

OF PRAYER



LUXURIOUS: The opulent House of Prayer building 15 miles outside Steubenville, Ohio in the United States



VISION OF WEALTH: Steubenville main street (above); €4 million Malahide mansion (left); Sunday World reporter Jim Gallagher in Ohio and (far right) Fr McGinnity with John Rooney



Gallagher years ago when they travelled to Ireland to find their roots.

The couple were bowled over by the self-proclaimed visionary and told her that there were many Catholics in the Steubenville area and that you would often see elderly men and women walking about with rosary beads in their hands.

Soon after Gallagher claimed she had a vision from Our lady telling her to open a House of Prayer in the area.

The Rooneys took to the task of finding a suitable house or land with zeal.

It took months for Mrs Rooney to find the present house which was the former home of an elderly couple who used to run homes for the mentally handicapped. It had been empty for years.

The Rooneys snapped it up and then began a huge renovation and extension. The local Heritage Society forbade them from knocking down the front of the old building but it has been greatly expanded.

A large chapel was built along with guest

rooms and the work is still ongoing.

Mrs Rooney told me: "Christina told us to keep it open even when the building work was going on, otherwise the devil would get it."

"I open it every day from 12 noon to 3pm to stop the devil getting in."

The back of the chapel is filled with books, DVDs, beads and pictures for sale with the price of the "donation" written on them.

Violent

Gallagher and her spiritual director, Fr Gerard McGinnity, both flew to Steubenville for the dedication of the House of Prayer in December 2006.

During the service, Gallagher went into 'ecstasy' and claimed she had an apparition from both Christ and Our Lady that lasted nine minutes. The House's patron saint, St Bernadette, also appeared, she said.

Gallagher, whose so-called messages from heaven have become much more violent in recent years, has since claimed the existing houses must be completed quickly "or all will be destroyed".

She has caused outrage in the established Church by claiming anyone visiting any of the houses or donating cash for them will be saved in the next life.

"Christina has repeatedly confirmed that whoever donates will be protected in the coming times," says an apocalyptic newsletter in the Ohio House.

And those who hear the message and don't respond will be doomed to eternal damnation, it says.

Another newsletter calls for more donations saying "only a small number" have been received this year and that "we are forced to ask you yet again for assistance".

Meanwhile, locals in Smithfield seem non-plussed by this huge centre which has appeared at the edge of their quiet town.

One man said: "There was a big celebration for the opening when people came from all over America. Someone asked me if I lived here and said I was very lucky because this is where it was all happening. You could have fooled me!"

"A woman gave me some medal which I still

have. But the people there don't really have anything to do with the town. I've never been in it."

As in Ireland, this House of Prayer does not have the support of the local diocese.

Just as the Archbishop of Tuam has ruled the Achill House has no Church approval "whatsoever", the Bishop of Steubenville has said the local house is a private concern.

Confessions

A spokeswoman for Bishop Daniel Conlon told the *Sunday World*: "The bishop does not sanction it. It is located in his diocese but that's it."

"They are not allowed to have Mass or confessions or any sacraments and no priest is assigned to it. The bishop spoke to the Archbishop of Tuam before it even opened."

"If someone wants to put something in our diocese there is nothing the bishop can do except say it is not sanctioned. Just like a shop opening, there is nothing we can do."

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