Divine Mercy Conference in Ireland, the Legion of Mary, St Michael's apostolate for Priests, and Spiritual Revival Ministries.

He was a priest who reflected the Saint whose way of dealing with people, especially the young and those most in need, he had vowed to follow when he made his first profession as a Salesian of Don Bosco on 26 August 1973 in the same Salesian chapel of Mary Help of Christians, Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick, in which his Requiem Mass was celebrated and from which he was carried to his final resting place in the community cemetery.

May Mary whom he loved with all his heart wrap her mantle around him.

May he now know just how great and wonderful and loving is the God he served and who finally took his breath away!

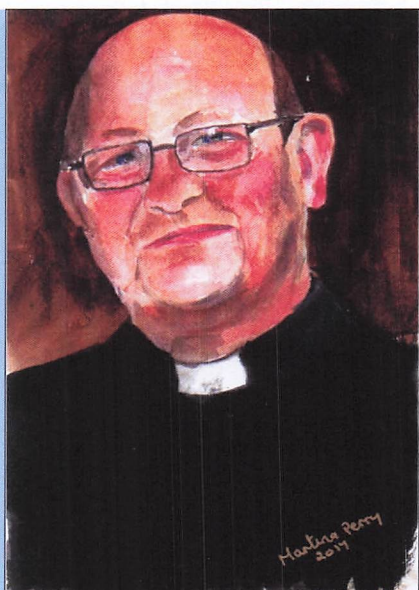
Fr Pat Egan SDB, *Provincial Secretary.*
Salesian House, St Teresa's Road, Crumlin, Dublin 12.



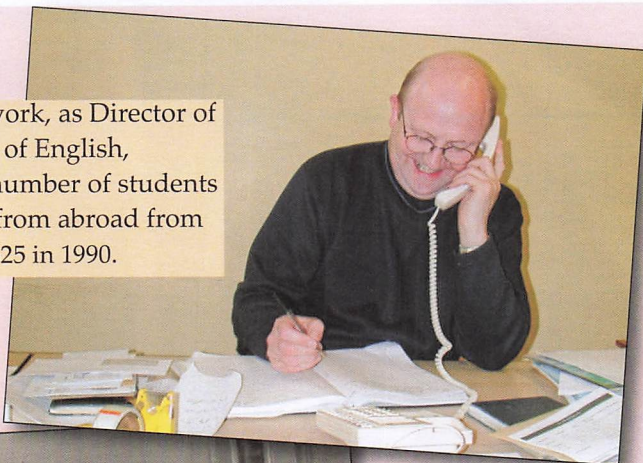
Salesian past pupils delegates from Ireland at Eurobosco '85 (from left to right):
 Michael Noonan, Mrs John Hogan, Sean Collier, John Hogan, Dick O'Connell, Fr
 Eddie Fitzgerald, Tom Darby, Dublin's Lord Mayor - Alderman Jim Tunney, Bro.
 Pat Coye, Fr Michael Ross, Fr Pat Egan, Shaun Lynch, Noel Hynes, Terry Brady.

Painting of Fr Michael Ross SDB

by
Martina Perry
2017



Through dint of hard work, as Director of De Sales School of English, Michael increased the number of students coming to Maynooth from abroad from 500 in 1986 to 625 in 1990.



Visit of Frank Duff to Summer Camp in Rialto, 1977.

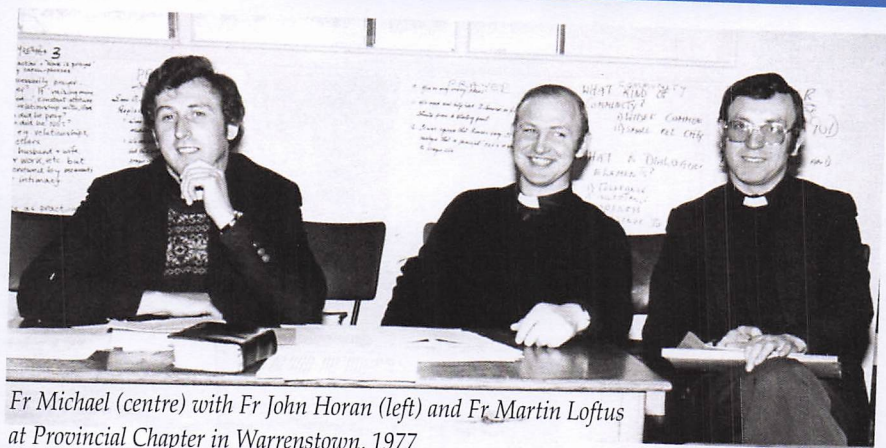
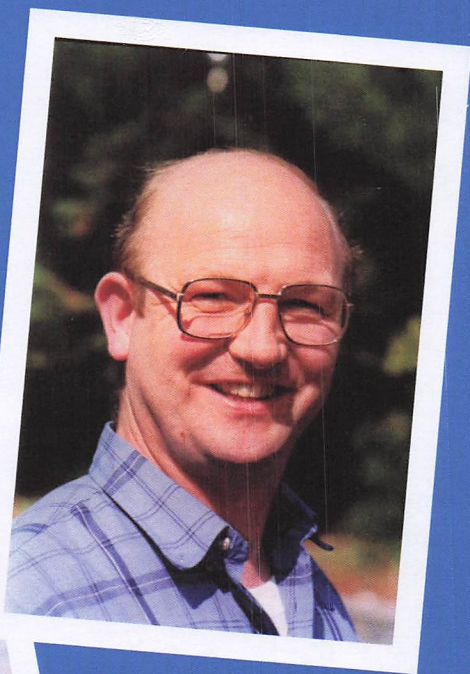
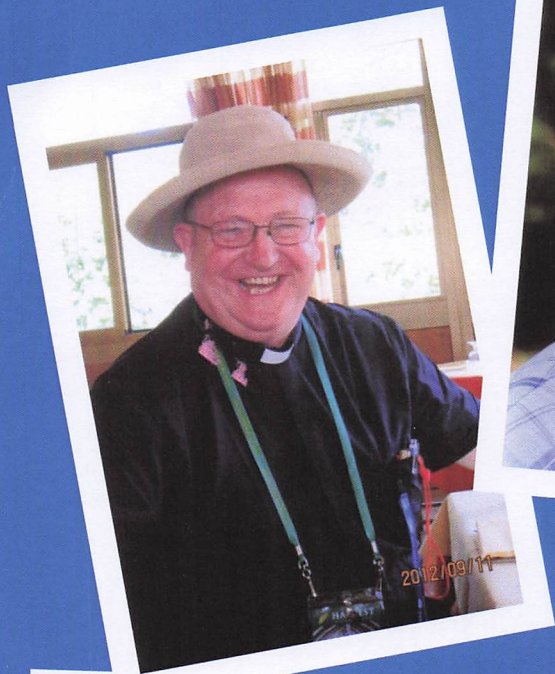


Mike at the mic!

Priest Director and Head of Editorial, Radio Maria.
Its first pilot broadcast took place 13 May 2015, feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

A tool in the promotion of the New Evangelisation, the radio plays 24 hours each day and is found on www.radiomaria.ie





Fr Michael (centre) with Fr John Horan (left) and Fr Martin Loftus at Provincial Chapter in Warrenstown, 1977

For the Necrology:

30 October

P ROSS Michael † Dublin, Ireland, 2016, a. 68