

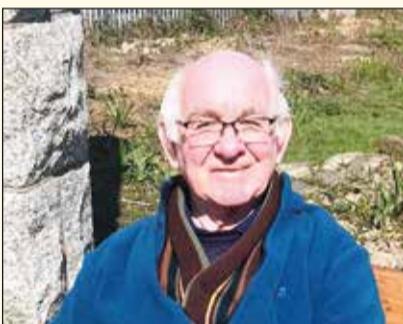
See  
inside...



Building 'New Normal' – Cappagh



Drawing God – Creggan



Remembering Sr Clare – Derry

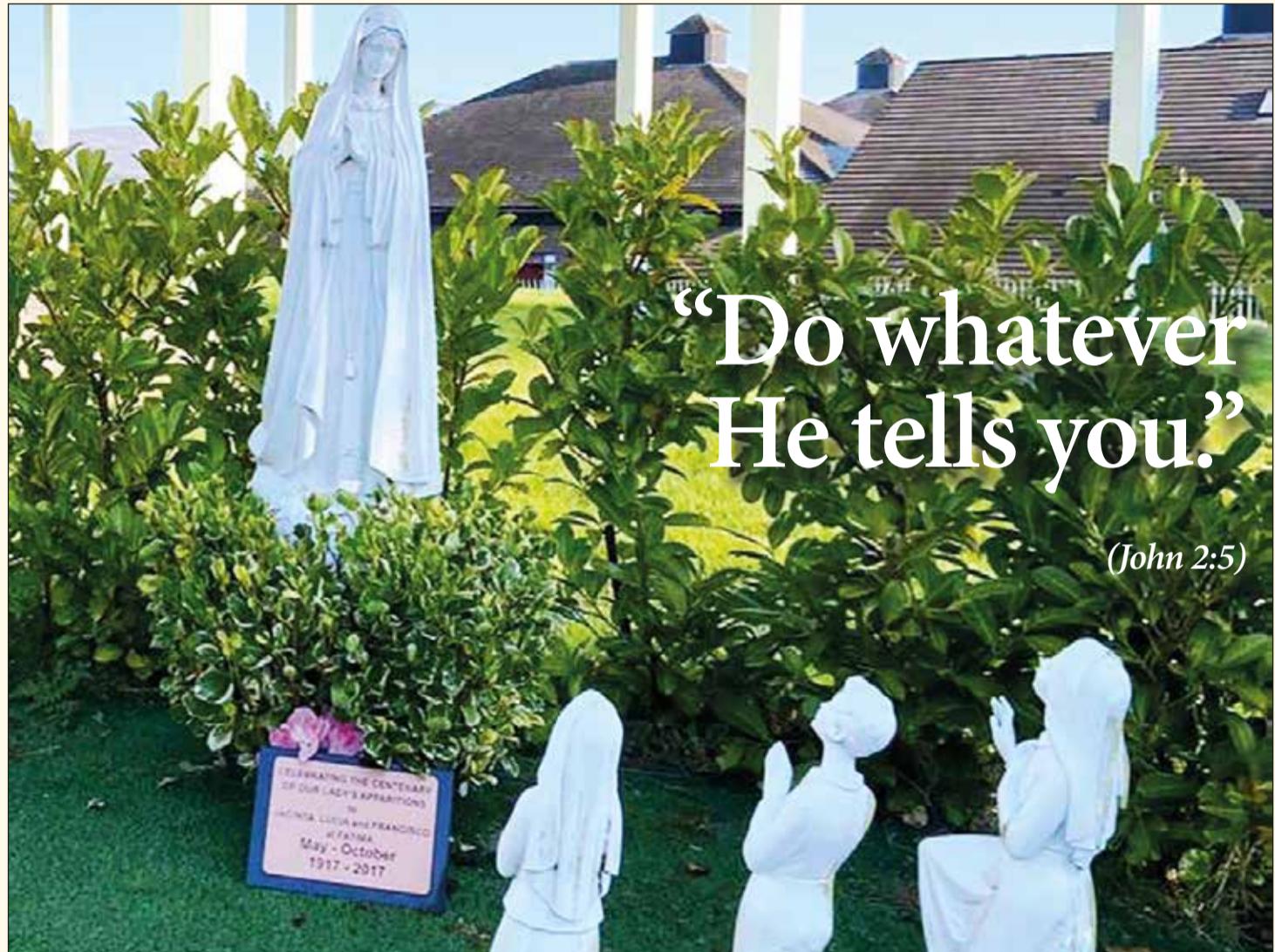


Lockdown Ministry – Greencastle

# The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 54. MAY 2020  
PRICE - £1.50  
/€2.00



Reflection Time – Maghera



Music Ministry – Bellaghy



Marriage Encounter – Derry

People in focus



Siuin Lafferty – Iskaheen



Thomas McConway – Clonmany



Michelle D'Arcy Burns – Culmore



Helen Grant – Iskaheen



Delma Boggs – Ballymagroarty

*Also featuring:* Youth ministry, Schools maintaining family links, Surviving lockdown, Tribute to late Fr John McNamara OCD, Marriage Encounter feature, Fatima reflection, Divine Mercy, Parish ministry, Irish Page, Children's Catechism, Quiz.

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## The NET

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

### Contacting us:

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

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

Reflecting on the Pope's prayer intention for the month of May regarding deacons, Bishop Donal suggests this may be a time to consider...

## Is God calling the Derry Diocese to introduce both Permanent Diaconate and Order of Virgins?

*"We pray that deacons, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be an invigorating symbol for the entire Church". (The Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network)*

ON May 23, 1976, in the Pontifical Irish College in Rome, I knelt before Bishop Dominic Conway and was ordained a Deacon. Eight years after I entered seminary, this was a big day. It involved taking various promises, including that of celibacy. But, for me and my classmates, it was just one more step in preparation for priestly ordination one year later. That was the real goal.

But, in the last 50 years, there has been a renewed discovery in the Church of the Permanent Diaconate as a ministry in itself – and not just as one stage on the way to priesthood. Thus, many countries – and some dioceses in Ireland – have ordained men (often married) as Deacons to serve in their parishes.

They have gone through a four-year period of preparation and study, and they are entitled to proclaim the Gospel and preach, to celebrate Baptism and Weddings. Some have also been involved as hospital or prison chaplains, or they often say the prayers at gravesides. They may well undertake other faith formation roles in their community. Many parishes – and older priests - have benefited from their being available.

It is for these men that Pope Francis asks us to pray in May 2020. And the Holy Father is specifically seeking prayers for their ministry in the service of the Word of God and of the poor.

However, some people have objected that ordaining deacons is simply 'clericalising' more men - and sometimes doing jobs that lay men and women could equally well do. However, it should be noted

that Pope Francis recently set up a Commission to consider whether women might be ordained deacons. (Cf <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-04/pope-commission-women-deacons.html>)

I would make three points about what role the Permanent Diaconate might have in the Diocese of Derry.

Firstly, there is clearly a growing need to find support for priests in the many tasks that they have to take on. Clearly, deacons might well be 'useful'. But Diaconate is a ministry in its own right, not just a part-time help for priests.

Pope Francis is clearly indicating that Deacons would have a symbolic and sacramental value in the Church – and not just be extra 'man-power'. Men would be asked to discern a specific call to Diaconate and not just to fill gaps in a particular model of Church.

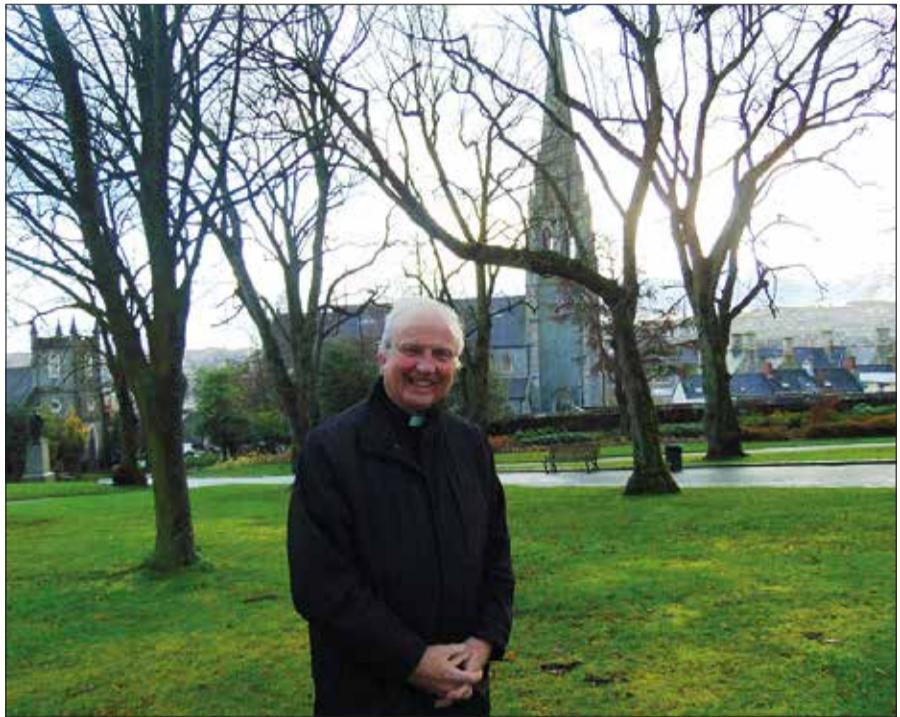
Secondly, Pope Francis, in his document following the Amazon Synod, underlines the need to rediscover a range of ministries – ordained and non-ordained – in the Church.

Writing to the Church in Corinth, St Paul was clear that "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good". (1 Cor 12:4-7).

In the Body of Christ, which is the Church, no individual ministry stands alone. We are blessed in each other. We need each other.

Thirdly, over this past year, I have met a few women in the Diocese who have expressed an interest in becoming Consecrated Virgins.

We have three Consecrated Virgins in the Diocese



Bishop Donal

already. These are not women who feel called to join a religious congregation. Rather, members of the Ordo Virginum live as 'brides of Christ' but go about their daily lives. They are specifically mentioned in the early Church and in modern Canon Law.

As with deacons, aspirants go through a period of formation – and their Consecration is normally carried out by the Diocesan Bishop. (cf [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_20180608\\_istruzione-ecclesiaeponsaeimago\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20180608_istruzione-ecclesiaeponsaeimago_en.html))

As Pope Francis asks us to pray for Deacons, their work and what they symbolise, perhaps this is a time for a conversation about whether God is calling the Derry Diocese to introduce both the Permanent Diaconate and the Order of Virgins at the same time.

Can we make that another topic for our prayer at this time of challenge and change?

at 7.30 pm on Saturday, May 9, with the St Therese Healing Mass, with Devotions at 6 pm on Sunday, May 10.

From Monday to Friday, May 11-15, the itinerary starts with the 6.30 am Novena Mass, followed by daily Mass at 8 am, and the second Novena Mass at 10 am. The Angelus and Rosary will be prayed at 12 noon, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet at 3 pm, with hymn singing on the Monday, Wednesday and Friday. At 5 pm, there is Gospel Encounter,

### 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.*

with the daily evening Mass celebrated in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, has been getting an amazing response, with people tuning in from not only across the Diocese, but the world too. The healing Mass is celebrated on Wednesday nights at 7.30 pm and is streamed live on Facebook or can be accessed via the webcam link – <https://www.mcnmedia.tv/camera/st-columbas-church-longtower>.

### Dungiven Seminars

Fr Seamus Kelly is currently leading Life in the Spirit seminars online from St Patrick's Church, via the parish website on Tuesday evenings, starting at 7.30 pm.

**Padre Pio Mass**  
The weekly Padre Pio Mass

**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.

## Parish Post-its

### Cappagh Youth

The youth of Cappagh Parish, on the outskirts of Omagh, Co Tyrone, will be leading a Holy Hour on Wednesday, May 6, and are hoping many will join in the evening of adoration, reflective prayer and music.

The time of prayer will begin at 8.15 pm and end with Night Prayer at 9 pm, and will be transmitted live from St Mary's

Church, Killyclogher, via the Cappagh Parish Webcam - [www.CappaghParish.com](http://www.CappaghParish.com).

### St Therese Novena

The St Therese Novena which attracts large crowds annually to St Eugene's Cathedral will take a different format this year, and will be broadcast via webcam. The Novena to the Little Flower will get underway

Willing to accept Bishop Donal's challenge to take up 'apostle' role at Pentecost, Iskaheen & Upper Moville JPII participant, Siuin Lafferty, hopes to...

## Spread the Good News of Jesus' Resurrection to friends

I am a Transition Year student at Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana, and I belong to the Parish of Iskaheen and Upper Moville. I started my Pope John Paul II award in September and am hoping to achieve the Gold Award.

At the beginning of the Award, I volunteered to read at Sunday Mass in Iskaheen and also helped with the collections. I was nervous at the thought of reading in public, as this was not something I was used to doing but, with a little practise, I overcame my nervousness and was delighted when a few of the older parishioners told me I was doing a great job.

These duties were a great way of engaging with my parish and I thoroughly enjoyed doing them. Unfortunately, with the Mass having to move online, I can no longer help out but look forward to the time when I can return to

these duties.

I love the experiences that the award has opened up for me. On Friday, September 27, I travelled to Knock, with my school, as part of a Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage led by Bishop Donal McKeown.

Over 600 young people travelled from across Ireland to participate in the third National Pope John Paul II Award Pilgrimage to Knock Shrine. The theme of the pilgrimage was 'Life to the Full, Positive Friendships, Your Parish Needs You Now!'

The pilgrimage involved participation in prayers, readings, dance performances and activities, all with the message of encouragement to become involved in your parish and grow your faith. It was a day I thoroughly enjoyed.

On a cold Friday night, February 28 this year, I travelled to the

grounds of St Eugene's Cathedral, in Derry, to take part in a sleep out to help raise money for the homeless. While it was very cold, I enjoyed making new friendships and becoming more aware of the challenges facing the homeless.

Unfortunately, with the arrival of Covid-19, all events involving crowds/groups have had to be cancelled, which has brought new challenges to completing the Pope John Paul II Award.

With the help of the Derry Diocesan Youth group, I have been able to continue to complete my award. Every weekday, the group sends me a new task.

I enjoy Monday's Meetings, TikTok Tuesdays, Wellbeing Wednesdays, Takeover Thursdays and Faith Fridays. These have helped me keep in touch with everyone and keep the boredom away, while travelling on my faith

journey.

During Holy Week, I particularly enjoyed taking part in the online services. While it was strange not to be present in the chapel, the online Rosary, Stations of the Cross and reflections given were all inspiring and uplifting, and helped me to stay positive in these difficult times.

I will try to accept Bishop Donal's challenge of taking up my role as an apostle at Pentecost and spread the good news of Jesus' Resurrection to my friends. Like everyone, I look forward to life returning to some kind of normality, but for the time being I am happy to complete my Pope John Paul II Award online.



Siuin Lafferty, JPII participant from the Iskaheen & Upper Moville Parish, in Co Donegal

## Clonmany JPII parishioner going for Gold!

MY name is Thomas McConway and I'm from Clonmany Parish in Donegal. I'm a transition year student at Carrndonagh Community School and I'm currently hoping to complete the Gold John Paul Award.

I completed all my social hours in my school, participating in a mentoring program with first and second year students in the school since September.

I hadn't started progress on my Church hours before the coronavirus lockdown. I have been

participating on the Derry Youth Online programme during the lockdown each week to complete some of my Church hours, while the churches are not open and everyone has to stay inside.

Each week I've been watching the live video on Derry Youth's Instagram page and listening to what tasks have to be done for that week. I then complete the tasks over the course of the week. I hope to finish completing my award after the quarantine ends.



Thomas McConway, JPII participant from the Clonmany Parish, in Co Donegal

## Youth ministry online

THE Youth Ministry online programme continues weekly and we invite all young people in parishes across the diocese to get involved.

If you are doing the Pope John Paul II Award this year you will find a weekly task on Instagram @Derryouth that you can use as part of the hours for your award.

Each week, the programme kicks off with Monday night 'Lives' at 8.30 pm on Instagram @Derryouth. Please join us to find out the theme for the week and the plan of action.

We invite young people to be creative on 'TikTok Tuesdays'. 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' will help young people stay positive in these difficult and uncertain days. 'Take Over Thursday' will give you a glimpse into 'a day in the life of a special guest'. On 'Faith Fridays', we will pray, share

testimonies and have moments of reflection together.

On 'Scripture Saturdays', Bishop Donal will continue to share some scripture with us and how we might apply that in our own life at this time. 'Sunday Reflections' are on the Gospel of the day and are hosted by various priests and religious sisters.

### Upcoming themes

Our upcoming themes include: #Mary's Meals; #M&M for Mary's Month; #JPII Award; and #Faith.

Each week we will unpack the theme and invite young people to reflect and engage with tasks through the social media platforms of Instagram and Facebook.

Mary's Meals is an international charity that advocates for 'a simple solution to world hunger'. They will be sharing their work with

young people this month.

Young people from across the Diocese will lead a reflection on Mary in early May, and we will also hear from young people who are completing part of their JPII Award in creative and new ways.

Stay tuned to find out more details or to volunteer to get involved email lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org.

Parish leaders and volunteers are invited to join our youth ministry online community via Zoom to stay connected, pray together and share ideas and experiences. The first parish leaders' zoom took place at the end of April. If you would like to join, email yvonne.rooney@derrydiocese.org.

Stay tuned at Instagram @Derryouth, Facebook @DerryYouth and Twitter @DerryDiocesanYouth for all the latest ideas and posts.

## World gatherings of youth and families postponed

WORLD Youth Day and the World Meeting of Families, which were due to be held in the summers of 2022 and 2021, respectively, have each been postponed for a year due to the current health situation with Covid-19.

Typically held every three years, the next World Youth Day will now be held in August 2023 in Portugal's capital city, Lisbon.

Started in 1985 by Pope John Paul II, some past World Youth Days have attracted millions of young people.

The theme for the 2023 youth gathering, which the Pope usually attends, is 'Mary arose and went with haste'.

The Holy Father usually attends the World Meeting of Families as well, which was established in 1994 by Pope John Paul II also.

Held every three years in a different country, the last WMOF was held in Dublin in the summer of 2018. The next one will now be held in June 2022 in Rome, and the theme will be 'Family Love: A vocation and a path to holiness'.



Bishop Donal with some of the Irish World Youth Day pilgrims in Krakow, in 2016.

# Building a 'New Normal' centred on Christ

by Davog McCaffrey – Cappagh Parish



Davog McCaffrey.

WHO could ever have predicted the situation we find ourselves in at this time? If you had described it to somebody this time last year, or even a few months ago, they would have thought you were bonkers! We live in a busy and demanding world. We are used to having what we want, whenever we want it and yet, currently, that couldn't be further from the truth.

However, for me personally, it's the happiest and most content I have been in a long time. For those who know me, that may come as a bit of a surprise. I'm undoubtedly a creature of habit and I live by the clock and a set routine. I lead a relatively busy but enjoyable lifestyle as a third year medical student at Queen's University, Belfast, often on placements in hospitals

throughout the province. I enjoy music and arts, love dining out and spending time with family and friends, and being involved with my Parish and other faith-based organisations.

For now, that life has been put on hold. As a medical student, a number of weeks ago, I took the decision to put my name forward to help on the frontline should the opportunity arise. However,

influencers, personal trainers, or 'motivational' life coaches - they know everything about everything! I'll be the first to admit that with the lure of social media and the temptations of the modern world, in the course of normal life, I often find myself looking for answers in the wrong places.

St Augustine wrote in his confessions that, "our hearts are restless until they rest in you". Undoubtedly, I have used the past number of weeks to refocus my attention on my Catholic faith, and I can wholeheartedly say that I concur completely with Augustine's words. Perhaps the timing in terms of the Church calendar has helped, however, I've come back to realise that in order to live life to the fullest, we must place our trust in the Risen Lord who is always there for us and will guide and protect us.

As I noted earlier, I have always enjoyed a sense of routine and, therefore, I have attempted to build a new routine for myself during this period. In an attempt to really focus on my prayer life and my relationship with God, who provides us with all that we need, I have been beginning my day with Lauds (Morning Prayer) at 6:45 am, joining the Benedictine Monks from Holy Cross Abbey of Rostrevor via their webcam. This uplifting and peaceful start sets a good tone for the day and allows me to be as productive as possible, as I still have examinations coming up in June with plenty of work to keep me busy! I then finish the day with Vigils (Night Prayer) at 8:30 pm, before winding down and relaxing by reading, watching some TV or listening to music, or catching up with friends.

We are so blessed to have a vast array of excellent online resources available to us and I would encourage you to make use of these. Find something that works well for you. Personally, I find great peace in the Benedictine services, but also make use of the daily services provided by my own parish of Cappagh on their webcam, as well as different social media accounts.

In today's society, there are so many people who claim to have the answer to all of life's problems - whether it be online

The relatively simple lifestyle

which I am now leading has allowed me to appreciate all that is good about my life. As I've mentioned, very importantly, I've definitely grown in my faith but I've also enjoyed spending time at home with my family. With my brother, Ronan and I both at university, my parents working full-time and a busy family schedule, it's not often we get to spend so much time together as a family unit.

I've also had more time to rediscover my love of baking and have enjoyed taking walks around my local area and appreciating the natural beauty of our environment. I've been more aware of the birds chirping, the beautiful flowers of spring and the smell of freshly-cut grass. I've also been able to keep in contact with friends from all over the place, making use of a range of technology. So, personally, I don't feel isolated at all!

I do, however, appreciate that for many, their experience of this pandemic may be very different. Undoubtedly, it has been a challenging and difficult time, particularly for the most vulnerable in our society. However, I believe also that this pandemic has brought out the very best in our community and it has been amazing to see people getting together to deliver food parcels to elderly neighbours, give practical support to our frontline workers, and develop creative ways of reaching out to the people of God. We are together, even though we may be physically apart.

A number of weeks ago, our parish priest, Fr Kevin, told us how we would never really go back to "normal", but rather we will build a "new normal". Perhaps this period was what we needed to slow down, step back and take stock of our lives, before setting out on our own diverse paths again.

I hope and pray that our "new normal" will encompass a more caring, compassionate and loving society that values and appreciates the amazing gift of life and the beautiful universe that we have been given. Take care, stay safe and may God bless you all!



Lizzie Rea

## Surviving Lockdown

HELLO, my name is Lizzie Rea. I am the youth coordinator for the Derry Diocese. The pandemic that has taken over the world is one that we are all struggling to adjust to. Lockdown is very unnatural for us as social beings; it can be very difficult for the older generation who are unable to leave their homes at all.

For me, lockdown has completely changed the way I can do work. I usually would be in schools and parishes, or involved with diocesan events. That is unable to happen.

We, in the youth department of the Derry Diocese, have created an online programme on social media to engage with our young people. It is going well but, definitely, it is strange times for all of us.

On a personal level, I do not find lockdown very difficult. I live in the countryside in Donegal, and it's a lovely place to isolate. I feel like lockdown is a chance to take a look at my life, which has been very hectic in the last few years. I have had the chance to take a step back and see how lucky I am. I have a family that are extremely calm and easy to live with. I have food, water, and Netflix, so am luckier than most.

Don't get me wrong, we all have down days when we miss our friends and extended family but, by staying in our houses, we are protecting ourselves and others.

I feel like my faith has also benefited from this lockdown. I have had more opportunity to participate in Mass every day and, during Holy week, we were able to have a holy hour with the young people and that really made me feel connected with the outside world.

I think that this pandemic happening at the time of Easter has given me a new hope for the world. The Hope that we feel when Lent is over is showing us that there is hope for our future after this pandemic.

As I previously said, I am in an extremely lucky situation. Lockdown is so much worse in countries that do not have any health system in place and are struggling for food. I am also very fortunate to have my faith and be in a job that I get to share my faith with young people.

I hope everyone is staying safe, and if anyone would like to take part in our online programme, follow derry youth ministry on Instagram, Facebook and twitter.

Acting head of Religious Education at St Mary's College, Derry, Ms Deirdre McElholm reflects on lockdown for the St Mary's family and looks forward to, once again, being together to sing...

# “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20)



Ms Deirdre McElholm, Acting Head of RE at St Mary's College, Derry.

WE may not be physically together right now, but the community of St Mary's College, in Derry, remains as connected spiritually as ever. The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the spiritual development and faith formation pupils normally receive through their daily school life, has taken an alternative approach.

We miss our normal routines of laughing, praying, friendships, reflections, and the busyness of school life! One aspect the pupils miss most is the sense of togetherness and security they experience in school. This begins at 8.45 am every day in St Mary's with the gathering of the school community to say our school prayer. This does not have to change; pupils are encouraged to say their school prayer once a day to remind them of the values and faith which are paramount to St Mary's College.

Additionally, every day, our current acting principal, Mr Brendan McGinn sends daily uplifting emails to our pupils and staff, with messages of hope, prayer intentions, messages from past pupils on the front line, recipes, fun activities or just some jokes to cheer up our day!

As this is a highly anxious and unsettling time for us all, consequently, our pupils have been encouraged and guided towards fantastic, free apps; 'Daily Bible Inspiration' or 'Prayer Guide', to provide an invaluable opportunity for quiet reflection to calm their head and hearts.

Moreover, Easter is a significant and special time in schools, with many events punctuating the Lenten period and Holy Week. While we were not in school, there were ample ways that pupils celebrated Easter at home. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed designing

their own Palms, creating a cross for Good Friday, or setting up an Easter table in their homes.

Every year, many of our pupils complete the Pope John Paul II Award, proudly completing social and parish hours. The Derry Youth Community has created exciting, innovative ideas for the Pope John Paul II pupils to complete their hours at home! St Mary's is so grateful that the pupils will not be denied this worthwhile award that so many of them benefit from!

So far, they have enjoyed 'Tik Tok Tuesday', 'Well Being Wednesday', 'Faith Friday' - to name just a few! Any pupils still unsure of how to complete their hours can log on to the Derry Youth Instagram, Twitter or Facebook to keep up-to-date with the latest tasks!

As we are now moving into the month of May, pupils will put their creativity skills to the test with creating an altar for Mary in

their homes. Additionally, we will be still completing our 'Rosary Relay', where pupils will pass on a 'Hail Mary' to someone in their form class. Pupils will compose a prayer to Our Lady for help and protection during this time; these will be sent to local nursing homes to offer their best wishes and prayers.

Finally, Mrs Marie Lindsay, our principal, reminded us all through an inspiring video message to remember the words of St Mary's school prayer, "Mary our Mother, as patron of our school, we entrust ourselves to your loving care."

Trust in Mary and Trust in God. The choir will soon be singing the beautiful hymn 'Where two or three are gathered in my name' and all of this will be a distant memory; we really will be gathered in His name!

 The Door of Faith  
@derrydiocese

#PalmSunday @DioceseOfDerry  
#createyourownpalms. Display on your front door!! Use as you watch/listen to Mass. Thanks to MissMcElholm @StMarysDerryRE for sharing ideas

 Create your own Palms | Catechetical Centre  
catecheticalcentre.org

 The RE Department  
@StMarysDerryRE

Don't forget to make your crosses for 3pm today! They are looking fantastic already! #GoodFriday #HolyWeekAtHome

 Maeve Stillman



## St Colm's Ballinascreen family caring for the Earth and each other

ST Colm's in Draperstown are also maintaining their connection with pupils.

Having worked very creatively on the Easter story, they will now be encouraged to celebrate Our Lady during the month of May.

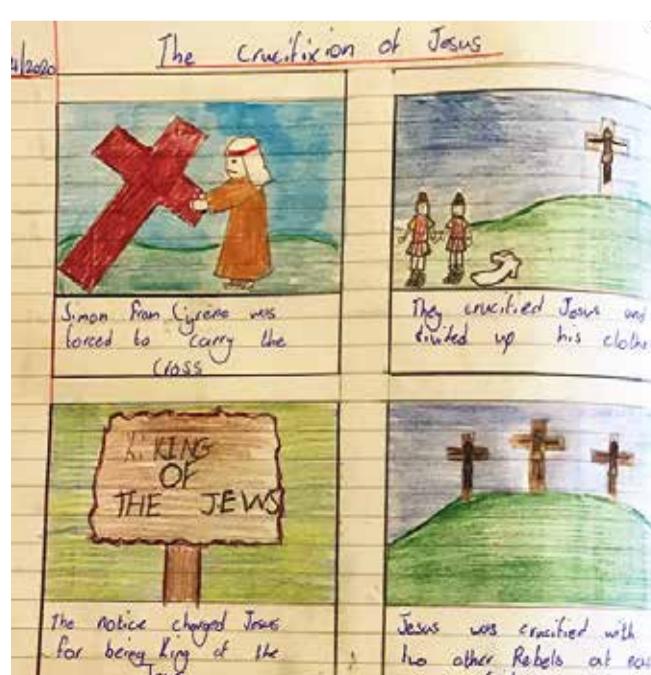
With plenty of time to gather some wild flowers during their daily walks for exercise, there will hopefully be May altars in honour of Mary adorning many homes in and around the Ballinascreen parish. Some have already shared photographs of their beautiful May

altars.

Keeping on the nature theme, the pupils were also very creative with Mrs Devlin's project to promote care of the earth, to mark Earth Day.

The pupils are also encouraged to use their extra free time to be helpful around the home, and this was promoted by Mrs Belaid through her Acts of Kindness initiative.

The primary schools in the parish are keeping the links with their pupils too, with the teachers and priests of the parish especially remembering in prayer all the children who had been preparing for their First Holy Communion Day and the Sacrament of Confirmation, and now have to wait another while for that special occasion.



# Thornhill family looking forward to better times with hearts of hope

by Ciara Collins

WE said "goodbye" to our classes, unknowingly, for the St Patrick's Day break, armed with resources and tasks in preparation for the very real imminent school closures. Our pupils had been given many tasks, worksheets, revision books and guidance to keep them occupied as they entered the new environment of working from home.

Home schooling started on March 23 and, as we began to readjust to our new normal, it became very clear that our spiritual life also needed to be supported. All around us, we were reminded about the advancement of COVID-19, with news stories and official advice given to change our behaviours by our Stormont Assembly. These frightening reports were beginning to dominate our thinking, which in turn could adversely affect our health and well-being. The RE Department in Thornhill responded by offering our girls many opportunities to tune into their spiritual life and to develop an attitude of hope and faith.

Through our use of group hubs in Google classroom, our pupils were guided by our Key Stage Three coordinator with the sharing of beautiful inspirational messages, reflections such as the 'Footprints Prayer' and prayers that the girls could say at the beginning of each day. The girls were also invited to participate in Key Stage 3 faith initiatives, such as their sharing Lenten Talents to bring a smile to all our faces!

Key Stage 3 pupils are also

currently sending in their contributions for the weekly 'Mercy Moment', in which the RE Department will recognise one pupil who has been inspired by our Mercy Ethos and lived out these ideals in their daily life. Currently, the Mercy Moment has been awarded to Eve Gorman for her outstanding pencil drawing of Jesus for her granny, and Lucy O'Donnell for her sterling efforts of shopping for her vulnerable neighbour.

Individual teachers within the department have also enabled pupils to participate in their own spiritual development. During Holy Week and Easter, our girls made their own Palm Crosses, painted Stations of the Cross (inspired by 'Drawing God' by Karen Kiefer), and created Easter Gardens for their families. This will continue into the month of May, as we will be encouraging our pupils to make their own May Altar. This beautiful prayer space can be used as a focal point each day to come together as a family as suggested by Pope Francis, and to "rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home in the month of May."

We are also grateful for the support given by the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre and the wonderful resources provided during the season of Easter. These quiet, reflective prayers and meditations have allowed pupils to take time out of a hectic day and focus their mind peacefully on God.

Our Pope John Paul II coordinator

has also been engaging daily with our 100 JP2 pupils via Google classroom and enabling them to continue to build up hours for their completion of their award. They have been contributing to 'April Blessings' by posting prayerful inspirational quotes to help each other during this time of uncertainty. The group will also be invited to join an online Rosary recitation each Thursday via Zoom in May, in which intentions from Thornhill Community will be offered.

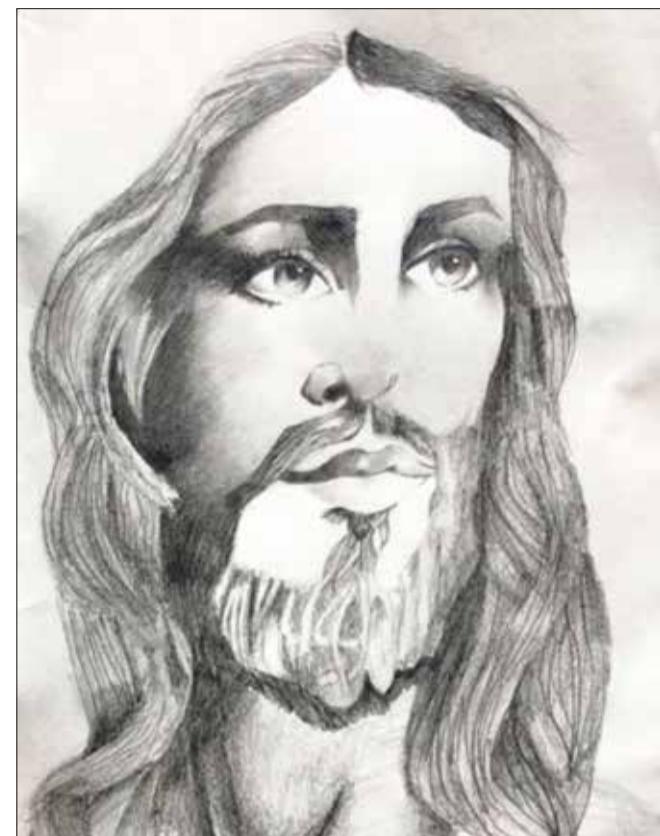
Finally, the Department has been making use of Twitter to engage with pupils and their families. We have been posting daily morning reflections which give our girls the opportunity of starting the day in a positive way. The reflections are categorised for each day and we hope that these can inspire positivity and hope - Monday Motivation, Thankful Tuesday, Wednesday Wisdom, Thursday Thoughts, Friday Feeling, Self-care Saturday and Sunday Blessings.

We have also been regularly sharing many opportunities for celebrating Mass within the Diocese, albeit digitally, as the parishes continue to be closed. We keep our pupils updated with the

many other prayer opportunities that are posted on Twitter during the day. In particular, the Department encourages pupils to log in at 3 pm for the Divine Mercy at St Eugene's Cathedral, which is often followed by uplifting and nourishing music from Anne Marie Hickey and Roisin Rice. We are reminded by St Augustine that to sing is to pray twice, and the music certainly enables us all to do so!

Finally, for night prayer, our Twitter page posts the daily Rosary Mystery and encourages the girls to offer the intention whilst saying the Rosary for that night. We are guided by Pope Francis and his prayer intentions at this time and we hope that all our families can be united in prayer during this period of tribulation.

"Let us be generous. Faith can nourish our hope and it is a hope of a better time to come" - Pope Francis, April 2020. Although we may be apart from our wonderful pupils, we are still very much spiritually connected. It is a period of great uncertainty but we look forward to better times, with a heart of hope and a union of spiritual connectedness



## St Columb's maintaining spiritual focus

ST Columb's College is trying to maintain a spiritual link with its pupils in a number of ways.

On Friday, April 3, our school Chaplain, Fr Chris Ferguson offered Mass in the school Oratory for the school community.

This was recorded and then posted on our Facebook page - StColumbsCollegeDerry. Fr Chris will be offering Mass again in the school Oratory on Friday, May 1.

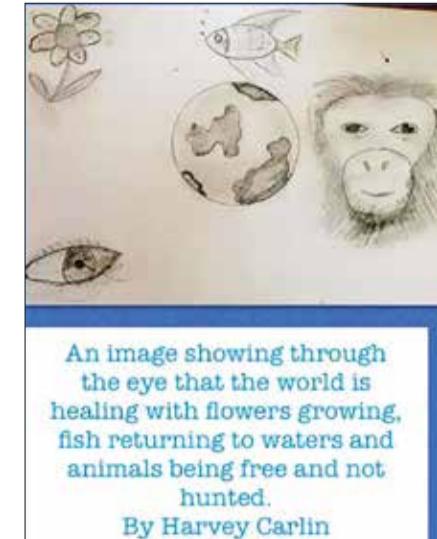
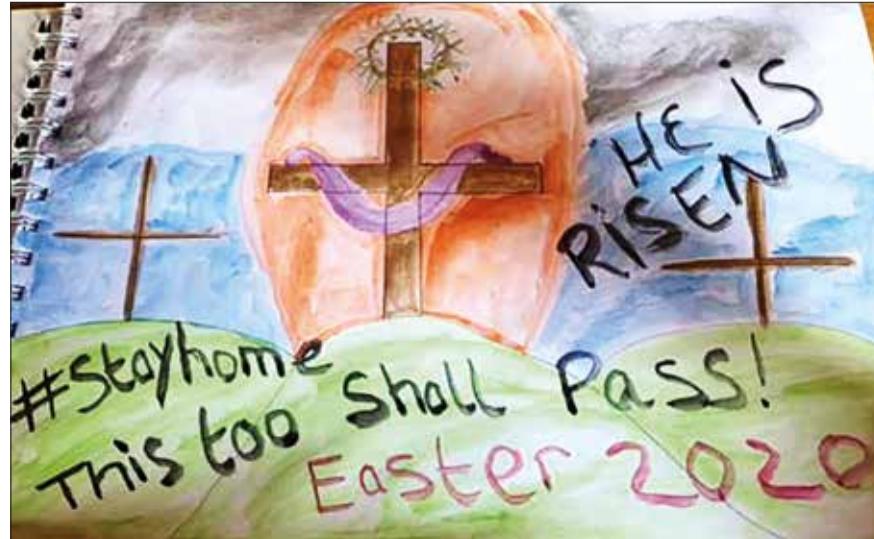
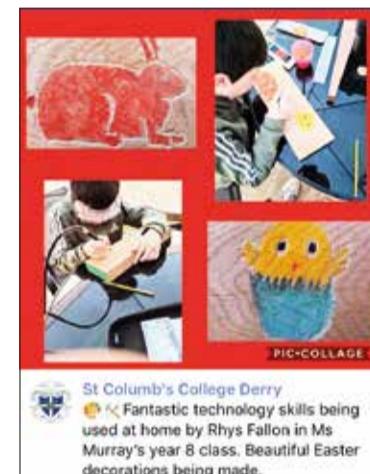
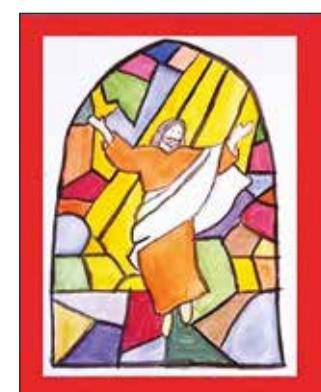
In addition, the Art Department ran a very successful Easter Poster Competition, and every morning our Head of RE posts a recorded 'Thought for the Day' on our Facebook page.

We make extensive use of our Facebook page and our Twitter account (@ColumbCollege) to post daily spiritual thoughts, reflections, poems, images etc.

Every week, the principal, Mr

Finbar Madden, writes a letter (via email) to staff, which contains among other things a particular spiritual focus.

In general, all of the school community's news - happy or sad - is shared, which allows for important messages of support to be given (remotely).



*Through on-line spiritual support during coronavirus lockdown...*

# St Cecilia's maintains strong link as a family and community *by Bernadette O'Mianain*



Mrs Martina Davidson, Head of RE at St Cecilia's, Derry

DURING these unprecedented times during lockdown, as a teacher and head of Sixth Year in St Cecilia's College, Derry, it has been a very unfamiliar and unusual challenge to maintain links with our pupils online, with their classes, homework, coursework etc.

Simultaneously, as a member of the Pastoral Team, one of my core missions is to ensure that our girls are still managing to practice their faith, as St. Cecilia's College has a very strong Catholic ethos, which is integrated into our school on a daily basis.



Mrs Bernadette O'Mianain, head of sixth year at St Cecilia's, Derry

Mrs Mulhern, our school principal, delivers her weekly assembly on our school Facebook page, and she begins with our school prayer. Mrs Mulhern continually informs our school community about any religious events, Masses, services etc, which our students and their families can avail of.

One of our most recognised St Cecilia's past pupils is Sr Claire Crockett. We are so blessed and so honoured to have Sr Claire as a past pupil and ultimately a role model for our girls in green.

Mrs Mulhern, during one of her recent assemblies, reminded all of us to join in with the celebration of her fourth anniversary in Termonbacca through the webcam. It was the most beautiful celebration of her life and her undivided commitment to her religious order, where she selflessly gave her whole life and love to following Jesus. Two other St. Cecilia's past pupils, Lauren and Bethany Doherty, who are part of the acclaimed 'I Am' singers, provided the music during the celebration. Their heavenly voices added to the sacred ambience of the event, it was truly very special.

As head of Sixth Year, I myself have been uploading my weekly assemblies on the school Facebook page. At the beginning of each assembly, I also begin with our school prayer, and we offer up these prayers for all our personal intentions. I recite the Miracle Prayer at these assemblies too. Each girl is given a laminated prayer at the beginning of the year, which fits perfectly into their blazer pocket, and again we recite this together for anyone who undoubtedly needs our prayers at this time.

Like Mrs Mulhern, I also use this channel of communication to share with our girls any upcoming religious events which they may participate in. One very special ceremony which I have informed our girls about is the Mass for Healing in Mind & Body, which takes place in the Long Tower Church every Wednesday at 7.30 pm. Our girls have been asked to participate in this Mass by drawing a candle and placing it in the window. Everyone receives a Spiritual Blessing using a 1st class relic of Padre Pio.

In her first Assembly, she talked about the parable: 'The Calming of the Storm', as a way of explaining to the girls that God will always be with us no matter how scared and helpless we may feel, particularly during our current unsettling situation. If we place our trust in God and open our hearts to him, He will never leave us.

As a school, we have been blessed to have had the opportunity of taking groups of sixth years on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje over the last two years. This has, undoubtedly, strengthened the faith of all of those students and staff that had the privilege of going to Medjugorje. As a result of these trips, we have set up Messenger groups, where we continue to share our stories of faith with each other and reach out to each other during these difficult times.

Mrs Davidson, who is head of RE in our school, also does a weekly Faith Assembly in school. Again, during this current situation, she has also been continuing to do these via the school Facebook page. She continues to share with our girls the importance of prayer, and has given help and guidance to pray the Rosary, with simple steps to follow.

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St Cecilia's College is, undoubtedly, a school with a huge heart. We truly care for each other, and this has been paramount over these last weeks. Form-teachers have been contacting girls in their form-classes just to make sure they are ok. This has been such a comfort for our girls and their families



Celebrating Palm Sunday in Lockdown

to know that we genuinely have the girl's well-being at the core of all we do in our school. This has been an invaluable means of continuing to maintain our strong link as a family and community, and ultimately strengthening our spiritual connection during this very unnatural situation.

*Principal of St Eithne's PS, in The Holy Family Parish, Ballymagroarty, Terence McDowell writes...*

## Pupils' spiritual development continues to be a priority

IN these unprecedented times, the staff of St Eithne's has worked extremely hard to prepare work and resources to ensure that our parents can help support their children's learning at home.

We want to ensure that, as far as possible, the children continue to grow and develop in all curricular areas. In these times, more than ever, their spiritual development continues to be a priority for us all.

In the absence of being allowed to attend Mass, or make plans to receive the sacraments of Confirmation or First Holy Communion, we need to create new ways to meet the needs of our families.

With the help of the Diocesan Catechetical Centre, we reach out to our children and parents to help guide their knowledge and understanding in Religious Education, as well as foster the development of their relationship with Jesus.

St Eithne's continues to maintain the holistic development of our children with the use of online technologies. Virtually, teachers,

parents and children have the ability to communicate with each other.

The images shown are of some of our children as they complete RE tasks at home, set by their teachers online.



# Diocesan Catechetical team go all out to keep focus on faith *“Let everything you do be done in love” (1Cor:16:14)*

THE Diocesan Catechetical Centre is responsible for catechesis in the Diocese of Derry. The centre provides faith formation and religious education support to Catholic schools, families and parishes. It aims to bring people of every age into a closer relationship with Jesus in the Body of Christ. The centre was established in 2005, with Fr Paul Farren as director of the Centre.

Like many other organisations at this time, the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre has been 'working from home' and has had to find new ways of engaging with and supporting schools, families and parishes in the handing on of the faith to children and young people. With schools and parishes

'closed' physically, and children, young people and families unable to attend Church liturgies and faith events, the Centre is endeavouring to reach out through online resources and initiatives, and increased engagement with the social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter provided a great focus for encouraging children, young people and families at home, to Journey with Jesus, to pray at home, to live their faith in a creative way and to attend Mass through Church webcams, Facebook pages, television and radio.

Working closely with Bishop Donal McKeown, and taking

the theme of 'Walking with Jesus through Holy Week', the Diocesan Schools Team, Thérèse Ferry, advisor for Primary Schools and Mary O Boyle, advisor for Post Primary, with support from Centre volunteers, created a variety of resources to help families to do this whilst at home.

Resources included, Stations of the Cross, daily prayers for Holy Week, colouring booklets for younger children, music, art and craft ideas. For Palm Sunday families were encouraged to make their own palms and display them on their doors, for Good Friday to make and display a Cross and, for the Easter season, to have a home Easter Garden in the absence of being able to

visit an Easter Garden in parish churches. A liturgy was provided for the Blessing of Water and Renewal of Baptismal Promises at home during the Easter Vigil and to celebrate the full Easter Season. The 'Fifty Days, Fifty Acts of Love' initiative was launched with children, young people and families asked to carry out an 'Act of Love' each day between Easter Sunday and the Feast of Pentecost. To mark Divine Mercy Sunday, a number of activities, suitable for young people were created.

With May traditionally the month given over to Mary, the Mother of God, the website has a special section again to support and encourage families to give thanks to God through creating

a May Altar, praying the Rosary, making an outdoor Rosary, asking for Mary's help during the Coronavirus, exploring the Bible Stories of Mary, baking special Mary cakes or singing hymns to Mary.

Schools throughout the diocese have been very good at promoting the resources provided by the centre, as they themselves continue to provide the regular Religious Education and Faith Formation Programmes at Primary and Post Primary level. A key role for the Catechetical Centre is supporting schools as they do this. There are already some resources on the website available for teachers, and this is a section which will see considerable development in the



coming months.

Contact Details: Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre, The Gate Lodge, 2 Francis Street, Derry, Northern Ireland BT48 7DS. Telephone - +44 (0)28 7126 4087. Email - Thérèse Ferry - [tfferry@derrydiocese.org](mailto:tfferry@derrydiocese.org) and Mary O Boyle - [mary.o Boyle@derrydiocese.org](mailto:mary.o Boyle@derrydiocese.org).

## Holy Family pupils encouraged to keep linked in with their faith



Holy Family PS Religious Education coordinator, Jacqueline McCarron

THE Religious Education coordinator at Holy Family PS, in the Ballymagroarty Parish, Derry, Jacqueline McCarron told 'The Net' that the children from the school were doing great work at home and had sent in some wonderful photographs of how they celebrated Easter and Earth Day, and of them having loads of fun in the sun.

"We are keeping in touch with our children mainly through Twitter; encouraging them during this time," said Jacqueline.

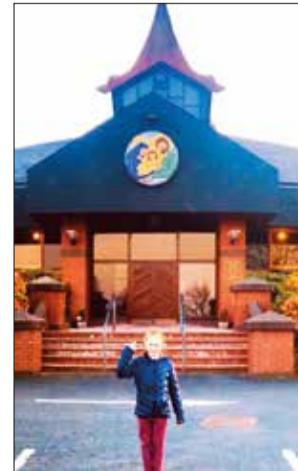
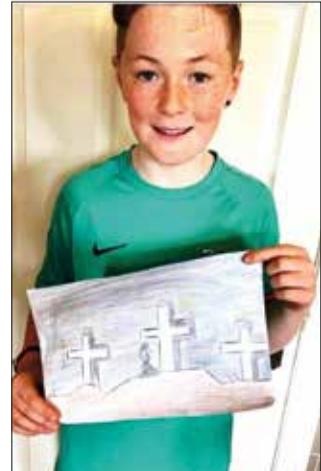
"The teachers are setting RE work," she added, "as well as linking them with tweets from the Diocesan Catechetical Centre and sending tweets about the various Masses in our parishes and on Radio Maria. We are linking in with anything that is going on and retweeting it for our children to see."

"We follow Karen Kiefer, the author of 'Drawing God', on Twitter, and have been encouraging the children to send in their drawings of God to us and then we tweet them. Also, if the

Sacraments.

"During a parish retreat, all the homes were visited and we, as a school, were asked to take part in the Sunday Mass. Since that, we ask the children to come to Holy Family Chapel for Mass on the second Sunday of each month, during which they do the Readings, Prayer of the Faithful, take up the Offertory Gifts, and sing as the choir. We try to encourage all the children to come along to this Mass and we have usually had a good turnout.

"We have also been taking part in the morning Mass on the second Friday of each month, and the people of the parish love to see the children coming to these Masses. That is something I miss; these Masses with the children from school and just being able to



*Iskaheen JPII leader, Helen Grant talks about her love of working with young people and how she believes...*

# Parish life should be a natural extension of family life

THE parish of Iskaheen & Upper Moville is blessed to have an enthusiastic team of leaders to guide and encourage young parishioners participating in the Pope John Paul II Award, and amongst them is Scottish-born, Helen Grant.

Chatting to 'The Net' about her love for her Catholic faith and her involvement in parish life since she was a child, Helen explained that helping out within the parish family was just like an extension of her family life in the home.

An only child born in Greenock to Irish parents, Teresa Doherty and James McCallion, both from the Iskaheen Parish and now deceased, Helen looked back on a happy and secure childhood, that included visits to her Donegal family home two or three times a year, along with her parents.

"Growing up, faith was central to family life," she said, "and we were very involved in the life of the Church. We prayed the Rosary every night and my mother went to Mass every day. My father worked on the boats on the Clyde. In those days, he would have been home one day a week."

"I attended Catholic schools, where my faith was further nourished. My primary school principal was a Franciscan Nun of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We had Morning Prayer, Grace before meals, and Evening Prayer. It was a very structured prayer life in school and at home."

"When I moved on to Catholic secondary school, I became involved in the liturgical life there. My friend and I set up the altar for Mass, which was celebrated every Friday during the year and every day during Lent, at 8.20 am. I always tried to get someone in the year or two below me to help us, so that the Lenten Masses would be carried on and they are still celebrated today. It's amazing how that has become a legacy."

One particular memory that stands out for Helen is that of her being involved, as a fifth year, in organising a Caring Church event within her school: "It was more like a mission for a week, but we thought if we called it a mission then young people would disengage. We had missionaries from all the different orders that we could get our hands on, as well as representatives of lay organisations, to come and give talks, and they brought their banners and stalls. We tried to think outside the box and it was a resounding success. The feedback from the pupils was that they couldn't believe how approachable the missionaries were."

Recalling being very involved in the junior Legion of Mary, Helen remarked: "Maybe that is where the idea of working in the caring sector came from, as we visited people, and also my

love of working with youth. The members of the junior Legion were encouraged to take it in turn to look after younger children in the parish hall while their parents were at Mass. There was no children's liturgy then; we were just minding them."

"There were four Masses and the second was the 10 am Children's Mass. The principal, Sr Mary Anthony brought all the school children up to the front rows of the chapel for this, and we took part in the liturgy, carrying up the gifts, etc. Afterwards, those of us in the junior Legion of Mary went to the hall to look after the children of those attending the 11 am and 12 noon Masses."

"I also helped with the Religious Stall that was set up in the hall, to sell religious items. It was just natural for me to be involved in things like this. You were kind of swept along and your faith just grew. School was within the parish and all my friends went there, and our social life was discos in the church hall. So we really didn't have to go outside the Church setting for anything."

Going on to study Diagnostic Radiography in Glasgow, Helen travelled the three-quarters of an hour train journey, there and back, every day, which meant that she could continue her parish involvement. This was the same for her friends.

She remarked: "I continued practising my faith as I didn't have the distractions that come with living away from home while at college. This was actually a huge bonus in the development of my faith life. I was blessed because my group of friends were all very grounded and part of the parish faith community."

Helen recalled an experience during her training in a Glasgow hospital, when a teenage girl, who was undergoing a routine Intravenous Pyelogram procedure, took an allergic reaction to the contrast agent and died on the table.

"That was a real shock, especially for someone young, like me at the time. You ask yourself why, but your faith carries you through," she said, adding: "Obviously, it played on my mind but it was my faith that pulled me through. You couldn't talk about things like that to your friends or family because of patient confidentiality."

"There were a lot of different experiences that I don't know how I would have coped without my faith. You do your job and do your best for the patient, and then fall back on your faith to pull you through."

Helen loved helping out on the farm in Donegal during the summer, and her warm memories of times spent in Ireland made the opportunity of working as a radiographer in her parents'

homeland, when she qualified in 1984, one she didn't want to miss.

"There weren't great job opportunities in Scotland at the time anyway," she recalled, "so when I saw a job in a place called Nenagh, in Co Tipperary, advertised, I applied and got it. I headed off in January 1985 on my own. My parents bought me a second-hand car and I left home at 8 am and was in Nenagh at around 9 pm. With no mobile phone then, my route was planned out on a hand map. When I arrived, I was able to use the 'phone at reception to ring my parents. I was staying in the nurses' accommodation at the hospital".

Helen continued to be surrounded by her Catholic faith while in Nenagh, with the hospital run by the Sisters of Mercy, who had a small convent attached to the hospital and a bigger convent building in the town.

## Family

"Sr Eileen O'Driscoll ran the lab and she became one of my best friends," she said, adding: "When I first arrived, she brought me to a meeting of the Nenagh Historical Society. I remember thinking, 'What am I doing here?' She also introduced me to her family and they made me feel part of their life. This was very reassuring for my parents too, especially when I became ill with meningitis in 1985. I actually had meningitis twice, the second time in 2009."

She talked about how she continued to practice her faith: "I made an effort to go to 7 am Mass. Through my involvement with the nuns, I got to know the priests, including Fr Sheedy, who had started the 'No Name Club' in Nenagh. I got involved helping with that. It was like a youth club and they ran alcohol-free discos, which a lot of the young people came to. I was also involved with the Junior Chamber in Nenagh and ended up with very few nights that I wouldn't be going out somewhere, including going to dances in Thurles".

The Diocese of Paisley was sending students to Thurles to study for the priesthood at the time, and the brother of a friend of Helen's was one of them.

"The students from Paisley didn't go home at the weekends", she recalled, "so when I wasn't working on Sunday afternoons, I travelled over in my car to visit them and we would go on tours of the area, such as the Rock of Cashel. They had Evening Prayer at 6 pm and I joined them for that on our return".

After four years in Nenagh, Helen moved to Castlebar, where she worked for about five months, before moving to work in Sligo because it was closer to Donegal, where her parents had then moved back to live.

"During the three years that



Helen with her husband, Seamus, and son, Peter.

had a World Youth Day Mass in 2019 and, following on from this, we hope to have an annual Parish Youth Day Mass like we had this year in January.

"We try to say the family Rosary once a week. I would not be as good as my parents who said it every night, but now, during lockdown, we do make a point of watching the 9 am Mass on Sunday morning, and sometimes a Saturday morning, as a family unit.

"We go to many different events organised in the parish as a family. Peter was an altar boy and when he came off the altar, he helped with the collection. The hope is that he will find being involved in parish life just a natural thing to do."

Peter is currently doing his Pope John Paul II Award and Helen is one of the parish leaders: "I got involved in this through my role with the Parish Pastoral Council, which I was asked to join when it was set up in 2011."

"We have four different sub-groups within this, including Building a Community of Faith, Marriage and Family Life, and Children and Young People. I took the lead with the Children and Young People Group, which took over the running of the Pope John Paul II Award in the parish. I get so much out of organising activities for the young people, and have great support from the other members of the Children and Young People Group."

"Last year, when Peter was doing his Junior Cert," said Helen, "I noticed the Redemptorist Novena in Limerick that I had attended when I was in Nenagh, was online, so I printed it out and the three of us did it together. Seamus and Peter were a bit sceptical at first, but they got up with me at 7 am to join in with it. It was something different and Peter was impressed

by some of the lay people who gave talks.

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"Also, every day in the month of May, each young person will say a decade of the Rosary at a time for an intention of their choosing, and the rest of the group will say it in their own homes at that time too".

The Children and Young People's Group also run the new GIFT programme in the parish, which Helen explained is a mix of fun and prayer: "I think that is very important. We have to show our young people that our faith is not just something for inside our Church, but for every part of our lives".

American author, Karen Kiefer writes about her book that has been stirring the imaginations of all ages in the Diocese...

# Drawing God - a catalyst for more God talk



Drawing God author, Karen Kiefer.

OUR Catholic faith makes the world a much smaller place. We can connect, strangers and friends, over our love for God any time and any place, even on social media. Such was the case when Therese Ferry, Diocesan Advisor for Primary Schools in Derry, reached out about participating in the new 'Drawing God' book project that launched World Drawing God Day, from Boston, last November.

The message of the children's book, 'Drawing God' is that we all see God differently. Creatively, this message draws young and old closer to God by drawing God. The Diocese of Derry was off and running, engaging thousands of kids in the artistic and faith-filled pursuit to draw God. Their drawings affirmed that each child does see God differently and their masterpieces were abundant and spectacular.

It was the beginning of a growing partnership. The Diocese then participated in the launch of the virtual Drawing God Museum, as we showcased so many drawings from the children of Derry. The Derry schools embraced 'Drawing God' Advent projects, as well as Lenten initiatives, including drawing God through a new Stations of the Cross project. Teachers and children also participated in the 'What if God Were One of Us' project, introduced during the pandemic.

I began typing...Emma escapes to the comfort of her bedroom and draws a brilliant sun. "It was so dazzling and radiant my cheeks throbbed. Its rays were so long they poked at my heart." Emma knew she had drawn God. The next day, Emma takes her drawing to school to show her best friend Peter. But Peter looked at Emma and said, "Emma, that's not God, that's the sun." Emma tries again and again to draw God, but her classmates can't see God in any of her drawings. They actually find her attempts laughable. Emma finally realizes, through a prayer answered, that she doesn't need their approval. "I knew I had drawn God. God knew I had drawn God, and maybe Picasso knew, too. That finally felt like enough."

The story stopped there. But I remember feeling that urge to keep writing because this wasn't the end of the story. Emma eventually returns to school on the following Monday, and

God at school, because it makes people feel uncomfortable," said the young voice to the other. I stood still, shaking my head, as I uttered, "Oh— no," under my breath. Needless to say, I felt uncomfortable.

For the next several weeks, that conversation would not leave my mind or heart. In a world propelled by wonder, invention and advanced communication, could 'God talk' eventually become extinct? It seemed to be an astonishing possibility. All I could do was pray about it, asking God to intervene. Then, on a quiet Sunday morning, I began to write a story about a little girl named Emma, who visits an art museum and is so inspired by the works of Pablo Picasso that she decides that she is going to draw something "beyond spectacular." Emma decides to draw God. I remember tapping on my keyboard, just waiting to see what might happen next.

something beyond spectacular happens. I won't spoil the ending of the book, but when I finished writing, it was clear that if this story was ever published it might get more children and adults talking about and drawing God. Fast-forward a few months, after some polishing, miraculously the story found a willing publisher. Over the course of the past year, I've worked closely with Paraclete Press and Belgian illustrator, Kathy De Wit, who took the story and brought it to life with her simple and beautiful illustrations.

On Tuesday, October 8, 2019, the children's picture book, 'Drawing God' was released into the world. May it be a catalyst for more God talk and inspire children and adults of all faiths to connect their very own faith imagination, to realize the contagious faith that lives powerfully within and to embrace the truth that we all see God differently.

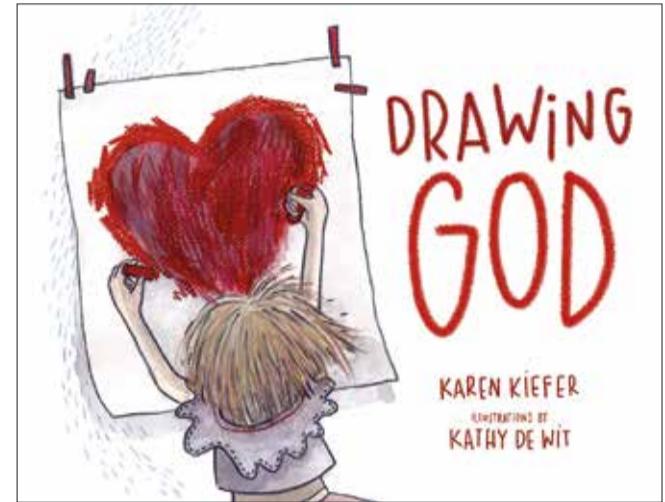
The release of the book was followed by the celebration of the first World Drawing God Day, on Thursday, November 7. That day offered a chance for our world to 'draw' God, whatever that might look like, using the hashtag #drawinggod.

It's true that books can't necessarily change the world, but the people who read them can. To future readers of 'Drawing God', my hope is that this book will make you a little more comfortable, knowing that there will be a little more God talk in our world because of you.

Over the past several months, I have had the opportunity to connect with hundreds and hundreds of kids across the country and around the world about how they imagine God. What does God look like? What does God feel like? Who is God? These are big questions for all of us, but their words, drawings and imagination were a powerful reminder of how we all see God differently.

Currently the director of the Church in the 21st Century Center, at Boston College, and mother of four daughters, Karen was raised in a large Irish Catholic family

outside of Boston, Massachusetts, where her faith was nurtured until she started Boston College, and the Jesuits helped her to see her faith in service to others, for others.



Front Cover of Drawing God.



St John's PS, Creggan



St John's PS, Creggan



St Patrick's Glen PS



St Columba's Straw PS



Drawing God drawings from the Derry Diocese.

## What the children discovered...

"I drew a picture of my house. God lives in there with us".

"This is a heart. We live inside God's heart, but God also lives inside our heart".

"God makes rainbows and flowers to make us smile, so I drew them".

"I drew a picture of what looks like the sun, but it is really the Eucharist. When I eat the Eucharist, God's light goes inside of me".

"See this heart. This is God. God will always love you back".

"I drew a picture of me because God looks like me and I look like God".

*Diocesan advisor for primary schools, Thérèse Ferry, shares how...*

## Drawing God in Lenten Stations project enhanced Easter story for children



Thérèse Ferry, Diocesan advisor for primary schools.

SOCIAL Media can be a great place to find new ideas and resources which help all of us to draw closer to God. I find the exchange of ideas, books, prayers, reflections, artwork etc, enhances the work I do on a daily basis. I am always on the look-out for new ideas and resources to share at our Annual Diocesan In-Service Day for Primary School Religious Education Coordinators. One day, scrolling through Twitter, I saw a post from Karen Kiefer, an American author, about her children's book 'Drawing God' and 'googled' the website, as you do!

Children love to express their understanding of God, their

friendship with Jesus through movement, singing, drama, poetry and art. I read the following introduction to the book and was hooked: "Follow young Emma who is inspired to draw like Picasso after a field trip to the art museum. Emma wanted to draw something beyond spectacular and decides to draw GOD. Find out what happens when her classmates can't see God in any of her drawings..." (Karen Kiefer [www.drawing-god.com](http://www.drawing-god.com))

I immediately ordered the book and set about thinking how we might introduce this at In-Service, so we could get the children of the Derry Diocese Drawing God! Again, scrolling through Twitter one morning, I noticed that, due to the response the book had already had, there was going to be a National Drawing God Day on November 7 and that was it. We would ask the teachers to get all of their pupils drawing God that day and make it an 'International Drawing God Day'.

Mary O Boyle, the Diocesan Post Primary advisor, was one of the facilitators and took on

the task of introducing the idea to the Religious Education Coordinators. She decided to give the teachers an opportunity to draw God themselves and they took to it brilliantly! They drew, in silence, their images of God. They drew hearts, sunrises, family members, and nature scenes; their reflections on how God is everywhere and in everyone.

The response from schools in the Diocese was fantastic. The coordinators shared the idea back at their schools and, on November 7, the children drew God. But they not only drew God. They talked about God, how God might look, where you might find God, who you might find God in. They prayed and their drawings are really a prayer acknowledging the presence of God in their lives, their families, their school, the world. Children have such an amazing gift of wonder; they are less inhibited by 'stereotypical' images of God and the freedom of their imagination and hearts is something I think we can all learn from.

On November 7, 2019, and the days following, schools sent

through the children's images from their 'Drawing God' experience. The results were just amazing. We shared them on our social media platforms and Karen picked up on them, sharing them on her social media platforms. One day I got an email to the office from someone I had started following on Twitter, who was following Karen and who showed great interest in what the children were doing! Janet Forbes is currently working in the Armagh Diocese, but also studying at Boston College, where Karen is the director of the Church in the 21st Century Centre. Subsequently, Janet visited several of the schools in the Diocese, gave a presentation on Drawing God and presented the children with special certificates.

At a time when many people are asking the question, where is God in the Coronavirus, Karen's 'Drawing God', Lenten Stations of the Cross Project, was a great opportunity for the children to walk with Jesus to Calvary and express how they were feeling as they were experiencing a very different way of life.

Again, the response was tremendous. Children and families created their own sets of Stations of the Cross and prayed them during Holy Week. Their sensitivity, their trust in God, their belief in the hope of the Resurrection was, and is, a great encouragement at this time. One group of children, some of whom have parents working in frontline jobs, created a video of the Stations of the Cross in book creator. They illustrated each station and added a voice note to each Station. (<https://catecheticalcentre.org/holy-week-2020/stations-of-the-cross-book-for-children-by-children/>)

Pope Francis, in Tbilisi, 2016 said: "Children, who have no problem in understanding God, have much to teach us: they tell us that He accomplishes great things in those who put up no resistance to Him, who are simple and sincere, without duplicity".

The images from the 'Drawing God' projects reveal that the children from the Diocese "have no problem understanding God". They are "simple and sincere" and they have much to teach us.



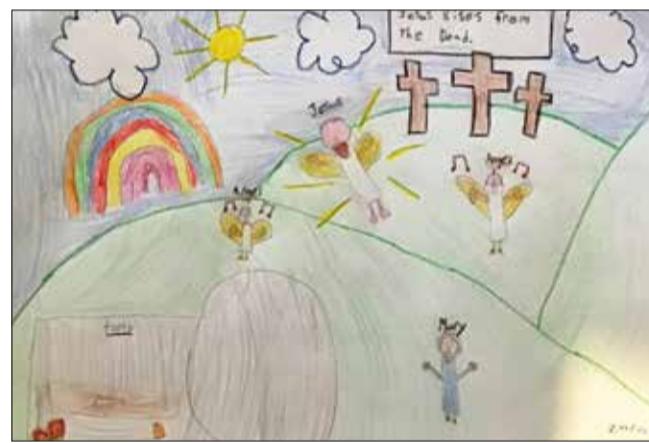
Kate McGranahan.



Jesus Crucified by Noah Greer Knocknagin PS Desertmartin.j



Deena and Cara.



Zara McCool St Theresa's PS, Glebe



Lily Mae Saint Theresa's PS Glebe

## The gifts, joy and grace children bring to our Church by Janet Forbes

THE Covid-19 Pandemic has heralded acute changes to all aspects of life and society. For me, as a lifelong Catholic committed to the task of religious education and formation of our young and young adults, the job of nurturing those young minds has been interrupted and ruptured in a way that is painful and disorientating.

Yet, I see many shoots of hope emerging during these most difficult of times. There has been a turning back to an expression of faith that many of us thought was lost. I have witnessed the creativity, dedication and sterling work that many dioceses, their clergy and their pastoral teams have been engaged in throughout Ireland. In the Diocese of Derry, I have observed the meaningful engagement of many schools with Boston College's 'Drawing God' initiative.

As a Master's student at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, my engagement

with 'Drawing God' came about when Thérèse Ferry offered the book as a resource to the schools of the Derry Diocese. I visited three schools from the Diocese, where the initiative caught the imagination of the teachers and children throughout the diocese and, amazingly, resulted in the prolific sharing of the fruits of the children's imagination on social media.

Born in Lurgan, Co Armagh, I graduated from the University of Ulster in 1999 and worked in corporate motor trade until 2012, when, I retrained as a vocational educator. I subsequently worked with young men and women from some of the most marginalised communities in Northern Ireland; a greatly humbling experience that invoked a period of deep personal reflection around the path I was on. This resulted in the study of Pastoral Theology with Drumalis, through St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth and, more

importantly, a deepening of my own faith.

A chance meeting with renowned Religious Educator and Boston College Professor, Tom Groome, and a subsequent attendance at a seminar in Dublin where I met Karen Kiefer for the first time, led me on the journey that has resulted in my studies at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, and now in my support of the 'Drawing God' initiative here, in Ireland.

Since September 2019, I had been working with the Archdiocese of Armagh as part of my studies and, just before Christmas 2019, I was fortunate, through 'Drawing God' in the Derry Diocese, to have the opportunity to visit St Columba's PS, Straw, St John's PS, Creggan, and St Patrick's PS, Glen. I met and prayed with the staff and children from the schools, and presented them with their 'Drawing God' certificates.

What impacted me most during those visits was the vibrancy and joy with which the students engaged, along with the hunger and desire they each had to talk about and articulate their thoughts on God. The pictures they each created have had a marked impact on me and are what stands out most. Each was different and many exhibited deep insight and wisdom into the families, communities and society within which each child found its inspiration. Most importantly, each drawing had that unique spark of the Divine that was particular to that child alone.

I have also been struck by the profound knowledge of God that they possess. The expression and articulation of who and what children believe God to be, offer a great vision for the future, should we as parents, grandparents, educators and leaders of our Church take the time to listen to them, support them and, indeed,

nourish their faith.

Of all the school visits, it is the visit to St John's, Creggan, which resonated most with me. The area, its history, and the narratives of the people of Derry City are very similar to my own. As we currently navigate the difficulties and challenges that Covid-19 presents to all of us, I urge each person to seek out the images drawn and painted by the many children from the Diocese of Derry during the 'Drawing God' initiative. Look closely at each

articulation and expression of who God is, look at where God is found in their lives and consider the question of where God is to be found in our own.

John F Kennedy once said: "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." In this time of great upheaval and uncertainty, a time when change is inevitable, we are each called to consider the kind of Church and society we will pass on to future generations.



St Patrick's Glen PS.



St Patrick's Glen PS.

# Abundance of happiness comes in real friendship with the Son of God



CELEBRATING Mass in the Carmelite Monastery chapel, in Termonbacca, to mark the fourth anniversary of Sr Clare Crockett's death, Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, talked about how God is speaking "directly to a new generation" through "this daughter of Derry", as to where true happiness is to be found.

"Our young ones", he said, "are fed on a daily diet of celebrity and they are oriented in that direction from no age at all. Almost by a process of osmosis, they are told that this is the path you wish to follow; these are the people you want to emulate".

However, in a recent film released by the Servant Sisters on Sr Clare's life, Fr Stephen noted the quandary she faced of having to be satisfied with living "behind the mask of untruth" as an actor; having come to truth and some happiness, "why would she go backwards behind a mask?"

"Sr Clare is not speaking just to

wannabe actors," he added, "but to all who live in this culture and think that happiness can be found in those material things and in that type of lifestyle. A lifestyle, in which, we are living our lives in front of screens of various kinds, trying as it were, to live life through others.

"We have fallen into a bad habit of going from one superficial experience to another; trying desperately to get answers for ourselves outside of ourselves... Always deathly afraid that, at some inconvenient moment, our mask will slip and people will see us as we fear to be seen, and that they will see us as inauthentic as we really think we are and empty as we feel."

"Right there, in midst of all that", Fr Stephen noted, "we can reach for an understanding of why Sr Clare lived the way she lived up until she made the definitive choice that she did; the reason why so many others follow suit, and why in a world that seems to have everything, there are so many undisguised symptoms of a problem.

"If it is that we are all frightened that, under all the appearances, we are nothing at all, we need to know that this is the greatest of lies, it is the ultimate fake news, and nothing but the propaganda of the Bad Spirit. Sadly, the opposite seems to be happening; we are falling for it hook, line and sinker".

He continued: "Sr Clare believed

it up onto a certain point, a point at which a person spoke to her, in the most unlikely of places. This budding actress came on holiday expecting the bright lights of Ibiza and found that she was on pilgrimage at a convent in northern Spain. A pilgrimage that she said herself she spent smoking and sunbathing. It was only on Good Friday, when she bent down to kiss the feet of the figure on the cross that the figure spoke to her soul. She tells us what happened, as she looked at that figure on the cross, racked by suffering and torture. She saw not just another defeated man but Divine Mercy itself, giving Himself away to the last drop.

"In addition, she realised that her sins, her superficiality, and her masks had nailed him to that cross. She had heard all this as some kind of internal conversation or reflection, but it did not come from herself. He who truly hung from the cross was speaking to her; those words running through her head were, in fact, His words to her.

## Role

"The depths of what He was saying to her started to wake her up. He had for her, only words of His love. The crucified hands of the figure on the cross had been the very ones that had made her and shaped her into His own likeness. Her heart and soul were the throne on which He took up his reign. He had a definite purpose, role and mission in mind

when He formed her in His love. He thought that it was good for her to exist.

"Yet there was more still to know; even though she had strayed with her drinking and carousing, strayed in her living in boredom and indifference, strayed in living behind her various masks, strayed in her superficiality, strayed in her fear and strayed in her living without God. Her weakness and brokenness were never a block in the road of Christ's love. Rather than being a barrier, it simply draws out what is best and greatest in God".

Remarking that the Easter Proclamation "puts its finger on something profound that was actually happening in the life of Sr Clare", Fr Stephen continued: "The Proclamation declares 'O happy fault that gained for us as great a Saviour' as Jesus Christ.

"In her weakness, Sr Clare saw God for who He truly was; His beauty, His majesty, His goodness, and His truth was to take everything that He was, is, and will be, and give it away to us all as individuals. He emptied himself and came into the world as if Clare was the only one in the universe, He went to the cross freely as if Clare was the only one in the universe, He rose from the dead as if Clare was the only one in the universe, and He offered Clare the life of Heaven as if Clare was the only one in the universe. If God had paid such a high price for Clare and thought her worth



Fr Stephen Quinn with sisters, Lauren and Bethany Doherty, who sang at Sr Clare's anniversary Mass.

that price, how could it be that she thought herself so worthless and as being nothing at all? She was everything in His sight! His love for her was her true identity. His love was the good news to her".

"Incredible is not a strong enough word for what Sr Clare experienced," he concluded: "The words that Christ spoke to her that Good Friday were so potent that no one could possibly get their heads round it all at once. It took Sr Clare more than a year to come to terms with those words of love. In that year she came to see through all those things that, until that point, she held so dear. It all seemed to have turned to saw-dust in comparison to that experience.

"The day she went off to be a Servant Sister, she decided to build her whole life on the solid

rock of what had been told to her by the figure on the Cross. From that moment, she became a person like onto one described in the Book of Psalms, who is like a tree that is planted by living waters. She put the roots down deep into the goodness and the love of God. She grew just like that tree, in nature, in character, in goodness, in virtue, in generosity, in sacrifice, in faith, in hope and in love. That growth was written all over her face.

"The designs of the Lord are, indeed, wonderful to see. In this young woman, this daughter of Derry, the Lord speaks directly to a new generation as to where they will find their true happiness... abundance of happiness comes in real friendship with the Son of God".

## Sr Clare's family overwhelmed by depth of devotion

THE family of the late Sr Clare Crockett have been greatly moved by the growing devotion in their home city of Derry and beyond to their Clare, the 33-year-old Servant Sister who died in an earthquake in Ecuador four years ago.

Amazed at the large number of people who joined in online to pray the Rosary led by Bishop Donal, from St Eugene's Cathedral, on April 16, the anniversary of her death, and watched Fr Stephen Quinn OCD celebrate the anniversary Mass in the little chapel in Termonbacca, the Sunday after, via YouTube and Facebook, Sr Clare's sister, Shauna said that it eased the pain of her death to know that so many were being helped in some way

through her story and prayers of intercession.

In the lead-up to the Rosary on her anniversary, and afterwards, Shauna said that they had been inundated with requests for Sr Clare's novena card: "I had just got 1,300 copies of the prayer card printed and the day after getting them there were none left. I have now placed an order for 3,000 cards.

"At first, my sister, Megan and I were delivering them to the people who asked for the novena, but it got to the stage that we were out six hours one day. So we decided to leave them in shops and put a post up on Facebook about where they were available. We have been overwhelmed by the response. They are flying out of the shops

too, as word spreads about people getting prayers answered after saying the novena, asking Sr Clare to intercede for them.

"It is also lovely to see how many people have put a photo of Sr Clare on their windows, after a post went up on Pat Ramsey's Facebook page about a woman who had felt her home fill with a lovely peace after she had put up a sketch of Sr Clare on her window.

"It turned out that the sketch had been done by an old family friend of ours, Jimmy Melaugh, who had been our neighbour when we were growing up. He said that he was sitting one night and felt that he wanted to draw Sr Clare. That was just a couple of weeks before her anniversary. Little did he know that it would end up on someone's window! It's just like something that would happen to our Clare!"

The home in which the sketch of Sr Clare was put up on the window is that of Myra McLaughlin, who has a great devotion to Sr Clare and often asks her to pray and intercede for her and others.

"I just felt such an inner peace and a peace in my home after praying to Sr Clare to intercede for me, as I had been anxious about my asthma," said Myra, adding: "I thought it would be nice to

share that with other people, especially as it was coming up to her anniversary, so I asked my daughter to send a message to Pat Ramsey for his Facebook page about this, and it just took off from there. A message was put on the Termonbacca Facebook page too and requests started coming in for the novena card and Sr Clare's photo, not only from the around the world but the Fountain as well!"

The Servant Sisters have also been receiving more and more emails every day from people sharing how they have been helped by Sr Clare's intercession.

The Sisters from the Home of the Mother Order celebrated Sr Clare's anniversary with a live broadcast of a festival of song and testimonies about her life. This had been watched by over 1,000 viewers.

Sr Kristen Gardner remarked: "It is truly overwhelming to see how Sr Clare continues, after her death, to touch people of all ages and all lifestyles, but not to bring them to herself. As she did in her lifetime, she continues to bring souls to Our Lord and Our Lady.

We receive emails and messages continuously in which people share how Sr Clare is helping them. They arrive from all over the

world - from Vietnam to Nigeria, from Denmark to Malta, and from the Philippines to Argentina.

"We can only give thanks to God! There are many young people who have been stirred to respond to God's call and to enter the seminary or religious life. Many others write how far they were from the Lord, how empty they were, and how Sr Clare is helping them to rediscover their Catholic faith.

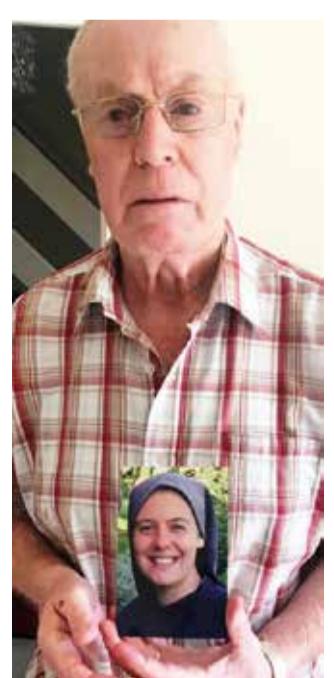
"These spiritual graces are the most important for us, but there are also other types of favours, where people claim Sr Clare has responded to their prayers for physical healing or job requests or many other types of petitions. We give thanks to God for what He is doing through her".

Fr Stephen Quinn, of the Carmelites, is continuing with the monthly Mass on the second Sunday, at 7 pm, for the intercession of Sr Clare for special intentions, and the next will be celebrated in Termonbacca on Sunday, May 10, and broadcast again via Facebook and YouTube.

Relieved that the cemeteries have now been re-opened, Sr Clare's sisters said that it had brought great comfort to them, and many others who have loved ones buried in the City Cemetery,

when Bishop Donal went there on Easter Sunday morning and blessed the graves.

Looking forward to being able to gather with others for the Rosary Prayer Group on Monday nights, like before Covid-19, Shauna added: "When the restrictions are lifted, we are going to go ahead with the Rosary we had planned to pray at the Brandywell Grotto and the candlelight procession to Termonbacca for her monthly Mass".



*Echoing sentiments of parishioners for the ministry of their priests in parishes across the Diocese and beyond, Greencastle parishioner, Maria Bradley expresses...*

## Appreciation of unwavering support of Fr Eddie

AS we watched the news unfold about the Coronavirus in other countries, little did we know about the drastic effects it would have here, in Ireland, and the stringent measures which would have to be adapted to try and stop it spreading.

We are very blessed here in Greencastle, Co Tyrone, to have the unwavering support of our parish priest, Fr Eddie Gallagher, who promised his parishioners that he would endeavour to meet the pastoral needs of his parish no matter what happened.

It came as a great shock when it was announced that Mass would no longer be allowed to be celebrated in our churches; added to that were all the restrictions regarding the traditions associated with wakes and funerals.

Worse news was to follow when it was announced that not only our churches, but our graveyards were to close. Visiting the Church to light a candle and/or visiting the grave of a loved one had been a great source of consolation to grieving families, but even that was to be taken away. I could see the pain etched in Fr Eddie's face as he relayed this information to his parishioners via social media.

Life, as we knew it, was going to change big time for the foreseeable future and there was nothing we could do about it. The realisation that we were living in unprecedented times really hit home! However, Fr Eddie was not to be phased by these announcements and immediately set in motion his plan of action, the first of which was to broadcast Mass live from the Oratory of the Parochial House. For all our

parishioners and especially for those in isolation, this was a great blessing.

As the days went by, it was heartening to see the numbers of those joining the online services increasing. It soon became apparent that in the absence of our 'normal' Masses that we were connected more than ever by our 'virtual' online Masses. It was evident that Fr Eddie was reaching far and wide as messages began to flood in from abroad on social media, thanking him for the great effort he was making in spreading the Word of God at this very difficult time.

One of the highlights for the sick and housebound is Fr Eddie's pastoral visit on the First Friday of the month. As this was no longer possible, he decided to keep in touch by chatting and praying over the 'phone with those he would normally visit. His calls are now as eagerly awaited as his visits, and are a source of great comfort and consolation to all involved.

Fr Eddie made a special effort to engage with all our young people, especially our Year Four and Year Seven pupils who should have been receiving the Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. This was done through a series of Penitential Services at Easter and a beautiful Confirmation Service on Sunday. It was, indeed, very different from what had been planned but it was a platform for the families involved as well as for the whole community to reflect and pray for our young people, and to let them know they weren't forgotten about. They are very important and are the future for carrying on

the faith in our parish.

In the absence of a 'normal' daily routine, Fr Eddie decided to do a solitary Parish Rosary Walk, choosing different routes for each evening and praying for the intentions of everyone as well as for an end to this Pandemic. This was a huge success and he was greeted by parishioners who came to pray and sing at various points en route. There was always the wee surprise to lighten the mood such as the 'Pope Mobile', in Broughderg. Fr Eddie had his picture taken in it but assures us that he continued his walk on foot! I think that we will remember him, among other things, as our very own 'Rosary Priest'.

He is now on a different walk, 'A Walk through Scripture', reflecting on The Acts of The Apostles. This is proving to be enlightening not only for our students studying RE for examinations, but for all of us. Hopefully, it will encourage us to become more familiar with our Bibles and display them in a more prominent place in our homes.

Fr Eddie has left no stone unturned in trying to make life as normal as possible in these difficult times. We have our daily Mass, Rosary and also Eucharistic Adoration on Wednesday evenings. All the liturgies are enhanced by his beautiful singing. Young and old, the sick and housebound, are all catered for.

The re-opening of our graveyards is perhaps a light at the end of a very dark tunnel and, hopefully, a sign that things will return to normal in the not too distant future. On behalf of the parishioners of Greencastle and Broughderg, I would like to

express my thanks for everything that Fr Eddie has done since being appointed to our parish, and commend him for how he has dealt with the surreal challenges presented by the Coronavirus. We will forever remember his dedication to his parishioners, and we ask God to guide him and give him the grace and strength he needs to continue in his ministry.



Fr Eddie



*From virtual to Hi-Vis, Greencastle parish priest, Fr Eddie Gallagher writes about...*

## Ministry in lockdown

"THE new normal"..."We live in strange times"..."Virtual Church"..."meeting remotely". From Pope to president, priest to politician, in fact for everyone, these phrases have become our everyday existence. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, Bishop Donal encouraged the priests of the diocese to somehow remain visible. Priests across the diocese have been innovative in making this possible; discovering hidden gifts and talents, and also by using tried and tested centuries old methods of spreading the Good News.

Here in the Parish of Greencastle, parishioners have been mourning the temporary loss of access to their churches and cemeteries, and the postponements of Baptisms, Confirmations, First Communions and Weddings, as well as the regular rhythms of church and parish life. However, they have been comforted by the knowledge that they are not alone or forgotten. If we have learned anything from this crisis it is, in

those well known words of John Donne, "No man is an island". We need each other, and that is all the more true in a very rural location like Greencastle, where isolation can easily happen.

Over these past few weeks, we have managed to keep the tapestry of parish together with the help of our digital outreach of daily Mass, Angelus, Rosary and other devotions on Facebook Live, which are later available on archive on the parish website. The parish newsletter is now available on Facebook, the website and in printed form in the local shop, in Greencastle, and Post Office, in Broughderg.

The postponed Confirmation and cancelled Penitential Services were marked with special Facebook Live events. The congregations have still gathered, not in church, but in these times around 'phones, tablets and smart televisions and, despite our physical absence from each other, our praying in this way has brought us all, priest and people, closer together in prayerful solidarity.

In the weeks before and after Easter, I embarked on nine 'Rosary Walks' around different districts, which brought people of all ages to their windows, doors, laneways and roadsides, to pray the rosary together for the physical, spiritual and temporal wellbeing of the parish and for their family members scattered across the world. Nine evenings, 50 miles walking and countless prayers lifted up to God seeking his help and guidance through this period of time we will never forget.

What of the future? No one knows but surely, at the very least, as a church and parish we can go forward from these Covid-19 days to days where Christ comes first, where we respect life, our own and others, born and unborn, young and old, man and woman. May we continue what we have started, ministering to each other and living out our baptismal call in the family, parish, diocese and on what Pope Francis calls, Mother Earth. Wouldn't that make for a powerful 'new normal'?

*Photographs continued from p12*



*Steelstown and Culmore faith formation coordinator, Julia Fitzgerald reflects on...*

# Parish life in lockdown



Julia Fitzgerald, Faith Formation coordinator for Steelstown and Culmore

HIYA! I'm Julia, and I'm the Faith Formation coordinator for the parishes of Steelstown and Culmore, in Derry. Lockdown life means that my office has been relocated to my spare bedroom over the mountain in South Derry, and I find myself - like everyone else - daily navigating this new temporary normal and trying to find ways to stay connected with my church family.

Social distancing seems to have really reinforced how much even the most introverted of us desire to be in communion and relationship with others. Certainly, for us over in Culmore and Steelstown parishes, our focus has been on how we can continue to be in community with one another: praying and celebrating together, and how we can support that Domestic Church that exists in our homes.

It has been a constant

learning curve and technology is not always on our side, with sometimes the webcam having a mind of its own! This is ok. I think one of the things that we have let go of in all of this, is the need for polished articles. God delights in all our efforts...even when the sound goes wrong, the picture is blurry or the feed doesn't quite appear.

It has been down to some fearless parish volunteers, willing to enter the digital world and the dodgy WIFI, and a lot of understanding and good will from the parish communities that we continue to grow and learn.

One of our limitations has been that neither Culmore nor Steelstown had webcams installed going into this, but this has turned into a huge blessing. It is a joy to join daily Mass on Facebook and be able to dialogue (through the comments box) with the others who are gathering to take part in Eucharist. It has helped many of us to have an enhanced sense of community and it gives you a real sense of the gathered Church.

In Culmore and Steelstown, we have mainly been using the platforms of Facebook and Zoom. We have daily Mass on our Facebook pages - Our Lady of Lourdes, Steelstown and Thornhill Chapel, Culmore. In the build up to Holy Week, we prepared our homes and hearts with Palms for our doors, like many others around the diocese.

One of our parishioners, who

does the flowers in both chapels, created videos to help us make our palms and Easter gardens. The week before Holy Week, we had a mystery parish guest lead us in an evening reflection daily, and during Holy Week we had night prayer live on Facebook at 10 pm, from five different homes at the same time. On Good Friday, young people from across the Diocese came together to lead us in reflection and prayers around the Cross - a truly moving moment of prayer.

In Culmore, many of our families from the parish and beyond gather in their own homes each night as one of our Culmore families leads us in the Rosary. It has been a great source of comfort and community. People, in particular, look forward to the great wee videos - after we pray - from various members of the community, giving messages of love and support.

The schools in our community are doing amazing work, and it has been great to see all the brilliant work our children are doing from home. They have made sacred spaces and sent so many pictures of all the work they are doing, as well as completing challenges in the run up to Holy week.

With so much available online and on the TV to help nourish our faith, we are looking for ways moving forward that we can allow people to have conversation as well as observation.

On Wednesday, April 29,



Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Steelstown, where Fr John McDevitt PP and parishioners look forward to gathering again as a community

we started our Lectio Online programme, which is open to everyone and is really easy to join.

One of the things this social distancing has created is a greater sense of unity with the wider Church. It's been a joy to pray with people from across the diocese, country and world. The weekly prayer gives time for a group call, with reflection and conversation on the Sunday scripture and concluding with prayer, lasting just an hour, from 11.30am-12.30 pm. If anyone would like to join the weekly prayer group, you can message me at [Julia.fitzgerald@derrydiocese.org](mailto:Julia.fitzgerald@derrydiocese.org). We'd love to see you there.

We are also gathering (again online) with families - and those interested in the conversation - on Wednesday evening, to look at what we can put in place to support our families

as the Domestic Church at the moment and into the future.

As we navigate new terrain, the joys are definitely in the interactions and in the times we gather together from our homes to celebrate God's story in our lives. We will continue to explore new ideas...maybe even a community quiz night online;

brave technology...even when it doesn't always cooperate; and share in the gifts being offered from around the diocese and beyond, because God is good and present in so much that is happening in these times and being Church together is central to who we are and what we are called to be.



## Online prayer an important link with parish community

*by Fr Colum Clerkin, PP Culmore*

MAY is the month of Mary, a month traditionally associated with devotion to Our Lady, and especially with the daily recitation of the Rosary. In his Letter addressed to the whole Church for May 2020, Pope Francis encourages us "to rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home, either as individuals or as a family", assuring us that he, himself, will be praying in spiritual union with all of us "in this time of trial".

In Culmore Parish, people are invited to join us on Facebook for Mass each morning, and there has been a very encouraging response. People

see it as an important link with the parish community, as well as a welcome routine in an otherwise long day at home.

Normally, the Rosary is recited in Thornhill Church before our weekday Masses by a small, dedicated parish group, but now this has been replaced with a 'virtual Rosary' each evening, led by Michelle Burns in our parish.

Michelle has been approved as an 'essential worker' because she is the only parishioner who attends Mass in Thornhill every single day and records it for transmission on our Parish Facebook.

She also leads the Rosary

from her home, along with her family, every evening, again through the medium of Facebook. What had been for years the daily Burns family Rosary has now become a community Rosary, which has sometimes attracted over 2,000 people in a single day. It certainly meets a genuine spiritual need at this "time of trial".

"I commend Michelle for this unique parish initiative, which is surely an unforeseen blessing during this present pandemic.

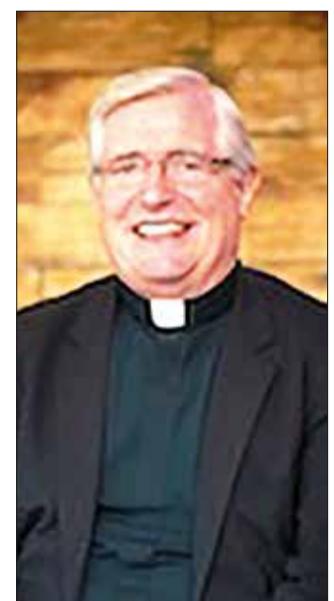
"Our parish Liturgy Group, in association with Julia Fitzgerald, who is the Faith

Formation coordinator in Culmore and Steelstown parishes, are also providing online prayer programmes, including Lectio Divina, for use under the present circumstances, with the restrictions in place since St Patrick's Day.

In his Letter to mark the Month of Mary, Pope Francis has included a prayer which he suggests could be recited by us at the end of the Rosary each day in May 2020...

be the oldest prayer to Mary the Mother of God, and there is evidence that it has been recited by Christians as early as the year 215, especially in times of trial and persecution. We can see why it is strongly recommended by Pope Francis to end the Rosary each day in May 2020...

*We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God;  
despise not our petitions in our necessities,  
but deliver us always from all dangers,  
O glorious and blessed Virgin.  
Amen.*



Fr Colum Clerkin, PP Culmore.

Maghera Pastoral Council reports on Parish Lenten reflection...

# The importance of faith, hope and love

'As Catholics – The importance of faith, hope, love' was the title and theme for a Lenten Reflection held in St Mary's Church, Maghera, on the second Sunday of Lent, which was led by Fr John Walsh OP, Prior of the Dominican Order, and hosted by Fr Paddy Doherty PP and Fr Kieran O'Doherty.

Fr Walsh had travelled to Maghera from St Saviour's Priory, in Dublin, after celebrating Sunday Mass and returned to his parish following the conclusion of a memorable Lenten preparation in our St Mary's Church. We thank Fr Walsh for undertaking the journey and sharing his sermons.

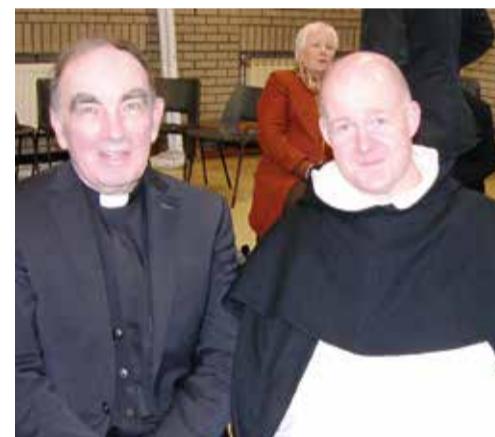
We can now reflect on the depth of faith conveyed to us by Fr John's first talk, which was followed by Confession during a Holy Hour. Following an enjoyable break for

refreshments in the nearby Fairhill Youth Club, Fr John's second talk led into a Lenten Healing Service and Benediction.

This lovely Lenten Reflection is especially memorable for us in Maghera now, because of what we experienced a short time after - the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings of 100 people, which led on to the sudden and unimaginable closure of churches.

We now cling to the Gospel via the webcam and occasionally stumble if there is a technical delay in accessing morning Mass in our parish church, which is St Patrick's, Glen.

We thank all the priests in the Derry Diocese for the prayers and Mass via webcam.



## Generous hearts needed to witness to power of Good Shepherd's love

CELEBRATING Good Shepherd Sunday in the still empty St Eugene's Cathedral, Bishop Donal had this message for those who were listening in online, as he reflected on the need to want more than just getting buildings open again – "We have to be yearning for the day when parishioners can hear the shepherd's voice and gather in the sheepfold to celebrate Christ's love and mercy".

Remarking that the image of the Good Shepherd was "a powerful image and inspiring for ministry in Jesus' name", he went on to point out that Good Shepherd Sunday, traditionally known also as 'Vocation's Sunday', was "much more than a recruitment drive for clergy and religious".

Referring to how "the generosity of health workers and others has inspired communities", Bishop Donal said: "Young people will similarly be encouraged to dream of doing something heroically

great with their lives when they see parish communities and clergy that inspire them".

"Despite many bland and frail cultural role models," he added, "many young still yearn for inspiration and challenge. Jesus is still calling generous hearts to seek their deepest joy in nourishing others and not just in self-indulgence.

"The world will not be renewed by a philosophy that looks after number one. Sport and music can numb the pain but not free the heart to soar. Retail therapy does more for the economy than it does for the addicted shopper.

"We can glimpse God's dream in those who want to serve the common good and who resist a world of self-service for the strong. Jesus has inspired people in every generation to look after the little ones".

He continued: "Jesus says that life to the full comes from giving of yourself and not merely getting

for yourself. The generous Good Shepherd wants to offer protection and pasture for the flock. They are the reason for his existence".

Expressing the hope that "generous service of many parishes will inspire a new generation of crazy followers of Jesus, whether to work in parishes or to live in consecrated communities", Bishop Donal noted that "generous families will inspire generous young people" and "self-sacrificing church personnel will inspire new heroes".

"A Church with a Good Shepherd heart will inspire people," he said, "to do the right thing even when that involves mockery and incomprehension. The Lamb of God is prepared to sacrifice his life for the flock, to heal us through his wounds, knowing that Resurrection is guaranteed for those who give all in the service of divine love."

He continued: "We older clergy are not merely calling young

people to fill our shoes but to walk in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.

"As ever, the powerful Word of God can continue to fire and inspire down through the centuries. As Church, we must be open to the God who strips away much of our self-identity and remakes us in his image and likeness. That may be uncomfortable - but the Good Shepherd can see the big picture".

"As we prepare to celebrate Pentecost in four weeks, can we use this month of May to be inspired by Mary's generosity and the grace of her Son, and get ready to be thrown out on Pentecost to witness to the power of the Good Shepherd's love?" asked Bishop Donal, before concluding: "That would be a powerful way to prepare for the unknown new challenges that face us and our society. And we needn't worry for the Good Shepherd knows what lies ahead".

## Parishioners praise their 'unsung heroes'

PARISHIONERS in the parishes of Cappagh, Omagh and Ardstraw East have asked 'The Net' to give "a big shout out of thanks" to their priests.

Hailing them "unsung heroes", the parishioners have expressed deep appreciation for the ministry of their priests in difficult circumstances.

"They went all out to bring us beautiful Easter Masses in our



EASTER 2020 - We thank & pray for all our priests who brought the Holy Triduum to our homes - *Surrexit Christus spes mea*

## Ár nDúchas

### Laoi na mBuaidheann

(The song, or incantation, of the victories)

Make your home, Christ, in my heart,  
O Lord, Son of Mary.  
Come every Saturday, my Brother,  
and settle in my heart.

Don't head off at will  
as others are inclined to do.  
Son of God, come every Sunday  
and make your home in my heart.

On Monday, in the very same place,  
guiding star of our souls,  
make your home, Christ, in my heart,  
King of heaven and earth.

Every Tuesday until the day I die —  
meagre and arid all my achievements —  
fill my heart with your will,  
Heir of the heavenly Father.

On Wednesday, holy God,  
when we have been completely redeemed,  
until Christ pays the dues of war,  
come and sleep in my heart.

On Thursday, fresh Son of Mary,  
save us by your own love.  
Come into my heart, Healer of the World,  
Judge of Adam's Clan.

Come into my heart on Friday,  
holy Friend, Son of Mary,  
healing herb of every soul,  
helping hand of the world.

# Christ, healer of the world, Make your home in my heart



The Irish page of The Net, headed simply Eangach, always has a yellow sidebar on the left, in which you can find traditional Irish prayers and poems. This month, May 2020, the yellow sidebar contains an unusual text, called Laoi na mBuann. Those who have visited the Donegal Gaeltacht over the years will remember it in the older spelling as Laoi na mBuaidheann. It is both a poem and a prayer. The word Laoi means Song, or Incantation, and the people of the Rosses on the west coast of Donegal revered Laoi na mBuaidheann as a miraculous prayer for God's protection in time of disaster or emergency.

Most emergencies on the rocky shores of the Rosses arose from the Atlantic Ocean. Niall Ó Dónaill, in his book, *Na Glúnta Rosannacha* (The Rosses Generations), has the lovely statement: 'Níl scaradh ag scéal na Rosann leis an Fharráige Atlantach' — The story of the Rosses is inextricably linked to the Atlantic Ocean. The tradition was that when the local fishermen were at sea and were caught in a sudden storm, the wives and mothers would gather on the shore and recite Laoi na mBuaidheann to implore God's mercy and the safe return of the boatmen. They didn't need a book to read from, as they would all have known the

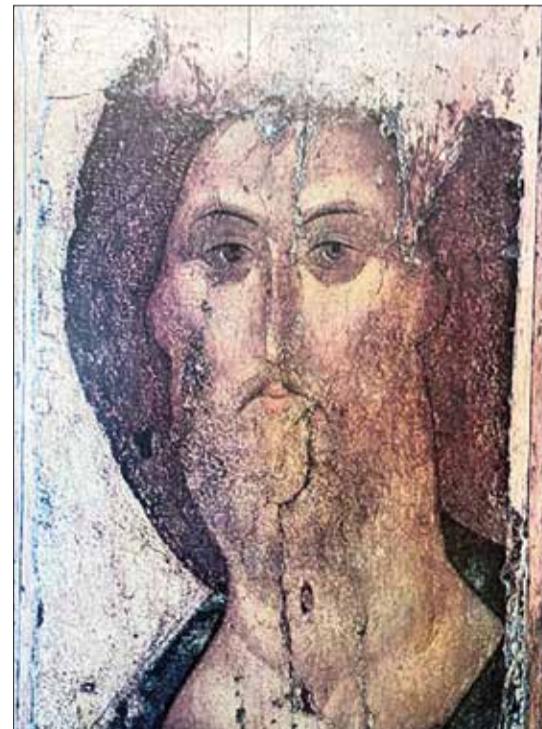
text by heart. It was said that if you succeeded in reciting Laoi na mBuaidheann from beginning to end without stumbling, you could be sure the men would return safely.

It seemed appropriate to include Laoi na mBuaidheann in this month's The Net, as the emergency of Covid19 seems to echo the threat of the dark stormy waters of the Atlantic. A few years ago we all learned a new word: tsunami,

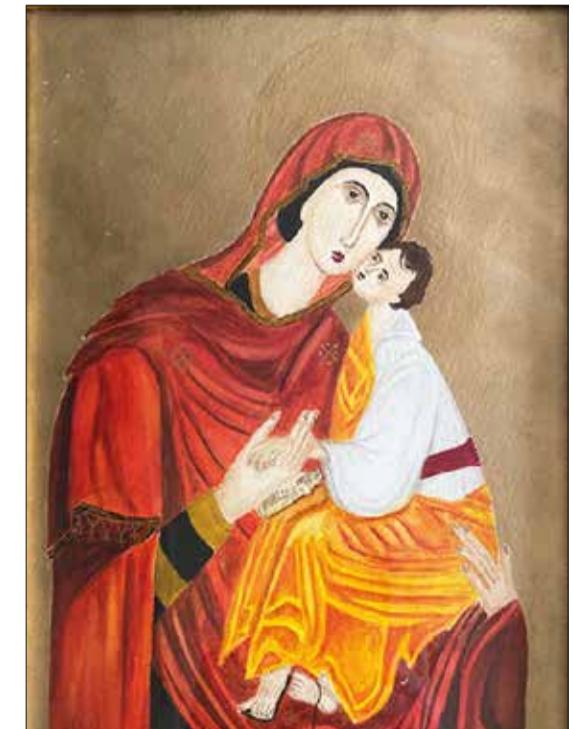
for an overwhelming tidal wave resulting from an underwater volcanic eruption. In the Irish tradition there is reference to 'the three great waves of Ireland': Tonn Chlóna, off the coast of Cork; Tonn Tuaithe, at the mouth of the river Bann, off Derry and Antrim; and Tonn Ruairí, off Dundrum Bay in County Down. A lovely positive turnaround of the idea of the threatening waters is found in the description of Our Lady in one manuscript as 'Tonn Chlóna na

Trócaire' — the tsunami of mercy.

The verses of Laoi na mBuaidheann follow the days of the week, starting, strangely enough, with Saturday. Some of the phrases seem particularly appropriate for our present situation. Jesus is addressed as: A Lia na Cruinne — O Healer of the World, and as: A luibh Leighis gach anama — O healing herb of every soul.



The Saviour of Svenigorod



Our Lady of Tenderness

## The irish folklore commission: The schools project

In the years immediately before the Second World War, someone in the Irish Folklore Commission in Dublin had an inspiration: they sent thousands of exercise books out to the schools all over Ireland, asking that the children collect stories and traditions in their locality, and record them in the exercise books. The schools, the children, their parents, and especially their grandparents, responded enthusiastically: they filled thousands of the exercise books, and these were returned, collated, and catalogued. Nowadays they are accessible at [dúchas.ie](http://dúchas.ie).

The little school in Rannafast in West Donegal returned a rich crop of stories and traditions — in Irish, of course. The school is catalogued as Rann na Feirsde (with a d), and we're told the Principal was Pádraig Ó Baoighill.

One of the wonderful stories that is recorded in the Rannafast notebooks is the story of Laoi na mBuaidheann: the Song or the Incantation of the Victories.

# Eangach

## Ár nDúchas

### Laoi na mBuann

Cónaigh, a Chríost, i mo chroí,  
a Choimdhé, a Mhic Mhuire.

Gach Satharn tar, a Bhráthair,  
agus áitigh i mo chroí.

Ná déan siúl na saoire  
do nós na ndaoine eile.  
A Mhic Dé, tar gach Domhnach,  
agus cónaigh i mo chroí.

Dé Luain san áit chéanna,  
a réalt eoil ár n-anmann.  
Cónaigh, 'Chríost, i mo chroí,  
a Rí neimhe agus talmhan.

Gach aon Mháirt go lá m'éaga—  
Tearc tur-dhéanta a ndearna—  
líon mo chroí de Do thoil,  
a Oidhre an Athar neamhdha.

Dé Céadaoin, a Dha naofa,  
d'éis ár saortha ar oile,  
go n-íoca Críost an cogadh,  
tar a chodladh i mo chroí.

Déardaoin, a úrMhic Mhuire,  
saor sinne le do ghrása.  
Tar i mo chroí, a Lia na Cruinne,  
a Bhréithimh Chlainne Ádhmha.

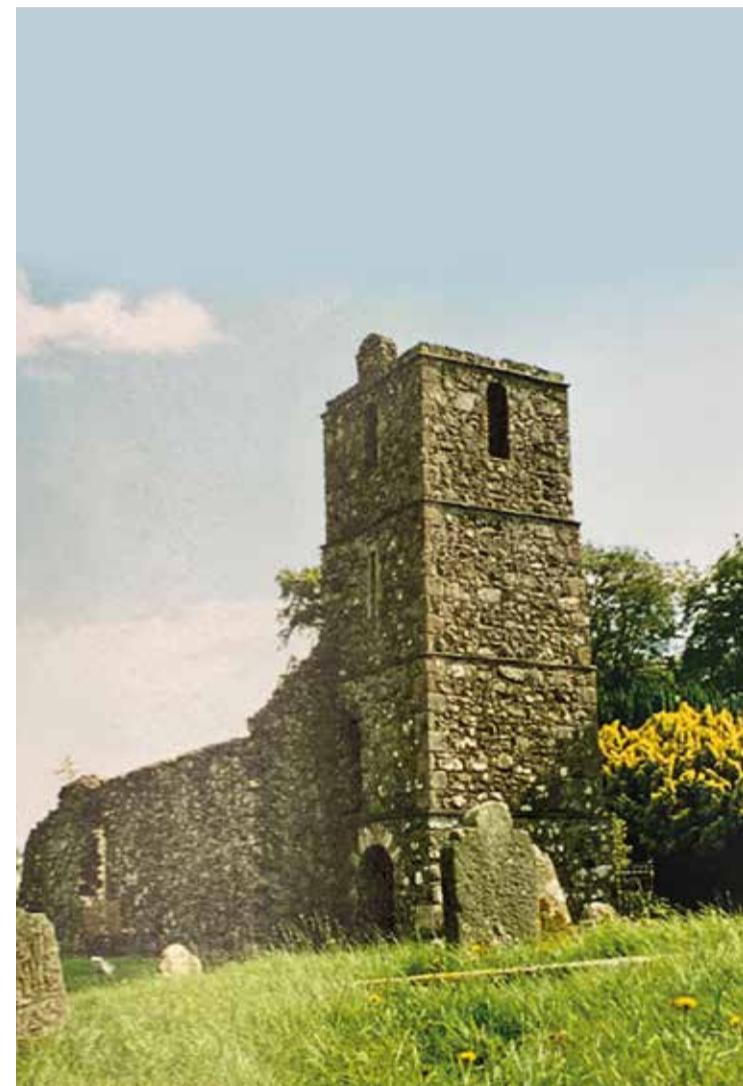
Tar i mo chroí Dé hAoine,  
a Naomhchara, 'Mhic Mhuire,  
a luibh leighis gach anama,  
a lámh chabhartha na cruinne.

## Críost Mhachaire Rátha

Iocón atá i gCros Mhachaire Rátha: bunaithe ar an Scriptúr, agus ar shoisceal Eoin go háirithe. I scéal an Chéasta ag Eoin, agus i gCros Mhachaire Rátha, ní chuirtear Íosa os ár gcomhair mar fhíor aonaránach, thréigthe. Is cuid thábhachtach de scéal an Chéasta é sin chomh maith, agus cuirtear béim ar leith air i soiscéal Mharcais. Ach san iocón Éireannach seo, a d'fhás as scéal na Páise i soiscéal Eoin, tá Íosa ina fhíor ríoga, ardaithe i nglóir, agus beo i measc a phobail. Anseo tá an bhéim ar an ghaol idir Íosa agus a dheisceabail. Céasadh eaglaisiúil é seo: léirítear breith na hEaglaise ó nóiméad bhás Chríost—nóiméad a shoilsíonn a ghlóir agus bronndadh an Spioraid.

Tá saibhreas i gcúlra Chros Mhachaire Rátha. Tá ceithre aingeal os cionn láimha Chríost, a chuireann saol ósnádúrtha in iúl, saol na bhFlaitheas. Tá Críost ar an chros suite mar bheadh droichead ann idir an saol fisiciúil agus an saol spioradálta, idir an saol thall agus an saol abhus. Aontaítear iad ar dhóigh eile leis an chiorcal

Tá smacht agus íogaireacht i gCros Mhachaire Rátha; tá neart agus fuinneamh sna línte agus sna cruthanna, ins an dóigh a gcruthaíonn gach fíor ionad do na fíoracha eile. Oibríonn na línte



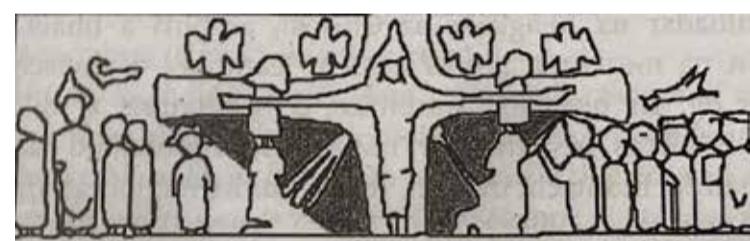
Eaglais Naoimh Luraigh

agus na cruthanna go léir le chéile  
le tábhacht íomhá Chríost a chur  
chun tosaigh, agus é ina shuí go  
ríoga i lár a dheisceabal. Thig linn

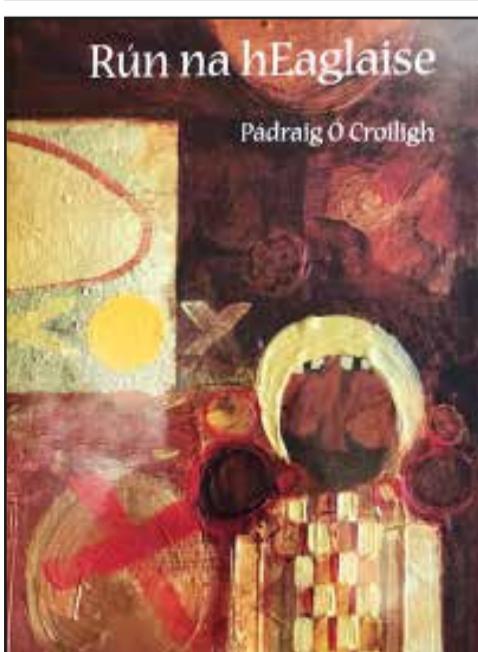
go léir ionad a aimsiú dúinn féin  
mar dheisceabail sa chomhluadar  
chéanna, ag neartú chreideamh a  
chéile.



Cros Mhachaire Rátha



Leagan amach Chros Mhachaire Rátha



## Iontas an Aifrinn: Críost Linn

Sa Chomaoineach, braithimid iontas Chríost i láthair ionainn. Sin an cúlra atá leis an fhógra ag deireadh an Aifrinn: tá an tAifreann thart. Imigí faoi shíocháin. Iarrtar orainn dul amach leis an iontas sin, go bhfuil Críost beo go fóill. Tabhair leat amach é isteach i do shaol féin agus i saol do phobail. Mar, ar ndóigh, ní bhíonn an tAifreann thart choíche. Maireann sé, agus caithfimid é a thabhairt linn agus a scaipeadh.

Maireann láithreacht Chríost san abhlann fosta agus é sa

taibearnacal, agus ba chóir dúinn cuairt a thabhairt air agus a bheith ag comhrá leis. Fanann sé linn le go mbeimid in ann a bheith leis. Tá dualgas orainn Dia a adhradh in Íosa Críost. Caithfimid áit agus am a aimsiú le go mbeimid in ann é sin a dhéanamh mar is ceart. Ní fearr áit ná os comhair na haltóra, i láthair an té a théann thar am isteach i ngach gné dár saol, agus a thuigeann gach comhthéacs dár ghníomhartha. Biodh ciúnas thart orainn corrúair, agus cuimhne an Aifrinn, mar ní fuilleach an Aifrinn atá sa taibearnacal ach toradh an Aifrinn agus láithreacht

réadúil an té a shlánaigh an domhan trína pháis, trína bhás agus trína aiséirí.

Cuirtear béim faoi leith ar an láithreacht seo nuair a bhíonn Beannachtna Naomhshacraiminte againn. Ní rud sean-fhaiseanta é seo a thig amach as ré atá imithe agus cailte faoi dheannach agus faoi dhusta na n-aoiseanna agus i bhfolach faoi dheatach na túise. Is searmanas tábhachtach é a bheir seans dúinn adhradh a thabhairt do Dia in Íosa Críost, agus a bheith umhal ina láthair fad a shíneann Íosa Críost amach

inár dtreo agus a bheannacht a bhronnadh orainn. Thig leis a bheith gairid, ní thig leis a bheith fada, ag brath ar mhéid na hurnaí a dhéanaimid, ach bíonn sé i gcónai machnamhach agus uasal, agus cuireann sé spiorad na humhláiochta ag borradh inár gcroíthe agus muid ina láthair. Tá ócáidí mar seo de dhíth le muid a chur ag smaoineamh ar iontas an Aifrinn agus ar mhaorgacht Chríost a fhanann linn idir na hAifrinn uile.

(Buiochas le Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta.)

# Bellaghy blessed with amazing music ministry

by Mgr Andy Dolan

AT the outset, I must say that we, in the parish of Bellaghy, are very blessed with a strong Music Ministry.

For as long as anyone can remember, we have had an adult choir who have faithfully stayed the course and continue to enhance our Liturgical celebrations, under the leadership of Laurence Diamond.

In more recent years, a youth choir has been formed and, under the direction of Sean Scullion and Cathy McErlean, has made a tremendous input into Sunday Mass and at other times, including the 'Night of Hope'.

St Joseph's Ballyscullion has its own choir over many years, too. We are grateful to those who have led at different times and, currently, Sean Scullion has taken on the responsibility.

There are others who, from time to time, lend a hand especially at funerals, Month Mind Masses, weddings and where a gap needs to be filled. They are recognised and appreciated as being important within our parish Music Ministry.

The choir about which I have been asked to write few words is our Folk Group. Having the various choirs and others available takes the pressure off any one group and offers a lovely variety as well.

Our Folk Group came into being around 1996. Some of the present members were performing at an event for Seamus Heaney, in Bellaghy, shortly after I had come to the parish. I extended an invitation to them to come

and sing at Mass on a Sunday morning. They immediately struck me as a very talented group of young people, and what they might have to offer at Mass would certainly enhance our liturgy, and surely did.

Kevin Jordan is a name which will be ever associated with St Mary's Folk Group. Kevin, who came to live in the parish, was a member of the Down and Connor Diocesan Folk Group and he led the Bellaghy Folk Group for about 12 years. He was so talented and inspirational, and brought everyone to a different level in their understanding of appropriate liturgical music.

The contribution to Taizé Prayer around the Cross on Good Friday was special. I had wondered how this would go down, when I saw so many older people along with the other age groups present. To put it simply, everyone just loved it; the setting, the atmosphere, the music/song was a whole new spiritual experience and has been a feature in this parish since 2001.

However, Kevin's health was failing, some people had moved away through studies, work and other reasons, hence regular contributions were not possible. I cannot readily recall the timeline, but I know that by 2012 there was a move to get things moving again and Kevin was delighted with that. However, sadly, he died in November 2012.

The Down and Connor Folk Group came to sing at Kevin's funeral Mass and his wife,



Bellaghy Folk Group when they presented Charis with the proceeds of the sale of their CD

Mairead asked the members of St Mary's Folk Group to join with them. That event was to stir the Group to honour Kevin's memory and commit to be the best they could be. I can say that they have delivered big time. Their commitment involves serious practising, attending weekend workshops and always on the lookout for new and inspirational material.

Reflecting on folk groups in general, it is something which is hard to sustain; you need good leaders, which is true of any choir. It is difficult, too, as a lot of folk group members are quite young and have studies and careers which need attending. We saw the same with this group in the early days. Thankfully, they came back again and were able to regroup.

They were back and settled as young adults, which has given continuity, and are able

to assimilate new members as time goes by. I admire their commitment and am so grateful to their contribution to the life of faith in our parish.

What brought about the idea of this article was a recording done by the Group for Easter, this year, in the absence of any choir. I am not well up on the technical side of things but hopefully what I say gives you an insight into the variety of talent which exists within these people.

The Folk Choir recorded a CD last year, called 'Faith, Hope and Love', which raised £1,740 from sales for Charis, and they used some of the songs from this for the Easter ceremonies, by recording them onto a mobile phone via a recorder app. Lead guitarist with the choir, Jonny Armstrong took care of the technical process, connecting the mobile to his sound mixer, which in turn was

connected to a speaker playing into the chapel mic.

As well as including two individual keyboard instrumental pieces - 'Stay Here' played by Marie-Claire Mackle, and 'Behold the wood of the Cross' played by Bronagh Curry, which were also recorded via the recorder app, Jonny came up with the idea of recording the whole choir singing remotely, 'My Soul is Sad'.

This involved Jonny recording his guitar part before sending it to Bronagh via WhatsApp, who then recorded base vocals on another phone using the app and sent this back for Jonny to sync with his guitar recording. He then sent this recording, via WhatsApp, to the rest of the choir members, who recorded their individual vocals/instrumentals and returned the recording to Jonny, who then mixed all the separate vocals/instrumentals together, using his

recording equipment to adjust timing and volume. The finished recording was then sent back to Bronagh for inclusion in the playlist for the Easter ceremonies, with the amazing result of their efforts heard by the many who tuned in for the Holy Thursday and Good Friday ceremonies.

I introduced this piece referring to our various choirs and, if I dare use the word, harmony exists among all involved. Many different events in the parish have called on all to work together and that is a most powerful witness. It is not about competition or about performing. To be involved in music ministry is about giving praise and glory to God and we are blessed in this regard. Those who know me, and are familiar with my singing, can only be surprised that I would be so privileged to have such talent around me!

## Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the faithful for the month of May 2020



Pope Francis praying the Rosary.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The month of May is approaching, a time when the People of God express with particular intensity their love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is traditional in this month to pray the Rosary at home within the family. The restrictions of the pandemic have made us come to appreciate all the more this "family" aspect, also from a spiritual point of view.

For this reason, I want to encourage everyone to rediscover the beauty of praying the Rosary at home in the month of May. This can be done either as a group or individually; you can decide according to your own

situations, making the most of both opportunities. The key to doing this is always simplicity, and it is easy also on the internet to find good models of prayers to follow.

I am also providing two prayers to Our Lady that you can recite at the end of the Rosary, and that I myself will pray in the month of May, in spiritual union with all of you. I include them with this letter so that they are available to everyone.

Dear brothers and sisters, contemplating the face of Christ with the heart of Mary our Mother will make us even more united as a spiritual family and will help us overcome this time of trial. I keep all of you in my prayers, especially those suffering most greatly, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. I thank you, and with great affection I send you my blessing.

Rome, Saint John Lateran,  
25 April 2020  
Feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist,  
FRANCIS

### First Prayer

O Mary, You shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick, who, at the foot of the cross, were united with Jesus' suffering, and persevered in your faith.

"Protectress of the Roman people", you know our needs, and we know that you will provide, so that, as at Cana in Galilee, joy and celebration may return after this time of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the will of the Father and to do what Jesus tells us. For He took upon Himself our suffering, and burdened Himself with our sorrows to bring us, through the cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God;  
Do not despise our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from every danger, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin.

### Second Prayer

"We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God".

In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana,

so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.

Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health.

Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.

Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus. Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.

Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

Beloved Mother, help us realise that we are all members of one great family and to recognise the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.

Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.

To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.

# Fatima - more relevant than ever

by Fr Noel McDermott, PP Faughanvale

THIS month marks the 103rd anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima to the three shepherd children - Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia. Since 1917, millions upon millions have travelled there to hear the message of Fatima, to be touched by God's grace in that holy place, and to be renewed in their faith or converted anew to it. Fatima has been rightly described as the altar of the world.

Our Lady's call for prayer, especially the daily recitation of the Rosary, penance and conversion, remains thoroughly relevant and possibly even more relevant today than it was in 1917.

But above all, it is her assurance that in the end her Immaculate Heart will triumph that gives devotees of Fatima encouragement and hope in today's climate of unbelief and despair.

The message of Fatima does not add anything to the message and ministry of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is final, complete and definitive until Jesus returns at the

end of time, but gives us a means to follow Him and an effective way to put His Gospel into action in the particular circumstances of our daily lives.

If a pilgrimage to Fatima does not inspire us to be ever more devoted to Jesus Christ and committed to practising our faith in our own home and our own parish, then the pilgrimage has not been successful. This is simply because Our Lady's mission and message is always to point us to Jesus her Son, her Saviour and our Saviour.

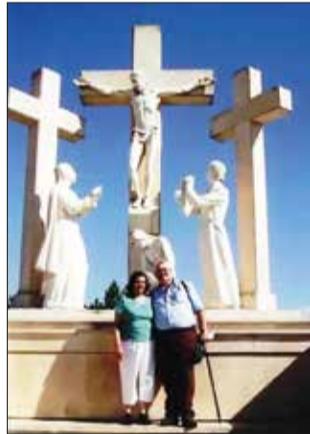
Our Lady's message has never changed since the day at Cana when she told the servants to "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

Perhaps the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (from his theological commentary on the third secret of Fatima, June 2000) explaining the expression of Our Lady, that her "Immaculate Heart will triumph", sums up the Fatima message best of all: "The

contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of every kind. The fiat of Mary, the word of her heart, has changed the history of the world, because it brought the Saviour into the world - because thanks to her Yes, God could become man in our world and remain so for all time. The Evil One has power in this world, as we see and experience continually; he has power because our freedom continually lets us be led away from God. But since God himself took a human heart and has thus steered human freedom toward what is good, the freedom to choose evil no longer has the last word. From that time forth, the word that prevails is this: 'In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33)

"The message of Fatima invites us to trust in this promise".

*Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us.*



Fatima 9-7-2004

Faughanvale Parish Fatima Pilgrimage 2004



Faughanvale Parish Fatima Pilgrimage 2019



## The Fatima Prayer

*O Virgin of Fatima, Mother of Mercy, Queen of heaven and earth, refuge of sinners, we consecrate ourselves to your Immaculate Heart. To you we consecrate our hearts, our souls, our families and all that we have.*

*And in order that this consecration may be truly effective and lasting, we renew today the promises of our Baptism and Confirmation; and we undertake to live as good Christians, faithful to God, the Church and the Holy Father.*

*We desire to pray the Rosary, partake in the Holy Eucharist and work for the conversion of sinners. Furthermore, we promise, O most Holy Virgin, that we will zealously spread devotion to you, so that through our consecration to your Immaculate Heart and through your own intercession the coming of the Kingdom of Christ in the world may be hastened. Amen.*

# “None of us are safe until all of us are safe”

by Caoimhe de Barra, CEO Trócaire



Caoimhe de Barra, CEO Trócaire.

TODAY, as the world joins together to battle the Coronavirus, we are reminded how connected we are. We are one human family who share God's earth together. We have the same hopes. Today, we face the same fear.

But this fear can be overcome by us acting together, in solidarity and in love.

In the weeks ahead, as we face the Coronavirus in our own communities, Trócaire's teams will face it in some of the poorest communities in the world. They will face it in conflict zones where people live together in crowded camps. They will face it in communities already ravaged with hunger. These are places with little healthcare and few resources; places sadly ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.

Trócaire's Lent activities may have been cancelled but we still rely massively on the support

Poor countries are vulnerable at multiple levels:

there may not be a functioning state to warn people how to protect themselves; many do not have the systems to detect the virus; most do not have a functioning health service to respond to a mass outbreak of illness.

Poverty also makes individuals more vulnerable. If you are living through a drought in somewhere like Malawi or Kenya, you may only be eating once a day. You may have HIV or be malnourished. Your immune system is going to be compromised.

We are told how hand

washing is one of the best protections against COVID-19, but three-quarters of sub-Saharan Africa's 645 million people don't have the facilities at home to wash their hands with soap and water. People have said they are being advised to wash their hands and they ask – “With what?”

The other key protection is social distancing. In conflict-affected countries, people are often living together in very crowded camps where the virus could take hold very easily. A staggering 84% of refugees are living in developing countries. How do you stop a virus taking hold in a refugee camp? The reality is that refugees are often living in overcrowded camps that are starved of resources. So, even accessing enough detergent and clean water to keep people healthy in normal times is a huge challenge.

Trying to contain the spread of the virus in the countries where Trócaire supports people is going to be a mammoth task for our teams in the weeks and months ahead. The number of cases in Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories has been growing day by day, followed by further recent cases in Gaza and Syria – areas which are already suffering from conflict. Elsewhere, in Central America, Guatemala and Honduras are in lockdown. In Africa, cases have been reported in countries including Kenya,

Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, DR Congo, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe, where Trócaire has ongoing programmes.

Trócaire has experience combating disease outbreaks and we can help to tackle this pandemic.

During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-15, our teams in Sierra Leone delivered vital services to affected communities, helping to save thousands of lives. Today, we continue to counter the spread of Ebola in DR Congo, where over 2,200 people have died from the disease in the last 18 months. We are winning the fight against Ebola and we can win this new fight against COVID-19.

What makes COVID-19 different to other response work is that it is not isolated to one region or country. When Ebola struck West Africa, the world could mobilise in response. Were Coronavirus to spread across the entire African continent – and at a time when Europe and America are struggling to contain their own crises – African countries will have to rely only on their own scarce resources.

Elders and Church leaders have an important role to play. Governments and international organisations are not always trusted. When Ebola struck, rumours spread that governments and international aid agencies were to blame. In some cases, medics were attacked. That is

why engaging with community elders and Church leaders is so important. They have the trust of the people. Failing to engage them has very serious consequences – if they are not informed of the facts, they can spread the wrong information.

Agencies such as Trócaire will respond to the Coronavirus crisis while also trying to maintain other life-saving programmes. The virus also presents challenges to our work in Ireland. Organisations around Ireland are trying to deal with this risk in a sensible and appropriate way. Trócaire is no different.

We cancelled all staff travel and all face-to-face events here in Ireland planned around our annual Lenten campaign. This will impact our crucial fundraising, but the most important thing today is stopping the spread of this virus and protecting each other.

This crisis has highlighted how interconnected our world and our lives are. The global community is rallying together. The people who are least able to fight the virus are going to be the hardest hit. In the weeks and months ahead, we must be prepared to stand with people who are largely defenceless against the threat they face.

May we, as children of the light, continue to express solidarity with the work Trócaire and others are doing in the developing world at this time of unprecedented crisis. Let us show our love for each other and for mothers and families around the world, who face conflict, poverty and disease. As Dr Mike Ryan, of the World Health Organisation recently said, 'None of us are safe until all of us are safe'.

**You can support Trócaire's work at [trocaire.org](http://trocaire.org)**



Twal Umande (48) and Bahati Imulali (20) accessing Trócaire water points to prevent the spread of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (Photograph by Garry Walsh)

## Internet transmission of services

### a big hit in Ardstraw East

by Pastoral Forum

THERE is no history of liturgical broadcasting in the Parish of Ardstraw East. However, the lockdown by the Covid-19 pandemic has brought a cyber dimension to every parish. The creative thinking of Newtownstewart's Pastoral Forum has resulted in live-streaming of the liturgy via the parish Facebook page.

The government's prohibition on congregational attendance took hold in this diocese on Wednesday, March 18. In preparation, the first experiment of live-streaming from St Eugene's Church at Glenock took place the previous day, for the Mass of St Patrick.

This internet transmission proved such a big hit with housebound parishioners and the parish diaspora that the streaming has continued.

Of course, there were teething problems, but the impromptu visit of a Catholic broadcaster provided some valuable advice.

The inventive cameraman, Martin Kerrigan, adapted a trolley into a mobile tripod in order to film the Stations of the Cross for Good Friday. He also invested in a gimbal, a hand-held pivoted support that allows the rotation of the camera around a single axis.

The lectors, Ashlene Canning and Shauneen Kilpatrick, adhere faithfully to the two



*Celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday, Bishop Donal spoke of the need for witness, saying...*

# Only mercy will drive us to rebuild life-giving communities of faith



CELEBRATING the Feast of Divine Mercy in St Mary's Church, Creggan, which houses a beautiful Divine Mercy Chapel, Bishop Donal told those listening to the three o'clock ceremony, via the church webcam, that the message of Divine Mercy was desperately needed today.

Noting that it was almost 100 years ago now that Sr Faustina had spoken of Divine Mercy "into a sore and hurting Europe after the First World War", Bishop Donal said that, while she may have used a language that some people in 2020 find unusual, "we need to know the abundance of divine mercy, so that we can bear witness to it in our century".

"Only mercy," he stated, "will see us through this crisis. Only mercy will drive us to re-build life-giving communities of faith".

Highlighting that Jesus had died and rose "to bring God's healing mercy to a hurting and often angry world", Bishop Donal remarked that it was not surprising Pope John Paul II had established the Second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday.

"Sin is not a popular concept nowadays," stated the Bishop, adding: "It is portrayed as part of an old judgemental way of looking at life. People, it is said, should be free to make their own decisions and not to be judged.

And yet, while I reject anyone who questions the rightness of my decisions, on the other hand, there appears to be a strong urge to condemn others".

throw at others or with which to gash ourselves".

"Many people," he added, "find it hard to believe in the creativity of God which makes our lives beautiful, no matter how ugly they may have been. That is the maturing process that Divine Mercy wants to enable in each of us and in our communities".

Stating that new life is possible, the bishop went on to point out that we cannot, however, "simply draw a line" under the past and the terrible things that people did to one another: "Only the truth can set us free. But the truth has to be sought by hearts that are open to be touched by grace and not just by a hunger for victory or a fear of embarrassment. Dishonest narratives about the past will have to be sacrificed. That will involve personal 'Calvaries'. Some people are not prepared for that.

"And there is a huge need for mercy with our own Church circles. We too have been affected by the shrill tone of political discourse. There are discordant voices about what went wrong in the recent or distant past. If, like the early Jerusalem Church, we are to face the future with Christian communities that inspire our contemporaries to love Jesus, then we have to be the first to be open to healing and divine mercy. If we have not sought that mercy, then we cannot talk about it. If all we can do is blame someone else and burn bridges, then we have not really encountered the Risen Jesus and allowed him to say, 'Peace be with you'. We have to be the first to bear witness to the healing power of God's mercy. Otherwise, we cannot blame our society for not daring to believe that a shared forgiving future is possible".

Speaking of the joy that comes from knowing Divine Mercy, he said: "Where anger and resentment dominate, we are all diminished and isolated in the tomb of the past. Where mercy and forgiveness dominate, we can dare to dream God's dreams for us as a human race and specifically as a Church. As Jesus showed with the empty tomb, He seeks to nourish our hearts on new life in the breaking of bread in his name, and not on the stale bread of old angers".

Turning to the words of Thomas to Jesus, "My Lord and My God", Bishop Donal prayed that God "will use us, too, as channels of His peace".

Divine Mercy ceremonies were celebrated in other areas of the Diocese as well, including St Columb's Church, Waterside, St Mary's Church, Ardmore, and St Patrick's Church, Claudy.



Divine Mercy Sunday in St Mary's Church, Creggan.



Divine Mercy Sunday in St Patrick's Church, Claudy.

## Divine Mercy quotes... From the Diary of St Faustina

"I remind you, My daughter, that as often as you hear the clock strike the third hour, immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it; invoke its omnipotence for the whole world, and particularly for poor sinners; for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul. In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking; it was the hour of grace for the whole world – mercy triumphed over justice." (Diary, 1572)

"At three o'clock, implore My mercy, especially for sinners; and, if only for a brief moment, immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in My abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy for the whole world. I will allow you to enter into My mortal sorrow. In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion..." (Diary, 1320)

"All those souls who will glorify My mercy and spread its worship, encouraging others to trust in My mercy, will not experience terror at the hour of death. My mercy will shield them in that final battle..." (Diary, 1540)

"My daughter, do not tire of proclaiming My mercy. In this way you will refresh this Heart of Mine, which burns with a flame of pity for sinners. Tell my priests that hardened sinners will repent on hearing their words when they speak about My unfathomable mercy, about the compassion I have for them in My Heart. To the priests who proclaim and extol My mercy, I will give wondrous power; I will anoint their words and touch the hearts of those to whom they will speak." (Diary, 1521)

"My daughter, tell souls that I am giving them My mercy as a defense. I Myself am fighting for them and am bearing the just anger of My Father." (Diary 1516)

"Souls who spread the honour of My mercy I shield through their entire lives as a tender mother her infant, and at the hour of death I will not be a Judge for them, but the Merciful Saviour. At that last hour, a soul has nothing with which to defend itself except My mercy. Happy is the soul that during its lifetime immersed itself in the Fountain of Mercy, because justice will have no hold on it." (Diary, 1075)

## Derry couple enjoy golden years after Marriage Encounter enrichment



Madeline and Tom McCully on their wedding day.

AT a time when more couples have been feeling the strain of the Covid-19 lockdown on their marriage and family life, Derry couple, Madeline and Tom McCully have shared how their experience on a Catholic Marriage Encounter weekend over 40 years ago helps them greatly to keep their relationship vibrant after 50 years of marriage.

The couple celebrated their Golden Jubilee last July with family and friends. As well as being blessed with two daughters and a foster family, they delight in their three grandchildren, aged nine, seven and three years old. These days they have to be content with a wave from them at a distance as they walk to the park near their Pennyburn home.

Aware of the greater pressures for young couples and families now, Madeline and Tom also feel blessed to have had their marriage enriched through doing the Marriage Encounter weekend seven years into their married life.

Madeline recalled still being at school when she first met Tom: "He was a student at St Joseph's College, in Belfast, at the time, and I was at Thornhill College. We met at my friend's 18th birthday party. I was asked to sing a song and was nervous, so Tom joined in with me, singing harmony. We still enjoy singing together. He plays the guitar and I have an autoharp."

Both teachers, early in their married life, they went on a Teacher Exchange year to Berkeley, in California.

"Tom was teaching in the High

School and I was working in the university there," explained Madeline, adding: "My cousin, who was a doctor and doing his residency in Los Angeles, rang to tell us that he and his wife had just been on a wonderful weekend, and invited us to go on one. It was a Marriage Enrichment Weekend presented by the Marriage Encounter Movement.

"We couldn't find out any information in our local area until we saw an advertisement in our church bulletin about one of the weekends. After finding out more information about it, we decided to go on the weekend and it was the highlight of our lives. We were seven years happily married, keen travellers and didn't have any children. We had a good life, but I can honestly say that that weekend was the best investment in our marriage.

"That was in June 1977 – 43 years ago, and we are still as enthusiastic about Marriage Encounter now as we were then. You can begin to take each other for granted a bit when you are married for a while, and we found it a wonderful way of awakening all the hopes and dreams that we had had when we got married".

Highlighting that Marriage

Encounter believes that marriage should be a deep source of joy and vitality, Madeline explained that when couples come on a weekend, which is presented by three couples and a priest, it is a very private experience.

She continued: "They don't share

with anyone else, just each other. There is a presentation and they have a time to reflect individually on that. They meet in their own room and talk about what they reflected on in relation to their marriage. From this, couples learn a way of communication that is without blame or judgement. It is about learning listening skills and being empathetic with each other.

"It's a case of not reacting

to feelings but responding to

each other. They look at how to

communicate better and each

spouse looks at how they are as

a person and how are they as a

couple. Later on the weekend,

they look at their relationship with

God, with the Church, and with

the community, and, at the close

of the weekend Mass, they renew

their marriage vows. This is very

meaningful to each couple."

"On a Marriage Encounter/

Enrichment weekend, couples

experience the full richness

that there is in their marriage,"

continued Madeline, saying: "It

is a very positive weekend. It

is for couples who are in stable

relationships. It is not for couples

in need of counselling or who

have very divisive issues. They

don't need to have a fantastic

relationship, as not many couples

have that, but be committed to

each other.

"The weekend is for enriching

what they already have. It is an

opportunity to enjoy quality time

away from distractions like work

and children. It gives the couple

time to sit down together and

talk about themselves, as in most

marriages couples do not have

time to do that.

There is just a very warm, relaxed atmosphere, in which couples can sit and discuss their hopes and fears in private in their own room."

Madeline and Tom had been so appreciative of their Marriage Encounter Weekend experience that when they mentioned that they were returning to Ireland,

they were asked if they would be happy to get involved in promoting and presenting the weekends there, as it was just getting started in their homeland. The first weekend in Ireland was held in Dublin a few years beforehand, with the help of Fr Bill White who had experienced it in America.

"We said that we would," recalled Madeline, "and we went for a training weekend and when we came back from California, we presented our first weekend in the Rosapenna Hotel, in Donegal."

### May anniversary

May marks the 47th anniversary of Marriage Encounter in Ireland. The international movement was started by Spanish priest, Fr Gabriel Calvo, in Barcelona, who saw the opportunity for married couples to enrich their marriage by better communication and subsequently enrich family life. A Jesuit priest, Fr Chuck Gallagher had the wider vision of a worldwide movement. Now Worldwide Marriage Encounter is in over 90 countries, with more than 2.5 million couples having attended weekends since the first

one in 1962.

Madeline and Tom are now the national leaders, along with Fr Sean Coyle, of the Columban Fathers in Dalgan, for Worldwide Marriage Encounter Ireland. Three times a year, they attend a European Conference.

"For the most part the conference is focused on relationship formation, as we can always learn more and more about relationships," said Madeline, adding: "We couldn't hold the last one because of Covid-19 but the work that would have been done at that has been sent to us and we have been sharing that via Zoom, email and WhatsApp. Normally, when we come back from the European Conference we have a meeting of the National Board, and the participants in that, from all different areas of Ireland go back to their communities and share".

She went on to explain: "There is a worldwide leadership team and one leadership team in each of the continents. We are part of the European Continent, with other countries such as France, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Croatia and Russia.

When we used to pray at Mass for the conversion of Russia, never did we think that they would have Marriage Encounter there".

Madeline and Tom were amongst the presenting couples who brought the marriage enrichment programme to Nigeria and Scandinavia, while another Derry man, Philip Friel and his wife, Tricia introduced it to Cameroon.

Commenting on this, Madeline said: "Cardinal Arinze of Nigeria was in Dublin and was invited to a Marriage Encounter Convention. He approached the organisers and said, 'We must have this', so Tom and I were one of the couples invited to go to train couples and present Marriage Encounter there. Other Irish couples went to Kenya and South Africa also. It is now very strong all over Africa."

She added: "Marriage issues are pretty much the same the world over. Cultures are different but issues in marriage are the same. Couples do not always talk at a deeper level with each other. They will have conversations about their home, family, friends, jobs,

etc, but they don't often have time to actually talk at a deep level about how they feel about other things in their lives such as health, finances, intimacy, leisure time, and family.

"One of the things you will find that most wives say is that, after a while, the romance becomes less in their marriage when daily life gets busier...and that is the same the world over".

Noting that around 400-500 couples have experienced the marriage enrichment weekend since Marriage Encounter first began in the Derry Diocese, Madeline said: "There was a great surge in the 1980s and mid 90s. It is much more difficult now to get younger couples to come on the weekend, as husbands and wives both work. For most couples, the weekend is the precious time that they have with their children. Yet most couples who come on a weekend will say that the first to benefit from it is the family."

In the north of Ireland, the weekends are mostly held in Dromantine Retreat Centre, but couples can also choose to attend a weekend organised in other parts of Ireland, such as Killarney, Cork and Dublin.

With regards cost, Madeline said that, while they don't receive funding from any outside body, they strive to keep within the financial reach of couples: "The cost to Marriage Encounter of a weekend is £420 per couple but, at the end of the weekend, couples are given a blank envelop and they put in what they can afford. This means that we can ask any couple to go on a weekend regardless of their financial situation. The initial booking fee is £80 per couple and, after that, it is whatever they can afford.

"We generally hope for about 10 couples on a weekend. Some cannot afford to pay the whole cost but there are other couples who can, and it always works out. We have never had to cancel a weekend because of a lack of finances. We always manage to get by. And if a couple can't afford the initial booking fee, we can always try to find a way around that. We don't want money to be an issue for any couple who would like to be involved in Marriage Encounter.

"We would say to couples that if



Madeline and Tom's 50th wedding anniversary cake.

they can't afford to pay the whole cost at the time of their weekend, maybe they can contribute at some time in the future, if they find that they can. Some couples get so much from their weekend that they make regular donations. If there's any money left over after a weekend some will go into a fund in Europe to help finance couples going to present weekends in places like Africa, South America and Siberia. As the presenting couples are all volunteers, they are not asked to pay either, otherwise only well-off couples could present weekends.

"Some couples feel that they have received so much from their weekend that they want to invite other couples to go on the weekend, like my cousin did with us, and in some instances they may even pay for other couples to go."

#### Important

She added: "For us in Marriage Encounter, the most important people are the couples who have not yet made a weekend. There is so much there to offer. The modern world shows us consumerism, materialism, status etc, are the important things, but we try to show that relationship is more important. I think we are finding that out during this pandemic. People are rallying to help each other; friendship and neighbourliness is being shown on all sides."

The message of our weekend is that the couple and family relationship is most important. So, the weekend is really 'couple time' and afterwards we try to encourage couples to have couple and family time at the centre, and they begin to see that once the couple relationship is good everything else falls into place."

After their weekend, couples are encouraged to meet up with other couples, and Madeline and Tom have been meeting with a group in the Derry area for about 15 years, while other groups they know of have been meeting for some 35 years.

"Every so often, we used to hold Family days during the summer,

in places like Portrush or in the Dominican Convent grounds in Portstewart," recalled Madeline, adding: "We would have had the whole family along and the older members would look after the younger ones, while the parents took some time to share with other couples, and that's something we would love to do again."

Noting that they were finding more and more couples who had come to their original weekend 10 or more years ago, are returning to make another weekend, Madeline said: "Things change in their families...like a child going to school, to university or getting married, changing jobs, losing jobs, or the couple have retired or are facing illness, so their lives change over time. The experience of doing the weekend 10 years ago is different from that 10 years later.

"This was something that surprised us at first, but we welcome couples coming back. They know what the weekend is about and they are not nervous, as some couples coming on their first weekend might be since they are not sure what to expect. Couples who have been on the weekend before have found it to be very enjoyable time out, and so look forward to the experience."

She added: "We try to run about six original weekends a year and a deeper enrichment weekend for those couples that would like to go a bit deeper. There were about 18 couples on the last one of these that we had."

"Quite often, we would find that if it has been three or four years since their original weekend, couples have received so much from the first weekend that they like to experience a deeper level. For this, we would encourage couples to get into a small group with other couples after their weekend and we have different enrichment evenings that they can experience with each other. It's good for them to have an opportunity to meet other couples. It is a way in which couples can help each other to have a deeper experience".

Couples from these groups

can go on to present weekends," explained Madeline, "and while there are presenting couples in every diocese, we do not run at a Diocesan level yet but we hope that that will happen.

"The weekend isn't just for couples but for priests too, to enrich their relationship with their parishioners in their community. Priests need to be good listeners maybe more so than other people. A lot of things that we experience on the weekend, the priest will talk about in terms of his priesthood.

"We currently don't have a priest involved in Marriage Encounter in the Derry Diocese. Fr Stephen Kearney and the late Fr Kieran Devlin, and many other priests and even bishops were involved in the past. Due to the shortage of priests it is much harder now to get a Diocesan priest available to come on a weekend, which is a pity because the priest on the weekend benefits from the experience. The priests that we have now are from Orders such as the Dominicans, Columbans and Redemptorists".

Pointing out that they could always do with more presenting couples, Madeline continued: "Tom and I still present weekends as we feel that it is really important not to lose touch with where we started. A priest once told us that it was important for us to do this; to be a witness to life-long marriage, as it is getting rarer to get couples who are married more than 30 years, never mind 50 or 60.

"We have found, on weekends, so many of the couples telling us that we are saying something that is very important for them to hear. Once you have written a presentation, it is not going to be the same five years on, as your life will have changed. So, you have to look at how life changes as well.

"I would call it one of the greatest privileges to be able to present a weekend. The couples who present make the same weekend as those who come on it. They take time for reflection as well, so each time it is a renewal for them".

Saying that they keep in touch with couples after their Marriage Encounter weekends, Madeline



National Marriage Encounter Team, Madeline and Tom McCully, and Fr Sean Coyle, Columban Father.

added: "We have a new website now, [www.marriageencounter.ie](http://www.marriageencounter.ie), and have information on there we feel will be of interest to couples.

Movement also presents Engaged Encounter Weekends, which is marriage preparation to enable couples to enter into marriage with very good communication skills, so that they will be good listeners and good at affirming each other, and know what marriage is about.

"We are trying to build up a group in each area, so that couples who want to meet with others do not have to travel far, however, some couples do not want to meet locally and want to meet with groups in a different area. We offer options and they can make their own decision regarding that".

The Marriage Encounter

couples on an Engaged Encounter weekend. This programme for engaged couples can also be run one night a week, over five weeks.

**Notices for upcoming Marriage Encounter weekends are sent to the Diocesan Office for promotion via Diocesan and parish communications platforms. For updates and further information see the website - <https://www.marriageencounter.ie/>**

## Couple comments...

**"After the Weekend, we became even closer and understood each other better instead of second guessing".**

**"Our marriage was good enough before the Weekend, however, after the Weekend it was great, just like it was when we were married years earlier".**

**"Marriage Encounter gave us the opportunity to experience the deepest, most intimate exchange of feelings we had known in 20 years".**

**"The Weekend brought romance back into our relationship and now we have a spring in our step and a sparkle in our eyes".**

**"The weekend and the dialogue technique prepared us for handling many difficult moments in our family life, where we so frequently needed to connect and reconnect with each other."**

**"The Weekend taught us to face some issues that we had been avoiding and allowed us to go deeper into conversations that we never had before. It brought us closer together".**

**"We would highly recommend any married couple to take part in this Weekend. It will transform your lives, it transformed ours".**

**"We discovered the meaning of the 'vocation of love' and the impact we have as a couple on our children".**



Madeline and Tom share a love of singing.

## ACCORD offering free support line

ACCORD, the Catholic Marriage Care Service which offers a professional counselling service throughout Ireland, has a free and confidential 'Relationships Support Phone Line' for marriages, families and relationships, offering support to those

experiencing extra pressure due to social restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Accord NI can be contacted on 028 9568 0151 or 00353 1531 3331**

# Holy Family teacher's faith deepened following visit to Our Lady's House



DELMA Boggs is a member of the Holy Family PS community in the Ballymagroarty Parish, in Derry, and, like many other teachers in schools around the Diocese and beyond, she is doing her bit to keep pupils encouraged and engaged not only in their home-schooling, but also in regards to their well-being.

The primary one teacher, who lives in Woodbrook, loves walking and capturing the beauty she feels blessed to see and enjoy on camera, to share with others on social media, such as Twitter.

These days, she is grateful to be able to go walking and do all that she is able to do, having been brought back from the brink of death after falling seriously ill with pneumonia in the run-up to Christmas 2018.

Sharing her experience with 'The Net', the mother of three recalled how, within the course of a week, she had ended up on a ventilator and her family told that she had 20 minutes to live!

"I had felt like I had the flu," recalled Delma, "but when I went to the out-of-hours I was told that it was just a heavy cold. However, a couple of days later I got worse and rang our principal, Garry, to say that I was sick. I went to the doctor and was sent straight to Altnagelvin Hospital.

"Initially, I was responding to the treatment, but five days later I suddenly went into respiratory failure and my husband, Colm was sent for. I was on full life-support for a week and was brought off it on December 29."

Putting her recovery down to the intercession of Our Lady, and sipping some of the Holy Water she had brought home from one of her many visits to Mary's House in Ephesus, Delma said: "I have a great devotion to Mary and every year I go to Turkey on holiday, and always go to the House of the Virgin Mary and bring home some Holy Water from the font there. I had some with me in the hospital. Before I was put on the ventilator, I asked if I could have a drink and was told 'no', but I had a little sip of the Holy Water anyway!"

"I was taken off life support on December 29 and by December 31, my daughter's 21st birthday, I had made good progress. Every day I had a sip of the Holy Water and every day I got stronger. So much so that when Garry, our principal, came to visit me, on January 4, he couldn't believe how well I looked just a few days after coming off full ventilation. I was very alert and got home on January 5.

"My respiratory consultant,

Dr Martin Kelly didn't say it was a miraculous recovery, but he said that he couldn't believe the progress I had made. Within a few days of not being able to walk, I was up, dressed and walking. It was a rapid recovery."

She added: "There were three other patients on the ward with me and they told me that every hour they could see a difference in me, and ended up asking me for some of the Holy Water too! One of them was a Catholic woman in her 90s who had a flu, another was in her late 40s and the third was a woman in her late 60s who was waiting for an operation. She had a problem with her chest and was supposed to be in hospital long-term before she got the operation.

"The day I was being discharged they asked me for some of the Holy Water. They wanted to know what they should do with it and, because they don't bless themselves, I just told them to sprinkle it around them.

"The doctors then came on their rounds and I left the ward for a bit. When I came back, the doctors were away and the woman in her 60s said that whatever was in the water I had given her was miraculous. The doctors had just told her that she could go home until it was time for her operation in Belfast. About half an hour later, I was waiting for my lift to come and another doctor came to tell her that Belfast was going to send a surgeon to Altnagelvin to do her operation!"

Delma said that she discovered afterwards that as well as her husband and children, Aaron, Eimear and Connor, her mother, Philomena, and sisters, Justine and Claudine, many others had been praying for her, including her friends, the staff of Holy Family PS, and Holy Family parish priest, Fr Paddy O'Kane, who visited her as well.

She added: "Up until August 31, that year, I had been the Northern Ireland president of the NASUWT, and Justin McCamphill kept all the members I had worked with informed about my health situation, and asked them to pray. Chris Keates, the general secretary of the Union in England, had sent out word to members across the UK too, and they were all praying for me. I am also on the Board of

Governors at St Mary's College and St Columb's College, and they were praying for me too, as were the members of Derry Credit Union, which I am a director of".

Delma progressed slowly, but surely, after getting out of hospital because she still had pneumonia in her system. Walking a little each day to build up her strength, she returned to school on June 25, last year.

"I still have scarring on my right lung and have some pain, but nothing too bad. The scarring will get less as time goes on", she remarked, adding that she is back walking now after self-isolating for a few weeks.

## Photography

Having a love of photography, she has managed to take some great snaps during her walks, including those of red squirrels that she came upon while walking in woodland just across the border in Muff, and which she has shared on Twitter.

"My son is working in E&I, at Burnfoot, as an apprentice, and the shifts there have changed because of the virus, and sometimes I leave him at work and then have a wee walk and take some photographs," she said, adding: "I have been to Inch Island and Lisnagra Woods, in Muff, and just as I was getting out of the car, at the woods, two red squirrels appeared. It was amazing. It was like they were playing hide and seek in the tree in front of me, and one them was hanging upside down."

Delma loves sharing the beauty of nature through her photography with others, especially the children she teaches; seeing it as an important part of their nurturing. And she has a great love for teaching too.

Qualifying with a degree in Primary Education from Ulster University, Coleraine, she began her career subbing for three years in a number of different schools, including Belmont House Special School, the Model PS and Holy Child PS.

Securing a permanent teaching position in Holy Family PS in May 1990, Delma noted: "This is my 30th year in Holy Family, where I am head of Special Needs. I have a passion for working in Special Needs and set up a nurturing unit in Holy Family in 2004, which was

the year my father, Alan died. I'm not in the unit now but it is still going from strength to strength.

"In September 2015, I went back into teaching P1 and then was offered a secondment by CCMS, and became acting principal at St Brigid's PS, in Mountfield, Omagh. I worked there for six months and then came back to Holy Family PS in September 2016, as a P1 teacher".

She had also been given the position as the Northern Ireland officer of NASUWT, and from September 2017 until August 31, 2018, she was the NI NASUWT president. During that period, she was the first person from Northern Ireland to win NASUWT National Communication Awards across 280,000 members.

Having also won different SENCO awards with Holy Family PS, Delma remarked: "We have a big focus on Special Needs in Holy Family, and in 2010, 2013, and 2017, we were awarded the British Dyslexic Association's 'Dyslexia Friendly School' Quality Award. It is a very hard award to get and we are going for it again."

For her part in the success of the Nurture project and the BDA Dyslexic Friendly Schools Project, Delma won the Local Woman Magazine 'Derry Woman of the Year' in 2014.

She had been hoping to go to Turkey on holiday this year again, to spend more time at Our Lady's House, but she is resigned to living with the memories of last summer for another while, with Covid-19 having turned the world upside down.

"I already had our accommodation booked for this summer, but I don't think I will risk it because of the scarring on my lung," she sighed.

Recalling her first holiday in Turkey with her husband and two youngest children, after a friend had recommended the beach resort town of Kusadasi, Delma said: "I had never heard of it and when I did some research, I discovered that the house of the Virgin Mary and the ruins of the ancient city of Ephesus were not far away from it, so I made a note to visit there.

"I couldn't believe it that, on my first visit to Our Lady's house, I met Pat Ramsey! It was the first

time I had met him and us both from Derry!"

Commenting on her experience, she added: "I loved it. There was just something really special about the place that I wanted to return to it someday, and I have, every year from 2011. I would be a very contented person but the peace I feel at Our Lady's house is different; it's like a deep inner peace.

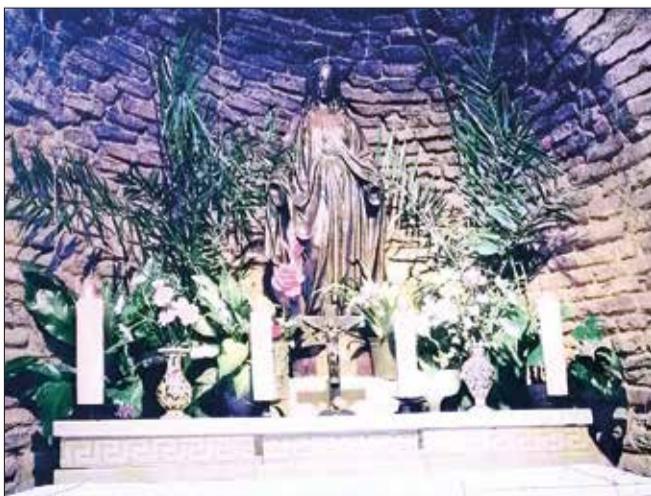
"It is about a 30-minute drive from where we stay during our holiday in Turkey every year. Over the years, I have been asked to do readings at Mass at Our Lady's House, and take up the collection, as I am a familiar face there now. It's lovely.

"Before this, with regards to my faith, I would have said my prayers and went to Mass, but I wouldn't have thought too much deeper about my faith. As a teacher, I would teach the young people their prayers and about being the best person that they can be. So, when I first went to visit Mary's house in Ephesus, I was just going to see it out of interest, but it drew me completely in and I just love going back there.

"Now, people give me petitions to take over with me. I usually get about 30 petitions each time and I put them up on the petition wall when I get there. It's a 40 foot long, eight foot high wall, and there are thousands of petitions attached to it. People have come back to me to say that their petition was answered".

"I have embraced my faith more now as a result of my experience at Our Lady's house," remarked Delma, saying: "I feel blessed to be able to go there and love talking about it to others. I also take some of the Holy Water from the well there back for people who are sick. I have given it to about eight people who had either cancer or pneumonia, and each time there has been a positive outcome. There is healing power in it.

"When I was ill, I didn't know if I would be able to travel again because of my lung, so as I improved I couldn't wait to get back to Our Lady's House to pray and give thanks. I just know Mary interceded for me, and the Holy Water and all the prayers that were said helped me recover as well and as quickly as I did".



*Fr Gerard Mongan, St Brigid's Carnhill, reflects on the last recorded words of Our Lady in Scripture...*

# “Do whatever He tells you”

THE last recorded words of our Blessed Mother in the New Testament have quite significance and a profound meaning. Those words are found in the Gospel of John, when she spoke at the ‘Wedding Feast at Cana’. Mary, ever attentive to the needs of others, notices that the wedding couple has run out of wine. She goes to Jesus to let Him know. Then she says her final words in scripture, to the servants at the wedding, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5). Those beautiful words could serve as a meditation for our prayer for the rest of our lives.

Mary’s command, “Do whatever he tells you”, has a profound impact on the servants who have to really trust Jesus in a completely radical way. Jesus tells them to take the six stone jars for the Jewish rites of purification, fill them up with water, and draw some out to present to the steward of the feast.

**“**Representing the faithful of Israel, Mary invites the servants, the disciples, and all of us to run after our Bridegroom’s desires, ardently seeking to fulfil whatever He wants of us.

**”**

As St John explains in the Gospel, these stone jars would have been used for ritual washings of hands (and possibly feet). Astonishingly, Jesus tells the servants to fill up these very jars with water and then present them to the ‘Head Waiter’ to serve as drink for the guests. We can just imagine the servants’ reaction! Is this man crazy? How on earth is serving water to the guests going to solve the problem?

As Edward Sri states: “From a human perspective, Jesus’ plan does not make any sense. Yet first and foremost, Jesus is asking the servants not to understand His plan, but to trust Him. We may not always grasp Jesus’ work in our lives. We may not see clearly where the Lord is leading us.” (Edward P Sri, *Knowing Mary through the Bible: Mary’s Last Words*, [catholiceducation.org](http://catholiceducation.org)).

Yet, as John Paul II reminded us in his general audience on February 26, 1997, Mary’s command, “Do whatever he tells you”, challenges us to trust Him without hesitation not only when it makes sense to us, but “especially when one does not understand

the meaning or benefit of what Christ asks.”

Those servants are inspired to have tremendous faith through Mary’s words, “Do whatever he tells you”. In fact, St John, in his Gospel, highlights how the servants promptly follow the command of Jesus, no matter how unrealistic they appear to be. They respond as faithful disciples to Christ’s two orders. First, He tells them, “Fill the jars with water.” John’s Gospel immediately points out that the servants not only obeyed Christ’s command, but did so perfectly: “And they filled them up to the brim” (Jn. 2:7). Second, Jesus tells them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast,” and John’s Gospel notes, “they took it” (Jn 2:8). St John clearly emphasises that the servants did exactly as they were told. They did exactly what Our Lady told them, “Do whatever he tells you.” In turn, they are portrayed as faithful disciples, obedient to Christ’s words.

However, we can see that there’s more going on in this passage than the servants’ trustful obedience to Christ’s commands. Again, commenting on this passage, Edward Sri asserts that Mary’s words, “Do whatever he tells you”, are “also spoken in the context of a wine miracle and a wedding feast”.

He continues: “Jesus is revealed as the messianic Bridegroom coming to renew His marriage covenant with His bride, Israel. In the first century, Jews were longing for their Messiah to come and for their divine bridegroom to heal and restore their marriage covenant of love, just as Hosea had foretold (Hos. 2:19-20). That Jesus chose to have His first miracle provide an abundance of wine in the context of a wedding feast is intentional. It signals that the messianic Bridegroom has finally arrived to usher in the great feast and reunite Himself to His bride, the fallen people of Israel” (*Ibid*).

And, we see how Mary represents Israel in this account, echoing Israel’s loving response to Yahweh when the covenant was

first established at Mount Sinai: “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do” (Ex. 24:3, 7). By saying, “Do whatever he tells you,” Mary recalls Israel’s original vows of her marriage covenant with God – vows that had been severely broken through centuries of sin and idolatry, but ones that are now being restored as the messianic Bridegroom begins His public ministry with His first miracle.

## Faithful

In this light, “Do whatever he tells you” should not be seen as a legalistic call to tediously obey an all-powerful master. Rather, Mary’s words reflect the heart of a bride in love with her bridegroom.

Representing the faithful of Israel, Mary invites the servants, the disciples, and all of us to run after our Bridegroom’s desires, ardently seeking to fulfil whatever He wants of us.

And so, Mary’s last recorded words in Scripture are packed with meaning and much more! They do not only apply to the waiters at the feast, but to every Christian throughout history. Mary leads others to Christ and speaks those words to us today. Her mission has always been to point others to Jesus; to urge them to follow His commands with complete trust and without hesitation, as members of the Church, His spotless bride whom He loves and for whom He gives Himself totally and freely. We can safely say that Jesus wanted His first miracle at Cana and His mother’s words recorded.

**“**When the jars run dry, when we need to transform a situation, we can turn to Mary. With her request, the Lord will transform the water of bland routine in our lives into the wine of grateful gladness.

**”**

Through a social embarrassment of wine running out, the power of our Lady’s intercession for the mortified couple is revealed. She asked her Divine Son for things that weren’t meant to be in the Divine plan, as Jesus told His mother “my hour has not yet come”. Yet, Our Lady got it done! She had asked her son for help and she knew He would respond favorably to her.

As we pray in the Memorare, “Never was it known that anyone who sought thy intercession was left unaided”...Do we have the confidence of going to her? We can seek her intercession for everything. We will receive graces and her protection. How often will she protect us from hidden dangers, solve problems, because we are her children?

When we pray the Rosary, we can be assured of the same response. When we find ourselves unsure of what to do in a certain situation, we can ask her for wisdom and help, and she will simply put it in our head and on our heart, “Just do whatever he tells you.” She will always direct us back to Jesus because she has already reached out to him on our

behalf.

If you find yourself in a difficult moment of your life, turn to her in the rosary. Say it slowly and intentionally. Listen to the words of the prayers and speak them with reverence and respect. See this blessed prayer for the power it brings into our lives, when we take the time to speak the words with care and intention. It has been known for its sacredness throughout history, and it will certainly continue to galvanize the faithful to reach out to Mary in confidence and trust, believing she will intercede on our behalf, helping us attain greater holiness in our lives.

When the jars run dry, when we need to transform a situation, we can turn to Mary. With her request, the Lord will transform the water of bland routine in our lives into the wine of grateful gladness. He can transform us to make the first move of forgiveness, to say the kind word that needs to be spoken, to reach out in little acts of love and to live in peace. Jesus alone has the power to fill those empty jars of ours. The sign in the wine is the story of possibility and abundance.

During this time of pandemic, Pope Francis wrote two prayers to Mary that can be recited at the end of the rosary during this month of May; prayers that he said he would be reciting “in spiritual union with all of you.” Both prayers acknowledge Mary’s closeness to her son’s followers and ask for her protection and for her intercession, just as she interceded with Jesus on behalf of the newlyweds at Cana.

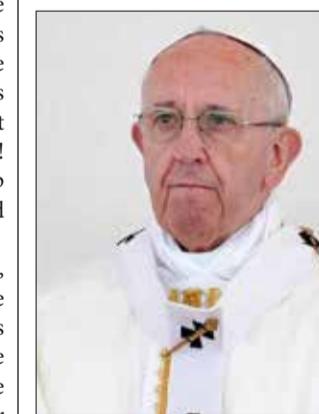
As members of the body of



Fr Gerard Mongan, CC Three Patrons, with the beautiful statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

Christ, the Church - wedded to Christ the Bridegroom as His bride, we can take to heart once again the profound lesson taught by our Blessed Mother: to “do whatever” the Lord asks of us.

In these days, we make the words of Pope Francis our own prayer to Our Lady of Cana: “We



## Pope’s monthly intention

*The Holy Father has asked for prayer during MAY for:*

### Deacons

*We pray that deacons, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be an invigorating symbol for the entire Church.*

## Prayer for Priests

*Heavenly Father, I ask you to bless our bishops and priests and to confirm them in their vocation of service.*

*As they stand before us as ministers of Your Sacraments, may they be channels of the love and compassion of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve.*

*Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the courage to proclaim your Word of justice, love and truth. Bless, in a special way, Your servant*

*Father....*

*Send your Spirit upon him So that he may always walk in the path of faith, hope and love, in the footsteps of Christ, the eternal priest, who offered Himself on the cross for the life of the world. Amen.*

## Remember in prayer:

*All Priests (1st May)*

*All Priests (2nd)*

*Fr Michael Porter (3rd)*

*All Priests (4th)*

*Fr Ignacy Saniuta (5th)*

*Fr John Ryder (6th)*

*Fr Gerard Sweeney (7th)*

*Fr Joseph Varghese (8th)*

*Fr John Walsh (9th)*

*Fr Alex Anderson (10th)*

*Fr Patrick Arkinson (11th)*

*Fr Patrick Baker (12th)*

*Fr Declan Boland (13th)*

*Fr Eugene Boland (14th)*

*Fr Francis Bradley (15th)*

*Fr Manus Bradley (16th)*

*All Priests (17th)*

*Fr Brian Brady (18th)*

*All Priests (19th)*

*Fr Thomas Canning (20th)*

*Fr Michael Canni (21st)*

*Fr John Cargan (22nd)*

*Fr Neal Carlin (23rd)*

*All Priests (24th)*

*Fr Colum Clerkin (25th)*

*Fr Roland Colhoun (26th)*

*Fr Michael Collins (27th)*

*Fr Oliver Crilly (28th)*

*Fr Patrick Crilly (29th)*

*Fr Brendan Crowley (30th)*

*All Priests (31st)*

*What is the reason for the hope that you have? (1 Peter 3:15)*

# My faith journey

**I** have been steeped in prayer all my life. I am the eldest of eight children born to very religious parents, Hughie and Etta D'Arcy, and we lived in the Culmore Parish, where I still live with my husband, Eugene and six children.

Growing up, our lives revolved around God. We weren't reared to fear God but to know that He was our best friend and the only one in the world that would never let us down, and we did experience many little miracles within our family through the years.

Our faith was like a security blanket. We were brought up to trust that God knows best. We went to Mass every night and mammy would march us up to the front of chapel. Years later, mammy and I met a woman who remembered this and told us that we were known as the Von Trapp Family!

Going to Mass for me was as natural as eating my dinner and that never left me as a teenager, or when I got older. I just loved God. And this love grew when I got my heart broken. I was 18 at the time and mammy said that I should do a novena to St Anthony to heal and seal my heart, as I was so heart-broken. She guaranteed that I would meet a good man who would love and marry me.

I went on to meet Eugene, and I had been doing the novena to St Anthony for four years when he proposed to me. Unbeknownst to both of us, the date he proposed was the Feast of St Anthony, June 13. It was mammy who pointed this out to us when we told her that we were engaged. I still say that novena. I have a very strong bond with St Anthony now; he has been with me through the highs and lots of lows. Whenever I go into St Eugene's Cathedral, I am just drawn to his statue there.

Eugene and I will be married 21 years this July. We got married on July 12 and, having been brought up in Culmore, we probably had as many Protestants as Catholics at our wedding. They went out marching that morning and then came to our wedding Mass at 2 pm in Culmore Chapel. I hadn't known that there was such a thing as a Protestant until I was a first year in Carnhill High School. I came home one day and asked what a protestant was. Mammy and daddy just looked at me as if I had said the worst curse word in all of Ireland! We were brought up to show love to everyone. All that mammy wanted for us was to be good, kind and holy.

It was great growing up in a loving home. I just loved going back to see mammy and daddy whenever I got married. Daddy died eight months ago. He was diagnosed with cancer. We thought he had months to live, but he died a few days later. We were

bad, so she said to me that maybe I should take one. I said that I wasn't taking any tablets.

So we left the doctors and, after I left mammy home, I wanted to go to a chapel where nobody knew me, so I went to the White Chapel in Galliagh. I had such a sore head and was sitting there sobbing. I didn't know anything about the friars, but the next thing one of them appeared and asked me if I was alright. I just lunged myself at him and told him what had happened. I told him that I had an awful pain in my head that wouldn't go away. He asked me if he could put his hand on my head to pray with me. He must have prayed over me for an hour. He told me that it was going to be a painful journey for me but that God loves me. I said that I knew that God loved me and he told me that he knew that I did. Then the pain in my head stopped and I have never had it since.

People talk about babies being in limbo, but I know that my baby is safe with God. On a Tuesday or Thursday, I always went to a chapel that had a statue of St Anthony to light a candle and say a prayer, so that was either the Holy Family chapel in Ballymagroarty or to the Cathedral. On this occasion, I went to Ballymagroarty and when I went into the chapel it was in darkness, except for the light from candles. I could see women and some men about, and some were crying, but I didn't really think anything of it and went to light a candle. Then Sr Ann came out with the priest and it turned out that a Mass of Baptism for unborn babies was being celebrated.

During the ceremony, you brought up a white rose to represent your child and left it on the altar with Our Lady; symbolising that you were leaving your baby in the care of Our Mother. You told the priest what age your baby was and you were asked if you had a name for the baby. I said that my baby's name was Jamie Burns. There was a registration of my baby's name and Sr Ann told me that he was now a Christian and in the arms of God.

That was so special. I have found that if things have not gone my way, God is always there for me. He puts His arms around me. People asked me if I was angry at God that I had lost the baby, but I wasn't. What happened was that I realised I had been saying the right things about my faith up to this, but it wasn't until I lost my child that my faith really deepened. It's not until you suffer that you really grow in love for God.

Jamie was due on September 28 and we found out that I was pregnant with Luca on September 27. It was as if God was softening the blow. I think that was the first day that my faith moved to having

complete and absolute trust in God, and that helped me cope with daddy dying too.

Times of death really make me think about what I am here for. Thinking about this for these last couple of months, it's like a thirst inside me. I have been really thinking that there has to be more to life. I felt that I wanted to do something for God. I have always wanted to be a mammy and I love being a mammy, but I want to have something in my life that is faith and God based. This is something that has been really strong within me this last while, so I said to Him, I don't know what this is about, but I know that I want to get to know You, I want to help You.

I had heard that we had a new pastoral worker in the parish called Julia Fitzgerald, but I had always missed hearing her talk. Then, our priest, Fr Clerkin asked if I would come on to the parish pastoral committee, and through being part of that I met Julia. We clicked as soon as we met, and when I talked to her about wanting to do some kind of course within the Catholic Church, she told me that there was a course coming up in Maghera that would suit me. So, I was really looking forward to that when the coronavirus came and it got cancelled because of lockdown!

## Rosary

Julia told me that she had set up a Facebook page for the parish and was thinking about having the Rosary said on it during Lent. In the course of the conversation, I said that I did the Rosary every Lent with my family, so she then asked me if I would be interested in leading the Rosary on our parish Facebook, and I said 'yes'.

I told Eugene when he came home from work that evening about it and he, and the children, said that they weren't doing it. I told them that the camera would be facing the Holy pictures and so they wouldn't be seen. I also thought we would only be taking our turn along with other families, but no one else volunteered!

I don't feel embarrassed about my faith because I love God and, because I have grown up here in Culmore, people know that's just my way. I have wanted to do something for God and maybe this community Rosary is what He wants me to do. I just see myself as a channel and God is doing all the work. I believe that everybody is a channel that God can work through.

I had to go up the town to the shop one day, and two women I didn't know recognised me from reading out the petitions at the start of the nightly Rosary on the Culmore Facebook page, and they took the time to tell me how much this Rosary meant to them.



Michelle and her parents, Etta and the late Hughie D'Arcy.

If it helps somebody get even a glimmer of hope, then I will have done something for God.

I also feel privileged to have been a channel in helping to get our cemetery open again. When it was announced by the UK Government that cemeteries were to be re-opened, my mammy and I presumed that meant ours would be open too. We were both so excited about going to visit daddy's grave the Sunday after the announcement, but when we got there the gates were locked.

A man there told us that the announcement by the UK government didn't include our cemeteries here in Northern Ireland, and that that decision had to be taken by Stormont. I couldn't believe what I was hearing after years of being told we were part of the UK and just felt that I had to do something. Mammy and I decided to stand outside the gates every Monday in protest and I put this up on Facebook, so others could join us if they wanted, and stressed that it was to be a silent protest as we would be standing at sacred ground.

Mammy didn't like the sound of the word protest and suggested that we call it a compassionate plea. I told her that nobody would know what we were on about and we needed to call it a protest... though a silent protest. When we went up on the Monday morning to the cemetery gates, we didn't know if anyone else would turn up but there were about 60 there... some of them stayed in their cars because of the social distancing



Michelle and her husband, Eugene and family.

with the virus. The media was there too, even though we didn't mention it to any newspaper etc, and to this day we still don't know how the media knew about it. They were already there when mammy and I arrived.

We were also praying within our family that the cemeteries here would be opened again; calling upon the Holy Spirit to help with this. On the Friday, Fr Clerkin was celebrating Mass and a Holy Hour and I was sitting in the chapel recording this for our Facebook, while all the time praying for the Holy Spirit to guide our politicians, who were sitting up in Stormont talking about whether our cemeteries should be opened up again. At 4 pm the news came out that the Executive was leaving it up to each individual council area whether to open the cemeteries. So we kept praying that we wouldn't be kept waiting any longer, and were delighted when our Council announced that the cemetery gates would be reopened at 2.30 pm on the Saturday. We just put this all down to prayer.

All these little miracles make my life happy. It's not that I don't have any bothers. I do worry at times but deep down I know that God is not going to leave my side. Mammy gives out to me if she hears me worrying about something, asking where my trust in God is.

Sometimes I feel as if my eyes are blindfolded and God is guiding me. Whatever happens, I try to trust that God is in front of me.

*A tribute to the late Fr John McNamara OCD, Termonbacca...*

# Derry mourns death of beloved monk and dear friend



THE many tears shed when news spread about the death of Fr John McNamara, OCD, reflected the great love and respect the Carmelite Father had attracted during his 15 years in the monastery, at Termonbacca, in Derry.

Appreciative of all the 'phone calls from people expressing their sympathy and sadness, the Prior, Fr John Grennan, was touched by the great number who were in tears as they talked about their relationship with the 81-year-old Carmelite.

"People regarded Fr John not only as their confessor but as a friend as well. His time in the confessional brought out his goodness and holiness," remarked the Prior.

He added: "When I think of Fr John, I think of St Joseph, because he had a great faith in the advocacy of St Joseph. He liked him because he was a low-key person; and John was that too. He just liked to do what he had to do, and for him that was just a way of holiness."

"He will be most remembered for his ministry in his little Confessional room; a lot happened there. People also have fond memories of being with him on his annual Carmelite pilgrimage to Lourdes, along with one of his confrères from Dublin, Fr Pat Beecher; they were very good friends."

Born in Scotland to Irish parents, Fr John was ordained in 1978, and later joined the Carmelites in 1990, serving in their houses at St Teresa's, Clarendon Street, Dublin, Our Lady of Mount Carmel,

Kensington, London, and Lough Rea Abbey, Co Galway, before arriving at Termonbacca, where he put down very deep roots.

Fr John's Requiem Mass was celebrated in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, with the chief celebrant being Carmelite Provincial, Fr Michael McGoldrick. Bishop Donal was also in attendance.

The homily was delivered by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, who spoke of the "very heavy blow" it had been to hear that Fr John, who had been in rehabilitation following an emergency back operation in hospital, had been diagnosed with the coronavirus. Describing that time of not being able to go and be with him as he lay "dying of this terrible illness alone in a strange environment" as "some of the worst days that I can remember in Carmel".

Relating the situation to that of the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, who had been so distressed that Jesus had not come in time to save their brother from death, Fr Stephen said that they had found themselves in a similar situation, asking "why didn't he come and why didn't he do something about it?"

He went on to remark: "Jesus comes to the funeral of Lazarus, as he comes to the funeral of John, as truly a strange friend. He arrives to this funeral without any flowers, without a card, and without the usual accoutrements of mourners. And he does not even bother to answer Martha's and our desperate questions. Instead, of answering he comes up with his

own question for Martha and, in turn, ourselves, 'Do you believe in me?' At such a moment to those people gathered around the family of Martha and Mary, the words must have sounded tone deaf and inappropriate.

"The question that Jesus poses contains within it a force all its own. The force even stops Martha in her tracks as she is driving home her own questions. She is forced to look up from her grief and distress and take a good look at the one who has just arrived for the funeral of Lazarus, and to see not with the superficial glance of worldly reasoning, but with the eyes of faith, that this strange friend who has arrived late is not just some holy man or self proclaimed prophet.

"So much more than that has arrived at Lazarus' funeral. The Son of God, pondering the grief and fear of the world, saw Martha's distress at the death of her brother and was profoundly moved by her plight. He jumped to his feet and abandoned the glory of Heaven, and stepped into this troubled and dubious old world. He came all this way just for Lazarus' funeral. He did not arrive on time because, mystically, he had stopped off in Jerusalem for three days. In

these three days, He was busy about his Father's affairs, He had to celebrate his Last Supper. His garden of Gethsemane, He being found wanting by human trial, His scourging at the pillar, His carrying of the Cross, His being nailed to that Cross, His death to the last drop of water and blood for us, and then rising from the tomb on the third day.

"He arrives a day late; the fourth day, after all of Martha's fears, he had not tarried. St Augustine asks us to see the one who arrives after his long journey to Bethany not so much as the good shepherd but as the good physician, or the good doctor. In his stopover in Jerusalem, at the Last Supper, in the Garden, on the Cross, in the tomb and coming out alive, was all about generating the medicine, not just medicine for coronavirus but for eternal life.

"All these events, he poured into a jar creating a potent mix of



ointment to soothe the wounded and bereaved heart of Martha, then to reach and heal the dead body of Lazarus, and then to share eternal life with Fr John. The medicine has been beautifully described by the Evangelist, 'God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life.'

#### Resurrection

"Martha steps back and sees it, recognises it for what it is, and asks for the medicine, the ointment with the words...you are Resurrection - you are Life!" We must find our own words at this moment."

Fr Stephen went on to talk about Fr John's life; his devotion to his parents, William and especially Mary, his mother, and his pride in Ireland, even though he was born in Barrhead Scotland.

He continued: "He saw himself very much as a child of immigrants from the west of Ireland, so much so, that when he went to the community in Loughrea it was as if he was returning home. There were many roads that his life went down, his life as a Redemptorist brother, his life as a Diocesan priest, and then as our brother in Carmel".

Recalling Fr John's great love of the cinema, which carried him back to his childhood, Fr Stephen went on to pay tribute to him as their own "Padre Pio", saying: "It became very evident in the time that Fr John was absent from his normal duties in the Confessional box, just how Derry regarded the priesthood of John McNamara.

"It truly is a special gift to be a good shepherd in the confessional box. It says many things about the person under the stole. To be able to be a merciful priest takes you to have got a real grip on your own humanity, that you are not running away or that you are not disguising your own weakness. It also tells you that the person has had some profound experience in their life of the gift of mercy from the Lord, that they have accepted that mercy wholeheartedly and are living that mercy out. And lastly, they have found their own way to express to the person opposite just how much the Lord Jesus loves

and embraces them precisely in the place of deepest weakness.

"John was able to chatter away in the box, he was able to tell disarming stories, he was able to empathise with people's distress, he felt their pain, and he was able to show them that, as their pastor, he loved them and wanted only the best for them. Also, he was capable of telling a few home truths when they were needed to wake the person out of their stupor".

Thinking of how uncomfortable Fr John would be at this talk about him, Fr Stephen concluded: "John had his own quiet way. A way in which he followed the advice of St Benedict to his monks; to take responsibility for their own weakness and failure and to ascribe to God their success and strength.

"Maybe the best thing, therefore, that we could say of him was that in his ministry Jesus took the bread of mercy, broke that mercy, and gave it to the people of Derry, those whom John loved so much!"

Fr John was laid to rest in the Carmelite plot in the City Cemetery, where fellow Carmelite, Fr Jerry Fitzpatrick was buried a year ago.

With numbers attending the Requiem Mass limited because of the Covid-19 restrictions, many of those mourning the passing of Fr John gathered outside the Long Tower chapel to pay their respects, with some showering the pathway of the cortège with rose petals.

Amongst the mourners were Myra and Jamesy McLaughlin, who cater for the Carmelite Fathers at Termonbacca, with Jamesy working as a chef there for 10 years and Myra helping out for about six years.

Myra described him as a quiet and thoughtful person who always took time to ask about her family and her parents, and had become more of a father-figure over the last couple of years.

"He was always praising the Derry people, saying that there was a great warmth about them. He loved everything about Derry and many people loved him. They came from everywhere to go to Confession to him and he was also very caring towards the sick. When people were sick, he really seemed to feel it. His death will leave a big

void in our lives and others. We have not only lost a dear monk but a very dear friend."

Jim Toner, of the Long Tower, and his business partner, Ciaran Doherty have also been deeply shocked and saddened by the death of Fr John.

"He was a great person; always very clear in his direction and he had time for people," said Jim, who had known Fr John for 10 years.

He added: "I would have spent a lot of time in Adoration, as Fr John said that the highest glory you can give God is the Mass and the exercise of Adoration. He knew clearly that God was there in the host and he had a great devotion to Our Lady as well.

"He often spoke, too, about the miracles that happen in the confessional box, saying that that is where the real healings begin, and that is something that I found myself, personally. Fr John had a lot of wisdom and he was happy to share it and help us in our faith. I would have spoken to him every day. He loved his friends and we loved him".

Derry Diocesan Eucharistic Adoration Apostolate chairperson, Gwen Lagan paid tribute to Fr John for the outstanding support he had given to the committee over the years: "We appreciate the friendship and welcome we received in Termonbacca, and the many words of encouragement he gave. We will be forever indebted for his humble, gentle and devoted ministry. May God grant him eternal rest".



# 'Boats that sailed' by Vera McFadden



DRIVING to Letterkenny from Bridgend, we pass a church which is shaped like a boat. The architect wanted to show that a boat is symbolic of the church, as a 'lifeboat' and symbol of hope.

In the Gospel, St Luke tells us of a time when a crowd of listeners were pressing around Jesus on the shore at Galilee. Jesus asked Simon to pull out from the shore, so He could give the rest of His teaching to them from there. After the teaching, He told Peter to go out further and cast a net into the deep water. Peter replied that, although they had been fishing all night and had caught nothing, he would do what Jesus had asked him.

Amazingly, there was a large catch of fish, in so much abundance that the men were afraid that the nets would burst, and they needed help from other fishermen who brought out their boats and helped to bring their massive catch ashore. This is when Jesus called his first disciples - Simon, Simon's brother, Andrew, and James and his brother, John - with these words: "Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men".

Later in St Matthew's Gospel, we learn again of the great commission through the directions that Jesus gave His apostles before He ascended into Heaven: "Go therefore and make

disciples of all the nations, baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teach them to observe all the commands that I gave you. And know that I am with you always, yes, until the end of time".

They remained in Jerusalem as they had been instructed until the Holy Spirit descended on them. Then they came out and began to preach the Word of God, telling the gathering crowd about the resurrection of our Lord and many of the other spiritual happenings, making people aware of His teaching and leading them to living the good news.

Once Jesus had sent them to bring the Gospel to 'the lost sheep of Israel', they had travelled all over the land. Now they would go by land and sea, to places in the then known world. The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles tell us something about the initial evangelisation. Rome, Ephesus, Galatia and Thessalonica were some of the places where they converted people to Christianity.

Another symbolic reference to boats used for evangelisation is in the life of Patrick. In the first century AD, as a young boy, he was taken prisoner by Irish raiders. He was taken with other captives in a boat to Ireland, where he was sold into slavery. His experience of hardship drew him closer to God. When the time came for him to escape, it was an angel named Victorious that showed him the whereabouts of the ship on which he would escape. Years later, dreams of the Irish calling him would bring him back to teach the good news in this country.

Adamnan's book has a lot of stories about sea travel, so we hear of many journeys between Iona and the mainland. My brother, Tony, wrote a song about Brendan. St Brendan went on a long voyage. A very old document tells of the journey. For a long time this story was considered to simply be a legend, however, Tim Severin made a boat according to the instructions given in that document and, with a crew, recreated the voyage Brendan took. When he reached the places, they encountered situations similar to those described in the story. This helped to dispel doubts that Brendan's journey was merely just a story. On that voyage, Brendan arrived at the Hebrides, Faroes, Iceland and the coast of Greenland.

In a previous voyage, Brendan also visited the Aran Islands, Argyll, Wales and Britanny, on the Northern coast of France and founded some monasteries. Brendan returned to Ireland and settled at Clonfert (Cluain Fearta),

where there was a constant praise provided by two great choirs. He was a gifted manager, writer and composer. Following God's Commission, he left Ireland to go to Europe and founded monasteries there. His tomb is in Bobbio.

One of many songs set to a Londonderry Air, tells of Columba sailing down the river from Derry on his missionary work. It was written by a Sister of Mercy from Thornhill College. One of the lines is 'Swift sails my barque but oh the salt sea spray has dimmed my eyes, pure wet with longing great, how great He knows, who forms hearts passionate'.

Another little song tells of Columba and his friends out in an Iona sound, when a great storm arose. This song was inspired by a story from Adamnan's 'Life of Columba'. The terrified monks asked Columba to intercede for them as their Curragh tossed about on the stormy waters. Columba replied that Canice could pray, if only he knew. At that moment, Canice, who was away at Aghaboe, in Ireland, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to pray and intercede for them.

## Journeys

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The Voyage of St Brendan by Edward Reginald Frampton, 1908.

which means the field of miracles. Throughout time, this location has been a place of important spiritual significance. In more recent history, a butcher, Eddie Stones and his wife were called to ministry there. They did not understand or know where Clonfert was, but were told that God was calling them to an evangelising ministry of preaching, praying and healing there.

The period of the Celtic saints was the Golden Age in Ireland and the Dark Age in Europe. Missionaries went from Ireland to Europe and students came to great monastic schools such as Clonmacnoise, which was founded by St Ciaran. After Ciaran's time, it became the first university in Ireland.

Over the centuries, evangelists travelled from many countries and Orders of monks came to Ireland from Europe. New monastic Orders and Orders of Priests and Sisters developed. They also set out in all directions to bring the Gospel. They went as far as Japan, North America and Africa.

One priest who did not travel but was especially called by God was John Bosco. He experienced prophetic dreams from God, where he was shown the work of God that he would do when he grew up. He would improve

the quality of life of young boys by giving them an education, profession or trade. His dreams continued throughout his life and, though he did not journey very far to evangelise, he was shown a prophetic dream which showed all the places in the world to which the Order he founded would go, even after his death.

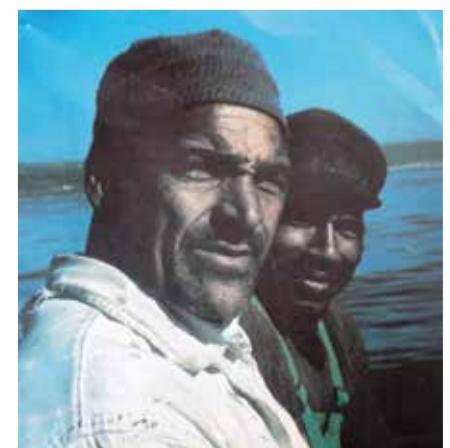
Another dream that John Bosco had, showed a ship on a stormy sea, and other ships and boats throwing missiles at it. Then he saw two high pillars in the sea, Our Lady was on one and the Blessed Eucharist was on another. When the ship was guided through those two pillars, everything went peaceful, the sea and the attackers. I think that this prophetic dream has come to pass. There was a bad period when there was a lot wrong and it all needed to be sorted. People like the late Fr Peter Byrne began to call for opportunities for Adoration and he wrote many little family prayer books. The acts of prayer brought a greater peace and stability to the church.

We are all in this 'big boat' together; sometimes we have to, with guidance, paddle our own canoe. When we do this, let us think of the lines from Columbanus' song, 'Think, lads of Christ and follow him'. We all have to work at following Christ



and spreading the good news. How we do that is by watching His actions and listening to His words, living His word and imitating His behaviour, so that it is Him we are bringing to each other.

The good news has now been spread to all the ends of the world, although there may be some races that still have to hear of the Lord. We must remember the directions we were given, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teach them to observe all the commands that I gave you. And know that I am with you always, yes, until the end of time'.



# Staying prayerful and open to God's promptings

GUARDIAN of the See of Derry since his installation at St Eugene's Cathedral on April 6, 2014, Bishop Donal shared some thoughts with 'The Net' about ministry amidst the Covid-19 lockdown, during which he reached a landmark birthday with the rising of the sun on Easter Sunday.

## Celebrating 70th birthday...

"It was a very strange day. I would normally have been celebrating it with siblings and my nephews and nieces, and then preparing for Lourdes the following day, but, like Mary Magdalene and the Apostles on the first Easter Sunday, we are where God calls us to be. That is where we bear witness to the Resurrection. So, I had the cemetery blessing at 6.30 am, Mass at 12.30 pm, lunch at the Cathedral, and a quiet day on my own. That is where God wanted me to be and, for that reason, it was a blessed time!"

## Thoughts regarding ministry during this time...

"It is a very difficult time for everybody. Over the decades, clergy and people have become accustomed to a way of being Church. Now, we are tested in our faith. How can we believe that this is a time when God is forming us, not abandoning us? And, we are a sacramental Church, so we are trying to know what that means when we cannot celebrate any of the Sacraments with God's people.

The challenge for clergy and parishes is to be 'visible' for their people, who are also disorientated. We have to be visible for people – otherwise, I fear that they will be invisible when all this is over!"

## How priests are coping...

"It is difficult for priests who have been very dedicated in walking with people, ministering to them and letting them minister to us. But, who am I if I am not doing the things that normally filled my day? That is stressful about a priest's identity and I know that it is taking a toll on some priests. However, some have shown great creativity in communicating with their parishioners. Deaths are a difficult time for all. Wakes are not possible and there is no face-to-face contact with grieving families until the Church and the graveside. Our chaplains currently cannot get into the hospitals to minister to the sick, and have to do with video calls from outside."

## Plans regarding easing of lockdown...

"At this stage, we all know that

the lockdown will have to come to an end at some stage, and that this will happen in stages. Our job is to plan for some of those stages. As Church, we need to be considering what we would do if, and when, the following areas are being considered by Government:

1. Permission to open Churches for private and individual prayer (which is not banned in the Republic). Such a move could facilitate an appropriate access to the Sacrament of Reconciliation or pastoral counselling for those who desire this.

2. Permission to provide religious and sacramental services other than funerals. a. Baptisms. b. Weddings. c. Masses.

We have to be able to encourage Government to make these changes possible, and to offer them a package of measures that we will take to make it safe."

## Calling on the Holy Spirit...

"We have no idea what the new normal is going to look like. One of the prayer intentions for the Lough Derg style vigils, at the beginning and end of this month of May, is that we can discern how to act in the pandemic and how to chart the way forward afterwards. This is a time of grace and a time when we are being opened up to a new Resurrection. As with the Apostles, it can be hard to make sense of what Resurrection means and implies. But open hearts and

hands will make us better able to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches.

The idea of the 24 hours of prayer and sacrifice was born out of a desire to promote intercessory prayer at this critical time, to make space in our hearts for God's grace. I have been very encouraged by the large number of responses from all around the country and beyond. There are clearly many people who want to face this pandemic with a tsunami of prayer, alongside all the other health measures. As the early Christian Church discovered, God who can do great things through us, if we are open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit."

## A new way of being church...

"So often in the Bible, God's people had to make sense in retrospect. It was only at the end of the Exodus from Egypt that they could see it had been tough, but also a time of grace. So, we have much time to pray and think. But it will be within later conversations in the Body of Christ (the Church) that we will sense where the Spirit is leading us. We are not in control of the Spirit – and we don't have to be. But we believe that God is in control. And, in His Will is our peace! All we have to do is stay prayerful and open to God's promptings."

## A typical day now...

"It is important to create some sort of a routine to give shape to each day. The diocesan office is open for office hours, though some members are working from home. I aim to be in the office from 8.30 am. Priests have been great and generous. But we have to support priests and parishes with information about government regulations and help them deal with 'furloughing' staff. Financial issues also arise for many parishes, which so often depend on Sunday collections to keep them afloat. There are then ongoing weekly meetings of the Northern Bishops. Issues we are dealing with are the proposed abortion regulations, dealing with legacy issues, supporting ACCORD etc.

I also chair meetings of the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service, and am Chair of CCMS, which entails legal obligations. And then we have the ongoing programme of spiritual events from the Cathedral as the 'parish church of the diocese'. We have to be preparing, as well, for what will happen when some of the lockdown measures are eased and churches are again open in a limited way. Leadership is difficult at times like this. And we all make mistakes and miscalculations. But we pray for wisdom and guidance that we can discern what the 'Spirit is saying to the Churches'."



## What missing most during lockdown...

"After 43 years as a priest, I have become very accustomed to engaging with people in the liturgy and in daily life. Covid-19 has put up barriers around us and between us. My world has in some sense become very small. For example, for a month I had not crossed over the River Foyle. That was remedied only when I celebrated Mass in Trench Road! Of course, I miss all those Confirmation ceremonies which I was scheduled to celebrate around the Diocese. They are times of great energy and hope, seeing the young people and praying for God's grace to fire them. But the Lord has not gone away. He has just created a new hunger for grace!"

## A Word of God for your Family Life Confidence by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR

OVER the past 3-4 months the coronavirus, Covid-19, has changed the world! Almost everything that had become our security has been stripped away from us by this virus. So much of our resources of wealth and personnel have been dedicated to defeating the virus. Our freedom has been greatly reduced and now we are forced to live almost exclusively with those who are closest to us in family and community.

There is a parallel thing happening to us in our life of faith. The churches are closed so that no one can spend time there in personal prayer. People can no longer be present for the celebration of the Eucharist. All the sacraments have been postponed until further notice. And even funerals of our loved ones take place mostly without Mass and with only a few family members present. It is heart-breaking for so many of us. The main participation in public worship is now through online services and, thank God, there are many of those and they are being very widely used by people in their own homes and among their families.

### The heart of our faith

Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Alleluia. That's the heart of our faith, the source of our hope, the inspiration of our love. What a great time of the year this is! Nature all around us is coming to new life. The colours are reappearing. The smells are freshening again. The daylight is lengthening, life is good, and our faith is renewed. It is a time for confidence and trust.

couples let their life together drift so that there is nothing to build on. It doesn't have to be like that.

### Family Life

Next, our faith gives us confidence in our family life. Parents can be easily almost afraid of their children, not knowing how to deal with them. Your children are wonderful people, waiting for you to take the initiative with them, the initiative of love and humanity, of sharing the joys and struggles of life. Family life can be a wonderful experience if you only have confidence in yourselves and in your children. It is time to build each family as the Church of the home.

### The Church

Our faith gives us confidence in the Church. Our Church has many faults and always will have. We are a Church of sinners. But the Church is a marvellous people to belong to, especially in so far as we get involved in building up the power of love that has been given by Christ.

This is a time to renew our confidence in the Church, and, with that confidence proclaim the love of God far and wide. Issues can divide us. Let Christ unite us so that we can hold up to the

world the power of God's great love for all of humanity and all of creation.

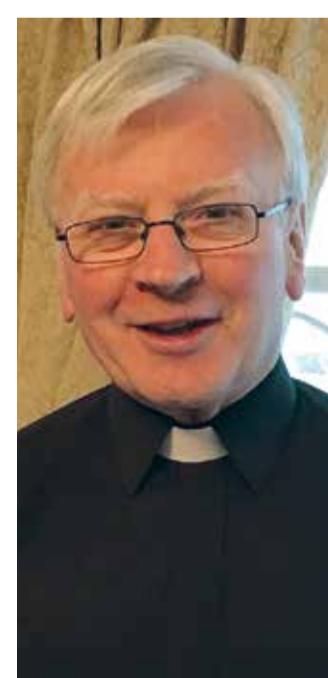
### The world around us

Finally, our faith in Christ gives us confidence in the world around us. It is so easy to get depressed by the state of the world, but there are so many good things and so many great people out there all around us. If we set our sights on them and unite ourselves with them in the mission of making the world a better place, we will grow in confidence for the future of the world. God is at work all the time, in many ways, in every place, bringing good out of evil, creating salvation out of what seems to be almost lost.

### Special features

Over the Sundays of May, we are offered the opportunity of growing in this kind of confidence as we walk with the risen Lord, listen to him, are inspired by him, and open ourselves for a fresh outpouring of his Holy Spirit.

By making the Scriptures the basis for our thoughts and prayer during this month, we will certainly catch the spirit of confidence that God has in us, shown by giving us Jesus, our risen Lord.



# ‘Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth’ (Ps 104:30)

CELEBRATING the 50th Earth Day during his General Audience in Rome, on Wednesday, April 22, Pope Francis welcomed it as “an occasion for renewing our commitment to love and care for our common home and for the weaker members of our human family”.

Reflecting on his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, the Holy Father spoke of the need to “grow in awareness of caring for our common home”.

“We are fashioned from the earth, and fruit of the earth sustains our life,” he said, adding: “But, as the book of Genesis reminds us, we are not simply ‘earthly’; we also bear within us the breath of life that comes from God (cf. Gen 2:4-7). Thus we live in this common home as one human family in biodiversity with God’s other creatures.

“As *imago Dei*, in God’s image, we are called to have care and respect for all creatures, and to offer love and compassion to our brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable among us, in imitation of God’s love for us, manifested in his Son Jesus, who became man in order to share our state with us and save us”.

“Because of our selfishness”, he continued, “we have failed in our

responsibility to be guardians and stewards of the earth...We have polluted it, we have despoiled it, endangering our very lives. For this reason, various international and local movements have sprung up in order to appeal to our consciences. I deeply appreciate these initiatives; still it will be necessary for our children to take to the streets to teach us the obvious: we have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us.

“We have failed to care for the earth, our garden-home; we have failed to care for our brothers and sisters. We have sinned against the earth, against our neighbours, and ultimately against the Creator, the benevolent Father who provides for everyone, and desires us to live in communion and flourish together. And how does the earth react? There is a Spanish saying that is very clear about this. It goes: ‘God always forgives; we humans sometimes forgive, and sometimes not; the earth never forgives’.

The earth never forgives: if we have despoiled the earth, its response will be very ugly”.

As to how a harmonious relationship with the earth and with the rest of humanity can be restored, Pope Francis commented: “We so often lose

sight of harmony: harmony is a work of the Holy Spirit. In our common home too, on the earth, and in our relationships with people, with our neighbour, with the poorest, how can we restore this harmony? We need a new way of looking at our common home. For this is not a storehouse of resources for us to exploit. For us believers, the natural world is the ‘Gospel of Creation’: it expresses God’s creative power in fashioning human life and bringing the world and all it contains into existence, in order to sustain humanity. As the biblical account of creation concludes: ‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very good’ (Gen 1:31).

“When we see these natural tragedies that are the earth’s response to our mistreatment, I think: ‘If I ask the Lord now what he thinks about it, I do not believe he is saying it is a very good thing’. It is we who have ruined the Lord’s work!”

Commenting on the Earth Day call for a renewed “sense of sacred respect for the earth, for it is not just our home but also God’s home”, the Holy Father remarked: “This should make us all the more aware that we stand on holy ground!”

Quoting from the Post-Synodal

Apostolic Exhortation ‘Querida Amazonia’, 56, in saying, “let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense”, he said: “The prophetic gift of contemplation is something that we can learn especially from indigenous peoples. They teach us that we cannot heal the earth unless we love and respect it. They have the wisdom of ‘living well’, not in the sense of having a good time, no, but of living in harmony with the earth. They call this harmony ‘living well’.”

“At the same time,” he added, “we need an ecological conversion that can find expression in concrete actions. As a single and interdependent family, we require a common plan in order to avert the threats to our common home. ‘Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan’ (*Laudato Si'*, 164). We are aware of the importance of cooperation as an international community for the protection of our common home. I urge those in positions of leadership to guide the preparations for two important international Conferences: COP15 on Biodiversity in Kunming, China, and COP26 on Climate Change in Glasgow, United Kingdom. These two meetings are of great



importance”.

Expressing support for “concerted action also on the national and local levels”, Pope Francis noted: “It will help if people at all levels of society come together to create a popular movement ‘from below’...We can each contribute in our own small way. ‘We need not think that these efforts are going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit

unseen, inevitably tends to spread’ (*Laudato Si'*, 212). ”

He concluded: “In this Easter season of renewal, let us pledge to love and esteem the beautiful gift of the earth, our common home, and to care for all members of our human family. As brothers and sisters, which we are, let us together implore our heavenly Father: ‘Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth’ (cf. Ps 104:30).”

## Maytime contemplation in lockdown by Patricia McCormack



IN Thornhill College in the 60s, there was a large circle of azalea bushes that burst into the most vibrant colours in early May. The girls named this area ‘Paradise’. It was a shame that this time of blossom and beauty was always overshadowed by revision and exams!

“Some time, make the time”, Seamus Heaney urges us in the poem, ‘Postscript’, but too often we have been on the treadmill of endless activity and missed the magic of early spring.

**Our God is a God of surprises**  
While reliable scientists and activists have been trying to draw our attention to the far reaching

consequences of our rate of production and consumption, the coronavirus crisis has stopped us in our tracks and given us the time to take notice of the world around us.

In a recent interview, Pope Francis said: “This is the time to take the decisive step, to move from using and misusing nature to contemplating it”.

The current lockdown has given us a precious opportunity to fall in love again with...and to cherish ‘Our Common Home’.

### Our God is a just and compassionate God

This time can also increase our awareness and compassion for those who cannot be touched by the beauty of nature - those in hospital, prison, overcrowded cities and slums. Where is the life-giving beauty in huge refugee camps or towns devastated by bombing in Syria and Yemen? Where is the respite in lands destroyed by deforestation, mining, drought, flooding, industrial smog and mountains of rubbish?

Can the experience of these

weeks lead to the ecological conversion that Pope Francis calls for in ‘*Laudato Si'*? Will we “go back to normal”, with all its craziness and consequences? Or will we have a serious rethink of the way we live our lives? Become more mindful of what we purchase, consume and waste? Will we differentiate between needs and wants? Will we continue to appreciate a slower pace and simpler life?

As we continue to pray for those who are ill and dying, those anxious, separated and bereaved, all those faithfully serving, heroically caring and tirelessly pursuing vaccines...we must also pray for wisdom for ourselves.





Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steeletown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy, Clonmany, Coleraine, Gregg, Culdaff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamanagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,

Clonmany, Coleraine, Gregg, Culdaff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamanagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

# Let Your Light Shine!

