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Friends, family, neighbours, and all who cared for Michael Gallagher—our Mick—thank you for being here today.

We gather to mourn a man we loved,
and to honour a life that asked more of itself, and more of us, with gentleness and with purpose.

Mick was born on the 5th of January, 1941, in County Donegal.
His story begins in Ardara, with the sea not far off, the hills watching over, and a home where words mattered and promises were kept.
From there he went west to study in Galway, a young man with a satchel and a hunger for history,
and from Galway he made his way to Limerick, where he became first a teacher, then a principal,
and where he learned what he always believed:
that education is not a staircase to status, but a bridge to belonging.

In 1967 he married Kathleen.
Fifty-seven years of partnership, of quiet courage, of shared laughter and the kind of loyalty that doesn’t advertise itself.
Together they raised Niall and Orla, and in time they welcomed five grandchildren who knew him as Grandad—
a title he wore with a particular kind of pride, the kind that shows up in the small things:
a lift to training, a postcard posted from Ardara with a bad joke squeezed into the corner,
a book left on the kitchen table with a note—Have a look at page 87.

Mick believed in learning not as a race, but as a habit of mind.
He taught history with respect for its complexity and its demands.

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Dates and battles were there, certainly,
but he would steer you towards the questions that matter:
What shaped this moment?
Whose voice is missing?
What duty does the present owe to the past?

I know this because I am his second grandson,
and he was my mentor and my moral compass.
If I stand a bit straighter in the world, it is because he taught me that real integrity is doing the needed thing when nobody is taking notes.

My favourite memory lives, quite simply, at his kitchen table.
A cup of tea cooling beside a stack of papers.
He was correcting an essay I'd written.
He didn't circle mistakes as trophies.
He leaned back and asked me questions—
always questions.
What are you really saying here?
What if the opposite were true—could you still defend your point?
Why this source and not another?
He never scolded.
He placed the responsibility for clarity back in my hands, and somehow made that feel like a vote of confidence.

He had a dry humour that arrived like a footnote at the end of a serious conversation.
You had to be listening to catch it.
A raised eyebrow, a line half-whispered:
Grand statements, he'd say, are best tested in small rooms.

There was also a courage in him that did not ask to be admired.
In difficult times—professional storms, family worries—he held his ground without bluster.
He resisted the easy drift of fashion.

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Principled, yes; but never rigid.
Thoughtful, yes; but never distant.
In that middle place—steady, respectful, curious—he did his best work.

When he retired, he and Kathleen came home to Donegal.
Retirement, in his vocabulary, did not mean retreat.
He wrote local history articles, the kind that put names back into their places, the kind that stitched the townland to its stories.
He loved the Irish language, not as a museum piece, but as a living inheritance.
He would greet you with a cúpla focal and expect, kindly, that you might offer one back.

Sundays often held a rhythm he treasured:
Mass,
a quiet pint afterwards with a friend or a cousin,
a crossword squared off between sips.
On clear days he would take to the hills—Slieve League especially—where he seemed to measure time not by hours but by horizons.
He read Yeats in the evenings, not theatrically,
but with a patience for the turn of a line and the weight of a silence.

He gave himself to community.
A principal’s job never ends at the bell,
and Mick wore that truth lightly.
He argued for education for all with calm persistence.
Funding applications, board meetings, awkward conversations—he did them, and he did them well.
He believed the measure of a school is not just where its top students go,
but whether every student feels seen and supported on ordinary days.

If you asked what values shaped him, the answer would not come as slogans.
It would come in the texture of his days:
integrity that had no appetite for shortcuts,
respect that had no need to raise its voice,

service that didn’t wait for applause.

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He could fix a timetable, a broken latch, or a knotty sentence.
He could sit in companionable silence for an hour and make you feel you had been profoundly understood.
For us grandchildren, he had a particular gift:
he made each of us feel seen, and not in a general way.
He noticed what we loved, what made us hesitate, what set our minds sparking.
He didn’t nudge us towards a single path.
He taught us how to walk whatever path we chose with care, with decency, and with an eye for the person beside us.

We will miss his counsel.
We will miss that steady presence at the head of the table, the way he folded a newspaper as if the day could be brought into order by patience alone.
We will miss the humour that arrived late and lingered.
We will miss the simple reassurance of his company.

But we have much to carry forward.
When I struggle with a choice, I hear him say,
What question have you not asked yet?
When I am tempted to speak too quickly, I hear him say,
Listen twice before you answer once.
When I look at our county—the townlands, the place-names, the schools, the ways we greet one another—I see more clearly because he insisted that we know where we stand.

It matters today to call things by their name.
Mick was a husband who honoured his vows with quiet constancy.
Kathleen, you and he built a home where seriousness was never bleak,
where duty was leavened with humour,
where love was a practice, not a feeling waiting on the weather.
He was a father who expected much because he trusted much, who taught by example as much as by word.

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Niall and Orla, the pride he had in you was deep and unshowy, like the roots that hold at the cliff’s edge.
And as Grandad to five, he was very simply a blessing.

He did not wish for flowers today.
He asked instead that donations be made to the school library.
Of course he did.
He knew that a single book put into the right hands at the right time can open a future that might otherwise stay shut.
That is a living memorial.
And in Ardara, a bench will bear his name.
I can think of no better place for it:
a spot to sit, to watch the world go by,
to rest the legs after a walk and set the mind to wandering.
If you find yourself there one day, take a moment.
Ask yourself a better question.
He would like that.

It is tempting, at a memorial, to cast the life we loved in bronze.
Mick would resist that.
He mistrusted grandiosity.
He believed in accuracy, in fair dealing with the truth.
So let me say simply:
He was principled without being proud,
thoughtful without being remote,
humorous without being cutting,
and brave without asking for credit.
He worked hard, he loved well, and he left the place he stood a little better ordered than he found it.

We will mourn him.
We should.
Grief is the proof of our bonds.
But we will also give thanks.

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For the walks that ended with windburned cheeks and a story about a cairn on a ridge.
For the Yeats lines shared across a table and followed by a wry smile.
For the afternoons when a crossword taught us that patience finds patterns.
For the evenings when a quiet pint held a friendship in place.
For the mornings when a school opened its doors and a young teacher found, in his office, not criticism but a plan.

I return, finally, to that kitchen memory.
A pencil tapping the margin.
A pause.
Then the gentlest nudge:
Is there a better way to say it?
That was his gift to us, in words and in life:
a better way to say it, a better way to do it, a better way to be in the world.

So let us honour him as he would wish.
By holding to our integrity when it costs something.
By widening the circle of education and opportunity.
By greeting one another with respect, even when we disagree.
By serving our communities in the ordinary, unphotographed ways.
By minding our language—our Gaeilge included—and carrying our local stories as living things.

And let us remember him not only at moments like this,
but on the slope of Slieve League when the wind lifts and the path steadies,
in the hush before a Mass when old friendships nod across a pew,
in the turning of a page,
in the asking of a better question.

Michael Gallagher—Mick—husband to Kathleen, father to Niall and Orla, Grandad to five,
teacher, principal, keeper of local memory, walker of hills, reader of poems,
man of integrity and humane good sense—

we give thanks for your life, and we will carry it forward.

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Go gently, Grandad.
We will mind each other.
We will mind the place.
And we will meet you, often, in the good work still to be done.

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