

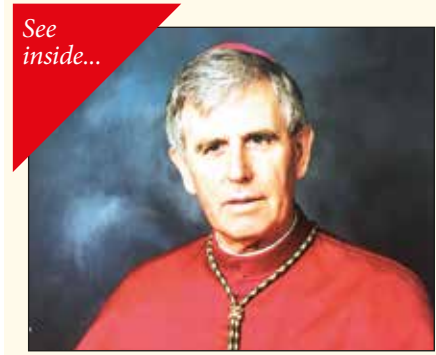


# The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 56, JULY / AUGUST 2020

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See inside...

Bishop Francis Lagan RIP



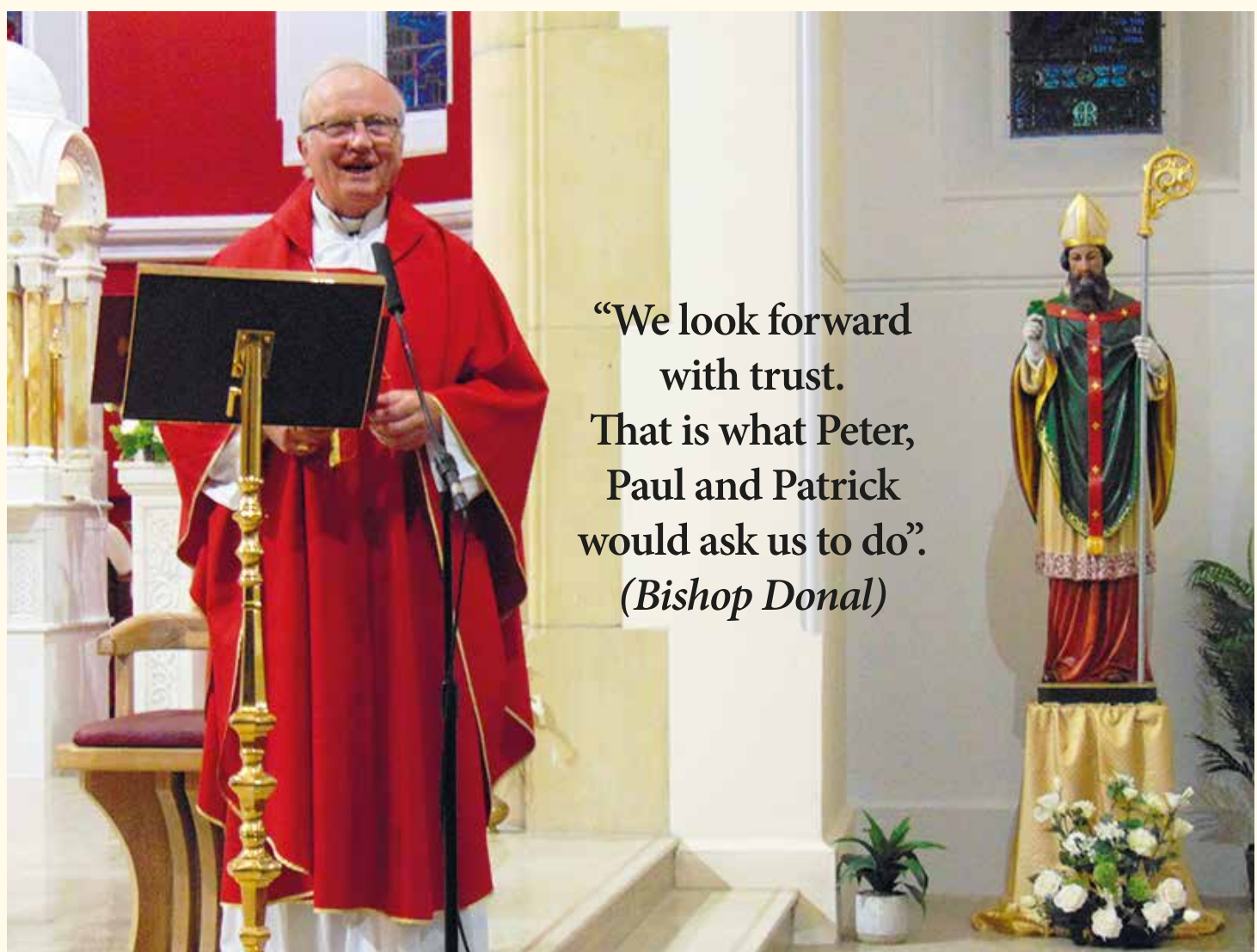
Celebrating St Columba – Long Tower



St Pio House – Galliagh



Holy Family Honoured – Newtownstewart



Bishop Donal celebrating first public Mass in the Diocese in St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn.

“We look forward with trust. That is what Peter, Paul and Patrick would ask us to do”.  
*(Bishop Donal)*



JP11 Reflections – Malin



Confirmation – Bellaghy



First Communicants – Limavady

People in focus



Oliver Barrett, Leckpatrick



Kate McGranaghan – Strabane



Moran Family – Desertmartin



Hollie Frystal – Melmount



Fr Columba Jordan CFR

Also featuring: Fan the Flame, End of School Year Diocesan Mass, Search Rosary, DYC recruiting and other Youth News, College and Parish lockdown features, St Francis Men's Prayer Group, Award for Bishop Donal, Children's Catechism Club, Irish Page, Features & Quiz.



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# Family and a sense of belonging are important human experiences

*Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope's prayer intentions for July and August...*

**Our Families. We pray that today's families may be accompanied with love, respect and guidance (July).**

**The Maritime World. We pray for all those who work and live from the sea, among them sailors, fishermen and their families (August).**

THERE was an advertisement many years ago for a Belfast-based removals company. The slogan went something like this – Four-fifths of the world is covered by water. The rest is covered by Morgans! The Pope's Prayer intention in August is for those who work in ships and boats on the four-fifths of the world's surface that is not land.

These millions of men and women transport goods of all sizes around the world – and they trawl the seas to satisfy our almost insatiable hunger for seafood. Without those who work on the waves our modern world could not exist. That is especially true for us who live on an island.

Some of my own relations from the Glens of Antrim went to sea – and my mother lost two cousins who were sailors. There is a very moving monument in Greencastle, Co Donegal, dedicated to the large number of local people who were lost at sea – in war, in the merchant navy and in fishing.

When reflecting on this

prayer topic, I contacted a ship's captain and asked what challenges sailors face. There is bad weather, the threat of piracy in parts of the globe and a strange life that leaves many sailors far away from their families for long periods of time. They often miss important family events like births, marriages or funerals. Many – especially in developing regions – live tough lives on board, often exploited and even abused by their employers under threat of sanction, long working hours and no time off. Many suffer marriage breakdown due to separation. A lot of men and women pay a high price so that we can have the goods and foods that we expect to pick up so casually.

The Catholic Church has had a long-standing commitment and outreach to sailors as they arrive in foreign harbours. The 'Apostleship of the Sea' and the Legion of Mary have done great work in Irish ports through seamen's hostels, often dedicated to Our Lady, Stella

Maris, Star of the Sea. A smile, a welcome, the chance to pray or to attend Mass can be a significant source of comfort.

Family and a sense of belonging are important human experiences – not just for sailors. In his July theme for prayer, Pope Francis asks us not just to 'pray for families' – but to pray that they will be 'accompanied with love, respect and guidance'. Families come in different forms. They often find themselves in situations that are not of their own making. There may be the ideal picture of mum, dad and children. But, for sailors and others, life is not that easy. All families deserve to be accompanied with respect.

Grace can be at work in all life circumstances. As we can see from how Jesus treated his contemporaries, God takes us where we are. He will want to move us from where we are. But God does not start by telling us we should start from somewhere else. He met Matthew and Zacchaeus the tax collectors, the Samaritan woman and the woman caught in adultery. From every place and every situation, there is a graced path that leads to God. The heart of God knows where we have been – but the Father also sees what we can become.

Thus, the Pope's prayer is that our parish communities develop big hearts which



Bishop Donal at the 2019 Greencastle Maritime Service.

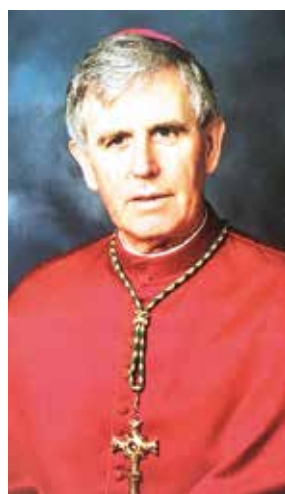
can accompany all families, whatever their starting point might be. Jesus knows that everyone benefits when relationships are healthy and nourishing. Many people have been hurt, when they have lost faith in others or in themselves. They may need a lot of encouragement to believe that their life and their circumstances could change for the better. Coming to belief in a God who has belief in us may take time.

Yes, children benefit from growing up in stable environments. An excessive emphasis on the rights of the adult can lead to neglecting the priority of children's needs. But adults need strong and dependable environments in which they too can flourish. That is why St Paul addressed all those connections when he wrote to the Church in Ephesus (Cf Ephesians 5:21-6:4).

We can inspire families to grow and mature because we have been given a divine vision of human dignity and our interdependence. Our bodies are sacred because they are Temples of the Holy Spirit. Our relationships are between sacred people who are destined for eternal life. It is God's dream and not human reprimand that we need to let everyone hear.

In these weeks, we will be coming out of the lockdown. We hope and pray that we will not relapse into a second wave. As we do so, Pope Francis asks us not to be too preoccupied with ourselves – and to remember in prayer families who may have suffered a lot because of the virus. And to remember those hidden workers who spend their lives on boats. The fishermen from Galilee would not want us to forget their modern counterparts.

## Bishop Francis Lagan RIP



priesthood when he quietly slipped away to his eternal rest on the Feast of St Columba.

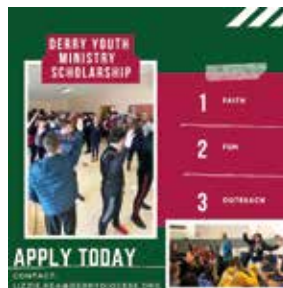
With restrictions on wakes and funerals due to Covid-19, people found alternative ways of paying their last respects to Bishop Francis.

While some stood socially distanced outside the Church of the Immaculate Conception, in Strabane, during his Requiem Mass celebrated by Bishop Donal, others lined different parts of the route of his funeral cortege from the Co Tyrone town, where he had resided for almost all of his Episcopal ministry, to his final resting place in the cemetery of his home parish in Glen, Maghera.

Bishop Francis is survived by his sisters, Tillie McVeigh and Mary Cassidy and his brother, Brian.

A fuller tribute to Bishop Francis will be included in the next edition of 'The Net'.

## Derry Youth Ministry Scholarship



However, all young people in senior cycle at school are welcome to apply to be involved in this Diocesan initiative.

This is an opportunity for the youth department to accompany senior students before they make the transition from school to either university or working life.

Through their experience of the scholarship, it is hoped that they will become more formed in their faith, gain leadership and team building skills, develop important life skills, have an active involvement in social justice projects within their communities, and gain a qualification in youth ministry (Level 2).

The Scholarship will help to empower the young people as they prepare to embark

on their next stage in life. They will gain experience of working in a parish and local community and it should give them the tools to become leaders in their own parish and communities.

If you are in senior cycle at school and would like to apply please contact [lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org](mailto:lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org), or message any of the Derry Youth Ministry social media pages.

The ministry of  
**The NET**  
was dedicated to Our  
Lady, through the  
intercession of  
St Maximilian Kolbe, in a  
ceremony celebrated by  
Bishop Donal McKeown  
on August 14, 2019.



**The NET**

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

**Contacting us:**

If you have a story that you would like to share or an event you would like covered by The Net, just drop an email to

**[editorthenet15@gmail.com](mailto:editorthenet15@gmail.com)**  
or ring/text 07809292852



## Celebrating End of School Year Diocesan Mass, Fr Paul Farren reassured young people and urged them to... Never let a day pass without talking to Jesus in prayer

SCHOOL communities across the Diocese were invited to gather online for the celebration of the End of School Year Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral by Fr Paul Farren, director of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre.

With a special mention for pupils leaving either primary/national or post primary schools, Fr Paul said: "You are finishing in a very different way than normal. You have not been in school for a few months and have been home schooling. It is a very strange and difficult time, with different ways of doing things."

Noting that the schools had written special prayers for the occasion, which had been presented in a book that lay in front of the altar, along with the colourful quilt displaying all the school crests, Fr Paul went on to pray for God's blessing upon all the young people, and to thank God for their gifts and talents, and for the gift of education.

In his homily, he spoke to them

about the Gospel reading, which told of the experience of the disciples in a boat that was being tossed about in a storm, while Jesus slept.

"They were afraid they were going to die during such a storm, but Jesus was sleeping", remarked Fr Paul, asking: "What do you need for a good sound sleep? You need not to be worried. We want to feel secure when we go to sleep. Well, Jesus felt secure."

"In some sense, the world is our boat to take us where we need to be; with Jesus. Sometimes it is very difficult, like now when we have this coronavirus that has stopped the world. But Jesus is with us. He has no worries about being with us."

"No matter what age you are, or what school you are finishing, Jesus trusts in you and knows you have gifts and talents to stay close to Him always. He believes in you no matter what result you get in any test. What matters is that Jesus believes in you and has complete

confidence in you that you will get through this difficult time."

Praying in thanksgiving for the young people, their parents and teachers, Fr Paul added: "We pray that you will have a wonderful summer and that you will feel free and not burdened by work in the summer months, and that you will always believe that Jesus believes in you and that He feels safe being part of your life."

"Never let a day pass without talking to Jesus in prayer, so you will know that there is somebody there who will save us, who trusts us and believes in us. It is extremely important that you remember that Jesus is asleep in your boat and will awake to help you in whatever difficulty you may face."

End of school Masses were also celebrated in various parishes, some watched only online before restrictions were eased, with special efforts made by staff to mark the occasion for their pupils who were leaving.



Diocesan End Year School Mass



Fr Paul Farren, Anne-Marie Hickey, soloist, and Michael Mullan, who took part in the Liturgy for the Diocesan End of Year Mass in St Eugene's

## St Finlough's Sistrakeel pupils celebrate First Communion and Confirmation



Mgr Bryan McCanny, PP Limavady, and Fr Paddy Baker with the St Finlough's PS children who received the Sacrament of Confirmation in Christ The King Church.

THE re-opening of churches for public celebration of the sacraments was marked by the school community of St Finlough's, Sistrakeel, in the Limavady Parish, with the celebration of First Holy Communion and Confirmation, on Friday, July 3.

While Fr Paddy Baker, CC, ministered to the children receiving their First Holy Communion, the parish priest, Mgr Bryan McCanny celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Both ceremonies were held

in Christ the King Church, Limavady, and principal, Mrs Suzann McCafferty found that the smaller congregation "allowed the focus to be on the sacraments and the children".

"It was an intimate and personal celebration," she remarked, adding: "I was so proud of each and every child today. The children were a credit to the school, their families and themselves. Their behaviour was exemplary, with all displaying great reverence and respect".

Mrs McCafferty also paid tribute to Mgr McCanny and Fr Baker, who celebrated both Masses, "for all their help, support, guidance and prayer to make the day so special for the children and their parents".

Thanking Mrs Morrison, Miss Herron and Mr Duffy for preparing their classes, the musically-talented principal said that it had been a pleasure providing the music for the celebrations.



The children of St Finlough's PS, Sistrakeel, who celebrated their First Holy Communion in Christ The King Church, Limavady, with Fr Paddy Baker.

## Bellaghy Confirmation a beautiful sacramental and child-centred occasion



26 pupils of St Mary's Primary School, Bellaghy, 16 pupils of New Row PS, Castledawson, and 15 pupils of St John Bosco PS, Ballynease, over two ceremonies in St Mary's Church.

Commenting on this year's Confirmation ceremonies, Mgr

Andy said: "The children seemed less distracted by having less people around them, and I think parents felt the children were more at ease too. It became both a sacramental and child-centred occasion".

THE re-opening of churches for public ceremonies, as the Covid-19 restrictions were further eased, has ended the long wait for children who were preparing for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

Within the first week, Bellaghy parish priest, Mgr Andy Dolan VG was delighted to confirm





# God is alive and active even when our plans don't work out – Bishop Donal

"IN your lives, you are writing a story that will be told and talked about for decades to come. Be proud of the story you are living, not angry at it," Bishop Donal told the Year 7/Sixth Class pupils from primary schools around the Diocese, who were watching him celebrate the 2020 'Fan the Flame' Mass via the St Eugene's Cathedral webcam.

Recalling the very different 'Fan the Flame' scene at Celtic Park each year, with banners, t-shirts, caps and lots of music, to celebrate the young people having received the Sacrament of Confirmation, the bishop remarked: "Today, you are at home, many of you have not been confirmed, all of you cannot have your various end of year/school celebrations, and you are not quite sure how next year will start".

"But", he added, commending the youngsters for their positivity: "lots of you have done your decoration

at home on the theme of the Beatitudes and your names are all here in a book at the foot of the altar".

Saying that they could "look back on today and lament what you didn't have", Bishop Donal told them, encouragingly: "People of faith look for what gifts you do have. You will be the only generation to look back and be able to say you knew what it was like to be leaving school in the pandemic.

"There will be books written, songs sung and films made about this generation. In your lives you are writing a story that will be told and talked about for decades to come. Be proud of the story that you are living, not angry at it. God is alive and active, even when our plans don't work out."

He went on to talk to them about how young people grow up believing that there are celebrities they should follow and imitate, saying: "Most of them have done

and said little or nothing. All they have to offer is entertainment so as they can get your money!

"Real heroes have shone out during this pandemic: Health Service workers; post office workers; shop assistants; and delivery drivers. Real stars are people of courage, generosity, and self-sacrifice.

"Entertainment is pleasant, but is of little value when you are faced with illness or loss or people letting you down."

Bishop Donal noted that the Gospel message for the Mass, in the story of The Beatitudes, said the same thing: "Blessed are the gentle, peacemakers, the poor in spirit, the merciful. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice, and those who mourn."

Pointing out that Confirmation was not just something to mark the end of primary/national school, he said: "It is a gift from God for those who say, 'I want to make the choice

to be a hero with my life', 'I believe that happiness comes for me - and for others - by having the values of the Beatitudes, not from greed and grabbing all I can', and 'I want to stick by those values even when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you.'"

"Confirmation," he added, "is the day when you are asked to choose - What do I want to live for? What am I prepared to die for?"

"Wisdom, understanding, knowledge, courage, wonder and awe in God's presence, etc, are the gifts you are offered this year. You have to choose whether you want them and whether you want to fan them into a flame."

Bishop Donal went on to promise those children who have not yet been confirmed that everything will be done to make it possible for them to receive the powerful gifts of the Holy Spirit as soon as that is possible.



Bishop Donal at the 2018 Fan the Flame ceremony.



## A very different but no less special Fan the Flame 2020 by Thérèse Ferry



Therese at a previous Fan the Flame ceremony in Celtic Park.

PREPARATIONS for the annual Diocesan 'Fan the Flame' Mass start for the Catechetical Centre each year in August. As we prepare to send out our September information leaflet to schools and parishes, a date is confirmed with both Celtic Park and Bishop McKeown! This year, June 4 had been booked, schools informed, and Year 7 and 6th Class pupils were already looking forward to the occasion. However, Covid-19 and lockdown arrived, and it soon became very clear that the 14th annual Mass for those

leaving primary school would not be in Celtic Park this year and so many of the children, due to attend, would not have received the sacrament of Confirmation.

At a Catechetical Centre team meeting, we discussed how we could still have a 'Fan the Flame' Mass via the webcam and Facebook Live page at St Eugene's Cathedral, and engage the schools, young people, their families and the wider diocesan community.

Resources were developed based on the Gospel of the day

- The Beatitudes - and shared with schools. The children were encouraged to design T-shirts, complete Reflection Journals and Memory Bottles and, in the week leading up to the Mass, memories of previous 'Fan the Flame' Masses were shared on social media and websites.

Faughanvale Primary School, under the direction of Naoimh Moore, prepared an amazing virtual video of 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hands'. The youth of the diocese always play a vital role in the 'Fan the Flame Mass', so our Youth Department worked with four young people, one from each of the diocesan deaneries, and they created a special video message for all the Year 7s and 6th Class pupils. Music for the video was provided by primary school pupils, Grace, Isabella and Aoife. They sang the Psalm, 'Set your Heart on the Higher Gifts', which is the Psalm used at the Mass each year.

On the day of the Mass, the Diocesan Schools' quilt was

placed on the steps of the altar of St Eugene's Cathedral, and Reflection Journals from Katie in Strabane, Eoghan in Carndonagh, Sarah in Desertmartin, Grace in Faughanvale, and Shara in Derry (completed in Irish) as well as a Memory Bottle completed by Brooke in Castlederg, were placed on a table at the foot of the altar.

The music warm-up has always been an important part of the Mass in Celtic Park and Anne Marie Hickey, accompanied by Aidan Watkins, carried on that tradition, by encouraging the young people to sing along to the hymns from home.

As Anne Marie sang the 'Fan the Flame Anthem', Bishop McKeown carried forward a book containing the names of all the diocesan primary schools, their parishes and, very importantly, the names of all the Year 7/6th Class pupils. He also read a beautiful Holy Spirit prayer, written by Aileen, a Y7 pupil at St Mary's PS, Ballinascreen, and I led a reflection, after the Spiritual

Communion, thanking God for the gift of the young people and all who had helped them during their time at primary school.

Willie, one of our seminarians and myself, were left to accompany Anne Marie's singing of a 'Fan the Flame' favourite, 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hands'. We did the actions - the less said the better!

A very different Fan the Flame Mass this year, but one that

marked a very special time in the lives of young people throughout the Diocese. The response to the Mass was wonderful, with so many families joining online and praying together for these wonderful young people, so many of whom wore their T-shirts as they watched from their homes.

(The resources and videos mentioned can be viewed at [www.catecheticalcentre.org](http://www.catecheticalcentre.org))



Fr Paul Farren, director of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre, and Mary O'Boyle at Fan the Flame 2018.



*One family who joined in the 'Fan the Flame' celebration were the McGranaghans from Strabane. Here Yvonne, a teacher at St Catherine's Primary School and mammy to Kate in Year 7, shares their experience...*

## Feeling hopeful after 'Fan the Flame' ceremony by Yvonne McGranaghan

AS a Religious Coordinator at St Catherine's Primary School, in Strabane, I have always been involved in the preparation for the 'Fan the Flame' Mass. I have worked alongside the Year Seven Team, disseminating information about resources, dates, times and arrangements for the big day in the Celtic Park GAA Stadium.

It has always been a day that our Year Sevens have anticipated with joy and excitement. Every member of staff who has attended the 'Fan the Flame' Mass over the years has loved being part of the experience, and recognised how special a day it is for everyone involved. The joy and happiness on our pupils' faces in past photographs says it all.

I am also the mum of two children; Kate, who is 11 and Aodhan who is 9. When I thought of 'Fan the Flame' this year, as a parent, it was with a huge smile on my face as I knew how much Kate would love the whole experience of this wonderful, spiritual open-air occasion. So, when Covid-19 closed our schools, I could not help but feel disappointed that this truly uplifting experience was one Kate would miss out on.

Throughout this pandemic we, as a family, have talked about the changes that have occurred and tried to find the silver lining in our everyday lives to overcome those disappointments, especially for Kate, who would miss many

memorable events in the final term of her much loved Primary School.

For us, it was also important that we supported our children's faith at home, that our faith continued to be an important part of our lives and that our family kept close to God. Luckily, webcam is out there. We have enjoyed the many webcam Masses around our diocese and other dioceses in the country. We also come together at the end of each day as a family to say a prayer and encourage our children to think about something they want to thank God for.

The Catechetical Centre, in Derry, has been inspirational in supporting the faith of our family and many families in our school

during this time. The resources that they have shared enabled us, and the parents of children in our school, to continue to support their child's faith formation. We have been painting, meditating, praying, making May altars and even baking cakes for the month of May.

The staff at the Centre also ensured that our Year 7 children did not miss out on the preparation for the 'Fan the Flame' Mass this year. As a parent, I was delighted to find out that the Mass, albeit in a different way, would be celebrated by Bishop McKeown on Thursday, June 4 in St Eugene's Cathedral via webcam.

As part of the preparation for the Mass, we sat at our kitchen

table as Kate designed her 'Fan the Flame' t-shirt; a very different experience for her, I imagine, than sitting with her friends in her classroom sharing ideas and compliments. However, it gave us an opportunity to remember her Confirmation Day; how we celebrated as a family and to talk about what it means to fan the flame of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Kate also filled in a reflective journal in which she thought about her memories of school, her hopes for the future and her relationship with Jesus. I loved listening to her talk her way through what she was thinking about writing and reflecting on her school life and what the future

might bring. It was an experience that left us feeling hopeful, and allowed her daddy and I to reflect on how far she has come and that the girl we have in our lives is someone who is resilient, hopeful and who knows that Jesus is always by her side.

On the morning of the 'Fan the Flame Mass' there was no bus trip, no huge, excited crowds of children waving banners. Instead, I had a daughter who proudly wore her t-shirt down the stairs that morning with a smile on her face and hope in her heart. We lit a candle and as a family came together in God's gentle presence to listen to the words of Bishop Keown, as he related the Beatitudes to life today.

When Kate reflected on his words after the Mass, she wrote: "You can be God's love by being kind, helpful, generous and courageous...choose the right hero, someone who is helping us through this difficult time. I can be a hero in my life by doing what is right and helping others".

On the back of her t-shirt when she was designing it, she wrote the words... "Be the Change".

These words continue to resonate with me, as I watch her grow. I hope, as we continue to guide her and encourage her faith, that Kate will Fan the Flame of the Holy Spirit and be the change in small ways that bring kindness and God's love into the world.

### Prayer by Aileen for Fan the Flame Mass

*Bless me with knowledge to know what is right and what is wrong,  
Strength to stand up and be strong,  
Courage to follow God's ways,  
Reverence to worship and pray,  
Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide me,  
Guidance to feel God's presence beside me,  
And wonder and peacefulness  
When I am in the presence of God.  
Amen*



Kate enjoying watching Fan the Flame Mass and wearing her home-designed Fan the Flame t-shirt.

## Celebrating 35 years as a youth faith group in Derry during lockdown...

## Search brings 'Light of Christ' into many homes in Diocese and beyond by Martin McLaughlin

ST Patrick's Day was announced 'Cancelled'; the virus had taken its toll. Little did we realise that our way of life all over the world was about to experience an unprecedented change. Cities and countries were closing down, all the things that we thought we couldn't do without, were no longer available to us.

A new dawn on March 18 brought a deeper realisation that this was a serious issue. Businesses, shops and schools were closing, sporting fixtures were cancelled and, the unthinkable, chapels and churches were closing. Lockdown had arrived and people were forced to isolate in their own homes for unknown timescales.

In every other situation of turmoil, the solution was always to turn to God; rush to the Church, light a candle, say a Rosary, attend Mass, and pray to God to intervene. Not in this case, for the virus had succeeded in closing down the houses of God.

But God was not to be defeated so easily.

Prior to this, social media was deemed to be highly risky to the moral welfare of our children and even our adults. Nothing is impossible to God, however, and suddenly social media became a positive channel in feeding the hunger of our Catholic people.

Masses were being screened live on Webcams, Rosaries were being broadcast nearly every hour in different church locations, the Blessed Sacrament was being exposed endlessly on many iPhone, Laptop, iPad and Tablet screens, and multitudes of people were tuning in to the various opportunities to demonstrate their need to pray in order to squash this deadly coronavirus.

Derry Search Youth Group has been on the go for 35 years this year, facilitating various needs among our young people. Operating from our own rented accommodation, we have been

offering programmes weekly to children and young people, aged 6-18 years, throughout the year.

We make no apology for our identity as a Catholic Christian youth group, where we endeavour throughout all our programs to proclaim the message of the Gospels. We provide free tutoring to both secondary and primary children, and our Friday Night Club attracts a regular weekly attendance of over 65 teenagers. All of these activities are geared towards raising self esteem amongst our young people, with a very specific emphasis on promoting our faith in Christ.

At this time of year, for the past 20 years, we would normally be preparing to facilitate a faith-based summer scheme for primary school children. We are also due to have one of our biannual residential retreats in July, accommodating up to 70 adolescent young people, which is geared towards greater awareness

of good values and morals.

However, the virus sadly put most of these activities on hold and, like others, we had to close our premises. But, we did not surrender to it. Right from day one of the lockdown, we have also been hijacking the social media; using Facebook to pray a decade of the Rosary live, a scripture reading and a short reflection, ending with a relevant uplifting song or hymn. This has allowed us to keep in contact with our young people. What started off as a group exercise in promoting our Mother Mary, has now expanded to different families throughout the country looking to participate in this beautiful reflective 15-20 minutes each night.

To date, we have managed over 90 consecutive nights of this prayer led from homes in Derry, Omagh, Strabane, Coleraine, Claudy, Gortin and Belfast, and the good news is that we are getting 600-2,000 views per night.

We have been well supported by quite a few of our clergy in spreading the beauty of the Holy Rosary.

Thanks to the electronic experts in our group, we have put together a beautiful handing-on of 'The Light of Christ' in a small symbolic candle gesture to many of our homes throughout the above mentioned areas; all of this through social media. In 'The Light of Christ' exercise, over 8,000 viewers enjoyed the privilege of praying with us on Facebook. It is our hope that,



with or without the virus, this will continue.

We have made the best of Zoom to connect with a big percentage of our Friday Night Club members each week, and use this tool as a way of keeping their focus on staying upbeat. With God on our side, who can be against us? This, too, will pass and, hopefully, very soon we will be up and running to full capacity again. But in the meantime, thank God for social media. He did promise us that He can turn everything bad into good.





In a move to develop youth content, 'The Net' welcomes three young people from different parts of the Diocese as regular contributors to the youth section. Hollie Frystal is from Melmount, in the Co Tyrone Deanery, while Peter Grant lives in Muff, in the Inishowen Deanery, and Oisín Mulhern, is a Dungiven parishioner, in the Co Derry Deanery. It is hoped to include a contributor from the Derry City Deanery in this team of young reporters too, and that, together, they can add to all the positive youth news contributed by the energetic Diocesan Youth Team.



Hollie Frystal, Co Tyrone Deanery



Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery.



Oisín Mulhern, Co Derry Deanery.j

## The return to public Mass... Go forth and spread the Good News *by Hollie Frystal*

I am 17 and a parishioner of St Mary's, Melmount Parish, Strabane. Following the news on Thursday, June 25, we were delighted that our churches can reopen for Mass and religious services. Like so many people, I never thought three months ago that we would be now saying that we are preparing for the slow return to church gatherings.

I remember on March 16, 2020, it was my last Mass before lockdown. I had caught onto the forthcoming lockdown gradually, due to empty Holy Water fonts and only being allowed to receive Holy Communion in your hands not the tongue. It was the St

Patrick's Day vigil and my granny's 'Month's Mind'. There was a wave of sadness in so many ways. It was my granny's Month's Mind but also it was the stripping away of the traditional right and obligation to go to Sunday Mass, and other sacramental ceremonies, from March 17 onwards. That is how I knew things, obviously in relation to Covid-19, was serious.

Phase One was the complete lockdown of Church buildings and Mass/funeral services were broadcasted live from parish webcams. It was so strange. I believe that I speak for everyone when I say that I missed receiving the Blessed Sacrament and being

present at Holy Mass.

Phase Two was at the beginning of May, when places of worship could reopen for individual prayer. I know that this had a huge impact on parishioners, and not long before that the cemeteries were reopened after a short period of closure, which also brought some peace and consolation. Parishes around the Diocese had installed Covid-19 safety restrictions, where every other seat was closed off and hand sanitizers and wipes were at the front doors and exits. It was such an unusual setting, but it has gradually become the norm.

During these devastating times,

we had missed a lot in relation to the rest of Lent and the Easter feasts and celebrations. However, thank God we have technology! For, at least, we were able to witness the Paschal Mystery within the stories of Holy Week. As Jesus taught us, 'When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there.' (Matthew 18:20). Through His teaching, I felt like no matter where we were, we were together through prayer.

Phase Three is now. The call for volunteers! On Monday, June 29, the first public gatherings for Mass since March took place. The youth, including participants of the Pope John Paul II Award, are being called to serve their parishes in these very important times, by cleaning, stewarding, setting up a welcome team, helping with Church decor, offering to read at Mass, be a Eucharistic Minister or help their parish with their online webcams and websites, etc. Jesus is calling us to serve Him and His Church every day, but now more than ever our help is needed on the return to parish life.

I was delighted to talk to some people who have been involved in the process of getting the Chapels prepared for public worship. They told me that they had a great

response on the call for volunteers and that it is a busy operation to ensure the highest level of safety is put into action.

Volunteers are on the go regularly; deep cleaning the churches throughout the day between Mass times, services, and private prayer. So far in most parishes, safety restrictions have been installed and the doors have been opened for public Mass. So many were waiting for that day since lockdown in March, and everyone I have talked to have said that they were delighted to hear such great news!

As a result of the lockdown and transition back into parish life, I, and so many, believe that we have achieved so much online as well. It is said that many people have engaged with the online programs, especially the youth. We cannot let this new ministry go! It is new, rich, and fitting in today's world. It is appealing and relatable to young people. It may also reach out to youth who might not be in the best environment in terms of faith, and they need courage and support to motivate them on.

I believe that our 'traditional' ministry and our 'new' ministry must go together, because I feel

like I speak for many when I say that it is a gift from God that will ensure and support a brighter future for our Church.

I want to thank all the volunteers for offering their help on the return to public Masses and services. Also, to all the people and teams that have worked hard with their online programs to ensure everyone still had access to watching Masses and services, as well as faith-based programs that have made young people's spare time valuable. As well, I would like to express appreciation for the daily parish online prayer programs that gave people hope and a sense of comfort, in such fearful and possibly lonely times.



## Diocesan youth programme kept me busy and hopeful during lockdown *by Hollie Frystal*



DURING lockdown, I have been engaging with the Derry Diocesan Youth online Instagram channel through various tasks and events. In the first week, we had the theme - 'Be the light', were I led 'Takeover Thursday'

as the mystery guest. 'Takeover Thursday' involved finding ways to 'Be the light' in our society and how to discover the 'lumen Christi' in today's world.

One out of three tasks which I prepared involved drawing/painting or taking a photo of something that signifies 'new life' and hope. This practice of faith was aimed at finding the positive amongst the pandemic; that we are all precious in God's eyes and that we must acknowledge Jesus' work at hand.

This helped me realize that, in comparison to the present global devastation, my family and I are doing okay, and therefore, I have discovered the 'light' amongst the 'dark'. I also have been able to identify the 'light of Christ' in today's world on so many

occasions and I have learnt that 'light' is also found in service.

Additionally, I have also participated in LIVE Facebook dramas, such as 'Prayers around the Cross' on Good Friday and 'The Story of Lourdes' for the month of Mary. My involvement in the Good Friday drama struck me through the role which I was given to perform. I was performing the role of the soldier who had nailed the sign (INRI) of mockery onto the cross above Jesus for all to see.

In the Passion drama, there was a wave of sadness and guilt which I felt helped me to grow in my understanding of Jesus' walk to Calvary. It has also encouraged me to be a better witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

My participation in 'The Story of Our Lady of Lourdes' drama was also a great chance to put myself in St Bernadette's shoes. For instance, trying to understand how she felt in contrast with the confused crowd. In relation to today, we are also experiencing pain and fear, as well as confusion; the fear of getting ill and the confusion of not knowing much about the virus. However, what I have learnt from St Bernadette is her persistent prayer and trust in Our Lady, which has further encouraged me to pray and trust God that everything will turn out to be okay.

Overall, the LIVE dramas have continued to keep me busy and committed to the faith since lockdown began, and I have had more time to reflect on my

faith with the support of these activities.

The Derry youth programme included so much other activities too. The Alpha course program was launched and I am currently taking part in this every Sunday evening. This is a course for Christians which aims to help us explore the big questions of life. I am really enjoying my participation so far in the program. It is very interesting, especially hearing other people's opinions and answers to tricky questions. Alpha has kept me occupied during lockdown by raising my curiosity, watching Alpha videos, hearing other people's experiences, having fun in the debates, and meeting new people.

I would recommend the Alpha

program to anyone because it gives people a platform to ask questions and to try and understand things that they had trouble with before.

I want to thank the Derry Youth Team for these fantastic online programmes because they have not only helped me grow in my faith, but they have also kept me busy and hopeful since lockdown began. My engagement with the activities and events supported my commitment to my faith when, for a time, I could not physically attend Mass and go on pilgrimages, etc. I highly encourage anyone who has not yet participated to give the online programmes a go. I can promise you that you will enjoy engaging with the various activities and the online Alpha course.



# A perfect role model for the young - Carlo Acutis soon to be beatified

by Peter, Hollie and Oisin

CARLO Acutis was an Italian Catholic teenager who was born on May 3, 1991 in London. His family were Italian and after his birth they returned to Milan, where Carlo would spend his childhood and teenage years. He and his family were very religious people, who attended Mass frequently and Rosary services too; devoting their lives to God.

Throughout his life, Carlo showed a great devotion to both God and the Eucharist. He often prayed Rosaries to Mary and, after his First Communion, became a frequent visitor to the church, always attempting to go to confession and praying in front of the tabernacle.

At school, some of his friends and classmates would often be bullied for being disabled and Carlo defended their rights and stood up to the bullies. He became popular in his school for showing his kindness and understanding to others. He played sports but had a passion and talent for computers.

Unfortunately, Carlo was diagnosed with leukaemia at a young age. But that didn't stop him from following up his love of travelling, and his favourite place to visit was Assisi. However, when his leukaemia got worse, it did prevent him from travelling.

When he was 11, he wanted to spread his faith to others like the apostles did, whenever they witnessed Jesus perform miracles to show that the Kingdom of God was real. So, Carlo wondered how he could do such a thing in the modern world of today and then he thought of a mind-blowing idea that would attract people, especially teenagers, to the Catholic Church and give them a better understanding of it. He created a website of 'Eucharistic Miracles' that showed the miracles Jesus had performed, and the stories of Saints and how they

began their missions of spreading the Word of God to people across the world, in different countries. His website grew very popular among young teens like him across the globe, as he managed to make it a multi-language site, where everyone could access his website and understand the teachings of Jesus and God.

In his own words, Carlo said: "The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on this earth we will have a foretaste of Heaven."

He was greatly recognised by ministry across the globe and the Vatican City, with Pope Benedict XVI offering him support during his diagnosis of leukaemia. On October 12, 2006, Carlo died shortly after being diagnosed with promyelocytic leukaemia. It was said that the 15-year-old boy died with a content face and a peaceful smile, indicating the sensation of a fulfilled life dedicated to Christ.

Carlo told his parents: "I offer what I have to suffer to the Lord, for the Pope and for the Church, to skip purgatory and go straight to Heaven."

These are striking words from such a young boy. Carlo acknowledged Christ's promise for salvation through service, devotion, and suffering.

The calls for Carlo Acutis to become a saint resulted in him being named a 'Servant of God' in 2013, which is the first stage on the road to sainthood. Additionally, with further investigation from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, he was declared 'Venerable' by Pope Francis on the July 5, 2018.

Medical experts confirmed a miracle attributed to Carlo on November 14, 2019. The miracle involved a very ill, 11-year-old Brazilian boy, who had gravely suffered a rare congenital disease of the pancreas which prevented him from eating solid foods. The

Brazilian boy, with his family and the local parish priest, prayed a novena for the intercession of Carlo Acutis. Within three days, the boy claimed - for the first time in a long time - that he was "hungry". He ate solid foods and proved to be completely healed. This miracle attributed to Carlo has encouraged his road to sainthood because of the divine intervention performed in his name. Furthermore, Carlo's body was found incorrupt on January 23, 2019; a common sign of an extraordinary person who lived a dedicated life to Christ, like St Bernadette Soubirous whom he had great devotion to.

On October 10 this year, Carlo will be beatified by Pope Francis, receiving the title, 'Blessed', which is the last stage before canonisation.

## Relatable

For young people today, Carlo is most definitely relatable and interesting. He is modern and very normal as a teenager. He played video games, the saxophone, and sports. However, his use of technology was most unique and clever because he used the internet as a way of spreading the Gospel.

Through his website 'The Eucharistic Miracles', he has archived all the recognised miracles that have ever occurred in relation to the Eucharist. As young people, we can learn from Carlo by having the Blessed Sacrament in the centre of our lives.

Rebekah from Strabane, who is 16, said: "It is clear to see that, from a young age, Carlo knew what he wanted to do and that was to have a relationship with Jesus. He was born to stand out."

Erin, who is 12 and also from Strabane, said of Carlo: "He wasn't afraid to die because he knew he was going to meet all the people he loved in Heaven."



Carlo Acutis

Carlo is simply a perfect role model for young people today. He demonstrates the fact that young people can do great things. He shows us that it is possible to have a relationship with Christ and that we can spread the word of God in today's world by using our God-given gifts and talents. He teaches us to be 'original' not a 'photocopy'.

He lived his life according to God's Word, however, he also faced struggles like any 15-year-old. He struggled with over indulging in food, talking in class, being the classroom joker and, like many, he also had a temper. Nonetheless, Carlos was aware of these flaws and focused hard to improve, sometimes failing but always trying again. This, in itself, is inspirational; the fact that he was just like the rest of us but was extremely motivated to continue improving. It shows us that making mistakes is part of who we are, the challenge is working to improve and better ourselves like Carlos did. If he could do it,

we can too.

Like most of us these days, Carlos was also into technology, he created; short animations on computer, a database to document miracles of the Eucharist and he loved playing the Play Station. The difference is, he limited video games to one hour per week as he realised this can become all-consuming, impacting us in negative ways. He, instead, preferred to use his expertise in this field to spread the Gospel. Many of us can identify with the overuse of technology nowadays and could aspire to be more like Carlos; limit our time online and use it wisely to help others.

As a young teenager, he helped the homeless, defended those who were bullied and had a special place in his heart for those of different ethnicities within his home country. His faith in God helped him to realise that as young people we are not here to follow the crowd, we are here to use our gifts, to stand up and be counted, and help those who are

less fortunate than ourselves.

Carlos had an unwavering devotion to God. He faced his illness with great strength and all this at only 15 years of age. He has shown that having faith enables us to face difficulties head on. He was an average young boy, who liked to have fun, had friends and enjoyed himself, but also kept God close to his heart. We, too, can do this; we can still lead a normal life and enjoy the grace of God within in it. All we need is faith and a relationship with God. We, too, can be great in our own small ways!

*(Hollie Frystal, Peter Grant and Oisin Mulhern are teenagers from the Diocesan Deaneries of Tyrone, Inishowen and Co Derry, respectively, who will be regular contributors to the youth section in 'The Net' each month. It is hoped that a young contributor from the Derry City Deanery will join the team for the next edition).*

## Youth pilgrimage plans cancelled...but hopes held out for 2021

by Lizzie Rea

THE youth department of the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre had lots of great plans at the start of this year that have been totally turned upside down due to Covid-19. Some of the things we had planned were to go on pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Croagh Patrick and Lough Derg.

A group of 25 young people had signed up to go to the youth festival at the beginning of August in Medjugorje. We are extremely disappointed that we will not be able to go. The excitement, community and relationships we can make on pilgrimage is

something that we, in the youth department, are sorry we will not be able to give the young people this year.

But enough on what we can't do, what we have been doing, and continue to do, during lockdown is to try and build connections and engage in conversation with the young people of Derry Diocese.

Throughout lockdown we have had an ongoing online programme, which has included reflections and challenges. We have loved doing the online programme and hope to continue

this form of engagement after lockdown ends.

Part of the online programme now includes a Youth Alpha programme. Alpha is a film series that explores questions of faith and important life questions. We have 50 young people signed up for the programme and will run it weekly until the end of July.

We are delighted that young people from all around the diocese can come together online and talk about difficult questions and how they are feeling during lockdown.

The work that we are doing

would not be possible without our parish volunteers and the young people who continue to engage and amaze us in how they are coping during this pandemic.

We are hopeful that, as the churches reopen, the students doing their Pope John Paul II Award will be able to return to the church and help in any way they can. We are positive that the young people in the diocese will rise to the challenge.

We aim to continue to plan ahead amidst all the uncertainty, and hope to offer a pilgrimage next year, if this is possible.



Lizzie Rea, Diocesan Youth co-ordinator.



## Instead of letting the virus defeat my participation in JPPII Award, I upped my game!



Oisín Mulhern, Dungiven.

HELLO. My name is Oisín Mulhern. I am 17 years old and for the past few months I have been a part of the Pope John Paul Award. The reason I decided to take part in this Award in the first place was that I wanted to improve a range of different skills, such as public speaking and my confidence when interacting with others. However, most important of all, I wanted to become more active

in the life of St Patrick's Church. Thanks to this Award, these skills have seen a considerable improvement overall, especially my public speaking skills. Before beginning the Award, I rarely, if ever, was comfortable talking in front of large crowds but this programme allowed me to tackle this aversion head on, by doing tasks such as reading at Mass, which brought me centre stage to read to everyone. My confidence has been boosted substantially. I have socialised in wider circles by meeting new people and have also been able to rekindle old friendships, by meeting up again with friends I had in primary school.

This Award has benefited me in many ways. I have always been an avid Church goer since I was a toddler; however my participation mainly came from attending

Mass. I have now read at Mass and lifted the collection, and I feel it has been a valuable experience. It also enables people to see that the young can engage actively in the church and are welcomed fully.

We have attended regular meetings with Marion, who leads the award. She has been extremely supportive of everyone participating; encouraging and guiding us all, and she has also helped us develop our confidence.

However, after St Patrick's Day 2020, Ireland went into lockdown and attending Mass in person was ruled out due to the restrictions. Marion could no longer hold her face-to-face meetings. Despite this stumbling block, it was not the end of my journey. I quickly realized that there were still many ways in which I could be a part of the parish and community.

This is when I decided to find

other ways of obtaining my hours for the Award. These included tuning into Mass every Saturday, completing Novenas and even taking part in a virtual Lough Derg pilgrimage, which required me to stay up all night. I also participate in the Divine Mercy and Rosary on a daily basis.

Instead of letting this virus defeat my participation in the Award, I have in fact upped my game. Ever since the lockdown began, I have been taking part in these activities and I am not willing to stop anytime soon. I am aiming for the highest Award possible; namely the Gold Award. I realise that this will take a considerable amount of effort to obtain, due to the restrictions on social movement. Nonetheless, this motivates me further to achieve my goal and I hope, as February 2021 dawns, I will be lifting the Gold Award.

## JPPII experience has helped me see value of parish life and how I can help



Darci O'Neill, Dungiven.

THE Pope John Paul II Award is an amazing opportunity for young adults to get involved with their parish and the local community, writes Darci O'Neill.

From the beginning, I have participated in many activities in my parish, Dungiven, including helping out at a special Mass on November 13 to remember all the parishioners who had died in the past year. During the ceremony, I helped out by lighting each of the candles and giving them to representative families and loved ones, who then took them to the

altar.

For several weeks, I helped to clean the chapel by sweeping floors and taking down the beautiful Christmas decorations. The great part was that I got to do this activity with friends as well, so it didn't even seem like a chore. In February, we had a course on how to make St Brigid's crosses, which was really fun and inspiring. I was able to make two crosses! I had also signed up to do Children's Liturgy but, unfortunately, due to Covid-19, this has been placed on hold.

Since lockdown has occurred, I have done many things despite the limitations. I have been watching Mass through the parish webcam every week, which is cool as we can still be part of Mass from our homes and celebrate our faith. Our Pope John Paul II group also had a special Mass offered by Fr Joseph on April 26 for our exams, and we were very thankful for this.

I participated in the Life in the Spirit seminars as well that Fr

Kelly led, and I really enjoyed this every Tuesday night until it concluded. I'm so grateful that we have opportunities like this in our parish.

In addition to the structured parish hours mentioned above, I have been reading Bible stories from the Children's Bible to my little brother, and researching inspirational quotes which have real resonance with today's issues. For example, this quote from Pope John Paul II: "As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live in." This says to me, in today's context, to really value my family and the spirit of togetherness especially in these Covid-19 times.

I have started the Alpha Youth course on-line, through Zoom. It started on May 31 and will run for eight weeks. It is a big group of young adults and leaders. During the meetings, we watch the Alpha Youth Series and discuss the questions asked in the videos. The themes so far have included forgiveness, happiness and Jesus'

life. This is such a great idea and I really enjoy taking part. I would recommend it to everyone my age. It's not formal or stuffy, but encourages you to think about how your faith can help you navigate the challenges of being a young adult.

The Pope John Paul II Award is not just about parish hours, it is also an opportunity to give a little back to your own community through the allocated social hours. I have helped out by delivering meals to the local Fold and vulnerable people in my community, who have had to self-isolate during these times. Before lockdown, I also raised money for charities and helped out in my school, St Patrick's College, Maghera.

The whole experience has made me see the value of parish life and how I, as a young adult, can help my community. It really has brought a sense of achievement and makes me feel more connected to my parish and the people in it.

## Online youth programme keeping Swatragh JPPII participant connected



Helen Doherty, Swatragh.

MY name is Helen Doherty and I'm from Swatragh, South Derry. During these long months of lockdown I have kept my spirits up and stayed positive.

I have been participating in the 'Walk a Million' Challenge to raise money for ALPS Mental Health Awareness and Talk to Tom Suicide Prevention. To maintain my daily step count I've been running the roads and also

going on 'FaceTime walks' with my friends every day. Walking my Springer Spaniel, Barney has definitely helped my fitness too!

As quite an organised person, I've been keeping up-to-date on online learning. Participating in the weekly Derry Youth tasks has contributed to my parish hours for the John Paul II Award.

Having taken part in the 'Sleep Out' at St Eugene's Cathedral in February 2020, I have kept in touch with new friends and connected through the online programme.

The Scavenger Hunts and Quizzes have been great fun! I particularly appreciated the experience of reading during at the Story of Lourdes online livestream.

The weekly Youth Alpha Programme, via Zoom, has been engaging and allows me to discuss and reflect on key aspects of our faith with my peers.

The organisation and delivery of this programme has been brilliant. I would like to thank the Derry Youth team for all their hard work and dedication to making lockdown entertaining.

## Three Patrons JPPII parishioner embracing online youth programme



Evie Doherty, Three Patrons.

MY name is Evie Doherty and I am a Year 13 student in Thornhill College, as well as a Pope John Paul II student. I am from the Parish of the Three Patrons.

Before lockdown started, I was well underway with my award, having completed most of the

social hours by doing a six-week 'Faith Friends' programme with Primary 4 students from Bunscoil Cholmcille. This programme improved my Irish and allowed me to help younger children in their faith journey. I also did the 'Cued Spelling' programme in school, in which I helped Year 8 students with any difficulties they were facing with spelling or understanding particular words.

When lockdown started, I was informed that the Diocesan Derry Youth Leadership Team planned to do an online programme in which I could complete the rest of my award. Through this programme, the Pope John Paul II students were given a choice of tasks to do on a weekly basis, such as baking a cake for a relative

or getting your neighbour's shopping - which I completed as well as participating in Masses on a regular basis, by reading the Story of Lourdes on a Facebook live. My parish leader did regular Zoom calls with the students, where we would have a Mass and an opportunity to earn an hour by doing a reflection or a Prayer of the Faithful.

When the Online Programme ended, the Diocesan Derry Youth Team provided a 'Youth Alpha Programme', which allowed Pope John Paul II students to earn more hours or, even if you weren't participating in the Award, it was an opportunity to virtually meet people with similar interests and explore what our faith means to us. Every Sunday, we have a Zoom

call where we watch a video on exploring our faith and the group discusses different opinions.

The Alpha Programme is fantastic because it is a non-judgemental environment where everyone's opinions are respected and taken into consideration. It also allows an insight into other people's views. The programme is a fun, friendly place also, where all the students and leaders can talk about how their week has been, as well as discuss anything exciting that has happened to them that week.

I have found lockdown a great opportunity, as there is so much time to be productive and I have been able to focus on things that I would not have necessarily had the time to do pre-lockdown.



Malin JPPIIs in Knock with Fr Peter Devlin, PP.

## Malin JPPIIs gaining greater understanding of parish work

WE are four Carndonagh Community School students, from Malin Parish, who are participating in the Pope John Paul II Award.

Throughout our time completing the Award, we have gained much knowledge, developed many new skills and gained a new understanding of all the activities and work done within our parish, and gained a new level of respect for those within our parish who make everything possible.

Some of the tasks we undertook whilst participating in the Award included helping in the sacristy before Masses, cleaning our

chapel, helping prepare for and supervising at Confirmation gatherings.

We also went on a retreat to Knock along with the Confirmation children. We felt this trip would benefit us especially because Pope John Paul II visited Knock in his duration as Pope.

We found this a great experience and look forward to completing the award.

We would also like to thank Fr Devlin and the Confirmation team for all their great help and encouragement throughout our time participating in the Award.



## Claudy JPPI parishioner hopes Award will help her contribute to parish life



Claudy JPPI participant, Orla McGonigle.

MY name is Orla McGonigle and I am 17 years old and belong to the parish of St Patrick's and St Joseph's Claudy and Craigbane. In the autumn of 2019, I enrolled on the Pope John Paul II Award jointly through my parish coordinator, Laura McKeever and my school, Lumen Christi College.

Along with 10 other young volunteers from my parish, I was commissioned by our parish priest, Fr David O Kane in St Patrick's Church, Claudy in mid-December 2019. Before the world went on lockdown due to Covid-19, I was busy assisting in my local community, helping both young people and the elderly, so I had been gradually building up volunteering hours for the John Paul Award.

The main activity I was involved in was assisting at the GIFT course in our local pastoral centre. GIFT (Growing In Faith Together) was a weekly meeting on a Thursday evening for children in first year at secondary school and aimed

to allow them to continue their faith journey, following on from their confirmation the previous year. The course was run over six weeks and the children discussed various religious stories and how they applied to their everyday life, alongside relevant arts and crafts activities.

As part of a school enrichment programme, I coached netball in a primary school in Derry after school each Wednesday through the autumn term. I gained great satisfaction from this experience as I built up a great camaraderie with the girls from P5, 6, 7 whilst teaching them new sporting skills.

Along with the other 10 local John Paul II volunteers in my parish, I was about to commence training for Eucharistic Minister duties and was looking forward to assisting regularly at weekly Mass. I even had a rota assigned for which months I would serve as Eucharistic Minister in 2020 but, unfortunately, the training scheduled for late March was cancelled due to lockdown restrictions, as was the shopping trip to buy some 'Sunday best' clothes to wear on the altar! We are all hopeful that this training can be completed later in the year and we will be given the opportunity to assist Fr O Kane with Eucharistic Ministry.

Along with my JPPI colleagues, I was planning to take up a role as a volunteer at our parish HOPE camp that was scheduled for late July 2020 but this, unfortunately, had to be cancelled as well due to Covid-19 restrictions on larger gatherings. The HOPE camp is a

fantastic, heavily oversubscribed summer camp that was first established in the Claudy Parish, in Summer 2018, to provide over 100 young people, between the ages of 11-16 years, with a week filled with faith, fun and friendships. I volunteered last year at HOPE 2019 and was excited for the opportunity to do the same again this year, as the camp was a fabulous week of activities for both those enrolled in the camp and the volunteers of all ages, and I built many new friendships in this wonderful week.

Covid-19 also caused the cancellation of the Derry Diocesan Lourdes pilgrimage in early July 2020, which I was planning to attend as a helper along with several of my friends.

As Covid restrictions begin to ease slowly but surely through the coming months, the John Paul II volunteers in our parish look forward to being part of the support team assisting with sanitising and safe social distancing for our weekly Masses, now that our chapels have been re-opened.

So, although our year of the Pope John Paul Award has not quite progressed as we expected over the last few months, we can all look forward to becoming more involved in volunteering in our parish as the world returns to a 'new normal' post Covid. I hope that the completion of the Award later this year will improve my confidence and leadership qualities, and help me contribute meaningfully to parish life in the future.

## Why conversations about 'Black Lives Matter' belong in the classroom

by Deirdre McElholm

NO one could have failed to ignore or remain emotionless regarding the recent worldwide events regarding racism and the Black Lives Matter movement, after the tragic death of George Floyd.

Consequently, there is an onus on educators to discuss these events and issues in the classroom. Our role as educators is to develop pupils as individuals in society. Introducing constructive, open and respectful conversations about racism can seem a daunting and anxious task. We have a natural tendency to want to protect children, to not shatter their innocent and hopeful outlook on the world; additionally, there is the fear of causing offence or upsetting children.

However, from a young age, pupils learn about superheroes - the idea of their heroes defeating evil and making the world right.

Children love to hear stories about how people have changed the world for the better. Who could argue that the impact of Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks or Maya Angelou were not heroic?

In Religious Studies, pupils explore other World Religions and study their history, beliefs, founders and places of worship. Pupils love the experience of exploring a virtual mosque, learning about the different customs of Judaism and imagining a day in the life of others. Linking with this, in Learning for Life and Work, pupils study diversity, prejudice, discrimination and ethnicity. However, perhaps there is now an ever-pressing need to actively teach pupils to become anti-racist. Education is, arguably, the best tool for tackling racism and this does not begin and end in the confines of the classroom or school environment; we are

learning every day.

The recent events have been eye-opening for myself and how much more I need to educate myself. I, too, thought, like many others, "I am not racist, so it's not my issue." I am in a very valuable position where I educate hundreds of pupils every day so there is a massive opportunity for me to ignite the conversation of 'Black Lives Matter'. James Baldwin's famous quote has struck me in that, "not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." It is about empowering teachers and educators to have the confidence to discuss racism.

In October 2019, I recall teaching my GCSE Religion class about human rights. When discussing abuse of human rights, I highlighted the example of racism which had occurred during a football match between

## JPPI Award during lockdown a welcome distraction from the news and school work



Shaciara McCallion.

MY name is Shaciara McCallion. I am part of the Iskaheen and Upper Moville Parish and I am doing the Pope John Paul II Award. During lockdown, doing the Award was quite different but I really enjoyed the experience.

Every Monday night, the Derry Youth Instagram page held a live stream. During this, the bishop came on and talked, the week's theme was discussed and the team for that week came on and chatted. There were Tiktok Tuesdays, which I enjoyed as they were interactive and very

age appropriate. We did Tiktok challenges such as Hit the Beat and We Will Rock You. They were fun as you could get your friends who were and weren't doing the John Paul II to help you with the challenges. On Wellbeing Wednesdays we created posters with inspirational words on them, took walks and did good deeds for the day.

When it got closer to Easter, we were asked to make crosses and palm leaves out of nature. I painted rocks with a cross and palm trees on them. I also watched a Zoom call on the Derry Youth Facebook page where people talked about the story of Easter. This helped it feel more like Easter as we couldn't attend Church.

The 'Mary's Meals' charity took over the Instagram page for a week, which made me more aware of the charity and what they do. During the month of May, those doing the Pope John Paul II Award in my parish decided to say a decade of the Rosary, with a different intention each night. We decided on a time and we all said the decade at that time.

During the Alpha youth

programme, we join other people in the Diocese and discuss the questions in the programme's YouTube videos. You have the choice to join the Zoom call half an hour earlier so that you can participate in a quiz. This is a fun way to get to know everyone better. At 7 pm, everyone joins the Zoom call and we watch a YouTube video. After this, we are broken up into different groups and discuss the questions in the video. The groups are different each week, which also helps with getting to know others doing the Alpha programme. Having discussed the video, we are brought back into one big group and say a prayer. Each week, the video discusses different topics. I think the Alpha programme helps to reflect on the world around us and our own personal lives.

Doing the Pope John Paul II Award during lockdown was nice overall. It was good to be able to continue the Award and to get to know more people doing it. I enjoyed having something religious to do during lockdown and it was a nice distraction from the news and school work.

## Moville JPPI enjoying Alpha Youth on-line



Hanna Fiorentini, Moville.

MY name is Hanna Fiorentini. I live in the parish of Moville and I'm a Transition Year Student in Carndonagh Community

School. While participating in the John Paul II Award, I was invited to take part in the Alpha on-line course. Alpha is a series of interactive sessions that freely explore the basics of the Christian faith.

Each Sunday evening, we have a Zoom meeting with the Alpha leaders and the other participants. We begin our session by watching a video. We view the video separately and once the video is finished we are then split up into 'breakout room' groups. This allows the leaders and participants to reflect and discuss the video content in depth.

Each week, we have explored different topics, which makes each session different and interesting.

So far, I'm really enjoying the course as it is nice to see and make friends with other young people from different parishes in the Diocese of Derry. Alpha helps us learn and think about our faith together in a fun, safe environment.

Thankfully, I have been kept busy during lockdown. I go on many walks along the shore front with my dog, Layla, help with household chores and practice my musical instruments throughout the day.

It has been lovely to still be able to practice my faith by watching Masses online, partaking in the Alpha course and finishing my Pope John Paul II Award.

Bulgaria and England. Indeed, the pupils were shocked and appalled that racism does still occur. Perhaps it is not something pupils experience or witness daily, but it is important to acknowledge it is not a far-off reality for many or something that was defeated in 1960s.

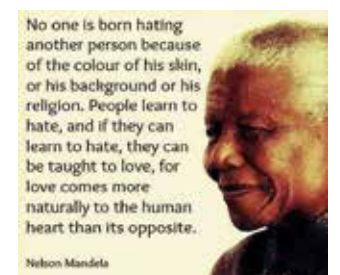
My intention is to bring to life teaching and to empower pupils with values of respect, tolerance, empathy and celebration of others. Within St Mary's, our daily school prayer states, "May respect for each other be the light that guides us." Thus, I feel it is important to teach pupils explicitly what is respect and how to respect others and embody the Golden Rule taught by Jesus, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Matthew 7:12)

One profound experience that stands out for me when I was in school was reading the book 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. A novel by Harper Lee published in 1960, depicting racism in America surrounding a story of a falsely accused black man, Tom Robinson and the most enduring fictional image of racial heroism, Atticus Finch. This struck me in many ways and as I read through the novel, I kept waiting for the happy ending; only to be sadly found wanting...Consequently, I have now taken the opportunity to order educational books to educate myself and the pupils in my classroom. I have become Amazon's most loved customer... to the misfortune of my postman! Books such as 'Becoming' by Michelle Obama, 'Hidden

Figures: the story of Four Black Women and the Space Race', by Margot Shetterly, and 'I am Malala' by Malala Yousafzai will now punctuate my classroom.

This is a significant, invaluable time to educate ourselves in the hope of eradicating racism and making the dreams of Martin Luther King Jr a reality!

*(Deirdre is the Acting Head of Religious Education at St Mary's College, Derry)*





## Parish youth leader opportunities *by yvonne.rooney@derrydiocese.org*

### On-line Alpha film

THE on-line Youth Alpha film series is now running every Thursday night for parish leaders and volunteers 8-9 pm.

To date, there are 13 parishes involved. The format weekly is - meet for chat and catch up, watch the Alpha film which has a different theme each week, and then break into smaller groups to reflect on the film and particular questions.



### GIFT – Growing in Faith Together

THE GIFT programme introduced for Year 9s or 1st Years last autumn may be needed this year more than ever!

GIFT is a post Confirmation programme that helps bring the P7s/6th Class back together in the first term of them leaving Primary/National School. The idea is the young people have a chance to come back together at parish level and they reflect on the Sacrament of Confirmation, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and how they can help them navigate the

challenges and excitement of starting a new school.

As we are all too aware, the P7s/6th Class have unavoidably been robbed of their final term, a uniquely special time as they prepare to leave primary/school, when they would have normally been reflecting on all they have achieved and preparing and planning to look to the future and new beginnings.

Many of them have also not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Schools have been

so creative online as they celebrate their leavers' classes, with many inviting them online to special liturgies, events and making videos, etc.

The GIFT Programme may be a good opportunity, if government guidelines permit it, for these young people to come together again at parish level. The programme runs for 6-8 weeks, focusing on different gifts and fruits of the Spirit each week.

The motto of the programme is Fun, Faith and Friendship,

and each session involves games, prayer, Scripture, saint of the week, arts and crafts, baking or another creative task, and it ends with a quiet time for reflection. Some weeks have invited guests to speak or a demonstration such as First Aid.

Whilst it is too early to tell if we can run GIFT this autumn in our parish settings, the Diocesan youth department is confident that, if needed, an on-line version of this programme could be made available also.

### Extending our Youth Ministry

SEVERAL diocesan representatives have embarked on the training course, 'Extending our Youth Ministry', facilitated by the charity 'Million Minutes'.

'Million Minutes' enables youth action and advocacy activities that give voice and support to young people (aged up to 25) to transform their lives and their world. The core of their work focuses on Catholic Social Teaching.

The training course evolved from an online community of conversations around how we

support young people at this time, and how do we prepare to walk with them following Covid-19.

The training sessions will run for six weeks and at the core will be unpacking 'Christus Vivit', and incorporating it into our planning for Youth Ministry going forward.

This training will explore ways to approach and engage young people, accompanying them and inviting them into effective youth ministry.

To find out more about 'Million Minutes' check out [www.millionminutes.org](http://www.millionminutes.org)



## As DYC member, Elaine Patton waves goodbye... new recruits welcome



Elaine Patton, Stranorlar, who enjoyed a year with the Derry Youth Community.



IT is with great gratitude the Derry Youth Community say goodbye to Elaine Patton, from Stranorlar in Donegal, who has served the community this year with great dedication and

commitment.

Having joined us after two years in another youth community, we were blessed with her maturity of faith and willingness to serve in so many aspects of ministry in our diocese.

Elaine's witness has been an inspiration to so many and I know her testimony has had a powerful impact on the young people she shared with on school retreats. We will miss her and wish her every blessing and success in the next stage of her faith journey.

The Derry Youth Community invites young people to give 10

months (September to June) of their life in the form of a gap year, and to live in community in Derry and serve in the schools and parishes of our diocese.

The vision for the community seeks to help the members firstly grow in their relationship with God and will provide opportunity for formation and nourishment at a personal level.

Training will also be provided to equip young people to plan and deliver school and parish retreats, and this forms a central part of the community outreach.

Although the scene for autumn is still very uncertain, we are inviting young people aged 18-25 to consider joining this community. For further information and contact details please check out [www.derryyouthcommunity.com](http://www.derryyouthcommunity.com).



## Happy end to challenging school year in Newtownstewart *by Parish Pastoral Forum*

THE end of school term was certainly different this year in Newtownstewart. The restrictions due to the Covid virus made sure that the closing Mass had very few in attendance. It was streamed on Facebook Live from St Eugene's Church, Glenock, on Friday, June 26, and there was not a child in sight.

However, to make it special for the children, the Parish Pastoral Forum had invited every pupil and staff member to prepare an A4 page on a saint of their choice. The posters were then displayed around the gallery front. As Fr Roland Colhoun prayed the Rosary before Mass, Martin Kerrigan, the cameraman, screened every poster. He gave emphasis to the Primary Seven posters, since it was those pupils' last Primary School Mass.

With immense patience on the evening before, Ashlene Canning and Shauneen Kilpatrick had taken still photographs of every poster. They transposed these photos into a slideshow with music for the parish Facebook page.

At Mass, the school was represented by the principal, Peter Torney, who read the scripture, and by teaching assistant, Patricia Maguire, who led the music, with Michael McGurk on guitar.

The following Tuesday saw an organised drive-by at the school itself. The staff stood at the gate to greet every family and to present each P7 child with a football in memory of the school.

To put the finishing touches to the day and the year, the Pastoral Forum and the School Parents' Group invited all the children and their families to the GAA car park for a socially-distanced party.

Ashlene Canning had baked over a 100 cup-cakes; one for every child. Their little eyes were growing larger by the second at the sight of the long table of delights. After three months of lockdown, the pupils' excitement at seeing their friends almost drowned out the lively music! All in all, it was a happy end to a challenging school year.





# At start of lockdown we vowed to devote as much time as possible to God

by Frances Moran, Desertmartin

LOCKDOWN. The word 2020 will be remembered for. My mum always taught me to ask God for the grace to accept any difficulties and challenges and life will be so much easier. God has definitely given us this grace in abundance as, thankfully, we are coping well in these strangest of times.

I am a stay-at-home mum and my husband, Paul is self-employed and has been working from home for the past 12 years. We have three children; Therese, who is 11, and 10-year-old twins, Olivia and Michael.

Being at home has always worked well for Paul and I. We are used to each other's routines and I'm grateful for the company every day. Like Ant and Dec, I get to spend each and every day with my best friend. So living in lockdown has not been a challenge for us in this way. What has been different is having the kids at home 24-7! I miss 'our time' during the day, where we could take time to maybe go to Mass or visit Portglenone Monastery, have breakfast or lunch together, or just chat in peace.

I must admit I am enjoying this time. It's good to be just mummy (and teacher) at the moment. I don't miss being a taxi driver, ATM, cheerleader, coach and all the other hats we feel we have to wear in order to believe we are doing the best for our children. I have realised that they just want us, all along, and I am so happy to have the time to do this now; to really chat to them now. It's amazing to see how their values and moral compass are forming. We have many conversations at the dinner table each evening about current topics, our faith and morals and so much more. It makes us so proud to see them growing in self-confidence and faith.

We love going for walks, rambles

and bike rides at the minute. The beautiful weather definitely helps! I love to bake and never seem to have the time to teach the children with the 'busyness' of normal day-to-day life. But now Therese loves to bake every weekend and is fast becoming proficient in this new talent. The twins are not so domesticated. They love everything outdoors. They live for the time of day that daddy finishes up in the office and they can go out into the garden with him. But most of all, the trips to a local farm to help out with all things agricultural is like a piece of heaven for all three.

Therese just missed out on making her Confirmation before lockdown started. She's also missed all the fun stuff that goes hand-in-hand with the last term in p7. She was gutted about missing the Fan the Flame Mass, but we did have fun making the sensory bottles and t-shirt, and keeping the journal.

God is, and always has been, the centre of our home and family. To Paul and I, it is our most important job as parents to ensure we pass our faith on to them. If we have done our job right on this, we believe everything else will fall into place. I take the lessons I learnt from my parents, especially my mother, and I love passing them on to my children. I am confident that someday they will do the same.

## Devote

At the start of lockdown we made a vow to devote as much time as possible to God while we have no outer distractions getting in the way. We start our day with our Morning Prayer and Mass and end each day with our night prayers and family Rosary. We have taken the time in lockdown to teach the children the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be in Irish.

Every morning at Mass time, the

children take it in turns to set up the 'altar' around our computer, with our Holy Water, Crucifix, blessed candles and a few other religious objects. It gives them a sense of involvement. As they are normally altar servers in our local parish chapel, we encourage them to ring a 'bell' during the Consecration to remind them of the importance of the sacrament being celebrated. I try to take a little time, where I can, every day to explore my faith. I love to read articles that help give me a deeper understanding of my faith and what it is to be a Catholic.

I miss a few things. I miss hugs. A hug can say more than all the words in the dictionary sometimes. But I still get to hug the four most important people to me as much as I want, and I'm happy to wait a little longer to hug everyone else who wants or needs one. I miss seeing my friends and family. I'm not into the 'Zoom' thing, only if needs must. Nothing beats sitting together, laughing and chatting over coffee and cake. But again, please God that will come soon.

I also missed the odd wee trip to the hairdresser and beautician. But I have nowhere to go at the moment so it doesn't matter if my hair or nails aren't done. I think what I missed the most during lockdown was going to Mass. Receiving the Eucharist and going to Confession is both very important to me and to my family. I have little to complain about in life in general and in life in lockdown. God has always given me more than I deserve and I am very thankful for that. My mum brought me up to hand it all to God and He will sort it for me. Whatever may come my way, I always believe it is God's plan and He has never left my side in good times and bad.



# Holy Family honoured in Newtownstewart Oratory

by Newtownstewart Pastoral Forum

THE Covid-19 lockdown has had some tangible benefits in Newtownstewart. The Parish of Ardstraw East used the time to install two new statues in the Oratory of Mary Mother of God, on Main Street.

Since its opening in the Jubilee Year 2000, there has been one statue in the Oratory; a statue of the Mother of God, the Patroness. But for the twentieth anniversary, Fr Roland Colhoun has added a gothic arch and a brass crown with 12 lights to the statue of Our Lady.

The Book of Revelation describes Our Lady "clothed with the sun, standing on the moon with twelve stars on Her head for a crown" (Rev. 12:1). The new illuminated crown and wooden

pedestal have been donated to give honour to the Mother of God. The crown was blessed on Saturday, June 20, Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The previous day, Feast of the Sacred Heart, Fr Colhoun blessed a new statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This fulfils a church tradition of having a statue of Our Lord on the left-hand side and a statue of Our Lady on the right-hand side of the interior.

The following Wednesday, June 24, Fr Colhoun blessed a new statue of St Joseph and the Christ Child. Wednesday is the traditional day of the week to honour St Joseph because it is the half-way point between Sunday (the Lord's Day) and Saturday (the day set aside to honour Our

Lady). Over these three days we honour the Holy Family of Nazareth every week.

Actually, none of Newtownstewart 'new' statues are new. The history of acquired old statues is almost always impossible to trace. In any case, the statues were impressively restored by the artist, Terence McNamee of Legfordrum. His artistry is now on display and inspires people to pray.

Fr Colhoun, who designed the new shrines, hopes that the installation of the statues and the crowning of Our Lady will be a permanent testimony to the talent and skill of the men of the parish and the devotion of the whole community to the saints.





# St Conor's College family thank God for walking beside each of us every day *by Grainne McCallion, Head of RE*



AS St Conor's College (Clady-Kilrea) pupils attended school for lessons on Friday, March 13, it was unbeknown to them, staff and parents that it would be the last time they would set foot in the school building during the 2019-2020 academic year. It is fair to say that the last few months have been a challenging and uncertain time for everyone, yet the St Conor's College community has been committed to ensuring the holistic well-being of our pupils. Living, Learning and Excelling Together as a virtual community has been a learning curve, however both staff and pupils have risen to the challenge.

To ensure the development of pupils' academic ability, staff very quickly became familiar with Microsoft Teams which we used as our remote online learning platform to engage with pupils and colleagues, thus ensuring that pupils covered essential content and developed their thinking skills and personal capabilities in each curriculum area. Learning

packs were also created for those with limited access to an online device. A reduced weekly timetable was created to ensure students were not overwhelmed, yet it gave them structure and focus to complete weekly tasks set by their teachers. To engage pupils, teaching staff have had to become more innovative in their delivery of the curriculum. Our ICT Department have also been fantastic in aiding the development of staff and coming up with creative ways to motivate pupils, such as creating Interactive Bitmoji Classrooms.

As a Catholic, child-centred school, the health and well-being of our pupils is paramount. The pastoral team of St Conor's College created an Extra Curricular channel on Teams for each Year Group. Pupils were given fun quizzes and competitions to take part in and were encouraged to partake in physical activity for a healthy body and mind. Heads of Year also used this channel to convey important pastoral

messages, such as 'Being Kind' to one another. Pupils were also given tips to look after their mental health and build resilience and were encouraged to seek help if they were struggling, with links to our school counsellors and Aware NI made available.

Examples of pupils' God given talents, abilities and creativity, from outstanding assignments to innovative artwork, superb baking, skilled farming and inspiring physical challenges was also celebrated on Teams and our social media sites.

St Conor's College is not only a place of academia but also a faith school, with Christ at the centre. Our Catholic ethos underpins everything that we do, through our teaching, through our worship and by our example. Our online Religious Education lessons have allowed our pupils to develop their faith through examining scriptures and Church teaching. Pupils were also afforded other opportunities to strengthen their faith and meet Christ, such as by creating paper palm crosses in remembrance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and were encouraged to listen to Bishop Donal McKeown about how we could "walk with Jesus during Holy Week". Some pupils created a Sacred Space, an Easter Garden where they were able to pray. Some also engaged in Spy Wednesday, whereby they created a treasure hunt for younger siblings in their home, using 30 pieces of silver, which was then donated to Trocaire.

## Holy Spirit

In the month of May, pupils were encouraged to create a May altar in remembrance of Mary,

the Mother of God. On Pentecost Sunday, pupils remembered how the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples in tongues of fire and gave them the courage and strength to preach the Word of God, despite the difficult circumstances. Today the Holy Spirit continues to guide us through difficult times.

In addition, we have encouraged our pupils to engage in prayer, following the call from Pope Francis, who, at the beginning of lockdown, called each of us to pray the Rosary every evening. Pupils have also been encouraged to view weekly Sunday Mass via webcam from their own local parishes, as well as view special Masses celebrated in St Eugene's Cathedral, such as Fr Paul Farren's special intentions Mass for all school communities and past pupils who are now frontline workers, as well as the end of the school year Mass.

In May, our Year 12 and Year 14 pupils celebrated their leavers Mass behind closed doors, through a live webcam. The Leavers' Mass is always a very memorable and poignant ceremony, which pupils very much look forward to. Fr Harkin made it a very special occasion and was joined by our principal, vice principal, Head of the Junior School, Heads of Year, and the Head Boy and Head Girl. The reflection read at the end was entitled, 'Trust in God', and in these unprecedented times and at the crossroads that our Year 12 and Year 14 pupils stand before, we wanted to remind them that despite the "rugged roads" and "insurmountable hills" they face, if they have courage and faith



in God, they will achieve their dreams.

Despite the challenges of lockdown, our PJPII Award participants have found new ways to contribute towards their local communities and parishes. Our pupils have actively lived out Christ's command to "love their neighbour" by delivering food parcels to those in need and volunteering to create PPE for those on the frontline. Some pupils have also expressed their solidarity for 'Friends of Africa', by completing the 10k for 10 days challenge to fundraise and help people in Africa respond to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, pupils have been tuning in to the Derry Diocesan Youth page on a Monday evening

to listen to Lizzie and Yvonne, and to complete the weekly tasks set. Pupils have also told me that they believe that their faith has been strengthened as a result of the lockdown and that they have turned to God for guidance and have been saying the Rosary in their homes with their family every evening.

Over the last few months, our faith has been a great source of comfort and will continue to guide us. We, at St Conor's College, thank God for walking beside each and every one of us every day.

*(St Conor's is name for the newly amalgamated St Mary's College, Clady, and St Paul's College, Kilrea)*

# St Patrick's Dungiven pupils encouraged to pray and trust *by Breda McCormack, Head of RE*

PRAYER has featured strongly in our care for our pupils here at St Patrick's Dungiven, when they were unable to be in school because of Covid-19.

From the start of lockdown, I gave each Year a simple prayer that

I had written... 'Dear God, look after us and keep us all safe in these very difficult times. Sacred Heart of Jesus I place all my trust in you. Amen.'

Every week, I tried to encourage them to keep saying this prayer,

and I encouraged our Pope John Paul II Award pupils to take part in the online youth programme organised by the Diocesan youth team, including the Alpha Programme for 15-18 year olds.

We were invited to send in a

prayer for the Diocesan End of School Year Mass, and I sent the prayer entitled 'God's Promise', which was included in the book of prayers compiled for the Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral...

'God didn't promise days without

pain, laughter without sorrow or sun without rain. But God did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears and a light for the way, And for all who believe in His Kingdom above, He answers their faith With everlasting love. Amen.'

We also had our own on-line Mass celebrated by our parish priest, Fr Seamus Kelly, which was attended by our principal, Michael Gormley, and two students, Erin McClune and Amy McFall sang at it.



Year 14



Year 12



# St Patrick's & St Brigid's family apart but very much together

by Michael Donnelly

DURING this worrying and unexpected time of distance, the RE department of St Patrick's and St Brigid's College, in Claudy, have recognised the ever increasing importance of exposing our pupils to the spiritual dimension of our faith.

We have done this interactively by ensuring the online work set is based on faith formation and the teachings of the Church.

In each year group, we have tailored our lessons to ensure that there is an emphasis on prayer, pastoral and sacramental activities.

As Church services are unable to be the much needed constant in our young people's lives, it is

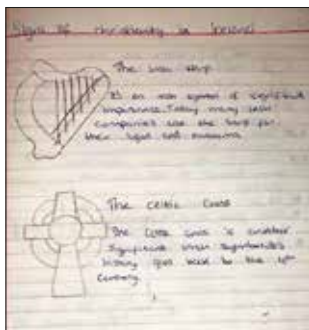
up to school and home to provide spiritual nourishment.

Through partnership, we endeavoured to focus Year 8s on the Mass and how it has changed since the Last Supper, and we encouraged our young faithful to reflect on the role they can play in our church today.

Our Year 9s were encouraged to research a world religion, with an emphasis on respect and inclusion whilst simultaneously linking back to Catholicism, while Year 10s experienced faith formation closer to home, delving into the early growth of Christianity in Ireland. We encourage our pupils to follow in the footsteps of our great saints, St Patrick and St

Brigid.

And, as we prepared to say 'goodbye' to our senior students in KS4, we, in partnership with our parish priest and school chaplain, Fr David O'Kane, uploaded an online blessing so that our pupils could see that although we are apart, we are very much together in Christ.



*Reflecting on the importance of faith in facing the trials of lockdown, Ann Cullinan of Sacred Heart College, Omagh, writes...*

## We never lost hope that God would accompany us on this journey

AT Sacred Heart College we endeavoured, like all other schools, to support our students in their overall development during these unprecedented times. Never has faith, hope and love been so important to each and every one of us, even if it was shared remotely. This remoteness is alien to many of us as social beings, but in these times of crisis we never lost hope...hope that God would accompany us on this journey.

Right from the beginning of lockdown, prayers and links to Catholic spiritual websites were shared on the college website and Facebook. Students in Key Stage 3 completed a project on Mary during the month of May, and some beautiful prayers were

composed and altars displayed.

Additionally, our Year 8 students composed prayers on the theme of the pandemic, some of which were read at our College Mass on the Feast of The Sacred Heart.

During lockdown, Fr McDermott kindly celebrated two Masses; one for the intentions of those leaving our college and, most recently, for the Feast of the Sacred Heart. During this Mass, he enlightened us with his words on faith, hope and love. He reminded us that "there is a place reserved for each of us deep in the very heart of God".

Our vice-principal, Mrs McGinn led us in our First Reading, while Year 8 student, Caitrin Barrett read the prayers of

intercession, and Miss McAllister, our principal, read the post communion reflection. The ceremony was greatly enhanced by the music ministry of Aoife Bogle, Orla Hamill, Mrs Rodgers and Mrs O'Hagan.

Meanwhile, Pope John Paul II Award students were encouraged to complete their awards remotely.

Unfortunately, we had some students who suffered bereavement during these unprecedented times, and support was offered to them through guards of honour at funerals, messages through TEAMS and 'phone calls from pastoral leaders.

We certainly were "in this together..."



## The flame of faith shines brightly in Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana by Edel O'Connor



CATHERINE McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, encouraged us "to be shining lamps, giving light to all around us". When the darkness of the pandemic descended on us, the students of Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana kept the light of faith shining brightly. Over the last few difficult months, the themes of faith, hope and love were brought alive within our homes, school and parishes.

Students were assigned weekly activities from their RE teachers through the platform of Google classroom. These included academic coursework, prayers and meditations. A particular emphasis was placed on spiritual tasks that students could complete with their families. To

say we were overwhelmed with the response of these tasks is an understatement.

"Branching out in Buncrana" took place on Palm Sunday. Students and staff uploaded photos of their branches. Some of the students participating in the Pope John Paul II Award distributed additional branches on the doorsteps of their elderly neighbours. School, home and parish were working together to bring alive the Gospel values.

Gerard Manley Hopkins reminds us that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God". Our students fully embraced the task of "Finding God in the world around us", uploading images of nature, people and the community spirit

evident in the Inishowen area and, during the month of May, students from across all year groups shared images of their May altars. We may have been physically isolated but we were united in our faith and in our belief in the power of prayer.

Our final liturgical event for this academic year was our 'End of Year' Mass for our Sixth Year students on May 28. It was streamed live from Cockhill Church, Buncrana. The celebrant, Fr Francis Bradley gave a warm welcome to all watching online, including students, staff and families. Students were represented by Head Girl, Orla Barnett and Head Boy, Céin McColgan, while the staff was represented by Ms Lorna Barron, deputy principal.

Our school principal, Ms Rosaleen Grant, in her welcome address, expressed how very proud Scoil Mhuire are of the Class of 2020. Ms Grant highlighted how the pandemic has shown us the importance of family, friends and faith. Although unable to be gathered together physically, united in prayer, the class of 2020 marked this special milestone in their lives.

The theme of the Mass was

'Let your light shine'. Ms Ward, along with students, Raissa Grant, Aoife Lennon and Saoirse MacLochlainn, greatly enhanced the liturgy with their beautiful music, including songs Christ be your Light and Amazing Grace.

Fr Bradley delivered many words of wisdom and inspiration. Firstly, reminding the students that the concept of 2020 has been with us for a long time: "If we went to an optician and they told us we had 20-20 vision we would be very happy with our perfect sight. Unfortunately, many things can obscure our vision and this pandemic could darken our light. However, the God who inspires us, guides us, helps us and blesses us, can give us a glimpse of the perfect vision."

The Readings and Gospel highlighted to students the message that they are never alone; God walks by their side guiding their lives every step of the way. In his homily, Fr Bradley reinforced the message of never being alone, by reminding the students of a quote from John Henry Newman, "God knows me and calls me by name". Fr Bradley also noted that at home, in school and in their parish, the students have been nurtured physically, emotionally

and spiritually.

In the words of Fr Bradley, "what matters most is that we have belief in God and belief in Christ. That's what makes us Christians. If you believe in Christ, anything is possible. If you don't, most things will be difficult if not impossible. God in Christ wishes us on to greater things. He tells us never to be satisfied with mediocrity. Never settle for less than our best. No matter how much the world tries to hold you back, always continue with the belief that what you want to achieve, so long as it is good and comes from God, is possible. By believing in Christ and by remembering how much He believes in you - you can achieve so much".

Following the homily, Ms Martina McBride, Year Head, led a ceremony of light, with the students at home lighting their candles representing wisdom, love, memory, faith and hope. The Class of 2020 were a precious part of our school community. With joyful gratitude, we gave thanks for their gifts, talents and accomplishments and prayed that they would find courage to face the new adventures. Finally, Ms Grant read the Communion reflection entitled, 'Make your

life the best it can be', with the key message being 'there will always be hope in your tomorrows'.

As the recessional song, 'This Little Light of Mine', began, this beautiful liturgy on a warm summer's evening came to a close. However, all in Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana will continue to hold the Class of 2020 in our prayers. The flame of faith and the light of Christ will remain strong in our homes, school and parishes. We ask God's blessing on the students, staff and families, and may the Class of 2020 be beacons of hope in our world. In the words of the Prophet Micah, "may you act justly, walk humbly and love tenderly", confident in the knowledge that God is by your side.





# St Mary's Limavady embraces slower pace for greater thought of others

by Sean Mullan



WITHOUT a doubt, we will look back on 2020 and think what a year that was! Globally, the world has faced challenges and our local context has been no different. As a school community, our greatest concern was our students and their families. None of us wanted the school year to end in the way in which it did. Our year 14 pupils, who would have completed their final year in school, did not get the opportunity to complete their school year with the usual Leavers' Mass, nor did they get the goodbye they deserved. However, at some point in the future, we will celebrate their final days as pupils of St Mary's, Limavady.

Our staff, students and families have had a steep learning curve with regards to remote learning; our staff and students getting to grips with new technologies,



and our families coping with the struggles of home schooling alongside everyday life. I can only imagine the levels of stress in some homes and, like them, we are desperate to see our pupils back to school full time, whenever that may be.

The Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged us all to see things and do things in ways we would never have seen or done before. We have had to adapt as individuals, as families, as schools and as a country, and we have embraced these challenges, resulting in communities coming together in a way never seen before.

The Religious Education department, as with all departments, in St Mary's Limavady have had to adapt the way in which they do things. When we, as a department team,



sat down in August 2019 to plan for the year ahead, never did we imagine what would come.

Since then, it would be fair to say many discussions have been had about how to ensure the development of faith, while losing face-to-face contact with our school community. A conversation had by many parishes across the country!

In a normal school day, our entire school community comes together each morning for assembly, which includes Morning Prayer. This, of course, is no longer possible. In an attempt to continue this in a remote form, the department posted daily prayers to encourage our students to continue this at home.

The reality that there would be no internal school exams soon became a realisation and this



allowed for the department to step back, slow down and encourage continued faith development.

We gave students the opportunity to explore the 'Stations of the Cross' through prayer and art. Students designed their own crosses and the prizes offered encouraged their creativity! Our students and families created some of the most prayerful May Altars during the month of May and for our namesake.

Utilising some of the excellent resources from the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre on Pope Francis, our students became amateur and, in some cases, very professional photographers. They captured images of what they saw to be beautiful around them, ranging from scenery to pets, from plants to farm animals. This



encouraged our pupils to look out and up at the wonders of creation, which sometimes can go unnoticed in the rush of daily life.

We asked pupils to submit short videos of what they were grateful for and what they missed the most. The most common responses were being grateful for family time and missing family members. I wonder will we say the same things in six months time!

We gave our students activities allowing them time to reflect on their own personal journey during lockdown, and this allowed them to think about their contribution to society.

If we have learned anything as a department in the midst of this crisis, and if we can take any positive away, it has been that slowing down and taking notice is



not a negative but something that we will foster moving forward. A slower pace can encourage greater thought of others and ensure that, as a community, we continue to care for one another as has been the case over the last few months.

In Pope Francis' letter, 'Laudato Si', he asks us to show care for others, to recognise that we need each other and promote a culture of care. He writes: "We must regain the connection that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for each other, and that being good and decent are worth it"

If we can instil this in the pupils of St Mary's Limavady, we will have achieved more than any examination result can achieve. We will have educated their heart as well as their mind!"

*As well as continuing its commitment to charity during lockdown...*

## St Patrick's Maghera kept focus on emotional and spiritual well-being

WHEN St Patrick's College went into lockdown on March 18, we could not have predicted how the following weeks and months would transpire. Every effort was made in the days and weeks that followed to ensure that our children continued to make academic progress. Face to face teaching was quickly replaced by online and blended learning. However, our priority during these difficult and unprecedented times remained the emotional and spiritual well-being of our young people and our College community.

The Religious Studies Department, led by Mrs Francine Walls, has played a key role in keeping our College family connected through our faith and shared values during the lockdown period.

All Key Stage Three students were initially invited to write prayers for their families and friends, on the theme of Hope, Strength and Faith. The students also completed a range of creative

activities throughout Lent, including Holy Week timelines, crosses, stained glass windows and Easter gardens.

During the month of May, all members of the College family were invited to create a May altar/prayer space in their homes. Students produced beautiful depictions of prayers and hymns devoted to Mary, and researched and produced leaflets on Marian shrines. Our celebration of the Marian month ended with virtual celebrations; we prayed the Rosary with Pope Francis at Lourdes on May 30 for an end to Covid-19 and joined Archbishop Eamon at Knock Shrine on Pentecost Sunday for the Rosary, Pilgrimage Mass and Benediction. We also participated in a 'Virtual Pilgrimage' of fast and prayer with Bishop McKeown on the first and last Friday of May.

Our students have been rewarded for their creativity and engagement in Religious Studies through Pupil of the Week Awards and Certificates of Achievement.

Our John Paul II students continued to receive support and encouragement throughout this period, with opportunities to participate in virtual events shared online. We celebrated World Day of Prayer for Vocations on May 3 and shared the Derry Diocese's Prayer for Vocations with our school community.

The Religious Studies Department made creative use of our Facebook and Twitter social media accounts to highlight our students work and to provide spiritual and uplifting guidance and support to our College community. Our annual Year 12 Thanksgiving and Year 14 Leavers' Masses were celebrated by Fr Doherty in St Patrick's Church, Glen, and were shared via webcam and our social media.

Mental Health Awareness Week was also promoted on our social media, providing an opportunity for our school community to reflect on the importance of kindness and our potential to help others through our words and

deeds.

St Patrick's College is renowned for its commitment to charity and this continued during lockdown. We celebrated our annual 'Pink Friday' on May 30 in memory of the deceased members of our school family. The College staff produced a video and enjoyed a virtual coffee morning, raising £1,265 for Marie Curie.

Our College staff also manufactured 18,000 face shields, which have been delivered to frontline workers.

Although the 15 weeks of lockdown have presented our school community with numerous challenges, there are many positives to be taken from our collective experience. As a Christian community, we have continued to care for and support each other, bound by our Christian faith and values and comforted by the word of God: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". (Jeremiah 29:11).





## Holy Cross pupils encouraged to pray and celebrate faith

HOLY Cross College, in Strabane, students and staff were kept connected on-line during the Covid-19 lockdown via Google Classroom.

Ms Bronagh Mullan said that while the emphasis had been on getting academic work completed, the school tried to provide spiritual support where they could

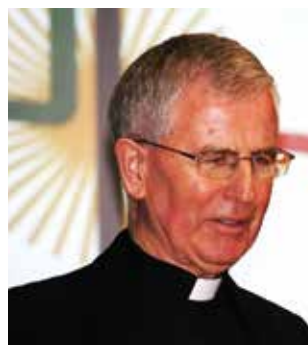
in the difficult situation.

Times of bereavement were particularly difficult and during lockdown the school paid tribute to Bishop Francis Lagan, who had been instrumental in the development of Holy Cross College.

Encouraging pupils in their prayer life, Ms Mullan spoke about

how they had been asked to write and share prayers, and engage in small activities to celebrate events in the life of the Church, such as making Pentecostal Windmills.

The school also reminded them that all Masses and services from St Mary's Church, Melmount, were on YouTube and could be watched at any time.



The late Bishop Francis Lagan, who was a great support to Holy Cross College.



## Omagh Loreto pupils' lockdown experience a source of great hope and joy by Brenda Bannon - Head of RE



Loreto College, Omagh Year 8 pupil, Brackyn, doing her work on 50 Acts of Love.

IT is a fascinating question to ask Catholic schools how they maintained faith development during lockdown. It suggests that faith can be measured. Before Covid 19, family attendance at Mass had declined in many homes; young people had endless opportunities and choices but were often too distracted to reflect or deeply commit; social media occupied their time which can be a superficial and fleeting form of communication. Lockdown happened and none of us could have predicted the many positive outcomes for the natural world, for family life, and for the faith.

Lockdown has cast many shadows for the future, but it has also produced much fruit if we allow it to continue to grow, rather than rush to restore the 'old normal'.

As school closed, the initial concern was for the safety of all, and the worry that the virus could reach any of our student families. We had to work out

how to monitor learning against a possibility that a student was caught up in coronavirus concerns.

There was a great opportunity for teachers to master online teaching tools at speed. As teachers began to work remotely, all subject areas worked hard not only to deliver their specifications but to mind the students in their care – by maintaining conversation with each one in feedback; by creating lively and engaging tasks; by reminding them that we are still here for them. For those interested, you can see evidence of the richness of the work on our school Twitter and Facebook.

The primary purpose of any RE Department is to realise the intention of Jesus for young people; to point them to Him in all their searching. This means revealing to them that they are beloved children of God. We do this within the context of a Catholic school so that all of education is centred on this truth and that all of a school's practices are aligned to this vision.

In practical terms for faith development, the first step was to maintain regular, personal and meaningful dialogue with each student. Keeping relationships between staff and students real and alive is important. It was easy to check in with how they were doing as work was returned, and the replies were often moving and unlike anything that could happen in the classroom setting.

The second step was to encourage them to live in the grace of the day that was given. We did this by asking students to capture pictures of the beauty of nature and share it. It was wonderful how they opened the world they live in, to us. We invited them to develop or initiate family prayer – which many did by praying the Rosary,

setting up May altars, and joining in Church services by webcam which we constantly promoted. We also invited students from all year groups to write a Morning Prayer for our school social media. They were genuine and beautiful, reflecting their anxieties, their faith, their awareness of nature, their gratitude for family and their relationship with God. It was a lovely start to the working day to read each prayer and think of that particular student in response. Many of the parents liked this practice very much.

The third step was to ask students to research and present a saint's life and what it teaches us today; to research and present a place of Marian pilgrimage with their families and grandparents. Tasks like these gave time for reflection into which the quietness of lockdown had led students.

The fourth step was to share online Assemblies with each year. We adapted the Reflective Journal, provided by the Diocese, for Year 10 students. We had our Leavers' Mass online on May 10; our chaplain, Fr Hasson, shared a lovely message on the video created for them. The whole school joined the online Mass on June 17 with Fr Farren. Many classes ended the year with a Zoom or Team meeting, so they could know an ending and prepare for a beginning.

The fifth step was to promote outreach – helping neighbours and grandparents. It was heartening to hear their stories of working with grandad on the farm or minding granny with dementia. It reminds us that young people have big hearts and have much to teach us. Some responded to the calls of parishes for readers and cleaners; others continued to complete the Pope John Paul 11 Award in creative, if limited,

ways. Year 8 and 13 students participated in the Knights of Columbanus' competition by writing speeches on God versus Virus. This encouraged a sense of being connected to the wider community.

The sixth and final step was to listen to student experience. They wrote accounts early on about how they were experiencing lockdown; toward the end of June, we asked them to tell us what they have learned from lockdown about themselves, their family, their community, their faith. Their replies were a source of great hope and joy. Many of them delighted in how close their families had become – walking, playing, eating together; they shared great insight on the courage of volunteers and frontline workers; and they spoke of a realisation that daily prayer mattered and that, while online Mass was a good tool to have, that they wanted to be back in Church.

We never fully know how and where the Holy Spirit is at work. We need to be wary of claiming credit for any growth of faith in our students. All we can do is reveal to them their beauty and their value as baptised Christians with a call and a mission; and to encourage them to be bold witnesses.



## Carndonagh Community College continued caring during lockdown

DESPITE the challenges of lockdown, the staff at Carndonagh Community School did their best to continue to cater for the academic, moral, spiritual and social education of its students.

School chaplain and Head of Sixth Year, Serena Doherty was one of a team of 12 who kept in contact with pupils in their care, which was especially appreciated at times of bereavement.

In her role as chaplain, Serena sent out prayers to the pupils, including the Serenity Prayer – "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference".

Saying that the guidance counsellor had on-line meetings with any anxious pupils, Serena noted that the usual increase in anxiety and stress levels around May time, because of exams, hadn't occurred.

In a lovely touch appreciated by parents, the school's Wellbeing Team sent out personalised care packs to every Sixth Year pupil that contained sweet treats such as chocolate and coffee, along with some words of reassurance that during this difficult time, the staff were behind them "every step of the way".

In a note to the Sixth Years, the Care Team assured them: "We believe in you. This road ahead may feel daunting, but it is one we must travel. There is no doubt times are tough but so are you! You may not be able to control this situation, but you are in

charge of how you respond to it.

"The Leaving Cert Class of 2020 will emerge from this as stronger individuals. We, at CCS, are resilient and we can overcome this. Remember nothing is impossible, even the word itself says 'I'm possible!' Sometimes obstacles are part of our success.

"When this is over, may we continue to be more appreciative of the simple things in life. Keep your eyes fixed on the horizon; there are better days to come!"

The school also put together a graduation video with messages for the leavers' group from the teachers and the principal, Paul Fiorentini, as well as messages from the pupils themselves.

In addition, welcome packs were sent out the 215 incoming first years, which included a positive message to them.

Remembering the late Bishop Francis Lagan's connection with the school, beginning when he came to teach French there in the 1960s as Fr Lagan, the school paid tribute to his friendly and considerate manner, and how he had kept in contact with the school and the colleagues he had worked with.



### A Morning Prayer by Loreto College, Omagh Year 12 pupil, Colleen.

Lord,  
Thank you, for the blooming,  
bright, May flowers that  
dance in the wind,

The cloudless skies, the  
growing grass,

The returning birds, perching  
on branches of swaying trees,

All reminding us that  
through everything, life goes  
on.

Give us the strength, courage  
and bravery we see from our  
NHS heroes,

And encourage us to be more  
grateful for each other and  
the world around us.

Please help those who need  
our prayers during this  
challenging time,

Help us trust in you.

Amen.

### I am grateful for everything that I have...

By Emma, Yr8, Loreto-Omagh

I have learned to keep my faith in God during the uncertain time of Covid-19. Although my family could not go to the chapel, we still were able to watch Mass on the webcam. I learned how lucky we are to be able to watch Mass at home in 2020 unlike many years ago. Lockdown has changed many things in my life and I am grateful for everything that I have.





# Funds needed to help Derry-based friars complete St Pio House

ST Pio House – one of the fruits of the prayer and discernment of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in Derry – will soon be complete, with the new community hub in the heart of Galliagh expected to be open by September.

A major project for the Friars, who were initially based in the Long Tower when they first came to the City 10 years ago, it has been made possible through their great relationship with the Three Patrons Parish and the generosity of their many friends.

St Pio House has evolved from the building within the grounds of St Joseph's Church that had served as the Parish Centre for the area.

Fr Isaac, the director of St Pio House, explained that when they were offered the chance to take over the administration of the building about four years ago, they saw it as providential.

"When we move into an area, we normally have a place of our own from which we minister, but we hadn't had such a place in our 10 years in Derry," said Fr Isaac, adding: "We have used other people's buildings and plugged into other services, such as Heal the Hurt and the chaplaincy at St Brigid's College, and it is a blessing to be able to participate in such fruitful ministries. But, when we were asked if we would like to use the Parish Centre building, we said 'Yes!' Now, with St Pio House, we can do something for

the sake of the community that is specifically ours."

"At the start," he explained, "we were going to just touch up the existing building, but then we realised that part of it was not in good shape. So, 40 per cent of it was knocked down and rebuilt. This, along with the Covid-19 restrictions, slowed the construction process and with each delay the money needs have gone up.

"We are a charity and live a life of poverty, so there are significant restrictions on us paying out money. At every stage where the cost has gone up, we have had to get approval and then get funding.

"It has been an interesting process and now we are in the last push for the final £20,000 to finish off the interior of St Pio House. We are doing a draw, with people going door-to-door selling tickets, and we have a 'Go Fund Me' page, which has been amazing in bringing in money and we are very grateful for that. We also have some amazing volunteers who are very generous with their time, and people have been responding very generously to the funding appeal."

Fr Isaac went on to explain that St Pio House would be just that, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal house of hospitality, where people can connect with others and with services, and where secular and sacred meetings can be held.

"We want to wait and see what needs people who come will



The Franciscans of the Renewal receiving a donation from representatives of the Greater Shantallow Area Partnership and the Leafair Community Group.

have and that will lead to other resources and services being offered as well.

"A lot of people are isolated and do not have much human contact, and probably not a lot of contact with God either. So, the St Pio House showpiece will be the cafe area. It is going to be really nice and welcoming, with lovely food and tea, etc, to sit and enjoy, and instead of charging for this we will have a 'good will' basket for people to contribute what they can.

"We will have a couple of friars in attendance there and people can connect with them as well as

each other."

He added: "We are really excited about the potential of St Pio House. It represents a new era for us here in Galliagh and in Derry. Our hope is that St Pio House will be a place where both the young and old will be happy to come and connect with others."

Michelle D'Arcy Burns, from Culmore, and her sister, Andre, are two of the many people who have stepped in to help raise the money needed to finish the project. Within a week of setting up a 'Go Fund Me' for St Pio House on her Facebook page, Michelle reported

that almost £6,000 had been raised, thanks to mentions too on other Facebook pages, including local traditional musicians who promoted the fundraising for the Friars' project while they played live via Facebook.

The next big fundraiser will be the raffle on July 20, and Michelle explained that anyone who would like to donate can do so through the link on her Facebook page or that of the Derry Franciscans.

"This facility is really needed in Derry," said Michelle, "however, it is for anyone who feels drawn to come there, no matter where

they are from. It is going to be a very open and welcoming place. Whoever God guides to St Pio House will be looked after.

"The friars really love God and pray to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The work that they do is so beautiful. Their aim is to bring God to the forefront of all our lives. They want people to know that no matter what, God loves them. They don't preach it; you see it through the love in their eyes when they are talking to people. St Pio House will be such a special place."

## Fr Columba off on sabbatical

AFTER nine years ministering in Derry with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Fr Columba Jordan is off on sabbatical for a few months.

On the Feast of St Peter and St Paul, June 29, when priests were able to celebrate Mass publicly again, with the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, people gathered in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, for the celebration of Mass by the Friars and to wish Fr Columba well during his time away.

The main celebrant, Fr Charles Reche offered the Mass in joyful thanks for being able to celebrate the Eucharist with a congregation, and in thanksgiving for the

ministry of Fr Columba over the past nine years.

He also prayed for the new arrival, Fr Francesco, who has taken over the mantle of The Servant from Fr Columba, in the Franciscan's Galliagh Friary.

At the end of Mass, Three Patrons' parish priest, Fr Michael McCaughey paid tribute to Fr Columba and thanked him for his leadership, saying: "I have been very privileged to work with Fr Columba, and have seen the great work that the friars have done within their own community, and the church and schools here, with his leadership and guidance. He will be missed.

"He is going off for a few months on sabbatical, which he needs after all his hard work. St Pio House is very much his vision, which he shared with us on the Feast of Christ the King."

Welcoming Fr Francesco, Fr Michael assured him: "You are amongst good people here, and we welcome you to this city and this parish."

Speaking, socially distanced, with well-wishers afterwards, Fr Columba said that he looked forward to returning for the next exciting chapter in their ministry in Derry, with the opening of the new St Pio House.



Fr Columba Jordan with the new St Pio House in background.





# Eangach

## Ár nDúchas

### Paidir Choimirce

*Charles de Foucauld*

A Athair liom,  
Cuirim mé féin go hiomlán  
faoi do choimirce.  
Déan liom mar is toil leat.

Pé rud is áil leat,  
tá mé buíoch díot.  
Tá mé réidh go hiomlán,  
géillim go hiomlán.

Do thoil amháin  
go ndéantar,  
ionamsa agus in achan dúil  
a chruthaigh tú.  
Níl a dhath eile uaim,  
a Thiarna.

Cuirim m'anam  
faoi chúram do lámh.  
Tairgim duit é  
le hiomlán ghrá mo chroí,

nó gráim thú, a Thiarna,  
agus dá bhrí sin  
is gá dom mé féin a bhronnadh,  
mé féin a ligean i do lámha,

gan ceist,  
agus le lán-mhuinín,  
nó is tú m'Áthair.



## An Bráthair Séarlas



Charles de Foucauld

Fógraíodh ar na mallabhaigh go bhfuil Charles de Foucauld le canónú mar naomh de chuid na hEaglaise. Rugadh Charles de Foucauld sa Fhrainc sa bhliain 1858 agus fuair sé bás (scaoileadh é ag Tuareg óg) i ngaineamhlach an Sahara ar an chéad lá de mhí na Nollag, 1916. Ar leac a uaghe tá na focail: "Is toil liom an Soiscéal a fhógairt le hiomlán mo bheo".

Liostáil sé in Arm na Fraince agus é ina fhear óg. D'fhág sé a chreideamh ar leataobh agus chaith sé saol dramhlach. Caitheadh amach as an arm é, ach glacadh ar ais é nuair a bhí cogadh Impiriúil á chur ag an Fhrainc ar an Ailgéir. Nuair a bhí sé ag troid san Ailgéir, thug sé faoi deara gur stop na hArabaigh ón troid ag am paidreoireachta; thiontaigh siad i dtreo Mecca agus shléacht siad go talamh. Cead

ag saighdiúirí na Fraince iad a scaoileadh dá mba mhian leo, ach ní chaillfeadh siad a gcuid urnaithe. Chuaigh sin i bhfeidhm ar Shéarlas agus threoraigh sé ar ais i dtreo a chreidimh féin é. In aois a fiche hocht thiontaigh sé le lán-chroí chun Dé.

In aois a 31 chuaigh sé isteach i mainistir, ach fuair sé cead ansin imeacht ina dhíthreabhach. Chuaigh sé go Nazarat, agus chónaigh sé i mbothán i ngáirdín Shiúracha San Clár, ag iarraidh a shaol a chaitheamh ag déanamh aithrise ar Íosa. Mhair taithí Nazarat leis i gcónaí, agus i measc a lucht leanúna ciallaíonn Nazarat simplíocht bheatha agus doimhneacht spioradálta. Ach mhair cuimhní na hAilgéire agus Morocco leis fosta. Sa bhliain 1901 chuaigh sé chun na hAilgéire agus chuir sé faoi amuigh i ngaineamhlach an Sahara ag Beni Abbés, agus ansin ag Tamanrasset i measc na dTuareg, "a bhráithre d'Ioslam".

Shamhlaigh sé comhlúadar a mhairfeadh i measc na mbocht, ag obair lena lámha agus ag urnaí os comhair na Naomh-Shacraiminte. Scríobh sé cur síos iomlán ar an fhís a bhí aige, agus tar éis a bháis bhunaigh an sagart René Voillaume Bráithriní Íosa in 1931, agus bhunaigh an tSiúr Magdaleine Siúiríní Íosa in 1939.

Tá 'teaghlach' Charles de Foucauld

lonnaithe in Éirinn le blianta fada anois. Tháinig Siúiríní Íosa a chónaí in Labré Park i mBaile Fhormaid leis an lucht siúil in 1974. As sin tháinig muintearas na sagart (Íosa-Caritas), agus grúpaí Íosa-Caritas i measc an phobail chomh maith. Tá Siúiríní Íosa ina gcónaí i gContae an Dúin faoi láthair.



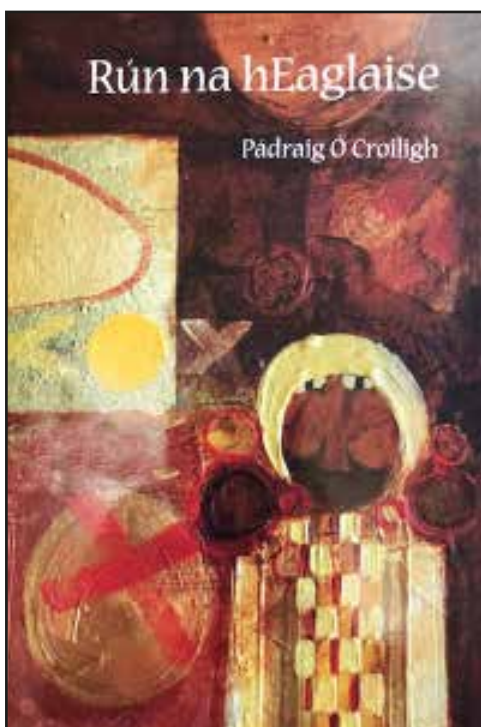
An Sagart Jim Murphy, duine de na Siúiríní, agus páiste, i Rwanda



An tSiúr Magdaleine, bunaitheoir Siúiríní Íosa, ag Tre Fontane sa Róimh



An Sagart Eric Lozada, Íosa-Caritas, ar chamall



## An Cóineartú

Tá sé deacair a bheith críostaí inniu. Tá a oiread sin ag cur ina choinne. Dearnadh agus fealsúnacht sholta ceann acu, polaitíocht dhomhanda ceann eile, agus brú láidir i dtreo an phléisiúir amháin ceann eile go fóill. Ní thioctadh le duine ar bith a bheith críostaí gan cuidiú ó Dhia sa Spiorad Naomh i lár an tsaoil seo inniu.

Tá sé deacair ag aos óg an lae inniu go háirithe mar go bhfuil a oiread de chultúr na n-óg dírithe ar an olc. Fiú amháin na focail a úsáideann siad ina gcaint féin sa Bhearla, tá siad tiontaithe bunoscionn acu. Mar shampla, is ionann wicked agus iontach

maith. Má éistean tú le liricí an phopcheoil is féidir an rud céanna a aithint agus in amanna is teanga eile ar fad í seachas an teanga a úsáideann daoine fásta. Teanga aonarach, uaigneach, shealadach. Teanga nach bhfuil geallúint ná dóchas ná pobal ina croí.

Is iontach an tarraingt chun aonarachta atá sa chultúr sin, agus is iontach an dóigh ar athraíodh tuiscint na bhfocal, go fiú an focal bás. I saol s'againne tuigimid go bhfuil ceangal ag an bhás leis an saol atá á chaitheamh agat, agus leis an saol a thioctaidh ina dhiaidh. Beidh ceangal idir an saol úr sin agus cáilíochtaí na beatha a chuir tú i gcrích.

Ach is cosúil nach ionann sin agus an tuigbheáil atá ag déagóirí an lae inniu. Cuid acu, is ar an bhás mar ócáid mhór a mheabhraíonn siad, ócáid an chliú agus an cháil. Tá cuid éigin dó sin sa ghalar pobail atá mar phréamh ag an fhéinmhárú, agus níl an locht uile ar an mhuintir óga. Táimid i ndiaidh domhan a chruthú nach bhfuil de chiall leis ach cúbláil agus alpadh, agus caithfidh na daoine óga dóigheanna a fhoghlaim le maireachtáil leis, nó imeacht as. Fiú sna scoileanna bímid ag brú orthu féin-mhuinín a bheith acu oiread sin nach bhfuil a fhios acu an dóigh le bheith ag brath ar a chéile.

B'fhéidir nach bhfuil ansin ach barraíocht spéise a bheith á cur ag an duine ann féin. Ní hamháin go dtiocfadh leis seo a bheith ag cur leis an bhrú agus leis an easpa dóchais is cúis leis an fhéinmhárú ach thioctadh leis fosta a bheith ag cur bacanna sa bhealach ar thuiscint ar an phósadh agus ag cur le líon na bpóstaí briste. Má chuireann tú beirt le chéile a bhfuil barraíocht spéise acu iontu féin, beidh sé deacair orthu dóigheanna a fhoghlaim le bheith ag brath ar a chéile, agus ní féidir lánúin a chruthú gan sin.

(Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*.)



*Saying that there will be no renewal in the Irish Church without groups of young committed believers who are prepared to let community mould, prune and inspire them, Bishop Donal sees pandemic as an opportunity for...*

## Clearing the ground for some of Columba's wisdom to take root again in our lifetime

CELEBRATING the Feast of St Columba, who was born almost 1,500 years ago, Bishop Donal noted that he was remembered as "a strong-minded believer who drove himself and others to lay solid foundations on which others would build".

In his homily during Mass on June 9 in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, the bishop considered how these qualities of Derry's Patron Saint had been developed through the self-discipline of community life in a monastery; a simple lifestyle, built around community prayer, hard work and learning.

"Those early monks knew that, together, they could develop great craftsmanship," he said, adding: "A self-centred culture is the author of its own destruction".

Referring to the battle against Covid-19 and what lessons could be learnt from Columba, Bishop Donal remarked: "We have seen that real heroes are those who give generously of themselves and work in teams. There will be no renewal in the Irish Church without groups of young committed believers who are prepared to let community mould, prune and inspire them".

He also pointed out that, down through the centuries, healthy communities of faith were known to not be inward looking.

"Wise leaders," he said, "in the past have been able to face the future without having to know all the details of where they were

going. When you trust in the wisdom of God, you can believe that divine grace will build on the shaky foundations that we lay. Faith means acting in good faith and leaving the rest to God".

"Because he had that trust", added Bishop Donal, "Columba did not leave these shores because he sought early retirement in the sun. He wanted to go out – from Ireland, from himself, from what he knew. When you believe in the God who loves you, you are prepared to face fear and not be crushed by it. Deep faith makes strong people".

Recalling that Columba had "left Ireland after a battle over a book", Bishop Donal said: "We all have skeletons in our cupboard – mistakes, bad decisions, things we are embarrassed or ashamed of. But Columba was able to take responsibility for his past. He was not trapped by it nor did he pretend that whatever happened was all somebody else's fault."

"In our own country, we can be tethered by the need to blame others for our actions or inaction. And we can see people around the world who misuse religious values in order to avoid facing the truth. Jesus insists that following His way leads to the truth and that there alone we find life for here and for hereafter".

"There is much in the past of this island and of our church that we need to face, however uncomfortable that might be,"

he continued, saying: "Denying the truth traps us in living a lie and in angrily defending that lie. Columba might tell us that you can build the future only on the foundation of truth and regret about the past. A person of faith can live with the mistakes of the past because they believe in God who has reconciled all things to himself in Jesus. Someone else has borne the cross of our mistakes. We don't have to be crushed by sin and its consequences. Columba knew that only the truth will set us free. That is a wisdom that is valid in every generation".

Saying that Covid-19 had "put paid" to plans to begin a year of preparation to mark the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of Columba, Bishop Donal remarked: "As people of faith, we see the pandemic, not merely as something that thwarts our plans but as a reality that can be seen as clearing the ground for some of Columba's wisdom to take roots again in our lifetime."

"There will, undoubtedly, be many celebrations of this figure from the depths of history, and I hope they will bring new waves of visitors to this city. But Columba would ask his children not just to study lessons about him but to learn lessons from him. The grace of God inspired him. He would want people to be inspired by him, and not just be entertained by stories about him".



*Ivor Doherty, of the Long Tower, writes about how St Columba's Day, June 9, 2020, was the strangest he had ever participated in...*

## Being at the Calvary with such a small number was very surreal

EVER since 1897, June 9, St Columba's Day, has been celebrated in the grounds of Long Tower Church. After the Rosary in Irish at the Calvary, Mass is celebrated in the Church, and then there is the procession to the well for the blessing of the water.

Only once since 1897, in 1908, was it not celebrated in that way, since folks were too busy knocking down the old church and building the new one, which we all know and love so well.

This year, a very small number gathered at the Calvary to recite the Rosary, just to keep faith with the past and all the souls who gathered there over so many years. Bishop Donal McKeown celebrated Mass in an empty church and then blessed the water which had been drawn from St Columba's Well earlier in the day. I found it a very surreal

experience being at the Calvary with such a small number and even stranger to be inside the church on such a date with no one present. May that be the last time that happens.

Down the years, people who have left the Long Tower Parish to live elsewhere always came back on June 9, not only for the commemorations but also to meet up with old acquaintances and rekindle past friendships. Others would invade the upper graveyard to take leaves off the two oak trees and pin them to their chests.

Another great memory for people would be hearing the singing of the age-old Long Tower hymn, 'St Columba', written in 1897 for the 1,300th anniversary of his death by Mr Eddie Conaghan, who was the organist.

I have a memory of a well known man in Derry, Hugh (Whitey)

O'Neill, who, at every opportunity, in any circumstance, would want to sing that hymn, which he described as the National Anthem of the Long Tower. Whitey left us a number of years ago for a better place.

I missed meeting my old school chum, John McCormack, who for many years was there also, and we would meet up and talk about old times, war stories, and remember other boys from our class, as well as our teacher, Mr Seamus Kelly.

The absence of St Columba's Temperance Association Brass and Reed Band, playing both in the graveyard and at the Well, was another missing ingredient to this splendid long-standing occasion.

*(Photographs by Ivor Doherty)*





*Receiving award for community service alongside Bishop Ken Good, Bishop Donal says they are looking forward to...*

# Celebrating our shared past with centenary commemoration of St Columba's birth



Bishops Ken Good and Donal McKeown with Burt parishioner, Kathleen Grant, during their Gartan to Derry walk

HONoured to have received a Lambeth Award for Community Service from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Donal has pointed out that while the award was in recognition of the contributions by him and the former Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry & Raphoe, Rt Rev Ken Good, "there has been a huge amount of active inter-church work here for decades".

He added: "I am not merely talking about prayer together or inter-church dialogue. The Churches, specifically in the City, have carved out a role for themselves in civic life."

"The Churches Trust," he went on to note, "has worked on social issues for decades, while The Inner City Trust, again led by the Churches at senior level, played a major role in regenerating the City

centre".

Bishop Donal also pointed to the great relationship and work of the late Bishops Edward Daly and James Mehaffey, Church of Ireland, which had led to them being awarded the Freedom of the City in 2015, just before the Council boundaries were redrawn."

He went on to note that Bishop Ken had "laboured long and faithfully in this corner of the Lord's vineyard. Anything I have done in my few years here was built on the foundations that others had laid before my arrival."

Feeling privileged to have received the Award along with his former Church of Ireland counterpart, Bishop Donal remarked: "As the disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered, the Truth can be encountered by those who walk together. +Ken

and I sought to walk together as a symbol of the pilgrim Church, making space for Christ to make our hearts burn within us".

Indeed, they celebrated their shared Christian witness and common Columban heritage in a series of joint pilgrimages in 2017, which saw them walking together from St Columba's birthplace in Gartan to Derry, and travelling to the Saint's resting place in Iona. This was followed by other joint walks across their dioceses to raise awareness of their shared Columban vocation to "Preserve with each other sincere charity and peace".

Saying that he and Bishop Ken had been heavily involved in the Irish Church Peace Project, Bishop Donal went on to recall the four main churches setting up a 1916/2016 centenary project,

involving 13 post-primary schools across the community and cross-border.

"Now, we are looking forward to celebrating our shared past as we commemorate the Centenary of St Columba's birth," he said, adding: "What Bishop Ken and I may have done is merely the tip of an iceberg of good work and good relations!"

Recalling welcoming Archbishop Welby to Derry in 2018, Bishop Donal expressed the hope that the Award will be an encouragement to both Church and wider civic society, adding: "I look forward to building on the existing links with Canterbury long into the future."

A total of 32 people, involved in evangelism, Religious Life, safeguarding, ecumenism, theology and interfaith relations, received recognition this year through the Lambeth Awards, which acknowledge "outstanding contributions to the Church and wider society". As well as from the United Kingdom, other recipients came from New Zealand, Kenya, and America.

Each awarded a Langton Award for Community Service, Bishop Donal's was for "his exceptional and sustained dedication to the cause of peace and social cohesion in an environment of traditional interdenominational tension", and Bishop Ken's was for "giving strategic leadership to the local church to engage fully with the community, throughout his ordained ministry, most of which was in the complex community of Northern Ireland."

The Awards are usually presented at a ceremony at Lambeth Palace, in London, the official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, but this year's ceremony has had to be cancelled because of Covid-19.

Humbled to receive the Award, Bishop Ken said that he felt "doubly blessed to receive this honour alongside my friend in Christ, Bishop Donal McKeown. This simultaneous recognition of the work of two bishops is a source



of great encouragement".

"The pursuit of peace is a noble endeavour", he added, "but the journey is frequently challenging and can feel lonely. I'm thankful for having had Bishop Donal as a trusted companion in what became for us a joint quest."

"Donal and I do what we do because of a sense of calling. Jesus told his disciples to love one

another, and that is a command we have sought to live up to and to share as best we can, whatever the cost. In this, we have been privileged to follow in the footsteps of inspirational predecessors.

"I hope that the Archbishop's generous gesture towards us will inspire peacemakers elsewhere in God's Kingdom. To God be the glory."



Bishop Donal and Bishop Ken setting out again from Burt Chapel, on their way to Derry from Gartan, in Co Donegal.



The gathering in St Augustine's Church when Bishop Donal and Bishop Ken arrived in Derry, having walked from St Columba's birthplace in Gartan, Co Donegal, in 2017.



# We look back with gratitude...and look forward with trust – *Bishop Donal*



**S**T Patrick's Church, Pennyburn, in The Three Patrons' Parish, in Derry City, was the setting for the celebration of the first public Mass in the Diocese with the ease of the Covid-19 lockdown.

Parish priest, Fr Michael McCaughey welcomed Bishop Donal for the celebration of the 7.30 am Mass on June 29, the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul, and thanked all the parish volunteers who had helped prepare the three churches in the parish for the return of congregations.

Acknowledging anyone joining in via webcam, Fr Michael had a special welcome for the congregation sitting socially distanced in the pews before him, saying: "It is lovely to see you here

for Mass this morning."

Recalling that his last public Mass before lockdown had taken place in St Patrick's Church as well, for the celebration of St Patrick's Day, Bishop Donal gave thanks for the strength so many had shown.

"We can look back and say with St Paul, 'The Lord stood by us and gave us power,'" he said, adding: "We have been blessed by those who, like Peter, held church and community together: workers throughout the diocese,

parishes; priests and the parish communities who have supported them; those who, like Paul, have tried to hand on the faith and good news; and youth workers and those in communication ministries.

"We are moving beyond one difficult chapter. We don't need to know where God is leading us; we know that the Lord will stand by us and give us power. We look back with much gratitude over the last months and we look forward with trust. That is what Peter, Paul and Patrick would ask us to do."

Celebrating Mass for the Feast Day also in St Eugene's Cathedral, the Mother Church of the Diocese, Bishop Donal spoke of Jesus' instruction to the disciples about what they should expect

"when they go out to proclaim that it is possible to renew the face of the earth".

"That mission of Jesus' disciples is as difficult today as it was then," he remarked, before going on to state: "In any age, if the disciples of Jesus do not seek to play an uncomfortable challenging role, if the Church becomes tasteless and without inspiration and hope, if the Church becomes too aligned to the dominant ideology of the powerful, then it loses its prophetic voice".

Referring to talk, both by Jesus and St Paul, about dying to ourselves and losing our lives for Jesus' sake, Bishop Donal said: "That is not a welcome message. The dominant ideology tells us that self-indulgence offers us the

best that we can hope for.

"We have discovered over the last three months that there are many beautiful things to enjoy that cost nothing...Real freedom is based on deliberately choosing the good, the true and beautiful even if that means depriving myself of some immediate pleasure".

## Cherish

Hoping that lessons had been learnt about life since lockdown began in March, he said: "This is a time to cherish those lessons and not to allow the insights to be lost in a tsunami of going back to the future...It will take many people time to overcome the fear of mixing again. We want our churches to be places where people can share the infectious good news of the Gospel – but avoid being Corona-infected through selfishness and carelessness. We have to begin cautiously.

"These next weeks will be a time for discovering the Resurrection that St Paul talks about in writing to the Romans...As with Jesus, it will be to a new way of being alive and being the Body of Christ. As happened 2,000 years ago, Resurrection will not be easy to understand. But, as with Jesus, this new form of 'resurrection' is a call to come together so that we can be sent out. The prophetic voice always speaks of hope and a different future".

In a later homily, for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Bishop Donal spoke on the Parable of the Sower, remarking: "The Church is challenged to ensure that we are proclaiming a hope-filled message, even in the midst of the present situation. And that message of hope is needed."

Referring to "largish groups in society and church who have a narrative about the 'fear agenda' being promoted by the establishment to fool and control people", he pointed out that Jesus' message was "never based on stoking the flames of fear".

"He will point out uncomfortable truths," said Bishop Donal, "but he always offers a way through and a way forward. People of faith are asked to keep sowing seeds of hope, not announcing a harvest of despair".

He added: "Our job in parishes is to do everything we can here and now for the people who need to hear good news – and leave it to God to worry about the future of the Church."

Congratulating parishes "on reaching out to and gathering parishioners as soon as at all possible", he continued: "We will make mistakes and have to learn lessons. And we must be sure that we do not endanger anyone. But Jesus would rather that we were remembered for being too zealous than for being too frightened.

"The bible is full of stories about those who were pushed away beyond their perceived limits. Fear imprisons but Jesus wants to liberate us...We offer Jesus' message of hope and we have to ensure we find ways for that hope to be proclaimed and celebrated...Graced growth will come through those who sow and who believe that flowers can bloom in the most unexpected of places. The sower in the parable saw beyond the rocks and the briars. That is a message for every age. If pubs can do their best to welcome people, so can churches".

## The love of Christ urges us on (2 Cor 5:14) by *Bishop Donal*

THIS period of enforced lockdown has been a time of challenges and grace. As the People of God, with St Paul, we can say that it is the love of Christ that drives us on. Sharing good news and mercy within our communities is at the heart of being parish; focussed on God and each other. Pastoral charity is at the heart of the diocesan priest's vocation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created challenges which we have faced as a diocesan family and as parish communities. It has been a time of stress and unexpected change, and that cannot be played down.

Lockdown has taken its toll on people and priests. At the same time, we have seen a great wave of initiatives across the diocese.

Parishes have worked to engage with and support each other in a myriad of ways. I would like to commend the many priests and people who reached out to their communities within the many limitations placed on us all.

The return to public worship is just one stage on a new journey. There will be many more stages. But we journey in faith, in the company of Christ. We do not know, and do not need to know, what the future will be like. Our calling as Christians is to do and be the best that we can at this moment, and leave the rest to the Lord of the Harvest, the God of surprises.

There are two priorities that guide parishes at this stage of the journey. Firstly, the People of God have a right to access their

churches, all the sacraments of the Church and generous pastoral care. Many people of faith have a deep hunger to be part of a congregation at Mass. Many have found it very painful that they were unable to gather in church, unable to celebrate Mass, receive Holy Communion and the other sacraments. A lot of parishioners wish to have their children baptised or to make their First Holy Communion or Confirmation. The absence of full funeral rituals has left scars for very many people.

Secondly, these rights entail responsibilities which we owe to others. At a time such as this, we have to ensure that we all act in ways which protect the vulnerable and minimise the risk of the spread of the virus. The Common

Good is at least as important as my rights or comfort. We proclaim the sacredness of life. Part of being pro-life involves protection from harm.

In all that we do, we are still guided by the principles of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan: Building welcoming communities; Growing in faith together; and Making Jesus known and loved.

The Irish Bishops' Conference Framework Document on reopening churches, aims to give parish communities guidance in planning, allow room for local circumstances and solutions, and ensure that we have consistent best practice across the diocese.

This will not be an easy task. Many people are very wary of leaving their homes or gathering in public places. The process of

normalisation will take some time. Things will never be quite the same again.

But, as St Paul discovered, we have to be courageous in the service of the Gospel, and to learn from our mistakes. Circumstances and government regulations will keep changing. But, if each parish has been developing an honest consultative approach, the wisdom and generosity of God's people will be able to discern the best way forward, one step at a time.

Our guidelines are meant to support parishes in their own preparations for a return to the public celebration of Mass and the sacraments. No church should be opened for public prayer or worship until satisfactory arrangements, as indicated in

this Framework, have been put in place.

It is most important that people who are vulnerable or unwell, and especially those with any symptoms that might suggest Covid-19 infection, should stay at home and, if possible, participate, as now, via webcam, social media, television or radio. The same applies to those who have been in recent contact with someone who has the virus, in accordance with public health advice.

Thus, I welcome these pastoral reflections from parishioners. It is good that we can see where God was in the confusion and learn lessons. It is by sharing such insights that we can discern God's way forward for us.



AS we begin to gather again for the public celebration of our faith, in line with restrictions due to Covid-19, people in parishes around the Diocese have been sharing their experience of life in lockdown, and how their faith and the abundance of on-line prayer ministry has been a wonderful source of strength and comfort during this challenging time for humanity world-wide. The first of the reflections are featured here, with the rest to be continued in the next edition of 'The Net'.

*Aghyaran...*

## We thank God for His protection

WHEN Fr John Gilmore, our retired parish priest, celebrated Mass in St Patrick's Church, Aghyaran, on March 17, little did we realise that it would be June 30 before we participated fully again.

That week, schools and businesses closed, ceremonies were postponed, Lenten Services discontinued and attendance at Mass suspended. On March 22, our Mass problem was resolved when our parish priest, Fr Paul Fraser broadcast Sunday Mass on our newly installed webcam. We were delighted, especially as our families from further afield were able to participate. It has been a blessing.

In Holy Week, we had our full quota of Masses, including one on Spy Wednesday especially for the children, when Fr Paul made great use of our beautiful Easter Garden to explain the Easter Story. On Good Friday, as well as Mass, we had the Stations of the Cross followed by an inspirational Penitential Service. We even got our Easter Water and Palm Cross delivered, along with an Easter

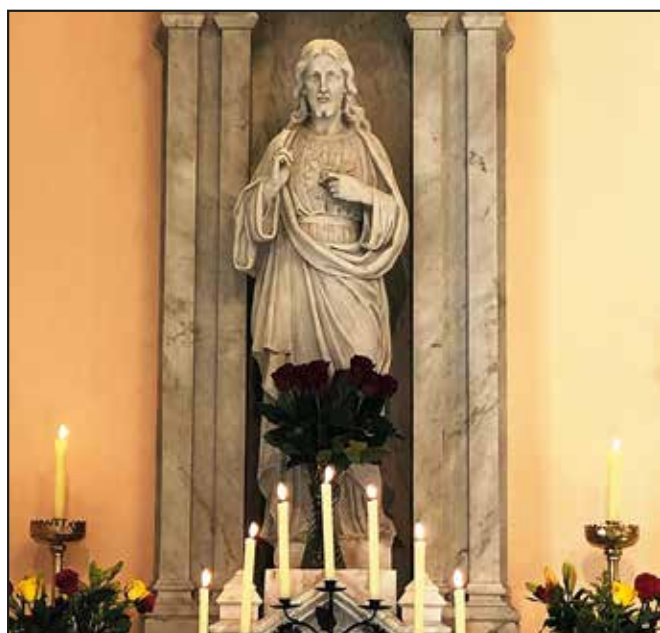
Egg and a poem by Mrs Rosemary Connolly, 'When the world stood still', compliments of St Davog's and Fr Paul.

As the pandemic restrictions ease, we look back on the three months plus of lockdown which brought out the best in our community. Volunteers were at the end of the 'phone, shops delivered goods when contacted and dinners were distributed to those shielding. Families who lost loved ones were consoled and helped too. Self-distancing friends and neighbours lined the roadsides to say goodbye.

The staff of our local St Caireall's PS worked tirelessly throughout, providing work packs for the children, and Fr Paul marked those days which should have been special – First Holy Communion, Confirmation, Leaving.

Now that near normal Mass has resumed, we thank God for His protection of this little peninsular part of Tyrone which is Aghyaran.

(Sadie)



Ardmore parishioner reading at Mass

*Ardmore*

## We witnessed true meaning of Church



Fr Neil Farren with pre-lockdown haircut.

WHO would ever have imagined the reality we are living in now? Whether regular Church goer or not, few would have thought churches would close even for private prayer. So, what happens in a parish when pandemic hits?

Well, this is where we see the importance of being in touch with the people coming to the fore. The parish priest in Ardmore, Fr Neil Farren has, over the years, built a strong Pastoral Team that has been working diligently to involve all parishioners in shaping the parish for the future.

Although the review of a recent parish survey was stopped because of the pandemic, the consultation itself was a good beginning to building a stronger, more inclusive, parish community.

Initially, the only word to describe the feeling of most was 'shock'. All of us, Parish Pastoral Council members included, tuned in to watch the lone figure of Fr Farren on the altar offering Mass and praying the Rosary in an empty church. For a few weeks we watched and prayed with mixed feelings of it being great to have a priest, guilt that we couldn't do anything to help, and an uneasiness that maybe things could be different but not sure how.

It was in the course of a conversation airing some of those feelings that a suggestion was made to have a volunteer to assist Fr Farren in Mass responses and the Rosary prayer. Thanks to the willingness of PPC members, and the amazing enthusiasm shown

by both past and present Pope John Paul II Award participants, a new dimension was added to our experience of both Mass and Rosary.

The experience of the JP2 participants meant they were familiar with being involved and taking part in Church ceremonies. With many people living in fear and worried about what was happening, it was the turn of our young people to step up and help parishioners in Ardmore stay connected spiritually with each other via webcam and Facebook Live; a new dimension in our use of social media. And step up they surely did, and very soon brought their own personalities to the fore, reading and singing at Mass and Rosary.

In the following weeks, we witnessed the true meaning of Church – the acceptance and inclusion of all. Fr Farren has reached out to the various groups and people in the parish and encouraged them to be actively involved during this time of difficulty.

It is great to see how it has given a sense of human connectedness at a time when we have been forced apart by the conditions imposed on us because of the pandemic. The wide variety of individuals and family groups involved from some of the youngest to the more mature, spans the whole parish community and encourages others to join online and participate.

Those who have taken part have spoken of how "lovely it was to be in the Chapel". It has allowed for spiritual growth but also personal, with some who have never read or sung in chapel before suddenly finding themselves taking a lead, giving a true sense of achievement.

The interactions between priest and parishioner – men, women and young people – on the altar of St Mary's Church every morning and evening for both Mass and Rosary, have brought the true teaching of the Gospel to life.

We are all invited to become active members of the Body of Christ – the Church. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, Fr Farren spoke of the "sense of togetherness in the Body of Christ" created by the involvement of local parishioners



Curryniet Community Association.



JP2 Award Participants from Ardmore Parish.

in the offering of the Mass, the recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the praying of the Rosary.

Those isolated at home have relished the participation of family and friends, and identified with the ceremonies even more as a result. Add in the Facebook live element and there is a real feeling of parish community gathering for Mass and Rosary. People are finding a source of consolation knowing that others are joining in with them.

We, as a Parish community, are indebted to the forward thinking and encouragement shown by Fr Farren to realise the true meaning of 'parish' and 'church', especially during this time of challenge. As important as the chapel is, true Church is about the people who make up that Church. We acknowledge the willingness of Pope John Paul Award participants and members of Curryniet Community Association, Ardmore GAA, St Mary's Folk Group and the

Ardmore Cricket Club to both participate and encourage others as well.

The delegation of this task to others by Fr Farren has further increased the number of people involved. The fantastic mix of current volunteers and new, young children being involved with their parents and families, and the discovery of such willingness among the parishioners to be involved, is something to be proud of. This active participation at a time when faced with the unknown has left Ardmore Parish well placed to meet the various challenges that will face so many when this present crisis is over.

The opportunity to reach out and involve parishioners has certainly been embraced by Fr Farren and the members of Ardmore Parish Pastoral Council, and presents the real possibility for an exciting and vibrant future for this parish.

(Pat)



Glendermott PS.



## Ardstraw East (Newtownstewart)...

# Early blessing of parish townlands kept us safe during pandemic



IT was only when I looked back on our Parish Facebook page that it occurred to me the mountain of activity which Fr Colhoun and the pastoral forum of Ardstraw East have provided during lockdown 2020, with hundreds of people from different corners of the world engaged in our Parish activity.

I managed to count at least 25 individual activities. They included: Blessing the Parish on wheels, Rosary with Cora and Paddy, candle of hope, Blessing of Palms at home, arts

& crafts, singing for Easter, Mr McGlone's 50th birthday video, Divine Mercy Sunday, Blessing of Glenock graveyard, May devotions, May altar photos, Mass for First Holy Communicants followed by gift bags & video slideshow, The Great Parish Bake-off (Fr Colhoun being the Parish taster), floral arch for the month of the Sacred Heart, Blessing of new statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and St Joseph and the Christ Child, together with the beautiful illuminated crown for the statue of Our Lady.

Then there was the end of year Mass for the children and primary seven leavers of St Patrick's PS. Glenock Church was adorned with artwork of the children's favourite saints, which took a lot of preparation. The penultimate activity on the list was the blessing of two new reader stands for St Eugene's Church and finally there was little Clodagh Marie McNamee ringing the bell.

In the background, a renovation of St Mary's Oratory has taken place during lockdown, with Fr Colhoun seeing no opportunity wasted!

Any resource that could be used was utilised, to the extent that music stands were adorned with home-made ambo falls, a microphone stand and selfie stick on wheels made for a brilliant makeshift camera stand for live Masses. All were temporary measures until the reality set in that social distancing was going to

be a part of life for the foreseeable future and more permanent fixtures were invested in.

Shauneen Kilpatrick, Anne McDonnell, Martin Kerrigan and I all rallied around and contributed where possible; Martin who had been furloughed from work becoming resident video camera operator, preparer of Church candles and bell ringer. Shauneen, who was still busy working for the NHS and caring for her family, dedicated every ounce of spare time to assist Fr Colhoun and the Parish. Her creativity and forward thinking brought many of our Parish lockdown activities to the forefront, too many of which to begin to name individually. She quickly became resident reader for live Masses too. Anne McDonnell's hidden talents in flower arranging and poetry were a creative delight and her steadfast advice was often called upon through our group messenger. As

Facebook became Fr Colhoun's main means of communication to the masses of people, my digital skills were called upon. I, too, went from a parishioner with a pastoral forum role to a resident reader at Sunday Mass.

Besides the projects that have taken place, the live Masses and Rosaries, together with the Blessing of our townlands and perimeters of our homes in the Parish, Fr Colhoun became the sole deliverer of collection envelopes for the Parish!

We have been guided spiritually throughout this testing time in our lives by Fr Roland, who has helped bring the presence of God even more into our homes through his prayer and encouragement. To quote Cathy Flanagan, who is a parishioner of Ardstraw East: "Fr Colhoun has always encouraged leading the faith through our children, but during lockdown I feel that he has

reached into our homes, made us feel protected and closer to God with his prayer around the Parish and his presence on Facebook through live Masses and little impromptu videos. A lot of local people have put their safety throughout the pandemic down to Fr Colhoun's early blessing of the townlands of the Parish, and I totally agree with them".

During this very testing time, Fr Colhoun has suffered his own personal loss, the sudden death of his dear friend and colleague, Mary Hampdon, RIP.

As so many of his past parishioners have commented on the Parish Facebook page: "Ardstraw East are a very fortunate and blessed parish to have Fr Colhoun", and the pastoral forum are in total agreement with these sentiments!

(Ashlene)

## Ardstraw West & Castlederg...

# Ringling of chapel bell and candle burning before Tabernacle a great comfort



IN our parish, St Mary's Dregish and St Francis, Drumnabey, closed during lockdown. Fr Paul Fraser continued with Mass in St Patrick's Castlederg, on Saturday evenings, Monday mornings and Friday mornings.

It was a great relief that we could continue to attend Mass via the newly installed webcam. What a blessing and just in time! Fr Paul also set up a Facebook page and through that could let everyone know what was happening. The parishioners could also communicate with him and know that he was ok too.

Some Masses were recorded, including funerals, and so could be watched by those who could

not attend at the time.

The ringing of the Chapel bell on Thursday evenings at 8 pm in support of NHS workers and key workers, and the lighting of the blue candle which burned in front of the Tabernacle, were little things that were very comforting.

For Holy Week, Fr Paul set up a sacred space in his home and encouraged us to do the same. Beginning on Palm Sunday with our palms and continuing with the Crucifix and small stones and rocks representing our sins on Good Friday. For Easter, we added photos of our families and those we could not be with. The Easter Masses were so beautiful and comforting and brought joy and hope to our days.

Moving into May, we made May Altars dedicated to The Blessed Virgin Mary, and these were decorated with flowers of all kinds, gathered from our gardens and wildflowers.

The Children's Mass took place and the children sent photos of their May Altars to Fr Paul.

For June, our sacred spaces changed again, with it being the month of The Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Now with great expectations, our chapels are open for the public celebration of Masses, though with restrictions in place for now. I would like to thank Fr Paul for all his prayers and support during such a difficult time for us all.

(Marie)



Fr John Forbes, PP.

## Lower Badoney (Gortin & Rouskey)...

# We dug deep and the results were amazing

IT seems a long, long time since the beginning of Covid-19 lockdown. Had we been told at the beginning of March that we would be four months out of our comfort zone, then we might have emigrated or dug underground shelters for ourselves...but, I'm being negative.

We did dig deep and the positive results were amazing, both individually and community wise. People surprised themselves by what they were capable of. Many parishioners became involved in volunteering, which covered shopping, cooking, collecting

prescriptions, delivering PPE to surgeries and hospitals, taking people to medical appointments, 'phone calls to people living alone, the housebound and the self-isolating along, with humorous cards sent to people in care homes.

What effect did this have on the fit and healthy parishioners? Volunteering made them realise that they had a lot to offer, boosted their confidence and made them feel good about themselves. Volunteering made them realise that they shouldn't wait to be asked and that we had a lot to be grateful for.

We are very thankful to our priest, Fr John Forbes, who kept our community together by his webcam services and possibly reignited the faith in some.

When things got tough at times and the hill got steeper, by stopping and thinking that we are a vital cog in the community wheel got us going again.

Wheels keep rolling and we, as the cogs in this parish wheel, will, with God's help, overcome and come out stronger.

(Alice)



St Patrick's Church, Castlederg.



## Badoney Upper (Plumbridge & Cranagh)... People longed to be present again at Eucharistic table



A cross was erected at St Patrick's Cranagh on Good Friday, when people gathered in their cars for the ceremony, and will remain as a reminder of the Covid-19 pandemic.

LOCKDOWN in our Badoney Upper Parish was challenging but overall it was a very positive experience. The curtailment due to the pandemic gave us a deeper appreciation of what is most important in life, such as family, friends, the gift of time, the gift and beauty of nature.

We learned that the things which do not cost anything, such as spending time with family, taking time to reflect and being still, are more important than the fast pace of life which we are often pulled into.

Many people in the parish adopted a slower pace of living. Many took up walking and cycling, while children learned new skills like baking, planting vegetables and doing their school work remotely from home.

The lockdown brought out the best in the people of our parish, with many volunteers giving support to those in need and isolating or vulnerable, by delivering food parcels to them and checking that they were doing alright.

Our parishioners found solace in prayer, joining online daily

Mass and praying the Rosary for protection. Our parish priest offered Mass each day for every family in the parish and was always there at the end of the 'phone for those in need, especially the sick in our parish; offering his prayers and support.

Our first Mass, after being without it for almost 13 weeks, was a joy filled occasion for the parish. Everyone felt the pain of being without the Eucharist and longed to be present, once again, at the Eucharistic table.

The bond of community was very evident, and we had a strong appreciation that we cannot exist as an island.

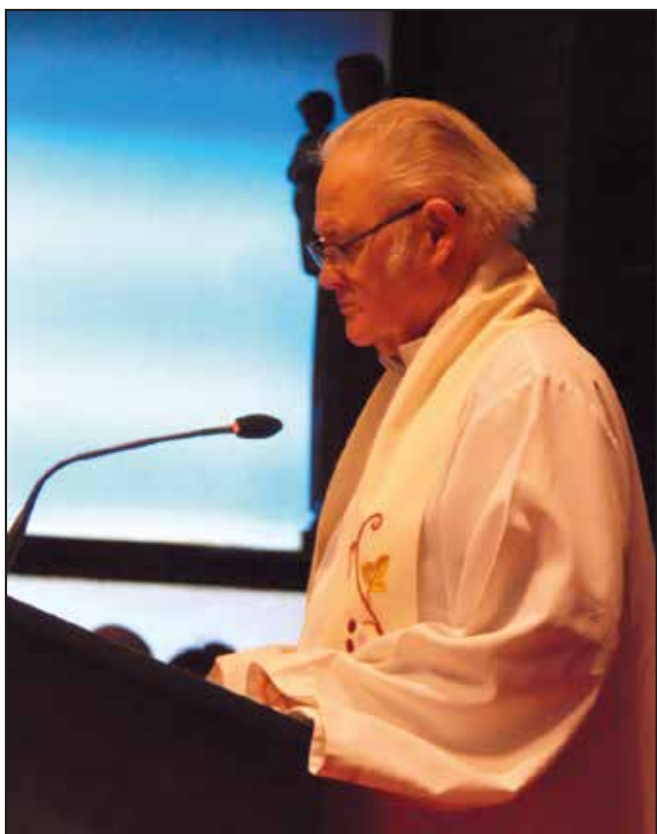
St Augustine once said, 'God is closer to us than we are to ourselves'. Who knows what the next few months will bring - we look forward in hope.

(Clement)



Sacred Heart Church, Plumbridge

## Ballymagroarty (Holy Family)... Many reconnected with their faith



OUR parish priest, Fr Paddy O'Kane has done tremendously well in his efforts to continue ministry during lockdown despite dealing with illness. He did

his best to reach out to people, doing audio reflections as well as streaming the celebration of Mass, and putting prayer resources for during this time of pandemic on

the parish website. All of this was very comforting to people.

I liked that he kept parishioners involved in the liturgy of the Mass, asking men, women and young people to read at the Masses during the week and at the weekend. My experience of Holy Family is that people are very willing to get involved and there was a great response during lockdown. As well as readers, we also had music and singing for the weekend Masses.

People were really looking forward to getting back to 'normal' Mass. One of the things that struck me during lockdown was the number of people who weren't normally Mass goers but who tuned into the streamed celebration of Mass. There is a yearning there... a connection with their faith, so maybe they will come back to Mass in the chapel after their lockdown experience.

It hasn't been easy for any of us, but I have particular admiration for Fr O'Kane and thank God for giving him the strength and grace to keep going at this time.

(Sr Ann)



Ballinascreen...

## Faith did not lockdown and parish life did not go into quarantine



REFLECTING on my Covid-19 faith experience in Ballinascreen, I consider that, like many, I have had to adapt and compromise has been thrust upon me. It has not all been negative. God has surprised me!

The pain and restrictions have most keenly been felt in death; it is not the same as was. Some families have been denied being at the bedside of a loved one - there are no words to alleviate this pain. The rural community gathering for large wakes, loud renditions of the Rosary, endless cups of tea and packed funerals are no more in Ballinascreen. This is sad for the bereaved and hard for the parish generally.

The bereaved have not, however, been left to get on with it. The willingness of God's people to compromise, to line the roads, to have the Rosary outside with

social distance and to engage in the webcam funeral Mass, has been incredible. It is a new way of doing things but, with the grace of God, we are trying to retain the great tradition we have of supporting the bereaved, and burying and praying for the dead.

I, with the entire Parish, empathise with the couples whose marriages have been postponed, and I feel for the families who have had to wait on Baptism, Communion and Confirmation; in some cases whilst outfits get tighter and shorter.

I have really missed Mass and the Eucharist.

Our Parish has embraced technology and the priests have been amazing in leading from the front, promoting it and utilising it with well-planned ceremonies. The webcam has been well used across the generations. We are now on Facebook engaging daily with a wide audience. We had hundreds of pictures of May Altars. Pastoral meetings are taking place on Zoom! Parishioners are accessing Mass and services across the Diocese and further afield. This is all good. Lockdown pushed us to think in new ways.

Having always been able to attend, I never had to watch Mass on the webcam. I always felt it was a bit of a compromise. It will always be a substitute but I have been blown away by the power of

the online Mass over Lent, Easter and beyond.

At home, we have tried to create a sacred place. We light a candle for online services and set out a statue of Our Lady, a Bible and a Crucifix, so that it is not just watching tv. We waved palms, found a purple cloth for Good Friday and filled bottles of water to be blessed at Easter.

God has surprised me. I have felt connected at Mass, felt the presence of God, the movement of the Holy Spirit and a sense of peace. Spiritual Communion has honestly been a real blessing and full of graces. Before lockdown, I would not have believed that this would all have been possible in an online Mass. God moves in remarkable ways and cannot be underestimated. He is not confined and I have been reminded of this!

As we move out of lockdown, the dedication of our priests and parish volunteers is commendable. Organising the opening of Churches, the resumption of public Mass and timetabling postponed sacraments within Covid guidance has been no easy task.

Summing up, faith did not lockdown and the parish life did not go into quarantine - it was a different way of being Parish.

(Caroline)





## Banagher...

# A renewed sense of gratitude and belonging



WHEN 'lockdown' was announced back in March, we were all in a kind of shock; trying to make sense of what was going on around us and the sudden changes to our daily routines. It was with a sense of disbelief that the world had found itself in this position!

Looking back on those days now, I suppose it was a form of grief that was washing over us.

We had no choice but to say goodbye to the normal and

embark on a new normal. Perhaps, some people may have given into just going with the flow and lounged about, binged-watched the new Disney+ Channel or Netflix, drank tea/coffee/wine, baked banana bread, became acquainted with ZOOM and FaceTime calls, and embraced the time at home. For a lot of others though, the new normal brought with it anxiety and worry about their nearest and dearest regarding Covid-19.

I had not quite felt nor witnessed this type of uncertainty before and the only answer for me was to plan a daily schedule. Having just retired before lockdown, I had always been used to a busy schedule so it didn't take me too long to find another. My days soon filled with prayer, walking, cooking, gardening, reading and listening to news updates in equal measures, alongside living with four dehumidifiers going steady to dry out a very serious leak in the house! I was able to distinguish which day of the week it was according to which road I was walking along first thing each morning. Everyone, in their own way, had slowed down and began to assess and make their own way in this new world.

The beauty of the Banagher Parish, at the foothills of the Sperrins, was reaffirmed daily throughout the lockdown period. Lots of families were out walking along the many roads and lanes.

Mother Nature, in all her glory, did not disappoint us with the birds singing a lot louder than any other year. I was blessed to hear the cuckoo daily on all my roads during May and June.

The beautiful spring weather did help to lift people's spirits. In fact, I met one lady on my walk who said that perhaps it was a sign from above, that God had sent us good weather to help us through these difficult and challenging days. I'm not going to dispute that as it had the desired effect on people's mental health and wellbeing.

We were blessed in Banagher Parish with how Fr Micheal McGavigan supported us during lockdown. Being able to log onto daily Mass, even though it was devastating not to be able to attend Mass, was a daily consolation for a lot of people, and he even mentioned some special and significant birthdays during Mass, which I am sure was appreciated.

It is important to mention the special packages from Fr Micheal, that were delivered to households during Holy Week to enable us to spiritually and physically be involved in the Holy Week and Easter ceremonies. Indeed, parishioners were so appreciative of this kind gesture that some of them prepared a quirky video (social distance measures in place!) to say thank you. It's available on Facebook.

The icing on the cake, I believe, for parishioners was the very kind gesture that Fr Michael performed on Easter Monday. He blessed all graves in the three graveyards in the parish. This was very thoughtful, especially at a time when we could not visit

the graves of our loved ones. That particular sanction was such a cruel blow to a lot of people and Fr Micheal's empathy and actions comforted a lot of families.

Whilst we are still slowly coming out of lockdown and the future is uncertain, as Covid-19 hasn't gone away, I believe we are all in a better place. Hopefully, people will have found peace in the new things that they have discovered about themselves and about the world around them, and have a renewed sense of gratitude and sense of belonging in the parish of Banagher in our 'new normal', along with remembering HOPE and our daily prayers.

(Briege)



## Buncrana...

# Social media helped keep us connected as a parish in prayer

THE parish of Desertegney and Lower Fahan, or Buncrana as it is known, is a busy place. With over 8,000 parishioners and three church buildings, Fr Francis Bradley and Fr John R Walsh, are "kept going". When the first of the lockdown measures came into force with the closing of schools on Thursday, March 12, no one really thought that we would only now, in July, be starting to tiptoe our way out of those necessary restrictions. But, as we now know, that is the reality.

The shutdown came when we were only two weeks into Lent, which leads to the busiest period in the Church calendar. Just the week before, we had begun our five-week Family Lenten programme, focusing on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our 6th Class students were putting their final touches to their preparation for the Sacrament on Confirmation on March 28, and our 2nd Class pupils were getting ready to make their First Confession during Lent. Other celebrations of weddings and baptisms were also in the pipeline and in the diary.

Once it was clear that the measures were in place for the foreseeable future, we streamed our first daily Mass on Wednesday, March 18 on our Parish Facebook page. None of our churches had a webcam, and we all had to quickly learn how to use social media platforms to bring Mass to the parishioners. Our Facebook insights told us that a peak of 94 people tuned in to that first streamed Mass. The next day the peak reached 142, and it grew steadily as the weeks went on. There has been Mass streamed

every day on both Facebook and the parish webcam, which was eventually installed in St Mary's, Cockhill, in Holy Week. All the Holy Week Services, including the lighting of the Paschal Fire on Holy Saturday night went ahead and were able to be seen online, as were the Divine Mercy devotions the following Sunday.

Parishioners were encouraged to set up a sacred space at home and to join in the ceremonies of Holy Week, in ways such as decorating their front doors with palms for Palm Sunday, baking bread for Holy Thursday and later, create red displays for Pentecost as a show of unity even when apart. A benefit of using Facebook was that people could leave comments requesting prayers, or just say 'Good Morning', and this also helped to keep us connected as a parish in prayer. The focus of the parish prayer during this whole time has very much been for those who were affected by Covid-19 and those working on the frontline, as well as praying for an end to the pandemic.

Funeral Masses were streamed and this was so important for the family and friends of the deceased, who couldn't be at the church due to the limit on numbers, but thankfully there was no limit as to how many could watch online. In May and June, Leavers' Masses and 'End of Year' Masses were celebrated for our schools and watched online by the staff, pupils and their families.

The busy Adoration Chapel also had to be closed. Instead, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in St Mary's Oratory during the day, but that also had to be

stopped in due course, although the churches remained open for private prayer throughout this time. In response to this, Fr Bradley began to broadcast a Holy Hour with Exposition each evening at 7 pm. Initially, this took place from his private oratory and then moved to St Mary's Cockhill once the webcam was installed. There was a special Holy Hour for the Confirmation students on the day they were to have received the sacrament and, during the month of May, video messages were created for the 2nd Classes and posted on Facebook on the days that they would have made their First Holy Communion. These videos had messages from their teachers, principals, priests and catechist.

There was a small group who met online using Zoom to finish a video course on the lives of the saints during May, and it is hoped that Zoom will be still be used over the summer to facilitate other short courses, discussion groups and prayer.

Fr Bradley visited some of his sick on his bike, while keeping a safe social distance and, as Parish Catechist, I kept links with the Pope John Paul II Award students who were able to complete hours with the Diocesan Youth Programme online. A weekly family newsletter called 'Catechist Corner' was launched on Pentecost Sunday. It is designed to help families with catechesis and contains teaching, Scripture and some simple colouring activities. The Parish Secretary, Lorna Porter, was contactable via phone or email and was able to point those who needed help or support in the right

direction. Blessed candles and Mass petitions were still required and provided, and bonfires were lit and blessed on June 23.

So, even though we were asked to stay socially apart from one another, ministry in Buncrana Parish was still able to continue and, thankfully, along the banks of Lough Swilly at least, lockdown has not led to meltdown.

(Maire)



## Bellaghy...

# Great to be back at Mass to receive Holy Communion



THE priests have been marvellous in the work they have been doing during lockdown. I don't know how we would have coped without all the prayer they provided on-line for us.

Every morning, Monday to Friday, our parish priest, Mgr Andy Dolan celebrated Mass at 9.30 am. Saturday was left free for family time and then we had 10.30 am Mass on Sundays, at which Fr Liam Donnelly concelebrated. Fr Donnelly also helped out with funeral Masses if Fr Andy wasn't available.

On Monday evenings, we had two parishioners lead the Rosary on-line, and on Tuesday and

Thursday evenings Fr Andy led Night Prayer. We had a half-hour reflection period on Wednesday evenings, which were led by a parishioner, and on Friday evenings, Fr Andy led a half-hour reflection.

We had our Cemetery Sunday Service on-line too and then Fr Andy and Fr Donnelly blessed the graves, with people able to go along and visit the graves in their own time.

It hasn't been easy for our priests celebrating Mass in front of empty seats and people really missed not being able to be physically present at Mass, although it was great to be able to watch it on-line.

When the restrictions were eased and we were able to open our churches for private prayer, our chapel was open for a couple of hours in the day, and eventually it was open for most of the day. This brought great comfort as we had missed not being able to go to the chapel for private prayer, and it is wonderful that we are now back in our chapel for Mass so that we can receive Holy Communion again. Many people really missed that.

(Marie)





St Aengus' Church, Burt.

*Burt, Inch & Fahan...*  
**I could see God in so many kind and good people**

LOCKDOWN and Covid-19 challenged all our lives. Personally, without my faith, I would have become an emotional wreck!

The first few days I was in a tizzy and went in search of Mass by media. I soon found our parish priest, Fr Francis Bradley in Cockhill Chapel, as well as Fr Frank Lynch in Killygordon (St Patrick's), St Eugene's in Derry, and St Eunan's, in Letterkenny.

I found great relaxation and inner peace reciting the nightly Rosary with Bishop McGuckian, and the Examen prayer became such a source of strength for me. With the Examen, you ask God to send you in more depth the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and you dwell on what good things happened in your life this day, then smile about it and be thankful. Well, I felt the benefits immediately.

I could see God working in so many kind and good people who called at our window asking Breige and I was there anything we needed! Our local shop, Callaghan's, brought the shopping and other parishioners brought treats.

One lady organized an al fresco

bingo and we received lots of 'phone calls offering more help. The Burt GAA club was only too willing with help also, which was so much valued.

We should keep all our clergy in our prayers. They, as well as the families who lost loved ones, offered great endurance with the many restrictions owing to Covid-19.

I also ask God to bless all the entertainers who used their gifts from God to lift our hearts in music, song and poetry

Webcam has not been installed in our parish churches yet, at the time of going to press, as the signal is weak. We ask God to bless Fr Fintan Diggin, Fr Kevin Mulhern, Fr. Carlo Centra, and our parish priest, Fr Bradley, and all parishioners safe from Covid-19.

I'll finish with a mention of Sr Philomena Donaghey, of the Illies, who is a resident in Nazareth House, Fahan. Sr Philomena recently celebrated her 99th birthday and is looking forward with us all to a 'new beginning'. Now that's faith for you!

(Kathleen)

*Clonmany*  
**Clonmany Together' Committee valued by community**

WITH lockdown in our parish, the strangest thing I found was not being able to attend Mass. I found it hard to put signs up in our three Churches, with the words - "No Mass this Weekend" on March 14/15.

Little did I think that it would be June 29 before the Churches would open again for daily Mass.

Within a couple of weeks, a group of local people formed a committee and established a Facebook page which allowed Fr Brady to stream Mass on Saturday evenings at 6.30 pm and also Funeral Masses of our parishioners who had passed

away. Due to the restrictions on numbers, it was important for family members and the local community to view funeral Masses and show solidarity with the bereaved.

The 'Clonmany Together Committee' has been tremendous in keeping our community informed and up-to-date with everything. It was also very active in looking after the elderly and those living alone; bringing them groceries, the daily newspaper, their cooked meals, medication, or whatever their needs were.

Thankfully, I was kept very busy during the week preparing for

weekend Masses starting again, which we are very pleased about.

With our attendance numbers limited, we have divided the parish into four areas to allow everyone a chance to attend Mass. We will also continue to stream Mass live into the homes in our parish and have our loud speakers transmit Mass for those who wish to listen outside or sit in their cars.

We are looking forward to the attendance number increasing which will make it easier for everyone.

(Kathleen)



*Camus – Strabane...*  
**Temporary exclusion a time to see God in the everyday**

THE lockdown came as a shock, as we, like thousands of other people, found ourselves confined to the house. 'Nobody in, and nobody out' became the by-line, as the only people coming in were our staff, who showed their selfless commitment by continuing to work when no one knew how serious Covid-19 might become.

Not being able to go out to Mass was very hard; indeed, it seemed incredible that the church could be closed, an event that had never happened in living memory.

Like clergy everywhere, our parish priest, Fr Declan Boland quickly moved our regular faith supports online. For those confined to home, it was a real comfort to be able to go to the website and sit before the Blessed Sacrament. As well as daily Mass, we had the Rosary each weekday, and Fr Boland gave a regular talk on contemplative prayer, followed by a period of silence, in which those looking in were guided in the practice.

Being able to tune in to the parish was a real support to those who found the isolation difficult. One outstanding element of

this was Fr Boland's great love of nature, and his awareness of God's presence in it all. In his homilies, he generously shared this and helped us all to become more attuned to the Divine Presence around us.

Everyone has commented on the blueness of the sky and the amazing harmony of birdsong during the worst of the pandemic. One very positive aspect of lockdown was having the time and freedom to sit in the garden and absorb all the beauty around us, and to sense the real presence of God reflected there.

Thanks be to God we are again free to return to church, to Mass and to the Blessed Sacrament; a precious privilege we will never again take for granted. But I think our temporary exclusion also proved an opportunity to see God in the everyday, in the best of modern technology, in the kindness of those who help and support us, and in the beauty that surrounds us in the sky, the trees and wonderful birdsong.

(Philomena Horner, Sister of Mercy)



Church of the Immaculate Conception, Camus Parish, Strabane, currently undergoing refurbishment works.

*Coleraine...*  
**A time to slow down and think more about God**

I loved being at home during lockdown, although I went through a particularly stressful situation. But my faith helped me.

On one particular day, I was so stressed that I was in tears and rang our parish priest, Fr Jimmy McGrory to ask for prayers. He was so supportive and right away said that he would offer Mass for me, and as soon as I put the 'phone down after speaking to him I felt so much at peace. All the stress and worry just left me and everything

worked out. I couldn't believe how immediate it was.

At the start, we didn't have a webcam in our church, so it was great that there was so much choice on-line. But, in the last few weeks, it was lovely to watch Mass live from St John's.

The beautiful weather during lockdown was also a blessing. It was lovely to see gardens blooming as I went for my daily walk. I liked to pray during my walks and these were usually prayers of

thanksgiving.

We seemed to pray more during lockdown. A lady told me that one day she watched three Masses. It really seems to have been a time for people to engage more in their faith. Indeed, I have heard many say that they think this is happening to make us slow down and think about God and the beautiful world that He has made for us, and how we should take better care of it.

(Kathleen)





## Cappagh...

# Our priests and prayer helped us through a very difficult time

I am the mother of five adult children, ranging in age from 20-30 years, and we all went into lockdown together, as I wanted them to be home. As a Marie Curie nurse, I could see very quickly that this virus was going to lead to a very difficult situation.

Within a week, my husband, Peter, got quite sick. He has asthma and an underlying heart problem, and had received a letter to shield. He started to show some signs of Covid-19, so I rang the doctor. We decided to manage him at home, but within 24 hours his condition deteriorated rapidly and he was struggling to breathe, so he had to be admitted to hospital. It was faster for me to drive him to the SWAH, in Fermanagh, as he was really having difficulty breathing. He was taken away quickly, so there was no 'goodbye', and I spent the next four hours waiting outside A&E for news.

I was then advised to go home to prepare the family as the next few hours were going to be very difficult. I don't know how I would have managed that journey home had it not been for a good friend chatting to me and praying with me over the 'phone. The

children were very upset when I told them the situation and the next morning when we were still very anxious, I suggested that we pray as there was nothing else we could do.

Peter and I had been doing Lent and going to Mass, so I tuned into the Masses being celebrated by our parish priest, Fr Kevin McElhannon and Fr Declan McGeehan, and we said the Rosary. We kept this up and we took great solace from the prayers and ministry of our priests.

The whole community also came behind us. I could feel the power of the prayer both for myself and my family. Although we were still very distressed, there was also a sense of peace. It was a special feeling. We eventually handed the situation over to God. People were praying hard for us and, whatever the outcome, I felt strongly that we would not be on our own.

After 4-5 days, we were able to FaceTime Peter. He couldn't say much as he was very breathless, but it was great to see him, even for a few minutes. He is still recovering; the consultant said that recovery could take up to 6-9



months.

Peter told us that he knew people were praying for him because he had a sense of peace and a sense of God with him. He felt that he was going to be alright. His greatest fear had been when he was admitted, as he had thought then that he wouldn't see us again.

We are so thankful that God took us through this. The night that Peter was admitted to hospital, we lit a blessed candle and put it in the window beside a statue of Our

Lady of Fatima, and every day since we have done this. Whoever is up first in the morning puts the candle in the window and lights it. We do it in thanksgiving as it is very important to thank God, and we light it in thanksgiving for our priests and everyone who prayed for and helped us in any way. It is a reminder that God is keeping us safe.

During that whole time, there wasn't one row amongst us. We went out for long walks together



Peter and Majella Brogan.

as well as getting our own space. I am amazed at how we got through it and, for me, it was morning Mass and praying the Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet that really helped us. It was a great consolation to have this to get us through the day, and we continued with it.

One of my daughters has gone back to work and she says she misses the closeness that we had during this time in our lives. I am so grateful to Fr Kevin, Fr Declan

and our seminarian, Stephen Ward; these three men kept us together for 12 weeks and they still are there for us. It's wonderful.

Our lives have changed in so many ways. This has brought us much closer together and it has brought our faith to another level. All we had to do was trust in God. There were so many prayers being said by so many people that God could only but hear them.

(Majella)

## For people of faith even difficult periods are times of grace

**WITH lockdown easing and people thankful to be back in their churches for the celebration of the Eucharist, Bishop Donal reflects on the effects of the "Eucharistic famine" and other restrictions due to Covid-19, and the many creative ways clergy and youth leaders discovered to continue their ministry. Feeling the disappointment shared by many at the cancellation of traditional celebrations and pilgrimages, he offers the hope of 2021 and the message of our faith that "there are lessons to be learned and wisdom to be gained".**

### Back around 'The Table of The Lord'...

"It was surprising how strange it was to celebrate public Mass on June 29. As human beings, we can easily get used to any new normal! I had spent three months focussing on an unseen congregation through the webcam – and having no responses during Mass. And suddenly there were people who were answering back! And what was wonderful was the emotion in so many hearts and tears in people's eyes. Those of us who have had daily access to Mass, albeit in an empty Church, need to appreciate just how difficult the Eucharistic 'famine' was for many parishioners.

Priests reacted to the experience of lockdown in different ways. Some were excited by the challenge of finding new ways of contacting parishioners. Others were grateful for the quieter pace of life. It was frightening for a number of priests. But I must give credit for the great work that so many parishes did to remain 'visible' to their communities.

And clergy know that we are not going to return to the way things were. It will be a challenge for parishes to maintain a sense of community when large gatherings in church, and even outdoors, are some way off. Ministry to the sick in their homes will have to be rethought. There may well be limitations to the numbers of people who can be involved in wakes, funerals, weddings, and events such as First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

The future will be uncertain for all of society, and that includes our parishes."

### On-line parish and youth ministry a life-line for many...

"I think that we have discovered two things. Firstly, our Diocese, parishes, and many clergy, had untapped reserves of technical skills and creativity when it comes to ways of reaching parishioners. The Catechetical Centre has been able to produce excellent materials for schools and young people. The Youth Ministry team has developed an active on-line

presence through Instagram. Many parishes have been active on Facebook. Around the Diocese, the local parish webcam has served as a sort of local radio. It was the one permanent feature that allowed information to be made available to the homes that had internet access.

Secondly, we were very uplifted by the fact that so many people were tuning into church services. And priests received a lot of affirmation for their work and presence. So, it is important to see how the grace of God has been at work in these strange times."

### The role of our young people...

"One of the key points at the Youth Synod in 2018 was that the Church will be renewed by the faith and commitment of young people. They are the ones who can speak to their peers. Yes, there is much work to be done in parishes at the present time to enable people to return to church – stewarding, cleaning etc. But there is a huge job to be done in ministering to young people who have suffered a lot; missing education, job opportunities; chances to socialise. The Gospel message of hope is much needed. And it is young people who know best how to share their faith journeys with their contemporaries. I hope that we can see a new wave of creativity in infecting young people with the Good News of Jesus. That will

inoculate them against so many of the damaging modern cultural 'viruses' that damage their hearts and spirits!"

### Summer faith camps and pilgrimages cancelled...

"Young people have missed out on being with their peers in school. School leavers have had little chance to celebrate together. Big sacramental occasions have not been possible. And now most summer camps have had to be cancelled! A number of parishes have put huge efforts into summer events, which are appreciated by both the young people and their families. These annual gatherings have been so important. They create memories, give a sense of well-being and offer formation in faith. Please God, we will be able to celebrate them again in 2021.

Pilgrimages are a great opportunity for people to experience travelling together. They take all of us out of our normal routine and open new doors. The Lourdes Youth Team has been a profound experience for a lot of our teenagers. It involves team building, prayer and service of the sick. Medjugorje offers a different type of pilgrimage. I hope that these two youth pilgrimages can take up again in 2021 – building community, a spirit of prayer and a sense of service. And that can build towards a Derry team going to the next World Youth Day, due to take place in Lisbon (Portugal) in the summer of 2023.

Lourdes is important in the lives of many people, whether they

go with a diocesan pilgrimage or with other groups. With our little 'virtual pilgrimage' I wanted to both engage with those who would have been in Lourdes, and encourage some to look at considering a Lourdes pilgrimage sometime in the future.

The idea in all that we do in Church is to mix an opportunity for prayer with a teaching on what we believe. Thus, I took a theme for each day and tried to draw that from our scripture readings for Mass each day. The themes were: Being a pilgrim people; Reality of sickness and suffering; Penance, and Sacrament of Penance; Children and Baptism; Young people and faith; and a Missionary Church – 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few'. As well as using the Mass and the evening Rosary to look at these themes, I was able to record a short message each day for Facebook. I hope that this helped some people and that we can be back at Mary's shrine in Lourdes next July. I trust that we can learn how to continue with these on-line opportunities for prayer and catechesis. We have learned a lot and have a lot to learn. Like Mary, we walk on with trust and hope."

### Derry Youth Community greatly appreciated...

"The Derry Youth Community has played a valuable role over the last five years. It has offered a chance for young people to live as a praying community and to go on mission together within the Diocese of Derry. I want to thank those who have been members



– and those who have offered guidance, support and formation to the members of DYC. I really hope that the Youth Community will continue to attract new members. It is precisely what we need at present – young people being trained to be missionaries to their peers in this Diocese."

### Summer message...

"Normally, July and August are the months when young people have the chance to take a break from studying and many will want to rest after exams. But this year has been uniquely different. The structured learning environment has been missing since March – and the plans for the incoming academic year are still sketchy and uncertain. Planned holidays may well not materialise. But for people of faith, even difficult periods are times of grace, if only we have eyes and hearts to see the blessings that are given to us in unusual wrappings! Our faith tells us that there are lessons to be learned and wisdom to be gained."



*Gallagher-based St Francis Men's Prayer & Friendship Group seeks to...*

# Improve fatherhood values by learning more about Our Heavenly Father *by Martin*



Some members of the St Francis Men's Prayer & Friendship Group, Galliagh.

ST Francis' Men's Prayer & Friendship Group meets on Monday nights in St Joseph's Galliagh. It was formed with a holistic approach to facilitate the various needs of human development realising that, particularly in relation to the male species, most men are encaptured in their own secret, isolated space where they fail to recognise the importance and the necessity of group sharing. It is well known in the field of mental health that one of the key factors is isolation. There is always a higher risk in any human being's life in trying to 'go it alone'.

The benefits of coming together as a group of men, with varying years of experience of life, ranging from 21 to 70, is that every meeting is a learning curve for any one of us. It is true what they say, 'we can never stop learning'. In this group, there is time and space, in the praying and sharing, to explore all the needs of personal growth, spiritual, physical, educational and emotional. There is a bond of trust and unity, cemented by an opening prayer to the Holy Spirit that protects the confidentiality of the group members on anything shared. There is a solidarity among the men that recognises the importance of coming together, as Christian fellowship, acknowledging the Communion with each other; common union

in Christ.

It is also widely recognised in the field of psychology and highlighted powerfully by the great spiritual teacher and writer, Fr Richard Rohr that, amongst young men, there is a vast vacuum of low self-worth as a result of a lack of relationship with their fathers. This is particularly evident in the western world and very obvious in our own City of Derry.

In our group, we have moved into a deeper understanding of the importance of the roles of fatherhood, with an emphasis on the ultimate need to build a better understanding and relationship with Our Heavenly Father, whom most of us never take time to discover, even though we use the words 'Our Father' in our daily prayers.

As time moves on, even through this forced period of legal isolation when we met via Zoom, we have been able to expand our intimacy with both our Heavenly Parents, Our Father, ABBA Father, Our Daddy and, indeed, Our Mother Mary.

Isolation and Lockdown had enabled us to focus much deeper in expanding our knowledge of what it means to be Christian, what it means to be Catholic. We, as a bunch of ordinary men, most of us fathers ourselves, are seeking to improve our fatherhood values

by learning more about Our Heavenly Father, learning more about Jesus and how He came to reveal His Father as Our Father, and learning more about the Holy Spirit, as The Lord and Giver of Life that we profess in our Creed.

Added to all this is our sincere devotion to Mary. We take time every week to focus on a particular mystery, identifying it with the relevant Scripture relating to each Mystery, being taught the connections between Rosary and Scripture that has enabled us all to develop a deeper understanding of our Catholic faith, and recognise more freely that through our Baptism, we are rightfully called to be Children of God.

## The Key

We are so privileged to have Christ present with us in The Blessed Sacrament, where He permits us through the grace of the Holy Spirit to expand our knowledge of His Presence with us. On any given night, anyone of us can be teacher and on another night we can be student; being taught by the wisdom of others. We have come to realise in our open sharing that Christ is the key to any locked heart, the pathway that clears any blocked mind... that's why He is recognised as The Way.

He is the Redeemer who rescues us from the lies that shame us

into thinking less of ourselves, that fester stagnant in our minds, by revealing to us that we are Children of God. That's how we recognise Him as The Truth that sets us free. He is The Saviour that gave His life on a cross that we could be saved, if only we believe in Him and The Unconditional love of the Father. That's how we recognise Him as The Life.

All of this is empowered by the gift of having Him present at our meeting. In His Eucharistic Presence, we are learning things that we never understood before and all the time we spend there, for the two or three hours weekly, we are shadowed and cuddled by the visual statue image of our Blessed Mother, who points to her Son and tells us, "Do whatever He tells you".

Week after week, we can vouch for the fact that we leave our meeting with a lighter heart and clearer mind knowing that, through sharing with one another in His Mystical Presence, we have cast our burdens onto Him,

knowing that He cares for us.

It is spiritually therapeutic. We encourage each other on the need of availing of our sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. We deal with the basic ordinary everyday life affairs in our own lives and families, and we assist each other to maintain ourselves in difficult situations by our willingness to increase our love for Christ and our need for each other's friendship.

Thankfully, we have utilised social media outlets through the lockdown sufficient enough to facilitate some of our needs. We are greeted every morning, on awakening, with a Gospel reading for the day sent to all of us by one of our group members, whilst another one keeps us updated and fully versed on the life of whatever Saint we are celebrating on particular days; a fount of knowledge new to many of us. This, together with our weekly Zoom or Messenger meetings, has been crucial in keeping us connected over this period, but

we are all thirsting for the return as a physical body of men to reunite as a mystical body in the Church, in The Presence of Jesus in The Blessed Sacrament.

We are eternally grateful to our priests and, in particular, Fr McGaughey, for permitting us this special privilege each week. This is an open group for men from anywhere to join us and it is our hope that many more men will come to experience the freedom that is to be found in sharing time with Christ and in friendship with fellow pilgrims, all on a journey to discover our true selves.

All of us, and I should only speak for myself but I am confident in saying this, the St Francis Men's Prayer and Friendship Group has enhanced our spiritual lives beyond expectations and has also enriched our human development in understanding that 'We Never Walk Alone'.

The group is now back meeting in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, on Mondays from 7.30-9 pm, and all men are welcome.

## Special creation brings joy in time of great sadness



**WHEN** Holy Family parishioner, Jeanette Gallagher suffered the loss of her 89-year-old mother, Josie during lockdown, she found great comfort in the strong faith passed on to her from her prayerful mother, and that of her husband, Sean, who went all out to create something special in memory of his beloved mother-in-law.

**Happy to share the story, Jeanette writes...**

"I had always dreamed of having a grotto in my garden and I had chatted to my mum about it who loved the idea of having somewhere of our own to sit and pray to Our Blessed Mother.

Mum had a very strong faith, which she passed down to her family, and we would pray together all the time. Her favourite prayers were the Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet.

When she passed away in early May this year, I thought of doing the grotto in her memory. As soon as I mentioned it, my husband Sean got straight to work. Every day, after he finished his own work, he got stuck into building it.

He asked St Joseph to help him, as he had never done anything like this before and wasn't sure if it would turn out right.

Our good friend, Patsy McCallion donated a beautiful statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, which was amazing as my mother visited Lourdes a few times and spoke recently of wanting to go back. Lourdes was her favourite place where she felt really close to Our Lady.

We feel extremely blessed to have Our Lady's grotto in our own back garden, where we sit every night in the peace and quiet praying the Rosary, and it makes me feel my mum is very close. It is a very special time for us.

I am delighted with how the grotto has turned out; it is way above my expectations. Sean did an amazing job with the guidance of good St Joseph and we thank Our Blessed Mother and Jesus for all the blessings we have received".

*(Jeanette and Sean live within the Ballymagroarty Parish in Derry City.)*



*What is the reason for the hope that you have? (1 Peter 3:15)*

# My faith journey *by Oliver Barrett*

**I** was born into the Catholic faith 44 years ago and, thanks to my parents, Patsy and Mary, I was brought up practising my faith and received the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation, as did my four sisters and two brothers.

As a child, I remember learning what Confirmation was about for the Bishop coming, but I am not sure that I fully understood what I was learning. I have always believed in God and found life much easier to cope with because I had my faith.

Growing up, as a family we went on trips to Knock and said the Rosary together, and the Angelus. So, my home was my first real experience of the Catholic faith. As well as my parents, my maternal grandmother, Nellie McShane, who is recently deceased, was a major influence in my faith life. She had great faith in Padre Pio and she passed that on to me as well; that resilience that comes from knowing that no matter what happens in life, your faith will get you through.

There was a time in my youth when, like I suppose other young people, I wondered if I had a religious vocation. I was involved in various youth groups and, when I was still at school, I went on a Vocations Weekend in Termonbacca for the Diocese, where I met some men who were going into the priesthood.

“ Growing up, as a family we went on trips to Knock and said the Rosary together, and the Angelus. So, my home was my first real experience of the Catholic faith. ”

However, I thought my vocation was to be a teacher. I went to Queen's University to study Business and German, and still felt that I wanted to be a teacher so I did a BEd at St Mary's. While I was there, I got involved in Youth 2000 with Fr Joe Gunn, who was the chaplain. We went out to visit the elderly, which I found very rewarding as we were putting our faith into action. We also got involved with a Youth Group at the Cathedral on the Falls Road and ran retreats for young people, many of whom were from

dysfunctional backgrounds. We did street evangelisation in the Lower Falls on Friday nights, where a lot of youth were just standing around as they didn't have much to engage in. A youth retreat was organised in the Parish Centre and we had guest speakers come along. We ran retreats in schools too. We tried to encourage the young people to be more involved in their faith. That was in the late 90s.

I was also greatly inspired in my faith by a guy called Jason whom I met in Youth 2000. He had originally been an Anglican and had converted to Catholicism. He was very active in Youth 2000 and went on for the priesthood. As a cradle Catholic, I found it so interesting that he had made the decision as an adult to become a Catholic.

After I qualified as a teacher in my early 20s, I taught for about three years in Wiltshire, in the south west of England. I experienced a mental breakdown and had to take time off. I came back home and then worked in the family business for a few years. I didn't go back into teaching but ended up in Dublin, where I worked for 10 years in Customer Services.

In my late 20s/early 30s, I became lukewarm in my faith. I had thought that teaching was my vocation and when that didn't work out, I drifted a bit. I still continued to practise my faith, but sometimes it felt like I was there in body but not in spirit. It wasn't that I was angry with God, more disillusioned. We are told from an early age that we have a vocation and I thought mine was teaching, so when that didn't work out the way I thought it would, I was left wondering what it was that I was to do.

In Dublin, life is lived at a very fast pace. I was going to work, coming back late and going to bed, and then getting up in the morning to do the same thing just to get money to pay bills and keep a roof over my head.

I was in my early 30s when I found out about an annual silent retreat in Ards Monastery, in Co Donegal, on the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola given by the Benedictine Brothers from St Joseph's Abbey in Flavigny, France. It is a residential retreat,

and there is one for men and one for women. The men's is a five-day retreat and I decided to do it as time away from the fast pace of city life that I was living.

While it is a silent retreat, there are conferences every day and opportunities to receive the Sacraments. This was the breakthrough I needed. It was a welcome chance to stop and think about where my life was going, and it led me to the decision to move back to the North West. That was three years ago and I have taken part in this retreat every summer since, however, it has been cancelled this year because of Covid-19.

## Theology

I went back to college to do a conversion course in finance and then I got employment in Financial Services in Letterkenny, Co Donegal. I also do a lot of reading now, after being inspired by Pope John Paul II, when he said that he wanted people to be more informed about their faith. He wanted us to go deeper and actually understand what our faith is all about. Keeping his words in mind, and inspired by the silent retreat, I began studying Theology.

The Dominicans were offering a correspondence course in Theology that allowed me to work and study at the same time, so I signed up to do a Masters through Brussels. At first, I was worried about going back into study as I had been out of it for so long, but everyone is catered for. I am now

“ People born into their faith should have the opportunity to learn about their faith. That is something I would like to get involved in when I finish my studies; animating parishes through catechesis with the Diocesan Mission Team, which has brought great joy into my life. ”

in my second and final year, and will soon be starting a research project on Theology and Ecology, which will take into consideration Catholic Social Teaching and Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Laudato Si*. This is something that is much more topical now with



Oliver Barrett, Leckpatrick Parish.

people's deeper appreciation of the natural environment during this pandemic.

During lockdown, I took part in an online seminar on homiletics as part of the Theology group, which made it into the university newsletter as an example of ecumenism as those of us taking part were all from different continents and various faith traditions. We had a Presbyterian pastor from Finland, a deacon from Italy, a Religious Sister from Nigeria, a lady from Spain who had a background in economics, and then me.

I am also a member of the Diocesan Mission Team, which meets monthly. We had a listening day in Ardmore and Omagh, which gave people who had been on the Missions an opportunity to talk about their experience, and now we are preparing for the Extraordinary Month of the Missions in October. While Africa has no shortage of believers, Ireland is now seen as a missionary country in need of evangelisation because of the liberalism and relativism that exists here.

During lockdown our meetings have been via Zoom, but before that we met in the Bishop's house. Anyone is welcome to join who is interested in getting involved in catechism and missionary work here, at home.

Looking to the future, I would like to see the Permanent

Diaconate set up in our Diocese. I experienced this in Dublin, where men, with the permission of their wives, became deacons and were active in parishes; preaching, reading the Gospel, and presiding at weddings and baptisms. I think this would take a lot of pressure off our priests at a time when numbers are dwindling. There are many young married men in the Diocese who would be great deacons.

I also think that there is a real need for catechesis, particularly during Advent in the lead up to Christmas, and Easter. I first encountered catechesis in parishes while attending Our Lady Help of Christians, on the Navan Road, Dublin, where a young Polish priest had organised catechesis every Tuesday night. I didn't attend the sessions but it made me realise how important it is to understand what we believe, and gave me the desire to do so.

While researching for the Diocesan Mission Team, I came upon a catechetical programme called Sycamore, which originated in the UK. The programme has 10 week courses that teach people about the essential parts of their faith, and has been used in schools, parishes and prisons. It is presented through film and group work and I think it is especially beneficial for cradle Catholics.

People born into their faith should have the opportunity to learn about their faith. That

is something I would like to get involved in when I finish my studies; animating parishes through catechesis with the Diocesan Mission Team, which has brought great joy into my life.

I also enjoy joy being part of the Derry choir, Schola, as I find that group singing and reading helps my mental health, and my general sense of well being.

Another wonderful occasion in my faith life was the Papal visit for the World Meeting of Families in Dublin. I was a volunteer at the Festival of Families and the Papal Mass, and to be able to see the Holy Father here in Ireland was fantastic. I had heard so much about the last Papal visit, when Pope John Paul II came, and had often wondered if it would happen again in my lifetime. To have been part of that is something I will never forget.

Having the confidence to volunteer for the WMOF, to go back to study, and become involved with the Diocesan Mission Team, came from that silent retreat in Ards. Witnessing others on the retreat living their faith gave me the confidence to step out and become more involved in and knowledgeable about mine.

(Anyone interested in the Derry Diocesan Mission Team can find out more by contacting [jim@wmi.ie](mailto:jim@wmi.ie))



# The Significance of Eucharistic Miracles

by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD

**I**N the middle of the 11th century, a priest by the name of Berengar, became maybe the first theologian in history of the Church to openly question the full import of the Lord's own words at the Last Supper—"this is my body" and "this is my blood."

Berengar called into question whether those words necessitated the Lord to be truly present in the Eucharistic elements - the bread and the wine. He asked the whole Church: Was it not a more reasonable proposition to hold that the Lord was symbolically present in the bread and the wine? In that the bread stood for and represented the Lord's body broken upon the cross and the wine stood for and represented the blood shed upon the cross.

Berengar's questioning set of a firestorm of debate that has been argued backward and forward down to the present day. In its history, the Church has only defined her doctrines in response to questions that time and people have raised of her. The liturgical and theological answer of the Church to Berengar came with the establishment by Pope Urban IV of the Holy Day of Christ's Body and Blood (Corpus Christi) in the year 1264. The very name of the day was a definitive answer to Berengar.

In the year before the establishment of the Holy Day, a Bohemian (the present-day Czech Republic) priest by the name of Peter of Prague came on pilgrimage to Rome. Only known to himself, Peter was struggling in his spirit with the very same questions that Berengar so many years before had raised, and he was slipping further and further into the mire of symbolism. While on the road to Rome, the priest stopped off at the City of Bolsena to say Mass and he offered the Mass in the city's Basilica. As he spoke the words of consecration over the bread, the white host in his hand started to weep blood, with great drops running down the priest's hands onto the corporal cloth and onto the altar. In an instant of revelation, Peter's consciousness of the whole significance of the Lord's word was transformed. There was literally flesh and blood

in his hands!

Peter gathered up the corporal cloth and brought it before the Pope, who was none other than Urban IV himself. The same Urban who would declare the Holy Day would pronounce the veracity of the miraculous revelation that Peter brought him. Miracles are not the same thing as doctrine, each one of them is a personal revelation of God to a person, and no Christian is bound to believe in them, but these miracles are significant pointers or signposts; pointers and signposts that point to the destination and whereabouts of God's truth and will for the Church. Who could fail to see in Peter's experience, coming when it came, the finger of God pointing the Church in the direction of an all together more profound meaning to the Eucharist than a symbol? Once again real flesh and blood was in the hands of that priest, Peter!

Interestingly, these Eucharistic miracles are not reserved to the High Middle Ages. On Christmas Day 2013, at the Church of St Hyacinth in the town of Legnica, Poland, a consecrated host fell from a paten onto the ground. The Host was picked up by the priest and placed in a container full of water so that it would dissolve. When the priest went back to the container, he found that the host was marked with red stains. The bishop of the diocese turned the host over to medical science, in the form of the department of forensic medicine at the Szczecin Institute.

The scientists, in their studies of the host, made three progressive observations. In the first place, the red material in the host contained "the fragmented parts of cross-stricted muscle." In the second place, the muscle they discovered was none other than that from a human heart. And in the third, the heart muscle fibres demonstrated signs of being in severe stress, like the heart was of one undergoing



Raphael Bolsena Eucharistic Miracle

intense physical pain and agony.

You almost have to shake yourself and ask, "Can this truly be?" A piece of bread has within it the cells of a human muscle, the cells of a heart, and a heart undergoing the severest trial? You can see the miracle pointing beyond itself, bypassing any thought of mere symbol to those words of the Lord being absolutely literal - "my body" - "my blood."

The circumstances of the Legnica miracle were very different from those in Bolsena. The priest in the Polish case was not in the midst of a spiritual crisis, nor was he experiencing a trial of doubt. So, then with whom was the Good God primarily speaking? I think we can take it for granted that He had a wider audience than the priest and parishioners of that particular Polish parish.

In a strange way, I think that it was addressed to myself and my work within the Order. I have a very vivid memory to which God in this miracle spoke. When I was working and living in another monastery of the Discalced Carmelites, I preached one Corpus Christi on the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas and Eucharistic presence. I preached the homily in my own straightforward manner and with as much skill as I could possibly put together (or so I thought).

After the Mass, there was a man waiting at the sacristy door to speak with me. In my pride, the thought passed through my head that he must be here to congratulate me on a splendid effort and all my eloquence. They say pride comes before a fall, and if I thought that, I was to be quickly disabused. The man had come to challenge me as to the content of my sermon. The person introduced himself and added the detail that his brother was a priest. He wondered how could I still be filling people's heads with all this Medieval nonsense? By this

Medieval nonsense, he specifically meant the belief that the Eucharist changed from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord.

It was nonsense because his brother had told him about experiences of serving Papal Masses at which too great a quantity of the precious blood was consecrated, and the servers came home drunk consuming the excess. The man even commented that he could smell wine on my own breath after consuming the chalice. If that were Jesus' flesh and blood those things would not happen! It was nothing but wine, so the man argued. I must confess that I was not prepared for the assault of words and concepts that the man threw at me. I was distressed in a manner that I scarce remember on other occasions. Here was a man who had obviously sat in the pews for years, he was from a faithful family, and fancied that he knew a thing or two about the faith and yet, in this most fundamental and holy of beliefs, had simply no idea of the truths of Christianity.

I was so shocked I could hardly get out a word. I do not know what he expected me to say but I could do little more than mumble out some barely adequate line about "having to read the catechism." Maybe at no single time in priesthood was I so distressed and did I fail so utterly with my words or in this case lack of them! My failure to speak up was not imitated by the Good God! He spoke up in Legnica, He spoke to me, He spoke to that man, He spoke to the whole Church. He spoke by means of bread that in some way, unknown to medical science, modern philosophy, and modern commonly held opinion, had materially turned simple bread into the cells of a wounded heart! God was posing the man, myself and the Church a challenge whose word is it that we believe? Is it the tired cynical word of the

world or the literal and living Word of God?

The Lord at the dawn of Creation spoke a Word, a Word that effectively said, "let it be" and the whole of the universe burst forth in a multitude of life, it was so. In a divine effort to redeem that world back from the hell that humanity have made of things, The Word asked Mary to bear Him in her womb and, with her approbation, God shrank himself down to the size of a few tiny cells unfolding in the womb of the Virgin. The Word said it and it was so.

Now at Mass, in exactly the same manner, the Word is spoken by the priest to the Eucharistic elements - the bread and the wine - "this is my body" and "this is my blood" and the Word becomes so. When that Word speaks, no matter what the occasion, no matter what it says, The Word then does what it claims.

So when The Word speaks "this is my body" and "this is my blood" then you have even more than what the scientists can pick up by means of their microscopes (the wounded heart cells); you have under the white host the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. Everything that He is is there in the sacrament. At every Mass, and in every sacrament that you receive, you participate in a

more profound miracle than that which happened either at Bolsena or Legnica. A miracle equally as great as the act of creation and the act of Incarnation. A miracle of the Word doing exactly what it says it does - "this is my body" - "this is my blood."

The Word is not a word that will be received by the empty spirit of the World but rather by generous faith that goes on believing that the Word is always speaking and always doing. A faith that is ready to listen to and receive that Word, not on our own terms but on terms that the Word has set.

An incident from the life of Sr Clare Crockett is illustrative. In a letter to her spiritual director, she tells that she knew of an almost deserted church that not very many people would attend, and she recounts that she would go there to lay her head on the tabernacle to be as close to the Lord as the beloved disciple was in the upper room of the Last Supper. Sr Clare could only share this intimacy because the Word said it and it was so.

The Eucharist is the Blessed Trinity's enduring commitment to be so intensely close to the people. This is the true point that the Eucharistic miracles have been pointing to all the time, "I AM Here for you!"



Bolsena Corporal in Procession.



Legnica Eucharistic Miracle.



A Word of God for your Family Life

Peace by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR

“PEACE I leave you, my own peace I give you.” These are some of the final words that Jesus spoke to His disciples and that He left to us, the Church of all time. They express one of His most urgent desires for us and can be placed alongside His passionate prayer for us, “Father, may they be one”. It is a longing and a desire that can take root in us at every level: between husbands and wives; parents and children; friends; neighbours; communities; nations. We can seem helpless in creating that peace in the last two of these – between communities and nations. We are certainly not powerless in creating peace in all the other areas of our lives.

What destroys peace?

The same elements that destroy peace can be found at every level of life.

1. Firstly, there is selfishness that is so strong in all of us. Because of selfishness we not only place our own needs ahead of those of others but, very often, we have no concern for the needs of others as long as we, ourselves, are being satisfied. This can be seen clearly in many of the problems experienced by married couples

and within families.

2. Next, there are so many hurts from the past in people’s lives that cause anger. These hurts do not necessarily come from the people we are living with, but our anger nonetheless is poured out on them. It is so important for each of us to recognise hurts that control us from the past; to acknowledge them; and to surrender them to the healing power of God’s love and our love for one another.

3. Then again, there is the need in so many people’s lives to dominate others, to control others, to be in charge. This destroys peace because it creates a situation where there is a lot of fear and anxiety created. This happens in our homes and families as well as in our interactions with those who make up our communities of faith.

4. And injustice destroys peace. Whether that injustice is at an international or national level or at the level of marriage and family relationships. The result is the same – people are abused by injustice and peace is not possible.

What builds peace?

We are now well into the lifting of restrictions that have been part of our lives for the past few months

because of Covid-19. Some of us may even be thinking of the possibility of going on holidays, either at home or abroad. A major key to the success of these holidays, or simply time away, is the level of peace that can be created and built. This is also important and true if we are staying at home for this month.

Creating peace is done, firstly, by being at peace with yourself. Leave the past behind at this point by asking for forgiveness from anyone whom you may be at odds with, especially in your immediate family, and by granting forgiveness to anyone who may have offended or hurt you.

The experience of so many of us is that we spend the first half of time away trying to unwind and the second half is spent in a growing anxiety about having to face it all again soon. What a terrible waste of wonderful opportunities for joy and peace and love.

Secondly, set out to deliberately make this time really enjoyable for one another. That is the opposite to selfishness as we are putting each other’s happiness as our priority. Personal happiness is then guaranteed.

Thirdly, create an atmosphere of joy and enjoyment. That is often

the opposite to the atmosphere that is created by anger. And, in a setting of real enjoyment, it is possible to see the molehills rather than imagine the mountains of our daily lives and so not get distracted by things that do not really matter.

Fourthly, give each other a lot of space and personal freedom during these weeks. This is the opposite of control and can lead to real closeness to one another. This month can be a time of refreshment for all of us and then we can contribute to the peace of the world we live in.

Worship and prayer

For the past few months, people have only been able to participate in Mass online. This is not the same as being able to gather as a parish community to celebrate. But, it has been a great gift at the same time.

One of the big differences in the online participation has been the fact that people cannot receive Holy Communion sacramentally. They rely on the Spiritual Communion. And again, thank God for that. In the Mass, as part of the preparation for Communion, sacramental

or spiritual, there are prayers for peace and a commitment to being peacemakers. This is significant in our understanding of Communion and needs to be fully entered into.

The four weeks of July help us to put flesh on this sense of bringing peace to one another as followers of Christ.

**July 5th:** ‘Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.’ What a wonderful invitation that is at the beginning of the month. Because of turmoil within ourselves we may not be able to bring peace to those we love. Jesus invites us to place ourselves in His hands and then we can be free for one another.

**July 12th:** ‘Other seed fell on rich soil and produced their crop.’ We need to surrender ourselves into the hands of Christ so that we can be fruitful soil for His word to grow in us for others, especially those who are closest to us in marriage and/or family life.

**July 19th:** ‘Listen, anyone who has ears to hear.’ This week, listen very especially to the great love that God has for each of us and to

His desire that we would bring that knowledge to one another. Listen to the great goodness of those we love and grow in an appreciation of the privilege we have in being loved by them.

**July 26th:** ‘(The farmer) sells everything he owns and buys the field.’ This is a strong call to all of us to look at our priorities and set them straight. Nothing should ever be more important to us than God’s love for us and our love for one another. That commitment is the foundation on which peace is built, not just for us, but for the world in which we live.

Lord, make me, and us, a channel of your peace. May our homes be places of your presence and sources of your peace.



Get ready to celebrate

Season of Creation

by Patricia McCormack

THE Derry Diocesan Laudato Si’ Group is encouraging all parishes to prepare for the celebration of The Season of Creation, running from September 1 until October 4.

A special year of reflection on the fifth anniversary of Laudato Si’, from May 2020 until May 2021, has been announced by the Vatican.

Five years ago, Pope Francis’ prophetic encyclical called the world’s attention to the increasingly precarious state of our common home. Today its message is even more relevant, and can provide the moral and spiritual compass for the journey to create a more caring, fraternal, peaceful and sustainable world.

The effects of global warming and extreme weather around the world, and unprecedented levels of loss of biodiversity that sustain the very fabric of life, are too evident and detrimental to be ignored any more.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that what we do to the natural world has consequences for human health. Everything is connected. What we do to the planet, we do to ourselves. A true ecological conversion is needed.

“The urgency of the situation calls for immediate, holistic and

unified responses at all levels: local, regional, national, and international. We need, above all, ‘a people’s movement’ from below: an alliance of all people of good will.

“We hope that the anniversary year and the ensuing decade will indeed be a time of grace; a true Kairos experience and ‘Jubilee’ for the Earth, for humanity and for all God’s creatures.” (Vatican Dicastery)

The Season of Creation is a significant time within the Laudato Si’ Special Anniversary Year. Beginning on September 1, with a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and ending on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on October 4, the Season of Creation is celebrated by Christians throughout the world.

It is a special time to join together in prayer and action. We are all called to participate.

“Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.” (LS)

Resources

The following resources and contacts will be very helpful to clergy, parish pastoral councils, liturgy groups and anyone planning liturgies and events during the Season of Creation, and for follow-on activities.

The theme for the Season of Creation 2020 is Cultivating Hope.

Parishes are encouraged to identify and engage a small group of interested people in planning and promoting responses to Laudato Si’.

For homily guidelines and much more (available from mid-July) see... [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie); [www.ecocongregationireland.com](http://www.ecocongregationireland.com); [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org). 100 ways for parishes to implement Laudato Si’, Cafod Laudato Si’ Animation: Message of Laudato Si’ in four minutes, [www.LiveLaudatoSi.org](http://www.LiveLaudatoSi.org), and [seasonofcreation.org](http://seasonofcreation.org).



Pope’s monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during JULY & August for:

**Our Families (July)**  
We pray that today’s families may be accompanied with love, respect and guidance.

**The Maritime World (August)**  
We pray for all those who work and live from the sea, among them sailors, fishermen and their families.

**Prayer for Priests**  
Heavenly Father, I ask you to bless our bishops and priests and to confirm them in their vocation of service.

As they stand before us as ministers of Your Sacraments, may they be channels of the love and compassion of the Good Shepherd, who came not be served but to serve.

Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the courage to proclaim your Word of justice, love and truth.

Bless, in a special way,  
Your servant

Father....  
Send your Spirit upon him  
So that he may always walk  
in the path of faith, hope and love,  
in the footsteps of Christ,  
the eternal priest, who offered

Himself on the cross for the life of the world. Amen.

Remember in prayer:

- FrJohn Gilmore (July 1st)  
Fr Joseph Gormley (2nd)  
Fr Eamon Graham (3rd)  
Fr Dermott Harkin (4th)  
Fr Karl Haan (5th)  
Fr Eugene Hasson (6th)  
All Priests (7th)  
Fr John Irwin (8th)  
Fr Charles Keaney (9th)  
Fr Stephen Kearney (10th)  
Fr Gerald Hasson (11th)  
Fr Michael Keaveny (12th)  
Fr Seamus Kelly (13th)  
Fr Edward Kilpatrick (14th)  
All Priests (15th)  
Fr Charles Logue (16th)  
Fr Paul McCafferty (17th)  
Msgr Bryan McCanny (18th)  
Fr Michael McCaughey (19th)  
Fr Andrew McCloskey (20th)  
Fr Patrick Lagan (21st)  
Fr Francis Lynch (22nd)  
Fr Noel McDermott (23rd)  
Fr Eamon McDevitt (24th)  
Fr John McDevitt (25th)  
Fr Christopher McDermott (26th)  
Fr Kevin McElhennon (27th)  
Fr Declan McGeehan (28th)  
Fr Dermot McGirr (29th)  
All priests (30th)  
Fr Brian McGoldrick (31st)
- Fr Neil McGoldrick (Aug 1st)  
Fr Patrick McGoldrick (2nd)  
Fr James McGonagle (3rd)  
Dr James McGrory (4th)  
Fr Daniel McFaul (5th)  
Fr Edward McGuinness (6th)



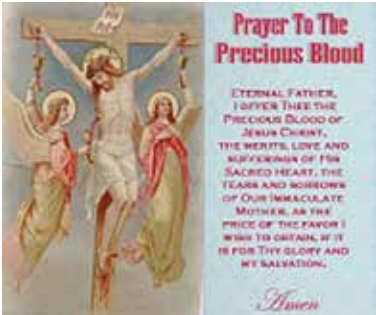
- Fr Micheal McGavigan (7th)  
Bishop Donal McKeown (8th)  
Fr Con McLaughlin (9th)  
Fr George McLaughlin (10th)  
All priests (11th)  
Fr Peter McLaughlin (12th)  
All priests (13th)  
Msgr Ignatius McQuillan (14th)  
Fr Peter Madden (15th)  
Fr Anthony Mailey (16th)  
Archbishop Eamon Martin (17th)  
Fr Gerard Mongan (18th)  
All Priests (19th)  
Fr Sean O’Donnell (20th)  
Fr Aidan Mullan (21st)  
Fr Kevin Mullan (22nd)  
Fr Michael Mullan (23rd)  
Fr Patrick Mullan (24th)  
All Priests (25th)  
Fr Seamus O’Connell (26th)  
Fr Joseph O’Conor (27th)  
Fr Colm O’Doherty (28th)  
Fr Kieran O’Doherty (29th)  
Fr Brian O’Donnell (30th)  
Fr Francis P O’Hagan (31st)



# Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

*Hello children. Welcome to the months of July and August. Summertime has arrived. These are fantastic months, filled with fun and plenty of things to keep you amused.*



## The Precious Blood of Jesus – July

The month of July is dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus. We all have blood in our bodies, which helps us to live and stay healthy. So, we know how important and precious that blood is. The Church and the sacraments, which we receive, have all come about through the precious Blood of Christ, which was poured out on the Cross when Jesus suffered and died for us.

## Saints of the Month

- July 3 – Saint Thomas the Apostle
- July 11 – Saint Benedict
- July 22 – Saint Mary Magdalene
- July 23 – Saint Bridget of Sweden



## Saint Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was one of the women who accompanied Jesus and His apostles during their travels, caring and supporting them. She was close to Jesus and played a major role in the events surrounding His death and resurrection. Over the centuries, there has been some debate about who Mary Magdalene really was. Some have thought that she was the sister of Martha of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42) and the sinner who dried Christ's feet with her hair. Despite any of these problems, the existence of Mary Magdalene is not questioned. She is known for her sincere conversion and total dedication to Christ.

The story of the repentant sinner is one of the most significant accounts that is believed to be related to Mary Magdalene. While Jesus was dining at the home of the Pharisee called Simon, a woman crept in and knelt before him (Luke 7:36-50). Simon

was very angry at this interruption because the woman was a known sinner. The woman began to kiss Jesus' feet and wet His feet with her tears. She dried them with her hair and covered them with expensive perfumed ointment. Because of her great love, Jesus told the woman that all her sins were forgiven.

Mary Magdalene is very important because she was a devoted and committed follower of Jesus. She witnessed some of the most important moments of His life. She accompanied Jesus on His last journey to Jerusalem and was present at the crucifixion, keeping vigil, on Good Friday.

On the Sunday morning, Mary of Magdala went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid, intending to anoint His body. When she arrived, she found the rock that covered the tomb had been rolled back and the body was gone. Waiting and weeping outside the tomb, Mary encountered the risen Lord, but mistook Him for a gardener. Only when He spoke her name did she recognise Him. Jesus told Mary to go and tell the apostles that He was ascending to the Father (John 20:17). Mary Magdalene then announced to the Apostles that she had seen the Lord and told them what Jesus had said. For this reason, some describe Mary Magdalene as the first evangelist; a messenger of the good news.

We celebrate the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene on July 22. Her feast day reminds us of how people can transform their lives if they are truly repentant. Mary Magdalene has always been an example of great love and forgiveness. She grasped God's love for humankind and spent her own life bearing witness to that love.

## The Blessed Sacrament – August

The month of August is dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament is the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Special times are set aside in our churches, called Adoration, where we can come and worship Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist (CCC 1178). The Blessed Sacrament reminds us that even when Mass is not celebrated, Jesus in the Eucharist, is still present in the Church.

*O Sacrament most Holy,  
O Sacrament Divine  
All praise and all thanksgiving  
Be every moment Thine*

## The Transfiguration

The feast of the Transfiguration is August 6. On this special day, we

celebrate how Jesus showed himself to be truly divine to the three Apostles who accompanied Him to the top of Mount Tabor.

In the Gospels, we hear how Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John and went up the mountain to pray. While the disciples were there with Jesus, Elijah and Moses appeared to speak with Him. Then before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured, completely changed, His face and clothes becoming dazzlingly white!

The feast of the Transfiguration helps us to see, as the Apostles saw, that Jesus is really and truly God



(CCC 554-555). This same Gospel story is heard during the second Sunday of Lent every year. It is part of the Lenten readings to remind us that the Apostles were given great hope at seeing Jesus in His glory before He was put to death and crucified. Likewise, we can reflect during Lent on the glory and joy which we will celebrate in the Easter story which will follow.

## Saints of the month- August

- St. Dominic - August 8
- St. Clare - August 11
- St. Bartholomew - August 24
- St. Augustine - August 28

## Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The beautiful Feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven is celebrated on August 15. The Assumption of Mary means that She was taken up into Heaven, body and

soul. Mary's body was always pure; She gave birth to the Son of God, therefore, God rewarded Her by taking Her pure, immaculate body into Heaven (CCC 966).

Mary now reigns as Queen of Heaven and earth. She is our Mother who listens to our prayers and asks Jesus for special graces for us. On the Last Day, in the General Resurrection, we, too, hope to enter Heaven with our newly glorified bodies. Our resurrected bodies will not suffer any illness nor need food or drink, but instead will be splendid and eternally beautiful.

If we use our bodies for doing good while we are alive, we will share the heavenly reward. On this great Feast, we ask the Blessed Mother of God to guide, protect and care for us.



# Quiz Time with Lawrence

## General Knowledge

1. By what name is the art form, La Gioconda more widely known?
2. What 3 colours make up the national flag of Hungary?
3. How many US Presidents have been assassinated while in office?
4. From what fish are eggs taken to produce Caviar?
5. In which US state was George Floyd killed in June, sparking mass riots and protests?
6. Who was the father of the current Queen of England?
7. There are five Australian cities with a population of more than one million people. Can you name them all?
8. Which is Europe's longest river?

## Film and Television

9. Which film featured the fictional skyscraper, 'Nakatomi Plaza'?
10. Wendi McLendon-Covey is best known for her portrayal of which US sitcom matriarch?
11. Which Canadian-born actor provided the voice of Shrek in the 2001 movie of the same name?
12. Johnny and Jenny Connor are the current owners of which fictional business premises?
13. Which 'creature feature' movie won the Oscar for Best Picture in 2018?
14. Adapted from a novel by Sally Rooney, name the romantic TV drama set in Ireland that has topped this year's ratings?
15. Who played Mr Rigsby in the 1970's sitcom 'Rising Damp'?
16. Who played the role of God in the 2003 movie 'Bruce Almighty'?

## Sport

17. Who was manager of Liverpool FC the last time the club were champions of England in 1990?
18. There have been 10 maximum 147 breaks made during snooker's World Championship tournament. The most recent was in 2012, but by which player?
19. Who played at Quarterback for both Indianapolis in 2007 and the Denver Broncos in 2015, when those two sides won the Super Bowl?

20. Which Australian tennis player won the Wimbledon Men's Singles title in 2002?
21. Which horse racing track in the north of England was the first to host racing behind closed doors following the outbreak of coronavirus?
22. What is the final event of the Olympic decathlon?
23. Which county has won the most All-Ireland senior titles (either football or hurling)?
24. Which of these players has scored more Premier League goals - Frank Lampard, Thierry Henry or Robbie Fowler?

## Music

25. Which band used a video of themselves on board a round the world racing yacht for their 1982 hit song 'Rio'?
26. Who was lead singer with the band Fleetwood Mac before branching out into a successful solo career?
27. What were the Christian names of the Gibb brothers who formed the Bee Gees?
28. Which band had nine UK Number 1 hits between 1974 and 1980?
29. Which group had a Number 1 hit in 2005 with the song 'The Importance of being Idle'?
30. Which singer/songwriter/guitarist recorded the 1994 Album entitled 'From the Cradle'?
31. Which band had a 1979 hit with the song 'My Sharona'?
32. What song was a Christmas Number 1 for both Harry Belafonte and Boney M?

## Pot Luck

33. In what year did John Hume and David Trimble win the Nobel Peace Prize?
34. During religious services, what is held in a Thurible?
35. Which is the smallest of New York City's five Boroughs?
36. How many strings are there on a regular Bass guitar?
37. What does the 'Q' stand for in IQ Test?
38. In which Irish county would you find the Blarney Stone?
39. What is the name of Boris Johnson's fiancée?
40. The offices of what satirical French magazine were the target of the 2015 Paris terrorist attack?

**Quiz Answers:** 1. Mona Lisa. 2. Red/White/Green. 3. Four (Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley and JFK). 4. Sturgeon. 5. Minnesota. 6. George VI. 7. Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. 8. The Volga. 9. Die Hard. 10. Beverly Hills Cop. 11. Mike Myers. 12. The Rover's Return. 13. The Shape of Water. 14. Normal People. 15. Leonard Rossiter. 16. Morgan Freeman. 17. Kenny Dalglish. 18. Stephen Hendry. 19. Peyton Manning. 20. Leyton Manning. 21. Newcastle. 22. 1500 metre race. 23. Kerry (37). 24. Lampard (177). 25. Duran Duran. 26. Stevie Nicks. 27. Barry. 28. Abba. 29. Oasis. 30. Eric Clapton. 31. The Knack. 32. Mary's Boy Child. 33. 1998. 34. Incense. 35. Incense. 36. Manhattan. 37. Quotient. 38. Cork. 39. Carrie Symonds. 40. Charlie Hebdo.



Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

# Let Your Light Shine!

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Cullaff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnylough, Drumquin, Dunamaghy, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelstown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside



*‘Thankful  
to be back  
around  
The Table  
of The  
Lord*



Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,