




# The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 62, FEBRUARY 2021  
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See inside...



Sr Clare Crockett - Vocation's Prayer



Hollie Frystal - Youth Book Club



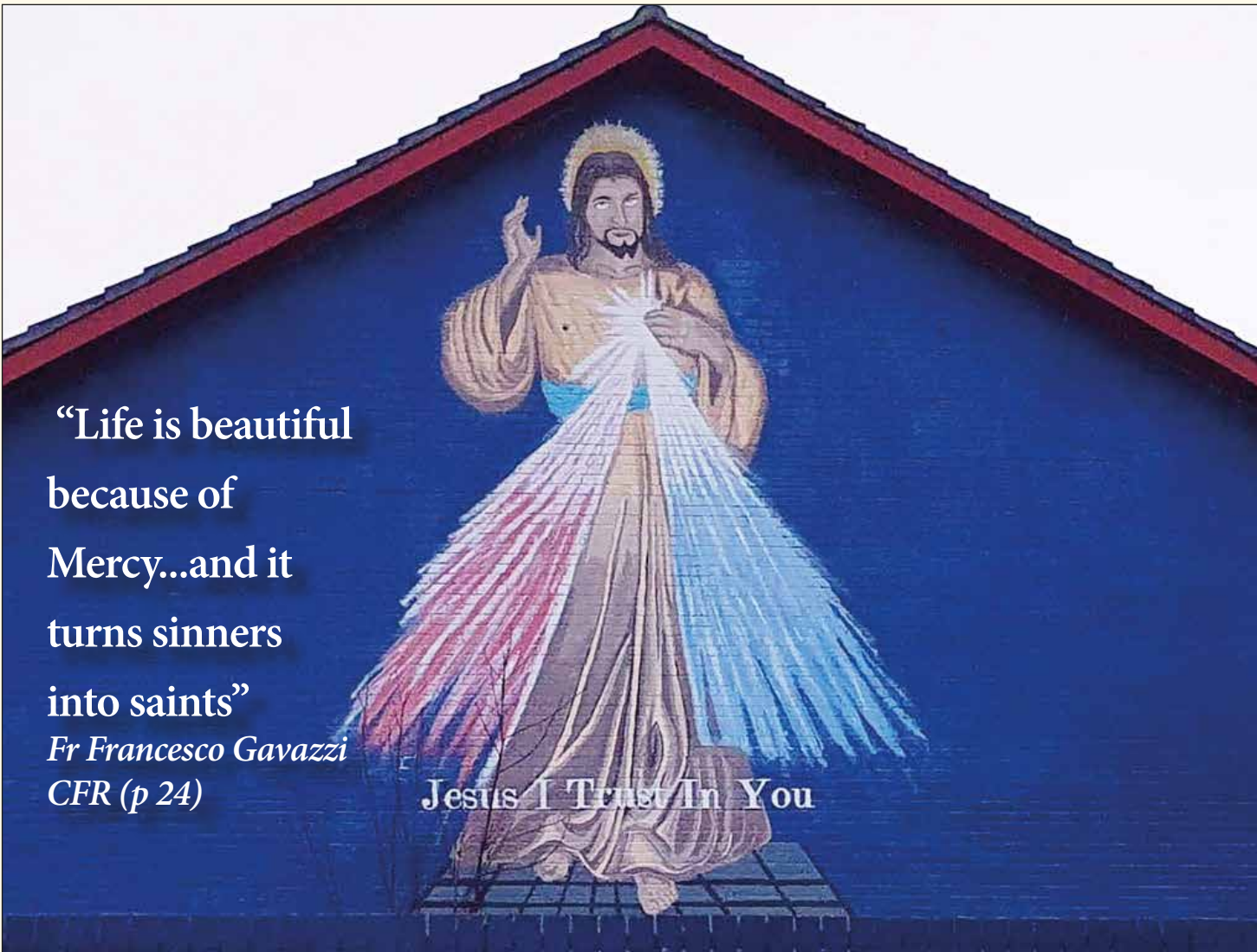
Celebrating Grandparents - Long Tower PS



Celebrating Catholic Schools - Ardmore

“Life is beautiful  
because of  
Mercy...and it  
turns sinners  
into saints”  
Fr Francesco Gavazzi  
CFR (p 24)

Jesus I Trust In You



Divine Mercy image on a gable wall in Galliagh, Derry



Catholic Schools Week launch - St Eugene's



Gemma Gallagher - Carnhill Celebrating St Brigid



Christian Unity Week - Ardmore

People in focus



Sr Deirdre Mullan RSM



Roisin McKenna – Ballinascreen



Michael O’Kane – St Colmcille’s PS Claudy



The late Bridget Carroll – Long Tower



Sharon Mallett – Thornhill College

Also featuring: Youth writers section, Youth Ministry update, Co Tyrone singer writes Sr Clare song, Strabane youth helping mark 125th anniversary of Church of The Immaculate Conception, Irish Page, Holy Spirit feature, Mercy feature, Ancient Celtic Church & Renewal of Faith, Children's Catechism Club, Quiz...and much more...



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*Reflecting on Pope Francis' prayer intention for February - "We pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded" – Sr Deirdre Mullan RSM writes...*

## Prayer alone is not enough...we must ACT!

VIOLENCE against women and girls is not a new tragedy, and it is as prevalent today as it was 100 years ago. Studies, sponsored by the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) in the last 10 years, make it undeniably clear that violence against women is a global problem of staggering proportions.

The UN defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

Whether in the West or the East, North or Global South, women are at high risk both at home and in society, in intimate partnerships, the workplace and major institutions, large and small.

However hard it is for any of us to understand this, it is estimated that one in every five women faces some form of violence during her lifetime – all too often leading to serious injury or death.

While the call of Pope Francis is encouraging, the call alone is not enough. Until all members of all societies are challenged and taught to look out for violence occurring on our very doorsteps, violence against women and girls will continue. WHY? In most societies, women are perceived as the commodities of men.

Understanding the concept of commodification is key to this problem, and would go a long way towards clarifying and concretely dramatizing the plight of women in a world that still fails to recognize fully the consequences of gender inequality, violation of human rights and ignorance of the depths of human suffering among us.

In many societies, this means that as the commodities of men, women can be hidden, disposed of or kept out of sight for many varied reasons.

What does commodification mean? When any person is in a situation of unequal power, there is vulnerability. Where there is vulnerability, there is always objectification, and when any person becomes an object, there is denial

of personhood. Denying personhood means treating a person as a non-person. A person who is objectified has no right of objection and becomes the commodity of the one holding power. So often, women and girls become 'things' to be used to sell cars, washing machines, jokes, and so on.

Yet, while I agree with the call of Pope Francis that "we pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded," prayer alone is not enough!

Compassion and respect are a powerful combination and every human person deserves both respect and compassion. Yet, when put to the test in certain situations, these two imperatives can diverge from one another. While prayer with compassion may evoke warmth and caring, far too often it is disconnected from the clear-eyed regard for human rights and dignity demanded by respect.

The victims of violence, trafficking and malnutrition surely need our pity and our prayers, but such prayers must

be infused with justice and directed towards action that deals with root causes.

Compassion is a powerful response to human need and human suffering. Sometimes, however, an appeal to compassion can remain an empty appeal – not because the experience of compassion is empty, but because recognition of what compassion entails is empty.

Since the present Covid-19 pandemic began, incidences of sex trafficking and violence against women and girls are on the rise. With the eyes of law enforcement elsewhere, the people smugglers are very, very active.

For example, most of us in Northern Ireland remember with horror the recent example of victims of human smuggling, which resulted in 33 human beings dying in a freezer lorry. The smuggler erased from his mind the fact that the people he was smuggling were someone's sister, brother, son or daughter. The 33 Vietnamese nationals were reduced to commodities, which would yield a high monetary return for the series of lorry drivers involved.



Horror, disgust and outrage are not enough. How did we as a society respond? Did any of us engage with organizations which work to alleviate human suffering? Did we learn or have we learned how to recognize trafficked persons in our midst?

Prayer alone is not enough. The God of Mercy knows that it is not enough to be compassionate – we must ACT!

(Sister Deirdre Mullan is a native of Derry who currently works in the USA. She is the coordinator of the Mercy Girl Effect, an NGO in consultation with UNICEF, which highlights the plight of girls worldwide.)

## St Joseph challenges men to embrace their role in society

by Mary McMenamin



gave me a prayer card before we were married. Since then, we have always turned to St Joseph in times of need and he continues to answer our prayers in the best way possible.

St. Teresa of Avila had a special devotion to St. Joseph, and said: "I cannot call to mind that I have ever asked him at any time for anything which he has not granted; and I am filled with amazement when I consider the great favours which God hath given me through this blessed Saint; the dangers from which he hath delivered me, both of body and of soul".

I was delighted when I heard that Pope Francis had dedicated this year to St Joseph, from the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 2020, until the same feast day in 2021. My initial thoughts were that this year will be a good one if St Joseph is involved.

My personal relationship with St Joseph began many years ago, when my husband

in how he responded to the news the angel gave him. "Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life".

The letter goes on to say, "Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, and take responsibility for them".

Pope Francis, reflecting on fatherhood, makes a beautiful statement that "Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person".

I worked as a volunteer with a prolife organisation for over

20 years, helping women in unplanned pregnancies. A lot of these women did choose life for their babies fortunately. From my experience, however, I found that some men too easily abandon their responsibilities in the name of a woman's choice, when it is discovered that their girlfriend or wife is pregnant with an unplanned pregnancy. Often women are pressurised by the father into having an abortion.

Last year here, in Ireland, there were 6,666 abortions carried out that we know of. Abortion is legal for any reason up to 12 weeks and late term abortions in certain circumstances. The doctors who carry out late term abortions in Ireland have said that is a sickening procedure.

St Joseph is the perfect role model of father and protector and he challenges men to embrace their role in today's society.

Below is a prayer that Pope Francis includes in his letter, which he encourages us to pray together...

"Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the

Blessed Virgin Mary. To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man.

Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen".



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

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**editorthenet15@gmail.com**  
or ring/text 07809292852



# Catholic Schools Week very much a community celebration in Ardmore

by Fr Neil Farren

THIS year's 2021 Catholic Schools Week was celebrated in a totally different way for Glendermott Primary School and the Ardmore Parish than any other of previous years.

For a start, there are no children at this school, nor any other school in this island of Ireland, due to Covid19 virus, except those open for key workers and special needs.

Traditionally, all the Catholic School celebrations of this week would be held in the school. There would have been school assemblies, the school Mass for Grandparents, the day when the grandparents would be invited into the assembly hall with the children for their school Mass and the wee cuppa afterwards. None of that this year.

All learning is done on line, with the children at home, learning on line from their teacher at the school. A whole new approach.

We, in Ardmore Parish, decided with the new technology of on line approach, which we had adopted in the past decade with MCN Media and now Churchmedia.tv, to also add, in the past year, Facebook live streaming of our Parish Liturgies.

These two on line tools we have utilised for the school children and their families at home, especially for Catholic Schools Week. The principal of Glendermott PS, Mr Conor Duddy, informed

all parents of the school of our churchmedia.tv and Ardmore Parish Facebook live streaming, and put this also on the school's web page.

To open Catholic Schools Week, we had the privilege of having the former principal of Thornhill College, Miss Marguerite Hamilton to introduce the celebration on line for the Parish with a liturgy and a talk in the Parish Church. She led this Liturgy and was assisted by a child preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation, Liam Lynch, from Glendermott Primary School and the child's parent, Pauline Lynch.

On the following nights, other parents and their children preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation assisted at the Liturgies with their parents; Natasha McLaughlin with her son, Shea, and Jenny Crothers with her son, Jake. The principal, Mr Duddy, assisted at the Mass, reading the scripture readings and the various prayers on two of the days.

Also involved with reading at our parish Catholic Schools Week Mass were the chair of the school's Board of Governors, Maureen Boyle, as well as Dr Sinead Hughes, John Lafferty and Martina Donnelly, Board of Governor members.

I was assisted by Dolores Chambers and Teresa

McCormick, who are members of our Altar Society, in preparing the Sacred Space in front of the Altar area, that had symbols placed depicting the various themes of Catholic Schools Week.

This year's theme was Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith and Resilience, so our sacred space included: a Crucifix, symbol of our Christian faith; Praying Hands, symbol of Resilience; school RE books, symbols of Learning; Hearts, symbol of Love; a Candle, symbol of Hope.

Every day of the week, the 'Thought for the Day', obtained from the Catholic Schools Week 2021 webpage, were read to remind us of the Catholic School being Communities of Faith, Learning, Love, Resilience and Hope.

Mr Duddy had made it known earlier in the week to all the parents in the school to participate where they could on line, be it at the morning mass – depending on their class working day schedule – but especially to participate in the daily Ardmore Parish Liturgies on line, at 7 pm.

The week's Liturgies were assisted by students attending second level schools, as well as by those students who are doing the special Pope John Paul II Award Programme: Ellie McLaughlin, Pamela Benson, Emily McCarron, Conor McCafferty, Alex Doherty,

and Odhran Black.

These senior students will extend our celebration, which here, in Ardmore, goes beyond the official Catholic Schools Week, to end on the first celebration held for 'International Day for Human Fraternity'; a day recently declared by the United Nations to be held annually on February 4. This day comes as a result of the Christian – Muslim cooperation to promote peace, harmony and intercultural dialogue in the world; a theme close to Pope Francis' heart, and which he has promoted in recent years.

We wish all involved in our Catholic Schools our heartfelt prayers in these difficult times. A special 10 am Mass at St Mary's Church, Ardmore, was celebrated on February 1, the Feast of St Bridget, for all involved in our Catholic Schools Community.

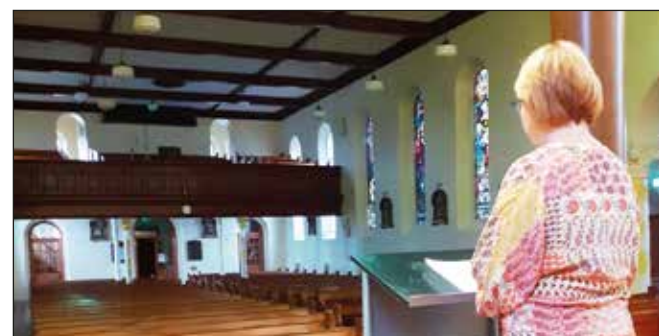
The School principal, Mr Duddy on behalf of our School community, assisted at that Mass, reading scripture and assisting with the Mass Prayers, remembering and praying for all at this difficult pandemic time.

In this 1,500th year since the birth of St Columba, December 7, 521 to December 7, 2021, we ask his intercession for all our safety and well being in this year.

St Bridget – Pray for us. St Columba – Pray for us.



Glendermott Board of Governor members, Martina Donnelly and John Lafferty.



Josephine McDermott, chairperson of Ardmore Parish Pastoral Council, reading the scripture passage during the Covid-19 lockdown at St Mary's Church, Ardmore.



## We are one big family at Glendermott PS

by Conor Duddy, Principal

CATHOLIC Schools Week is always an eagerly awaited event in our school. It gives us a chance to shine a light on all that makes our school unique. We are a proud Catholic school and all our staff demonstrate this on a daily basis in their interactions with the children. We are one big family.

During Catholic Schools Week the highlight is 'Grandparents' Day. Obviously, this year we were unable to welcome visitors to our school but we still celebrated all our grandparents online. Samples of work can be found here: <https://www.glendermott.net/news/grandparents/>

It was lovely to see the work that the children produced. Some of the prayers that they wrote for their grandparents were so poignant and moving. It's clear that our children are missing the interactions with the grandparents. God willing, they will soon be able to resume some form of normality with them.

Fr Farren has been very proactive in his approach and we have shared links to his online services that the older children have been able to enjoy from the comfort of their own homes. Several Y7 children and their parents kindly offered to read at Fr Farren's evening prayer services. The children read beautifully and the prayer services were enjoyed by the whole school community through the wonders of technology.

A big thank you as well to the staff of the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre, who provided wonderful help and support throughout the week, as did Bishop McKeown, who provided the children will daily reflections.

Despite lockdown, through the use of technology our Catholic Schools Week reached a wide and varied audience. We hope and pray that next year we will get back to some form of normality for our Catholic Schools Week celebrations.



Conor McCafferty, Pamela Benson, and, front, Emily McCarron, second level students who took part in the Ardmore Catholic Schools Week celebration



Natasha Doherty and her son, Shea, with Glendermott PS principal, Mr Conor Duddy.



Jenny and Jake Crothers, a P7 student from Glendermott PS



Glendermott Board of Governor members, Maureen Boyle and Dr Sinead Hughes.



Pope John Paul II Award students from Ardmore Parish, who took part in the liturgy, from left, Odhran, Alex and Eile.



*Celebrating Catholic Schools as communities of faith and resilience, Bishop Donal praised all for their adaptability in this time of pandemic, saying...*

## We have not just lain down under problems... We have risen to face them

LED by Bishop Donal and the Diocesan Catechetical Centre team, school communities across the Diocese enjoyed an inspiring programme of activities to celebrate a rather different Catholic Schools Week.

With lockdown measures still in place due to the continued risks associated with Covid-19, one of the highlights of the school calendar, the annual Catholic Schools' Week launch Mass, could only be viewed online with churches closed for public worship.

While this is a much looked forward to occasion, when pupils and staff from schools across the Diocese gather in St Eugene's Cathedral for a colourful and music-filled celebration of the Eucharist together, before embarking on a weeklong celebration of Catholic education, the Catechetical team made every effort to ensure that it was still every bit as special.

And by all accounts they succeeded, with some parents reporting back that it had indeed been very special for them to be able to experience, for the first time, the celebration of this uplifting school Mass by Bishop Donal, along with their children, the majority of whom are undertaking remote learning at home during lockdown.

The Cathedral webcam offered a bird's-eye view of the beautifully decorated altar for the ceremony,

during which parishioners and Pope St John Paul II Award participants, Luke, of St Columba's College, and Dara, Thornhill College, took part in the Liturgy, and Lizzie Rea, the Diocesan Youth Coordinator, led the singing with her sweet lilting voice.

'Communities of Faith and Resilience' was the very fitting theme for the 2021 Catholic Schools' Week, and Bishop Donal opened his homily by saying that, during this pandemic, he had been struck by how people have been so open to learning new skills.

Grandparents are very much included in the Catholic Schools' Week celebrations in the Diocese, and Bishop Donal was sure that many young people "have been impressed by how older relatives like grandparents have taken to following friends and church events on-line, as if they had been doing it all their lives".

"We have all learned how to do things differently and share our ideas and creativity," he said, adding: "I know staff in school will be exhausted after all the extra work – but many of them will be very proud of what your resilient school communities have achieved. In fact, we have learned new ways of working that we will not want to drop, once we get back to more normal life for schools. That level of adaptability is a sign of great resilience. We have not just lain down under problems. We have risen to face them".

He also noted how many young people really want to get back to school after lockdown, saying: "That is not just because it can be difficult to study at home. It is also because you enjoy your education and because schools work hard to build up a sense of identity and of belonging. It is a place where young people can be with their friends and feel at home".

Remarking that belief in God was "not some sort of tablet or vaccine against any problems in life", Bishop Donal added: "Problems and mistakes will arise. But faith in God can be a huge asset in facing the problems in life and bouncing back after the mistakes that we make".

He went on to point out that the faith we celebrate and seek to hand on in the schools is not just that God exists: "It is a message that, because God exists, we can face challenges together and that we are inspired to help the poor, the downtrodden and those trapped behind all sorts of bars. It is important to be reminded of that because there have been times in history when we seem to have forgotten that part of Jesus' teaching".

Highlighting the celebration of St Columba's 1500th birthday, the Bishop spoke about how Columba had sensed a call to be a monk and a man of learning, and "came to the monastery on the hill of Derry".

"But God asked him to do more,"



he added, "After a battle over a book during which a number of people died, he went across the sea to a windy island off the Scottish coast, called Iona. There he set up another monastery and worked to bring learning and faith to the people of Western Scotland. His faith made him a man of resilience, able to bounce back, despite setbacks, prepared to believe that every crisis was an opportunity.

"You do the right thing even when you get knocked back. People of faith don't settle down in their armchair and say, 'Leave me alone.' They seek solutions that will help others. Even at a cost to themselves".

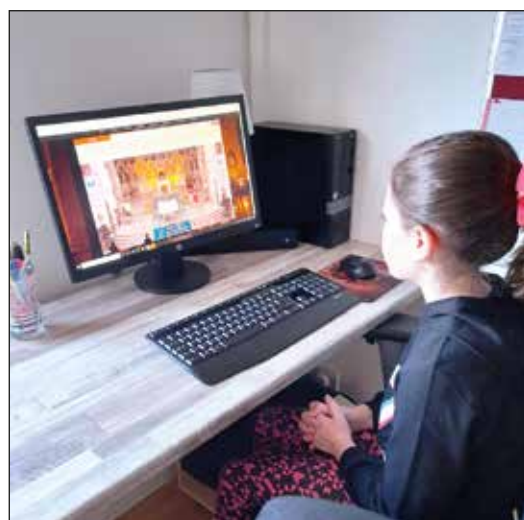
Bishop Donal then invited

the pupils and staff members to celebrate their school communities during Catholic Schools' Week, telling them: "You look inwards to provide space and support for each person, whatever their talents and challenges. And because you have a strong community, you can look outwards, knowing that life is very difficult for many people and believing that, together, we are stronger in facing everything. Faith tells us that selfishness makes people sad whereas generosity makes us saints and heroes.

"This week is an opportunity to thank all those people who have shown great resilience in the last difficult months. And we have a chance to face the future with trust

and confidence. In years to come, you will look back on these times and remember them as tough but as times of great learning. And you can know that God's grace has made you more resilient to face all the challenges that lie ahead. And for that you will be grateful".

In the lead up to the launch Mass, schools were asked to compose prayers for the special week of celebration, and present them on dove-shaped paper, in reference to the 1500th celebration of the birth of the Dove of the Church, St Columba. And Bishop Donal closed the ceremony by reading two of them; those composed by Crossroads PS and Loreto College, Coleraine.





*“If you have to fail, let it be on the side of kindness. Be kinder than kindness itself to the old people” - Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa, O.Carm.*

# Celebrating the precious gift of grandparents

WHILE schools were unable to celebrate Grandparents’ Day as usual this year during Catholic Schools Week, when time in the school day is devoted to them visiting their grandchild in their place of learning, children still got to express their love and appreciation for their grandparents on this special occasion by sending their beautiful creations to their schools online for display.

And Pope Francis has shown his own appreciation of the valuable contribution grandparents make to the lives of their families by instituting a Church-wide celebration of a World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, with the first to be held this year on Sunday, July 4. That is also the month we celebrate the Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus.

Describing the voice of the elderly as “precious”, for its praise of God and preserving the past, the Holy Father also spoke about how they serve as a reminder that “old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between the different generations, to pass on to the young the experience of life”.

He urged for the elderly not to be forgotten, encouraging grandparents and grandchildren to get to know one another, as each enriches the life of the other; grandparents enjoying seeing their grandchildren dream, while the young draw “strength from their grandparents, will go forward and prophesy.”

There is a beautiful quote regarding the importance of kindness towards the elderly attributed to Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa, foundress of the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm:

“If you have to fail, let it be on the side of kindness. Be kinder than kindness itself to the old people”

Born in Brocagh, Co Tyrone on January 21, 1893, Bridget Teresa McCrory moved with her family to Scotland when she was seven years old, and she became a Little Sister of the Poor, a Congregation engaged in the care of the destitute aged, at the age of 19.

Making her Novitiate in La Tour, France, she was sent to America after her Profession and went on to become Mother Superior of a Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor in the Bronx, New York, in 1926.

A year later, during an annual retreat, Mother Angeline felt an urge to do more for the aged for whom she cared and went on to discuss this with Patrick Cardinal Hayes of New York, who also felt that more could be done for the elderly in the area and encouraged her. With his blessing, Mother Angeline and six other Sisters withdrew from the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Poor and were granted permission from Rome to begin a new Community for the care of the aged incorporating Mother Angeline’s ideals.

The Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm was founded on September 3, 1929 and immediately drew the interest of the Carmelite Friars in New York, leading to the new Community becoming affiliated with the great Order of Carmel in 1931. It became known as ‘Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm.’

Going to her eternal reward on her 91st birthday, January 21, 1984, Mother Angeline had the great consolation of seeing the Congregation beyond her expectations. She is laid to rest in the Congregation’s cemetery at St Teresa’s Motherhouse in Germantown, New York.

On June 28, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI, authorized the Promulgation of the Decree of Heroic Virtues

and Mother Angeline became known as Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa, O.Carm.

Doing its bit to reach out to the elderly, the Catholic Grandparents’ Association has recently expanded its activities with the launch of the Catholic Grandparents’ Faith Cafe a couple of weeks before Christmas, over Zoom.

The Cafe serves as an online

social and spiritual space for grandparents and the next one takes place on Tuesday, February 9, at 7.30 pm, via Zoom. The theme will be ‘Grandparents as Influencers’ and the guest speaker is Bishop Fintan Monahan, of the Killaloe Diocese.

To register, email - info@catholicgrandparentsassociation.com.



## Lots of praise for amazing Catholic Schools Week programme

CATHOLIC Schools Week 2021 went ahead despite the restrictions of lockdown, with the Derry Diocese excelling in its online programme of daily assemblies led by Bishop Donal, daily reflections by guest speakers, and live discussion sessions that highlighted all that was good about Catholic education.

The programme was put together under the guidance of the creative team at the Diocesan Catechetical Centre and received widespread praise from the many who tuned in during the week-long celebration of Catholic education.

Each day, pre-recorded School Assembly prayers and messages relating to the theme of Catholic Schools Week were delivered

by Bishop Donal, along with Therese Ferry, Diocesan Primary RE Advisor, and Mary O’Boyle, Diocesan Post-Primary RE Advisor, and were available to watch online.

There were short video recordings for each day also, with reflections by Bishop Donal, who spoke about Communities of Faith, Rita Moore, principal of St Mary’s Limavady, who reflected on Communities of Learning, Fr Paul Farren, director of the Catechetical Centre, who talked about Communities of Love, Michael O’Kane, principal of St Colmcille’s PS, Claudy, who spoke on Communities of Resilience, and Marguerite Hamilton, former principal of Thornhill College,

who reflected on Communities of Hope.

One of the highlights of the week of celebration was the live interview each evening, which took place in the Cathedral Hall, across from St Eugene’s, and could be viewed online. The 20 minute conversations took place between Bishop Donal and a different guest every night.

Long Tower PS principal, Joyce Logue was in the hot seat on the Monday night, and chatted to Bishop Donal about her experience as a Catholic educator for over 30 years, and this was followed the next night with Mark McConnelllogue, Head of RE at St Columb’s College, talking about the importance of the Catholic

witness and his study for an MA in Catholic School Leadership. Thornhill College sixth form student, Evie Doherty, who is also participating in the Diocesan Youth Scholarship, gave an insight into the growing faith interest of young people, before asking Bishop Donal some questions of her own.

The sessions ended with Bishop Donal in the hot seat answering questions sent in from schools and the general public, and he expressed his gratitude for all who helped to make Catholic Schools Week 2021 so successful in the Diocese despite the current challenges.

The recordings are available for viewing on the Diocesan website.





*Reflecting during Catholic Schools Week, retired principal of St Colm's, Draperstown, Mrs Roisin McKenna highlighted how the Catholic faith is very much a natural part of the school day there...*

## The school year in St Colm's is a good faith diary



Mrs Roisin McKenna, recently retired principal of St Colm's, Draperstown.

JANUARY has been a strange month for Ballinascreen parishioner, Roisin McKenna. Not only because of the New Year starting with continued upheaval caused to everyday life as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, but also the major change in her daily routine now that she has retired as principal of St Colm's High School, in her home town of Draperstown.

St Colm's has been such a great part of her life for the last 35 years, first as a Home Economics and Geography teacher and then as principal for 13 years. But having been born and reared a few steps from the front door of the school, her connection with it goes so much deeper than the norm that it is only natural her allegiance for St Colm's goes well beyond the job description.

With the recent celebration of Catholic Schools Week, 'The Net' invited Roisin to share her life-long experience of Catholic education and how her strong Catholic faith helped shape her vocation.

Deeply appreciative of having grown up in a traditional Catholic home, she said: "My parents had a very strong faith and I have a lot to thank them for. I kept the values they instilled in me growing up".

The youngest of eight children born to Rose and Jim O'Kane, of O'Kane's Supermarket in the town, Roisin received her primary education next door to St Colm's, as a pupil of St Mary's School, which was just across the road from her home.

She feels that her elder sister, Anna entering the teaching profession is what instilled the

thought in her as a 15-year-old pupil at St Mary's Grammar School, in Magherafelt, to be a teacher. From there, Roisin went on to train in St Mary's University College, Belfast, and graduated in 1982.

The first three years of her career saw her work as a sub-teacher in six schools, as far away from home as Lurgan and Bessbrook, and as near as Magherafelt and Claudy, and gaining experience of the broad spectrum of grammar, further education and secondary schools. It was when she was teaching in St Patrick's & St Brigid's, in Claudy, that she got a call offering her a year's post in St Colm's.

That was 1985, and when the teacher Roisin was filling in for, while she was on a year out, ended up taking a job with the Education Sector, Roisin was delighted to get the permanent post.

"The experience gained in six schools prior to St Colm's helped me appreciate just how privileged I was to gain a position in my local school. There was something very special about St Colm's," she recalled, adding: "A lot of people asked me why I wanted to teach in the area that I lived in, but that was a big plus for me, especially when I became principal, because I knew the families of the pupils. As a local, I had a vested interest in my own parish as well as a bond with the children and the families. I always thought that was a huge advantage".

When Roisin became principal in 2007, the strong Catholic faith that had shaped her as a person and a teacher up to then, continued to guide her in her new role. And she was supported in this by her vice-principal and close colleague, Patricia Glass.

"It is very important in a Catholic school to lead by example," she remarked, adding: "The Catholic faith is very much a natural part of the school day in St Colm's, with prayers in the morning, when intentions are prayed for. During November, for the Holy Souls, and May, the month of Mary, a decade of the Rosary was said each morning in tutor class. That would just be a natural part of the day and is a team effort, with all staff very

supportive.

"The sixth formers lead the whole school assembly on Mondays. If teachers are up there on the stage delivering during the assembly, the children don't engage as well as they do if it is their peers talking to them. So, as part of their JPPI Award, the sixth years lead the Monday assemblies every week. If it is a Feast Day, the theme of their talk focuses on that, and other themes would include kindness, faith, anti-bullying, online safety, or environmental issues for which St Colm's has won many awards. Pope Francis has made the environment very much part of his own ethos.

"This gives the young people a foundation of faith and when it happens naturally, they absorb it without realising".

She continued: "Everyone is in their own year group for the Tuesday and Wednesday assemblies, which are led by the head of year and include prayers and intentions – a child may want to pray for a loved one who is unwell or someone in the school community who has passed away.

"The special assemblies are those held on Thursdays for Key Stage 3, and Fridays for Key Stages 4 and 5, and the theme can be anything that young people encounter in their lives, and include marking Feast Days".

### Impact

Roisin found that the assemblies that had the most impact were those led by the pupils, as not only were they developing their faith but also their confidence.

"Standing up in front of their peers is not something pupils feel comfortable with," she said, "but I felt it was important in building their confidence, and also giving them an opportunity to talk to their peers about an aspect of their faith.

"If someone in the group leading the assembly was very shy, they didn't have to speak; they could be the one holding a candle or operating the PowerPoint. For a child that is a very big step to get up on a stage, and when they do it in first year, then the shy child may find in second year that he or she is ready now to speak on

stage. On many occasions there were PowerPoint presentations delivering a clear message set to music, which the children loved.

"Each morning, the pupils spend 10 minutes in their tutor groups and on Thursday mornings they have an hour together for the Pastoral Programme, which gives them time to bond and work on their forthcoming assemblies. The Pastoral Programme is part and parcel of the Catholic ethos within St Colm's".

One very memorable assembly for Roisin is that of the whole school assembly during last year's Catholic Schools Week, when RE teachers, Jacqui Conway and Dymna Shields took the lead, with the support of the Pastoral Coordinator, Carol Devlin.

"They put together a PowerPoint presentation of all the things we had done in the school in the year since the previous Catholic Schools' Week," recalled Roisin, adding: "I was standing on the stage watching the presentation for the first time and it was really moving to see how much good work had been done during the year, such as the Shoebox Appeal, the JPPI children going to Lourdes in the summer, the SVP work, the Acts of Kindness, and fundraising.

"There was such a special atmosphere at that assembly, with all the laughter. If you are fundraising for something, you put emphasis on the fun. We had a colour run, which is especially good for raising funds to help the children going to Lourdes. The Key Stage 3 children are involved in the colour run and for them to see themselves covered in coloured powder, during that PowerPoint presentation later in the year, made them laugh. It was a wonderful occasion. These assemblies are very important and so should be memorable for the children."

Making a point of celebrating every child's achievements was encouraged by Roisin, and this included taking a photograph of a tutor group after its assembly ended and displaying it on the year group notice board.

Roisin also regards the Pope John Paul II Programme as essential for the continued faith development

of the young people, and all sixth formers at St Colm's sign up to it

She remarked: "If you are aged 16, you are starting to question a lot of things, particularly your parents, and why you should go to Mass. If you want to achieve the Gold Award, you need to engage in many parish and community activities. This enables faith education to continue for another two years.

"As well as doing parish duties, they are doing a lot of work in school, particularly with younger children. This is all character building – they are role models, helping to organise assemblies and fundraising etc. Through this they are gaining important skills and confidence".

Delighted at the number of Pope John Paul II Award pupils from St Colm's who join the Diocesan Youth Group for the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes, Roisin said that an important part of this was them going on stage, within a month of returning to school after the summer holidays, to share their experience with the rest of the school.

She explained: "They use a PowerPoint presentation to show what they did while in Lourdes, how they helped others, etc. It is very important that they do this because the children listening on the floor are the ones who helped them to get to Lourdes through the fundraising activities".

Describing the school year in St Colm's as "a good faith diary", starting with the Year 8 Mass for the new pupils, Roisin is full of praise for the chaplaincy of Ballinascreen parish priest, Fr Peter Madden.

"Fr Dermot McGirr is the school chaplain now", she noted, "but Fr Madden was the chaplain for my 13 years as principal and for three years before, so that was 16 years in total and he was fantastic. He is an integral part of the school and the children know him so well. When he was school chaplain, he was almost a member of staff, he was there that much. Fr Madden gave very freely of his time to St Colm's, over and beyond any chaplain's duty. It was a labour of love for him and he had so many great ideas".

### Harvest

Following the Year 8 Mass at the start of the new school year, another highlight for Roisin was the Harvest Mass in Holy Rosary Chapel, in October, which is now also established as the start of year Mass for the whole school community at St Colm's.

She recalled: "The Year 11 group are in charge of preparations for the Harvest Mass. They dress the altar with everything you can think of relating to the harvest and they do the readings, prayers of the faithful, taking up the gifts.

"Aware that some children don't go to Mass, we tried to do something different to engage them, opening up the possibility of them returning if they enjoyed the experience. One year we had a Year 11 who was very good at Irish dancing, and she and her friend danced up the aisle in their Irish Dancing costumes with the Offertory gifts".

Roisin is also a great believer in keeping sport and faith connected, and during her years as principal, Mass was always celebrated before major games.

Recalling one of these occasions, she said: "Our girls won their second All Ireland in Camogie in 2020. With the lockdown in March, we couldn't attend Mass, but when we could we had a most beautiful celebration of the Mass in Holy Rosary Chapel to celebrate our sporting achievements. Each player sat socially distanced with their parents. The pupils were involved and it was a very moving occasion. It was a way of thanking the young people as well as being thankful for their skills and for what they had achieved".

The links between St Colm's and the local community are very strong, and one of the occasions when this was clearly evident to Roisin was during Lent, when many parishioners came to the 8.30 am Mass in the school for three mornings each week. Another occasion she highlighted was the annual Christmas Parish Service in Straw Chapel, when parishioners get an insight into the developing talents of the young people, with the sixth formers

*see over -*



Camogie Celebration Mass.



St Colm's Harvest Mass.



## Doing his bit during lockdown to help schools navigate the best online classroom resources, the new principal of St Colmcille's PS, Claudy, points out...

# We all go through our storms and get to the other side with help from people around us



Mr Michael O'Kane, principal of St Colmcille's PS, Claudy.

WITH online learning very much to the fore in this time of lockdowns, Michael O'Kane, the principal of St Colmcille's Primary School, in the Co Derry village of Claudy, has been happily sharing ideas and resources from his vast technology experience with his colleagues, in an effort to help them continue doing what they love best...educating children and young people to enable them to be the best that they can be.

That is something he, personally, has striven for since childhood, with the encouragement of his parents, and the teachers and schools he feels blessed to have been educated in.

Reflecting on this and the fruits

of a Catholic education during the annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week, the 35-year-old put the resilience he has developed over the years down to a good grounding in the Catholic faith and the support of his family.

The eldest of five boys born to Henry and Majella O'Kane, of Swatragh, Michael spoke of the great influence his mother has been in his faith life: "She talked to us about God and Jesus regularly and always encouraged us to do the best we could. She encouraged me to be an altar boy and I served in my local chapel during my primary school years, after having made my First Holy Communion.

"Being an altar boy gave me an opportunity to serve the community, and I remember serving at funerals and weddings in the parish. One particular memory that stands out is serving at Mass in Kearney's Glen, just up the road from our home. That was a big occasion every year; there was a great sense of community coming together. It celebrated an era that greatly interests me as to how the faith endured in Ireland at that time.

"I grew up in a great faith community, including that of St

John's Primary School, and later that of St Patrick's College, in Maghera."

He recalled always wanting to be a teacher and, coming up to his A'level years, he decided to pursue this vocation: "I discussed this with my mother and father and they really encouraged me. So, after my A'levels, I studied for a History degree in St Mary's University College, Belfast, and then did my PGCE at Ulster University, Coleraine. It worked out for me to do my teacher training placements in local schools and I enjoyed it from day one."

After graduating in 2008, Michael's first teaching post was in St Joseph's PS, Dunloy, where he taught for a couple of years before moving to teach in St John's PS, in his home parish. Then he got a position as a Technology Educator with the Education Board, which led to opportunities to work with Apple.

"I still work with Apple and education authorities all over the world as a result of that experience," said Michael, who has had interest in technology from childhood.

He recalled: "When I was at St John's PS, I would have been really

into technology and would have stayed on for the after school club. I also remember 'Santa' bringing a computer for Christmas, when I was about 10 or 11 years old, and I loved using it.

"I have always seen the value of technology. When I went into education I got good opportunities to learn from the IT technicians in the schools I taught in, particularly St John's, in Swatragh, and also in St Joseph's, Dunloy.

"I worked with the Education Board for two-and-a-half years, helping to educate schools in the North in the use of technology, and Apple got in touch with me to present conferences around the world, in places like South Africa, Norway, Germany and Holland."

Commenting on the importance of equipping young people with the skills that they will need for jobs, for example in technology and coding, Michael said: "Two hundred years ago, the linen industry was the main source of jobs, 100 years ago it was ship building, and then construction in the last 50 years. Now, while Brexit and Covid have affected employment greatly, we have been getting more and more American IT companies bringing jobs here, not in big numbers, but 50 here and 30 there, so it is important that we help the children to learn the skills needed for these."

### Awards

And, Michael is more than happy to share his knowledge in this area, as is evident from his role as an Apple Distinguished Educator, which he was offered after winning a few technology awards during his three years as teaching-principal in St Peter and St Paul's PS, Foreglen, in the Banagher Parish; his first principal role.

"As an Apple Distinguished Educator," he explained, "I help and assist other schools to plan and deliver the use of technology in the curriculum, and help with remote learning."

When he arrived in St Colmcille's PS as the new principal early last year, Michael soon discovered that, under the guidance of the IT coordinator, Ms Katrina Robinson, the staff were delivering remote learning to the best that it can be.

He remarked: "They really developed online teaching from September to Christmas. It is nowhere near as good as teaching and learning in the classroom, but it is the best that can be done at the minute."

As principal of a school, Michael believes it is important to ensure that the whole child is developed – academically, spiritually and physically: "Outdoor play and awareness of the world around us have an equally important role to play in developing our children. And that is a strength of Catholic



Rembrandt's Calming of the Storm.

education.

"I share stories that I heard about Jesus from my parents and at school, and encourage the children to use these as a way to live life. I try to highlight the inspiration Jesus was and is; His resilience and how He built a team of people to help others, and from this show them that they should treat people as they would like to be treated themselves."

The prayer life of St Colmcille's normally includes daily morning prayer together in the Assembly Hall, which is sometimes led by Michael, as principal, or by the parish priest, Fr David O'Kane. At Christmas, the children usually lead a Carol Service in the local St Patrick's Church, and the school also hosts a big celebration for Grandparents Day, when, in normal circumstances, the community comes together in the school.

"My faith has helped me, as has the support of my family and wife, Nuala, and the importance of that can't be understated," said Michael, adding: "Sometimes things don't go right and you take a couple of days to dust yourself down and, with the help of family and the resilience that faith gives you, you get on with it.

"I try to be the best I can. I always wanted to be a teacher and as soon as I became a teacher, I wanted to be a principal. I wanted to give children, staff and community the best that I can be and help them to be the best that they can be.

"I have an image of Rembrandt's painting of 'Jesus calming the storm' on my office wall. We all go

through our storms, and we get to the other side with the help and support of the people around us".

Michael thought it was fitting, therefore, that the theme of this year's Catholic Schools Week was 'Communities of Faith and Resilience', saying: "There are many positives to be taken from the last year as well. A lot has been done to help those more vulnerable. In Claudy, the local GAA Club has worked to provide assistance for families, and we, in the school, had to ensure that all was safe for those in the building and to help the children learning from home".

The father of three children, aged six, four and two, added: "Parents are having to be so resilient also with regards to remote learning, and there are teachers who are working with their own children as well as their pupils".

Expressing his delight to now be the principal of St Colmcille's PS, Michael paid tribute to the excellent school his predecessor, Mrs Brieghe O'Neill, built up: "It is great to be working with a fantastic team and I hope we have great years to come. The staff really are brilliant across the board; the teachers, classroom assistants, secretary and caretakers. I walk into the school every day and everything is done".

In turn, it seems clear that, in the short time he has been in the role, Michael is very much appreciated for his contribution to school life in St Colmcille's as principal, with one of the parents nominating him for a 'Hero of 2020 Award' through the Stephen Nolan BBC radio programme!

### Continued from p6

being the only readers.

Remarking that Catholic Schools are asked to connect with their community, she said: "This can be hard to do, but St Colm's does this very well. The staff are very engaged in so many ways with the community, and the school youth club has links with the local FOLD and go up and help tend to the gardens. Being kind and helping those who can't help themselves is the main mantra of St Colm's".

The school also has a biodiversity area within the grounds developed by Mrs Clare Devlin, called Susan's Trail after Susan Potter, a former school secretary who died in 2010, and within this area is a Garden of Remembrance that was officially opened by Bishop Donal McKeown.

Roisin explained that anyone who had a loved one passed away could plant a tree in memory of them in the Garden, adding: "Anyone within the school community or parish can come and spend time here whenever they want. There are lovely trees and benches, and the area is to be extended as, sadly, quite a number of people have passed away since it was first opened."

Other important faith celebrations appreciated by Roisin were the Year 12 and Year 14 Leavers' Masses, with her hope being that the good curriculum time given to Religious Education in the school and all the opportunities that were taken to develop the whole child

through the strong Catholic ethos in St Colm's, will give them an array of strengths to draw on as they go onwards and forwards through life. One of the guiding philosophies of St Colm's has been to give our young people roots and wings.

When it came to their own leaving of St Colm's, the most meaningful way for Roisin and Patricia to have their retirement marked was through the celebration of Mass.

"It was an absolute privilege to be the principal of a school like St Colm's," said Roisin, adding: "Not many people get to succeed in their career a few steps from their front door. If anyone had told me, when I was 18, that I would spend my career so close to home, I wouldn't have believed them.

"I was very fortunate to have had the support of the Board of

Governors, the chairman, Patsy McShane, staff, parents, local community, and Fr Madden, and to have worked with so many wonderful children over the years. I had plenty of challenges but there was always a way, with faith, to help me deal with those, and I wish the new principal, Sinead McAllister all the very best".

Taking time to relax during January, though finding it very strange not being in the school, Roisin is looking forward to continuing an advisory role with CCMS, as an appointed associate.

She is also looking forward to spending more time with her husband, Seamus, three children, Aideen, Conor, and Ryan, and four grandchildren, especially when the pandemic passes, as well as keeping her hand in the education sector, walking, and reading novels.



Bishop Donal with Fr Peter Madden at the opening of the Remembrance Garden.



*THIS month, Hollie, Peter, Oisin, Gemma, Zara and John, 'The Net' youth contributors from the Co Tyrone, Inishowen, Co Derry and Derry City Deaneries, share their thoughts on Lent, embracing it as an opportunity to grow closer to God and others in preparation for the celebration of Easter, and extend this thought process in their reflections on Christian Unity Week that was celebrated in the latter half of January.*

*Hollie and John reflect on their Baptism, as encouraged by Pope Francis on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, while Zara shares her experience as a Catholic student to celebrate Catholic Schools' Week.*

*Gemma's artistic talents come to the fore again as she celebrates the Feast of St Brigid with a beautiful, colourful painting of her school's Patron Saint, and she also comments on how Pope Francis' encouragement of young people is making an impact on her peers.*

*And Hollie, who is also a Diocesan Youth Scholarship participant, launches the project she is undertaking for her JPPII Papal Cross Award – an online Book Club to enable JPPII Award participants gain hours while exploring the key themes of Pope Francis' 'Christus Vivit', 'Making room for the Young Church'.*



Hollie Frystal,  
Co Tyrone Deanery.



Oisin Mulhern,  
Co Derry Deanery.



Peter Grant,  
Inishowen Deanery.



Gemma Gallagher,  
Derry City Deanery



John Agustine Joseph,  
Derry City Deanery.



Zara Schlindwein,  
Derry City Deanery.

## Let's really push to achieve our Lenten promises by Gemma Gallagher

LENT can be a very challenging time for many Christians who may suffer from addictions, or many other people who struggle to come away from things.

Personally, this Lent I want to take on something different, like branching out and discovering what other talents I may have, as well as finding more motivation, which can be hard during this

pandemic.

Lent, this year, will probably be even harder with the fact that everyone is very isolated at this specific time.

I would like to see Christians, including myself, pushing themselves harder to focus themselves on God and really push to achieve their Lenten promises.



## Lent is a great opportunity to reconcile with ourselves and God by Oisin Mulhern

LENT is one of the most important times of the year for many people, as it is a time of preparation for the most important event in the liturgical calendar, Easter. It is a time to self-reflect on how we have acted throughout the year, seeing if we can improve ourselves and act more in line with what God wants us to do.

As many will know, Lent usually begins on Ash Wednesday, when we all go to Mass and receive ashes in the shape of a cross on our forehead, which are made with the palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday. This is a symbol of remorse for all we have done wrong or that was not in line with God. It helps us to begin the period of self reflection.

Usually, during Lent, many people will sacrifice certain items, ranging from electronics to other luxury goods, such as chocolate, in order to repent and prepare for Easter. These small sacrifices are

offered up to Our Lord as a way or saying sorry and purifying our souls.

This period is in relation to the 40 days and nights Our Lord fasted in the desert. We, too, want to fast and prepare, or give up things that we enjoy in the hope that we can have the strength that Jesus showed in the desert when He was taunted and tempted by the devil.

Alternatively, we can go on doing good, such as making a point of helping others in any way that we can; something that Jesus spent his life doing.

Personally, Lent is very important to me for a variety of reasons. The first being that I usually take a moment to look inward at myself, at how I've acted in the past year and whether I acted properly or improperly in line with God would want. Secondly, if I haven't acted properly in line with how God would want, I can use the time to ask for forgiveness and resolve to

do better going forward.

I also use Lent as a time to become closer to God in many ways, these include making a good routine of saying prayers and taking time out of my day to talk to God as well; discussing things like my worries and aspirations with Him.

God wants us to spend time with Him every day and, if we use the time of Lent correctly, this is exactly what we should be doing. Giving up distractions and making time for God is all that He wants.

We should never let life get in the way of our relationship with God; after all, He is the One who gave us life and He is the One who offered His only son up so that we can share in eternal life with Him.

One of the most important ways to become closer to not only God but Mary as well is through

the Rosary. I find that the Rosary especially gives me plenty of time to appreciate Our Lord and Mary, and to thank them both for all that they do to help me through daily life.

Finally, I believe Lent also helps me to become closer with my family, as there are many times when we come together and pray with one another, the main example of this being the Rosary, where we all pray together and take our turns to each say a decade. This brings us closer together because as the saying goes 'those who pray together stay together'.

I truly believe that Lent is, in many ways, a very important time in the liturgical year and can be used by everyone as a means of reconciling with themselves and with God.



## What Lent means to me by Peter Grant

LENT is a period of 40 days before Easter for reflection and preparation, during which we sacrifice one of our everyday items or habits we like, just as Jesus did in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights, and we can also take on something for the better in our life.

As we go into Lent, it also marks the first year anniversary of the coronavirus, Covid-19 leading to the island of Ireland going into its first lockdown. We are currently in our third lockdown and we have a sign of hope with the vaccines being distributed across the world.

Once Covid-19 came to Ireland, it was like Lent was extended for the year, as we had to sacrifice everyday things we do, such as visiting our friends, grandparents and family, and also our hobbies

outside our homes.

In the Gospel of Matthew (10:1-15), Jesus' disciples had to sacrifice their ordinary working lives to follow Jesus and spread the word of God to people across the globe. Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and saw two men, Peter and his brother, Andrew. Both of them were casting nets into the sea and Jesus approached them and said, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men". Both of the brothers followed Jesus and became the first of His 12 disciples.

This Gospel account is very similar to today's world during the Covid-19 pandemic, as many of us across the globe have had to sacrifice our daily routines, and some cases even jobs, to protect others from the virus.

Peter and his brother, Andrew sacrificed their jobs as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee and became Jesus' disciples, putting all their trust into a person whom they didn't know and had seen for the first time. They both followed Jesus and became preachers of the word of God when Jesus rose from the dead, spreading the good news of God and Jesus around the world, with Peter becoming the first Pope of the Catholic Church.

Today, I believe we can follow in the footsteps of brothers, Peter and Andrew, in sacrificing our everyday things and taking on something good during the course of Lent, and also during the pandemic.

We might not know what is going to happen in the future

regarding the pandemic, but there is a sense of hope due to the rolling out of vaccines. There is always light at the end of the tunnel, like what happened Andrew and also Peter.

During Lent, we might not be in our churches to celebrate Easter like last year, but we can always be connected with one another spiritually through this time of special significance in our church, and, hopefully, see light at the end of the tunnel in years to come.



## Whatever you choose to sacrifice this Lent...maximise the impact you will have on others and the world by Zara Schlindwein

WITH Lent beginning in February, we are given an insight into the progress we have already made this year. The six weeks of preparation that we await allow us all to stop and take stock of our lives. However, we cannot expect it to be peaceful; Lent is a time of great difficulty and challenge, when our perseverance and tenacity will either wither away or rise to its prominent role.

By observing the forty days of Lent, we replicate the sacrifice that Jesus made through his withdrawal into the desert. We are told that He experienced loneliness and isolation, which I am sure many people can relate to today.

We have faced many trials in this past year, but participating in Lenten traditions gives us the reassurance that we are not alone and, no matter what challenges may come our way, there is always light at the end of dark times.

So, as we grow in confidence for the trying times that may lie ahead, we must also look forward to the light that will remerge in the reflection of our increased strength.

In my opinion, Lent is a time for change. As Pope Francis said, "Lent is a good time for sacrificing. Let us deny ourselves something every day, to help others."

We should take something from

this message. As we enter into Lent, we should sacrifice bad habits that may cause harm to others, on a personal level, on a community level and on a global level. That means pursuing small acts of kindness to help people who may be in need, such as reaching out to family, friends or neighbours, whilst keeping them safe.

We also must strive to protect our community and not degrade the good efforts of those who are following the guidelines regarding the virus, by doing the opposite.

And, on an international level, we could aid others through charity and prayer, whilst also limiting the negative impact that we have

on the planet itself. It so easy to make small changes, such as using less plastic or burning fewer fossil fuels, but, most importantly, educating ourselves on the welfare of the environment.

Whatever you choose to sacrifice this Lent, just think about how you can maximise the impact that you will have on others and the world.





*Pope Francis reminds us to cherish our baptismal identity, writes Hollie Frystal...*

## “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”

ON January 10, we celebrated the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. For most of us, the day of our Baptism is a blur because we were very young; however, we can connect with our Baptism in several ways. For example, at Easter we, once again, are sprinkled or immersed with Holy Water and we renew our Baptismal promises. At Confirmation, we ask for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to shower down upon us.

Additionally, we think of Pope Francis' reminder to stay connected to our roots. We can relive the day of our Baptism by asking family members about it and, if possible, search for photographs.

Throughout our Christian lives, we continue to renew our Baptismal promises, encounter the Holy Spirit, attend Confessions, reflect and ask questions, and to grow in our relationship with Christ and continue our vocational journeys - like Jesus did when He embarked on His public ministry that He initiated through His Baptism. We are all called to

one mission through our Baptism: Holiness.

Pope Francis, speaking from the Apostolic Library during one of his Sunday Angelus prayers, reflected on the account of Jesus' Baptism. His Holiness noted that after the Feast of the Epiphany, we do not hear much else of Jesus' life, until about 30 years later when we encounter His Baptism, which marks the start of His public ministry.

The Sacrament of Baptism, as we know it, 'is a sacrament that washes away original sin, which makes us Christians and members of God's family and members of the Church'. This was a penitential practice, in which John the Baptist preached a 'Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'.

However, Jesus did not need to be cleansed of sin, as He was born without sin. Nevertheless, Jesus did this so that He could be like one of us, and to take the weight of the sins of the world upon His shoulders.

The second element to Jesus' Baptism is that the 'Trinity is

finally revealed'. The Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the shape of a dove, and Pope Francis added that "He lowers Himself upon us and the Spirit descends upon Him." Jesus bows down as a (suffering) servant.

Thirdly, after Jesus came up out of the water, the Heavens opened, and a voice said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." By 'cherishing our Baptismal identity', we are reminded that we are all God's children, and that He sent His only Son into this world for us. We are reminded of our roots and our collective mission as a whole Church.



Fr Michael Doherty, PP Melmount, holding Hollie after her baptism, with her parents and godparents.

I was baptised on January 31, 2003, which is now over 18 years ago. Reflecting on 'my baptismal identity', I see myself as one of God's children and, since the day of my Baptism, my identity has grown a lot stronger in the Church in many ways, for instance, through making other Sacraments.

I have also been reminded of my 'baptismal identity' through other experiences, such as the Holy Water Baths in Lourdes. Let's keep in mind Pope Francis' reminder of 'cherishing our baptismal identity' - especially as a unified Christian Church who all are devoted to the one and only God.



Hollie sleeping peacefully after her baptism.



Hollie being baptised by Fr Michael Doherty, in St Mary's Church, Melmount

## I am no saint, but without baptism I would not be who I am today

*by John Augustine Joseph*



FOLLOWING the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6, the calendar year takes a leap of 30 years to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. As we know, Jesus' baptism begins the three-year journey that would take him to Calvary.

Even though the Gospels give us little information about His life

during this period, apart from the Finding in the Temple, the Holy Father in his Sunday Angelus address, pointed out that our Lord "spent most of His time living an ordinary life, without standing out".

It was a 'hidden' time that Jesus "spent with His family, obeying His parents, studying, and working",

explained the Holy Father.

For Jesus, it was a time of preparation, in which He allowed Himself to prepare for the journey. He took time to stoop to the level of us humans so that He could live the ordinary life of a human, but above all to conquer evil and redeem us from the slavery of sin. For God, who created all that we see, smell, hear, touch or taste, it must have required great humility.

As the Holy Father reminds us, God conquers worldly evil "by humbling himself and taking charge of it".

Jesus' 30-year 'preparation' reveals to us the "greatness of daily life and the importance of every gesture and moment of life in the eyes of God", said Pope Francis.

The 30-year preparation leads

to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. We again see Jesus humbling Himself in front of others, who do not know that he is God, and John the Baptist, who knew who Jesus was.

The Holy Father explained in his address that the baptism consisted of a penitential rite and commented that "it was a sign of one's willingness to convert, asking forgiveness of one's sins". It shows Jesus' willingness to guide us by being like us, but not in our faults.

It is during this baptism, that God reveals who Jesus is. If Jesus was unknown before, he was out in the open after this. The Trinity is revealed - the Father (the voice), the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit (the dove) - and the perfect love between the three is said out loud

- "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee, I am well pleased".

What God did at that moment may seem insignificant in some ways, after all, many of our parents take their time to express their love to us. But through Jesus, God is extending His offer of love to all of us and, with those words, He makes his intentions clear. And that offer is extended to us through the medium of baptism.

The Holy Father describes the day of our baptism as the day in which "we were immersed in the love of Christ who died and rose for us and in which we received the gift of the Holy Spirit".

It's on that day we, by ourselves or through a sponsor, accepted God's universal offer to become His child. In my parent's decision

to baptise me, they made a deliberate decision in entrusting me to the hands of God. The baptism I received, the baptism through which our Lord began His public ministry, began my journey as a Christian; a journey that I have been warned countless times is not the journey that the world expects me to take, a journey that goes against my inner instincts to do what I want to do, a journey that requires of me to be better than who I am.

I am without a doubt no saint, but without the baptism that I received, I would not be who I am today.

(<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-01/pope-angelus-baptism-lord-catechesis.html>)

## In a world full of storms, it is time to break down barriers, build relationships and accept difference *by Oisín Mulhern*

CHRISTIAN Unity Week is dedicated to praying for unity in all areas of the world. It is taking place as I write this. Personally, I believe that Christian Unity Week is a great celebration as it gives us time to reflect and discuss not what breaks and divides us, but what brings us closer together, through forgiveness and dialogue.

The XXXII Day for Deepening and Developing the Dialogue between Catholics and our Jewish Brothers and Sisters also took place in Italy. This enabled

both people of the Catholic and Jewish faiths to come together and discuss their faiths with one another, seeing both similarities and differences.

Through open dialogue, people can come to understand each other's faith with an open mind and realise that differences are to be respected. Having differing opinions and beliefs does not make us a lesser people.

I believe this is one of the best examples of how we, as Christians, can show unity, by discussing and

learning about different faiths and cultures. We must live as one and show respect towards all other humans regardless of background, faith or culture. Jesus accepted everyone and so should we; who are we to judge?

Another important aspect of the Week of Unity is what Pope Francis highlighted, this being the belief that unity should be higher than conflict. I believe this to be an integral message not only to Christians but the world as a whole.

Recently, it has become all too common to let conflict come between different groups, causing greater divisions and unrest, where instead these groups should be working together for the greater good.

As recent events in America showed, division causes devastation, destruction and even death. If we truly believe in God then we should have dialogue, find common ground and work for peace.

In a world full of storms, it is

time to break down barriers, build relationships and accept difference.

No one is perfect, no one is without sin and no one is better than anyone else. Threats and violence lead to heartache and pain but mature discussions can lead to acceptance and peace.

Unity is the way forward, if only everyone could open their hearts to this, the world would be a much brighter place.





# Becoming one in loving Jesus we can succeed in life together *Peter Grant*

CHRISTIAN Unity is the unique grace of the Holy Spirit which allows all believers from different backgrounds to come together to show their love for Jesus in body, mind and spirit.

Christian Unity Week lasted from January 18-25 this year, and had the theme 'Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit', which Pope Francis said highlighted Jesus' wish that we "abide in His love so that we might bear much fruit".

Pope Francis has encouraged worldwide prayer during these

difficult times too, so that everyone feels a sense of togetherness across the world, though from different backgrounds.

I think that it is important to celebrate Christian Unity Week every year to bring people from all different nationalities and backgrounds to celebrate our love for Jesus. In Ireland today, there are many different Christian groups that follow in the footsteps of Jesus and Christian Unity Week is a great opportunity for all Christian groups to put their differences to the side and come together and

thank Jesus for what He has done for us.

As we know from the past, there has been war between these groups in Ireland for many years, and the same in many other countries across the world. Like Pope Francis said, the main thing is that we abide in Jesus' love, so that we might bear much fruit, meaning that if we all put our differences to one side, and come together to love Jesus and pray together through body, mind and spirit, we may all succeed in life together with the help of others,

through our different Christian groups in Ireland and around the world, as we become one in loving Jesus.

I agree that Christian Unity Week isn't just a celebration for our Christian groups, but for all other religious dominations throughout the world, as we use this celebration to come together with our different beliefs and learn from one another, like Jesus would have wanted.

Using Christian Unity Week as an example of acceptance to all people from different



backgrounds, we can all come together to support each other in need for the future as well as in today's world, as John said in his

Gospel, (15:13), "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

*The journey to unity has finally begun...*

## How we can be inspired by Pope Francis and other leaders around the world *by Zara Schlindwein*

POPE Francis has recently encouraged the faithful followers of Jesus to pray that the holy desire for unity may be accomplished. The Pope revealed these words ahead of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. He explained that the theme for this year surrounded "Jesus' request that we abide in His love so that we might bear much fruit", which is inspired by John 15: 5-9.

It was chosen to express the Christian community's vocation to pray and work for reconciliation and unity within the Church, our human family and all creation. The week of prayer involved representatives of other Churches as well, highlighting his growing support

for unity.

This custom has a history of over 100 years, with "the hope of moving closer towards the fulfilment of the Last Supper prayer, 'that they may all be one.'"

However, I feel as though we have stepped into a new era of hope that may bear more fruit compared to previous endeavours. The Church is blessed to have a forward-thinking leader during these pivotal times. Pope Francis has made it his personal mission to transform the longstanding conservative image of the Catholic Church, working steadily to diversify it and welcome the true message of Catholicism.

He has adopted certain issues,

such as economic inequality, environmental protection and further inclusion and put them to the forefront of his papal platform. 'Time' magazine declared him as the 2013 'Person of the Year', describing him as 'The People's Pope'.

As the prayers concluded, he announced, "Let us pray together so that Jesus' desire might be accomplished – that all might be one: unity, which is always higher than conflict".

These truthful words summarise all arguments against discrimination or division; the fact that amalgamation is better than dispute. We may all look different, share different cultures, or different interests, but we all

have one common factor: the fact that we were all made in the image and likeness of God. So, let's not waste time and effort to receive negative outcomes. Why would we, as when we are collaborated, we form an unbreakable force?

There have been many others who have led the way on the path to harmony. Despite the innumerable people who lost their lives due to the coronavirus, others have continued to remain united in the struggle against it. When together, the appeal for the greater good is strengthened and lives can be saved. Just look at the amazing work of those on the frontline, and how their joint efforts combine to diminish the challenge that we all face.

Unity can be observed in countless ways; the ceremony of marriage provides a prime example of this. It can also be observed through peaceful demonstrations in favour of racial, social or environmental justice, where huge amounts of people merge to voice their opinions in such a powerful and positive way. And perhaps through political actions, such as those of President Joe Biden, who strives to unite a divided country.

As I said, there are many more forms that it can take, but each follow the same principle, and that is what is referenced in Matthew 18:19-20, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they



ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them".

This message should inspire us to face off any conflict that may arise and encounter the future with a strong mindset and a united force, as it is only together that we can change for the better.

## Catholic Schools' Week through the eyes of a Catholic school student *by Zara Schlindwein*



Lumen Christi pupil, Zara and her sister, Saoirse, who attends Rosemount PS, Derry.

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Lumen Christi College

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# Pope's focus on youth really is encouraging young people today

by Gemma Gallagher



POPE Francis often encourages young people to go out and do stuff with their lives and talks to young people about reaching their

full potential.

I appreciate this as it encourages young people who want to do good with their life and are very focused on living out the best they can for God, and to feel good about themselves.

The Pope often says that every young person has been given gifts, and that young people are called to change the world and the lives of others, whether that's through their actions, talents or personality.

He also preaches to young people not to not fall away from the Church, and I really think a lot of young people are taking that in today.

From my experience, through his focus on the youth, I think this Pope Francis really is encouraging the young people of today.



## Gemma celebrates St Brigid through art

I first did this St Brigid's art piece for my school, which is St Brigid's College, in Derry.

I really enjoyed doing this painting of St Brigid because I like her teachings and my own confirmation name is Brigid.

Again, I used bright colours,

especially all over the face because I liked the way it almost looked like a stain glass window and I wanted to take a modern twist on the traditional religious stain glass windows that we see in our churches and cathedrals.

## 'Exploring' Christus Vivit - Youth Online Book Club

# 'Making room for the Young Church'

by Hollie Frystal

WOULD you like to gain hours for your Pope John Paul II Award... To 'explore' the key themes of Pope Francis' post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 'Christus Vivit'? And more importantly, why not be a voice for your generation and take part in the mission towards a youthful Church and a brighter future?

This year, I am undertaking the Papal Cross Award, and I was thinking long and hard about what I believe could be a worthwhile and fruitful programme that will benefit both me and the participants.

The project will be based solely on the basis of peer-to peer ministry, with our focus being on the fact that 'young people are the future of the Church, but they are also the present of the Church.'

To my knowledge, the motivation behind this Award were the inspiring words of Pope John Paul II, celebrating a youth Mass in Galway, in 1979. His

Holiness addressed the young people and said, "I believe in you!"

Pope Saint John Paul II's words still echo throughout the generations today and are vital especially in present day Ireland, where sadly many young people are not as involved in the Church anymore.

From June 21-23, 2019, I went on the pilgrimage to Lough Derg and while I was on the island I bought Pope Francis' new Apostolic Exhortation 'Christus Vivit', which focuses on young people and those who work with young people.

My first impression of the book was the fact that I found it easy to read and, more importantly, I felt that the Church had finally grasped young people's realities in which they find themselves in today. There was a great sense of hunger for renewal, which was encouraging.

The Vatican document has been widely adopted, and continues to serve and support youth ministry

initiatives both at parish and diocesan level. Additionally, about two years later, a book called 'Exploring Christus Vivit' was published on October 21, 2020. This book consists of a collection of essays brought together by a number of people who have experience in working with youth, and have 'explored' the key themes to Pope Francis' original document.

I will use this practical guide to help me lead this new programme. We will delve into the chapters, themes, topics, challenges and issues which young people have expressed to Pope Francis, and we will reflect on the questions which 'Exploring Christus Vivit' has to offer.

Finally, I do believe that this programme will consist of rich conversations and that it is a brilliant opportunity to explore the key challenges regarding young people and Church today, and to be a voice for your generation.

It is a great way to gain hours for your Pope John Paul II Award and, like Pope Francis' emphasis on the concept of 'synodality' - we, too, can 'journey together' through the season of Lent by growing in faith and having interesting, valuable and fruitful conversations.

The six-week book club will begin after Ash Wednesday, on February 18, and will run every Thursday at 7.30 pm, via Zoom, throughout the Lenten period. It is not essential to have read either of the books beforehand, however, it would help.

This programme will solely consist of discussions on key chapters rather than reading the book as a group, as I am conscious that some young people are not that interested in reading, but instead like to talk and discuss.

Applications are available on the Derry Diocesan Youth Instagram Page. I look forward to this new programme and I hope many of you will decide to sign up.

## Derry Youth Ministry update

DERRY Youth Ministry will be running a new series of Alpha that will take place via Zoom every Monday, from 7.30-8.30 pm, starting on February 15.

Running for seven weeks, this programme is for anyone who is interested in joining other young people from around the Diocese to ask big questions and have a conversation about them.

Anyone who is doing their JPII Award will also gain some hours by taking part.

Email [lizzieria@derrydiocese.org](mailto:lizzieria@derrydiocese.org) or message the social media pages @derryyouth for a registration form.

Derry Youth will also be preparing two live events; one on Pancake Tuesday and one on Holy Thursday, in which the young people of the Diocese can get involved in.

Keep an eye on the @derryyouth social media pages for more updates on these events.

Derry Youth Scholarship participant and 'The Net' youth contributor, Hollie Frystal is launching a book club that is beginning on February 18 at 7.30pm.

It will explore Pope Francis' Exhortation to Young People, 'Christus Vivit'. Anyone who would like to sign up to this book club can do so by messaging @derryyouth on our social media platforms or by emailing Lizzie.

Derry Youth Scholarship members have been working closely with Mary's Meals, and were a part of a post-primary school programme for the charity, where they were given the opportunity to review it before it launches now in February.

They are also involved with the Mary's Meals Appeal for Tigray, in Ethiopia, which is currently in the middle of a crisis due to ongoing conflict in the region.

Again, keep an eye on the @derryyouth social media pages for more updates on this, and how you can get involved in the appeal too.

We would like to express our gratitude to each and every one of the young people in the Diocese for their amazing work, and we look forward to working with other young people throughout the year.

## Thornhill calendar offers creative Lenten activities

THE Thornhill Lenten (scratch) Calendar might be a good way of journeying through the six-weeks of Lent 2021.

It is a simple little action each day, inviting those who undertake it to faithfully attend to the Lenten call 'to pray, to fast, to give.'

Since the Covid-19 restrictions, the usual rhythms of life and, indeed, our faith practice have been limited in so many ways. The Promise Card this year has been particularly creative in the gentle, yet formative activities we might engage in.

Geraldine, from Thornhill Ministries, enthusiastically says: "The Card for 2021 will probably be the most successful because of the accessibility of the tasks for all."

Some parishes may have them, however, an email, 'phone or facebook message to Thornhill

Ministries will also ensure people can get them.

For families with a child developing their ways of faith, the Promise Card is an ideal tool for home schooling - designed particularly with younger people in mind - though all tasks are suitable for older children too.



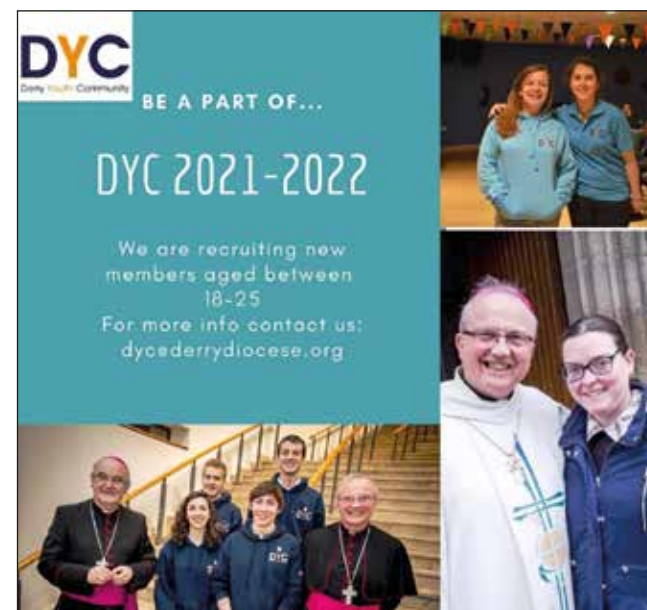
## Song released for WYD 2023

THE official theme song for World Youth Day 2023 has been released, with the lyrics described as evoking the 'party' atmosphere that builds up amongst the thousands of young people present, and reflecting the joy that comes from knowing and loving Jesus.

Entitled, 'Há Pressa no Ar', which translates as 'There's a rush in the air', the song was inspired by theme

set by Pope Francis for WYD 2023 - 'Mary rose up and went with haste' (Luke 1:39), and recalls the Virgin Mary's 'yes' and her rush to be with her cousin, Elizabeth, who was also with child.

The 2023 WYD gathering of young people is scheduled to take place in Lisbon, Portugal. Further information can be obtained from the official WYD 2023 website.





*Reflecting on the deaths of two young Irish nuns, Sr Clare and Sr Ruth, Home of the Mother Servant Brother asks...*

# Is God asking big sacrifices for Ireland?

THE Home of the Mother Servant Sisters, the Order to which Sr Clare Crockett belonged, are no strangers to her home city, especially since they opened their first house in Ireland on April 16, 2017; the first anniversary of the Derry nun's death.

The new community's first Irish location was in the town of Roscommon, in the Elphin Diocese, at the invitation of Bishop Kevin Doran, and documenting this new chapter in their history on their website, the Servant Sisters shared how they felt the Lord was permitting them to finally fulfil a desire they had long had to open a community in Ireland; a desire which, they stated, had been very dear to Sr Clare's heart.

They added: "She had longed to see a community of Servant Sisters in her own country. We are filled with joy to see God's providence and Our Lady's hand which are very present. The date the Sisters fly to Ireland is no chance, but thanks to Our Heavenly Mother who is guiding everything from above".

The four sisters flew into Ireland on April 16, 2017, and amongst them was Sr Clare's good friend and fellow countrywoman, Sr Ruth María O'Callaghan, from Dublin, and in the years since then they made their way to Derry several times to visit Sr Clare's grave and pray the Rosary there.

So, it was with great sadness that the many friends the Sisters have made in Sr Clare's home city heard of 43-year-old Sr Ruth's death in the Home of the Mother house in Spain, on December 19, after a year of suffering from cancer. Her broad smile and joyous demeanour will long be remembered, along with the humorous stories she loved to share about her friend, Sr Clare.

Sr Ruth had entered the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother in 1999, two years before Sr Clare, aged 22, having had a life-changing conversion experience during a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, which led to her wanting to dedicate her life to God.

In her testimony, she recalls organising a pilgrimage to Ireland in 2015 for young women, during which they visited the Rock of Cashel, where many Catholics had died as martyrs in 1647. She mentions a weathered statue of Our Lady in the graveyard

and being drawn into deep reflection by its expression; one of tenderness, touched by sadness. She felt that Our Lady was saying to her: "Look at what they've done to me. They've forgotten me. Won't you offer yourself to make reparation for this?"

In that moment, Sr Ruth shares that she offered herself to her Heavenly Mother again, "so that Ireland may recuperate its life and its being, what it has always been: a Catholic country and a place of saints and martyrs".

The fruits of that offering began to show just two years later, when Sr Ruth was amongst the four Servant Sisters sent on a mission to evangelise in Ireland, with the opening of their first community on the island.

When she was diagnosed with inoperable breast cancer and bone metastasis in December 2019, Sr Ruth again placed herself in Our Lady's hands. Feeling immense peace, she said: "What comforts me is the gaze of the Virgin Mary upon me".

Writing her thoughts down during this period, she noted: "We are so often trapped in the things we have to get done. Our feet stick to this world and sometimes we work as if we were going to stay here forever. Our view moves away from what is most important, and we forget about the great 'why' we are here in this world...As St. John Bosco said to his young people: 'Walk with your feet on the ground but in your heart, be in Heaven'".

She added: "Jesus also lived His hour. 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.' The Lord sometimes asks things of us that seem to surpass us. But if He asks it of us, He also gives His grace".

## Mission

Reflecting on her mission to evangelise in her home country, Sr Ruth pondered the question, in her illness, "What can be done from a bed? Isn't it a failure because you can't even move?"

"Not at all," she declares: "This is just the beginning. Now more than ever I can offer myself for my dear country. Our Mother has called me once again. She has given me this illness to help her make reparation for the lack of love. 'Would you offer yourself to make reparation for this?' This illness is hers and I offer myself

with her. She is guiding my life. Before, she wanted me in Ireland, doing 'this and that'. But now, in silence, in hiding, I continue to run the race with my prayer and with my rosary in hand. Thanks to the faith, I can live this with peace and joy".

She also shared the recent testimony of a priest that she felt confirmed her thoughts: "His name is Jon García Escobar, Pastor of Santiago Apóstol Parish in Madrid. He was in the hospital at the time, victim of Covid-19. From his bed, he said, 'The greatest thing we have in our parishes is our priesthood, the fact that we are priests. It's not about doing things, but about being priests. And now all of us have the opportunity to do the same, even me, even though I'm in bed. No one can rob me of this: offering my life, offering my life as a priest, for our people. I surrender myself from this bed for all of you. Now you are my Mass and my altar'".

Considering if it makes sense to offer yourself to the Lord, Sr Ruth went on to write: "Yes, it makes sense, because the Lord can use any suffering offered to Him with love. He can use it for our own sanctification and for the salvation of souls...A toothache, an aggressive cancer, eating the food someone prepared for you even if you don't like it: all of these things can be offered up. What you offer isn't as important as the love with which you offer it up to Him".

In commenting on Sr Ruth's death just before Christmas, the Servant Sisters' website relates how, in her last moment, "she looked upon each of the Sisters who were surrounding her in prayer. She then directed her gaze towards the image of the Virgin Mary, lifted her hands upwards, and expired".

In a Home of the Mother Podcast from Spain, a couple of days after Sr Ruth's death, one of the Servant Brothers, who is a member of Home of the Mother Brothers' community in Mallow, Co Cork, that was set up the year after the Servant Sisters came to Roscommon, noted that out of the three deaths amongst the young Home of the Mother Order since its establishment, two were from Ireland – Sr Clare and Sr Ruth.

Reflecting on this, he said: "Having been in Ireland for the past two-and-a-half years, I am wondering if God is asking for big sacrifices for Ireland. He has taken two young sisters; Sr Clare Crockett was 33 when she was basically buried under the rubble during an earthquake in Ecuador in 2016, after giving her life completely as a missionary, and then Sr Ruth, who was 43 years old, a year after she came back to Spain with breast cancer which

had metastasized into her back".

He noted how, a year after Sr Clare's death, Sr Ruth had been the lead in setting up the first community of Servant Sisters in Ireland, in Roscommon town, remarking: "This was something we had found very difficult to do in the previous 15 years, despite having Irish Sisters."

This was followed by the setting up of the Servant Brothers in Mallow, Co Cork, then another community of the Sisters in Mitchelstown, Co Cork, and Fermoy, Co Cork, all within the Cloyne Diocese, at the invitation of Bishop William Creen, and then the establishment of a new community of Servant Brothers in Cahir, Co Tipperary, at the invitation of Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, of the Waterford & Lismore Diocese, in November 2020.

## Youth

In his HM Podcast message, the Servant Brother recalled a request he had asked of Sr Ruth, after having celebrated Mass at her bedside on the Feast of St Maximilian Kolbe, August 14, 2020: "I said to her that I was going back to Ireland the next day and asked her if she could offer up all her suffering for the youth in Ireland. And, she said, 'Look, that was my prayer for the Home of the Mother, for the Sisters, and for Ireland and the youth, but it has got to the point where I am only zoned in on one thing, and that is me and Our Lord face-to-face. I want to go to Heaven to see Him and that has been my continuous prayer and focus'".

"However, I heard afterwards that Sr Ruth had told Mother Ana to tell me that the next day when she went to take her medicine, she poured the pills out on the table and saw, in the middle of the pills, three of them that were almost side-by-side; an orange pill, a white pill, and a green one. And that she said, 'I'm going to do it. I'm going to do whatever I have to, to put Ireland and the youth of Ireland back on the front page, through sacrifices and prayers'... she was suffering excruciating pain.

"This makes me feel that this whole ministry that we are doing, evangelising the youth and the way Sr Ruth offered up her suffering as a sacrifice, that Our Lord is asking big things for Ireland. This inspires and encourages me to just keep fighting for the youth. One of Sr Ruth's big loves was the youth, especially the really rebellious ones."

Greatly moved by the Sisters' account of the moment Sr Ruth passed away, the Servant Brother said that whole experience had given him "huge hope" for all countries, but particularly for



Sr Ruth O'Callaghan, Servant Sister, RIP.



Sr Ruth with some of the other Servant Sisters within the Roscommon community.



The Home of the Mother community praying at Sr Ruth's coffin.

Ireland, where he said he had seen "a huge lack of hope".

He continued: "People are concentrating on this life and only this life. No wonder it has not been a huge problem for many if the churches close because of Covid. They say, sure we'll just watch Mass online and that's fine. This is because there isn't an encounter any more. We are not having an encounter with the living God, who heals our wounds, who speaks into our despair, who is the only One who knows how to solve these problems that we have.

"There is massive relief, massive healing in that encounter, but when we stop going to Him we just hold on to what we have here. I could have a broken marriage, I could have no desire to live anymore, things could be falling apart, and that's it, if I don't have that supernatural vision to look into the next life.

"Hope is so important; it is like a fire that needs to be kindled with thoughts about Heaven. When I start thinking about how do I want to die, I start thinking about how am I going to live, because everybody dies as they live."

He then urged people, the Irish in particular, to "take these two examples that God has given us, Sr Clare and Sr Ruth. There are over 160 Servant Sisters, all young and on fire, but the first two to die are Irish. Is God not saying something to us?"

"I think they are going to be saints down the road. I think He is giving us the experiences these Sisters had of a living God, of an absolute hope and joy that is contagious. Hopefully with both Sr Clare and Sr Ruth up there, with that one, two punch, they will start bringing Ireland back to the faith because Ireland is not done yet."



Sr Ruth's funeral cortege.



# Hopes high amongst Sr Clare devotees for opening of beatification cause



IT will be five years this April since the death of Sr Clare Crockett, the Derry-born Servant Sister who died in 2016 when an earthquake in Playa Prieta, Ecuador, caused the building she was in to collapse.

A special Mass has been celebrated each year on the anniversary of her death, April 16, in her home city, by Fr Stephen Quinn, OCD, who also celebrates a Mass on the second Sunday of each month, praying with and for Sr Clare in the Carmelite Monastery, Termonbacca, that the Church will recognise her heroic virtue.

And for the fifth anniversary, plans are underway for a week of prayer starting on Sunday, April 18, with Mass celebrated by Fr Stephen in Termonbacca, and ending on Sunday, April 25, depending on Covid-19

regulations in place, with a procession from Our Lady's Grotto in the Brandywell, to St Columba's Church, Long Tower, where Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown.

During that week, special evening services will alternate between Termonbacca and the Long Tower, with talks to be given by various people who had connections with Sr Clare.

Commenting on the example of Sr Clare's life, Bishop Donal said: "We all need role models to inspire us to believe that the unimaginable is possible. The life of Sr Clare Crockett did not develop according to her plans or as her teenage role models would have wanted. God had far greater dreams for her. And she became the star of a film that no-one dreamed of."

"A girl who died tragically thousands of miles away is a famous, smiling mural in her native Brandywell. She does not ask us all to do the same thing that she did. She just asks young people to expect a lot from life because we all have our own form of beauty in God's eyes, and to allow God to give us a lot more than we can ever dream of."

"She has inspired a group of very determined devotees in Derry. Holiness is possible for everybody in every age and in many ways. I believe that the life and witness

of Clare Crockett are a blessing to this community as we seek to renew the mission of the Church in Derry."

The story of Sr Clare's life has been recorded by her Home of the Mother Order in a video, entitled 'All or Nothing', and a recently published biography, 'Sister Clare Crockett: Alone with Christ Alone', and has grabbed the attention of people from various parts of the world, with many reporting how it has changed their lives and having received favours after praying for Sr Clare's intercession.

Amazed by her conversion from the heady life of a budding actress to one where she gave herself completely to Jesus, following a deeply-felt spiritual encounter as she kissed the Cross during a Holy Week Retreat in Spain, as a 17-year-old, hopes are high amongst the growing number of devotees of the young nun from the Brandywell, who died aged 33, that her cause of beatification will be opened this year.

While not wanting to anticipate the judgement of the Church, the Home of the Mother website, in response to an unofficial newspaper article that had published that the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother will open Sr Clare's cause of beatification later this year, stated: "Over the past years, since the



Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, Termonbacca, speaking at the blessing of the Sr Clare Mural in her native Brandywell.

death of our Sister, we have seen the fruits that her testimony is working in souls, and we sense that it is possible that the Lord wants the cause to be opened. The Church always waits five years after the death of a person before opening such a process. Since this coming April will mark the fifth anniversary of Sr Clare's death, we have begun to take steps in view of opening the cause. However, the opening of the process will not depend only on us, but on the ecclesial authorities.

"In this case, it falls under the

jurisdiction of the bishop of the diocese where the person has died. The document *Sanctorum Mater*, published in 2007 by the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, explicitly states: "It is the right of diocesan Bishops, Eparchs and those who are equivalent to them in law, to investigate, within the limits of their own jurisdiction, the life, virtues or martyrdom, and reputation of holiness or of martyrdom, alleged miracles and, if it be the case, the ancient cult of a Servant of God, whose beatification and canonization are

asked."

The statement went on to say that the Sisters are keeping all testimonies received regarding Sr Clare in their archives, noting: "... these will be useful when the cause will be opened by the competent authority".

*The next monthly Sr Clare Mass will be celebrated by Fr Stephen on Sunday, February 14, at 7 pm, live on the Termonbacca YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/c/TermonbaccaDerry>*

## Co Tyrone singer pays tribute in song to Sr Clare after watching 'All or Nothing'

THE ever-growing number of devotees of the late Sr Clare Crockett includes the musically talented, Co Tyrone painter, Gerry Loughran, who has recorded a beautiful song dedicated to the young Derry nun.

The talented singer/songwriter from Kildress came upon the story of Sr Clare unexpectedly, a couple of years after her death, while searching the internet regarding Medjugorje, where Apparitions of Our Lady have been reported since 1981.

He told 'The Net': "Every so often I go on YouTube and that time, while looking up something about Medjugorje, a Sr Clare Crockett 'All or Nothing' video came up. I was watching it for a few minutes before I realised that she was from

Derry. I was just blown away by her story.

"I felt a connection with her straight away and wanted to write a song about her, because she was an amazing person with an unbelievable story that I wanted more people to know about. I play music and write a bit, so this is my way of celebrating Sr Clare's life and message, 'All or Nothing'."

"Everywhere I go now, I talk about Sr Clare," added Gerry, "asking people if they have heard about this young nun from Derry, and then I tell them about the video and encourage them to watch it. Many have come back to say how great her story is and thank me for telling them about the video."

The 47-year-old found the words for the song coming to him as he got to know more about Sr Clare's life: "It took about a month to write, and my sister, Pauline helped me. I visited Sr Clare's home city and her grave a few times in the process."

"I had heard about the mural to Sr Clare and went to see it. I stopped in the Brandywell with a man who was out painting and asked him if Sr Clare had lived around there, and he told that he was good friends with her father. We got chatting and, before I left, he went into his house to get me a Sr Clare calendar!"

Having written the song, Gerry

decided to record it: "In the video on her life, Sr Clare talks about her wanting to be a famous actress, but that she might just become a famous nun instead. Amazed at her story, I thought she should be a famous nun and so when I wrote the song, I decided to record it. I felt that Sr Clare was pushing me on."

"I wanted to do it right, so I contacted Clive Culbertson, who I worked with previously, and recorded it in his Coleraine studio. Then a friend of mine, Gary Devlin, of Devlin Media, Brockagh, recorded a video to go with it."

"I put it up on my Facebook page and also on my YouTube Channel. I was nervous about doing that but it got 6,300 views on Facebook within the first two weeks of me putting it on. I had contacted Sr Clare's family beforehand to ask them if that would be alright with them. I sent the song to her sister, Shauna and she said that she loved it and I think it is on the Sr Clare Facebook page now too."

"Various people have contacted me about it and thanked me for taking the time to write the song, as they think Sr Clare was an amazing person too."

Married to Lyn and father of three daughters, aged 17-22 years, Gerry has always loved singing,

particularly folk, and sharing his talent within his parish: "I play the acoustic guitar and the harmonica, and have played for my local choir in St Mary's Chapel, Dunamore, for the last 20 years."

He has also performed to a packed Millennium Forum thanks to Derry radio presenter, Sean Coyle, who organised for him to be the warm-up act for the band, 'Marmalade', when they played at The Forum about five years ago.

Regarding himself as having a good faith, Gerry shared an experience of asking for Sr Clare's intercession: "I had a relative very ill in hospital and one day I asked Sr Clare to intercede for her. She got out of hospital two weeks later, so I believe Sr Clare is a great intercessor."

"My girls also find her story very interesting and I hope it will help them in life, as well as many others. I think she will be declared a saint one day, meanwhile I want to do all that I can to make people aware of Sr Clare."

To help Gerry in his mission why not have a listen to his song, 'Sr Clare - All or Nothing' on his Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/gerry.loughran.7161> - or YouTube channel - <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=sdS3d2Z00qM&feature=youtu.be> - and share it with your family and friends.



## Sr Clare – All or Nothing

*You rest in Derry Sister Clare,  
A fragrant rose it lingers there,  
In a quiet repose I think of you,  
As surrounding life filters through.*

*Blessed am I to know your grace,  
As you gazed with love upon His face,  
Chastity, obedience in all you do,  
With gentle joy and wisdom too.*

*So now on earth your work is done,  
The Heavenly Father has called you home,*

*All or Nothing the angels sing,  
Continued blessings on us please bring.*

*A silent voice called your name,  
You turn away from wealth and fame,  
Prayer and love was what you gave,  
To help lost souls reclaim their place,*

*Ave Maria. Ave Maria.*

©Gerry Loughran



Kildress singer, Gerry Loughran.



*Hollie Frystal reports on the project marking the 125th Anniversary of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, in the Parish of Camus, Strabane.*

## “Helping the young to discover the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to make use of it” (Pope Francis – *Christus Vivit*)

ON Sunday, September 18, 1895, the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Strabane, was officially opened after a five-year building period. Fr Hugh O'Hagan PP, who died in 1905, organized the building of the Church.

The extraordinary thing that I learnt during this 125th anniversary project is the fact that the Chapel is literally the people of Strabane's inheritance. Our ancestors, who were very poor, funded the construction of the building on a weekly basis to ensure that the cost was fully paid by the day it opened. The community's desire was to have a beautiful place of worship, where families, friends and neighbours could come together in communion to celebrate the sacrifice of the Holy Mass.

Prior to the building of the chapel, there was a small church called St John's, which was located on the very ground where the Grotto is today. I found this mind-blowing as a 17-year-old who is from Strabane and brought up in Strabane, and although I have heard many stories, I have never heard of this old foundation. We are simply blessed to discover such treasures and hidden gems in our history, which reveals and reflects the precious and sentimental value of our past. We are forever grateful.

For this 125th anniversary project, once again, the community has come together and fundraised an amazing amount of well over £200,000. The remaining monies needed for this first phase of the project, £524,600, has been generously granted from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

I first got involved in the 'Church of the Immaculate Conception Strabane – History and Heritage Project' at the beginning of September this year, though I belong to Melmount Parish, Strabane.

As a proud parishioner of Melmount, we are also celebrating our Golden Jubilee, marking 50 years. I have many old family members who are from Barrack Street and were baptized in Camus Parish, therefore, I also feel part of Camus Parish's history.

My first task consisted of research on liturgical vestments and religious objects which were found stored in a room in the parochial house of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. I researched the colours, symbols

and materials to try and paint a portrait of how old the objects date back to. Although we know that the Chapel is 125 years old, the items may go back longer, which we can identify through the quality of materials and the representation of detail and patterns, etc. Also, getting to know the parish priests who wore the vestments at that time is all so exciting and interesting!

I have included a photograph of the white vestment which would have been worn at Christmas and Easter, as well as other feast days like the Transfiguration or in celebrating the Sacraments, like First Holy Communion or Baptism. I have also included a photograph of a piece of altar stone which contains the relics of Saints. These are on all altars, especially the older ones.

This is just a snippet of what the project involves, and we are hoping to hold an exhibition sometime when it is a lot safer regarding the coronavirus.

The project consists of a range of sectors involving various volunteers, like myself, who works with the research and social media planning for Facebook. There are other volunteers who I work with, such as Hannah, who does research on some of the interesting people involved in fundraising, designing, and the building of the Chapel, such as James Pearse, who built the altar and, interestingly, was the father of Pádraig Pearse. Dearbháil also researches old photographs and labels artefacts.

We have construction workers too, who commit themselves to restoring the Chapel, for instance the roof, gutters, and drainage, and to creating a heritage exhibition space in the conference room above the sacristy and around the Church. There is a range of items, clothing, stonework and wood-turnings, which were created by hand by the men of Strabane at that time.

And we have delved into the archives of the surrounding areas that link in with the Church of the Immaculate Conception, such as the Strabane Convent of Mercy, the Grotto, and the cemetery.

To conclude this brief introduction, I find this project absolutely fascinating. I see it as a great opportunity to engage in intergenerational relationships, between the volunteers, and also to understand and learn from the figures of the past.

I found it very important

when Pope Francis said, in his Apostolic Exhortation, 'Christus Vivit' regarding intergenerational relationships, about "Helping the young to discover the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to make use of it...", and that is reflected in this brilliant initiative which is getting young people involved with their Church community.

I would like to thank the leaders of the project, Roisin, Mary and Lorraine, who are so committed and enthusiastic in their work, and are excellent in guiding me and fellow volunteers in our work.

You can keep up to date with the project via our Facebook website called 'Church of the Immaculate Conception Strabane – History and Heritage'.

We are hoping to hold an exhibition sometime in the post-Covid future. Until then, please tune into our story, and when the exhibition comes about you are all more than welcome to visit.

*Photographs by Roisin Doherty, Curator with Derry City & Strabane District Council.*



## Bridget Carroll's legacy to Long Tower Church by Ivor Doherty



The late Bridget Carroll, Long Tower.

A much-loved parishioner of Long Tower church, who passed away in May 2020, has bequeathed money to the Parish to purchase a new carpet for the altar.

Miss Bridget Carroll, lately of Alexander House, Bishop Street, bequeathed enough money to the church to purchase the new green altar carpet which was laid

in January.

Affectionately known as 'Wee Bridget' to all her family and friends, Bridget was a daily communicant and reader at Sunday Mass, in the Long Tower, until chronic illness took hold several years ago.

At every Benediction service, Holy Hour, Parish Retreat, and Stations of the Cross, Bridget could be found in her familiar seat at the back of the church. She was a particular devotee of the yearly parish retreat.

Her friend, Kathleen Doherty said: "It was a lovely gesture for Bridget to think of leaving money to benefit the place she loved more than anywhere else in the world."

"She spent many hours in the church praying and giving her own time working with the committed group of Chapel cleaners."

"I am delighted to see the carpet on the altar now, and I'm sure many will think of Bridget when they see the beautiful new altar."



The beautiful new green altar carpet.





# May the Season of Lent be a time for prayer and discernment – *Bishop Donal*

WITH the continued lockdown meaning another term of on line learning for school communities, and churches and many businesses remaining closed, as we approach almost a year of life being turned on its head, Bishop Donal offers words of encouragement that God is in the middle of it all, teaching us something.

## Preparing for the post-pandemic mission to heal the hurting

This post-Christmas lockdown seems to be the most difficult for many people. January can be a wearing time for everyone – and this year's uncertainty has added to that. Families do not know when children can go back to school and how they can catch up on what has been missed.

Many parishes have been working very hard with little chance of a break. And now they have to face a rather nondescript couple of months. What do you do during one week after another? Will we have nothing to look forward to or plan for – Ash Wednesday, St Patrick's Day, Holy Week? Will we be able to get moving when things are again possible?

The first thing that people of faith do is to recognise the difficulty that we are in and then we acknowledge that God is in the middle of this, teaching us something. In some ways, we have had a 12-month

compulsory Lent since Spring 2020. Those of us who grew up in an earlier age experienced deprivation. It is very difficult for the younger generation, who were given the message that the market could provide a solution for every problem.

This is a real crisis for the consumerist mindset. We are not masters of the universe. We have limited resources, and we cannot demand that everybody has the right to everything.

This is a time of reset. And we have to be ready as a Church to speak of Christ into the post pandemic crisis. That is what Jesus would do. And that is what parishes need to be preparing for! The lockdown is not a time for holiday but a space to prepare for the post-pandemic mission to heal the hurting in Jesus' name.

## Recognise the things that we miss but look for the lessons that we can learn

So many schools have responded magnificently to the challenge. In my role as Chair of CCMS, I have heard reports of huge care for pupils as well as creativity in teaching. Our schools have so often been places of great care and compassion in normal times. They have simply developed that generosity of spirit to support those who have been most negatively

affected by the lockdowns.

It is a worrying time for young people who fear missing out on qualifications and job opportunities. Life was already pressurised enough for them. The most important message is that we will get through this. Faith is not the belief that everything will work out well but that, no matter how things work out, all will be well, for we are all in God's strong, gentle hands. Recognise the things that we miss but look for the lessons that we can learn.

## Emphasis in schools has to be on the needs of young people

Exams are supposed to monitor how much students have learned, and to assess a range of skills. The lockdown has been hardest on those who may not have all the human and technical support at home to facilitate on-line learning. The Transfer Tests are not a part of the statutory curriculum arrangements. They are something that some schools are not forbidden from using in selection Year 8 pupils. Many Catholic schools realised very early on that any post-lockdown Transfer Tests would discriminate against those who had fewer resources at home.

Ultimately, schools exist at the service of the pupils that they have. The emphasis has to be on the needs of young people and not

on the wishes of the institutions. The 1977 Vatican document on Catholic Education was clear that "first and foremost the Church offers its educational service to the poor and those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith." (The Catholic School, para 58).

In all decisions, the needs of the underprivileged have to be given priority. As Pope Francis wrote in 2004, "If in our schools we do not develop another way of being human, another culture, another society, we are wasting our time." (Bergoglio, J M., Education for Choosing Life. Proposals for Difficult Times, 2014, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, p.75)

## With churches still closed, the hope is that we will develop ways of celebrating many of the feasts of February, and beyond, within the 'domestic church'

We have been living a 12-month period of sacrifice, deprivation and loss. So much of the Lenten ritual is not possible under lockdown. However, one grace of the last months has been the material

from the Northern Pastoral Network which has promoted the development of 'domestic rituals'. These are not just settings like May Altars, a Crib or Prayers for the Dead. They are also great opportunities for family to celebrate their faith together and to create memories for children.

With churches still closed, we will be promoting the celebration of Ash Wednesday within family homes. I hope that we will be able to develop ways of celebrating many of the feasts of February, and beyond, within the 'domestic church', where parents are 'first and best teachers of their children in the ways of faith' (Cf Baptismal Liturgy).

These are all opportunities to see the pandemic as a time of grace and not just as a time of deprivation.

Spring is a time of new life, in nature and in the Liturgical Year. This year, we are not looking at a 'return to normal'. This is a year to discern, Columba-like, how we go on mission in a changed environment.

Certainties have been swept



away in church and in the secular world. And that offers new opportunities to be true to the priorities of our Diocesan Plan, namely: build communities; form people in the faith; and prepare them to share that faith in the post-pandemic confusion and vacuum.

In that sense, I hope that the Season of Lent, as well as the feasts of February, will be a time for prayer and discernment. I hope that we can have local and diocesan level conversations about the pastoral needs of the Diocese, and of parishioners, as we come out of the pandemic lockdowns.

## Main churches in Derry collaborating for many decades *by Bishop Donal*

THE Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has been observed in one form or another since 1908. Each year a theme is offered and materials are made available to all churches to help their prayer intentions. The theme for this year 2021, "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit," was inspired by John 15: 5-9. And a booklet was prepared on this theme with ideas and reflections of reach day.

In Derry, there has been much ongoing collaboration between the main churches for many decades. Bishop Daly and Bishop Mehaffey had set up the Churches Trust and the Inner-City Trust. Those two bishops were the last individuals to be made Freeman of the City in 2014 – all because of their cross-community work for urban renewal.

Each Good Friday representatives of the main churches carry a cross

through the city centre in Derry. And we have been involved together in many public activities.

This year, specifically for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we hoped to have a joint walk for peace and reconciliation around the City Walls, stopping at different points for prayer. However, that was ruled out because of the lockdown and the fear of gathering people.

What was agreed was that different church representatives would take the prayers and readings for one of the eight days of the Octave – and record those in a church building of another denomination. In a virtual way, we would be travelling from church to church in the city.

Thus, I was asked to go to St Columb's Cathedral for my contribution. The various recordings were collated and sent

out to each church for uploading onto their social media platforms, one day at a time.

My focus was on 'Called by God'. That involved scripture readings about the call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-4) and the call of the first disciples (John 1:35-51). They were followed by a reflection from the Taizé Community and a closing prayer.

Other contributions were recorded in the Long Tower, St Augustine's Church, Carlisle Road Methodist Church, First Derry Presbyterian Church and St Eugene's Cathedral.

I hope that this has helped to remind people that Christian disunity is a scandal and not the desire of Christ. What unites all Christians is a shared faith in the love of God. If we abide in that love, we will bear much fruit – in God's own good time.



## Richness of universal church evoked in week of prayer for Christian unity

IN the run-up to Christian Unity Week last month, Pope Francis expressed the hope that in praying together, "Jesus' desire might be accomplished – that all might be one: unity, which is always higher than conflict".

In Derry, the week-long Christian Unity programme of prayer saw representatives of the different local churches involved in leading the prayers and reflections based on the theme, 'Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit' (John 15: 1-17).

With Covid-19 restrictions, the reflections were pre-recorded from different churches around the City and then viewed online, with Bishop Donal opening the week of prayer on the Monday, speaking from St Columb's Cathedral on the theme, 'Called by God'.

On the Tuesday, Fr Paul Farren, Adm St Eugene's, was joined by Methodist Minister, Rev Richard Johnston, in reflecting on 'Maturing Internally', which was recorded in Long Tower Chapel.

The Wednesday reflection, on 'Love one another', recorded in

St Augustine's Church, featured Archdeacon Robert Miller, Church of Ireland, and Mr Michael Parker.

Carlisle Road Methodist Church was the venue for the recording of the reflection, 'Praying Together', which was led by Captain Julia Mapstone, Salvation Army, and Rev Nigel Cairns, Rector of St Augustine's Church, and for the following day's reflection on 'Letting Oneself be Transformed', which featured Rev Canon Katie McAteer, St Columb's Cathedral, and Mr Warren Alfeche.

Fr Aidan Mullan, Adm Long Tower, and Mrs Deirdre Amor led the Saturday reflection on 'Welcoming Others', while the Dean of Derry, Very Rev Raymond Stewart, St Columb's Cathedral, and Mrs Rosemary Parker were recorded in St Columb's Cathedral, reflecting on 'Growing in Unity', and the week was brought to a close by Bishop Andrew Forster, Church of Ireland, who led the prayers for 'Reconciling with all Creation', from his residence at See House.

The week of prayer for Christian

unity was launched in the Ardmore Parish with an online ceremony from St Mary's Church, where Fr Neil Farren, PP, was joined by retired Presbyterian Minister, Rev David Latimer.

This year's resources for the Christian Unity programme were prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp, in Switzerland, that experiences the richness of the universal Church in bringing together sisters from different churches and countries.

Choosing the theme, 'Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit', enabled the Sisters to share the experience and wisdom of their contemplative life abiding in the love of God.

Formed in the first half of the 20th century, the community has close ties with the Community of Taizé and Abbé Paul Couturier, and its contemplative spirit ensured a fruitful period of discernment with regards to the theme and the associated meditations, which were finalised in collaboration with Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.





# A reflection on the ‘Year of the Family’ *by Sharon Mallet*

## ‘The Christian proclamation of the family is good news indeed’ (‘Amoris Laetitia’)

POPE Francis has given advanced notice that as of March 19, 2021, the year will be dedicated as, ‘The Year of the Family’. Throughout this year, Pope Francis has asked that we examine and reflect on the teachings of ‘Amoris Laetitia’ (‘The Joy of Love’), which is the encyclical which was written following the Synods on the family in 2014-2015.

As a Christian mother and wife, and a person involved in working with young people, it seems clear to me that the essence of ‘Amoris Laetitia’ is both pastoral and a personal call to find meaning for the Joy of the Gospel in our family life, in the modern world.

In the nine chapters of the letter, it addresses many themes, such as, Christian marriage, challenges, unconditional love, the gift of children, sanctity of life, family life, motherhood, education, prayer, and mercy, all of which is underpinned by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I shall endeavour to reflect on Chapter 7, towards a better education of children.

The central tenet of chapter 7 is that parents play a central and pivotal role for the development of their child’s spiritual, moral and ethical formation. Pope Francis writes,

“Parents always influence the moral development of their children, for better or for worse. It follows that they should take up this essential role and carry it out consciously, enthusiastically, reasonably and appropriately”. (259)

As a mother of four young boys this is no mean feat, as to direct children in their faith and moral and ethical development can often be very challenging, given the influences of secular and modern society.

Pope Francis is only too aware of this and advises, “Families cannot help but be places of support, guidance and direction, however much they may have to rethink their methods and discover new resources. Parents need to consider what they want their children to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned about who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time. Only if we devote time to our children, speaking of important things with simplicity and concern, and finding healthy ways for them to spend their time, will we be able to shield them from harm. Vigilance is always necessary and neglect is never beneficial. Parents have to help prepare children and adolescents to confront the risk, for example, of aggression, abuse or drug addiction”. (260)

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many additional

challenges to family life. Many families have been denied access to their usual social and support systems and, therefore, there has been a forced return to a slower pace of life and an opportunity for valuable family time. The experience of the pandemic has highlighted the central role of the family as the domestic Church.

There is much in ‘Amoris Laetitia’ which would support this slower pace of life and much direction for developing strong family bonds. For instance, it encourages family prayer time, it calls for mutual respect, understanding of all members and a reminder of the need for unconditional love, especially in the darkest of hours.

However, because of the pandemic, there is most likely an increased reliance on the use of technology to keep us connected. Whilst this has been invaluable to keep connected to loved ones, given the many restrictions that are in place, there is also the opportunity for an over reliance of the use and influence of social media and technology.

Back in 2015, Pope Francis highlighted vigilance on the use of emerging technologies,

“When well used, these media platforms can be helpful for connecting family members who live apart from one another. Frequent contacts help to overcome difficulties. Still, it is clear that these media cannot replace the need for more personal and direct dialogue, which requires physical presence or at least hearing the voice of the other person. We know that sometimes they can keep people apart rather than

“Parents need to consider what they want their children to be exposed to, and this necessarily means being concerned about who is providing their entertainment, who is entering their rooms through television and electronic devices, and with whom they are spending their free time.”

together, as when at dinnertime everyone is surfing on a mobile phone, or when one spouse falls asleep waiting for the other who spends hours playing with an electronic device. This is also something that families have to discuss and resolve in ways which

encourage inter-action without imposing unrealistic prohibitions. In any event, we cannot ignore the risks that these new forms of communication pose for children and adolescents; at times they can foster apathy and disconnect from the real world. This ‘technological disconnect’ exposes them more easily to manipulation by those who would invade their private space with selfish interests”. (278)

There is, of course, a fine line between parental over governance and providing our children with the necessary freedom and autonomy to find their own way. Pope Francis encourages parents to be self critical and to ask ourselves, “Do we seek to understand ‘where’ our children are in their journey? Where is their soul do we really know? And above all, do we want to know?” (292)

### Support

When I reflect on these questions as a mother, I am mindful of the supportive role that Catholic education, and the support of my parish, has had on my children’s moral and spiritual development.

From the baptism of my boys, to their communions and confirmations, there has been a cast of thousands involved in supporting us as a family as we endeavour to raise our children to live a life based on the Gospel values of truth, justice, respect, forgiveness, love, prayer, sacrament and faith.

Whilst this is the case for many families, Pope Francis reminds us, once again, that our children’s spiritual development remains deeply rooted in the family, “Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today’s world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace just to survive. (306) Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour. This begins with baptism, in which, as Saint Augustine said, mothers who bring their children ‘cooperate in the sacred birthing’. (307) Thus begins the journey of growth in that new life. Faith is God’s gift, received in baptism, and not our own work, yet parents are the means that God uses for it to grow and develop. Hence ‘it is beautiful when mothers teach their little children to blow a kiss to Jesus or to Our Lady. How much love there is in that! At that moment the child’s heart becomes a place of prayer’. (308) Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does ‘one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts’ (Ps

144:4) and ‘fathers make known to children your faithfulness’ (Is 38:19). This means that we need to ask God to act in their hearts, in places where we ourselves cannot reach. A mustard seed, small as it is, becomes a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32); this teaches us to see the disproportion between our actions and their effects. We know that we do not own the gift, but that its care is entrusted to us. Yet our creative commitment is itself an offering which enables us to cooperate with God’s plan. For this reason, ‘couples and parents should be properly appreciated as active agents in catechesis... Family catechesis is of great assistance as an effective method in training young parents to be aware of their mission as the evangelizers of their own family’.(309)



Sharon Mallet

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To conclude, I wish to reflect on one of the humblest messages of the entire letter. I was fortunate to attend the World Meeting of Families in Croke Park in Dublin, in 2018. Pope Francis gave the most beautiful and inspirational of speeches on the love of a family. He said that the most important message for any family is to live by the three words of ‘please’, ‘thank

“From the baptism of my boys, to their communions and confirmations, there has been a cast of thousands involved in supporting us as a family as we endeavour to raise our children to live a life based on the Gospel values of truth, justice, respect, forgiveness, love, prayer, sacrament and faith.”

you’ and ‘sorry’. He said that if we want peace, joy, love and harmony in our homes we must use these three words regularly. Practice them, make them daily habits. This is such a simple message that could make a profound difference to all of us in our dealings with

our family, friends and the wider community.

Pope Francis states, “In the family, three words need to be used. I want to repeat this! Three words: ‘Please’, ‘Thank you’, ‘Sorry’. Three essential words! In our families when we are not overbearing and ask: ‘May I?’; in our families when we are not selfish and can say: ‘Thank you!’; and in our families when someone realizes that he or she did something wrong and is able to say ‘Sorry!’, our family experiences peace and joy. Let us not be stingy about using these words, but keep repeating them, day after day. For certain silences are oppressive, even at times within families, between husbands and wives, between parents and children, among siblings. The right words, spoken at the right time, daily protect and nurture love.” (134)

As I begin this New Year, a new year of hope and healing, of promise and kindness, I will try to remember those three simple words in the humble belief that they will guide and inspire my words and actions towards the Gospel of hope, love, justice, peace and forgiveness.



# Eangach

## Ár nDúchas

### A Íosa, Ó Saor Mé

A Íosa, 'Mhic Mhuire,  
féach ar mo chás,  
is beir mé leat féineach  
go Cathair na nGrást.

Díbir gach dríodar  
is cathú as mo lár;  
díbir gach smaoinemh  
is obair gan aird,

is díriú mé ina dhiaidh sin  
go Flaitheas na nGrást.  
A Íosa, ó saor mé  
le toradh do Pháis.

### In éineacht le Muire

Go raibh Muire,  
máthair ár dTiarna,  
ag guí in éineacht linn,  
mar bhí sí ag guí  
in éineacht leis na hAspail  
nuair a thuirling an Spiorad orthu  
i bhfíor-thús na hEaglaise.

Go dtaga an Spiorad  
anuas orainne freisin,  
agus go líona sé ár mbeatha  
le haoibhneas, le dóchas,  
agus le grá.

**Amen.**

## Cuimhní Cóivide 1



Faoistin le linn Covid-19.

Ag deireadh na bliana 2020 d'fhoilsigh Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta leabhar neamhchoitianta: 'Covid-19 in 2020'. Tá alt ann ag an Sagart Brian Ó Fearraigh. De bhunadh Inis Bó Finne é an Sagart Ó Fearraigh, agus tá a shliocht sin ar shaibhreas a chuid Gaeilge. Seo mar a scríobh sé:

### Biseochaidh Rudai

Nuair a shuigh mé síos leis an alt seo a scríobh rith na linte tosaigh ó shaothar de chuid Charles Dickens liom. San úrscéal finscéalaíoch staire, 'Scéal fá Dhá Chathair', scríobh Dickens, 'Ba scoith saol é, agus ba é díoghadh gach saoil é; ba í aois na céille í, agus ba í

aois na dí-chéille í; ... ba é am na soirche é, agus ba é am na doirche é; ba é earrach an dóchais é, agus ba é geimhreadh an éadóchais é; bhí gach uile dheigh-nidh roimh na daoine, agus ní raibh rompu ach neimhní; bhí an saol mór ag tarraingt caol díreach ar na Flaitheas, agus bhí an saol mór ag tarraingt caol díreach ar athrach na bhflaitheas de áit.'

Baineann sollúntacht agus dáiríreacht áirithe leis na focla céanna seo don saol corrach a dtáinig muid fríd agus ina maireann muid go fóill. Is cinnte gur 'scoith saol agus díoghadh gach saoil' é ag an am chéanna.

Ag caitheamh súil siar domh go tús aimsir na pandéime Covid-19, is dócha go bhfuil neart ceannógaí a thig liom a chruinniú i gceann a chéile le léargas a thabhairt ar an tionchar atá ag an ghéarchéim sláinte seo ar mo shaol agus ar mo shaothar, ar mo mheon agus ar mo mhinistreacht i bhfionghort an Tiarna. Tá sé ráite gur ó thaithí saoil a thig tuigbheáil, biodh sé lenár leas nó lenár n-aimhleas. Creidim gur toradh a leithéid de thaithí a mhúnlaíonn muid agus a chuideochas linn aghaidh a thabhairt ar imeachtaí an tsaoil mhóir le muinín láidir agus dóchas buan. 'Sé is cuspóir agus cúram an ailt seo nó cuid de na nithe a mhúnlaigh mo chuidse ministreachta agus an modus operandi a raibh orm tabhairt faoi in aimsir Covid-19 a roinnt libh.



An Sagart Brian Ó Fearraí, Dún Lúiche.



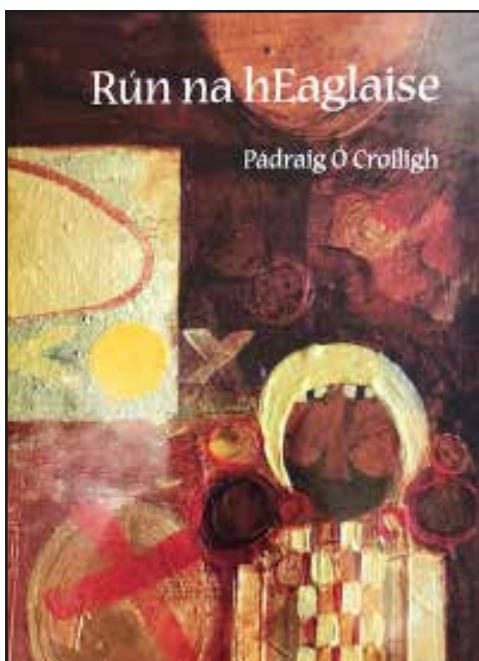
Soilsiú, le Mary Dunnion.

### Galair Ghránna na Bliana

Ag cur ceann ar an Phaidrín domh guím go hard na bhflaitheas ag iarraidh ar Dhia 'muid féin agus ár gcairde gaoil agus ár ndaoine maithe muinteartha uilig a choinneáil ar dhea-staid agus ar

staid na ngrást. An drochuair a chur tharainn agus muid a thabhairt slán as gach contúirt agus gábhadh, ó mhuir agus ó thír, ó ghaoth agus ó ghrian, agus ó ghalair ghránna na bliana.

(ar lean. Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*.)



## Sacraimint na nEaslán: Ola an Bhisigh

Táimid beo i ré na heolaíochta, agus shílfeá ó bheith ag éisteacht leis na saineolaithe, go dtiocfadh leis an eolaíocht muid a choinneáil slán ón tinneas agus ón bhás, agus go dtiocfadh am nuair nach bhfaigheadh duine ar bith bás ar chor ar bith. Muidne, lucht an chreidimh, tá a fhios againn nach bhfuil sé sin amhlaidh, agus go bhfaighimid uile bás, luath nó mall. Tá meas as cuimse againn ar an chúram is féidir a thabhairt don duine tinn le cuidiú na heolaíochta, agus nach teip é nuair nach n-éiríonn le lucht an leighis an duine a choinneáil ón bhás.

Ní hionann leigheas agus biseach i gcónaí. Aisteach go leor, shílfeá in amanna gur mó an eagla atá ar dhaoine roimh an bhás in aimsir seo na heolaíochta ná sa seanam nuair ba léir do chách go dtiocfadh do sheal agus go mbeadh ort imeacht. Bealach amháin nó bealach eile, tá a fhios againn uile gur ábhar mór imní é an tinneas. Chomh maith leis sin tagann sórt ciontachta leis an tinneas in amanna, sa dóigh go mbraitheann duine gur air féin atá an locht go bhfuil sé tinn.

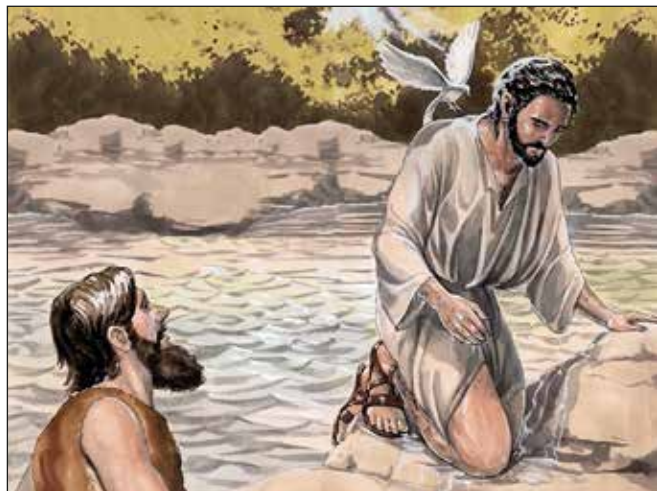
Bhí sé sin coitianta in aimsir Chríost, agus choinnigh siad na daoine tinne istigh ionas nach

bhfeicfeadh duine ar bith iad. Shíl siad, ar bhealach, go raibh rud éigin déanta contráilte ag na créatúir seo nach raibh ach ag iarraidh a sláinte, le focail Sheosaimh Mhic Grianna a úsáid. Mar sin, nuair a chuaigh Íosa thart ar an dúiche agus é ag iarraidh daoine a leigheas, agus dea-scéal an tslánaithe a thabhairt dóibh, ba é an rud iontach gur tugadh na daoine amach chuige, faoi sholas an lae. Leigheas sé cuid acu, agus iad siúd nár leigheas sé, tugadh amach os comhair an tsaoil iad, agus fuair siad cead a bheith tinn.

Is iomaí duine ar tharla an rud céanna dó amuigh i Lourdes,

mar shampla. Deir siad leat gur imigh an eagla, agus go raibh siad sásta cur suas leis an tinneas agus síocháin ina gcoithe. Is é an Críost céanna seo ar mhaith linn bualadh leis inniu agus muid tinn, an Críost a leigheasann daoine áirithe, agus a fhágann daoine eile gan leigheas ach le síocháin ina gcoithe. Ach chuaigh Críost trí laige agus pháis agus bhás nuair a bhí sé ar an saol seo, agus caithfimidne a bheith leis sna himeachtaí sin dá shaol, chomh maith leis na rudaí iontacha. (Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*.)





## Reflections on the Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit

*AFTER reflecting on a quote from Bishop Donal's homily on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 10, a number of people from across the Diocese have shared their thoughts about the Holy Spirit, and workings of the Third Person of the Trinity in their lives and in their parish communities and Diocese.*

*In that homily, Bishop Donal said: "Baptism is the beginning of a journey. For us that journey calls us to minister in the middle of a pandemic and the right or wrong political decisions about how to respond to that reality. None of us knows what God will ask us to deal with in the future. The baptised are asked only to pray intensely for the Holy Spirit to descend on us so that we can 'act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God. When Jesus is Lord, our personal agendas and fears pale into insignificance. Today, through St Mark's Gospel we begin our journey of discipleship with hope and trust. We are called by name and trust that Jesus has overcome the world. And on that journey of discipleship, we are assured that we will draw water from the wells of salvation."*

*Bishop Donal's full homily can be read at:*  
<https://www.derrydiocese.org/news/homily-baptism-of-the-lord-bishop-mckeown>

### Thanksgiving for Baptismal Graces

*I believe in you, O God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. You have accepted me as Your child, and in the laver of regeneration, You have constituted me as an heir to Your Kingdom.*

*I believe in You, O Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son, who has suffered and died for me, and through Your Precious Blood has ransomed me from the slavery of Satan.*

*I believe in You, O Holy Spirit, Who has made me and consecrated me at Your temple and chosen me as a vessel of grace.*

*I renounce the devil with all his works and all his pomps. I renounce all the evil desires of the flesh and the world with all its vanities and deceits, and I firmly resolve to lead a truly Christian life.*

*May the Most Holy Trinity strengthen my purpose, by whom I seal this renewal of my baptismal vows, in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

*(Source – Devotion to the Holy Spirit Booklet)*

## The Catechism of the Catholic Church shares the Good News...

**"Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, led back to the Kingdom of Heaven and adopted as children, given confidence to call God 'Father' and to share in Christ's grace, called children of light and given a share in eternal glory." (CCC 736)**

*Highlighting that a bishop's role involves listening...to God in prayer and to the Holy Spirit in the awkward questions and great ideas of others, Bishop Donal writes...*

**It is huge relief to know that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church!**

THE Baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of His public life. He knew that He was destined to play the role of the Suffering Servant. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to take on that role. But the details of how He would fulfil the role were unclear.

Immediately after His Baptism, He was tempted to take shortcuts. The devil suggested that there were easier ways to win people's admiration – like turning stones into bread or jumping off the Temple. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that He would not have to drink the cup of suffering.

We know from the Acts of the Apostles, that the early Christian Church was constantly being driven down roads that it would have normally avoided. The Holy Spirit drove them out of the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Later they had to deal with preaching to non-Jews who wanted to become Christian. Could they do that without first becoming Jews and obeying the Jewish Law? And Paul was sent by the Spirit to evangelise Asia Minor and then to go to Greece.

Missionaries have always had to move forward in trust. St Patrick in this country, and generations of missionaries from Ireland, had to keep going in faith. Those

thousands of missionaries who went to the Americas, Africa and Asia had to build up local churches, starting from nothing, not sure where the Lord was leading them. Often enough they saw their efforts destroyed by wars or persecution.

But for many centuries, the Holy Spirit was 'the forgotten person of the Trinity'. In fact, it was the Second Vatican Council which inserted 'Blessed be the Holy Spirit the Paraclete' into the Divine Praises. Our Lady had been there – but not the Holy Spirit!

Coming from a long history of a strongly established institutional Church in this country, we can sometimes find it difficult to think of walking forward, trusting only in the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. But that has been the norm for Christian missionaries over the last 2,000 years. And generations of saints have testified to how much wiser God's grace is than human thinking and planning!

We are currently facing into not just an age of change but a change of age. Some will be unsettled by that and want to go backwards. But the Holy Spirit has always been leading the Church forward into new territory. God is always remaking his Church.

But we will be led by the Spirit only if we try to get our priorities

and pride out of the road, and let God be God in His Church. Discernment involves a lot of prayer and listening.

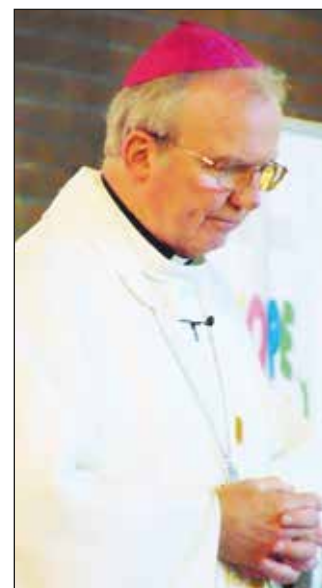
It is clear that many will see the Reports on scandals from the past as an opportunity to remove the Church from the public sphere in Ireland. But our focus should not be on finding evil enemies out there. For us, the only question to ask is 'Where is God leading us and what lessons do we have to learn?'

History shows that, when the Church gets too close to power, it will be corrupted by that power. History also shows that, when God remakes his Church, new life bursts forth. As Psalm 50 says, 'A humbled contrite heart you will not spurn, O Lord.'

In my role as Bishop, it is huge relief to know that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church! I don't have to have achieved anything before I retire or die. All I have to do is my best, knowing that God can use what I consider failures as well as those things that I consider successful. Those who are faithful will be fruitful in God's own good time.

A bishop's role involves listening – to God in prayer and to the Holy Spirit in the awkward questions and great ideas of others.

I don't need to know where we



Bishop Donal McKeown

will be in 25 years' time. But unless I am open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who does know where we will be in 2046, I can be letting my big ideas get in God's way.

The annual celebration of Christ's Baptism is a chance to begin again as new disciples of Jesus and to allow Him to lead our hearts and decisions – trusting that "all will be well and all things will be well" (Julian of Norwich).

We walk on in trust, knowing that the Holy Spirit will lead us in God's strange paths.

## My first visit to Knock was like a second Baptism that brought me much closer to God by Ashlene Canning

KERRY is a beautiful place to visit, it's a long journey from Tyrone but we go there every year to see our relatives.

In August 2011, for a change of route we came up the West coast. My husband, Nicky, was the driver that day. In the backseat was our baby son, Oscar, all of 16 months, with his 13-year-old cousin, Cahir by his side.

By the time we reached Co Galway, Nicky suggested we press on as far as Knock, to the National Shrine to Our Lady, who could argue with that?

I was keen to see Knock; I had never been. To be truthful, I was slightly nervous because I wasn't very holy. I had prayed quite a lot as a child because our school principal, Mrs Georgina Turbett was inspirational. In fact, a couple of years after I had finished in St Theresa's Primary School, Glebe,

Sion Mills, she sent me Rosary beads from Lourdes.

Even in those rebellious teenage years, I prayed an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be on the beads every night. I was faithful to this for about 10 years. But, in my 20s, I got caught up in the busy world and my three prayers fell by the wayside. I became disillusioned with the Church; it wasn't until Nicky and I began preparing for marriage that the faith beckoned once again.

When we arrived in Knock in 2011, I was not expecting anything special to happen. But I was immediately drawn to the gable wall where the apparition had taken place in 1879. The statues are beautiful, Our Lady, Saint Joseph, Saint John and the Lamb of God carved in white Italian marble.

My family and I stood in silence outside the Apparition Chapel.

It was gradual, but I felt a lovely sense of peace come upon me. I arrived expecting nothing and left with a great deal.

Something happened to me that day which is quite difficult to put into words. I don't know if it was Our Lady of Knock and the Saints praying for me or the Lamb of God calling me. It was an unforgettable moment, and one which I feel we were drawn into by the Holy Spirit.

The short visit to Knock brought me an inner peace. Now when I look back to that day, I think of it as a second Baptism which has brought me much closer to God in so many ways, especially through prayer.

I have a deep desire to pass on this love of God to our three children. On our annual journey to Kerry, they look forward to a visit to Our Lady's Shrine and I trust God to send them the inner

peace that I found in Knock.

*'Peace I bequeath to you; my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid'. (John 14:27)*





# I pray the Holy Spirit will continue to lead and raise up in us all we need to be Church in these times *by Aoife O'Neill*



Aoife O'Neill

IN the book of Esther (4:14), we read of the rebuke of Mordecai, who told Esther: "For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

This is what springs to my mind when I reflect on Bishop Donal's homily from the Feast of the Baptism of The Lord. At our Baptism the Lord called us all by name. He appointed us and gave us a mission for our lives.

Bishop Donal reminded us all that "Baptism is the beginning of a journey. For us that journey calls us to minister in the middle of a

pandemic and the right or wrong political decisions about how to respond to that reality. None of us knows what God will ask us to deal with in the future."

On the day of our baptism, the Lord knew what lay ahead of us. He made us all "for such a time as this" and made each and every one of us to become saints in these days.

At the end of 2019, I started work in my new role as youth minister in Three Patrons Parish. We had lots of meetings and plans in place for things we wanted to do with our young people. I was excited for this new challenge and couldn't wait to see how our plans would unfold.

The beginning of March 2020 brought a change to all those plans, when the Covid pandemic made nothing we had planned possible. As each month came and went, we saw another plan go under. Summer schemes, family fun days and youth retreats all became impossible as messages of stay safe, stay home, wear a mask and wash your hands filled all of our lives.

On a human level, it was so disappointing and frustrating to leave aside all those plans we had. My heart felt so heavy that instead of all the vibrant activities I had hoped to be doing with young people, I found myself in front

of a computer screen trying to master Zoom meetings, YouTube channels and video makers.

The Holy Spirit led me to reflect on Our Lady in the Annunciation. When the angel appeared and asked her to be the mother of God, she willingly and openly laid aside all her own plans for her life and totally trusted in the Lord - "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

I believe that, in this time, we are all being led into a greater trust in the Lord.

Naturally, I like to have things under control. I like structure and timetables and plans. I like to know what will happen at any turn and have a back-up when things don't go according to plan. The past 10 months have been a challenge, as time after time we saw plans being dismantled by a situation that is well beyond any of our control.

I have had many moments where I have felt like Peter sitting on that boat and trying to muster up the courage to join Jesus out on the water. I have felt the panic and the sinking moments when I have taken my eyes off Jesus and felt the seas close in around me. However, when I fix my eyes on Jesus I know that nothing is impossible.

I feel like this time has helped me grow a lot in giving the Lord

control of my life. I have learned to get up each day and do my best to give that day, and all that will happen, to the Lord. I still find myself most of the time trying to take over, but I am learning.

We, as a Church being unable to worship in public or rely on the structures and Sacraments that are so important, have had to find new ways of living out our faith at this time. I really believe that the Lord is calling us all into a deeper personal relationship with Him. If we have a strong relationship interiorly with the Lord, then exterior situations and circumstances will not have the same battering effect on us.

I hold onto the hope that the Lord has made me, and each of us, for these times. I am trying each day in work and in my personal life to call on the Holy Spirit to help me find new ways to reach out to others; to give and to receive support from my brothers and sisters in Christ.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead us all and raise up in us all we need to be Church in these times.

As Bishop Donal reminded us, "We are called by name and trust that Jesus has overcome the world. And on that journey of discipleship, we are assured that we will draw water from the wells of salvation."



## The Holy Spirit in our pandemic *by Brenda Deery*

THESE can only be described as strange times for most of us. Many of our normal routines have been abolished due to the ongoing lockdowns since last March. The novelty has certainly disappeared and, with our wintery weather, things can look a lot bleaker for many.

Our ongoing news updates are dismal, our lack of local parish contact is isolating and weary, and our conversations are saturated with COVID-19 updates, muffled words through our face masks and trying to keep our two-meter distance.

One could be excused for asking where Our Lord is, His Holy Spirit and His spiritual aids at this time.

So, what is the Holy Spirit saying to me? This pandemic has really got me thinking that my life before our pandemic, in all its busyness, had become disconnected somewhat from God and was not fully attuned to the Holy Spirit with all my relentless distractions.

I know God never stops His mighty works, but had I stopped listening and responding to God?

This pandemic has got me to try harder, in different ways, to listen for the promptings of the Holy Spirit. With not getting to Holy Mass, it is more challenging to take time out on my own to read, reflect and disconnect from the world. However, I do believe God is asking me to stop, take stock of my life and tune in again to His voice and Spirit through prayer.

The lockdown has got me praying more in private, looking up spiritual websites, seeking direction from our Pope and Mother Church and listening to some of the wonderful,

inspirational speakers that are available to us via social media. My faith has been awakened from its slumber through listening to these many mighty faithful speakers.

On New Year's Eve, I came across a beautiful witness to the spiritual power of our Holy Rosary which was so affirming and hopeful. I have listened to several talks on St Joseph and discovered, through social media, that this year is dedicated to St Joseph and has got many graces attached to it. I now realize the protection of St Joseph is so needed in our times.

It is great to be able to access Masses throughout the countryside and hear the different reflections on the Word of God. However, I do realize that, in all this, the Holy Spirit is asking me to 'switch off' to the many distractions, take time out, be silent, switch off the gadgets and reflect and pray.

I really believe I do need to step back from all that is happening around me and in our world, and listen to what God is asking of me, today in my wee bit of the universe.

As a speaker said recently, small changes are most effective when looking to build up God's kingdom. I believe the Holy Spirit is saying to me that if I want to assist in changing the world in these challenging times, then start with changing myself to become a holier person.

So my prayer is: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created and You shall renew the face of the earth."

## If we open our hearts to God's love from the Holy Spirit, He makes things new *by Bernadette Ó Mianáin*



by Bernadette Ó Mianáin

HOW has the Holy Spirit been working in my life? As a teacher of Year 8 RE in St Cecilia's College, Derry, it is very apt that I am writing about the impact the Holy Spirit has on our lives, as this is our current theme in the Year 8 Programme of Study.

I am privileged to be able to teach our young girls about how powerful the Holy Spirit is for each

and every one of us. I explain to my students that the Holy Spirit is like the wind outside on a windy day, or it's like a fan indoors. Each has the power to move things of which we cannot see. The wind can move leaves, twigs etc, and a fan can move paper. The Holy Spirit moves each of us. It guides us and helps us when we need to make important choices.

Sometimes we can feel the Holy Spirit moving us in our hearts, just like we can feel the wind against our faces. The Holy Spirit is God's own personal true love for each of us.

How can we say no to the giving of God's love when it is being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit?

This is what I am asking the young people whom I teach. So many young people are not aware that this is the case. I truly believe that the Holy Spirit has given me this mission of transcending this message to the young people in my school.

We are asked to pray for the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts and guide us as children of God. Although we say: 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' at the beginning of each prayer, I don't think we actually believe that we are asking God to be with us in our hearts as baptised children, to give us hope and peace especially in this time of uncertainty, sadness and upheaval from the norm.

This is the message that I am giving to our young people, that God loves us unconditionally. God is love. He loves us no matter what we have done or even not done, who is able to forgive us wholeheartedly for any wrongdoing we may have done in our past.

We can think of ourselves as a penny – something small and somewhat insignificant in this big crazy world. A penny can get passed from person to person, it can get stepped on, it can fall in the muck, but, no matter how

dirty and messed up it becomes, it doesn't lose its worth. Some pennies remain shiny and clean and some end up dirty and messy.

Pennies are like humans; in the midst of all the mess, if we open our hearts to God's love from the Holy Spirit, He makes things new. In the midst of despair He gives hope, in the midst of turmoil He gives peace. God has the power to make us shiny again. We won't ever lose our worth in God's eyes.

There is a beautiful prayer to the Holy Spirit which I encourage our students to say when they need God's Holy Spirit for guidance and support:

*"Breathe in me O Holy Spirit,  
That my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me O Holy Spirit,  
That my work, too, may be holy.  
Draw my heart O Holy Spirit,  
That I love only what is holy.  
Strengthen me O Holy Spirit  
To defend all that is holy.  
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,  
That I always may be holy."*



# The Holy Spirit in the life of the Church

by Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Merville



Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Merville.

IT'S fair to say that, for many years, the Holy Spirit was the 'Cinderella' member of the Holy Trinity in terms of Catholic spirituality. We knew God the Father and we knew Jesus, God the Son, and we addressed many of our prayers to them directly, but while we mentioned the Holy Spirit when making the Sign of the Cross, it didn't really figure in much of the rest of our thinking or praying.

In my own case, I can't even say that I remember hearing much about the Holy Spirit when I was preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation – although that could be put down to the fact that I was confirmed back in 1970! Nor did I learn much about the Spirit in my secondary school years.

It was only when I went to Maynooth and heard about the Charismatic Renewal Movement that I learned some more about the role of the third member of the Holy Trinity in the life of God's people. Added to that was the recurring singing of the 'Veni, Creator Spiritus' (Come, Creator Spirit) at the regular ordination ceremonies in the seminary, calling on the Spirit of God to fill those called to the service of God's people as deacons and priests.

Since my own ordination as priest in 1984, and my duties as school chaplain in the parishes where I've served, and my contact with the young people who were being prepared for Confirmation over those years, I've spoken much about the Holy Spirit, particularly about the gifts the Spirit gives at Confirmation, and what those gifts mean – or should mean – to those who receive them: how those gifts should be used; how important and necessary it is to call on the Spirit when a particular gift is needed – when we need courage, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, holiness, strength, and when we need to show wonder and awe in God's presence.

I've learned too that when we use the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit are brought out in abundance – love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (cf. Galatians 5:22-23).

There are many references to the Holy Spirit in the Bible, starting at the very first chapter of Genesis. We read there that the Spirit hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation, breathing the life of God into the abyss, the darkness, the nothingness that was there, and bringing life to the world.

Psalm 139 says, "Where can I flee from your spirit? Or where will I run from your presence?" The Spirit is everywhere, and always with us.

At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus quotes from the prophet Isaiah, saying that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me, and sent me to bring the good news to the poor..."

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the Church after His Ascension, a promise He fulfilled on Pentecost Day (Acts 2). He said the Spirit would be a "helper" (John 14:15) and a teacher (John 14:26). He also promised that the Holy Spirit would bring power, enabling God's people to be witnesses for Jesus "...even to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). And what power they received!

St Paul talks about the fact that we are all baptised into one body by the one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13); that we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). In Romans 8:26, he assures us that "...the Spirit will come to help [us] in our weakness..." praying in us and on our behalf.

In 1 Corinthians 12, St Paul tells us that only those who have received the Holy Spirit can say, "Jesus is Lord", and that when each one of us uses the spiritual gifts we've received, we can work together for the good of the whole community. He mentions there the gift of wisdom, the ability to speak in God's name, the gifts of faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, and tongues.

In Ephesians 4:30, St Paul advises us not to "...grieve God's Holy Spirit..." by committing sin, since the indwelling Spirit is God's presence in us.

Thinking of the Holy Spirit, as a diocese we're blessed to have St Columba as our patron. The name Columba means "dove" (the Irish word for dove is "colmn") and the diocesan logo is a stylised dove. So, on many diocesan occasions, we regularly see a dove which should remind us not only of our patron saint, but also of the Holy Spirit who appeared in the form of a dove at both the baptism of Jesus and on Pentecost Day.

I can't explain how or exactly when it happened, but in the past few years I've become increasingly aware, not just of the presence of

the Holy Spirit in my life and in the life of the Church, but of the compelling need for each one of us to call on the power of the Spirit.

This has, perhaps, been heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic which has brought many people, literally and metaphorically, to their knees. Many people who had been somewhat lukewarm in their faith and practice have found themselves regularly watching online Masses or joining other online religious and prayer services. There has been an active campaign to have our churches reopened, so that people can once again join together with other members of their faith community to pray and worship together, and many have expressed a deep hunger to receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

## Outpouring

Prior to the pandemic, I was asking people to join me in praying for a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on the Church and on the whole world. In the past eleven months, in particular, I've been actively encouraging prayer to the Holy Spirit because of the serious need for the Spirit's presence in every single one of us at the present time.

When I'm talking to children who are preparing for Confirmation, I encourage them to say the simplest of prayers, "Come, Holy Spirit!" It's a prayer any of us can say anywhere and at any time, preferably with our hands outstretched and open; ready to receive an outpouring of the Spirit.

On the Feast of the Lord's Baptism, at the beginning of January, I likened that pivotal moment in the life of Jesus with the pivotal moments we're currently living through in the history of humanity. I wondered out loud – although "wonder" isn't really the word to use when one already knows the answer to the questions – if the previous US President had asked the Holy Spirit for guidance before addressing his followers outside the White House on January 6, would he have said the things he said? Would those who heard him speak on that occasion, many of whom are probably "card-carrying" members of various Christian denominations, have stormed the Capitol building and caused the fear and destruction they did? Would many of our political leaders, at home and abroad, do the things they do if they asked the Holy Spirit for guidance? Would people in Ireland and elsewhere be organising parties or meeting in "shebeens", flouting Covid-19 regulations and thereby endangering themselves and many others if they were praying, and listening, to the Holy Spirit? The answer to each of those

questions is a resounding "No!"

We need the Holy Spirit now more than ever. We need the Spirit's guidance and wisdom. We need the courage to step up to do and say the right thing. We need the Holy Spirit to help us to understand and read the signs of the times.

We need the guidance and example of the Saints. I'd like to encourage you as you read this article to look into the life of at least one Saint, perhaps the Saint whose name you chose at your Confirmation, and see how he/she allowed himself/herself to be influenced by the Holy Spirit. Each one of them has a tale to tell of how the Spirit of Jesus changed them, changed the direction of their lives, and set them out on the path of loving and serving Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

My Confirmation name is Anthony. He's never far from me, especially when I'm looking for something that I've lost or mislaid, so I'm often praying to him. I think, too, of St Ignatius of Loyola, whose life was turned around completely when he learned to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Moving to more recent times, I'm very taken by the life, spirituality and example of Blessed Carlo Acutis – whose canonisation I hope to see in the not too distant future. How he lived for Jesus; his unshakeable belief in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; how he was led by the Holy Spirit to help his classmates, to befriend those who were being bullied or ridiculed, to adopt a very real and meaningful "option for the poor", spending his free time helping out in soup kitchens, never passing a beggar or a poor person in the street without helping them in some way, even refusing the offer of a new pair of trainers from his parents because the ones he had were good enough. He was never afraid to stand up for his faith, and was particularly vocal in expressing his pro-Life views. He died in 2006, at the age of 15, but has left behind a legacy of 'faith in action', and is a wonderful example to the young, and to the not so young, of how we can say "No" to the fashions and trends of our time.

We're all called to be Saints, to be holy people. There's a story told of a child visiting a church with an adult, and they're looking at some stained-glass images of Saints. The adult asks the child if they know what a Saint is, and the child answers, "A Saint is someone who lets the light shine through."

That's the kind of people we should aim to become – good, loving, forgiving, patient and understanding people, who let the light of Christ shine through our words and actions. We can do that



Bronagh Currie on her Confirmation Day with her aunt and Godmother, Mary.

## I have seen the Holy Spirit at work in my life many times

by Bronagh Currie

I have seen the Holy Spirit working in my life many times, when I have asked and also when I have not asked.

I have been told that one of my late aunts had the gift of speaking in tongues; she had a great devotion to the Holy Spirit. I do not possess such a gift.

I call on the Holy Spirit during trying times, when I need to make important decisions, and I ask for the gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Right-judgement and Knowledge.

I take time to pause and consider what might be the best decision for me and those around me. That's not to say I always get it right!

I have prayed for the gift of courage for myself and others in trying times, for example, when I or my friends or family have been

unwell.

I have had to really work at asking for the gift of Reverence and Wonder and Awe, with regards to how I treat others. I ask the Holy Spirit to help me show respect for God and to see God in everyone and the world around me.

During this trying time of the pandemic, when we are physically separated from family and friends, the Holy Spirit is needed more than ever to guide and strengthen us all with these gifts.

We have seen the fruits of the Holy Spirit in how everyone has dealt with the challenges of this pandemic: Love, some Joyful moments, Kindness, Goodness, Peace in the slowing down of busy lives, Self-control, and Faithfulness.

Come Holy Spirit.

## Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*O Holy Spirit, Divine Spirit of light and love, I consecrate to You my understanding, my heart and my will, my whole being, for time and for eternity.*

*May my understanding be always submissive to Your heavenly inspirations and to the teaching of the Catholic Church, of which You are the Infallible Guide; may my heart be ever inflamed with love of God and my neighbour; may my will be ever conformed to the Divine Will, and may my whole life be a faithful imitation of the life and virtues of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and You, be honour and glory forever. Amen.*

Source - Devotion to the Holy Spirit booklet

only if we open our hearts to the Spirit of Christ Jesus, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, to remove from our hearts any trace of selfishness or greed, and give us instead hearts filled with love for the poor, the needy, the vulnerable and the underprivileged. We should ask the Holy Spirit to give us a true and genuine concern for justice and equality, and to help us to establish the Kingdom of God

wherever we are. Right now!

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14)*





## Covid 19: A time of questioning the Holy Spirit and...

# A time of witnessing to the work of God's Holy Spirit

by Fr Neil Farren, PP Ardmore



Fr Neil Farren, PP Ardmore.

A young woman related to me recently that she personally liked "the creative" opportunity that this lockdown/more restricted time was giving to her, more than she had previously experienced for many a year. On the other hand, she admitted that she was deeply concerned about Covid-19 and the need to take all the necessary precautions. She, who had health, felt for those whose health was affected or taken away by Covid-19, as well as those who had bereavements. The stress it was putting on the health care workers, she very much empathised with.

This lady, who was fortunate to remain in good health and seen creativity in her own life improve with time on hand has, indeed, been fortunate, as opposed to the many others whose experience in this past year has been difficult and challenging.

There is in this more restricted Covid-19 time, a sense of blessing as well as curse, with its serious disadvantages as well as advantages.

Countless numbers of people, from the local scene to further afield, have been deeply impacted by this pandemic. It brought, and still brings, its fair share of woes for those affected as well as for their loved ones.

No one knows better the impact until they are, themselves, impacted by it. Its effect has as many harrowing variations as people's retelling of it. Countless numbers of people with no employment at this time, due to Covid-19, are experiencing serious repercussions to their financial situation, with knock-on effects on their health and wellbeing.

There are many tragic stories that are yet unknown and untold from this pandemic; from virus related deaths and financial woes to domestic abuse, stress, delays in health provision and isolation.

### Where is the Holy Spirit at work in all this?

That is the million dollar question that is hard to answer at this point in time. It may well come to light more fully at another time ahead. Right now, January/February 2021, we seem to be in the thick of Covid-19 and all seems very murky. When the dust of Covid-19 settles, then it will become clearer the working of the Holy Spirit in this local to global virus era. We can only, at this stage, see dimly the Holy Spirit at work.

There are many shining lights out there in society, from those who are at the coal face of Covid-19, particularly the health care workers who stand head and shoulders above everyone in these virus days. Their lived witness is revealed not only through their God given skills, but also their emotional, spiritual and mental courage, which is one of the greatest gifts of the Holy Spirit.

All the rest of us can do is our utmost to take all precautions to stay Covid free and keep the extra stress away from their hospital wards. We can only stand back in awe and amazement at their dedication and commitment to keep those affected by Covid-19 safe and nursed back into health to the best of their ability. There is where we best see the working of the Holy Spirit; in the witness of their testimony of care and restoration to health, and now vaccinations.

This has been a chastening experience for all of us, no matter what our experience in the past year has been, from being bereaved to overworked, from unemployment to Covid-19 positive, from more free time to being afraid. This past year has brought the vast majority of people, of all ages, to an awakening of the fact that there is more to life than the '9 to 5' working day and chill out weekends. There is more to life than thinking only of my own needs. Now our hearts consider the needs of others around us, even if it means wearing a face mask.

This is a time when people's hearts have been enlarged; when

hardened hearts have been stirred from thinking only of their own pockets to becoming more conscious of the other in dire strait, from isolation to financial woes. The Holy Spirit has tapped into people's social action response to many a plight by provision, be it of food coupons or actual material giving to another, wherever and whoever.

Many may wonder where the Holy Spirit is at work. Yet when we are taking Covid-19 precautions, be it with the wearing of the face mask, the keeping of social distance, keeping the travel restrictions and observing the hygiene code, there is good practice observed not entirely for one's own health care benefit but also for consideration of others around. Here, the Spirit of God works for each of our good.

This has been a difficult time for so many people and yet a time when some stood tall, despite challenges posed or unfavourable decisions made, be it in the world of local/national politics or those who take care of us in our daily tasks, from shopping to work places, to those who look after our young people's educational needs online. Here, in these often taken for granted assists, we too see the Holy Spirit at work in their attentiveness to duty of care.

Daily, people in all walks of life have responded to people's prayers to God Almighty for their needs to be met, and they were, as seen in multiple ways, be it in the health care, voluntary sector, schools and colleges, local government, retailers both open and closed, transport, people we meet socially distant in the street or parks, to people in their homeplace and many, many, more besides.

### Love

There are many good practices out there as well as not so good. Some people have more time on hand in their home, which is no bad thing. Many are creative in this time in varied ways. In many an unseen home, there are families working earnestly to keep the love in the home intact, despite the inherent difficulties that restrictions place, from travel to financial, yet, creating all the while an atmosphere for a home to be a real home with happy memories.

It is not always easy, and some homes have it difficult when



the weight of loving assist is not reciprocated. It can be a challenging and maybe hurting time, for this period we are in can be more isolating and difficult for some people when love is scarce. May the Holy Spirit give courage to not keep silent but to seek assist from helping agencies when it is needed, and not endure till the heart is broken in fear and sorrow. The Holy Spirit also brings light to where there is darkness, hope where there is hopelessness and courage where once there dwelt fear.

Yet there is, in all of this, an awakening. At this stage, we do not know where this awakening will bring us, but we pray for an even better world than before the pandemic. Creation has, through this past year, seen great and necessary improvements, with less pollution in the atmosphere. And nature seems to have quickly responded, from the simple chorus of birds chirping to better air quality and less pollution from our roads and industries.

We have become a people more conscious of creation and the damage that each of us are imposing on this once well connected eco system, to now an earth more fragile with our too long disconnect from it. An earth we humans, of all religious traditions and none, have too long dominated than shared.

Here, too, through this Covid-19 experience, from the local scene to the global, many prayers from Christians and others over the ages have been heard. Each person, in their own capacity, can and hopefully will respond to the pleas of so many prayers to bring about change to the care of creation.

God's Holy Spirit hovered over the earth at the beginning of creation, as is stated in the book of Genesis. God's Holy Spirit is not alone above us as then, but

working in and through each of our lives, enabling each of us to respond in this pandemic time to bear fruit in the ways of our duty of care for each other and for the earth we share.

I see the working of the Holy Spirit in the spirit of people's prayers offered daily for all concerned in this era of Covid-19. Many a person's prayer in the past was more superficially felt, whereas today many people pray more fervently and regularly. True, the reception of the sacraments has been depleted due to Covid restrictions placed on all, but yet we have, in mirror form, the sacraments open to us via the on line media.

Many people have kept connected with their Parish Masses and Services on line, and those of us who are priests celebrating Mass in an empty church, do not feel alone but very connected to all who are participating on line. It may not be the same as gathering together around the altar live in church, yet the connection is kept with the help of the Holy Spirit, until we can all return safely to church as before.

We have witnessed, and continue to do so, in our parishes, so many people who have volunteered to assist in a multitude of ways, from offering their services to assist in the liturgies to sanitizing the church, from the 19-year-old to the 90-year-old. How heart warming it is to see this outpouring of grace at work for the benefit of others in church or on line.

There are, in this darkened time of year, many lights shining in witness to the action of the Holy Spirit.

What an amazing time lies ahead, with the thought of our gathering once again as a congregation close to each and close to the Lord. What amazing times we took for granted in the past, to meet together in

each other's company without fear. To share the social side of life again, to celebrate more fully life to the full, and to thank God's Spirit for bringing us through what needed to be got through.

With the vaccination, praise God, that time won't be far off and by 2022 be a reality for all of us, when the dust of Covid-19 finally is settled. We hope and pray for this. Then we will know the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work for a new dawning of a people giving thanks to God for all He has done for us in real time, even being there in the darkness of it all.

These areas are where best practice of witnessing to the Holy Spirit is most visible at this time. From on ones knees in prayer to health care provision, from outreach to those in need to attentiveness to each other for the health care sake of each person met.

We invoke God, the Creator, to hear our prayers, our pleas and our groanings at this virus time. May His Holy Spirit give us vision and may the Divine Assistance keep up our hopes and good worthy practices in these darker days as we journey toward brighter days ahead.

## Come Creator

*From chaos and emptiness,  
From loneliness and lifelessness,  
Come, Creator, Come.*

*From darkness and shapelessness,  
From the abyss and awfulness,  
Come Creator, Come.*

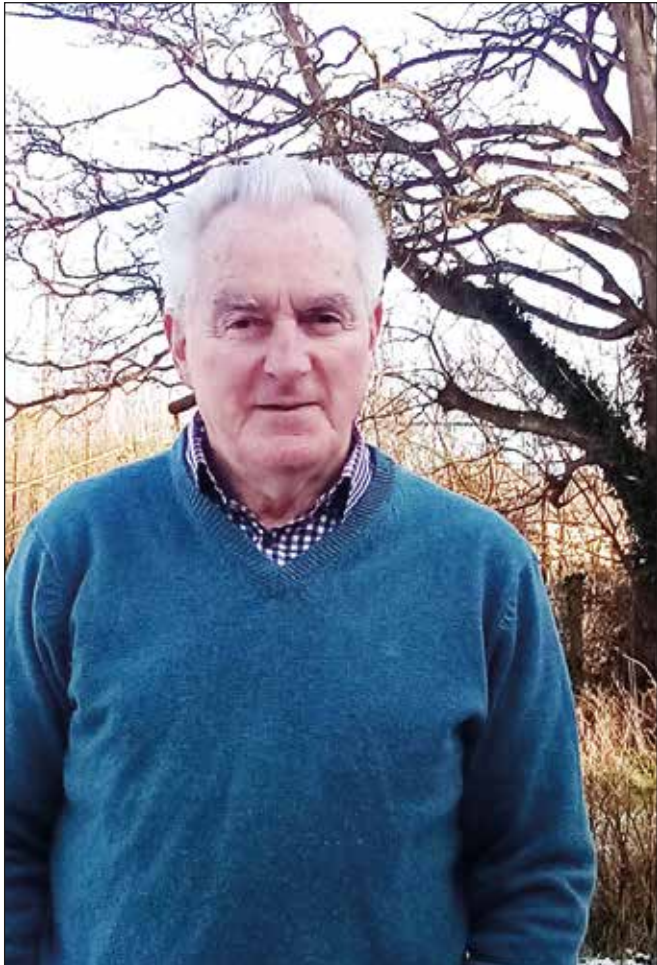
*From fearfulness and hopelessness,  
From weakness and dreadfulness,  
Come Creator Come.*

*(Tides and Seasons  
by David Adam)*





# Is the Holy Spirit real?...As real as Jesus is real? *by Noel Bradley*



Noel Bradley, Buncrana.

I was invited to write something about "How I see the Holy Spirit working in my life, and in the parish and Diocese, and where I see the Holy Spirit leading me and us at this time?" To be asked a question like this is very challenging because it is asking something very personal and intimate of me and, secondly, it is quite difficult to articulate an answer because the notion of the Holy Spirit working in our lives is very vague to most of us, I think.

For centuries, we have put the emphasis on Jesus and the Father, and particularly on Jesus. The Spirit was the forgotten one. I believed in the Spirit, of course, but it was very notional for many years, and I am only learning to take the Holy Spirit seriously and as real and working in my life and

the world.

This is why I ask, "Is the Holy Spirit real for you?" Of course, we say as the Creed does, 'We believe in the Holy Spirit', but have we any real experience of it? Jesus is real; He took flesh and dwelt among us - the Spirit not quite so real, certainly not like Jesus is real. Have I, or you, any tangible evidence of the Spirit?

## Experience of the Spirit

To find the Spirit, we have to turn inward, to the interior of our own consciousness and notice our feelings and sort them out, and this is difficult because from birth we are extroverts, always looking out and reaching out. We also learned that it was the teaching and doctrine that mattered and not so much our feelings.

It is also difficult because if we turn inward to our own consciousness, the stuff and data we find there can be all over the place - like looking into a churning washing machine sometimes; very confusing and frightening even!

Many of us also may carry hurts and pain, and anger or resentment about our past that block our energy to experience God's love and so see with new eyes. It is much easier to be continually extroverted, outside ourselves, blown about by this, that and the other, with no real sense of direction or being guided from within or called in our life, in what we call our 'vocation'. That call goes on everyday of our lives. We are called each by name and "my sheep hear my voice", and if vocation is real for you, then you live it out among the 'bits and pieces of everyday'.

If the Creed says 'We believe in the Holy Spirit', it is quite legitimate to expand that and say 'we believe that the Holy Spirit inspires each one of us in discerning our personal vocation in each moment of our lives and to respond to God's love there', as is stated in a very recent and good book published by Veritas, called 'A Creed for Today' by Donal Dorr.

## A directed retreat online

So, after that long introduction, how do I see the Holy Spirit working in my particular life, just now? Well, it just happens that I have just finished an eight-day directed retreat, on line from Manresa, in Dublin. So I will just reflect back on that experience as an example of the Holy Spirit working.

I believe I was inspired to do the retreat because I wanted to do it away back in September but, because of Covid, I couldn't. I heard of online retreats and felt drawn immediately. I felt more and more nudged to do it and I believe that was the Holy Spirit. Of course, I can't prove any of this. To give it my best, I also felt nudged to

cut out television at night, to go to bed earlier with no reading when I got there. I also decided to get up earlier to spend time in prayer, to get a walk in nature each day, to get quiet time for prayer in the evening again, to try to stay present to my deeper self... 'recollected'... during the day as I went about some Zoom commitments, to be a little bit more sensitive with my wife and children, and that allowed for fun and laughter too. I felt guided to do all these things.

I met a spiritual guide each morning and she listened to what was going on for me as I tried to be open to the Spirit and share, as much or as little as I needed to, about things that I wanted to talk about in my relationship with God and with life. I tried to listen within myself for the truth of my life and share that. She would notice things and share them with me. She would suggest a few lines from Scripture that I might pray about during the day. They were very apt and I believe the Spirit was showing me things. A word from Mass often also spoke to me.

So, I would see the Spirit working in all of this. To paraphrase a different translation (The Message translation, biblegateway.com) of the fruits or gifts of the Spirit in Gal 5:22, I would say that I now feel A BIT MORE alive and affectionate towards others and the natural world (love), exuberant about life (joy), serene (peace), a willingness to stick with things (patience), a sense of compassion in the heart (kindness), a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people (goodness), a willingness to stay with some commitments (faithful), not needing to force my way in life (gentleness), and able to marshal and direct my energies wisely (self-control).

I sound like a great fellow altogether in that translation and that is why I say I feel a BIT MORE of these fruits/gifts of the Spirit. I ended my retreat by praying over the text, "I will give water from the well of life free to anybody who is

thirsty" (Revel 21:6)

## Consolation from the Spirit

I believe I drank from this water freely during these days and I am grateful. It was an experience in consolation for me. Now I want to continue to carry that renewed sense of the Spirit into my life.

I will try to listen for the voice of the Spirit, to follow that thread, to discern my path in all the pulls and counter pulls of my life into the future.

## Consciousness Examen

I think the Holy Spirit is nudging me to really take seriously 'an evening exam' of consciousness before I go to sleep; to really take time to look back and see where God's Spirit was in the past day, then to give thanks for that and to notice where I might have been resisting or missing His 'voice'.

I find Pope Francis' words in an interview with his Jesuit brothers helpful here. He was asked, "What things give you consolation at the end of each day and what things take consolation away?"

He replied: "For me, consolation is the best anti-depressant I have ever found! I find it when I stand before the Lord and let Him manifest what He had done during the day. When, at the end of the day I realise that despite my resistance, there was a driving force there, like a wave that carried me along, this gives me consolation. It is like feeling, 'He is there'..."

I find it interesting that in all the appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection He comes to people as The Consoler.

I can only be brief regarding the second-half of the challenging question. Where do I see the Spirit working in the Parish and the Diocese?

I can only mention a few things. I see more lay people getting involved. This is a trend in the whole Church and I believe the work of the Holy Spirit. I know there is a good mix of lay and clerical members on the Diocesan

Pastoral Council. The atmosphere is cordial with everyone having a voice in decision making. There is an attempt at communal discernment.

There are parish pastoral councils as well and, while they are struggling, they are the future way for the Church. There is a Priests' Council. Pope Francis talks often about letting the Spirit guide our discussions and the need for discernment (personal and communal), honest communication and dialogue. That is emerging slowly.

There are all kinds of prayer groups (Lectio Divina) that listen to the words of Scripture, reflect on them and then share what attracted or touched them. There is a ministry of prayer and prayer guides trained through Thornhill Ministries and elsewhere. A lot of people are using their own initiative to go on line for Mass, courses, retreats and talks. There is a 'Laudato Si' group with concern for the environment. There are people planting thousands of trees in various parishes.

There is an ongoing development of the Diocesan website. There is 'The Net' newspaper. There are catechists and volunteers of all kinds and, of course, the creative work in schools.

The priests are at the continual service of the people and that is in the power of the Spirit. They desire to be better for their people in word and sacrament. The same is true for the small number of Sisters.

Do not forget the day-to-day love of parents for their children, the love of friends and the widespread love of people in general. All this love is a gift of the Spirit or even is the presence of the Spirit.

I am sure I have left out many groups because of my memory or lack of knowledge. I do believe that the Holy Spirit is doing a new thing and I believe that a key part of that newness is the increased involvement of lay people in the mission of the Church.

# It is the Holy Spirit that gives me the grace to do the Will of God *by Oliver Barrett*

FOR many of us, the first time we encountered the Holy Spirit was when we were preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation in primary school. This involved learning about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Looking back, at the age of 11, I do not know if I fully understood the gifts of the Spirit or if I learnt answers to questions so I could answer the Bishop correctly. I picked my best friend's name as my confirmation name, and thankfully it happened to be the name of an Irish Saint.

As with most of my education, it was a case of learning by osmosis. I only began to understand the importance of the Holy Spirit later in life when I began studying the schism between the Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church.

The breach between the East and the West happened in the 11th century. It happened partly because the East could not accept that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and Son, (filioque). This concept began to be added to the Creed from

the third Council of Toledo (589 AD).

When I started to read the writings of the Patriarchs to understand the reason for the schism, I found that all facts and figures in the Greek Orthodox Church are considered in terms of the Holy Spirit. In the Eastern Church, there is a deep appreciation of the Spirit as the animator of life itself.

I think the reality of the Holy Spirit, like the reality of Angels, is more in tune with the eastern mind and world view than the

western mind and world view.

This is how I understand the Spirit, as the animator, advocate, and counsellor, (paraclete). I believe the Spirit leads us (Luke 4:1).

I believe the Holy Spirit is leading us to heal the schism between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. I know it is the Spirit who gives me the grace to do the will of God. I see the Spirit animating people in our parish and diocese to do good.



Oliver Barrett, Leckpatrick.



# Saint Joseph: His actions speak louder than words *by Fr Joseph Varghese*



Fr Joseph Varghese.

ON the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX's declaration of St Joseph as patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis has issued a new Apostolic Letter entitled 'Patris Corde' ('With a Father's Heart'). In this letter, he proclaims a 'Special Year of St Joseph', beginning on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2020 and running until the same feast day in 2021.

All Christians know the story of the Birth of Jesus but how often have we considered the role of Joseph in this? It is hard to imagine just how much trust he put in God in accepting total responsibility for looking after Mary and her baby. Whatever God asked of him he accepted and, in his own quiet way,

went about fulfilling the duties assigned to him in circumstances that were difficult to understand.

It is timely and appropriate that we should be entering this 'Special Year of St Joseph' just now, in the midst of the global pandemic caused by the Coronavirus. The peoples of the world would do well to adopt a response to the pandemic similar to the response St Joseph adopted when he had to decide his best course of action to the problems he was confronted by, prior to the Birth of Jesus. Never was patience, trust, concern for others and understanding more necessary than at this moment in time. St Joseph had those attributes in abundance. Let us consider the situation that he found himself in.

Joseph was a humble carpenter about whom we know few details. We depend on snippets of information to help us build a mental picture of him. Joseph was a descendant of David. He followed the Law assiduously and was guided by its teachings and the instructions of those in authority.

Joseph was betrothed to a young girl named Mary and was preparing for marriage. He received a great shock when Mary told him the story of the annunciation. After serious thought, he decided that to divorce her quietly would be the best course of action. Before

this happened, he had a dream in which an angel appeared to him and explained the situation. Joseph accepted this and took Mary as his wife. Doubtless, there were numerous remarks from those around, but no word of complaint from Joseph about this. However, an angel appeared to him in a dream and explained God's plan for Mary and him, and he agreed to marry Mary irrespective of what anyone thought or said. He just accepted that this was God's plan and that he should be guided by it.

When the census was called, he immediately set off from Nazareth to Bethlehem, with Mary riding on a donkey even though her baby was almost due. It was almost impossible to get accommodation. Eventually, Joseph and Mary took shelter in a stable and he made it as comfortable as possible for her. There, in the humblest of surroundings, the baby was born, while the shepherds and the magi, who represented the people of Israel and the pagans, looked on in adoration. He was given the name 'Jesus', as Joseph had been instructed in his dream.

Forty days after the birth, Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple, committing Him to the Lord, and they were amazed at the prophecy of Simeon regarding what lay in store for Jesus and

Mary.

## Obedience

Soon after this Joseph was again instructed in a dream that he should move Jesus and Mary to Egypt for their own safety. In obedience, he set off with them, at dead of night, on what would have been a difficult journey. They lived in exile there until once more Joseph was instructed by an Angel in a dream to return to Israel. They came back and settled in Nazareth, a small village far from Joseph's ancestral town of Bethlehem. There they lived in almost anonymity, rarely venturing to places of note. However, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old, we got a glimpse of things to come when He became detached from both Joseph and Mary. Realising that He was missing, they searched frantically for Him and found Him in the Temple discussing matters with the Doctors of the Law.

While it would have been absolutely natural and understandable to have ignored the instructions in dreams and all the demands placed on him, Joseph was obedient to the Word of God and the Law, placing complete trust in God's will. There is no doubt that both Joseph and Mary passed this absolute obedience to the will of God on

to Jesus as He grew up in their care. We see ample evidence of this in 'The Agony in the Garden', when Jesus, knowing what trials lay ahead of him pleaded, "If it is possible Lord, let this chalice pass from me", and then, "Yet not my will Lord, but Thine be done". This was Jesus being totally obedient to the will of God.

Joseph is often referred to as the 'Silent Saint', as we don't hear any of his words recorded in Scripture but are continually witnessing his complete trust in God, his determination to comply with His will and his regard for the Law. He always gave due consideration to each situation and responded in the manner which he felt would be the one most pleasing to God. He didn't succumb to outside pressure or problems of daily life but trusted God to help him through.

Fathers would do well to adopt Joseph as their model. He has provided a perfect template in the manner that he reared Jesus in difficult circumstances. He fully accepted the word of the angel in the Annunciation, accepted Jesus as his son, watched over him and guided him through childhood, taught him the skills of the trade of carpentry and showed how to respect God and everyone he encountered. That is the most perfect model for any father.

We generally look upon the Holy Family as an oasis of peace, quiet and tranquil family life of which we hope and pray. As we study events which occurred in the Holy Family and how St Joseph followed the Law and an angelic dream from God to deal with upsets, we see why the silent saint, as he is known, demonstrates that "Words sound, but action Thunder."


Pope Benedict XVI also helps us to reflect more on the efficacious silence of St Joseph in the following words: "His is a silence permeated by contemplation of the mystery of God, in an attitude of total availability to his divine wishes. Let us allow ourselves to be 'infected' by the silence of St Joseph!" (Pope Benedict XVI, December 18, 2005)

Let us keep these thoughts in mind as we endeavour to follow Pope Francis' invitation to honour St Joseph in this special year.

In today's world, with all its trials and tribulations, especially with the scourge of Covid-19, we need to have someone we can trust to rely on. We should respond exactly as Joseph did; trust in God, in the knowledge that He will do what is best for us in the long run. It was good enough for St Joseph so it should be good enough for us. As we think of St Joseph now, we can see clearly that actions speak louder than words.

## Memorare to Saint Joseph

Remember, O most chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any who implored your help and sought your intercession were left unassisted. Full of confidence in your power, I fly unto you, and beg your protection. despise not, O foster-father of the Redeemer, my humble supplication but in your bounty hear and answer me. Amen.



## Novena to Sleeping Saint Joseph

SINCE Pope Francis' proclamation of a 'Year of St Joseph', December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021, to mark the 150th anniversary of the declaration of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, many people have spoken of their devotion to this humble carpenter and husband of the Virgin Mary, with some delighted to have received a statue of the Sleeping St Joseph as a Christmas gift.

And so, the announcement by the Carmelites, of the Iona Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, in Derry, that they are going to lead

a Novena to Sleeping St Joseph from March 10 until the Saint's Feast Day on March 19, will no doubt be warmly welcomed.

This Novena follows the very successful Novena to the Divine Child Jesus led by the Derry Carmelite Fathers in the lead up to Christmas Eve, which was a great source of comfort to many in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Likewise, this Novena to Sleeping St Joseph will be another time of prayer to look forward to in the middle of Lent.

Further details will follow in the March edition.

## Novena to Sleeping Saint Joseph



10th-19th March 2021

## 33 Day Consecration to St Joseph

IN this special year honouring St Joseph, a number of people across the Diocese are planning to undertake a time of prayer to consecrate themselves to this Patron of the Universal Church.

The 33-day Consecration will start on February 15 and involves daily prayer at home and an optional meeting once a week, via Zoom on a Monday evening, led by Fr Roland Colhoun, CC Newtownstewart. It will also entail one day of fasting.

Participants will receive a daily reminder email and will need a copy of Fr Donald H Calloway's book, 'Consecration to St Joseph

– The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father' (2020), which is available on Amazon.

Day 33 of the programme falls on Friday, March 19, the Feast of St Joseph.

Anyone wanting to take part can contact the coordinator, Veronica Harley by email – [vernieharley@hotmail.com](mailto:vernieharley@hotmail.com).

A decree granting special indulgences has been issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary for the duration of this special year, which ends on December 8; the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church, and the Feast

of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady.

The plenary indulgence is granted under the usual conditions – sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the Pope's intentions – to Christians who, with a spirit detached from any sin, participate in the Year of St Joseph on these occasions and manners indicated by the Apostolic Penitentiary:

- The plenary indulgence is granted to those who will meditate for at least 30 minutes on the Lord's Prayer, or take part in a Spiritual Retreat of at least one day that includes a meditation on St Joseph.
- The indulgence can also be obtained by those who, following St Joseph's example, perform a

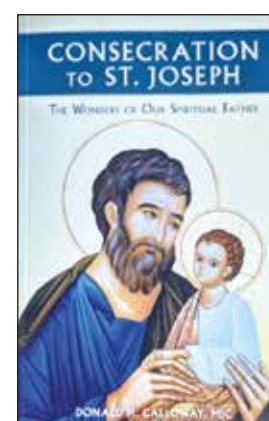
spiritual or corporal work of mercy.

- The recitation of the Holy Rosary in families and among engaged couples is another way of obtaining indulgences.
- Everyone who entrusts their daily activity to the protection of St Joseph, and every faithful who invokes the intercession of St Joseph so that those seeking work can find dignifying work can also obtain the plenary indulgence.
- The plenary indulgence is also granted to the faithful who recite the Litany to St Joseph or any other prayer to St Joseph proper to the other liturgical traditions, for the persecuted Church ad intra and ad extra, and for the relief of all Christians suffering all forms of persecution.

In addition, the Apostolic Penitentiary grants a plenary indulgence to the faithful who will recite any legitimately approved prayer or act of piety in honour of St Joseph, for example, 'To you, O blessed Joseph', especially on March 19, May 1, the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, on the 19th of each month and every Wednesday, a day dedicated to the memory of the saint according to the Latin tradition.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the gift of the plenary indulgence is also extended to the sick, the elderly, the dying and all those who for legitimate reasons are unable to leave their homes. They can obtain the plenary indulgences if they are

detached from any sin and have the intention of fulfilling, as soon as possible, the three usual conditions and recite an act of piety in honour of St Joseph, offering to God the pains and hardships of their lives.





*Reflecting on the gift of Mercy, Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, Fr Francesco Gavazzi asks us to look into the face of Mercy this Lent...*

## Life is beautiful because of Mercy...and it turns sinners into saints

LIFE is a gift. Mercy is beautiful. Sin is ugly. Sin makes the gift ugly. Mercy makes the gift beautiful again. Life is beautiful because of Mercy.

In 2018, I was ordained a priest with three other friars. There is a tradition that after a man is ordained a priest he returns to his home parish for a Mass of Thanksgiving. Before going back to Australia for mine, the four of us friars, Fr Angelus, Fr PT, Fr Mark Mary and myself, flew from New York to California for Fr Mark Mary's Mass of Thanksgiving. It was a great time of celebration out there in Orange County, a blessed part of the world.

After the Mass, we stayed for the week and did a parish mission at his home parish. On the Tuesday night of the mission it was 'Confession Night' and the four of us new priests heard confessions for hours. Driving back to the house late that night, there was total silence the whole way. Now this was unusual for the four of us because we're good friends and there's usually plenty of 'good craic'. But there was total silence, the whole way.

We finally got to Fr Mark Mary's parent's house, pulled in the driveway, stopped the car, got out and approached the front door. Still no word had been spoken. Then, standing at the front of the house, one of the friars finally broke the silence. He said this:

"It's funny isn't it...now that we are priests, the most beautiful moments of our day, we can't even speak about".

It took me a second to catch on to what he was saying. Then it clicked. He was referring to hearing confessions – "the most beautiful moments of our day, we can't even speak about".

The seal of confession means that what happens in the confessional stays there. In fact, in confession class at the seminary, we were simply taught to 'act as though it never happened'. Most priests will tell you that they have 'divine amnesia' anyway!

But, apart from the seal of confession, why did he say that? How could he describe confession as something beautiful when we are dealing with something as ugly as sin? Isn't confession all about sin? No. Sin is not at the heart of confession. God is. And God is love. It's about our lives becoming beautiful again because they are touched by God's mercy. It's letting Him take what is ugly - sin - and give us what is beautiful - His mercy. Mercy makes the gift of life beautiful again. Life is beautiful because of mercy. That's why hearing confessions are some of the most beautiful moments in the life of a priest.

Do you know that, in the history of the Catholic Church, we have saints who have raised the dead? St Vincent Ferrer is reported to

have raised 28 people from the dead. That's truly amazing. But the raising of the dead happens in the confessional every time someone in mortal sin makes a sincere confession. One of the friars said that someone can wake up spiritually dead in the morning, go to confession, and fall asleep that night spiritually alive again.

### Confession raises the dead.

Another one of the friars calls it the divine exchange; I give Jesus my sins and He gives me new life. It seems too good to be true doesn't it? But that is how good God is. "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins" (Psalm 103:12). Jesus describes reconciliation as if every time it happens, there is a party thrown in heaven: "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Lk 15:7). We let heaven celebrate even more simply by making a good confession.

### Wounds

Do you know what makes you the best candidate to enter into relationship with Jesus? It's not your virtue, or your togetherness, or your success or your talents. It's your wounds and your brokenness. He said it Himself: "It's not the healthy that need the doctor but the sick" (Mk 2:17). And, "I have not come to call the righteous but

sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:32). He calls us to turn from what hurts us – sin - to what heals us – relationship with Him.

The great illusion is that we must get our act together before we can truly come to Him, meet Him, encounter Him, enter into relationship with Him. But look at the Gospels. Who experiences new life, joy, freedom and healing? It's not the ones who stay away from Jesus and it's not the ones who think that they're righteous. It's the sinners, the wounded and the broken who accept Him and His simple invitation: "Come to me" (Mt 11:28). It seems too good to be true but it's true. Faith says 'Amen!' to a gift we don't deserve, could never earn, but desperately need.

He was crucified in giving it to us. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Jesus comes from heaven to us and, despite all our betrayal, He announces: "Peace...Your sins are forgiven...Receive your sight... Arise...I must stay at your house".

But remember, we have free will. A gift must be accepted and received. And where do we go to accept it and receive it? The Sacrament of Confession. Jesus told St Faustina that it's Him who is waiting for us in the confessional: "When you approach the confessional know this that I myself am waiting there for you. I



Fr. Francesco, second from left, with fellow Friars at their Galliagh Friary in Derry

am only hidden by the priest, but I myself act in your soul". He also told her: "The greater the sinner, the greater the right to my mercy".

Mercy is beautiful. You have a right to it, to accept it, if you are a sinner. And that's all of us. We simply have to acknowledge the truth about our sins and the truth about His mercy. Where these two truths meet, we have transformation and a cause for celebration.

Mercy is beautiful. Accept it, receive it and finally, make sure you look longer and more attentively at His face than at your sins. Because what really changes us is when we experience His joy over us coming back, coming home. Why? Because sin loses its attraction when we discover how amazing God is. It's easier to let go of the counterfeit, when you experience the real thing.

I will end with these words, reflecting on my own experience of His mercy, of confession and His joy when I return, no matter how far I've strayed...

*It's hard to let Someone give you what you'd rather not have to need, and know you don't deserve. I'd rather be thrown a party for accomplishing something great than for squandering something great and having to turn around. But if I never let Him throw me a party*

*for returning after squandering, I'll never know Who He really is, And what He's really like. It's been said, 'Every saint has a past and ever sinner has a future'. The sinners who become saints are the ones who enjoy the Father's joy at the party they know they don't deserve.*

This Lent, let's give Him our sins because He suffered and died to take them from us. Let's receive what is beautiful because He suffered and died to give it to us. Let's look into the face of Mercy. Let's give His mercy more time and attention than we give our sins. Life is beautiful because of Mercy. And it turns sinners into saints.



The Divine Mercy image painted on a gable wall in Galliagh.

*In this first of a three-part series reflecting on God's Mercy as Lent gets underway, Bishop Donal writes about Mercy in the Scriptures, with reflections on the Proclaiming of Mercy in our time and the Ministry of Mercy to follow in the March and April editions, in the lead-up to Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday.*

## There are lots of encounters and parables where Jesus shows loving mercy



POPE Francis' message to inaugurate the Year of Mercy in 2016 (Misericordiae Vultus MV) began with a clear opening sentence, "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy".

The term 'mercy' has deep roots in the Old Testament where it appears over 250 times. It is particularly strong in the Psalms. The Hebrew word 'hesed' has been translated into English as 'loving kindness' or 'compassion'. In the Benedictus, the prayer of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79), the original Greek speaks about the 'bowels of mercy' from which Jesus comes. Mercy comes from the heart of God. Mercy 'reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity' (MV 2).

St John's Gospel tells us that the reason for sending Jesus lies in the love of God for the world (Jn 3:16). It is in mercy that God

comes to meet us in Jesus. The mystery of mercy revealed in Jesus is thus to be contemplated rather than merely understood in an abstract sense. When Greeks come to Philip, they have one request, "We want to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21). It is not surprising that Saint Pope John Paul II, writing in 2001, insisted that there is no faith in our times without contemplating the face of the sorrowful and the risen Christ. (Novo Millennio Ineunte, para 16-28).

All Divine mercy begins with mercy towards me. If I have not known it in my own personal life, I cannot speak about it, except in theoretical terms. If I have not known Divine mercy, then I have not obeyed the first words of Jesus in His public ministry, "Repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15); that can be

rendered as 'Repent so that you may believe Good News'.

The Benedictus emphasises this. It is through the tender mercy of our God that His people will know salvation through the forgiveness of their sins (Lk 1:77). Without knowing repentance and forgiveness, there is no encounter with the God revealed in Jesus.

Many people saw the face of the Father's mercy in Jesus. We read in St Matthew's Gospel that 'Jesus, seeing the crowds of people who followed him, realized that they were tired and exhausted, lost and without a guide, and he felt deep compassion for them' (Cf Matthew 9:36 MV 8). There are lots of encounters and parables where Jesus shows that loving mercy. It is the sick, not the healthy that need the doctor.

The figure of the Father and

the Prodigal Son is a powerful image of God's unreasonable love-based mercy for the sinner. Similarly, He says that we should be prepared to forgive others seventy times seven times (Mt 18:33). In the 'Our Father', we pray for we will be forgiven as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lent provides an opportunity to contemplate the Jesus who emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave (Phil 2:6-11). Becoming merciful challenges His followers to empty ourselves from the urge to condemn or exclude. As the prodigal son discovered, being forgiven means believing that you are loved.

And that Lenten self-denial and self-emptying is a key element in preparing for the Feast of Divine Mercy on April 11.



Reflecting on the life of St Columba in this year of the 1500th anniversary of his birth, Columba Community founder, Fr Neal Carlin considers...

# The Ancient Celtic Church and renewal of faith in Ireland



THE 1500th anniversary of the birth of Columba gives us opportunities to reflect on the life of our local saint and, perhaps more importantly, think about what lessons he has to teach us.

What is there of value in the ancient Celtic Church and in the life of Columba that can help reignite a renewal of faith in Ireland?

In answering this question, let us look at the normal Christian life. It involves four clear elements. These you will find in the Pastoral Plan for the Diocese and in the lives of the Celtic Saints.

These are:

The centrality of Prayer is the first expression of the faith community ("with the Beloved" as Saint Therese tells us). Real listening prayer gives discernment and God's guidance;

The building of Community

with the variety of gifts that you have in any gathering of believers, with Christ as the cornerstone;

The notion of being a Light to others when we live as a Christian Community, ie. Evangelisation;

And last, but not least, is Reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness – a challenge for everyone.

These factors are true in the lives of faith we are living. They are true in the lives of the Celtic saints, like Columba, the Donegal man who founded his first monastery in Derry, Doire Cholmcille. Our first great Irish missionary, who sailed to Iona in 563, founded his monastery and then went on to convert the entire North West of Scotland.

Recently I stood outside the replica cell we have dedicated to him in the Celtic Prayer Garden and I thought of his prayer, such an example of discernment and compassionate ministry:

*"Sometimes in a lonely cell in the presence of my God I stand alone and listen. In the silence of my heart I can hear His will when I listen. Despairing people flock to me. They expect that I can see the answers. They ask for my advice, they say that I am wise. I answer that nothing can deceive me if I stand alone and silently listen. For I am but a servant in the presence of my King, when I listen. Sometimes in a lonely cell in the presence of my God I stand alone and silently listen".*

What a powerful example of listening prayer and ministry that could be a template for any parish today. It allows God's will be done.

The Celtic Church knew about silent listening. We need to return to this today. They knew how to unite a community of humble, gifted people into a people of prayer and service. They certainly were by example more than anything else, great evangelists.

The Venerable Bede writing about Columba and the Celtic

Saints, only 200 years after Columba died, said:

"These monks went out with a strange eagerness to preach the gospel, most never to return to their native land."

I want to focus on Reconciliation in the life of Columba. He became a great confessor and a man of reconciliation. He learned the hard way if we are to believe O'Donnell's "Beatha Colmcille", written in the 16th century. The story goes that Columba made a copy of Finnian's Psalter. Finnian demanded Columba's copy and Columba refused to surrender it. Columba, we are told, was a proud man. The High King rules on the problem of the Psalter. He said: "To every cow its calf, to every book its copy."

Columba was stubborn and still retained his copy. Colmcille, as he was called in his native Tir Connell, was from the Ui Neill's clan, kings of Ulster. A mighty battle ensued between the Ulster and Leinster Ui Neills at Cul Dreimhne. It was reported that one thousand soldiers perished.

Columba was convicted and converted as he walked among the dead and he repented of gathering his kinsmen to fight on his behalf. He went to Iona as a penance and promised never to return to Ireland.

He became a great man of peace and reconciliation. He reconciled King Aidan of Dalriada, Scotland, with King Aed of Dalriada, Ireland, regarding payment of tithes. He also reconciled the Bards and the local chieftains in Ireland, when the chieftains threatened them with extinction.

St Columba, having experienced forgiveness himself, became a compassionate confessor. So much so that Iona became the penitential centre for sinners from these islands. People who have experienced love and great forgiveness often become channels of such grace to others.

### Repentance and true confession

Adamhnan, Eunan writing about Columba, tells the story of how the saint prophesied about an old chieftain's visit. One stormy day a wounded crane was swept up on the beach on Iona. The monks took care of it. Then Columba prophesied: "Tomorrow an old chieftain in need of mercy, after much bloodshed, will come here. Be kind to him. He will stay for a month."

This happened exactly as Columba had stated it would. Later the penitent would leave the island chastened, and at peace and forgiven.

We only confess when we see the wrong we have done. A good example of this is after Pentecost, when Peter preaches with courage and truth about the Risen Christ. The Jews, through God's grace get converted and ask: "What will we do?" Only then can Peter say,

"Repent; believe in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit." This they did and thousands were added to the Church that day.

Among the many other good characteristics of the monastic Celtic Church displayed for six centuries was a love of nature. They made no distinction between the human and the divine. All is sacred, for them there is no mundane. God is everywhere and in all things.

This characteristic is powerfully echoed in Pope Francis' letter, 'Laudato Si', which calls us to care for the earth and curtail pollution. All creation is such a great gift from God.

I really believe that the characteristics of Celtic Christian Spirituality are like an underground river that runs throughout the land, just waiting to be invited to the surface to quench the thirst of our searching, thirsty people.

This truth gives me encouragement, hope and joy for the future of the Irish Church. This will involve governance that

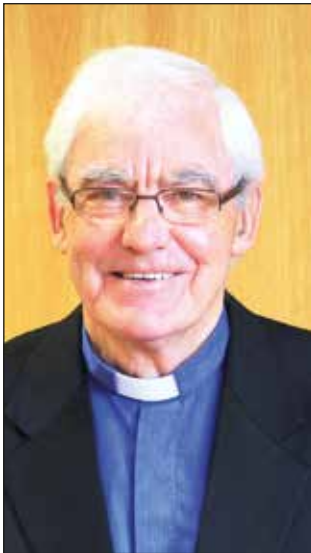
will follow Pope Francis' plan for a synodal church, where women and meaningful lay leadership come to the fore.

In summary, if we are looking for smouldering embers from the heart of ancient Irish Christianity on which we can ignite and rekindle faith, we need look no further than the Golden Age of Ireland (5-12 centuries).

Let us pray with people like Columba, Ita, the foster mother of the 12 apostles of Ireland, and Columbanus, patron of the European Church.

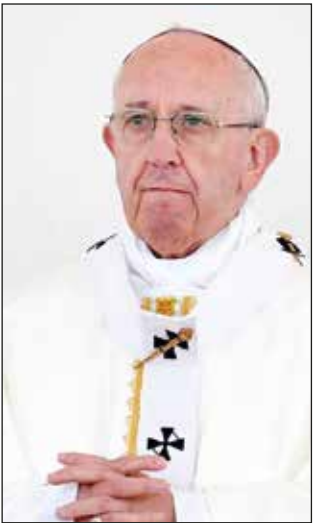
Let me finish with a prayer from the Celtic Saints' prayer book which we use at the Celtic Prayer Garden:

*"Lord we thank you for our great patron Columba. Increase your people's love of your Word and your Presence in the Holy Eucharist. Teach us to be reconcilers like Columba. Teach us to pray in your Spirit. Teach us to build Christian Communities and to be on fire with your presence. Give us a love for the*



Fr Neal Carlin

*outsider and welcome them home. Let us live in the Trinity of love. Columba's last words to his brothers were: 'Have unfeigned love for one another with peace. If you keep this course according to the example of the holy men and women of old, God, who strengthens the good will help you and I dwelling with Him will intercede for you'.*



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:

- Fr John Doherty (Feb 1st)
- All priests (2nd)
- Fr Michael Doherty (3rd)
- Fr Patrick Doherty (4th)
- Mgr Andrew Dolan (5th)
- Fr Brian Donnelly (6th)
- Mgr Joseph Donnelly (7th)
- Fr Liam Donnelly (8th)
- All priests (9th)
- Fr John Downey (10th)
- All priests (11th)
- Fr Malachy Gallagher (12th)
- Fr Jack Farrell (13th)
- Fr Paul Fraser (14th)
- Fr John Farren (15th)
- Fr Neil Farren (16th)
- Fr Paul Farren (17th)
- Fr Christopher Ferguson (18th)
- Fr John Forbes (19th)
- Fr Edward Gallagher (20th)
- Fr Dermot Harkin (21st)
- Fr John Gilmore (22nd)
- Fr Joseph Gormley (23rd)
- Fr Eamon Graham (24th)
- Fr Gerald Hasson (25th)
- Fr Karl Haan (26th)
- Fr Eugene Hasson (27th)
- All Priests (28th)

## Holy Hour for Vocations

THE series of monthly 'Holy Hours' organised by the Diocesan Vocations Team, as part of the Columban Year of celebrations in the Diocese, continues on Thursday, February 11, at 8 pm.

Focusing on the example of men and women who have lived their lives by faithfully answering God's call, like St Columba, the time of reflection and prayer will encourage awareness of Jesus knocking on the door of our hearts.

Fr Stephen Quinn OCD will lead this month's prayer and reflection, which will be broadcast from the Carmelite Monastery at

Termonbacca.

The Holy Hours will take place on the second Thursday of each month, at 8 pm, from churches throughout the Diocese, with the first to be led by Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Moville, from St Pius X Church, on Thursday, January 14.

Fr Stephen will focus on the search for holiness and how that holiness was shown in the life of Sr Clare Crockett, the Brandywell-born Servant Sister, of Home of the Mother, who died when an earthquake struck Ecuador in 2016, and is known for motto, 'All or Nothing.'



Derry Diocesan Vocation Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, gentle shepherd,  
You know your sheep,  
and you know how to reach their hearts.  
Give to the people of the  
Diocese of Derry,  
hearts that are open to the call of the  
Holy Spirit.  
Speak to the hearts of the (young) men  
of our Diocese,  
that they may hear your call to follow you  
and serve your people as priests.  
Awaken in them the courage to answer:  
**'Here I am, Lord, Send me.'**

St Eugene, pray for us.  
St Columba, pray for us.  
St John Vianney, pray for us.



## A Word of God for your Family Life **Where are you going?** by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR

PEOPLE generally go where they are looking! But they do not always look where they are going!! The beginning of a new year is always a good time to think about where we are going in life. One of the best ways of doing that is to think about what we are looking towards for our happiness and fulfilment.

Some people look towards success in work, or in sport, or in popularity for their happiness and fulfilment – yet this fails so often. Others look towards wealth and possessions but there never seems to be enough. Others, again, look towards pleasure and entertainment but often end up in loneliness and frustration.

### Our Way

The Sunday Liturgy, during the four weeks of February, calls on us to look towards Christ and in Him to find the fulness of life. This refocusing of our eyes is a constant need in the lives of Christians. If you go into a dark place, it takes a long time before you begin to see anything. Your eyes play tricks on you.

Even after a time, when things become visible, you can find it difficult to move around freely. Then you find the light switch, and everything becomes clear. Faith in Christ is the light switch that can

make sense of it all.

### Look towards the authority of Christ

On Sunday, December 31, at the beginning of the first week of February, the Gospel says: "His (Christ's) teaching made a deep impression on them, because unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority."

As Christians, our core belief is that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God. Everything is built on that belief. Because of that, we believe that He is the one above all others who can teach us about God. And the God that Jesus reveals to us is a God of infinite love and compassion. At times we, as the Church, move away from this God and create a false God of fear and judgement. Our responsibility, as followers of Christ, is to keep firmly moving back to the God of Jesus.

In accepting Jesus as the Son of God, we also believe that He is the one above all others who can teach us about the meaning of human life. He teaches us very clearly that the only way to live human life is the way of love – 'to love God with your whole heart and to love your neighbour as yourself'.

We make human life about so many other things and the

challenge of faith is to constantly move back to pinning all our hopes on love: in marriage, in family life, and in our life with one another in our faith community of the parish. This is becoming more and more important as our society changes with such speed and can leave us without our roots.

### Look towards the healing power of Christ

The second week of February begins on Sunday 7 with an account of several healings, one of which was the healing of Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. The Gospel simply says that Jesus took her by the hand and helped her up 'and the fever left her, and she began to wait on them'.

One of the lovely features of the Gospels is the number of healing stories they contain. These are not just accounts about past events but a revelation of what the present possibilities are. Nothing is too big or too small for Christ's attention. He raised Lazarus from the dead and He healed this woman from a fever.

We all need His healing power in so far as we set limits to our love for one another. Husbands and wives often need to stretch their love into being able to forgive if they are to go forward

together. Parents need to be free to understand their children and are often blocked from this ability. In our faith communities, we need Christ's power to heal us into generosity so that we can take on our responsibility to care for those in need.

### Look towards the presence of Christ in daily living

"Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God." These words, which are taken from the First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians and are part of the Second Reading of the Mass on Sunday, February 14, give a very good focus for our thoughts and prayers for the third week of February.

We often think of faith and religion only in terms of prayer. And, of course, prayer is vitally important! But the extraordinary thing about Jesus and His teaching is that true religion is to be found in the ordinary things of life and true faith is to be lived in daily living. This is especially true of the day-to-day loving of marriage and family life.

Each married couple live out their spirituality in the ways they tenderly love one another. In family life, the quality of love is what makes people holy. We need

prayer as part of it all so that we can both grow in our power to love and in order to celebrate the goodness and wonder of love. It is only through the power of God that we can love as we should.

### Look towards the call of Christ

On February 21 we celebrate the First Sunday in Lent, having introduced this season on Ash Wednesday, February 17. In the Gospel on this day, Jesus says: "Repent and believe the Good News". This call of Christ sets the agenda for the next six weeks. The first thing we have to do is repent. This simply means to let go of the things and the ways of living that limit our freedom to love God with our whole heart and strength and our neighbour as ourselves.

Secondly, Christ tells us to believe the Good News. This means to live the good news – to practice being happy, to bring joy and peace and healing to those we live with and those we meet.

This has huge implications for married couples in their relationship; for families in their life together; and for every community of faith. Lent is not just about giving up things but rather about changing in ways that will bring life to one another. Six weeks' practice should make



a profound difference to our lives and our love relationships.

### Postscript

I have written this short article without once mentioning Covid-19!! It is not that I have been ignoring it because it has been in the back of my mind all the time. It is the context in which we are practicing our faith and living our love today. We need to focus on our faith and our love rather than on the virus, and do everything possible to preserve our faith and build up our love especially in family life and in marriage.

May God keep each one of us safe through this time. And may Mary show herself as Mother of Perpetual Help to all of us in our homes and families, and in our parish communities.

*Enjoying retirement in Moville after almost 40 years as a Columban missionary in Chile, Fr John McLaughlin reflects on...*

## The Quality of Mercy

*...A unique present on a Christmas Day*

IT was Christmas in the hills of Valparaíso. I had just finished Masses in the two chapels of Las Palmas and was packing up to drive to Santiago to celebrate with friends and, later on, with my Columban sisters and brothers. Then appeared Sashka and her mother, calling at the window of the apartment. Would I do them a big favor, they asked... "We want you to come up the road with us to say a prayer for our friend being buried today". Dealers, like them, on the streets. How could I refuse?

So, onto the jeep and down the hill towards Recreo, in the next parish. I found myself being led into an unpaved house where people were gathered for a Responso. After introducing myself, I started off with the easiest hymn, 'Juntos como hermanos', and immediately the group took it up. That was a good sign of the faith in those partaking and I became more motivated. Prayer, readings, Psalm and Gospel and a short homily, before Prayers of the Faithful, and the long commendation and blessing of the ataud, singing and reciting 'The Lord is my Shepherd' and, finally, the well known 'Puedo confiar en

el Señor' (I can trust in the Lord... even when the sun darkens). All celebrated with attention and took up the songs.

The Blessing over, I approached the widow to express my pesame – condolences – only to hear her say something louder, "Father, can you put some sense in those sons of mine!" There was a sudden hush in the room. Two young men stood before their mother and were having a tearful embrace.

"You know they have not spoken for 14 years of hostility," somebody explained to me. The occasion just got to everyone and I found myself emotionally sharing in the wonder, the joy and the gratitude as I withdrew with Sashka and her mother.

On that drive to Santiago, I could not put on the radio to listen to the Christmas messages. Something marvellous had happened and I was an instrument of God in it all. There was a sense of wonder about reconciliation, so apt for the Nativity mystery. For the hour and a half drive, memories flooded in of Conversion Retreats on the scheme of the great Santiago priest, Pepe Valdès, down the coast in Cartagena with men and

women, week about, and well prepared celebrations for those removed for a time from church belief and practices, then the confessions and the Eucharist, followed by return to Santiago after the long weekend of being received by families in the chapel and their simple testimonies and hymns. Relations had been healed, addictions could be faced, hurts and failures were being pardoned. There were shared joys, smiles and applause as the leaders introduced the participants to the waiting family and members of the chapel.

I had rather similar memories of Valparaíso and the Nazarene Movement of families. A long weekend encounter this time, with couples of all ages together, sometimes of two generations. This was testimonial too, and emotional, some even coming into confession as a married couple, testifying to their hopes for a new life together. Some seemed to have had a long and embattled life in their poverty, and one pair I remember celebrating 25 years of a marriage that started at 16 years of age – I got emotional over that Absolution /Blessing! Couples were sponsored and



Columban Group Retiro 2015

encouraged by older couples. That Retreat would be later celebrated at a supper in one of the parish rooms the following week, when participants stood and, individually, gave joyful witness to a new way of life for them.

It was all part of the wonder at the Incarnation that this morning enveloped my emotions as I drove into Los Cerrillos, in the city. Anita, my friend, was waiting for me to join the family of the Hein-Gonzales clans and exchange presents. But first I had to tell her of the event of the morning. Anita knew it all; after a period of separation from Pepe and marriage, infidelity hurt. "When you love, then you can and must forgive everything", she said many times to me, her close friend, and

in whose Departamento I had lodged in that period of loss.

There were other moments too, where the Nona (grandmother) had the calming influence – a series of sexual abuse and harassment issues that had the family deeply divided, suspicions and murmurings – she brought calm to four families and she mourned the deaths of her own resourceful mother, Sra Carmen, and later, of Pepe, now back at her side.

I blurted out to her, my great friend, "Anita, I will never ever have a greater Christmas present than what I received this morning, nor do I ever want one". She knew the territory better than I.

Back last autumn, on an extended visit to Chile, my second homeland, I went to Mass in the

Italian Church where they have an immigrant centre. It was the Feast of the Peruvians, The Lord of the Miracles, and they were present there in numbers, all resplendent in dress and outfits and flags.

The Final Hymn would be familiar to anyone with some kind of roots in Latin American culture. Maybe it was in the mind of Pope Francis when he gave that first great exhortation on The Mercy of God, which has been the theme of his pontificate: "Solo le pido a Dios...que la Guerra (el engaño, el dolor, el injusto) no me sea indiferente"; sung by all the great trovadores of the Continent, Pablo Milanés, Mercedes Soza, Silvio Rodríguez etc..."I only ask God...that war...and injustice and sorrow are not indifferent to me".





# Sullivan Ballou's Letter: A Reflection on Marriage *by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD*

**I** desire to do something quite different with this month's article. I want to share with you an old letter. The letter bears the date July 14, 1861 and it holds a sender's address as Camp Clark, Washington DC. The date places the letter at the very opening salvos of the American Civil War and the address situates our attention on one of the many military camps that were dotted around America's capital as it lurched into war. The penman writes:

*"My very dear Sarah:  
The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days - perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.  
I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing - perfectly willing - to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt.*

*Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing, but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield.*

*The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when God willing, we might still have lived and loved together and seen our sons grow up to honourable manhood around us. I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me - perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar - that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name.*

*Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness...*

*But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the brightest day and in the darkest night - amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours - always, always; and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.*

*Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again.  
Lovingly, Sullivan."*

The penman of this beautiful letter was Major Sullivan Ballou of the Rhode Island Volunteers, and he died of his injuries five days later at the First Battle of Bull Run, the very first major engagement of the Civil War. There are just so many qualities to this letter. I do not want to draw your attention merely to the style of the author, I do not want to comment on the aesthetical quality of the author's language, nor do I desire to let the manifest emotion that flows from every word of the author's penmanship hold you wrapped.

I want everyone who encounters and engages with this letter to hear again an age-old wisdom that few in modern times care to comprehend. If you do not believe me, turn on your television, watch one of these bright magazine type television programs, and hear the story that they have to tell about marriage. In their characterisations, marriage does not rise above rancour, suffocation, infidelity, and despair. The divorce word is used almost interchangeably with marriage as if one is inevitable because of the other. It is to a people polluted with the suggestions of these self-help gurus and to this commonly held opinion of marriage that this letter primarily addresses itself.

Even though Sullivan and Sarah are gone over a hundred and fifty years, in this letter they breathe life again, their life together starts to speak, and what is it that they have to say? Why, it is nothing less than to renew after all these years their vows to each other. Just as if that was the only thing that mattered to them. Really hear the words that they share as they take leave of each other! The words are almost quivering with the vibrancy that is held within them, jumping off the page and hitting our ears with their power.

Sullivan says to his wife, "my love for you is deathless!" What an outstanding way to express oneself! Where did he find such words for such a moment?

Surely, it is manifest that we hear in them an echo of the Gospel. Christ, himself, saying such words to the Church and each and every member of His body. Jesus, Himself, is speaking through these two ordinary individuals - they have become

what he had originally meant in the act of creation; they are no longer merely two but one. Sullivan and Sarah could say in a more serious way than even Adam and Eve that "here at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

## Blind

There is a chance that Sullivan and Sarah had been unaware of how far they had come over the years together. We, human beings, can be so blind to the miracles that grow up around the small things of life. The oncoming of war maybe had a sobering effect, and each of them had started to comprehend in twenty-twenty detail their reality.

In the face of such a harrowing experience, life seems to boil down to its most fundamental elements: life and love. The vows of marriage and the concrete living out of those vows had meant more than having a joint bank account, sharing a house or even a bed. Sullivan and Sarah had entered into a holy compact. As they had taken each other's hand and shared their promises, God the Son had poured out on them the affection and grace of His own Sacred Heart. A Divine Love that seeks nothing for itself but to only pour itself out to the last drop for love of the Church and humanity. A Love that sacrifices unto death for the object of one's love; to give, to give, and to give again not counting the cost so as to raise the object of one's love high above oneself.

This was given to two people at the very foot of the altar, not the counterfeit notion that invades our brains from poor romantic novels and cheap movies. This love is more than merely some starry-eyed emotionalism; it is rather the difficult task of raising oneself up by raising up another. Seeing that person as somehow more than oneself, holding that person up above oneself, and seeing into the truth of that person and recognising them as something holy. This type of loving is made only possible by the Sacred Heart of Jesus and that is only measured out by means of the sacrament of marriage.

On first impressions, this type of loving seems beyond the paygrade of ordinary mortals; how could anyone live up to that standard? If we were to attempt to do this type of loving on our own, of course, it would be beyond any of us, but we do not have to do it our own. The Gospel gives us strength, the Gospel lets us in on a secret: apart from Christ we cannot do anything. He loves enough for all of us and, what is more, He invites people to adopt His loving as their own. What else do you consider the sacrament as? Sullivan and Sarah were ordinary people enfolded in an extraordinary mystery.

Other words jump off Sullivan's page, "forgive my many faults and

the many pains that I have caused you," - those words remind us that the words, "I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, and I will love and honour you all the days of my life", that are uttered on the day of marriage are not static, those words do not fall like weights from the persons lips before the priest but are rather alive and active. As the pair walk down the aisle so the words accompany them, as they go through the church door so do the words, and as they get into the car, the words proceed with them to wherever they are going. Those words and that commitment will be there in every little thing that presents itself and in every moment that they share together.

Those words hold and mesh them together long after they can no longer actually remember uttering those words. The words do not grow smaller with age, in fact the exact opposite happens, they grow and expand as the horizons of the pair's own life grows and changes: growing up with them. The words are not to be left floating in mid-air but must be applied in the harsh realities of life. In some ways, the words only take on reality when troubles come. When life is going well, we tend just to be rolling along with events. The momentum of things just seems to carry us along in their tide. It is only when we hit a block in the road, or that a spanner is thrown in our workings, that we are forced to stop and do something ourselves. We have to choose to do the loving thing. Trouble becomes the time when the vows take on rubber tires and hit the road.

Only in the moment when you have to spiritually and morally pick up your loved one and carry their weakness on your own back, only then can you truly say that you have endeavoured to love them. Exactly as the Lord did on the Via Dolorosa to the cross, carrying everyone else's great weight all the way to Calvary.

All around us, a strange belief has arisen that love makes all of life easy and simple and that when things get complicated and start to go wrong, then there is a corresponding problem with the marriage. Sullivan and Sarah tell us that the exact opposite is true. When things go wrong as they inevitably do, there is actually something going right, there is something working itself out, there is something emerging into life.

## Weakness

Married couples need to own their own weakness. Weakness is something that, from an early age, we learn to bury, to disguise, and to go on pretending is not there at all. We learn a type of thinking that if people see us for who we really are then they will not be able to love us. We imagine that we can do marriage in the same way, pretending that weakness and

brokenness is not always going to be a factor. But for marriage to be marriage we have to be able to share that thing about ourselves that we are most embarrassed about, with the one we love; to take out and share that deepest part of ourselves that we seem helpless to do anything about.

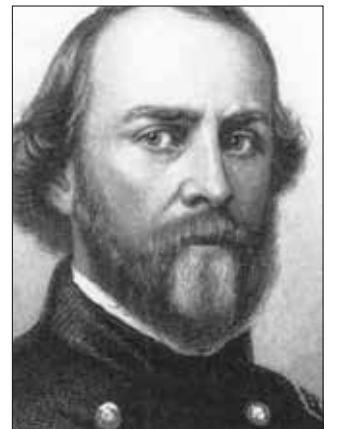
Daring to put that weakness into the hands of the one we love; by some "strange coincidence" finds the very hands that were meant all the time to help us carry the weight of ourselves. In sharing that weakness, the other person is prepared for the moment when they will need to step in, when they will have to brace themselves, when they will pick up the person like a beam across their back and carry it out of love. This shared truth of weakness creates space for mercy and for forgiveness.

One spouse can say to the other, just as Sullivan and Sarah do in the letter, "I have failed you in so many ways and I have hurt you maybe more than anyone else in this world," and after saying all that, it still does not spell the end of the couple's story, they have room for so much more! Room in terms of the size and shape of God's omnipotent forgiveness. The couple have to remember that always in marriage there is never just two, there is always a Third Person and that Person can forgive all the sins of the World. He can step into the deepest failure that one spouse can inflict on another and bring His peace.

As the letter draws to its painful conclusion; Sullivan tells his beloved Sarah that at this moment of writing, his mind is filled with all the "blissful moments" of their marriage, those moments that had given him greatest happiness. He does not actually mention what those memories are; but I am prepared to bet that the memories are not about houses, money, holidays, and lifestyle. Rather Sullivan's mind turned to what was the small and simple in life; of sitting with her, talking with her, of laughing with her, and of loving with her. Funny thing about his happiness, it came in seeing that she was tranquil, that she was satisfied, that she was thrilled with something, and that she was really happy, in that paradox, we find the greatest difference between the wisdom of the World and the wisdom of the Gospel.

The wisdom of the World exalts taking and the Wisdom of the Gospel cherishes giving. St Francis so rightly put his finger on the difference in his prayer, "it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Happiness for the Christian comes as a person grows in their character, nature, and stature. They grow by means of the good that they do. They grow by living in virtue. They grow by taking out the personal treasures that they



Major Sullivan Ballou.

horded away in their own hearts and give them to the other. When a person becomes capable of such generosity then they are able to receive happiness.

With such thoughts, Sullivan consoled himself as he prepared to go into battle. He had managed as best he could to make Sarah's life happy. He was only sorry that the road to Bull Run now so threatened that happiness. In so many ways, the World around us is deaf, dumb, and blind to the parts of human life that truly matter. It does not seem to see anything unless it glares and does not hear it until it blares. The problem is that the true qualities of marriage will never be found in anything that glares or blares. The true qualities of marriage are found in the small, almost insignificant details of the living of a real daily life and trying to invest those details with Him who came not to be served but to serve.

Sullivan Ballou and Sarah Ballou were by no one's measure extraordinary people; they were exactly the same as so many others, they probably failed as many times as they succeeded. The only thing different about them was that they found some means to give full expression to what had passed between them, the Sacrament that they had shared, and that they were living a deathless love that could even transform this moment of goodbye. The beauty that they are able to express in their letter is not reserved singularly to them. They lived a life not unlike that lived by my grandparents, parents, and other married couples that I have known.

In so many articles and sermons, I have sung the praises of religious and monastic life, but I have to recognise that there is a whole other way to holiness and that Christ came to the wedding feast of Cana long before He called His own disciples. At Cana, Christ blessed married love at the wedding feast and His blessing made marriage capable of carrying the "best wine" of His divine love.

So, through the letter of Sullivan and Sarah, Christ speaks again to this generation, a generation that seems so keen to embrace all kinds of alternatives, and He says through the sacrament, "Come and follow me" to a deathless love.



# Memories of Dungiven *by Vera McFadden*



DUNGIVEN is one of my favourite places. Though I was only there for an occasional visit or passing through, it has given me many pleasant memories. It was the place where my children and I always stopped for refreshments on our journey to Derry or back to Belfast. Sometimes we looked around the shops.

They were not large shops, but they were interesting. There was the newsagent who also sold books and, occasionally, some of my books.

There was the draper's where I was able to get a lovely, reasonably priced suit and comfortable shoes for my niece's wedding. Then I discovered Hasson's with its lovely tweed and the wonderful Benbradagh magazine. It was named after the mountain near Dungiven. We passed it on our way to Belfast. I knew that there were many prehistoric remains on those mountains between Dungiven and Maghera. The magazine contained a good mixture of stories, poems and history and folklore.

On our way from Belfast, we stopped at the church if the gate was open and went in for a visit, and then had a short walk in the grounds. In later years, God would use that church to enlighten me in a difficult situation.

We also passed a castle before we came into the town. I always meant to go and have a look at it, but I never got the chance. I was

told that it was a Plantation Castle. It was near the site of the O'Cahan stronghold which overlooked the river Roe. The last O'Cahan chief was Donal Ballagh, who died as a prisoner in the Tower of London in 1618.

When we came back to live in Derry, my children and I went on outings with the North West Historical Society. One of these was to a site near the town of Dungiven. On the narrow approach road there was a 'wart well', that is an old bullaun stone which was originally used for grinding corn. It usually has one or two hollows which held the corn. Sometimes an old monastic stone was placed beside a holy well and, at times, pieces of rags were attached to nearby bushes to signify the cure from some sore or illness. One man on the outing was very interested in that well and stone. I learned later that it was called St Patrick's Well.

Our destination was quite near the holy well and at the end of the lane. It was the site of an Augustinian priory, which had been built for the Order by the O'Cathan family, the leading clan at the time.

What we saw was very interesting and unusual. There were tombs with sculpted recumbent figures. All three were dressed in the garb of Gallowglass warriors. One of them was identified as Cooley-na-Gall. We could see all of this on the

other side of a protective barrier. This part of the former church was beautifully ornamental. There was a walled area with a door, but the keeper was not there so it was not open.

When I expressed my wonder at this place, a Dungiven man said, "Cooley-na-Gall and his seven sons". Cooley O'Cahan's daughter had married a Spanish chief, Angus McDonnell. He had asked for men to run the O'Cahan territory to become husbands to the daughters of Spanish chiefs. Was this why Cooley had been called Cooley-na-Gall (Cooley of the foreigners)?

When we were coming back up the lane, the archaeologist who was leading the outing told me that there had been a rath in the field to the right, which was just beside the main road, but that it had been too difficult to locate.

I went back to admire the priory site a few times later. The first time there were some cattle on the narrow road, so I turned back, thinking I had come to the wrong place. Then I was told that, as the lane passed through farmland, there could be cattle about. One day, as I was driving down, I noticed an upright stone near the top of a sloping field, and I wondered if it was a Bronze Age burial site or a termon marker to show the end of monastic land.

When I visited the site several years ago, with two friends, there had been some exploratory excavation and there were little informative notices about the layout of the former Priory. We were now able to see the tomb area. I wonder if it had been covered to protect it from acid rain.

While there was Christianity in the area in the fifth century, the first known historical Christian foundation was St Neachtain Neir's Monastery in the seventh century. The exact site of this holy place has yet to be established. My curiosity about its location was increased when I read about a round tower at Dungiven.

## Monastery

One of my books tells that it was part of the seventh century monastery and another tells that it was part of the 12th century priory. Both state that it collapsed in 1784. I felt that I had to find the position of the early monastery and so work out the period in which that tower was erected. A friend read that, at one part of the Priory, there had been a tower which was round at the top and square at the bottom, but there was no mention of any collapse in 1784. The research was beginning to be like a jigsaw puzzle was too many pieces which did not fit.

I am still wondering where the early foundation was. Had the priory been built on the site of Neachtain's Monastery? Was it near the site? Were the little standing stone and the holy well



indications of its position?

Had the rath been part of the Monastery or was it the stronghold of the ancient chiefs, for Dungiven was the main fort for the rulers of Glengiven. Had the monastery site been used for the building of the present day Church of Ireland across the road?

All of these places are near the present-day church which I loved to visit. It was a peaceful place, at which we took time to rest from our journey. Everybody's life has its times of difficulty and pain, of decisions and changes and adapting. I was at one of those stages of change and had made a decision, but was finding that it caused me a lot of stress. On my way to Derry, after visiting my daughter in Belfast, I stopped at St Patrick's Church in Dungiven and went in to pray for a while. As I left, I stopped in the porch to look at the book stall. There was usually something interesting on it. I picked a book and then another smaller one.

When I arrived home, I decided to have a quick look at them and I picked up the little one, intending to have a short read. It had been written by Julian of Norwich long ago. It held my attention for it was the answer to all the traumatic experience that I was going through. It was about the sacrament of the present moment; the importance of the now. It was fascinating and it gave me a proper sense of perspective.

A few weeks later, I met a friend who had been struggling through a similar experience. When I asked how it was, I was told that initially it was extremely painful but then after reading a little book by Julian of Norwich about the sacrament of the present moment, it was a lot easier to endure. Imagine! Two people in a similar difficulty getting immediate help from the same little book! How many more must Julian of Norwich have helped over the centuries!

The Dungiven man told me some childhood memories of his schooldays and classmates. Some very gifted people came from here. There was Mr Hasson, who was very erudite and had a great love and knowledge of history and folklore. There was the famous iconographer, Sister Aloysius and her sister, Perpetua McVeigh, both

of whom gave so much friendship and care to the people of Derry.

He recalled the church and a great pillar stone which stood on the other side of the graveyard hedge. I wondered if it had been a Bronze Age chief's burial site or a distance marker along an ancient road. This area has since been investigated by archaeologists, but no very ancient material was discovered.

Now there is another big change in the area. Part of a new motorway has been brought through there, and I have been told that there is no entrance to the little approach lane. The church is on one side of this new road and the Priory is on the other. Of course, during the layout of the road the territory it was passing through would have been examined, but I do not know if any early material was discovered. I expect that another route to the Priory will be laid out.

And I still wonder about the site of the Monastery where Neachtain Neir and his monks prayed and fasted, led ascetic lives, helped the needy and worked hard in the fields. Neachtain was born in

Scotland. Dungiven has several links with that country – Agnes who married Angus MacDonnell and Finvola, daughter of Dermot O'Cahan, who married another Angus MacDonnell from Islay. The tragic story of her early death is told in the ancient Ballad, 'The gem of the Roe'. Her remains were brought back to be buried at the Augustinian Priory. Hopefully the monastic site may yet be discovered. I still wonder about the round tower and if there were even two?

When we came to bus pass age, my friend and I sometimes visited Dungiven for a few hours. I always found what I needed there and the short journey from one place to another was restful.

If you are ever passing through the short Main Street of Dungiven – or bypassing it on the new motorway – you can remember that it was the home of great chiefs and an important centre of Christianity. There is a well documented past and much more still hidden, still to be discovered. It is a little town with a vast heritage.



## National Divine Mercy Conference goes online

THE annual National Divine Mercy Conference will run from February 19-21 and can be viewed online free of charge.

Speakers for the event include Fr Columba Jordan CFR, who recently moved from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal community in Galliagh, Derry, to London, Sr Breige McKenna, OSC, Fr Hayden Williams, OFM Cap, Fr Eunan McDonnell SDB, and Fr Brendan Walsh SCA, and Fr Eamonn McCarthy.

This year's theme is 'For thine is

the Kingdom the Power and the Glory' (Matthew 6:13).

The conference will get underway at 6 pm on Friday, February 19, finishing at 9 pm, and will run from 10 am until 9 pm on the Saturday, and from 9 am until 5 pm on the Sunday.

While viewing if free, donations will be most welcome and can be made via the Donate Button on the Front Page.

The Conference can be accessed at [WWW.DivineMercyConference.com](http://WWW.DivineMercyConference.com)



# The rise and growth of food banks *by Denis McGowan*

SINCE early in 2010 there was growing public concern throughout society about the effects of the United Kingdom government austerity programmes and the worsening effects it was having on families, particularly those living on low incomes and social benefits. Austerity programmes were sold to the general public as a very necessary response to the 2008 financial crash. The consequences of that crash had far reaching effects on society and even yet, society still struggles to recover from it.

It was obvious, during that time, from media reports and concerns raised by various people in the voluntary services working on the front line, that they were dealing with a rising tide of struggling families and people who were trying to cope with unemployment and experiencing extreme difficulty living on low benefits and low income jobs. The consequences of the financial crash had a major impact and were far reaching.

The consequences of austerity was felt particularly severely in many previously deprived areas, such as here in the wider North West and other areas of Northern Ireland. Throughout the whole of the UK, the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' was widening. In deprived areas it was, and still is, the time of payday loans, loan sharks and zero hours contracts. Many people became trapped by money lenders and loan sharks and still struggle to get themselves free.

The voluntary services at that time produced several reports expressing alarm about the rising tide of hunger; of people having to skip meals; facing the dilemma of whether to 'heat or eat'; adults cutting down on portion sizes to make sure their children would have enough to eat. However, it seemed that no one, particularly among the powers to be, was really listening, certainly not the people who controlled the purse strings. It was against that background that the first foodbanks made their appearance.

The Trussell Trust was founded by Carol and Paddy Henderson in 1997, supported by a legacy left by Carol's mother, Betty Trussell. It is a Christian organisation with its roots in both those families. Initially, the Trussell Trust projects focused on improving conditions for 60 plus children sleeping at Central Railway Station in Bulgaria. In 2000, Paddy received a call from a mother in Salisbury saying, "My children are going to bed hungry tonight – what are you going to do about it?" It left a deep impression on Paddy and he began immediately investigating data on poverty and deprivation in the UK. The results horrified him. He found that significant

numbers of people living in the UK faced going hungry as a result of a sudden crisis. Many were just one pay check away from poverty, living precariously from 'hand to mouth'. Any sudden upset such as an illness, loss of job and very quickly they and their dependants were plunged into poverty.

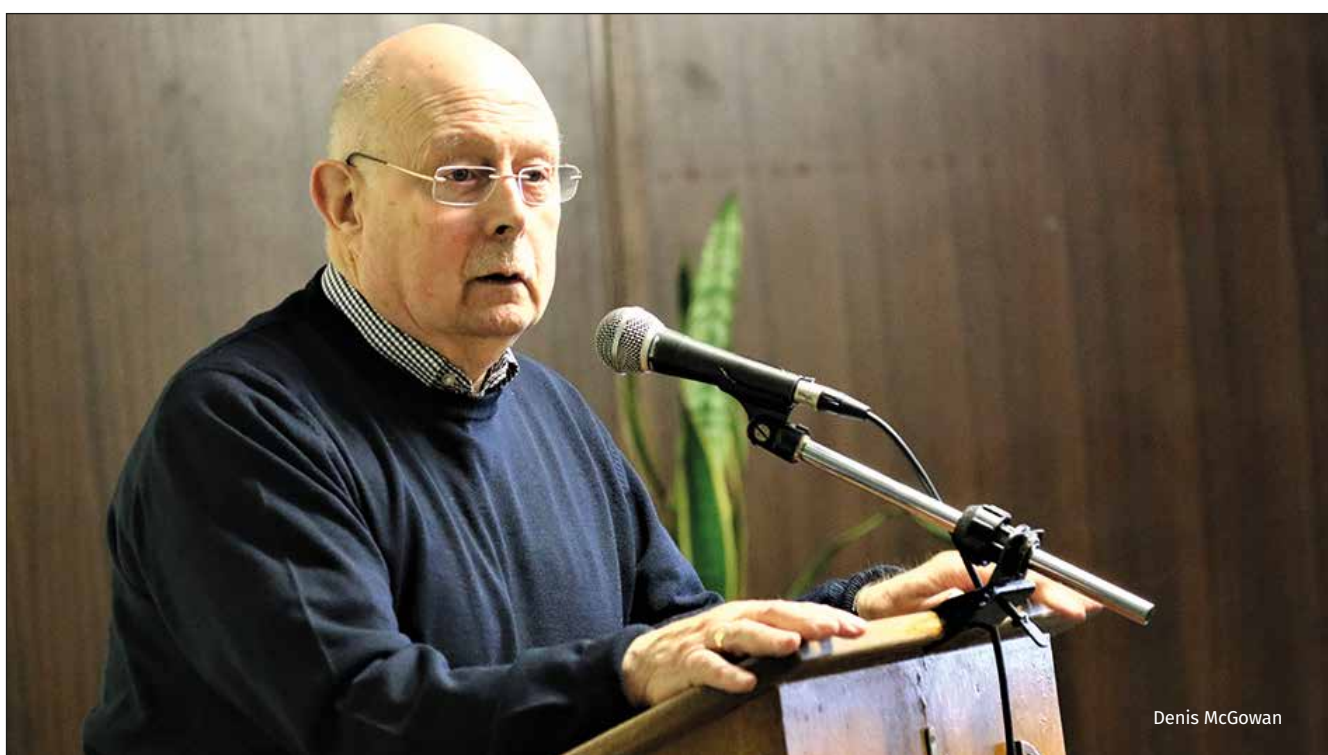
In 2010, Paddy started the Salisbury Foodbank in his garden shed and garage, providing three days' of emergency food to local people in crisis. By 2011, there were 65 food banks in the Trussell network, and in 2019 there were 1200+. Now, there are more than 2000 food banks throughout the entire UK. There are more foodbanks than there are McDonald's! A real and very visible indication of the total failure and effect of government austerity and income benefits programmes were having on the lives of people vulnerable to hunger and poverty.

The very simple reason people go hungry is that they do not have, for whatever reason, enough money to buy food. For some people that is a life-long chronic condition. Underlying root cause circumstances prevail that prevent them from escaping the poverty trap, circumstances that no food bank can fix. Many people never seem to be able to escape from it. They and their children condemned to constantly experiencing hunger.

It is hard to believe, but there are many people who do not believe that poverty and hunger exist or they believe it is self-made, that is, people blame individuals for being in poverty because of lifestyle choices, many think they should try harder to find jobs and work more. For some there seems to be no easy exit even with help. Some people cannot see the bigger picture, eg, the multitude of underlying root causes that combine and keep people locked into hunger and poverty.

In our City, Derry, almost half the benefit claimants (49%) are classed as long-term (chronic) unemployed. For those in work in the Derry/Strabane area, the gross weekly median wage is £324 per month approximately. The Northern Ireland average is £393. Derry has the highest levels of children getting free school meals (43.3%). The NI average is 30.7%. In 2017, a report from the Western Trust showed that one out of every three of Derry's children is being raised in poverty. Some front line workers in specific deprived areas of the city estimate that the real figure is two out of three. Some children depend on going to school for their only real meal that day.

In 2016, legally binding targets to reduce child poverty were dropped – the figures immediately jumped! It is now estimated that more than four million children



live in poverty in the UK. Levels of deprivation throughout the UK, once considered shameful and a failure of government social, welfare and work policies, are now treated as normal.

Many people also believe that poverty and hunger will never be eradicated; that it will always be with us. It most certainly will if those in power continue to ignore the catastrophic negative effects and outcomes of the decisions they make and the policies they introduce on behalf of the people they govern. It is against that type of background the foodbanks have become an essential part of life for far too many people.

## Christian

Trussell Trust and the Foyle Foodbank are founded on the Christian principle expounded by Jesus: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink." (Matthew 25:35).

As well as providing food for the hungry, an important part of the mission of Trussell and the Foyle Foodbank is to highlight and bring to the attention of the general public, and the powers that be, the real facts and accurate numbers about hunger in their particular area. We make no apologies for placing the problem at the feet of the only people who can ultimately end the life and growth of food banks – the people in government. Surely it is the job of any government to ensure their people are fed and do not have to rely on charity?

It is a sad fact that the 'temporary' Foyle Foodbank has grown so much since it began in 2010, and is still growing. In 2016, we provided food for 1,102 adults and children, in 2020 it was 4,643. As I look at our figures today, it stands at 7,800 adults and children and we expect to go beyond 10,000 before we close out our accounting year in

April.

This is unprecedented and is due, in no small measure, to the social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and austerity, particularly the Universal Credit system. They have combined to create an almost 'perfect storm' of extremely challenging conditions affecting the lives of ordinary people, many of whom now suddenly find themselves, at times, without food and the money to buy it. They are driven by their need to the Foyle Foodbank.

The Foyle Foodbank is a compassionate charity, grounded in a sense of injustice - it is quite simply not right or just that anyone should face poverty and hunger. No child should ever grow up living in chronic hunger but they do, and far, far too many of them live right here on our doorstep. People should not wake up each morning wondering how and where they will get food.

The vision of the Foyle Foodbank is to help bring an end to hunger and food poverty in the Foyle area by providing emergency food supplies and hygiene products directly to individuals and families in need, or through other organisations working to prevent hunger or relieve poverty.

Our values guide how we carry out our mission: providing help without creating dependency; treating people with compassion, dignity and respect while maintaining confidentiality and privacy; and maintaining a welcoming environment, a listening ear and signposting service to other agencies that can help with the underlying root causes of poverty.

Whilst the Foyle Foodbank considers itself as temporary, it is a sad fact that it will be here for a long time yet, as there is simply no end in sight to the underlying causes of hunger and poverty.

More people than ever are being forced to use food banks due to the effects of UK government's austerity programme, that has seen, since 2010, when food banks first appeared, and 2019, more than £30 billion in spending reductions being made to welfare payments, housing subsidies and social services.

The simple reason people are forced to come to the Foyle Foodbank is that they have reached a point where they have no, or not enough, money to buy food. They are in food crisis. Many people who come to food banks are deemed destitute. Low paid jobs, unemployment, workless families, zero hours contracts, delays in benefits and benefit changes, brought about by the Universal Credit system, are among the most prominent underlying causes why our people go hungry and are experiencing poverty.

However, it should be recognised that here, in Northern Ireland, local politicians have done their best to offer some protection to the most vulnerable by introducing mitigation measures, such as food access programmes and voucher systems, however, they too will not go on indefinitely.

The benefits system is supposed to protect us all from being swept into poverty. No one should be going hungry, or waking up in the morning wondering where the next meal is coming from. Food banks can only deal

with the consequences of the austerity programmes. It is for governments to deal with the underlying causes. Politicians of all shades must come together and start working towards ending the reliance on food banks.

This is the stark reality of the environment in which the 'temporary' Foyle Foodbank continues to grow and, like other food banks, continues to be an embarrassing indicator of a government's failure to deal with a broken economy and lack of jobs. Our hope is that constantly highlighting the problem of hunger and poverty, and its causes, through the media, our elected representatives, nationally and locally, will pick up the gauntlet and work for change.

We are indebted to the many people who volunteer to work at the food bank and those who work as our referral agencies, without them we could not operate. Finally, we could do nothing without the donation of food and money from the entire community here in the North West. The management board of the Foyle Foodbank thank you on behalf of all those people, who, from time to time, are forced by circumstances to experience hunger or food poverty and come to the Foyle Foodbank for assistance. Words are simply inadequate to express our deep gratitude to all the many generous people who support them through the work of the Foyle Foodbank.





# The year we want to forget? Looking back on 2020

*Trócaire CEO Caoimhe de Barra reflects on what has been an incredibly challenging year. She looks at how Covid affected some of the poorest people on the planet, but also shares some hope in the fight against climate change and success stories in struggles against injustice across the world.*

COVID dominated our lives this past year. Our whole way of life has been disrupted, in ways that we could never have imagined possible. Over 1.8 million people have lost their lives to the virus, an enormous human tragedy.

Global lockdowns have put the brakes on the world's economy and this has had devastating effects for people, especially in the poorest countries of the world. As we begin 2021, over 270 million people are facing hunger, that's double the number since last year, due to the impact of COVID and drought.

Women and girls have been particularly affected as violence against women has increased during the pandemic. Calls to helplines have reportedly increased by five times in some countries as violence increased during COVID lockdowns.

The pandemic has also been used as a 'smokescreen' by many repressive regimes to clamp down on human rights, as we recently exposed in our documentary, 'Never Waste a Crisis'.

Despite calls for a global ceasefire during COVID, conflicts have continued apace and violence and oppression have forced people to flee for their lives. This year we passed a grim new milestone, for the first time there are over 80 million people in the world who have been forced from their homes.

On top of all of this, we also faced unexpected catastrophes this year, such as the explosion in Beirut which made 300,000 people homeless in an instant and caused untold destruction, and two devastating hurricanes hit Central America within the space of just three weeks, towards the end of

the year.

**Yet, there is cause for hope.**

The fact that we now have COVID vaccines means that we can begin to hope that the end is in sight for the pandemic. Vaccine development is usually a long and complex process that typically takes a decade. Yet an incredible effort has resulted in a COVID vaccine in less than one year.

This is an inspiring story of human ingenuity and collective effort. It shows that if we have enough energy, political will and shared resources, we could rally together to tackle other global issues such as hunger and climate change.

As the global economy slowed down, people stopped getting on planes, working from home started to replace daily commutes for many, and the planet got a much needed rest. Our carbon footprints are probably looking a lot more sustainable this year, and globally carbon emissions are down 7% for 2020.

Many breathed a sigh of collective relief when US President elect, Joe Biden reconfirmed he would bring the USA back into the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Closer to home, the

Irish general election resulted in a programme for government with the strongest commitments ever seen on Climate Change.

However, there is a danger that public stimulus funds to recover from the economic devastation of the pandemic will support polluting sectors and fossil fuel industries. 'Building back better' post-COVID should be based on a just transformation that protects the planet from further harm.

Bailout funds should be used to transition economies towards renewable energy sectors, not propping up the fossil fuel industry. While the planet got somewhat of a rest this year, the drop in carbon emissions may just be a blip if we don't take considered action to protect our futures.

Despite the challenges of this year, there were many causes for hope and celebration.

In DR Congo, after two years, a devastating outbreak of Ebola was finally halted. Trócaire played its part by reaching a quarter of a million people with hand-washing stations, water tanks, latrines, and water pumps to provide safe water to people and prevent spread of the disease.

In Honduras, there has been good news in the struggle

against corporate exploitation. The community of Azacualpa stood up against a gold mining corporation that was digging up bodies from their cemetery to get to the gold underneath. Our local partner took a case all the way to the Supreme Court and won. The company now have to stop their activities and let the dead rest in peace.

There have been many other successes this year, including getting Palestinian farmers back on their land, growing crops that are drought resistant in Zimbabwe, and providing incredible mental health supports to people affected by violence.

As we begin this New Year, we can start to envision not just what a better, fairer world should look like, but how we can use the collective pooling of ingenuity, resources and political will that delivered a vaccine in record time to tackle the major problems of our times. As Nelson Mandela said: "It always seems impossible until it's done".

As always, Trócaire continues to support some of the poorest people in the world to achieve change locally, while also campaigning to challenge the root causes and global rules that prevent people



Trócaire CEO, Caoimhe de Barra.

from living lives free from poverty, injustice, gender inequality and human rights abuses.

The support of parishioners in Derry in 2020 has been nothing short of magnificent. You have stood in solidarity and provided essential support to families all over the developing world.

As we begin 2021, a year designated as a special year for the family by Pope Francis, I want to thank you for being with us on our journey for justice.

To find out more about Trócaire's work visit [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

*Trócaire's Lenten Appeal 2021 shares story of displaced families once fearful for the future...*

## Two Sudanese mothers find hope in the love and support shown to them

IN December 2013, a civil war broke out in South Sudan between rival political factions. Almost 400,000 people were killed during the war. One in every three people in South Sudan - about 3.6 million people - fled their homes and remain displaced or living as refugees in neighbouring countries.

Awut and Ajah are two women who present the very human face of this vast displacement and their story is featured as part of this year's Trócaire's Lenten Appeal. The two women survived the war but every day remains a battle: A battle to earn money; a battle to grow food; a battle to pay for their children's school.

These two remarkable women were strangers when they lost their homes and their husbands to South Sudan's brutal war. Today, they are the closest of friends. Far away from the villages they once called home, they are working hard together to rebuild from the ashes of war.

Awut still finds it hard to talk about the time she feared herself and her five children would die stranded in the dangerous bushland, trying to flee the war.

"The experience of fleeing was horrible," she says, "we suffered a lot in the bush with hunger and thirst. The children and I trekked for long days and nights without food or water. The children's feet were swollen. I forced the children

to drink their own urine just so they wouldn't die of thirst."

She was alone with her five children. She had no home. No money. No food. She arrived into the town of Malek scared, hungry and fearful. But in this very special place she found what she thought she had lost forever: love, hope and the welcoming arms of strangers.

"I arrived in Malek and told them I was fleeing the war," she says, "the people here welcomed us. They gave us food and some land."

It was March when Awut and her family arrived, a time of year known as 'the hungry months', when the last harvest is exhausted but the new one yet to bear crops. People in Malek had little of their own, but what they had they shared with this widowed mother of five.

"People had to feed on wild fruits," she remembers, "then Trócaire came in and started providing help. This help changed our lives. The people gave my family land and Trócaire gave us seeds. Now I plant my own crops. I am working hard and providing for my family. Trócaire also helped us begin a savings and loan group. Women in the village contribute money each month. It really helps a lot."

Awut found a new life in this welcoming community where people fleeing war and suffering are welcomed and supported.

Soon, she had a chance to pass

this love and support onto others.

Ajah arrived into Malek after the war destroyed her village. She had eight children and a husband who was very ill. Awut knew that this was her opportunity to support Ajah just as others had supported her.

"She welcomed and settled us next to her," says Ajah, "On the first day, she allowed me to share her plates and utensils. She gave me food to start up and settle in. I had nothing. So she tried to help me and my family."

Awut and Ajah came from different backgrounds and different regions, but have been brought together by the tragedy of war. Today, they are best friends and support each other.

"I am thankful to her," says Ajah, "she lifted me when I was in need, when my husband was terribly sick and I had nothing. She accommodated me and provided for me and my family until I picked up. We sit together and discuss ways of life. We share a lot. When she is down, I lift her up and vice versa. She is a very dear friend. We help each other at the times of need."

Awut agrees and says the people of Malek's determination to help each other has allowed them to survive.

"We share everything we have," she says, "Ajah and I do everything together. We farm together and make sure we have enough to



Ajah and Awut are two incredibly strong women who have been supporting each other as they face the challenges posed in conflict-ravaged South Sudan. Photograph by Achuo Deng

support our families. We make sure our kids stay together and live in harmony. We have to show humility. As displaced people, it is good to join hands and work out ways to survive together. Most importantly: always stay in peace. It is my desire for people to live in peace without conflict. Let's live as one people and one world."

Trócaire has provided seeds, tools and shelter to help the people of Malek. It has given people like Ajah and Awut a chance to rebuild their lives, but so many challenges remain. "We work hard but it is difficult when the rains fail," says Ajah, "I am a widow with eight kids. It is difficult. I try hard but

I can't always provide school fees, shoes, uniforms and all the other school requirements. That is why they stay at home without school. It is a struggle but I have hopes for my children."

Awut and Ajah were once fearful for the future, but the love and support shown to them has given them hope. This Lent, support for Trócaire will help Awut, Ajah and many more like them put the daily struggle for survival behind them.

The UK government will match, pound for pound, all public donations to the Lenten Appeal 2021 in Northern Ireland, up to a maximum of £2 million.

To find out more about Trócaire's 2021 Lenten Appeal, or to make a donation, visit [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org) or call 0800 912 1200 (NI)/1850 408 408 (ROI).



**Trócaire**



# Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

**HELLO children. Welcome to the month of February. This month is dedicated to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The Holy Family is where Jesus spent the time from his birth until He started His public journey telling us about God. The Holy Family is our best example of love, hope, faithfulness and joy (CCC 533).**



During the month of February we celebrate The Presentation of the Lord – Candlemas Day (CCC 529). The Presentation of the Lord is the story of Jesus being brought to the Temple in Jerusalem by Mary and St Joseph. It was customary for Jewish parents to present their child in the temple forty days after birth. When St Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple they met Simeon, a devout Jew who had prayed that he would live to see the coming of the Messiah. Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit, took the baby Jesus in his arms, blessed Him and proclaimed that He was truly the Son of God.

The Feast of the Presentation is also known as Candlemas or Candle Mass Day. It is given this name because Christ is the light who has come into the world to chase away the dark and drive out sin. Since the 7th Century, candles have been blessed before Mass and used in the year ahead for celebrations like baptisms and prayers in the home.

## Saints of the Month

February 1: Saint Brigid of Ireland

February 3: Saint Blaise

February 5: Saint Agatha

February 10: Saint Scholastica

## Feast of St Brigid of Ireland

St Brigid, one of the most loved saints in Ireland, was born during the fifth century. There are many stories about Brigid, especially her generosity to others. One story tells how St Brigid, after giving her mother's whole butter supply away to the poor, prayed to God that the butter would be replaced. And it miraculously re-appeared!

Brigid founded a monastery under an oak tree in Kildare. The monastery quickly grew in numbers. Many men and women came there to study the faith and learned the skills of ornate writing and religious art.

In Ireland we have special devotion to St Brigid's Cross. Tradition speaks of how Brigid went to visit a dying pagan who needed to hear the Gospel. The man was very unsettled so she sat and prayed with him and, as she prayed, Brigid lifted some straw from the floor and weaved it into a cross. When the man had become quiet he asked her what she was doing. Brigid explained the Gospel to him with the use of her cross made of straw. He immediately came to believe in Jesus. Brigid baptised him before he died.



Today people still make St Brigid's crosses out of rushes and place them in their home to ward off evil and welcome Christ.



## St Blaise - Blessing of the Throats

The feast of St Blaise is celebrated on February 3. Blaise was a doctor before he was consecrated as the Bishop of Sebaste, in Armenia. He was imprisoned for his faith during the persecutions of Licinius. While in prison, he miraculously cured a young boy who was choking to death on a fishbone lodged in his throat. From the sixth century, people who have been sick with diseases of the throat have prayed to St Blaise, asking for his intercession.

The custom of the blessing of throats arose from this and it is practiced every year in our churches. The priest holds two blessed candles over the head of the faithful, or touches their

throat, while he says the prayer of the saint and imparts God's blessing.

The priest says: "Through the intercession of St Blaise, bishop and



martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

We should also ask St Blaise to protect us against any spiritual illness like cursing, gossip or unkind remarks which come from our tongues. St James in his letter (James 1:26) reminds us that our tongues should only be used to praise God and not to curse others. Therefore, we should pray to St Blaise to protect us from all physical and spiritual ailments which attack our throats.

## Our Lady of Lourdes

We celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11. This feast celebrates one of the most famous apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It took place in Lourdes, in southern France. On February 11, 1858, a young girl named Bernadette Soubirous was out collecting firewood with her sister and a friend near a grotto. Suddenly, Bernadette saw a vision of a beautiful lady. This

was the first of eighteen appearances.

During these visits the Lady, who did not immediately identify herself as the Blessed Virgin Mary, asked for a chapel to be built on the grounds, so that Bernadette could pray for the conversion of sinners. She also asked Bernadette to drink the spring water that was revealed to her at the grotto.

The news of the apparitions spread rapidly and caused quite a commotion in the town. As a result, Bernadette was detained, interrogated and harassed by the civil authorities and treated as if she were a common criminal. The villagers, however, came to Bernadette's rescue and demanded that she be released. Through all these difficulties Bernadette was given an interior strength.

Many of the townspeople believed that it was the Blessed Virgin Mary who was appearing to Bernadette, and they came down in large numbers to the grotto to pray. The spring which the Lady asked Bernadette to drink from at the grotto quickly revealed itself to give forth blessed water with miraculous healing properties.

On March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, the Lady appeared at the grotto again, this time identifying herself as the Immaculate Conception...

"With her two arms hanging down, she raised her eyes and looked up at the sky, and it was then that she told me, joining her hands together now at the height of her breast, that she was the Immaculate Conception. Those were the last words she ever said to me."

The Marian dogma of the Immaculate Conception (CCC 490-493) had been announced by Pope Pius IX a few years previous, on December 8, 1854. This infallibly defined dogma stated that the Blessed Virgin Mary, "from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race,

was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful".

Lourdes has become a place of pilgrimage and healing, but even more of deep faith. A beautiful church has been erected near the grotto. The shrine of Lourdes is visited by millions of pilgrims each year. It has become one of the most prominent places of pilgrimage in the world. The water of Lourdes is readily available to all pilgrims and numerous miraculous healings of Lourdes have been medically documented. Many people who visit Lourdes return home with renewed faith and a readiness to serve God in their lives.

*Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us*

## Lent

Lent begins every year with Ash Wednesday, this year it falls on February 17. The word 'lent' means to lengthen and is also an old English word for spring. The season of Lent lasts 40 days, not including Sundays, before Easter.

During Lent, people give things up like eating chocolate, biscuits, or maybe try to do something which helps others, like helping out at home. Some adults fast and pray as part of their penance so that they can prepare themselves better to celebrate Easter.

Lent then is a time when we have the opportunity, each year, to change our thoughts and actions so that we can open our hearts to Jesus at Easter.

On Ash Wednesday, the priest places the mark of a cross on our forehead with blessed ashes. The ashes are made out of the burnt Palm branches from Palm Sunday the year before. The ashes are a symbol of sadness and death, while the cross reminds us that we belong to Jesus who died for all humanity on the cross.

## Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. What is the capital city of Serbia?
2. In which US state would you find the Little Bighorn battlefield monument?
3. What is the name of the annual carnival celebration that translates to 'Fat Tuesday' in English?
4. What band had a UK chart hit in 1980 with the song 'Geno'?
5. In football, when was the last year a non-European country won the FIFA World Cup?
6. Which female film star played the lead role in the movies 'Life of the Party', 'The Boss', and 'Tammy'?
7. What famous UK tourist attraction opened to the public on 31 December 1999?
8. What Biblical name translates from Hebrew into English as 'Man of Peace'?
9. In which US state would you find Princeton University?
10. Which book of the New Testament recounts The Beatitudes as presented in the Sermon on The Mount?
11. In Delia Owens' bestselling, 'Where the Crawdads Sing', what type of creature is a Crawdad?
12. Who sang 'This Land is Your Land' at President Joe Biden's inauguration?
13. In GAA, for how many consecutive years have Dublin been All-Ireland football champions?
14. Up until March 2020, which show was, and still is, Broadway's longest running hit musical?
15. Which former 'Happy Days' actor played the title role in the 1976 movie 'Bugsy Malone'?
16. The River Danube flows through 10 countries before emptying into which sea?
17. Name the tenor who performs in the 'Go Compare' television adverts?
18. Which South African city is overlooked by Table Mountain?
19. Who is the patron saint of animals?
20. How many karats signify pure gold?
21. In a game of Poker, which 'suit' holds the highest value?
22. The John Deere tractor is traditionally what colour?
23. In which sport do sisters Jessica and Nelly Korda compete?
24. What is the main ingredient of guacamole?
25. Which is Ireland's smallest county in terms of population?

**Quiz Answers:** 1, Belgrade. 2, Montana. 3, Mardi Gras. 4, Dexy's Midnight Runners. 5, 2002 (Brazil). 6, Melissa McCarthy. 7, The London Eye. 8, Solomon. 9, New Jersey. 10, Matthew. 11, A Shellfish. 12, Jennifer Lopez. 13, Six. 14, The Phantom of the Opera. 15, Scott Baio. 16, The Black Sea. 17, Wynne Evans. 18, Cape Town. 19, St Francis of Assisi. 20, Twenty-four. 21, Spades. 22, Green. 23, Golf. 24, Avocado. 25, Leitrim.



Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

# Let Your Light Shine!



“St Columba’s faith made him a man of resilience...prepared to believe that every crisis was an opportunity”  
– Bishop Donal,  
Catholic Schools Week  
Launch Mass

St. Colmcille, as you guided the early Christians in Ireland and led them with resilience and unyielding faith, may we take strength from this in our own school community during Catholic Schools Week and beyond.

St. Colmcille's Primary School & Nursery Unit Claudy

This is a beautiful prayer Caoimhin.

God we pray for all the bad things that happened to these people during covid 19 take away their sickness and take away their fear, make sure we all stay safe and stay happy and protected, we love you God in Jesus name we pray amen.

This is a beautiful prayer Oisín

Dear columba, Saint of great gift, Please help us during this hard time protect everyone from this horrible virus. Please help those that are in need.

An amazing Prayer!

Dear God,  
Thank you for all the ways you bless us in St. Brigid's Primary School. Thank you for every person in our school community and all the gifts you have given them. May you guide our teachers as they help us learn the faith and how to follow you. Thank you for all my friends and the fun we have together. Lord may we follow the example of St Columba the Patron Saint of Derry who lived a life sharing the Good News and living out your plan for his life.  
Amen

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steepestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnylough, Drumquin, Dunamagagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,