

James Hogan Memorial Service

New Ross, Co. Wexford. 6th December 2014

Address by John Connolly, Honorary CEO, The Lifesaving Foundation

Fr Tom and members of the extended Hogan family;
I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you at this commemorative mass in memory of James 'Jimmy' Hogan who died in 1946 and other deceased members of your family.

About 400 years ago the poet James Shirley composed a famous poem titled 'Death the Leveller'. In his poem Shirley proposes that when we die and face our final judgement it will not matter whether we are a king or a pauper – whether we were the most powerful person on Earth or one of the powerless majority. We will all be judged on how we lived our lives, on how we played the hand of cards that fate dealt us.

Today we are here to commemorate and to celebrate the life of **James (Jimmy) Hogan** and other members of the New Ross Hogan family. James Shirley ended his poem with the lines 'Only the actions of the just Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.'

Having read much about Jimmy Hogan recently I am sure that once his final judgement ended he would have been greeted with the words from St. Matthew's Gospel "Come you blessed of my father...".

Shirley's poem is titled Death the Leveller. As a person who has been involved in drowning prevention for over 40 years I would like to suggest that along with death there is another leveller - drowning is a leveller worldwide. It does not matter whether you are rich or poor, live in the first developed world, or live in the third under-developed world – we are all vulnerable to drowning. Today, in the world drowning prevention community, we talk about

drowning as a hidden pandemic. If you check the World Health Organisation database for world drowning figures you will be told that the total number of drownings is about 350,000 deaths with a small sub note saying that this is the number of drowning deaths recorded in hospitals. The majority of those who drown live in the under-developed world – only around 5% of all drownings happen in the first developed world where hospitals are easy to find. This leaves 95% of all drownings occurring in the third under-developed world where there are few hospitals. The real number of drowning deaths worldwide is probably somewhere between 1 million and 1.5 million annually. Children are most vulnerable to drowning. In Ireland and in other developed countries drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death after Road Traffic Accidents but worldwide drowning is most likely the number one cause of accidental death among children under the age of 18 years. We know that Jimmy Hogan rescued a number of children from the River Barrow as it flows through New Ross.

The World Health Organisation only counts drowning deaths but you don't have to die to drown. A simple definition of drowning used today is if you have a problem breathing in water or under-water then you are drowning. It is important to understand this definition. You don't have to die to drown - you can drown and live. Once you have had difficulty breathing in water or under-water you have drowned. For every one person who dies by drowning, four others survive a drowning incident and are hospitalised with medical conditions that range from short-term pneumonia to life-long epilepsy or are hospitalised in a permanent vegetative state. If we add those who are hospitalised from drowning to those who die from drowning the total number of drownings now ranges between



5 million and 7.5 million annually. Research also shows that for every person who is hospitalised following a drowning incident another four are treated in hospital as out-patients.

Let me do the sums for you - 1 to 1.5 million die from drowning, 4 to 6 million survive and are hospitalised for between 3 days and 1 year, and 16 to 24 million suffer minor injuries as a consequence of surviving a drowning incident. If what I have just said surprises you - if you have just realised that you drowned and survived you will understand why drowning is described as a hidden pandemic.

Every drowning incident is personalised to a specific family, living in a specific community. I would briefly like to look at some aspects of Jimmy Hogan's life as a local window on a wider world situation. At the beginning of the 20th century (100 years ago) the number of drowning deaths in Ireland was just over 200 persons annually. Today at the start of the 21st century the total number of drowning deaths is half that, around 100 deaths annually despite the population of Ireland doubling in that century. **A major reason behind the number of Irish drowning deaths dropping is that local communities are taking ownership of water safety in their localities.** People in communities like New Ross and Waterford are saying that too many people are drowning in our particular river or lake and we are going to do something about it. Community drowning prevention and rescue services are established by a small number of individuals but are funded by the whole local community. Let me give you some statistics;

in 2013 - 31 people were prevented from entering the River Slaney in Wexford Town by Wexford Marine Watch, since 2010 - Waterford Marine Search and Rescue have prevented 70 persons from entering the River Suir in Waterford City and 18 have been removed from the river alive, since 1993 - Foyle Search and Rescue in Derry, Northern Ireland have reduced the annual number of drowning deaths in the River Foyle from 25 a year to 4 a year.

In Ireland, individuals supported by their communities are taking positive action in drowning prevention and this is lowering our number of drowning deaths and increasing the survival chances of those removed from the water early.

This is what the Lifesaving Foundation is copying in Lesotho, Kenya, Tanzania, and Liberia. Not only the Lifesaving Foundation but the world lifesaving community is technically and financially supporting local drowning prevention and rescue groups to help themselves – helping them to solve their own local drowning problems themselves. If it works in New Ross and Waterford and Wexford, it can work in Africa and Asia.

I have worked with the Gardai (police) analysing their drowning rescues. Most Garda Stations close to water have officers who are identified as the water rescuer - those to call when someone is in

a river. I have this idea that in New Ross in the 1920s and 1930s, if a call was received that someone was in the River Barrow, the sergeant on duty would have shouted **"There's someone in the Barrow. Get Jimmy Hogan."** Jimmy was the 'go to man' for river rescue before we had a community rescue service. He is known to have rescued over 30 people from drowning in his local river. This idea of 'locality' is important in drowning rescue as in drowning prevention.

Here is my final thought for you to consider - statistically between 10% and 20% of all non-lifeguard rescuers die or are seriously injured during a rescue attempt. At the lowest percentage that is one in ten rescuers so if Jimmy had 30 rescues why didn't he drown? If we had time to quiz you I am guessing that the majority would answer that he was a strong swimmer. He was that but we know that today over a half of all those who drown are considered to be swimmers and some thought to be very good swimmers. The Lifesaving Foundation has a number of research projects into drowning including a major project asking "Why do swimmers drown?". Thanks to our research we know a lot about why swimmers drown. My belief, based on this research, is that Jimmy was a river swimmer all his life, unlike today when most swimmers are pool swimmers. He was expert in swimming in the cold moving water of the River Barrow.

If Jimmy was ever going to drown it was during his last recorded rescue of the 6 year old girl Ann Barron - now the elderly nun Sister Mary Gabriel. Jimmy, aged 71 years, entered the river fully clothed, with a bad leg due to arthritis, and a broken arm - damaged due to a fall as he entered the water. Both rescuer and casualty survived the incident. Much attention has been focused on this final magnificent rescue but for me the most significant rescue is his very first rescue about which nothing is known. This is significant because at that time Jimmy made a life changing decision – one that saved many lives subsequently – he saw someone drowning and he voluntarily crossed over the line that separates lifesavers from bystanders.

It is clear from his lifesaving work and his work as a founding member the New Ross Workman's Club that Jimmy Hogan was an outstanding man. It is my hope that it is now clear to you, his grandchildren and members of his extended family, that Jimmy Hogan was an outstanding lifesaver in any century.

Thank you.

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