



# Clonmel



## Place4U to revive community life in town centre

By Aileen Hahesy

A former convent in the centre of Clonmel is getting a new lease of life as an amenity centre for the entire town.

The former Sisters of Charity Convent and the adjoining nuns chapel in Gladstone Street is to be transformed into the Place4U Centre - a social meeting place that will also be home to a large number of community services, groups and agencies, from the St. Vincent de Paul to bereavement support counsellors.

A drop-in centre with a television room and library where elderly people can meet for tea and a chat; and a cafe style meeting place for teenagers are among the facilities proposed.

Renovation work on the protected building began last autumn and a planning application seeking permission to carry out more extensive renovations and redevelop it into a community amenity centre, with meeting rooms and offices, was lodged with Clonmel Borough Council last month.

A decision is due from the Council's planners on February 14th.

The application was lodged by the Board of Directors of Place4U, the company that has been set up to redevelop and run the former convent as an amenity centre.

The building has lain vacant since the Sisters of Charity, who were based there since the 1850s, moved out to Silversprings in 2002. It's an extensive property of about 7,000 sq.ft.

The Diocese of Waterford and Lismore and parish of Ss Peter and Pauls have kindly made the building available by way of a rent free lease to Place4U, which is in the process of obtaining charitable status.

Canon Nicholas Power, who was PP of Ss Peter and Paul's up to last July, played an instrumental role in getting Place4U off the ground.



Fr. Brendan Crowley, Parish Priest of Ss Peter and Paul's Parish, Clonmel; Place4U Board of Directors chairman Michael Campbell, and Place4U Board of Directors member Michael Morrissey outside the former Sisters of Charity convent in Gladstone Street, which is to be transformed into a new community centre.

The provision of this type of amenity centre for Clonmel was identified by the Building in Faith consultation process that the diocese conducted across all its parishes a few years ago as a way of developing the town as a caring community.

Fr. Brendan Crowley, the new PP of Ss Peter and Paul's, paid tribute to the people involved in Place4U for taking on this great initiative to provide this public facility for the town of Clonmel.

"I commend them for the

time, energy, vision and commitment they are giving. It's a great help to us clergy, who are left to do the more religious work in the community. We are becoming fewer in numbers so we are delighted that there is a lay involvement in this project".

While the amenity centre will be called Place4U, the actual building has been renamed Fr. Michael Burke house in honour of the Parish Priest of Ss Peter and Paul's, who invited the Sisters of Charity to set up their convent in Gladstone Street in 1845. Fr. Burke, who served in Ss Peter and Paul's Parish for 30 years, also invited the Christian Brothers to Clonmel in 1847.

Fundraising for the new amenity centre will get underway in earnest at the end of this month. A programme of fundraising events and initiatives is being drawn up by a 17-strong fundraising committee that includes Senator Phil Prendergast and Brendan McGuinness, the former managing director of Bulmers.

Michael Campbell, Chairman of Place4U Board of Directors, says the overall cost of the project is £500,000 and he estimates it will

get the amenity centre fully up and running. The centre is expected to be self-financing once it's in operation.

Clonmel Rotary Club has already pledged to donate half of the proceeds of its local telephone directory to the Place4U fund and Ss Peter and Paul's Parish is also generously supporting the fundraising effort.

Place4U's first application for grant aid will be submitted to the National Lottery at the end of this month and approaches have been made to the local authorities and relevant state agencies for funding.

Mr. Campbell said Place4U's Board of Directors really appreciated the generosity of the diocese and parish and the Rotary Club's welcome boost to their new fundraising campaign.

"The response we have got to date to the project has been great. We appreciate there is a massive recession out there and we are going to find it very difficult to raise funds and that it will be more difficult to get grants from the state agencies and local authorities."

How quickly the centre can become operational will depend on the funds available. Mr Campbell says they plan to do the work as

funding allows, and open up the centre to the community bit by bit.

He believes the premises will be sufficiently ready to take in its first occupants this summer - the St. Vincent de Paul parish centre and shop currently based in Mulcahy House.

Renovations carried out on the convent since the autumn have focused on rectifying dampness, dry rot and any other structural problems in the building.

The next phase, which is subject to planning permission, will involve transforming it from a primarily residential building to premises with offices, meeting rooms, a shop, a drop-in centre and toilet facilities. The building will have to be made fully accessible to people with disabilities, which will involve the installation of a lift.

The basement, which will house the heating and electrical services, contains a portion of Clonmel's old town wall.

"We plan to clean the town wall up and showcase it in the best way possible. We will also be retaining as many of the original features of the convent as possible," said Mr Campbell.

While the physical work of transforming the convent and fundraising is taking up much of Place4U's time and energy at the moment, work is also being done in the background on deciding what services should be provided at the centre. The Carmichael Centre in Dublin, which accommodates more than 30 services and organisations, is the template being adopted for the Place4U Centre.

A sub-committee of students from Clonmel's secondary schools, headed by Place4U Board of Directors member Fred Binchy, is investigating the youth services it should provide. The sub-committee has visited similar centres in Limerick and Galway to see the youth services they provide.

Another sub-committee is liaising with other community centres around Clonmel to ensure Place4U doesn't duplicate services based elsewhere in the town.

Mr. Campbell believes the Place4U Centre will greatly help revive community life in Clonmel town centre.

"It's badly needed in Clonmel. It will bring heart to the centre of the town," he said.

Anyone wishing to make a donation should contact Ss Peter and Paul's Parochial House on Gladstone Street at (052) 26292. Further information on the project can be obtained by logging onto [www.place4u.ie](http://www.place4u.ie).

<b>HIGH SCHOOL CLONMEL</b>	<b>NIGHT CLASSES</b>
Contact: 086-3123882, 052-24459, <a href="mailto:nightclasseshighschool@gmail.com">nightclasseshighschool@gmail.com</a> .	
<b>Enrolment Tuesday 20th January 7-9p.m. High School.</b>	
<b>Classes available:</b>	
• DIGITAL IMAGING • COMPUTERS • GUITAR	
• TRADITIONAL MUSIC • SET DANCING	
• MUSIC TECHNOLOGY • ARTS AND CRAFTS	
• MINDFUL DRAWING • BASKET WEAVING • SEWING	
• FELT WORKS • DRAWING • WATERCOLOURS	
• ART APPRECIATION • INTERIOR DESIGN	
• INTRODUCTION TO BEAUTY • IRISH	
• ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE	
• PILATES • BODY SHAPE • RELAXATION	
<b>Teachers in other disciplines welcome.</b>	