

My name is Sister Mary Cecilia, and my home is the town of Kildare, in County Kildare, Ireland. If you are coming from England, take the boat over to Dun Laoghaire and turn left.

Our story goes back thousands of years. But that is hard to imagine. Let me tell you about our House, the Convent of Saint Bridget, in Kildare.

Every Catholic child will tell you the story of Saint Bridget, how she is the saint of poetry, of healing, of peace, how her sacred flame was lit in the corner of the sanctuary in the convent here. How we nuns are like Saint Bridget, and keep the flame alight now. Sister Mary Cecilia, and Sister Assumpta, and the others. Very few others, if truth be told.

But those who live in Kildare in the present day know too that our old convent is closed. Things have happened that should not have happened, and women now do not choose a life in the convent, nor men offer to be priests.

(Drum) Boom. Boom.

So the ancient stones of our convent lie empty, while I, Sister Mary Cecilia, and Sister Assumpta, and two others, have been given number 14, Convent Close, Kildare as our home. Upstairs, we each have our small cell. Downstairs, apart from our kitchen and living room, we have this extension, which we call our Peace Room. The priest is often too busy to come. In the corner, over there, the flame is lit. Poetry, Healing, Peace. Sometimes we say 'Goddess Bridget'.

(Drum) Boom. Boom.

One day, not long ago, we received an invitation. To England. To Glastonbury. For rock music, and raving? No! For 'The Goddess Conference'. Women, invoking the Goddess, with prayers, and dancing, and drum. Our Goddess. Our Saint. Our Bridget. Sister Assumpta and I, we stare at each other.

(Drum) Boom. Boom.

We see in each other's eyes the question: do they, these women in Glastonbury, England, know that the priests in Ireland say, 'No no, no goddess! She is a Saint, our Bridget. Saint, not goddess!'

Sister Assumpta asks, 'What shall we wear?' For we left our black habits behind among the ancient stones. Now we wear cream satin blouses and brown Crimplene skirts. I reply, 'We will wear our blouses and our Crimplene skirts.'

We journey over. Women meet us, take us to our lodgings, give us a drum.

We move among them. The noise of these women! Their laughter! Before long we are laughing too.

(Drum) Boom. Boom.

We are led up to their stage. Even the drums are quiet now.

We tell our story. Our glorious story. Then our bitter story.

Then we say, together: 'Saint Bridget of Kildare, whose ancient flame we keep alive, and the Goddess Bridget, whose drum you drum, are not separate. They are One.'

(Drum) Boom!

Sister Mary Cecilia

Alison Leonard