

Christmas comes twice

Buy this phone today and when you top up by €20 a month...



Nokia 6600i
Exclusive to O₂
€149.99 Prepay



Together is better



EXCLUSIVE NO SIGN OF OUR LADY

LET US

BY GERALDINE COMISKEY

HOLY war has broken out at a shrine to the Mother of God.

The "sacred shrine" has been hijacked by a "pay as you pray" organisation, angry locals have claimed.

The site, in Co. Donegal, has been attracting pilgrims since 1939, when two girls claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin appearing on a rockface.

But the vacant cottage, holy well and area around the rockface have become a hive of activity in recent months.

And locals who occasionally visit the shrine, in the townland of Kerrytown, were shocked this week to find that the place was full of collection boxes and signs asking for donations.

People who have been going there for years to say the Mysteries of the Rosary, say the real mystery is: Who collects the money?

The site, which includes a whitewashed cottage, holy well and rockface, was bought 10 years ago by a woman from



WAITING FOR GOD: Joe Coleman Derry, now living in Strabane.

But unlike Our Lady, she doesn't appear at the shrine.

"We don't even know her name. We have been wondering for years why she bought the place because she's never here", a local man said.

Desolate

When the *Sunday World* visited this week we found it hard to believe anyone would want to set up shop in such a desolate spot.

The nearest villages are Loughanure and Crolly, home of trad band Clannad.

These old roads, which are not even on the maps and can only be reached by following hand painted signs, would even put the fear of God into Jeremy Clarkson.

So, on a rainy Monday, I expected to be alone. But within 15 minutes of my arrival, at least six more cars pulled up, mostly people from other parts of Donegal and Northern Ireland.

They told me they were there to pray, having first heard about this place when self-styled "visionary" Joe Coleman told the papers he had seen Our Lady here two years ago.

The Dubliner, who drew a crowd of 12,000 to Knock on Hallowe'en and provoked mass hysteria there after he claimed the Blessed Virgin was giving him "secret messages", claims he has been seeing "apparitions" in Kerrytown too.

Unholy war as angry pilgrims are asked to pay to pray...



JOY: Joe Coleman drew a crowd of 12,000 to knock

Coleman from Ballyfermot, Dublin, has even set up a website, Kerrytown-apparitions.com, in which he claims he saw not only the Virgin but also Jesus and Padre Pio.

But locals say whoever planted the collection boxes in the cottage has been seeing euro signs.

The first thing a visitor sees on arrival is vision of sorts, a surreal looking brick wall, barely a metre in length, with a slot like a post-box and a sign, "Donations".

Inside, there were more collection boxes and also three empty trays labelled "Rosaries", "Scapulars" and "Miraculous Medals" with a note on each: "Please take one. A gift for you, but should you wish to make a donation, please put it in the

donations box in the wall of the main room."

A noticeboard was covered in newspaper cuttings referring to Joe Coleman's "visions."

Displayed prominently is a printed poster advertising Sunday, December 8th, at 3 pm, as the "next day of prayer at Kerrytown Rock in the house of the Immaculate Conception."

Symbols

Various items hang on the walls, including a picture of the Virgin captioned "Medjugorje", the Child of Prague, a giant picture of Pope John Paul II with a St Brigid's Cross above it.

A giant string of Rosary beads hanging on the wall of the Prayer Room appears to be made of

Rune stones but instead of Celtic Pagan symbols, each bead bears a picture of the Child of Prague, Our Lady and other figures.

There is also a visitors' book (signatures start on 27th October this year) and a note stating that a committee looks after the shrine. But no members' names are listed.

The website kerrytown-apparitions.com gives a brief history of the shrine along with a lot of information about Joe Coleman.

The website also bears the same image of the Virgin as the one captioned "Medjugorje", which hangs on the wall of the Kerrytown cottage. Followers of Coleman will be familiar with his "pilgrimages" to the Eastern European town where he also claims to have seen spirits.