

Taoiseach to be 'pinned down' on WIT issue

A timescale for upgrading of WIT to university status is to be demanded of Taoiseach Bertie Ahern when he visits Waterford on February 8.

At Monday night's monthly meeting of the City Council Hilary Quinlan asked Mayor Mary O'Halloran to ensure she met him and demanded some answers "in light of the fact that when he last visited, prior to the general election, he gave the impression that the university was virtually a fait accompli".

The Mayor told him that arrangements for such a meeting were already in hand, to which Cllr. Quinlan responded by saying it was vital to pin the Taoiseach down on the subject. "This has been dragging on for too many years now and it's vital for Waterford future that we get the university to which we are fully entitled", he added.

Mr. Ahern's visit is for the purpose of officially opening the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre on the historic Mount Sion site at Barrack Street. The centre, as the name implies, will be dedicated to the founder of the Christian and Presentation Brothers and is expected to become one of the country's premier ecclesiastical and heritage tourism sites. This represents the first major refurbishment of the site since the beatification of Edmund by Pope John Paul II in 1996.

In the days leading up to the official opening, a host of events are planned. Among these is a one man play 'Edmund Rice', written and performed by Brother Dan Casey and a lecture on Edmund Rice at Mount Sion primary school hall by international author and historian Dr. Daire Keogh. That is on Wednesday, February 6 and tickets for the event are now on sale for €5 at Mount Sion or by calling 051 874390. Proceeds will go to Mount Sion Primary School.

Following the official opening, a gala concert will be held at the Theatre Royal, tickets for which are also on sale at €15 from the Theatre Royal.

The mortal remains of Edmund Rice rest at Mount Sion and it is the principal site for the veneration of his relics. It is also where he established his first community and school in 1802. The new Edmund Rice Chapel with the founder's tomb as a centre-piece is now nearing completion.

The new heritage centre will allow visitors to 'live the Edmund Rice story' through an atmospheric and interactive walk-through museum which will take them back in time to 18th century Waterford, visit a 19th century school-room and see personal items associated with the businessman from Callan who went on to found two congregations which are still meeting the needs of the poor in 35 countries around the globe.

Yorkshire-based museum consultants, Janvs, have been working on the centre which is housed in some of the period buildings at Mount Sion, including the former chapel and band-room, dating back to the early 19th century. The new centre charts the history and global missionary outreach of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers over the past 200 years. The museum will also reflect the social changes in Ireland since the beginning of the 19th century and will showcase some of the current developments and changes in the life and work of the Brothers and of the Edmund Rice Network in 26 countries throughout the world.

The new Edmund Rice chapel will continue to be available and accessible to the local community. Stained glass panels from the windows of the demolished 1970s building have been incorporated in the new stone-faced circular chapel which has a free-standing square natural slate roof. The chapel's design takes full advantage of the dramatic vista of Waterford city spread out between Mount Sion and the River Suir.

The Brothers in Ireland and throughout the world are changing their approach in line with the needs of our times and society. The changes planned for the Mount Sion site are mirrored in the changing composition and role of the Brothers in Ireland and further afield.

The present community on Barrack Street comprises four Christian and one Presentation Brother. They are currently offering initiatives in a Youth Ministry and the provision of an Information and Support Unit (ISU) for refugees, asylum seekers and recent arrivals in Ireland. The heritage centre is also home to the Nagle Centre which provides IT training to the local community. The Mount Sion primary and secondary schools are also on the site. The heritage centre thus has a healthy mix of history and living ministries.