

**FATHER PEYTON'S ROSARY CRUSADE IN IRELAND – 1954**

In a letter to His Eminence Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster His Holiness Pope Pius XII made an appeal for prayer – the Family Rosary.

The first Rosary Crusade was held in Canada in 1948. This was followed annually by crusades in different parts of the world.

Father Patrick Peyton had left his native Attymass in Ballina at the age of nineteen.

While studying for the priesthood, two years before his ordination, he contacted tuberculosis. He started his Rosary Crusade in thanksgiving to Our Lady for his recovery from that illness.

Father Peyton brought the Crusade to Ireland. He visited the Dioceses of Tuam, Galway, Clonfert, Achonry, Elphin, Kilallo, Down and Connor, Meath, Waterford and Ferns from 25 April to 15 August 1954.

The Family Rosary Crusade opened on 25 April in the GAA Stadium in Tuam. From all over the Archdiocese people were arriving all day and hundreds of cars lined the roads approaching the town.

About two hundred Aran Islanders arrived at Galway and travelled to Tuam by train.

In the Grand Stand in Galway Children of Mary in their blue veils forming letters of the word 'Hail Mary' stood out vividly in the vast crowd.

In Sligo three thousand children, in blue and white dresses, gathered round the altar. A pageant of five hundred Children of Mary, wearing their cloaks, formed the letter M around a statue of Our Lady.

Eighteen thousand people stood in a downpour as Mass was celebrated on the Feast of the Assumption 1954 at the Shrine of the Apparition, seventy five years before, at Knock, County Mayo.

Over one hundred thousand people attended the Rosary Crusade in Belfast. Eighty thousand were in the grounds of Our Lady's Hospice, Beechmount. Several thousand mothers with young children waited in MacRory Park and over a thousand elderly and infirm waited in the Broadway Cinema where Father Peyton came afterwards to visit them.

Fifteen thousand from North and Mid Antrim came to Ballymena, to Hugomont on the Broughshane Road on Thursday night 17 June 1954. Hundreds of girls from the local schools formed the letter M.

They were attired in white dresses and veils and wore different coloured sashes indicating the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary.

One hundred and sixty two thousand, five hundred and sixty one Catholics in Down and Connor signed the Rosary Pledge – 98% of the Catholic population.

The final Rosary Rally in the Diocese of Down and Connor was held in a spacious sloping field in Downpatrick on Sunday 20 June. Children from the Convent School presented the fifteen decades of the Rosary in front of the garland-bedecked platform and altar.

Fifteen thousand people attended the Rosary Rally in Navan on 24 June.

In Mullingar seventeen attended the Rosary Rally. Large numbers of nuns and members of Religious Orders attended, sitting on the ground in Cusack Park, with all the others.

On Sunday 11 July between twenty and twenty five thousand attended the Rosary Rally in Dungarven.

On Wednesday night, 14 July, forty thousand attended the Rosary Rally in Waterford.

In Clonmel, on Sunday 18 July, twenty thousand people attended the Rosary Rally – despite the competition from the Cork and Tipperary Hurling Final.

The twenty first and final rally was attended by forty thousand people. It was held on Our Lady's Island, fourteen miles from Wexford town. The lake had been drained and grass seed sown on the temporarily reclaimed foreshore to accommodate the crowds.

Father Peyton had come to Ireland from New Zealand and he left to go to Spain, India and Pakistan.