

ISSUE 01



Ards Friary

A Centre for the Care of Creation

SPRING 2026

ARDS FRIARY NEWSLETTER

The Primrose Edition



Local- Global- Spirit- Earth

— *Intro*



The Primrose Edition



Earlier in the year the snowdrops paid their short visit to us here at Ards Friary, and there is always an excitement that accompanies their appearance.

The Primrose more humbly arrives, without any great fanfare, and are in fact much more reliable heralds of the new spring. So, it is with a real joy that I welcome the primroses as they emerge here on the edges of our woodlands along with their message of change.

This first edition of our relaunched newsletter shares this sense of arrival of something new and transformed. What was let go into the last winter has been returned with fertility and life. Much has happened already in this new year at Ards Friary, and we will try to capture a little of that for you in this newsletter. Something of the rising sap of this spring.

It is a constant joy and privilege for me to continue to welcome so many here each day, and I continue to pray for our community that we might ever grow in the togetherness that the Easter season celebrates.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ade' with a flourish at the end.

Br Ade - Guardian

The Primrose



Common names: primrose, common primrose, English primrose

Scientific name: *Primula vulgaris*

Family: Primulaceae

Origin: native

Flowering season: December to May

Habitat: woodland clearings and grassland

The Primrose is a small, perennial woodland plant that grows no more than 10cm high and can flower from December through to May.

Leaves: wrinkly with hairy undersides, forming a rosette at the plant's base.

Flowers: pale to deep yellow with darker yellow-orange centres. The single flowers have five notched petals which form on the ends of upright woolly stalks.

Fruit/seeds: the unripe seed pod, which resembles a ball inside the calyx (the green leaf-like structures that are at the base of the petals), is pale green with soft, green seeds. When ripe it is whitish and its seeds are brown or black and hard.

Not to be confused with: oxlip (*Primula elatior*) and cowslip (*Primula veris*) which are both similar species. However, the flowers of oxlip droop to one side in the same direction. Cowslip flowers form in clusters and are usually bell-shaped and a darker orange-yellow. Primrose and cowslip also hybridise to make *Primula veris* x *vulgaris* which grows taller than primrose. There are also several cultivated varieties of primrose, some of which have escaped from gardens, which are now found in the wild.

The primrose is one of the first flowers to bloom in spring. Its name actually comes from the Latin word 'primus', which means 'first'. So, many believe that it has a meaning of youth, renewal and optimism

The primrose has many medicinal uses and was important in the past as a remedy for muscular rheumatism, paralysis and gout. The leaves and flowers can be used either fresh or dried; the roots should be dried before use. Culpepper was aware of the healing properties of the Primrose and said, "Of the leaves of Primrose is made as fine a salve to heal wounds as any I know."



Noel hard at work creating beds

News from the Farm

Growing Together

It has long been the ambition of the Friars and Friends of Ards Friary to develop an Organic and Regenerative Farm to renew the age old practice of tending and keeping gardens and livestock in Franciscan places.

In this few years we have been incredibly fortunate to build our Landwork Team around Seamus McLaughlin with the additions of Seamus Gallagher, Noel Doherty, and Pearse Butler. Each bringing their own gifts and energy for the work of Joy Farm.

We are now in the position of having both our horticultural and livestock endeavours acheiving beyond our intial goals. We have welcomed our first WOOFER's - people travelling and working on Organic Farms - and are putting in place the processes we now need to both accept volunteers and begin to open our doors for Social Farming.

We have a number of events and workshops organised throughout this year (see listed below), whilst also dedicating ourselves to growing good organic produce for sale.

Our herd of Dexter cattle was increased by 4 Heifers this year, and we also welcomed Eddie the Bull to the Farm. Our cattle will be for meat production and boxes will be available quarterly



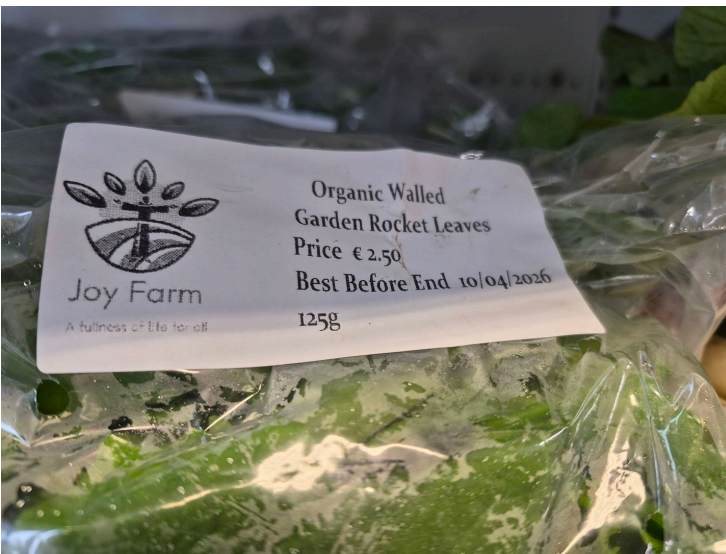
Joy Farm produce used at the Glen Bar

This Easter we began the process of selling our own produce through the Wild Garden Cafe at Ards Friary, and we will keep you informed about further sales as they happen in the near future. If you are particularly interested in any aspect of the Farm life - volunteering, buying, supporting in other ways, then please contact us at: joyfarm@ardsfriary.ie



Joy Farm

A fullness of life for all



Top left: Rows set for a new season.
Top right: Eddie the Bull checking things out.
Middle left: Greens for sale.
Middle right: Greenhouse veggies thriving. Bottom
left: Noel giving the benefits of his experience at
one of our workshops.

Pics from the Farm



What kind of things will we offer?

- Walking Together - a regular walking group which will include a variety of ecological and spirituality talks.
- Praying Together - frequent opportunities to come to the Friary to spend time in prayer with the brothers with a focus on Justice, Peace, and Care for Creation.
- Working Together - opportunities to volunteer on Joy Farm will be made available. All skill and ability levels will be welcomed onto the Farm to spend time in good company growing good food.
- Relaxing Together - times and spaces will be made available to be together to enjoy the beauty of Ards with a cup of tea or coffee. Listening to music, telling stories, supporting each other.
- Being together in concern and action - time of reflection and organising ourselves around important issues.

Growing Togetherness

A Franciscan Way of Life

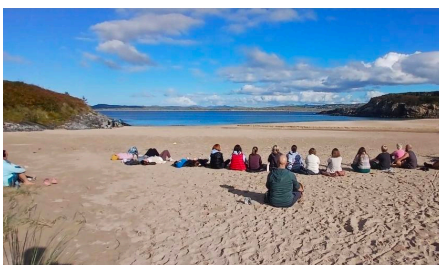
As part of our attempts to renew our life and mission at Ards Friary, and in line with opinions reflected back to us by our friends and visitors, the Friars have begun to create and deliver a fresh retreat and events program rooted in our Franciscan Spirit and inspired by Pope Francis' Laudato Si' encyclical.

The Growing Togetherness program will seek to offer spaces and opportunities for developing a deeper sense of our community life, including all of nature, through coming together in prayer, work, and recreation. Grounding us in our natural and native status in God's abundant creation.

Sharing our core Franciscan experience of the centrality of relationship to the living out of our Christian spirituality, the brothers and friends of Ards will invite and welcome all to enjoy togetherness in this place we call Ards Friary.

These are some of the ways in which the Friars want to encourage togetherness through sharing our Franciscan Spirituality and concern for a World.

Please join us in exploring and nurturing our community life.





Community notices

Volunteering

Volunteering opportunities are now available for working with our Landwork Team in the Fr Mathew Garden on Joy Farm.

Please contact Br Ade at guardianards@capuchins.ie to arrange.

Dates for the Diary

Information Sessions - Nurturing Hope Together - see next page.

April 24th - 7.30pm Padre Pio Mass.

May 16th - Joy Farm Plant Sale.

May 23rd - Fermentation (Kefir/Kombucha) Workshop

June 13th - Gut Health Workshop

July 4th - Local Herbs and their Health Benefits.

For detail of these events please contact us at info@ardsfriary.ie

Upcoming

We are very happy to be welcoming the Padre Pio Apostolate Team of the Irish Capuchins to Ards Friary for the 1st Annual Padre Pio Mass. Mass will take place at 7.30pm on 24th April here in the Friary Church, and will be led by Br Kevin Kiernan. Blessing with 1st Class Relics in prayerful intercession for healing will take place after the Mass.

Opening Mass for the dedication of the Peacemakers Chapel.

We have almost completed the renovation of the 'side chapel' in Ards Friary, and have decided to rededicate this Chapel as a place for prayers for Peace. An opening Mass in the Chapel will be held in the very near future, we do not have a date as yet. But keep an eye out as we will announce this soon.

Nurturing Hope Together



Some of you will have heard me speak of our hopes for Ards, and the work ahead of us. For those who have yet to, I am glad to share a little more about what that looks like, and to invite you to be part of it.

At the end of 2025, we completed a period of listening. We spoke with friends, retreatants, neighbours, and supporters, people who know and love this place. What we heard was both humbling and encouraging. You told us that Ards matters: as a place of prayer, of peace, of encounter with God and with one another. You also told us that you want it to be here for future generations.

That listening has shaped what we are now calling the **Nurturing Hope Together** campaign. At its heart, the campaign will enable us to renew and refurbish our retreat accommodation, care for our land and launch **Growing Togetherness**, a refreshed retreat programme rooted in Franciscan spirituality.

These are not small undertakings. Without investment and support, we cannot continue to offer the welcome that Ards has extended to so many people over the years. This campaign is essential to our future. We have already been moved by the generosity of those who have responded to early conversations, and we are grateful for every expression of support and prayer we have received. We are asking you to walk with us a little further and to consider how you might be part of what comes next.

We would love for you to join us to find out more:

Online Information Sessions

- 30th April via Zoom
- 7th May via Zoom

In-Person

- 19th April - after Mass
- 26th April - after Mass
- 2nd May - at the cafe

Thank you for being part of the Ards family. Whether you have visited once or returned many times over the years, you are part of our story, and we hope you will continue to be involved with what comes next. We hold you in our prayers, as we ask you to hold us in yours.

A Spring thought...

When we begin to understand ourselves as members of a created ecosystem, an Earth Community, and not as outsiders of the natural world, and has having a function within that ecosystem given to us in our earthiness by God – and blessed in the incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus – then a revolution will follow in our action.

When God spoke us into being through His Son it seems to me that the highest dignity of our human nature coincided with a wonderful capacity for simplicity. Simplicity is holy, and the vocation of simplicity is nothing more than the realisation of our true human nature. Being actively simple and loving are signs that we are acting truly and really. In fact simplicity and love are so deeply connected it is hard to find an instance of one without the other.

Simplicity is more than a mere preference for the inexpensive, or a reduction of our needs to the bare minimum (although this is part of it). When the Fathers of the Church talked of the Simplicity of God, this was in relation to His Oneness, His Unity. To become one and to act as a whole person is a reflection of the Simplicity of God. To commune with, and to function as part of, the whole of the Earth Community, is to benefit the whole, to be an agent of unity, and this is an act of love.

To be simple is to love, and compassionate action is simple. Thomas Merton often pointed out that complication is a symptom of division, and when we are divided and in the midst of the clouds of complication it becomes more and more difficult to make authentic acts of love – the whole process becomes confused by our competing motivations, desires, and ambitions.

So, to keep it simple, as part of our daily practice it might benefit to begin to make small changes that reflect our hope for simplicity. As with most things in the spiritual life what we will probably find is that what is simple is also difficult, that is why it is best not to take on too much! It is important to remain aware – of both our bodies and minds, and that every simple action is an act of love. Our awareness of the patterns and movements of our bodies and our minds will help us in making holistic decisions, of working towards unity not reinforcing division, and an awareness of the truth that our actions, when motivated by unity, are acts of love will support us because love is a much lighter motivation than fear.

Remember, you can choose to be simple. When you choose not to buy single-use plastics, or when you pick up a piece of rubbish in the park, or when you take time to enjoy a sunrise, or decide to repair rather than buy new, these are acts of simplicity and loving-kindness. Acts that benefit the whole of your community – the Earth Community.

— Some Franciscan Inspiration

*“ Hope opens new horizons,
making us capable of dreaming
what is not even imaginable.”*

Pope Francis

*“ Start by doing what’s necessary;
then do what’s possible;
and suddenly you are doing the
impossible ”*

Saint Francis of Assisi

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