

The New Cathedral of Galway

Its origin, purpose and description



An explanatory booklet by the Bishop of Galway



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. PICTURE OF CATHEDRAL *cover picture*
2. THE OLD JAIL GATE *page 7*
3. GROUND PLAN OF CATHEDRAL *page 9*
4. INTERIOR VIEW OF CATHEDRAL *page 11*
5. SITE OF CATHEDRAL IN CITY *page 13*

The New Cathedral Of Galway

I. *The function and purpose of a Catholic Cathedral*

OUR Divine Lord founded His Church on St. Peter and the Apostles. Thereby He gave to the Church a foundation and a frame-work. The Foundation is the rock, St. Peter, and his successors to the end of time. A good foundation secures cohesion and stability; a house built on a rock does not fall or crack.

The framework which our Lord gave is the diocesan system. The Apostles founded dioceses; one in Rome, another in Corinth, in Ephesus. As the Apostles died they were succeeded in each diocese by a bishop, who became the shepherd of the flock and the inheritor of the apostolic office and authority. So the bishop of Rome is the successor of St. Peter, and the bishops of other dioceses are the successors of the apostles.

The dioceses are the essential units out of which the whole Catholic Church is built up. This is the divine constitution of the Church given it by our Lord, that it

is made up of particular flocks, each held in unity of faith and obedience by the authority of a bishop as its shepherd, and all united under the authority of the supreme pastor, the Bishop of Rome. The function of the bishop of a diocese is to keep his flock united in faith and charity and to maintain them in union with the Holy See. The unity of the Church is visible; it is something that men can see and be sure of. It is made manifest in the persons of the Pope and the bishops. Dioceses vary in size but they are generally such that each of the faithful can have direct personal contact with his bishop. The bishop's first duty is to visit every parish of his diocese and to keep them in visible union with the Vicar of Christ and the true Church. When the people are in union with the bishop who is sent to them by the Holy See and obey his teaching, they are in the true Church of Christ.

The bishop has authority to teach; the symbol of that authority is the chair, the Latin word for which is *cathedra*. A church is called the Cathedral because the Bishop has his chair there. In every diocese there is a Cathedral. When a new diocese is established by the Holy See, one church is designated as the Cathedral. There the bishop must preach and regularly officiate; there he holds pontifical ceremonies, ordinations and synods; there he is buried and his successor is conse-

crated and enthroned. The cathedral is the principal or mother church of the diocese where great diocesan assemblies and celebrations are held. It is the centre of the religious life of the diocese and the sign of its religious unity.

II. *The ecclesiastical history of Galway*

The town of Galway belonged to the ancient diocese of Annaghdown which was founded by St. Brendan and comprised the territory of the O'Flaherty and O'Halloran clans. The parish church of St. Nicholas, which was built in the 11th century, was in 1484 raised by Pope Innocent VIII, at the request of the Mayor and citizens, to the dignity of a collegiate church. It was given a Warden and eight priests and a choir school in order that High Mass could be celebrated and the Divine Office chanted every day with the full splendour of the liturgy. This is interesting evidence of the devotion of the people to the Mass and liturgy just before the Reformation. In the course of time several parishes east and west of the city were attached to the Wardenship and it was recognised by the Holy See as an independent prelacy, ruled by the Warden, though he was only in priest's orders. It was exempt from the archdiocese of Tuam, in which Annaghdown had been merged except that the Archbishop held visitation and administered Confirmation every three years.

The charter of 1484 of Pope Innocent VIII gave the right of election of the Warden and vicars to the mayor and freemen of the city. During the Penal days Catholics

were deprived of the rights of citizenship; but when a vacancy occurred for warden or vicar, the Catholic inhabitants used to meet in the parish chapel and elect a mayor, officials and freemen and then proceed to the election of a warden or vicar. But only members of the fourteen ancient families or so-called "tribes" of Galway were recognised as freemen and given the right to vote. These were the Athy, Blake, Bodkin, Browne, Darcy, Deane, Ffont, French, Joyce, Kirwan, Lynch, Martin, Morris and Skerret families. Many ancient and influential families such as the Burkes, O'Flahertys and O'Hallorans were excluded.

The ancient Catholic Church of St. Nicholas was taken from Catholic hands in 1551 by order of Edward VI and a Protestant warden appointed. It was recovered by the Catholics in 1643. They were dispossessed by Cromwell's soldiers in 1652. They recovered it again in 1686 and were again dispossed in 1691 after the battle of Aughrim and the surrender of the city on 21st July, 1691. By the terms of the "Articles of Surrender" it was agreed that the Catholic clergy and laity of Galway were to be secured in the private exercise of their religion, but that treaty, like the Treaty of Limerick, was not observed. Under various Penal laws Catholics were deprived of all civic and religious rights and for a time were not even allowed to live inside the walls of the city. But they came back; and in 1725 they fitted up a chapel in a warehouse in Middle Street. Externally this building had no appearance of a church or place of worship. In 1752 a chapel was erected on the site of the present "parish chapel" at the corner of Middle

Street and Abbeygate Street by Warden Anthony Blake; it was a small and unpretentious building, one-third the size of the present chapel. In 1816-1820 it was enlarged to its present size by Warden French, the last Warden. Meanwhile, the families which were excluded from the right of election had begun to protest. At first, in 1792, and then at every subsequent election they demanded admission, and, on being refused, appealed to the Holy See. Eventually, in 1831, the Holy See settled the matter by raising the wardenship to the status of a diocese. So the youngest Irish diocese, consisting of Galway city and the parishes from Oughterard to Oranmore came into being. It was dedicated to Our Lady assumed into heaven and the parish chapel was declared the diocesan Cathedral. At that time neither St. Patrick's nor St. Joseph's Church had been built.

The ancient dioceses of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, which are across the bay from Galway, had been united by the Holy See in 1750 and had their own bishop. In 1866, when their bishop resigned through ill health, they were given in charge to the bishop of Galway temporarily; and in 1884 the Holy See made this arrangement permanent. Thus, by a remarkable series of historical changes, Galway became the Cathedral city and diocesan capital of the ancient territory that stretches around Galway Bay, from Rosmuck in the North to Lahinch in the South. It comprises an area of 1,010 square miles and has a population of 58,000 Catholics in 32 parishes.

From 1831, and especially after 1884, it was generally recognised that the parish chapel of St. Nicholas was not

suitable or adequate as a Cathedral. As early as 1876 a fund for building a new cathedral was established and a site was acquired near O'Brien's bridge. This site was later declared unsuitable by the architect, because it was too small and did not provide sufficient parking space, an important requirement in modern conditions. In 1941, the Galway Jail site was acquired from the County Council.

III. *The Jail Site*

In 1303 there was no jail in the province of Connaught, but English rule supplied the deficiency. The jail for the county of Galway was at first in Loughrea, but in 1686 was transferred to the town of Galway and housed in the old castle of the O'Hallorans near High Street. After the rebellion in 1798, larger premises were required, and one of the first acts of the English parliament for Ireland after the Union was an Act of 1802 "For Building a new Gaol for the County of Galway." In 1810 the county and the town were provided with two jails on a site of three acres on that part of Nuns' Island which is called *Oilean Altanach* and adjoins the river Corrib on its West bank. The bridge over the Corrib connecting the jail with the Courthouse was built in 1818.

Galway jail held in its time many famous prisoners, one of whom is still commemorated in the name of O'Brien's bridge which was called after William O'Brien, M.P., a leader of the Land League who was detained there in 1889 as the inscription on the bridge slab re-

counts. Many executions by hanging took place in the jail, and some of those hanged were in popular belief innocent, as in the case of the Maamtrasna murders in 1882.

Within a few years of the establishment of Irish Independence the prison population decreased notably and in 1939 the Government decided that there was no longer need for a jail in Galway. The premises were transferred to the Galway County Council which gave them for a nominal sum to the present Bishop of Galway as a site for the erection of a Cathedral.

The building of a Cathedral on this site is a remarkable turn of history. What more wonderful proof of the tenacity and victory of our people than that they should build a Cathedral in the very place which was the symbol of their oppression and the scene of their suffering! There is no greater contrast than between a jail associated with darkness, pain and human degradation, and a noble church which is a shrine of light, beauty and sanctity, and which lifts the soul to joy and happiness. The English parliament in 1802 little thought that its jail would give place to a cathedral of the religion of a people then so completely conquered. There can be no greater monument to the resurrection of the Irish nation than the building of a cathedral on this spot; and no clearer justification of its right to self-government than that the prisons built in former days are no longer required. His Excellency, the President of Ireland, speaking in Galway on the occasion of the blessing of the foundation stone on 27th October, 1957, referred to the history of the site and said: "All that remains of the old jail will disappear

and all the memorials of its unhappy history be obliterated. In its place there will arise a glorious symbol of the new, happier and independent Ireland, the Cathedral which will be raised to the glory of God and the honour of the people of Ireland, and in particular of the people of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora."

IV. *The beginning of the work*

In 1949 the planning of a Cathedral on the jail site was entrusted to Mr. John J. Robinson, a prominent Irish architect. Various designs and sketches were made and every aspect of the design, construction and materials was carefully thought out. On March 18th, 1957, the Bishop of Galway submitted the final design and plan to His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. His Holiness examined the plan carefully and with great interest, and then graciously gave his approval and his blessing to the work, and to all who would help towards its successful completion.

On 27th October, 1957, His Eminence Cardinal D'Alton, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland, in the presence of a great gathering which included the President of Ireland, the Taoiseach, the Archbishop of Tuam and the Bishops of Kerry, Achonry, Killaloe, Elphin, Killala, Cork and Clonfert, solemnly blessed the site, foundations and corner-stone.

Tenders for the construction of the Cathedral had been invited since July and took some time to prepare. They were opened on 26th November, and carefully analysed. On 6th December, the feast of St. Nicholas,



The Old Jail Gate

the lowest tender, that of Messrs. Sisk, Ltd., of Dublin, was accepted. For the sum of £600,000 the firm undertook to build the Cathedral from the foundations to the cross on the dome. The tender did not cover the internal equipment and furnishings, such as altars, rails, seats, confessionals, stations of the Cross, organ, heating and lighting.

V. *The Design of the Cathedral*

The design of the Cathedral has been influenced by the classical tradition of Galway architecture at the period of the city's greatest prosperity in the 17th century, and in particular by its ancient Spanish affiliations. The plan is in the form of a cross; the nave forms the vertical beam of the cross, and the transepts form the arms. The high altar is situated at the crossing of nave and transepts exactly under the dome. It will be visible to everyone in the nave and transepts. Over it will rise a baldachino and over that again the dome. Inside the Cathedral the high altar is the central and dominant feature, recalling to our minds that the sacrifice of the Mass is the central act of religious worship for which the Cathedral exists. From the outside of the Cathedral the position of the altar is indicated by the dome; it rises directly over the altar. A soaring tower or dome, seen from afar, reminds us that the holy Sacrifice of the Mass lifts up the human soul to heaven.

The high altar is the only altar that is visible inside the Cathedral from the nave; there are three other altars, but they are enclosed in chapels. In addition to the

Lady Chapel, there will be chapels and altars dedicated to St. Nicholas, St. Colman, and St. Fachanan, the patrons of the diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Killfenora, respectively.

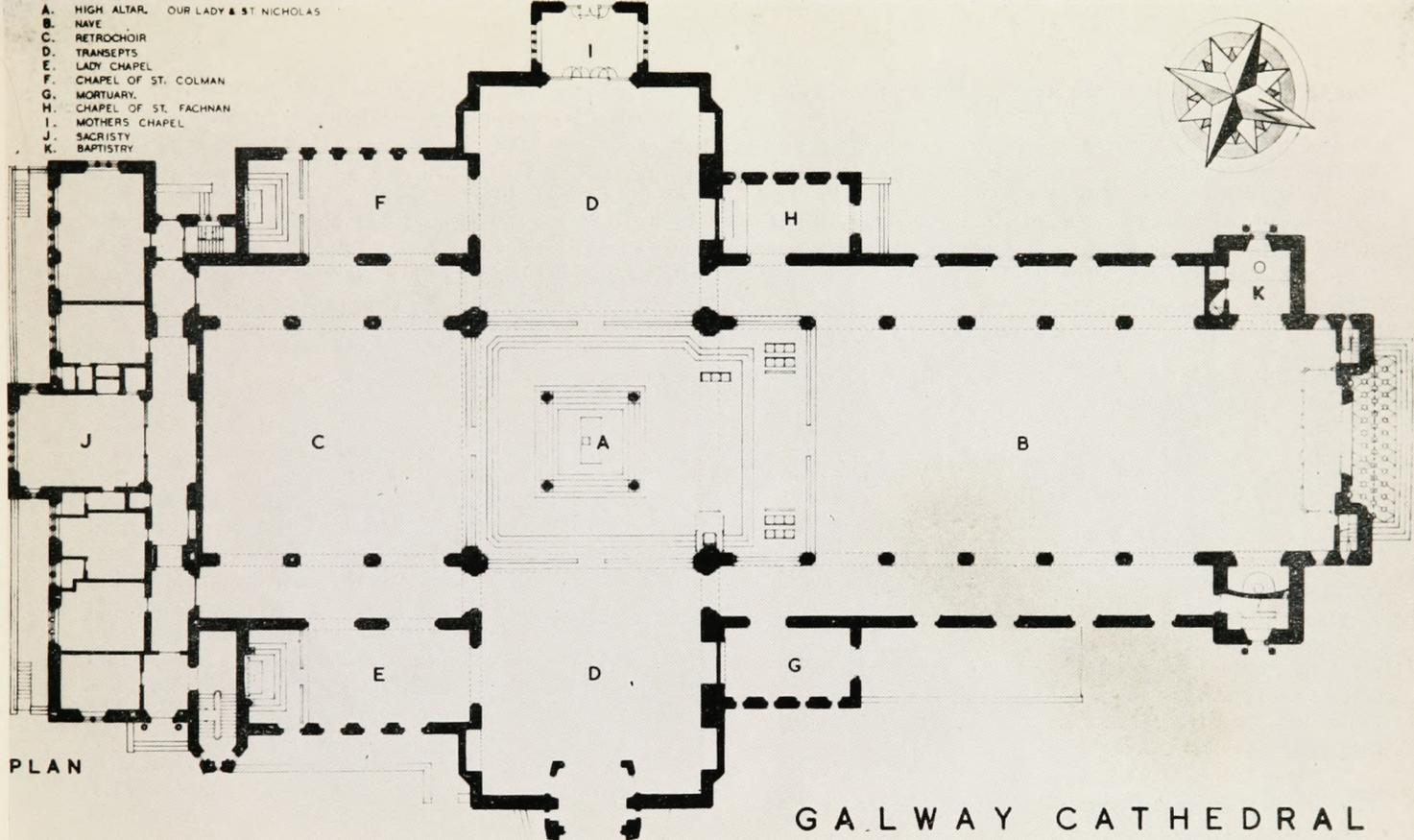
The dome will be situated on the centre line of the bridge as one approaches from the city. The nave or length of the Cathedral will be at right angles to this centre line and will run approximately north and south. The main entrance to the nave will be from the north and will face in the direction of the University College and the Regional Hospital. It will be flanked by two towers. Over the main door will stand a large statue of Our Lady. As one enters the main door the Baptistery will be on the right. (Marked on the plan page opposite)

The High Altar will be dedicated to Our Lady assumed into Heaven, and to St. Nicholas. On the left of the High Altar, opening off the transept, will be the Lady Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. On the opposite side, opening off the right transept, will be the Chapel of St. Colman, patron of Kilmacduagh. The Chapel of St. Fachanan, patron of Killfenora, will open off the right aisle near the crossing. The Mortuary Chapel will be situated on the Gospel side near the Bridge and will have direct entrance from the outside.

At the end of the right transept, there will be a Mothers' Chapel, with a full view of the High Altar but separated from the main body of the Church by a glass partition, so that mothers can bring infants in arms with them without disturbing the congregation.

The main portal of the Cathedral containing three

- A. HIGH ALTAR. OUR LADY & ST NICHOLAS
- B. NAVE
- C. RETROCHOIR
- D. TRANSEPTS
- E. LADY CHAPEL
- F. CHAPEL OF ST. COLMAN
- G. MORTUARY
- H. CHAPEL OF ST. FACHNAN
- I. MOTHERS CHAPEL
- J. SACRISTY
- K. BAPTISTRY



PLAN

SCALE OF FEET



GALWAY CATHEDRAL

FOR THE MOST REVEREND MICHAEL BROWNE D.D. BISHOP OF GALWAY

JOHN J. ROBINSON, ARCHITECT.

The Ground Plan of the Cathedral

massive doors, will be to the north. There will also be doors in each transept.

The Cathedral will contain seating for 2,000 persons in the nave and transepts, everyone having an uninterrupted view of the high altar. There will be no seats in the aisles, which will provide ample passage for circulation to the seats and to the altar. Allowing for standing room in the aisles, the Cathedral will hold 3,000.

The main dimensions are:—

Overall length, including sacristy	300 feet.
Overall width of transepts	158 „
Width of nave between pillars	48 „
Width of each aisle	11 „
Height of nave	61 „
Height of dome	126 „
Height of cupola	145 „
Size of chancel	50 x 72 „

The materials of construction are as follows: The external walls and drum of dome in Galway limestone. The internal walls of nave, aisles and transepts will be in Galway limestone. This local limestone, as is apparent in some of the oldest buildings in the city, retains its colour and freshness remarkably well. The roofs and dome will be covered with copper on timber framing, supported by steel trusses.

VI. *Why such an imposing structure?*

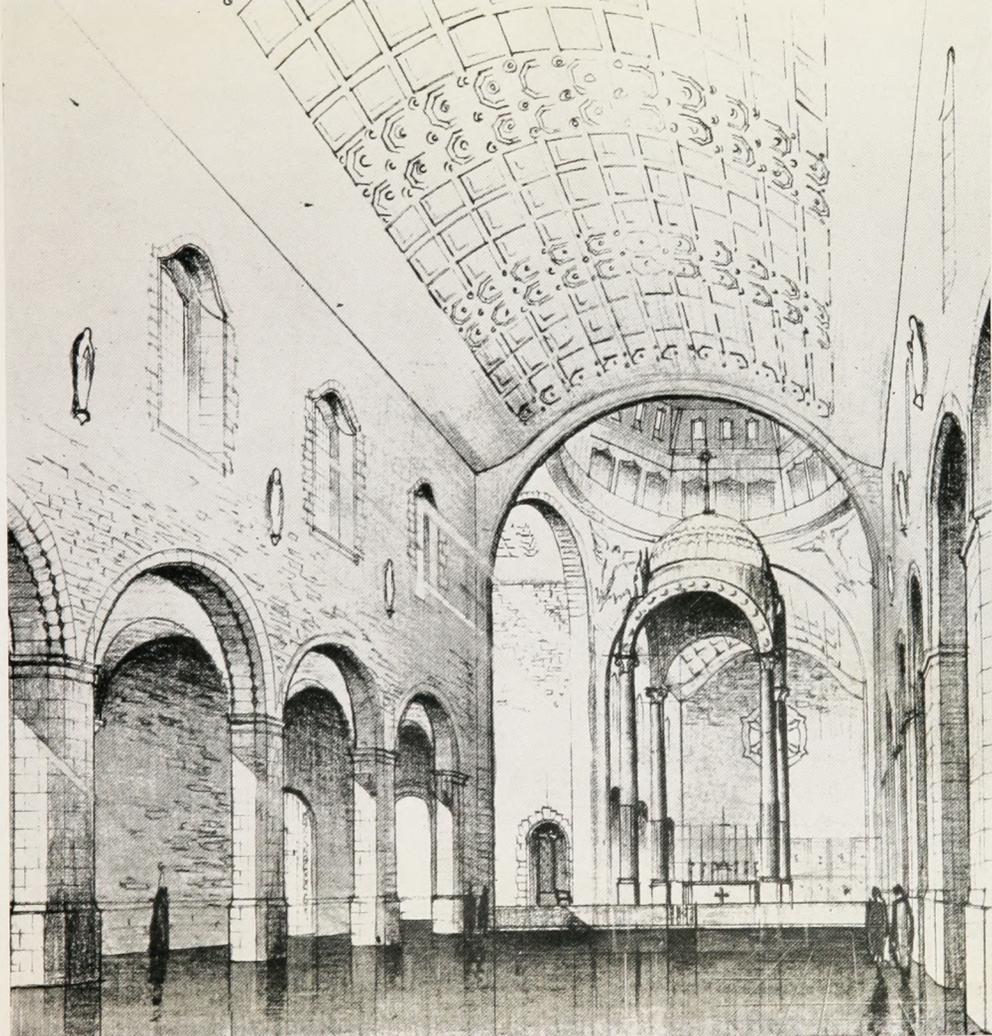
The Cathedral is situated between the Courthouse, the University College and the new Regional Hospital.

These are the principal secular buildings of the city. They have a spaciousness and dignity corresponding to their functions and importance. The House of God, which answers the deepest needs of the human soul and represents the strongest traditions of our people, should also have a dignity and grandeur worthy of its noble and beneficent function and a spaciousness corresponding to the needs of the people, not merely of the city but of the diocese. Our standard of building for hospitals, schools and private houses has risen in the last thirty years. A Cathedral should be a building of which subsequent generations may be proud.

VII. *The cost*

It has been mentioned that the contract for building the Cathedral, apart from furnishing, is at present prices £600,000. If the cost of labour or materials increases, then we will have to pay more. Six hundred thousand pounds is a very large sum. It should, however, be remembered that in the last fifty years the cost of building has risen ten-fold. Fifty years ago this work could have been done for £60,000. But wages were very low then, less than £1 per week. The price of cattle was also much lower fifty years ago. We are living in an age of inflation in which the value of money is steadily declining. That is the reason why it was decided to start the work of construction and not to wait in hope of lower prices.

*View of the
Interior*



VIII. *Our resources*

In 1876 a fund for building a Cathedral was inaugurated with a bequest of £500 from Mr. Murray of the parish of Kinvara. The fund grew very slowly. By 1908 it had reached £1,550. Then bequests and donations came more generously and they were invested carefully. In 1937 the fund had reached the sum of £108,000. In December, 1957, it had reached the sum of £250,000, at the current prices of the investments and securities held.

The balance to be found in order to complete the present contract is £350,000. In addition, professional fees of architect, quantity surveyor, structural consultant and clerk of works will come to over £60,000. The furnishing and equipment necessary before the Cathedral can be dedicated for use are estimated to cost £100,000.

The total is a very large sum for a diocese with a population of 58,000 souls. Our people have responded with wonderful enthusiasm and practically every household has undertaken to give an average of two shillings and sixpence each week for the next six years. For many this means a real sacrifice.

Our Holy Father, the Pope, has sent a contribution of £2,000, thereby showing how important and necessary he regards the work. His princely donation has been a wonderful encouragement to the clergy and people of the diocese.

Generous contributions have also come from many benefactors outside the diocese who are anxious to help in the work of building a Cathedral for the glory of God,

especially in these days when in many lands churches have been destroyed and Christians prevented from practising their religion. In Ireland itself there is much that we should thank God for, in the spiritual and in the temporal order. Speaking in Galway on the day of the Blessing of the Foundation Stone, Mr. E. de Valera, Taoiseach of the Government, referred to one reason for deep national thanksgiving to God, of which he was very conscious. "During the late war, (he said), when the maintenance of our neutrality and other difficulties arising from the war were a cause of anxiety to us, I felt that if we should succeed in maintaining our neutrality and come safely through the war, the people of Ireland should, in gratitude to God, erect a temple of thanksgiving just as the people of France after the Franco-Prussian war built the basilica of Sacre Coeur in Paris. When the war was over I would have tried to carry out the idea had I power, but on consideration I saw that the matter was primarily an ecclesiastical one, so I refrained.

"Now, however, if the people of Galway need outside help so that this Cathedral on our Western coast might be built, the people of our country as a whole have an opportunity of expressing their gratitude to God for their safety through the war by assisting, through their contributions, to build it."

IX. *How to become a benefactor*

You can become a benefactor and have your name enrolled in the Golden Book of Benefactors by contributing £1 to the Cathedral; *address your letter to the*



The Site of the Cathedral in Galway City

Bishop of Galway, Mount St. Mary's, Galway. You can also have the name of a friend, living or dead, enrolled in the Golden Book. Benefactors will share in the prayers and Masses which will be offered in this Cathedral as long as it stands.

You can become a BUILDER of the Cathedral by contributing the cost of a block of Galway limestone, £3.

It has not yet been decided in what material the Stations of the Cross will be, whether in wood, mosaic, opus sectile, stone or marble. Hence a definite figure as to cost cannot be given.

The equipment and decoration of the Cathedral offer many opportunities for honouring and perpetuating the name and memory of a beloved parent or child. Similarly groups or organisations will be able to commemorate men or women who gave distinguished service to their fellow-men. The following is a list of sacred requisites which may be presented as a memorial and bear a commemorative inscription:—

High altar—approximate cost	£2,000
Chapel altars, each	700
Communion rail to high altar on four sides ..	5,000
Communion rail to chapel altars, each	200
Tabernacles	200

Crucifix, altar	£50
Candlesticks, set of	500
Sanctuary lamp	350
Sanctuary gates	250
Stations of the Cross, each	300 to 500
Confessionals, each	350
Benches, seating twelve, each	70
Set of Vestments	100
Baptismal font	250
Pieta for Mortuary chapel	300
Statues in stone	200

There are four large rose windows, one in each gable, which will probably cost £2,000 each. There are eighteen windows on the ground floor level, which are fourteen feet high and four feet wide: in full stained glass they will cost at least £600. There are 26 windows in the upper level which are 12 feet high and 3 feet wide: they will cost approximately £500. These figures are only approximate as some artists put a high price on their work.

Intending donors are requested to consult the Cathedral authorities before making any purchases or placing any orders so that all furnishings and equipment may, as far as possible, conform to the general design and standard.

Donations will be gratefully received by
The Most Reverend Michael Browne, Bishop of Galway,
Mount Saint Mary's, Galway, Ireland

CATHEDRAL BUILDING FUND

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