

an iconic faith



World Meeting of Families  
Dublin, Ireland 21st-26th August 2018



# John Bosco O'Hagan

Manufacturer of the Amoris Laetitia icon



John Bosco presides as Group Chairman and Company Founder of Specialist Joinery Group. He is married to Teresa, and they have three sons and five grandchildren. He established the family business in 1988 with one partner and an apprentice. Specialist Joinery Group is now known worldwide for their stellar reputation in the manufacturing of premier bespoke joinery

and fitted furniture, employing 220 people. The company has won amongst Manufacturer Of The Year, some of the highest accolades in the manufacturing industry over several years.

In his leisure time John Bosco, a devoted family man and a person of deep faith, enjoys golfing, horseracing and supporting GAA games.

The icon – Amoris Laetitia is among John Bosco's proudest pieces, and his client on this special occasion was for the Son of a carpenter and his mother, Mary.

# Mihai Cucu

## Writer of Amoris Laetitia



Internationally renowned, Romanian born Iconographer, Mihai Cucu first came to Dublin in 2001 to visit some friends. He met the Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, and one year later he returned to exhibit his icons in the Cathedral and to facilitate his first Irish iconography workshop.

Mihai studied art at the famous Romanian University of Art, George Enescu in the university city of Iasi, where he specialised in the academic field of restoration and conservation of icons and frescoes.

His masterpiece, the World Meeting of Families icon, Amoris Laetitia, 'The Joy of Love' praised by Pope Francis, has travelled to all twenty-six dioceses in Ireland during the past twelve months and has been venerated by hundreds of thousands of Catholics North and South of the border.

Mihai also works on video art for different music performances, photography and graphic design.

# Patricia Keane

Author & Producer of An Iconic Faith



Patricia Keane is the author of the critically acclaimed book *Journey Of Ten Thousand Smiles* and is an inspirational speaker and witness to her inner healing in Medjugorje. She co-hosts a weekly programme called *Health and Faith Matters* on Radio Maria. She writes a monthly article called *Mary My Mother* for the *Medjugorje Messenger* and blogs at [www.journeyoftenthousandmiles.org](http://www.journeyoftenthousandmiles.org).

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Patricia Keane is Chairperson and Director of the charity *Rebuild for Bosnia* that raised and spent four million euros rehousing the ethnically cleansed families in the aftermath of the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. She received two International Awards for her humanitarian work with the displaced families from all religious denominations throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a metal square tool against a piece of wood. The tool is a try square, used for checking the squareness of a surface. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the thumb and index finger gripping the handle. The wood is a light-colored, smooth piece, and the metal tool is a dark, polished steel. In the background, a pencil is visible, slightly out of focus, suggesting a carpentry or woodworking setting. The lighting is warm and focused on the tool and wood.

# John Bosco O'Hagan

## The Carpenter/Business Man

A young 15-year-old teenager was packing his bags in his family home in Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. He was deep in thought about his pending move to Derby, England where he would begin an apprenticeship in carpentry.

Leaving his close-knit family behind was never going to be easy for the sharp-witted, determined, and fun loving John Bosco O'Hagan. His mother, Sarah O'Hagan had given birth to nine children, and she and her husband, Peter John had dedicated their children's lives to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She and her husband decided ever before they got married to raise their family in the Catholic traditional way. Morning prayer and the daily recitation of the family rosary with their 8- living children, (having lost their second son in infancy), became part of their evening prayer ritual all year-round. If neighbours or friends called, they were welcome to join in or wait outside, because nothing was going to detract from Sarah O'Hagan's important evening date with her distracting brood to be heard either end of the road.

A voice in the distance disturbed John's thoughts. It was his mother asking if he was packed and ready to say the rosary before he left home. Thinking he could get away without being collared for the rosary for one day in his life, his mother had other plans. She had changed the prayer time to suit John's departure. With rosary beads in hand, holy water splashed over him, a prayer book pushed tightly into his pocket, a mother's tears and good wishes from everyone in Ardboe, John left home to begin his new life in Derby. "Keep the faith son," his father said clapping him on the back as he jumped into a friend's van heading for Belfast Harbour.

It's fifty-five years later, and John Bosco O'Hagan has never missed his daily prayer. He has inherited his mother's deep, committed and

prolific faith. He and his wife Teresa have also influenced their three sons, Ciaran, Sean and Dermot, in the same way. John is sitting at his office desk when he's asked to take a phone call from Fr Tim Bartlett, Secretary-General for the World Meeting of Families to be held in Ireland in August 2018.

John and Fr Bartlett have known each other through faith circles within the Catholic Church in the North of Ireland for many years. Fr Bartlett is familiar with the family-owned company, Specialist Joinery Group who are known worldwide for their stellar reputation in the manufacturing of premier bespoke joinery and fitted furniture.

Specialist Joinery Group has been chosen to supply and make the icon, Amoris Laetitia, 'The Joy of Love', for the World Meeting of Families, but John doesn't know that yet. The 1995 European Entrepreneur of the year is left speechless when Fr Bartlett asks him if the company could select the timber and manufacture the icon. From John's formative days in carpentry, he'd learnt to make everything from a chair frame to fitted furniture, but this was the first – an icon - that would be blessed by Pope Francis and would travel to every diocese in the country before the Pontiff's visit to Ireland in August 2018.

John's career in carpentry had taken him on a long and exciting venture from his humble days in Derby to establishing his own business in Maghera, Co Derry after his marriage to his wife, Teresa in 1977.



He began the family business in 1988 with the support of his wife's teaching salary, a business partner and an apprentice. Much like every young enterprise, there were plenty of growing pains, teething problems and tight budgets. Despite the challenges, John held firm to his belief that what you ask for in prayer you will receive. He held his peace, worked hard and remained focused and positive that God would provide for him and his growing family. As a youngster, he used to hear his mother say that there are many ways to steal from a person, other than robbing their pockets. John aimed to deliver the best product at the fairest price and pleasing his customers was his main concern.



His integrity, work commitment, drive, positive outlook on life, and enthusiasm for making the workplace a peaceful and happy environment, and delivery of first-class work paid off. The company got on board with Murphy Brewery and the Heineken Team in 1995. The Specialist Joinery Group became their preferred choice for Irish Pub fit-outs from New York to Kazakhstan. The constant demand for fit-outs resulted in the Group having to extend their factory space from 2,000 square feet to 35,000 and increasing their workforce to fifty.



Family photo: Dermot, Ciaran, Teresa, John Bosco and Sean O'Hagan

In 1998 John Bosco began looking towards the future of the company. To him, it was always a family business, and he wanted it to remain so. He encouraged his oldest son Ciaran to leave his first love of farming and join the Group. With renewed confidence and energetic new life on the team, the company tendered for their first multi-million hospital fit-out at Tullamore General Hospital, Co Offaly in 2001. That contract landed the company in the major public and private hospital fit-out market.

John and Teresa's second son, Sean was appointed to the position of contracts manager in 2006. It was a hat-trick that John was striving for, and when their youngest son, Dermot joined the expanding enterprise in 2007 John Bosco's ambition was achieved. Their son's

fresh approach, enthusiasm and foresight gave John and his team the confidence to pursue contracts in the prestigious markets overseas with their eager eye set on London first.

The 2008 economic crisis forced the company to tighten their belts and postpone expansion. Significant bad debts should have crippled the company, were it not for John Bosco's pragmatic approach and the use of the company's cash reserves that managed to keep his business afloat.

Undeterred and unfazed he rallied his troops at board level and with a dynamic approach they tendered and won the interior fit-out for the Dublin Criminal Courts and the 690 million euro new terminal at Dublin Airport. Their contemporary styles and craftsmanship was now on view at T2 for the world to see and showcased Specialist Joinery Group's manufacturing competence at international levels.

Excitement permeated the air in the production facility as 2011 approached, and a new contract was signed for the most prestigious construction project ever to be undertaken in Northern Ireland, the Titanic Signature Building. The commission for the ticketing desk alone consumed 2,000 company man hours to fabricate and construct. The grand staircase and the opulent wall panelling took the staff back in time as they lovingly toiled to recreate Titanic history.



The replica of The Grand Titanic staircase



SJG's London masterpiece - the Guildhall School of Music

In 2013 their London masterpiece – a complete acoustic fit-out was unveiled at the Guildhall School of Music, the magnificent medieval London jewel. It was a momentous occasion that put their stamp on the London market ensuring them pride of place at the top luxurious level.

Specialist Joinery Group were on a roll, and not even the continuing downward spiral in the world's economy could stop them. Their diverse and versatile craftsmanship could be found everywhere throughout the hotel sector, hospitals and world-renowned laboratories, the entertainment division from soccer, rugby and GAA stadiums to multi-million euro theatres, public and private schools, and the corporate world with projects being delivered on time, to budget and specification.

In 2014 giant global names such as Google, Facebook and eBay were tripping off floor staff tongues as they created their colour inspired cutting-edge designed reception areas, washrooms, print stations, offices and panelling.

Their success on the London and mainland UK specialised manufacturing scene gave them prominence in a market that demanded complex design, craftsmanship and precision installation. A new 85,000 sq foot factory was commissioned, and the most sophisticated high-tech computerised equipment was installed that would further enhance growth. Employment numbers grew to 100 people when the updated facility was launched in 2013.

When you thought you had capped it and there weren't too many more big names to capture, in 2014, the Group won a contract with Rolls Royce for the design and fit-out for their Aviation Corporate Headquarter Offices at Buckingham Gate in London. Rather than have the company's PR team prepare a press statement with a headline that might run something to the effect of "Maghera Joinery wins multi-million contract with Rolls Royce", John opted to keep his head down and focus on building the team and reputation for quality, both in design and the manufacturing of goods.



Rolls Royce Aviation Head Quarters, Buckingham Gate, London

John Bosco O'Hagan was always known for his foresight in business, but this time it was to be his youngest son, Dermot who recognised the shortfall in precision joinery carpenters that would take the

company into the future as retirements within their skilled divisions lay ahead. In 2016 the Apprentice Academy was established, and 60 aspiring young people applied for the eight elite positions. The Academy now recruits, trains and develops new talents which allow the staff and their work to act as the company's brand ambassadors. Specialist Joinery Group presently employs 220 people, and the plant now spans to 145,000 square feet.

The Specialist Joinery Group is a multi-award winning manufacturing company that has won amongst Manufacture of the Year, some of the highest accolades in the manufacturing industry over several years.

In May 2018 Specialist Joinery Group celebrated 30-years in business. The company is steeped in a rich legacy of trustworthiness, loyalties to both old and new customers, a place for people to grow and learn, and they continue to add the big global names such as Amazon to their hall of fame contracts.

John Bosco presides as Group Chairman and Company Founder. His wife Teresa acts as Company Secretary and Director. Their oldest son Ciaran became Managing Director in 2017. Their middle son, Sean O'Hagan holds the position of Contracts Director while Dermot oversees company sales as Sales Director.

John Bosco stepped out into the world as a teenager with the faith of his parents and a desire to work hard. His faith guided him to

build up a great enterprise, and despite his immense success, he has held tight to his faith and continues to guide his family with those same spiritual values.

The icon – Amoris Laetitia is among John Bosco’s proudest pieces, and their client on this special occasion was for the Son of a carpenter and his mother, Mary.







Complete acoustic fit-out at the Guildhall School of Music



# Mihai Cucu

## The Artist/Iconographer

A mother firmly tugs on the arm of her four-year-old son and pulls him back to face the altar. "You must be quiet, Mihai", she says with a stern tone in her voice.

Mihai is standing with his head tilted in the air, gazing up at the multicoloured icons on the ceiling of the Orthodox Church of Our Lady's Nativity, in his grandparent's village, Dragoesti in North Eastern Romania. The inquisitive boy can only remain still for seconds, and he rises to his feet again and stares at the beautiful woman with the baby in her arms looking out at the world. "Who's in the picture, Mama?" the boy asks. His mother tells him the baby is called Jesus and the beautiful woman is His Mother, Mary. She explains that it's not a "picture" but it has a different name, and it's called an Icoană, (icon), and that it's a religious work of art, and that icons are very special. He wants to know why and what they are for, and his mama patiently finds the right words so that her son will understand. "The icon invites us to come and pray at it", she explains. He moves from left to right walking around in a circle consumed with the brilliance and sequence of the timeless, colourful works of art adorning the ceiling.

It's 1997 and Mihai is 19-years old. He has just walked through the doors of the University of Arts George Enescu, Iasi to study for an arts degree. He has chosen to specialise in the restoration and conservation of ancient icons, an intensely specialised discipline. Nothing could dissuade the eager Mihai from becoming an Iconographer and Restorative Specialist, not even the thought of being barely able to make a living.

The degree will take him five years to complete, and during his studies, he will spend five consecutive summers learning the practical art

of restoration in the Orthodox Monasteries throughout Romania, where he and his fellow students will be accompanied and taught by their University Masters.

The curious boy has now become the specialist. He's been to Christchurch Cathedral in Dublin to exhibit his icons, and he has sold out. He's been invited to teach courses in Iconography with the Redemptoristine Sisters at the Faith Centre on St. Alphonsus Road in Drumcondra, Dublin known for their icon workshops on teaching people how to write icons. He has created the icon of St Laurence O'Toole for the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin, and his work has been noticed by



several priests from around the Dublin Archdiocese, including the Secretary-General for the World Meeting of Families – Fr Tim Bartlett.

Sr Lucy, the Mother Superior of the Redemptoristine Sisters, has arranged an introductory meeting between Mihai and Secretary-General for the World Meeting of Families. Fr. Bartlett already has the concept of the Holy Family icon and he and Mihai discuss the details of what narratives should be used for *Amoris Laetitia*.

It is decided that the focus will be the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They are the first family of the Christian Church, and they represent family life to us and the many occasions that family life consists of. The focus will be on three different Gospel scenes. The first to be depicted is the Holy Family at a table sharing a meal and their faith together, reflecting a passage in the Gospel of Luke. Every family celebrates a wedding, and the story of Jesus and Mary attending a marriage celebration in Cana is the second scene as told in the Gospel of John. And finally sickness is part of family life, and we experience the compassion of Jesus when he responds to a family's cry for help and makes his way to the home of Jairus where he finds Jairus' daughter already dead, and he raises her up, as described in Mark's Gospel.

These three narratives form the images will be written on to three panels that are known as a triptych. It will look like a house from the outside with two front doors. Just below the front doors, the inscription *Amoris Laetitia*, 'Joy of Love' will be inscribed on the base. The Archangel Gabriel will feature on the right front door panel and Archangel Michael on the left. When the doors are closed, we see both the splendidly robed Archangels with heads bowed in adora-

tion and service of God, the Holy One and with the desire to protect.

Fr Tim Bartlett puts Mihai in contact with John Bosco O'Hagan in Specialist Joinery Group, and Mihai discusses his choice of light essence wood for the structure of the icon. Limewood is sourced, and the triptych structure is crafted at the Specialist Joinery Group's manufacturing plant in Maghera. A canvas is then glued to the timber, followed by the application of ten layers of gesso which acts like an undercoat. Each coat is sanded in preparation for the transferring of the sketches. The next stage is called gilding where 24-carat gold leaves will be applied with special glue. Now the process of writing the icon begins using an ancient type of paint known as tempera that involves a technique where the different colour powders are bound together with egg yolks and water, producing a different look and quality to either oil or acrylic paint.



Writing an icon is usually referred to as a work of prayer and love. It requires a quiet, contemplative mind where the writer is drawn into the narrative.

The writer begins applying the darkest colours in the background and working towards the front using the lightest colours as they progress. The face is written using a base green-brown colour, and

the lighter colours are used to add light to the face. The face and hands are generally the last parts to be completed.

It took Mihai Cucu with the help of the Redemptoristine Sisters almost five months to write Amoris Laetitia. On the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2017, Mihai Cucu had stayed writing the icon into the early hours of the next morning. At 8 am he rose from his desk having put the last stroke to Amoris Laetitia, 'The Joy of Love'. He took a taxi to Dublin Airport and flew to his hometown to visit his beloved father who was in the final hours of his life.



Amoris Laetitia was unveiled and anointed in Knock Shire, Co. Mayo on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2017 by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the President of the World Meeting of Families.

Pope Francis received the World Meeting of Families icon in Rome on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 where he met, blessed and complimented Mihai Cucu on his masterpiece – Amoris Laetitia, 'The Joy of Love'.

Mihai continues to live and work in Dublin six months of the year and returns to Bucharest, his Romania base to teach iconography there and also in various Eastern European venues. His time in Bucharest affords him the pleasure of visiting his mum in his hometown and beginning new projects.

His work on Amoris Laetitia has been hugely admired and appreciated by the hundreds of thousands who have visited it throughout the twenty-six Dioceses in Ireland.







Amoris Laetitia was unveiled and anointed in Knock on 21st August 2018. Since then Specialist Joinery Group has travelled approximately 40,000 miles around Ireland with the icon.



## OFFICIAL FAMILY PRAYER FOR WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES 2018

*God, our Father,  
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,  
One family, in the Spirit of your love.  
Bless us with the joy of love.*

*Make us patient and kind,  
gentle and generous,  
welcoming to those in need.  
Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.*

*Protect all families with your loving care,  
Especially those for whom we now pray:*

*[We pause and remember family members and others by name].*

*Increase our faith,  
Strengthen our hope,  
Keep us safe in your love,  
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.*

*This we ask, through Christ our Lord,*

*Amen*

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.  
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.  
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.  
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*





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