

DID YOU KNOW....

March 2013

That another scandal is coming to light in Ireland? Not as widespread as the Magdalene Laundries, but somewhat similar.

“Twenty-seven years after the closure of the last of the laundries, the scandal – child poverty – which partly gave rise to [them] and now St. Patrick’s Institution continues unabated” said columnist Jody Corcoran in the Sunday Independent (Feb. 24). St. Patrick’s, attached to Mount Joy Prison, houses boys, ages 16-17, and young men of 18-21.

In 1985, a high-ranking official recommended St. Patrick’s be closed as soon as possible. “Rehabilitation is not possible as the physical and environmental conditions are such as to nullify any personal developmental programmes [sic]” said Dr. T.K. Whitaker.

St. Patrick’s has also been criticized by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Judge Michael Reilly, the Inspector of Prisons in Ireland, issued a report on St. Patrick’s last June. In it, he revealed finding appalling conditions, from a cell where bed linens hadn’t been changed from the previous occupant and the toilet was plugged, to youngsters in 24 hour lockup “for their protection.” One such child, whom he described as fragile, was “now talking to himself.” Some were so afraid of staff reprisals that they wouldn’t talk to Reilly.

Judge Reilly concluded that “the detention of children at St. Patrick’s should end as a matter of urgency.” The columnist expressed no hope of that happening any time soon.

As for the poverty contributing to the problem, the number of people living in poverty in Ireland has reached a record level. The current government has slashed 200 million euro from child benefit programs in two years, leaving 19% of the country’s children at risk.