



The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 102. DECEMBER 2024

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125th Celebrations continue
- Sacred Heart Church, Drumragh



Fundraising Concert - Bocan, Culdaff



Honouring St Pio - Banagher



Hospice Coffee Morning - Ardmore



Milestone jubilee not just
a celebration of the past
but a call for the future
- Fr Kevin McElhennon

Wishing all a blessed
Christmas celebration

Fr Kevin McElhennon, PP Cappagh, getting some help to cut Mountfield's Corpus Christi Church 70th anniversary cake. (See p8-9)



Pope St John Paul II Novena - Gortin, Badoney Lower



SVP Day Out - Bellaghy



SVP Dinner - Coleraine

People in focus



Assumpta McGill
- Aghadowey.



Carmel McDermott
- Burt, Co Donegal.



Fr Kevin McElhennon PP
- Cappagh



Kate & Ellen McCloskey
- Craigbane



Stephen Gallagher
- Rosemount, Derry City.

Also featuring: Young Writers' section; Children's Catechism Club; Long Tower Pet Blessing; Coleraine Taize Mass; Lavey St Pio Mass; Parish Advent Novenas; Diocesan Knock Pilgrimage; New Year Consecration Journey; Sr Clare Retreat Talks contd; Vocations News; Features; Quiz; Diary Dates...and much more...

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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

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Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope’s prayer intention for December for Pilgrims of Hope...“Let us pray that this Jubilee strengthens us in our faith, helping us to recognise the Risen Christ in the midst of our lives, transforming us into pilgrims of Christian hope”...

Diocesan-wide consecration journey as pilgrims of hope



ON Christmas Eve, December 2024, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica and inaugurate the Jubilee Year 2025. The Holy Year has the theme ‘Pilgrims of Hope’.

Thus, in this last month of 2024, Pope Francis asks us to pray that we will be transformed into pilgrims of Christian hope. What does that mean? We all know that these are uncertain times. The last 20 years have seen an economic crash and a global pandemic, wars in different parts of the world, signs of an ecological crisis - and lots of angry gloom in our world. Social media tends to amplify the opportunities for bitter words and hurtful comments.

In that context, hope is much

needed. Along with faith and love, hope is one of the three cardinal virtues (referred to by St Paul 1 Cor 13:113). In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI wrote an encyclical called ‘saved by hope’ (Spe salvi). We journey as pilgrims and it is Christian hope which sustains us.

Pope Francis knows that the world needs to hear the hope which comes from the Joy of the Gospel. He is very clear that there is no room in the Church’s message for what he calls ‘sourpusses’, those with a gloomy story about the present and the future.

But Pope Francis does not merely ask us to pray. He asks us to develop the grace-filled ability ‘to recognise the Risen Christ in the midst of our lives’. That may be easy when things are going well. But very often it is not easy. However, as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered when they met the Risen Jesus and told Him their story, God is at work in every circumstance of our lives, despite our own personal Calvaries. Nothing

can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

The Gospel that we teach is not merely a matter of assenting to what it says in the Creed. A maturing Christian faith is the ability to see our lives through the lens of grace, and help others to do the same. That does not mean using glib words of consolation. It means bringing our real pain to the foot of the Cross, where Jesus has taken upon Himself the sins of the world – and letting the Risen Christ speak into our broken hearts.

Advent is a time of longing and yearning for the coming of Christ into the deserts of our world and our lives. But it is not a sad season, it is one that is based on our joyful hope that Christ will come again. Advent is our season of hope.

That is how Pope Francis wants us to be, pilgrims of Christian hope – and that journey starts with the beginning of Advent.

Sometimes we get very

depressed about how bad things are. But sin was always alive and well in the world. In Jesus’ time, there was a military occupation of Israel. Crucifixion was a savage Roman way of punishing those whom they saw as wrongdoers. Poverty was widespread. Little people like Jesus, Mary and Joseph did not matter.

We live today with terrible brutality and heartless use of force. The on-going slaughter of the innocent that scars the Middle East, Ukraine, Sudan and many other places, is a scandalous indictment of international community. The United Nations is weak because the big powers suit their own agendas. And violence is very prevalent on our streets and in many homes.

But we are people who proclaim that God is little in our midst – and that grace is stronger than sin; that all gives us encouragement as we look into the Jubilee of Hope next year.

In recent months, we saw the huge welcome for the

relics of St Bernadette. On January 12, 2025, the cause for the beatification of Sr Clare Crockett begins. On April 27, Blessed Carlo Acutis will be canonised in Rome. God’s grace is still at work in young people.

Following on the visit of St Bernadette’s relics in October (the month of the Rosary), we hope to begin the Jubilee Year with a period of 33 days leading up a diocesan wide ‘Child Consecration to Jesus though Mary, following the Spirit of the Little Flower’. That will go from January 9 until the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11.

The focus will be on encouraging families to pray the Rosary with their children – and will be supported by live on-line broadcasts each evening at 7 pm.

So, this year, as we celebrate Christ’s birth among us in Bethlehem, can we give thanks for God’s faithfulness to us. And ask for the gifts of God that will nourish our hope into 2025.

Eucharistic Adoration in the Diocese

Aghyaran: Thursdays, 10.30am–12 noon. Ardstraw West & Castlederg: Fridays, 10.30am–12 noon, St Patrick’s Church. Badoney Lower: Tuesdays, after 12.30 pm Mass until 5 pm, St Patrick’s Gortin. Badoney Upper: Wednesdays, after 7.30 pm evening Mass until 9 pm, St Patrick’s Cranagh. Banagher: Fridays, 10–11am, St Joseph’s Church, Fincairn. Bellaghy: First Fridays, from 10 am until 6.30 pm, in St Mary’s Church. Buncrana: Mondays, Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 6am-10pm, and Sundays, 2-10 pm, St Mary’s Oratory. Cappagh: Wednesdays, 8-9pm, concluding with Night Prayer, and Sundays, 3.30-6.30 pm, in Christ the King, Strathroy.	Claudy: Tuesdays, after 10 am Mass until 8 pm, St Patrick’s Church, Claudy, and Wednesdays, after 10 Mass until 8 pm, St Joseph’s Church, Craigbane. Clonmany: Tuesdays, 7.30-8.30 pm, the Oratory of the Assumption, Ballyliffin; Wednesdays, 3-4 pm, St Columbcille Village, Cleagh; Fridays, 3-6 pm (Rosary at 5.40 pm), St Michael’s Church, Urris. Coleraine: Wednesdays, in St John’s Church, 2-4 pm, with Rosary at 3:45 pm. Creggan: Sundays 1.30 pm-6 pm; Mondays 10.30 am - 7 pm; Tue - Sat 10.30 am - 12 pm, Divine Mercy Chapel. Donagheady: First Fridays after Mass until 12 noon, St Mary’s Church, Aughabrack. Drumquin: Wednesdays, 6 pm until Mass at 7.30 pm.	Drumragh: Wednesdays, following morning Mass, Sacred Heart Church until 5.30 pm. Errigal: Mondays, after the 10 am Mass until 2.30 pm, St Mary’s Church, Ballerin. Fahan: Fridays after 10 am Mass, St Mura’s Parish Church. Greencastle (Tyrone): Thursdays, 6-10 pm, St Patrick’s Church. Greenlough: Thursdays, 9am–5 pm, St Oliver Plunkett’s Church. Iskaheen: Tuesdays, from after 10 am Mass until 2 pm, St Patrick’s Church. Kilrea: Mondays, 12 noon - 7pm, St Mary’s Drumagarnier. Concludes with Benediction. Killygordon: Thursdays, after 9.15 am Mass, St Patrick’s Church, Crossroads. Lavey: Fridays, after 9.30 am	Mass until 5 pm. Leckpatrick: Wednesdays from 8.15 am–5 pm. Lifford (Murlug): 9.30 am - 12.30 pm Limavady: Sundays from 3-5 pm in Christ the King (with Confessions). Magilligan: Wednesdays, 3-7 pm; First Sundays, 3-6 pm, St Aidan’s Church. Melmount: Mondays, after 10 am Mass until 6 pm. Moville: Mondays, 2-9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6-9 pm, St Pius X Church. Newtownstewart: Thursdays, 6.30-7.30 pm, Oratory of Mary, Mother of God. Sion Mills: Fridays, 11 am-6.50 pm, ending with Benediction before 7 pm Mass. Steelstown: Fridays, from after 10 am Mass until 6.50 pm. Strabane (Camus): Every day from 10.30 am-1 pm in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis	of Peace), at the back of the Church. St Columba’s Long Tower: Wednesdays, after 10 am Mass until 7.30 pm Mass. St Eugene’s Cathedral: Sundays, 3-6 pm, and Tuesdays, 10.30 am-7.20 pm. Three Patrons: Tuesdays from 11 am-7 pm in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh; Wednesdays from 10.30 am-7 pm, in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, and seven days a week in the Adoration Room in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, from 8 am until 6 pm. Urney & Castlefin: Tuesdays, 12 noon-8 pm, St Anthony’s Chapel. Waterside: Mondays, 11.30 am-12.30 pm, St Oliver Plunkett, Strathfoyle; Thursdays, 1-6 pm, Immaculate Conception Church; Fridays, 1-6 pm, St Columb’s Church.
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The NET

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

Supporting us:

The mission of ‘The NET’ is to share the fruits of the faith in homes, parishes and schools across the Diocese of Derry, and be a source of hope and encouragement in living our Catholic faith each day.

‘The NET’ is a Lay Apostolate that has the blessing of our Bishop, Most Rev Donal McKeown.

With no fixed charge to read this publication, donations would be most welcome to help cover costs. Annual accounts will be available to view on request.

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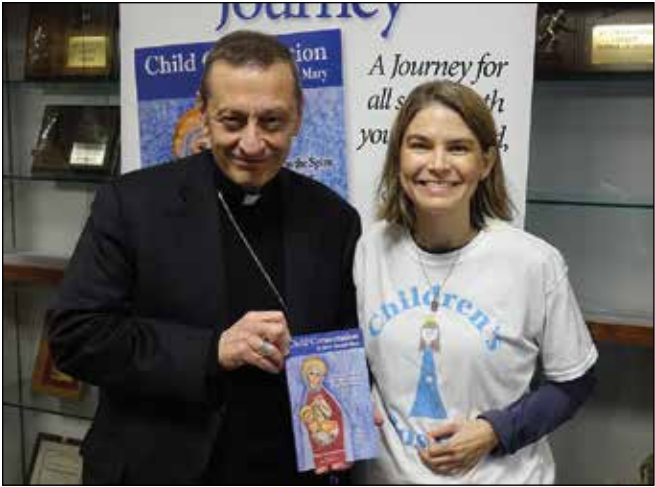
was dedicated to Our Lady, through the intercession of

St Maximilian Kolbe, in a ceremony celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown on August 14, 2019.

Child Consecration: To Jesus through Mary

...Following in the Spirit of St Thérèse, the Little Flower

by Dr Blythe Kaufman



Dr Blythe Kaufman, Children's Rosary, with Bishop Frank Caggiano, Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, USA

THE book 'Child Consecration: To Jesus through Mary - Following in the Spirit of St Thérèse, the Little Flower' was released in 2020. At the time, I imagined it would be a resource primarily for young people. But shortly after the release, I began to see that the Holy Spirit was

guiding its use in the hands of shepherds, in particular bishops. The first bishop to use the book was Bishop John Keenan of Paisley, Scotland. Like many in his diocese, I followed along with his leading of the journey each night on his Facebook page. I was drawn into the experience like

the others who participated. We were all experiencing the grace that flowed from it.

My own Archbishop, Archbishop Blair of Hartford, Connecticut, also used the book himself and throughout the archdiocese. Each evening, a different bishop, priest or deacon of the archdiocese led the Consecration journey on video. The schools were participating in the journey as well as the parishes. On Consecration day special evenings were planned in certain parishes, such as Holy Rosary Parish in Ansonia, Connecticut. The priest planned a Mass and procession, which culminated in those in the parish making their Consecration that evening on October 7, 2021.

Many bishops would go on to use the book: Bishop Kevin Rhoades, Diocese Fort Wayne South Bend, Indiana, USA; Bishop Frank Caggiano, Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, USA; Bishop Noel Pedregosa,

Diocese of Malaybalay, Philippines; Bishop Philip Dung, Diocese of Shendam, Nigeria; Bishop Oliver Doeme, Diocese Maiduguri, Nigeria; Archbishop Leo Cushley, Archdiocese of Edinburgh and St Andrews Scotland; and now Bishop Donal McKeown, Diocese of Derry, who is scheduled to use the book beginning in January 2025.

Translations

The use of this book has extended to non-English speaking countries and communities. The Dutch and Spanish versions of the book have been released. Most recently we have completed the French and Urdu translations, and these will be available shortly.

Since the book was released four years ago, many have used it more than once to make their Consecration journey. It is a recommended practice by St Louis de Montfort to renew one's Consecration yearly.

One of the interesting comments I have noticed, which has been repeated by many, is how people have found that they keep getting new meaning from the journey when they renew their Consecrations. The format of the book, which utilizes an allegory, has allowed people to find different meanings at different times in their lives, much like one would find in the parables of the Gospels.

Although the book has been used by bishops in Scotland, there has yet to be a bishop to lead a Consecration using the book in Ireland. That is, until now.



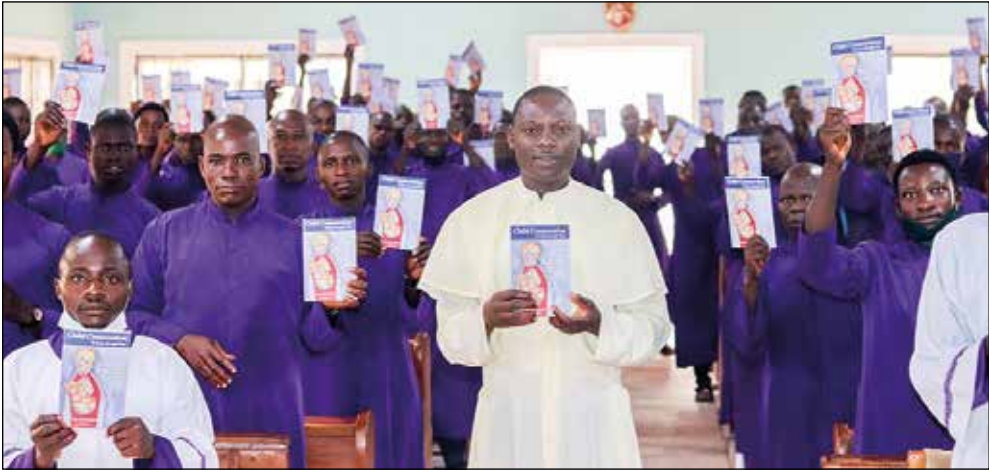
Two children participating in the Child Consecration journey in Paraguay.

Bishop McKeown will be using the book himself beginning this January. There will be evening readings from it, with associated prayers for the faithful to join by Facebook.

While the majority of evenings will be led by Bishop McKeown, other priests from the four deaneries of the diocese will be taking turns to lead. In this way, it is a journey led by the shepherds of the diocese. Since the book can be used by adults and young people, no

one is excluded. Families can participate together and make this journey.

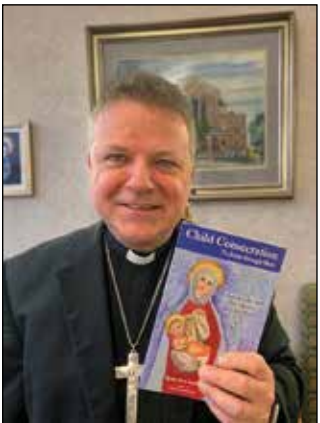
(Blythe is the founder of Children's Rosary®, which currently has groups of children gathering monthly to pray the Rosary in the churches of Claudy, Carnhill and Long Tower, within the Derry Diocese. Further information can be obtained by visiting: www.childrensrosary.org and www.childconsecration.com).



Students at the Catechetical Institute in Shendam Diocese, Nigeria, using the Consecration book.

There is something of Heaven about this Consecration

by Bishop John Keenan



Bishop John Keenan, Diocese of Paisley, Scotland

THE World Meeting of Families in Dublin 2018 brought me my first encounter with what would become my diocesan-led 'Child Consecration: To Jesus through Mary'. After a conversation with the founder of the Children's Rosary prayer group movement, Blythe Kaufman, we exchanged contact details and kept in touch.

Over the next few years, I followed with great interest the spread of the Children's Rosary

prayer group movement to more and more countries - over 44 at this point. The fruits were clearly evident, with children in parishes, schools, and orphanages meeting to pray the Rosary as a prayer group. Children were developing a relationship with Our Lord and their Heavenly Mother; a critical step in the formation of a Catholic identity. I was also intrigued by the reports from priests that they were seeing children who had been involved with the Children's Rosary becoming leaders in their faith.

In 2020, I was asked to review a manuscript of 'Child Consecration: To Jesus through Mary - Following in the Spirit of St Thérèse, the Little Flower' by Blythe. The book allowed both adults and children to make a Consecration journey. To have enduring spiritual effect, the Consecration would need the substance of St Louis Marie de Montfort's classic way. Yet for it to be accessible to children, a new perspective would be

needed. This was supplied in the spirituality of St Therese of Lisieux's 'Little Way' of childlike simplicity, trust and confidence. The children's imaginations would be engaged from the outset through the story of Daisy in her garden, guided by Mother to prepare a harvest feast for Father. The 33-day Consecration would blossom on the unfolding of this serene story.

Great thirst

Starting out, I was surprised by the initial response of so many to join the Consecration journey. Then I thought many might drop out after the first few days, or surely once the prayers increased to a full Rosary each day. What I found was to the contrary. There was a great thirst in the hearts of individuals and families to draw close. They were comforted to have a shepherd lead them in prayer and showered me with messages of thanksgiving.

For myself, I found great consolation through this journey. There was a great sense

of belonging, both among my flock and also in Our Mother Mary and Our Lord Jesus. I felt great graces flowing not only among those participating but also within my own heart. Each day as I led the prayers, I found myself inspired to add some little story from my own childhood or early years in the priesthood, or something from the life of the saints to complement the reading. It was not essential to the Consecration, but it flowed naturally and had the result of drawing souls even closer through the journey.

One person commented that she had never been able to complete a novena, yet never missed a night of the Consecration. Another spoke of the evenings as a "life-line." Yet another thanked me for having led the prayers each day and said, "It's been easy to give this time every evening to God." Even those who were doing the Consecration on their own found the time went by very quickly. A deacon joining the Consecration

shared that "the 33 days seemed like a daunting task at first, but quickly became joyful work." Indeed, due to the simplicity of the Consecration and the gentle way that prayers built upon themselves, during the days, the overarching sentiment was one of joy.

Great fruits

The only sorrowful sentiments were those made as the Consecration journey came to an end. So many were sad to see the evenings draw to a close. It moved my heart to see so many wanting me to continue to pray with them. Therefore, I chose to extend my evenings with them, which I thought at first might be some weeks or even months more. But months turned into years and now, almost four years later, I continue to pray nightly the Rosary live on my Facebook page as I had done during the Consecration journey. The good practice of prayer which began in those nights of the Consecration journey took root and has borne

great fruits in my diocese and beyond.

At the conclusion of the Consecration journey, I extended an invitation to other shepherds to also consider using this book to lead their flock. I shared: "For myself, this Consecration was one of the loveliest experiences of my priesthood. Priesthood can be a lonely road at times and this Consecration has surrounded me with love from my flock. I would encourage priests, deacons, pastors and even bishops to help lead their flock in a Consecration to Jesus through Mary using this Child Consecration book. There is something of Heaven about this Consecration."

I was delighted to hear that Bishop Donal McKeown will be using the book himself and in the Derry Diocese. I look back with such fondness on those nights of the Consecration and anticipate with joy all the graces that will come through this journey in Derry.

Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock

Diocesan pilgrims to Ireland's Eucharistic & Marian Shrine hear Bishop Donal say...

Knock calls us to pray and to listen



Parishioners from the Cappagh and Drumragh parishes travelled together to Knock for the Diocesan Pilgrimage.

THE annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock was well supported, with busloads of pilgrims making the journey from various parishes throughout the Diocese to join Bishop Donal at the International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine in Co Mayo.

During the celebration of Mass in the Basilica, Bishop Donal reflected on the central role Knock has played in Irish Catholicism for 145 years, and its message for today.

"It may seem strange that a one-off vision with no spoken words, in a poor village, still has the ability to draw hundreds of thousands including two popes," he said, during his homily.

He remarked that Knock, blessed with the Apparition of the Lamb of God surrounded by angels, Our Lady, St Joseph and St John on the gable wall of the Church of St John the Baptist on August 21, 1879, during a time of great poverty and suffering, has always brought the Gospel message of hope.

"The last decades of the 19th century were difficult," noted Bishop Donal, adding: "After the century of Penal Laws, there was little respite before the Famine devastated the country. And the post famine decades saw especially the western counties leaking huge numbers

of its strongest and youngest to emigration. But, as with Lourdes, Fatima and Medjugorje, it was precisely in out of the way places to little insignificant people that Our Lady appeared. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor in spirit."

"Hope is in short supply in many places," he continued, "Wars, poverty, addiction and environmental concerns cast a gloomy shadow over many people. Even among Christ's people, we often hear a message of doom and gloom. There is a narrative from some people that the church is facing an impossible future. They see there opposition and the challenges, and lament the problems."

"However, I believe that the greatest threat from us, in the Irish Church, comes not from external opposition and criticism, but from doom-laden voices in our midst who have not taken seriously the Gospel message of resurrection."

"Recently, I read those words from the prophet Ezekiel, long before Jesus - they keep saying 'our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, we are as good as dead' (Ez 37:11). A depressed message has nothing to do with the Jesus who went through Calvary to Resurrection."

"Knock echoes Ezekiel who,

amidst the pessimism of his day, talked prophetically about God breathing life into dead bones who have lost hope. In Knock, Our Lady points to the power of the Cross and of the Lamb of God. She asks us to be a people waiting in joyful hope, not a crowd marked by complaining and condemnation. God was at work on Calvary. God is at work in the mess that we are living through."

Missionary

Bishop Donal went on to highlight that the next big temptation for the Irish Church is to be focussed on itself, saying: "Mary's response to Elizabeth is to praise God. St Joseph listened to the strange dreams from God. St John proclaimed the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. In difficult times, we can choose to be preoccupied with ourselves. Or we can do what Pope Francis asks us to do, and become a missionary people, looking outwards."

"Thus, we need to bring young people to Jesus, not because we want to have bigger numbers into the future, but because, in their pain and distress, many young people need to hear about the love of God for them revealed in Jesus. During His public life, Jesus was often tired, but when He saw

crowds who were harassed and dejected, He set Himself to teach them."

"We want to bring young people to Jesus because they are plagued by huge pressures and poor role models. They need to meet Jesus, who is the face of the Father's mercy. They need disciples of Jesus in Ireland, who care for them in their distress. They do not need harsh and angry voices condemning them for mistakes that they make."

"Can we focus on the needs of the lonely and broken, the confused and the lost, and avoid any temptation in wallow in self-pity?" the Bishop asked, adding: "If we worry too much about ourselves, they will not see the mercy of Jesus and the smile of Mary in us. We are a missionary people, carrying the joy of the Gospel for others. Vocations to priesthood and religious life will come when we challenge the young to help fight the malaise of our time in Jesus' name. They will not hear the powerful voice of Jesus if they are merely encouraged to prop up an organisation that is alleged to be collapsing."

Adoration

Bishop Donal also noted a third message from Knock for the Irish church today, saying: "The apparition on the gable wall that wet August evening was silent. St Joseph heard the voice of God in dreams. We live in a very noisy society, weighed down with the need to achieve more and travel more and entertain ourselves more. Yet in silence and adoration, God is to be found. In silence we bring nothing, but we wait in peace for God to still the thoughts of our heads and the anxieties of our hearts. Prayer allows God to fill our imaginations and touch our hearts."

"The Irish Church is on a synodal path to discover God's way forward for us. That involves listening to one another, for God can speak in unexpected places. But it means listening together for the voice of God, just as the



Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock

silent witnesses did in this holy place. We are not listening to God if we major on angry voices that think they have all the answers and that their voice must prevail. As the prophet Elijah discovered, God is not in the earthquake or the fire or the mighty wind, but in the still, small breeze. Knock calls us to pray and to listen.”

He concluded: “We can look back on the last century and a half, and on the work of God in His Church, despite the blind eye that was too often turned to the reality of sin in our lives and communities. Future generations will look back on these years of renewal in the Irish Church. In 2025, we are preparing to celebrate the Jubilee Year under the banner ‘Pilgrims of Hope’. Then we will be building towards regional and national synodal gatherings the following year. That leaves us six years until the 16th centenary of St Patrick’s arrival

Ireland, in 2032.

“Our Lady in Knock, along with St Joseph and St John call us to be a people who believe that God is busily at work to renew our ministry in Ireland. They call us to be outward looking, offering divine healing to a society that is fragmenting and intensely self-preoccupied. And they quietly ask us to find places for silence and prayer. If we do that, we will be a springtime people, pulling up weeds, preparing the ground, sowing the seeds of new life for the dead bones.

“We are called to be like Mary who is ‘blessed because she believed the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled’. Even in the most testing times, we can say with her, ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour’. Mother of Divine Hope, pray for us.”



Long Tower Folk Group led the singing during the Derry Diocesan Pilgrimage Mass.



What is Consecration to Jesus through Mary? *Fr Peter O'Kane*

THE Church’s year has just come to its conclusion at the end of November as we have celebrated the Feast of Christ the King, as the cycle of days and weeks, feasts and seasons brings us to the end of one liturgical year and the beginning of a new one. Throughout November, our eyes have turned to the example of people of faith as we have kept the feast of all the saints of the Church and of our lands, and prayed for those who have died. And now, as we begin the season of Advent, we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ at Christmas, with eyes, ears and hearts turned to Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary. And indeed, Christmas will bring us into a new calendar year where we embark on a Year of Jubilee, led by Pope Francis, called to be Pilgrims of Hope.

As a diocesan family, we are celebrating this Year of Jubilee by taking up in our homes Bishop Donal’s invitation to be Pilgrims of Hope through a time of shared prayer together called ‘Consecration to Jesus through Mary’. This journey of shared prayer happens over 33 days, from January 9 and culminating on February 11, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, when every day we will take a short time to pray together as a family of faith, led by the Bishop.

The word ‘consecration’ means a number of things in our Catholic tradition. In its broadest sense, it means to dedicate someone or something to God. So, in the celebration of the Mass, consecration refers to the moment when the priest, acting ‘in persona Christi’, pronounces the words of institution, the words of Christ at

the Last Supper: “This is My Body, this is the chalice of My Blood.” In this moment, the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, known to us as transubstantiation.

Consecration also refers to the dedicating of people or things to God for His service. For example, the vows or promises taken by a person who is living the religious life, whereby promises of chastity, poverty and obedience they undertake a special service to God. This is known as living the ‘consecrated life’. But also, objects can be consecrated, such as altars, churches, sacred vessels – and, indeed, the holy oil of Chrism is consecrated, usually by the Bishop at the Mass of Chrism on Holy Thursday morning. This is then used throughout the diocese for the celebration of Baptism and Confirmation, sacraments which impose an indelible mark on the person, where they become ‘of Christ’ and journey more deeply into the life of Christ.

Entrustment

There is another kind of consecration known in the Catholic tradition, as consecration in private devotion. Although ancient in its existence, this type of consecration took on a particular place in people’s faith life since the seventeenth century. This type of consecration is when a person makes a formal act of dedication, commitment, entrustment.

In our tradition, acts of consecration have been made to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the protection, guidance and aid of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph and other saints, with the idea that their example will inspire and help us desire to live more closely

and fully in discerning the will of God. This form of devotion was coined in a special way by St John Eudes, a French priest and pastor, founder of the Good Shepherd Sisters, and the other French Saint, Louis de Montfort, who preached ‘ad Iesum per Mariam’ – ‘to Jesus through Mary’, among other saints, and has been encouraged in more recent times, especially by Pope St John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and, most recently, by Pope Francis when he invited the Church throughout the world to pray with him in making an act of consecration in March 2022, when war threatened world peace.

It is this form of consecration that we are invited to enter more deeply into during the month of January as we begin the Year of Jubilee. By undertaking this journey together, we will be pilgrims of hope that, as we meditate on the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and be inspired by the simplicity of St Therese the Little Flower, we will be inspired to live the Word of God every day through our actions, words, prayers and presence with others. This echoes the words of Christ in St Matthew’s Gospel: “Anyone who does the will of my Father in Heaven, they are My brother and sister and mother.” So, this journey of consecration is a chance for us as brothers and sisters, led by Bishop Donal, to pray with and for one another.

Together

Every evening, from January 9 for 33 days at 7 pm, there will be a live broadcast led by the Bishop and other priests of the diocese, using the book ‘Child Consecration: To Jesus Through Mary - Following in the Spirit of St. Thérèse, the Little Flower’,

written by Blythe Kaufman. As homes throughout the diocese and beyond are invited to spend time in this prayer together, a moment of meditation is followed by prayers of our tradition, praying to the Holy Spirit and reciting the Rosary in particular. And to aid us, there will be resources on the Diocesan Website, Diocesan Social Media platforms and ‘The NET’ newspaper.

On this journey, we are inviting Jesus and Mary into our homes – physical homes in the diocese, but also the home of our hearts where, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, we will be inspired to live well every day, growing in holiness and leading others in their relationship with God. This Act of Consecration is an intention of commitment and prayer that will lead into action.

As we enter into the season of Advent, we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ, who was God walking among the human family. A great way to keep Christ alive is by our participation in the journey of consecration as members of the family of this diocese, of our parishes, of our own families and among our friends, and especially to encourage our young people, children and young adults, so that we can imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary and, grow deeper in our consecration to God first given at Baptism and inspired by the Word of God. Like Mary, we utter “let it be done” so that we may become true pilgrims of hope by entrusting ourselves to the Saviour, Christ our Hope, Christ our Peace, Christ our Life, as we make our way to Heaven.

Drumragh 125th Anniversary

Gathering in Sacred Heart Church, Omagh, on Mission Sunday for Mass celebrated by SMA Archbishop as part of 125th anniversary programme...

Drumragh parishioners reminded of mission to help fill Earth with God's love



THE 125th anniversary celebrations for the Church of the Sacred Heart in the Drumragh Parish, Omagh, continued on Mission Sunday with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly, SMA, who is the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, Thurles, Co Tipperary.

With the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) founded in Thurles, 140 years ago on November 1, 1884, and Most Rev Thomas Croke DD, the Archbishop at the time, asked to be one of its patrons, Archbishop Kieran also assumed the honour of being Patron of the GAA in Ireland, and so was delighted to be greeted with a guard of honour formed by young members of the GAA clubs in the Parish, as Papal flags waved in the strong wind.

Ordained to serve in the missionary priesthood with the Society of African Missions (SMA), the Cork native worked in Liberia and Nigeria before training to be part of a seminary formation team that was training African priests for the church in Nigeria.

"It was a great experience to be involved in the church in Nigeria training future priests," he recalled, adding: "I returned to Ireland to work in our administration in Cork and then I moved for some years to work in Rome in the administration there, until I was asked to come back to Ireland as a bishop, first in the Diocese of Killaloe and then in the Archdiocese of Cashel.

"After nearly five years in Ennis, I was asked to become Archbishop of Cashel and Emly. The rock of Cashel is the site of the ancient cathedral of the diocese but history, as we all know, changes many things, the cathedral is now in Thurles."

Welcoming the opportunity to speak on Mission Sunday about the mission assigned to each one, Archbishop Kieran reflected on what it means to be "a missionary disciple", as called to by Pope Francis.

Referring to words in the Psalm in the day's Liturgy of the Word, "The Lord loves Justice, The Lord fills the earth with His love", he explained that God's love is not

only communicated through the beauty of nature but, more importantly, through each person called to be a witness of God's love on Earth through Baptism.

"We are invited to be missionary disciples by the way we help to fill the earth with God's love," added the Archbishop.

Call to mission

He continued: "The baptism we have received is not something to be stored and kept special, like a treasure at home – rather it is a continual call to mission. The theme for today's Mission Sunday from Pope Francis is that we are to Go out and Invite to the Banquet – the banquet of the Word and the Banquet of the Eucharist. If the Lord is to fill the Earth with his love, He can only do it through each one of us.

"On this Mission Sunday, we remember specifically the work of our missionaries from our own communities, just like your parish here and throughout Ireland, who bring the good news of salvation. The great mission outreach from Ireland in the last 250 years is a wonderful tribute to the faith of the people of our country.

"Irish missionaries were, and still are, to be found all around the world; the men and women who have travelled to the ends of the Earth to bring the Gospel. We can take a moment of quiet pride in the fact that from our communities throughout the country, missionaries have gone out to bring the message of love and hope."

Looking upon the young people

in the congregation, Archbishop Kieran said: "I invite you to consider that maybe the Lord is calling one of you to be a missionary. The Gospel still must be preached and maybe one of you will carry on a great tradition that is part of your parish here.

"The spread of the Gospel continues, and I think one of the most important aspects for us in Ireland is that we adopt what Pope Francis calls a Missionary option in our parishes, to continue to 'transform everything, the ways of doing things, our times and our schedules so that our structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than just self-preserving what we had in the past' - Pope Francis.

"It is a great time to be alive in our church. It's a time when we are challenged to be missionary ourselves to engage in mission right here, in Omagh."

Great tradition

Considering Ireland's commitment, he remarked: "Ireland has a great tradition of involvement in the modern missionary outreach of the Church. From every parish in Ireland, men and women travelled literally to the ends of the earth as missionaries. Through their lives of witness and their Missionary Institutes, they contributed enormously to the mission entrusted to the Church by the Lord. It is an involvement that we can all be rightly proud of.

Your own parish here has given of your community men and women who have served in



Drumragh 125th Anniversary

continued from page 6

mission countries, and to this day continue to do so.”

He concluded with comment on the work of Missio Ireland, saying: “World Mission Sunday is not just another Sunday; it is a powerful reminder of our call to be missionaries. The collection taken up on this day is unique as it is taken up in every church throughout the world and is essential for the survival and growth of the Church in mission territories.

“The funds support the pastoral and evangelizing work of the Church, including building churches, providing healthcare and education, and training of future priests and religious. In places where resources are scarce, your generosity makes a profound difference.

“As we reflect on the theme, ‘Go and invite everyone to the banquet’, we recall that our participation and support helps invite countless women and men to the banquet of God’s love.

The funds collected assist in the funding of over 1,150 dioceses throughout the world, where people have very little resources to fund their local church. The funds collected go to educate seminarians for the priesthood, last year (2023) over 79,000 junior and senior seminarians were funded. The income from the collection on Mission Sunday also funds projects for children throughout the missionary world.”

Thanking the families and friends of missionaries at home in Ireland, Archbishop Kieran said: “When we return home from our mission assignments, whether it is in Africa or Asia or South America, the support of families and our church communities is so important for our work. To all our mission supporters, I say a special thank you - you are, in fact, the backbone of our support and truly valued.”

Archbishop Kieran was joined on the altar for the concelebration of the Mass by Fr Eugene Hasson PP Drumragh, Fr Joseph Varghese CC Drumragh,

Mons Joseph Donnelly PEM (Drumragh), Drumragh natives, Fr Damian Bresnahan SMA and Fr Cathal McKenna SMA,

Fr Peter McCawille SMA, native of Dregish, and Fr Aodhan McCrystal SMA, native of Dromore Parish in the Diocese of Clogher.

Thanking the Archbishop for being there for another special day amongst the blessings already enjoyed by the parish during the anniversary year of celebrations, Fr Eugene Hasson PP highlighted how the SMA had nourished the spiritual journey of many Drumragh parishioners through its summer camp.

Extending thanks to everyone gathered and to all who had helped in any way with preparations for the day of celebration, Fr Eugene paid tribute to the parish GAA clubs for interacting with the organisers and supporting the occasion. All were invited to come along to the neighbouring St Joseph’s Hall for some refreshments and fellowship afterwards.

The anniversary celebrations continue with a special visit by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor to celebrate Mass in Sacred Heart Church on Sunday, December 8, at 12 noon. The parishioners and priests of Drumragh Parish will be happy to welcome visitors to celebrate this Mass with them. Refreshments will be served after Mass in St Joseph’s Hall beside the church. There, Archbishop Montemayor will re-launch a special edition of Rev John J McGlade’s book, ‘Five Years Tour in America....’ first published in 1906.

Fr McGlade was parish priest of Newtownstewart when the book was published, and was later appointed to the parish of Limavady. Less than five copies of the original publication have been found, so this is an opportunity to purchase an historical document. Fr McGlade spent five interesting years raising funds in America and other places. He was the nephew of Mons Bernard McNamee, parish priest of Drumragh, when Sacred Heart Church was built.



Mountfield Chapel Anniversary

Mountfield parishioners celebrate 70 years of faith life in Corpus Christi Church



Corpus Christi Church, Mountfield. Blessed, opened and Solemnly Dedicated by Most Rev. Neil Farran, Bishop of Derry on June 17th 1954.

CORPUS Christi Church, in the Co Tyrone village of Mountfield, was filled to capacity for a Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday, September 29, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of its dedication.

The joyous occasion drew parishioners of all ages, with young families very much to the fore and the youthful voices of St Brigid's PS choir filling the air with their sweet singing during the ceremony.

Parish Priest, Fr Kevin McElhennon was the celebrant and he extended a warm welcome to the Mountfield parishioners, particularly the school children and their parents and staff, and to those who had returned home to be part of the special occasion.

Reflecting on the life of the church in Mountfield, located within the Cappagh Parish, a number of symbols were brought forward to the sanctuary, the first being a trowel to represent those who had donated money and land in order for the church to be erected and furnished, which was presented by Breege McCauley, whose father, Mickey McDermott had gifted the land to the Parish on which the church is built. Those who had worked on the building of the church, the altar and the Stations of the Cross were also remembered.

A photograph of the 16 children from Mountain View School who were confirmed by Bishop Farren after the Opening High Mass,

on June 17, 1954, was brought forward by Sarah Meenagh, who had been one of the children confirmed that day. Another photograph was presented of the first couple to be married in the church, Ned and Mary Bridget Gorman, on November 23, 1954.

A white Baptism shawl, symbolising the new life that all receive in Baptism, was brought forward by Niamh Meenagh, whose daughter, Fiadh was one of the most recent baptisms in the church, in July 2024. A 'Do This In Memory of Me' candle, representing the light of faith passed on from generation to generation, was brought forward by Shane Og Tracey, who received the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion in the church in 2024.

Martin Gallagher, a Eucharistic Minister who brings Holy Communion to the housebound, brought forward oil representing the oil that the priest uses to anoint the sick, remembering those unable to attend the ceremony due to illness or old age.

A photograph taken on the day the church was blessed and dedicated to Corpus Christi, which has been displayed in the sacristy for 70 years, was brought forward by Kathleen McDonald-Farquharson on behalf of Teresa McDonald, her late husband Stanley, and the late Pete and Sean McAleer, who all served as

sacristans. Teresa and Stanley had been sacristans for 26 years.

St Brigid's PS pupil, Lucia Donaghy brought forward a St Brigid's Cross representing the strong link between the church and Catholic schools in the village, firstly Mountain View School and then St Brigid's. The Thanksgiving Mass also celebrated the beginning of a new school year for the pupils and staff of St Brigid's.

The Lectionary, representing the local community's faith and commitment to following God's Word, was carried forward by Rosemary Meenan, whose mother, Rita, had organised the Ministers of the Word for over 25 years, and was also a committed member of the Flower Arrangers' Team.

After Mass, everyone was invited to the Community Centre for refreshments and to view displays on the history of the church and various celebrations held there over the past 70 years.

The story of the construction of Corpus Christi Church began on Thursday, May 15, 1947, when Bishop Farren laid the foundation stone and blessed the grounds on which the church building would be erected, overseen by the parish priest, Fr J McKenna. The Bishop returned on Thursday, June 17, 1954, the Feast of Corpus Christi, to bless and dedicate The Church of Corpus Christi.



Mountfield Chapel Anniversary

Milestone jubilee not just a celebration of the past but a call for the future – Fr Kevin McElhennon



THE celebration of the milestone 70th anniversary of Corpus Christi Church, Mountfield, has been highlighted as not only an opportunity to reflect on what the village Church means to those part of it now, but also a time to envision what it will be in the future.

Speaking on this during his homily at the Thanksgiving Mass, Fr Kevin McElhennon PP paid tribute to the generations who had continued to find their way to Corpus Christi Church to worship together, to receive the sacraments, and to grow in faith.

“This church,” he said, “has stood as a reminder that in the often unsettling and confusing changes of life, God is always present, offering peace, rest and hope.”

He went on to remark: “As we look to the future, there is an undeniable concern that weighs heavily on our hearts; the practice

of our faith is dwindling, not just in Mountfield but everywhere. This Church and other churches, that were once full, now see fewer people attending. The rhythm of faith that once marked the lives of many has faded. Life has become busier, distractions abound. For some, faith may feel distant, perhaps even irrelevant in the face of life’s struggles.

“And alarmingly, with this decline in religious practice, society has seen a frightening deterioration in mental well-being, especially among our young; a loss of a sense of belonging, lack of meaning and purpose.

“As we have grown distant from the practice of faith, recall a well-known truth, that practice of faith is good for us, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, for life here and eternally.”

Stating that this was not just a celebration of the past, but a call

for the future, Fr Kevin said: “As we reflect on these 70 years, let us ask ourselves, ‘What do we want this church to mean to our children, to our grandchildren, and to all who live in Mountfield in the years to come?’

He continued: “For those who regularly attend Mass, this celebration is for you a time to renew your faithfulness and dedication. It is a time when we ask ourselves how we can share our faith with others. How can we extend our hands and hearts to those who may feel disconnected from the practice of faith, from God?”

“To those here who may rarely attend Mass, we are genuinely grateful for your presence. Your participation today is an essential part of this celebration. It signals that you are very much part of this community. I want to gently challenge you to reflect on what Corpus Christi means to you. What memories do you hold? What moments have been significant in your lives that are tied to this place?”

“You may have your reasons for stepping back, perhaps life has taken you in different directions or maybe you’ve felt that church no longer resonates with you. But, I urge you to ask yourself what it might mean to reconnect. What

might it feel like to re-engage with a community that gathers with God and is always here for you?”

Fr Kevin then encouraged the congregation to all look to the future and imagine a community where everyone feels valued and connected: “Picture our church as a place where everyone, whether regular attender or someone who hasn’t come in years, can feel the warmth and the love of Christ. This celebration is not just about filling pews, it’s about building relationships.”

“As we celebrate this anniversary,” he added, “let’s consider how we can breathe new life into this church. What legacy do we want to leave? What stories do we want to tell our children and grandchildren about what it meant to be part of Corpus Christi?”

“We must see ourselves as stewards of this sacred space, tasked with nurturing its future. This church is a gift not just for us, but for future generations. Let us recommit ourselves to this mission to be the Body of Christ not just in name but in action. Let us make Corpus Christi Church a place where everyone feels welcome, valued and loved, and grows in relationship with one another and with God.



Pope St John Paul II Novena a powerful and blessed time for Badoney Lower *by Colm O'Neill*



St John Paul II is celebrated as one of the great popes and saints of our time for his spiritual leadership and his commitment to the family, which he emphasised throughout his papacy by his teachings on mercy, human dignity, love, and the importance of faith in all aspects of our daily life. These were constant themes throughout the nine-day Novena to St John Paul in the lead up to his Feast Day on October 22, in St Patrick's Church, Gortin. A first-class relic of St John Paul II was present every night for veneration.

On the opening night, Fr James Devine gave a talk on the life and times of Pope John Paul growing up in Poland during times of firstly Nazi occupation followed by communism oppression, and his bereavements at such an early age. While these hammer blows would have crushed many young men, the young Karol Wojtyla turned to God with total and unwavering faith.

Total Trust

As a young priest in a Catholic country under communism, he showed his unshakable courage by organising underground prayer groups to maintain and strengthen the faith while public expressions of faith were suppressed, and many clergy were imprisoned. Later, as Pope John Paul II, he showed us how to defeat the enemies of our faith and evil in the world through deep prayer, meditation and having total trust in the power and mercy of Jesus.

On the night of Mass and Reconciliation Service, quoting Pope St John Paul who said, "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ, Fr Roland Colhoun urged the large congregation present to open wide their hearts to the mercy of God's healing. John Paul invited those distant from the Sacrament of Reconciliation to return, stating, "Christ himself is waiting for you. He will heal you, and you will be at peace with God." John Paul also described confession as "an act of honesty and courage; an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving

for personal and communal faith, and a vital expression of love and unity in Christ.

What a truly beautiful and sacred service of prayer, reflection and worship we had on the Sunday night of our Novena Holy Hour with Fr Devine. As part of the service, we reflected on the letter from St Mother Teresa of Calcutta...

I Thirst For You "Yes, I Thirst For You."

All your life I have been desiring your love. I've never ceased searching for your love and longing to be loved by you in return. You have tried many things in your goal to be happy. Why not try opening up for Me your heart, right now, more than you ever have before? When you finally open the doors of your heart and you finally come close enough, you will then hear Me say again and again, not in mere human words but in spirit: 'No matter what you have done, I love you for your own sake. Come to Me with your misery and your sins, with your problems and needs, and with all your desire to be loved. I stand at the door of your heart and call...Open to Me, for I thirst for you.'

"Jesus is God, therefore His Love and His Thirst are infinite. He, the Creator of the universe, asked for the love of His creatures. He has thirst for our love...These words: 'I Thirst'...Do they echo in our soul?" (St Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Divine Mercy

On the final night of the Novena, Fr Devine gave a passionate talk on Divine Mercy. From its origins, with the revelations to St Faustina, to its approval by Pope John Paul II and the establishment of Divine Mercy Sunday on the second Sunday of Easter, he recounted the ups and downs of the process and the huge joy on April 30, 2000, with John Paul's announcement.

John Paul II frequently spoke about the urgent need for God's mercy in a world marked by

suffering, conflict, and moral challenges. He called for the message of Divine Mercy to be proclaimed to all, especially to those in despair or facing injustice. He highlighted that the Church's mission includes proclaiming God's mercy as a source of hope and salvation, particularly in the context of contemporary issues facing humanity. Through these actions and teachings, Pope John Paul II sought to make the message of Divine Mercy a central aspect of the Church's mission and a source of hope for all people.

Youth

Pope John Paul had a love for the youth, so it was fitting that the last stop for the relic of St John Paul in our parish was at our local primary school, St Patrick's, Gortin.

St John Paul invested so much of his life inspiring young people to "be not afraid" and to "open wide the doors to Christ". He also started the World Youth Day celebrations that have attracted hundreds of thousands of young people each time they are held.

We prayed for the young people of our parish and in our local primary school, that through the inspiration and intercession of St John Paul they will come to know and love Jesus and Mary with all their hearts and live lives of peace and happiness. Thank you to the school for receiving the relic with so much love and reverence.

The parishioners of Badoney Lower were truly blessed and privileged to have had such a powerful novena and relic in their parish, and really felt the power and love of St John Paul in their midst throughout the nine days of the novena. They express their deepest heartfelt thanks to Fathers Donnelly, Colhoun and Devine for all their hard work and commitment in celebrating the Novena with them, their inspirational talks and the dedication they have shown to our parish.



Honouring St Pio in Banagher *by Joanne Hasson*

BANAGHER Parish held a Novena in honour of St Pio of Pietrelcina from September 21-29. The Novena to this popular saint provided a fitting welcome for new Parish Priest, Fr Dermot McGirr, who had a busy week with a full schedule of early and mid-morning Masses and evening devotions across the churches in Fincairn, Altinure and Foreglen.

Bishop Donal McKeown delighted the congregation with his spiritual wisdom and insight when he visited Fincairn for the first of the evening devotions on Sunday, September 22, and spoke about St Pio and his life and unique faith

journey.

Charlene McDaid shared her faith story with us on Monday evening, of how she felt she experienced the close presence of St Pio when she was very ill in hospital and that this was the beginning of a great deal of healing for her.

Tuesday evening introduced us to Barry Mallett, who lives in Derry city and is entrusted with one of St Pio's mitts that is available to people. He shared with parishioners some of the powerful experiences he has had in bringing the mitt to people across the city who have requested it, and the impact that coming into contact with the mitt

and having it for a short time has had on them.

Mid-Novena, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, Brendan McGinn, principal of St Mary's College, Derry, and Martina Davidson, Head of the Religious Education Department, St Cecilia's College, Derry, spoke on each of their nights about their sense of their Catholic Christian faith and what it means to them, and on the place that St Pio has in their personal journey of faith.

Fr Bryan Shortall OFM, national director of the Padre Pio Apostolate, shared stories with the congregation about St Pio and something of the

encounters that he has had with the faithful across Ireland as director of the Apostolate and as a Capuchin Franciscan priest, which have been inspired by people's devotion to St Pio.

The novena concluded with a very well attended closing ceremony and blessing of the roses and candles on Sunday afternoon, September 29.

Fr McGirr and the Parish Pastoral Council would like to thank our parishioners, those from neighbouring parishes, those who tuned in online, and all who helped with arrangements during the extended week of the Novena.



Padre Pio opened his heart to promptings of Holy Spirit – Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap



THE extent of devotion in the Diocese to St Pio of Pietrelcina, the Italian Capuchin friar, priest, and mystic, who bore the wounds of Christ, is reflected in the number of St Pio Prayer Groups in parishes and the increasing number of St Pio Novenas and Masses to celebrate his Feast Day on September 23.

As well as the Banagher Parish, there were St Pio Novenas in other areas such as Creggan, in Derry City, and Cappagh, in Omagh, and a special Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Mercy, in Lavey.

Capuchin Franciscan, Fr Bryan Shortall, the national director of the Padre Pio Apostolate, was guest speaker at the Cappagh and

Banagher Novenas, and was the main celebrant and homilist at the Lavey Mass.

Pointing out that St Pio had only died in 1968, Fr Bryan said: "He lived in our time. His voice is recorded and you can see colour photographs of him. He is not that far away from us; he has only gone as far as God, and God is very near."

Speaking about St Pio's ability "to travel between our world and the Kingdom", he told those gathered: "Each of us can travel in a way between Heaven and Earth through prayer. At Mass, we are in Heaven as we are encountering Jesus in the Word and the Eucharist. Don't wait to die to go to Heaven."

Sharing some stories about St Pio, Fr Bryan recalled one told by a young friar who had been cleaning tables in the dining room where Padre Pio had been eating and exchanging conversation with other friars: "He noticed Padre Pio go into a state of prayer, with his hands on his head. It had been about 12.25 mid-day, and after about 25 minutes, he lifted his head up again.

"Bags and bags of mail used to come to the friary for Padre Pio. One letter was from a bishop in South America, who was writing to thank him for his prayers and to let him know that he had recovered. One of the friars found the details of the letter strangely familiar. The bishop recounted that he had cried out to his Guardian Angel in great pain and that Padre Pio had come and blessed him. The bishop added that when Padre Pio left him on May 12, he started to feel better and the doctors then found that his tumour had completely gone and he was healed. The friar realised,

from the details given, that he had seen Padre Pio in Rome, but this Bishop had seen him at the same time at his hospital bedside in South America.

"That is one aspect of Padre Pio's powerful gifts. He opened his heart to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and actions of the Lord. We can't explain these things in a worldly sense, but it doesn't really matter. Padre Pio said to anyone who couldn't come to him, to send him their Guardian Angel, and we can do the same today."

Fr Bryan concluded by telling those gathered: "You, too, are called to be saints and witnesses for others. Let each of us travel towards the Kingdom, supporting and sanctifying each other as we make our way to Jesus.

At the end of Mass, Fr Bryan was joined by Fr Eamon Graham, PP Lavey, in blessing people with relics of St Pio. Pointing out that the Saint's relics didn't contain any "special power", he stated: "It is Jesus who is the Healer."



Great day out for Bellaghy SVP

(Photographs by Paul Browne)

BELLAGHY St Vincent de Paul Society organised a big day out for senior citizens, starting with a warm cup of tea/coffee in The Inn, Castledawson.

The group of 48 then made its way to Derry for some retail therapy, or time to chill and watch the world go by.

Having worked up an appetite, they set off for dinner at An

Grianan Hotel, in Burt, and then on to the Co Donegal seaside town of Buncrana for the option of some award winning ice cream for dessert.

Feeling the sleepy effect of all the exercise, fresh air and scrumptious food, some slipped into Noddy Land on the return journey home. An enjoyable day for all.



Bocan Chapel fundraiser a big success

'BIG Nights in Bocan' was a big success, with great support for the fundraising concert in aid of Bocan Chapel Repainting Fund.

Held in Bocan Hall, the night was a nostalgic look back through the years with music, songs and stories, featuring local and guest artistes, with jazz, swing, old tyme, and traditional.

A special treat was the appearance of the Bocan Ceili Band and surprise visit by a couple of 'Scottish

guests'.

Appreciation was expressed to Roisin McGrory for preparing and organising everything, and to Neil, John and all the McGrory family, who wanted to raise money for the fundraiser in remembrance of their father, John Joe and his devotion to all aspects of St Mary's during his life.

The uplifting night came to close with all joining in the singing of 'Home to Donegal'.



St John's Choir add special touch to Coleraine Taize Mass



Over £2500 raised for Hospice from Ardmore Coffee Morning

ARDMORE parishioners, Josephine McDermott and Mary Murray organised a very successful Coffee Morning in aid of the Foyle Hospice, with donations reaching over £2,500.

The fundraiser was held in the Ardmore Pastoral Centre after the morning Mass on Thursday, October 17.

As well as tea/coffee, a wide selection of delicious scones, cakes, etc, were available. The event was rounded off with a raffle for lots of prizes donated by parishioners.

In all, £2521.36, plus 20 Euros, was collected and passed on to the Foyle Hospice.



Special blessing for Long Tower pets



Enjoyable night at Coleraine SVP party



Young Writers share thoughts...

WITH 2024 coming to a close and much to look forward to in the 2025 Jubilee Year, Youth of Acutis founder, James welcomes the much anticipated date for the canonisation of Italian teenager, Blessed Carlo Acutis.

Niamh reflects on the message of love and hope for young Catholics in the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, seeing the December 12 Feast Day as an opportunity to deepen faith and celebrate community.

The bombardment of opinions regarding 'assisted dying' moved Bláthnaid to write about the important role our religion needs to play in all areas of life, hoping that as we place the 'Baby Jesus' in our cribs this Christmas we will be reminded of the blessing of welcoming Him into our hearts, homes, and politics.

On the countdown to his 18th birthday and entry into adulthood, Seán reflects on the benefits of life experiences for development as a person and the fear that the unpredictability of the future can bring, and how he takes comfort from repeated Scripture messages to not be afraid because God is always at our side.

Luke writes about the importance of community in helping each to grow in their faith and become better people, while Erin reflects on the hunger in our hearts for God, which only He can satisfy, and how the season of Advent provides opportunities of prayer to draw us closer to our Heavenly Father.



Cara-leigh Doherty - Derry City Deanery
Bronagh Doherty, Co Derry Deanery
Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery.
John Augustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery.
James Tourish, Derry City Deanery.
Erin Whoriskey, Derry City Deanery



Bláthnaid McMenamin - Co Tyrone Deanery
Shea Doherty, Derry City Deanery
Evan Curran, Derry City Deanery
Seán McLaughlin, Co Tyrone Deanery
Niamh Sharkey, Derry City Deanery
Cadhla Shivers, Co Derry Deanery
Luke Doherty, Inishowen Deanery

Our God-shaped hole by Erin

AS humans on this earth, we are all on a search for happiness. We search for this in many different ways. However, Blaise Pascal, who was a Catholic writer and philosopher, said: "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the creator, made known through Jesus."

We all have a hunger in our hearts for God, which only He can satisfy. Jesus Christ came into this world to remind us of God's love for us, which there is an empty space in our souls for. Instead of acknowledging that only He can fill this space, people tend to look for it in other places, such as alcohol, drugs, pleasure, money, fame, and so on. Unanswered questions and confusions can lead us to seek these false answers and attempt to find happiness in the wrong places, but this will always be unsuccessful for us and leave us just as empty as before.

St Augustine of Hippo wrote in his Confessions: "You have made

us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." This supports the idea that only God can satisfy, and this space in our souls can only be filled by Him. When Adam and Eve committed the first sin, this hole was opened and since then we have been attempting to fill it. This idea is connected with Psalm 42:2, which says: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

There are many ways in which to help fill this hole, that is to give God His place at the centre of our heart. We should make more time and space for God to work in our lives, for example, spending time in prayer and adoration.

You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

St Augustine of Hippo

"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21)

Our religion most certainly has a place in our politics and human rights by Bláthnaid

IN the weeks leading up to Friday, November 29, the scheduled date of MPs voting on the new assisted dying bill, it was hard to avoid the countless news reports on various different prominent political figures' thoughts and opinions on such matters. My thoughts were how much of this were we supposed to listen to, and how did we remain faithful to the Truth amidst all the hustling and bustling conversations?

Our Lady of Lourdes said in her third statement: "I cannot promise you happiness in this life, but in the next one." As humans, through our own brokenness we tend to forget God's Will in our politics and personal affairs and, therefore, as a result end up bringing not our faith, but our feelings with us to the ballot box. This is dangerous and something that we must make an effort to stop doing, as it is an abandonment of our Catholic faith, which is not what God wants. Through everything in life, we must remember that God sees things in a bigger perspective than we do; the salvation of our souls, as opposed to our temporary happiness on Earth.

In relation to this new assisted dying bill, many Catholics have also been voicing their opinions. The Church has been very open and honest in disapproving of the proposed legislation, with the Catholic Bishops' Conference addressing the issue in a letter

outlining both The Church's law and doctrine on such matters. Commenting on the importance of compassion, the bishops wrote that "people who are suffering need to know they are loved and valued. They need compassionate care, not assistance to end their lives."

Understandably, this letter has been spread widely across many different Catholic platforms, such as podcasts, blogs and social media pages. Furthermore, many priests across the UK have commented on it during homilies, reminding congregations of their responsibility as followers of Christ to oppose this bill, asking them to contact their local MPs to do so.

Whilst scrolling on social media, I came across a post from one woman who was angry that her parish priest had done so, and claimed that "religion has no place in politics or in women's rights." Although it can sometimes be hard to accept, or hard to practice, the reality is that our religion most certainly does have a place in our politics and human rights.

Having true faith means that we try our best to honour God in all that we do, not just in what we think is easiest. We cannot attend Mass once a week and not welcome Christ into our lives the other six days, that is not what God wants. He wants a true relationship with us, and as the famous phrase goes, "You



will starve if you only eat on a Sunday."

Church teaching highlights the importance of the sanctity of life. The gift of life is a sacred and miraculous thing that God has been gracious enough to bless us with, and euthanasia in any way, shape, or form is an abuse of that. In the Book of Job, we are reminded of this when, even in the midst of his suffering, Job said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Job acknowledges that he is going through an extremely painful time, and yet continues to pray to God and maintain his relationship with him through each and every wave of hurt and

confusion. Job is an excellent role model for how we should respond to all of life's trials and tribulations, and showcases how prayer should be treated as not a last, but a first resort. Our lives are not ours to take, our bodies are not ours to choose, and our faith is not ours to abandon.

As we enter the Advent season, we like to remind ourselves of the wonderful grace of God and how miraculous it is that He has given us His one true Son, Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. So, perhaps, as we place the baby Jesus in the crib on December 24 this year, let's remind ourselves what a true blessing and honour it is to be able to welcome Jesus into our hearts, homes, and politics.

Community in Faith by Luke

BY nature, we, as humans, are social creatures. It is common sense that being isolated from other people is harmful to our mental health. In a similar way, being isolated in faith is harmful to our spiritual health.

Faith can be a largely personal and individual journey at times. After all, at its core faith is the relationship between us and God. However, this doesn't mean that faith is something that we must handle alone. Without others around to challenge and support us, our development in faith can stagnate.

The Bible recognises the importance of a community in the growth of faith. One example of this can be found in Thessalonians 5:14 - "And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone." In this biblical verse, we see an

example of the phrase "brothers and sisters", which is a frequent reminder that we, as Christians, are a family. In other words, we are a community. This verse also urges us to care for and support one another. We are responsible for helping those around us to become better people, just as they are responsible for helping us when we need it.

Community gives us the opportunity to serve one another and learn together. A person cannot be a good Christian without other people around us, because to be a good Christian doesn't just entail being faithful and not doing any harm, it entails actively trying to make the world around us a better and more loving place. This cannot be achieved if they are cut off from the community that they, and every other person, deserve.

Being separated from others also inhibits our growth in faith, as we are cut off from

perspectives that differ from our own. In isolation, it is easy for someone to think that they are following their faith as well as they can be, but exposure to other viewpoints can spur us on to improve as Christians.

Community is also important because it is inevitable that our faith will encounter challenges, that is a part of life. It is a natural part of our journey in faith to encounter these obstacles. However, it is much more difficult to overcome such difficulties alone. This is stated in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 - "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up."

Community is of vital importance in our life, and it is important to remember to be there to support others and let them support you.

Young Writers share thoughts...

The first Millennial Saint - Carlo Acutis

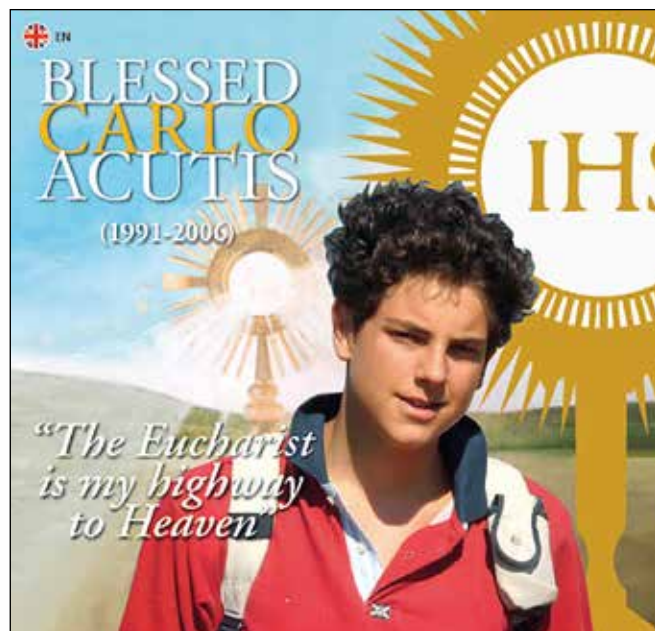
by James

ON November 20, Pope Francis announced from the Vatican that Blessed Carlo Acutis will be officially canonised during the 2025 Jubilee of Teenagers in Rome. During the Jubilee, which takes place from April 25-27, it is expected that tens, perhaps even hundreds of thousands will flock to Rome to celebrate it, with the canonisation of the 'Millennial Saint' Carlo Acutis to be the key event during this time.

Carlo's canonisation news came during the Pope's general audience in St Peter's Square as Pope Francis celebrated World Children's Day. It is long-awaited news and, although the canonisation date was expected to come during the 2025 Jubilee year, many will still be overjoyed to officially hear of the confirmation.

Not least happy, it is with particular delight for the group I am personally involved with, the Youth of Acutis. Established with the intention of bringing young people towards Christ, we seek to follow the example of Carlo who demonstrated how to use his youthfulness, in this technological age, to advance the Gospel and bring more people to the faith. In a world where technology dominates daily life, young people often struggle to find role models who reflect both their faith and their lived reality.

Carlo, a teenager from Italy who not only embraced his Catholic faith with zeal but also used modern technology as a



tool for evangelization, detailing Eucharistic Miracles on his own website that he created, used the revolution of the internet to connect people not to meaningless sites or pages, but to Jesus Christ. His canonization by the Catholic Church is more than a milestone; it is a beacon of hope for young Catholics everywhere.

Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation 'Christus Vivit', called Carlo a role model for young people, highlighting his ability to integrate faith and technology. Carlo's canonisation also speaks to the universal call to holiness. His short life, he passing away at the age of just 15 from leukaemia, proves that sanctity is not measured by years but by the

intensity of one's love for God and neighbour. For young Catholics, his story is a reminder that their lives, no matter how brief or seemingly ordinary, can have an extraordinary impact.

Young Acutis understood that Faith must be put into action, and his life serves as an example of Christian action. For our group named after Carlo, we hope to put our own faith into action, by following in the footsteps of Carlo Acutis and always seeking to, as in his own words, "be always united with Jesus, this is my plan of life."

We ask for your own prayers for the group's continuation and work, and of course, we say, Blessed Carlo Acutis, pray for us!

Our Lady of Guadalupe - A message of love and hope for young Catholics

by Niamh

IN the heart of the Catholic Church's history lies a story filled with hope, love and miracles; the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe. For young Catholics, this story is more than just a historical event; it is a call to live out faith courageously and compassionately.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, known as the 'Patroness of the Americas', appeared to a humble indigenous man, St Juan Diego, in 1531 on Tepeyac Hill, near modern-day Mexico City. This miraculous encounter not only transformed the life of Juan Diego but also ignited a wave of faith that continues to inspire millions.

On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego was on his way to Mass when he encountered a beautiful lady surrounded by radiant light. She revealed herself as the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and spoke to him in his native language, Nahuatl. Mary asked Juan Diego to tell the local bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, to build a church in her honour at that very spot.

Despite Juan Diego's earnest efforts, the bishop doubted his story and asked for a sign. Mary reassured Juan Diego and provided him with miraculous proof. On December 12, she instructed him to gather roses, a rare sight in the cold winter, and carry them in his tilma (cloak) to the bishop. When Juan Diego

opened his tilma, the roses fell to the ground, revealing an image of the Virgin Mary imprinted on the fabric.

This image, now enshrined in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, remains a source of awe and devotion. Scientists have studied the tilma for centuries, unable to explain how the image was created or how the fabric has endured for nearly 500 years. The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe offers profound lessons for Catholic youth today. Juan Diego was an ordinary man, yet God chose him for an extraordinary mission. This reminds us that we don't need to be famous or powerful to make a difference. When we are open to God's call, He can work through us in amazing ways.

However, the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe isn't just about miracles; it's about taking action. Juan Diego didn't shy away from his mission, even when met with scepticism. As young Catholics, we are called to live out our faith boldly, helping others, standing up for justice, and sharing God's love.

For young Catholics, December 12 is not just a feast day, it's an opportunity to deepen faith and celebrate community. Attending Mass, praying the Rosary, participating in cultural celebrations, or serving others in honour of Our Lady are



meaningful ways to live out her message. Our Lady of Guadalupe invites us to see ourselves as part of God's grand story, where even the smallest acts of faith can have an eternal impact. She reminds us of God's love and calls us to be His instruments of peace and hope.

As young Catholics, let us look to Mary, our Mother, as a source of inspiration and strength, trusting that with her guidance, we can bring Christ's light to the world.

"Am I not here, I who am your Mother?" Let these words echo in our hearts, drawing us closer to her Son and to one another.

What have I to fear from the future when God is by my side? by Seán

EXPERIENCES are what develop a person into who they are. People gaze back into their own past; they reminisce about times in which they felt a vast range of emotions and achieved or failed at many things. They remember good and bad times, times they were content and times they despaired.

I often turn my mind back to my childhood. I think about the memories that I gathered from times when the summer sun seemed brighter and warmer, times when the winter skies were pale and clear and I had time to enjoy the snow that flurried down and blanketed the cold, hard ground.

We have experiences for a reason; they are events in our life enabled by God for our own personal construction, the fortification of the mind and soul. Not everything we go through will seem satisfactory to us at the time, and yet with hindsight the spiritually aware will come to learn from those times of uncertainty.

The famous writer, CS Lewis

stated, "God allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons that we could learn in no other way."

It is the year 2024 in Anno Domini. There were many things in these past 11 months which have remoulded my worldview, drawn me spiritually closer to God than ever before. Pushing through the hardest examinations of my life thus far has astronomically boosted my resilience; I can achieve when I put my mind to it and exert energy into working towards a goal.

Going on the Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage in July was an unforgettable experience which deepened my spirituality beyond any previous level, and simply made me more aware of the world. Peace and quiet in deep thought and prayer for five days, the only sound a clear voice saying the Rosary in a vast array of languages, showing that the Word of God has reached many nations; the request of Jesus for His apostles at Pentecost: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all

creation" (Mark 16:15). Humid walks into the peaceful, rolling, green hills leading up into the Pyrenees Mountains to see the village where St Bernadette grew up. I was reminded of my Lourdes experience when the relics of St Bernadette came to Derry in October, and standing before them brought back a rush of vibrant memory. The pilgrimage to Lourdes was utterly fundamental to my development.

As the year 2024 draws to a swift close, I know for certain that it will be a chapter of my life which I will look back on with great fondness. I did a great abundance of things this year which I feel drew me closer to God. My pilgrimages to Lourdes and Knock, coupled with my completion of the Pope John Paul II Award, my monthly thoughtful contributions to this publication, along with my privileged role as sacristan of St Columb's College, have all focused my spiritual journey.

Unpredictable

I have always feared growing

older and having to live out my life. I turned 17 years old this year and, on my birthday in April, it scarcely dawned on me that in another 365 days I would be a legal adult – and that is only five months from now. Although the age of 18 seems like nothing to most people, a checkpoint in the course of life that they surpassed long ago, to me it has been an age that I have been dreadfully anticipating for years. The future is so unpredictable, and that is what makes it all the more feared. From day-to-day, we cannot anticipate what exactly will happen; we can plan and schedule, but there is no guarantee that we will ever be satisfied with the results of our time here.

In Jeremiah 29:11, God makes it clear: "I know what my plans for you are." And although the plans of God for us are not set in stone, they are the blueprint by which we should live our lives. What have I to fear from the future when God is by my side and draws a guiding line for me? The statement, "Be not afraid" is repeated in scripture countless times; a

constant reminder that whatever happens in life, God awaits us on the other side.

Powerful are the wise words of ancient scripture when it comes to the topic of fear and personal development. Isaiah 41:10-13 states: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will give you strength, I will bring you help, I will uphold you with the right hand of justice. All who rage against you will be put to shame and disgrace; all who fight against you will perish and come to nothing. You will seek but will not find them; those enemies of yours, those who took up arms against you will be destroyed, brought to nothing. For I, Yahweh, your God, take a hold of your right hand and say to you: 'Fear not, I am your assistance'."

They are some of the most powerful verses I have read, and they aided me considerably in realising that there is no purpose in stressing over what is to come. There will always be challenges and obstacles that block us from our aim and, whether we manage

to overcome them or not, there is no reason to fear the unideal alternative. Always there will be those people cold of heart who wish to see God-fearing people fail, but never forget that, in the end, it will be they who will see the fiery flames for their spite in life.

Those who recognise Jesus Christ and know that He is, indeed, the Son of God have nothing to fear at the end of their time here. This world is a shadowy place, and yet without light there is no shadow. At night there is no sun and yet its light reflects off the moon to remind us that it will return with morning to ease us. There is great evil in the world, and yet without good there is no evil. Always, the omnibenevolence of God will be present when our time comes.

"Although I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are beside me: your rod and your staff comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

Children in Crossfire fundraising co-ordinator, Shauna O'Neill calls for...

Help to provide nutrition, healthcare and education for inner-city children



I was delighted to accompany a group of Children in Crossfire supporters to Tanzania earlier in the year, to show them directly how they are helping us to deliver meaningful change for vulnerable children, families and communities.

Our visit to Dar es Salaam was especially impactful. Dar es Salaam is one of the fastest

growing cities on Earth, with a population of over six million. There are almost one million children aged five or under; 75% of whom are growing up in informal settlements. People there are highly resilient, but poverty is profound. We were privileged on our trip to meet children and families who are the human beings behind those

statistics, and this year our Advent Appeal focuses on them.

Together with the Tanzanian government and local day-care centres in inner-city Dar es Salaam, our goal is to ensure as many children as possible have daily access to nutritious food, good healthcare and high-quality education, before it's too late. That's children like Abraham, pictured, whose mother never got an education and deeply wants him to get a good start in life. We also want to support children with disabilities, those who spend their days on the streets, and orphans without the family network little Abraham is blessed to have.

We are deeply grateful for the kind support we receive from parishes in the Derry Diocese year-after-year, especially as we appreciate how tough times are here. We know that they share our passionately held belief that every child in this world matters.

- £22/€26 could help buy essential learning materials for one day-care centre.
- £35/€42 could help cover the cost of training for one day-care worker.
- £68/€82 could help ensure eight vulnerable children receive day-care for one month.
- £102/€122 could help pay for

day-care for one child for an entire year.

- £250/€300 could help pay for nutritious food for 1,000 children for one day.
- £408/€488 could help ensure four children with disabilities can access day-care for an entire year.

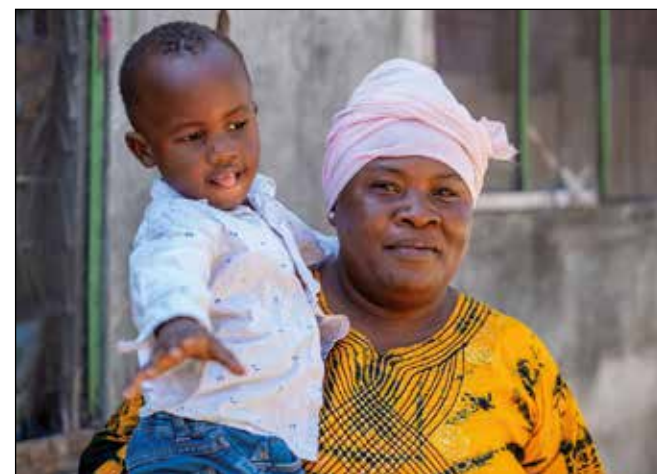
I also want to thank 'The Net' for its support, not just this year but over many. The publication helps us to reach people whose compassion and care in turn helps us to make a meaningful difference for children growing up in deep poverty. Anyone who wishes to donate to our Advent Appeal can:

- Go to www.childrenincrossfire.org/donate-advent
- Send a cheque made payable to Children in Crossfire to 2 St Joseph's Ave, Derry, BT48 6TH
- Call us on 028 7126 9898
- Scan the QR code



**Children
in Crossfire**

GIVING CHILDREN THE CHANCE TO CHOOSE



Together let's transform children's lives *by Ellen McCloskey*



AS the Advent season comes upon us, it's a time for reflection and gratitude, particularly for the many blessings that we often take for granted. During my recent trip to Tanzania, I was reminded in the most profound way how much we have, and how little others sometimes do. I had the privilege of visiting some of the most disadvantaged areas in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza with the charity Children in Crossfire, and it was an experience that has reshaped my understanding of what it means to make a difference.

Children in Crossfire's work in Tanzania focuses primarily on early childhood education. During my time there, I had the opportunity to visit pre-primary

school classrooms that had been developed through their projects, and the contrast between these spaces and others in the region was stark.

The Children in Crossfire classrooms were a beacon of light amidst overwhelming poverty. Bright, colourful walls adorned with vibrant artwork created an atmosphere of joy and possibility. The children, full of energy and enthusiasm, eagerly showed us their learning. Whether it was dancing, singing, or engaging in arts and crafts, it was clear that these classrooms were not just spaces for education - they were safe havens where children could grow, learn, and simply be children.

The dedication of the teachers

there was equally inspiring. They greeted us with open arms, sharing stories of how these educational spaces had transformed their communities. One educator described how parents, who once had to make the difficult decision between sending their children to school or leaving them home alone, now had a safe place where their children could receive an education and a daily meal. The benefits of these schools go far beyond academics - they are giving children the tools they need to thrive, both now and in the future.

But the contrast with the communities that do not have access to these facilities was equally striking. In these areas, classrooms were overcrowded, unkempt, and unbearably hot. Hygiene was a serious concern in a region where diseases like malaria and cholera are still widespread. The children in these communities face unimaginable hardships. Many of them walk for hours just to get to school, often without having eaten anything all day. The faces of these children were a mix of joy and hardship - a joy that came from their resilience and enthusiasm for learning, but

a hardship born from a lack of basic resources.

One young boy I met, just five years old, walked for two hours each way to school. Despite the immense physical strain, his determination was palpable. He was eager to learn, but the reality was that he only ate one meal per day. It was heart-breaking to witness, especially as I reflected on the privileges of the children I know back home, who have access to endless meals each day, clean schools, and the comfort of not having to worry about the most basic necessities.

Urgent

This is where the work of Children in Crossfire becomes even more urgent. These children, despite the hardships they face, are incredibly resilient. However, without access to proper education, nutrition, and healthcare, their potential will remain unfulfilled.

One of the most important aspects of Children in Crossfire's approach is not just building classrooms, but also integrating these educational spaces with healthcare provisions. In one of the communities I visited, a new school is being built that will be attached to a medical practice, providing children with access

to necessary vaccinations and healthcare. The community was excited, knowing that this new school would not only educate their children but also ensure their health and well-being.

Perhaps, one of the most touching moments of my visit came when I witnessed the children's joy over the simplest of gifts - a toy, a jersey, or even an empty water bottle. They had never seen skipping ropes before and were amazed at how they worked. The way they cherished these small gifts, using even the water bottle caps for games, was a powerful reminder of how little it takes to bring joy to these children. Despite their lack of material possessions, they were full of gratitude, constantly thanking us for what we had brought them. It was humbling to realise that, in a world where we are constantly chasing after more, these children were content with what little they had.

This experience left me with a deep sense of urgency. The work that Children in Crossfire is doing in Tanzania is undoubtedly life-changing, but there is so much more to be done. More classrooms need to be built, more children need to be given the chance to learn, and more

communities need access to the resources that will help them break the cycle of poverty. As the Advent season approaches, we are called to reflect on our own blessings and to consider how we can support those in need. I strongly believe that we, as parish communities, can make a tangible difference in the lives of these children by supporting Children in Crossfire's work in Tanzania.

Looking ahead, I am committed to continuing to raise awareness about the incredible work of Children in Crossfire and to supporting their efforts in building a brighter future for the children of Tanzania. I urge everyone in our community to consider how they can help, whether through prayer, financial support, or simply spreading the word about the charity's important work.

As we prepare for the joy and hope of Advent, let us not forget the children who face unimaginable challenges, and let us do all we can to give them the hope of a better tomorrow. By supporting Children in Crossfire, we can be part of a movement that transforms lives, one classroom, one child, and one community at a time.

A life-changing trip with Children in Crossfire *by Kate McCloskey*



I went to Tanzania in August to see the work that Children in Crossfire carry out, and it was an experience that changed my perspective on the power, impact and joy that education can bring young children. When we arrived in Tanzania, we were quickly welcomed with open arms and hospitality.

We visited early childhood development centers in rural areas that Children in Crossfire support. When we stepped out of the bus, we were greeted with immediate joy and excitement from the children to have visitors, and they showed us their dances and songs. The footballs that they were playing with were made from string and plastic bags, and when we brought out the footballs and skipping ropes that the parish had donated,

they couldn't contain their excitement!

After we showed the children how to skip (badly!) and played outside in their playground for a while, we went inside to see their school. The teachers' sustainable use of their limited resources was inspirational, and they had such love for all the children. They led rhymes and dances to teach them vowels. They used bottle caps to teach the children to count, stones in a jar as a musical instrument and different colours of sand to create art of giraffes and sunsets. At their young age, which ranged from babies to age 4-5, they even were learning valuable life skills. The children showed us their 'shop', which consisted of a shelf with empty packaging, a place to build a 'fire', and even slings, which the little

girls used to carry their dolls as their own mum would.

As well as the educational benefits that these schools supported by Children in Crossfire bring, the teacher explained to us that the one meal of porridge that the children receive might be their only meal of the day, and that the day-care provides the children with a safe place while their parents went to work.

Dedication

Before the day-care was developed by Children in Crossfire, parents had no choice but to leave them at home alone while they earned money for their family. Many of the small children at the day-cares walk for miles each morning to get there, and their dedication

and willingness to learn was humbling. Most of the rural day-cares that we visited were attached to primary and secondary schools, which made them more accessible to the children and increased their chances of attending it when older.

From the small room of one of the day-care centres, the teacher showed us a hawthorn tree, which was surrounded by cows in the shade, and explained that this was their previous classroom, and that since the room for the day-care was built the class has almost doubled in numbers.

We visited the site where Children in Crossfire are planning to build a day-care in the inner-city of Dar es Salaam. We met with the principal of the school it will be attached to, who expressed gratitude and explained how they were going to use the resources. We visited a private day-care center to gain a perspective of the conditions in the inner city, and were shocked at what we saw. We went to the 'slums' and had to jump over open sewer pipes to get inside. There were five rooms of children crammed in, with none of the space or enrichment that we had

experienced in the schools that we previously visited.

Another private day-care that the group visited was merely a shack with lots of children sitting on a concrete floor, with no room to play or learn. The children in these private day centers were considered lucky, as their parents were paying a large sum of their wage for them to attend, so that they were looked after by an adult

during the day.

This experience was a stark contrast to the enrichment, learning and joy that we saw in the schools supported by Children in Crossfire, and I left the trip with a renewed sense of responsibility to raise funds and awareness for the charity, as even relatively small donations can make a massive difference to many lives.



Supporting the most vulnerable children – Pauline's story

TANZANIA, in East Africa, is one of the most beautiful countries on Earth. It's also one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged. Children in Crossfire have been working there since 2008, focused on providing high quality early years' education to the most vulnerable children in the most impoverished communities.

In the last five years, Children in Crossfire have directly supported nearly 200,000 pre-school children in Tanzania. They have worked with 1,268 schools and trained more than 1,500 teachers. They have built more than 50 classrooms, improving education for tens of thousands of children.

Earlier this year, a group of Children in Crossfire supporters travelled to Tanzania to see their programmes first-hand, and to

get a sense of the positive impact they are helping to make.

Amongst them were sisters, Ellen and Kate McCloskey, from Craigbane in the Parish of Claudy, Co Derry, and Pauline O'Neill, also of the Claudy Parish, a long-time champion of our work. She visited Misungwi, in northern Tanzania, and the vast city of Dar es Salaam.

Here's what Pauline told us: "I have been helping Children in Crossfire to raise funds for many years, mainly through my local parish. It was wonderful for me to visit Tanzania and see how funds raised are making life better for so many children, families and communities.

"Everywhere I went, I met people living in deep poverty. In some cases, I witnessed need on a scale that I just could not have prepared for emotionally; that no leaflet, TV ad, or social

media video could accurately communicate. But crucially, I also saw hope and joy on the faces of children who don't yet understand how unfair and unjust this world is.

"I urge readers to support Children in Crossfire's 2024 Advent Appeal and help make life better for the vulnerable children I met in inner-city Dar es Salaam. Together we will make a real difference."

You can scan the QR code to watch a video of Pauline's experience.



I am convinced of absolute necessity for priesthood today with tremendous sense of confusion – Fr Kevin McElhennon



Fr Kevin getting help to cut the Corpus Christi Church, Mountfield, 70th anniversary cake

AS we prepare to embrace 2025 as pilgrims of hope, Fr Kevin McElhennon, PP Cappagh, shares his story of 35 years as a diocesan priest during a time of great challenges and changes, and the hope that he has for the Church going forward with more focus on Baptism as the foundational sacrament of the Church and the Holy Spirit working through both lay and ordained ministries.

The eldest of five children born to Anna and the late John McElhennon, Fr Kevin's life began in America – the homeland of his mother and the land of promise that had enticed his father to leave his home-place of Desertmartin, in the shadow of Slieve Gallion, and follow some of his siblings to New York.

Taking up his story, he said: "My mother's parents had both immigrated to America in the early 1900s and she was born and raised in Manhattan, as was I. My father moved to New York in the 50s, met my mother and got married over there. They decided to settle back in Ireland before I started school, and built a house in my father's home parish of Desertmartin, in the townland of Gortahurk."

Reflecting on the seeds of faith nurtured within his family and parish, which led to a sense of vocation, the 62-year-old remarked: "Like most people at the time, I was not only brought up in a strongly Catholic home, but our family was also very involved in parish life, with Mass, prayer, Sunday Devotions, the parish GAA club, etc."

"My parents were very strong in their faith. My mother's sister was a nun. Sr Patricia, of the Sisters of Charity of New York, was a strong influence on the family. She was very involved in education in New York until she retired, and I got a sense of vocation and mission from her."

"My mother's uncle by marriage, Joe Houlihan, was a Kiltegan missionary priest in Africa, who later became the first bishop in Eldoret in Kenya. He was ordained as bishop by Archbishop Fulton Sheen. I have no memory of him as he died in the 70s, but stories about him were very much part of our family when I was young. He was quite a character, and a mover and shaker in the Church in Kenya."

"So, with my aunt being a nun and stories about Bishop Joe, the whole idea of serving in the Church was very much to the fore."

He added: "Parish life also had a formative effect on me. I grew up in a small, rural parish, which was a tight knit community. I was an altar server for many years in St Patrick's Church, where I received my childhood sacraments. Weekly Mass, monthly Confession, devotions, etc, were part of my life."

"There were a couple of priests who had a particular influence on me. One was Fr Desmond Kelly, PP for many years in Desertmartin. He was a very saintly figure and had a profound effect on me and everybody in the parish, and he is still very fondly remembered. The other was Fr Kieran Devlin, who came to our parish as a curate. I found him a very engaging and intelligent man to talk to. His modesty and intelligence left an impression on me. I found him very captivating to listen to as a young boy."

"There were other colourful priests too, like Fr Joseph Houghton, who was a curate in our parish for many years. He was an eccentric character, who certainly left his mark, so much so that he is still talked about some 30 years later!"

Contemplating

In his student days, Fr Kevin, had an interest in the sciences,

particularly physics and mathematics. He feels that his great teenage interest in space drew him to a fascination with the concept of infinity: "How is the universe infinite, endless, unending, yet expanding?" he would ask himself. How is it possible to begin to understand what seems impossible to understand? How does an aeroplane stay in the sky invisibly? These are questions that captivated my young mind.

"Then, of course, when you pair these questions alongside my strongly inherited faith, I was drawn to wondering about these things and contemplating them in the light of faith, in the light of God who lives in eternity, but also lives with us in our world and in this time. These teenage musings were formative for me."

"Hand-in-hand with this, I was fascinated by death and the afterlife and would have spent evenings staring into the stars at night, wondering about how we human beings are situated within the vastness of space, and how we are related to God in eternity."

Fr Kevin went on to recall fond memories of his school years: "I went to the local Brackalislea PS, which is no longer. It was a small, two-teacher primary school at the foot of Slieve Gallion. One of the teachers, Rose Convery, is from Draperstown, and the other was the late Mrs Mary Kelly from our parish of Desertmartin. They were tremendous, not just as teachers but very faith-filled and they left a strong mark on me."

"I went to St Patrick's College, in Maghera, after that. When I passed the Eleven Plus, my mother didn't know what to do with me. I was either going boarding at St Columba's College in Derry, or going to St Pat's. I didn't want to board, so I went to Maghera."

"Fr Pat Crilly was on the staff of St Pat's when I was there and he is someone I looked up to as well. At school I preferred mostly the sciences, especially physics and mathematics. I had a strong interest in aviation and from my earliest days as a young boy wanted to be an airline pilot, so I did my A Levels with a view to working in the aviation sector."

"The idea of priesthood was a constant little niggle in my life that I had never really given oxygen to," he continued, "however, when I did my A Levels in 1980, I didn't get as good results as hoped for. I thought I wouldn't get into university. The Far East and Africa magazines were always in our home and, on the day the results came out, I reached for the Africa magazine and sent off a coupon from it expressing interest in joining the Kiltigans."

"Then I got a place at Queen's, in Belfast, and abandoned any idea of becoming a missionary as I primarily wanted to study aeronautical engineering at Queens. I loved it because it was an opening into the whole aerospace sector. I got a letter back from the Kiltigans, but I told them that I was suspending my interest because I was at university."

While it was a different time then in Belfast in the early 80s, with the Troubles, Fr Kevin said that he loved his experience at Queens, which included becoming very involved in the Catholic Chaplaincy.

He recalled: "There was a group of people who would have been very much part of the chaplaincy scene and I made a lot of friends there. Some of us started up a student St Vincent de Paul and visited the elderly in the area, as well as disadvantaged families. An evening a week, we also taught reading and writing at St Mary's College to adults who couldn't read or write, so that was a little outreach."

Commissioning

"At university, you stand on your own two feet and take more personal responsibility for your faith. I started going to daily Mass and read the Gospels in the Bible every night, from which I got energy and direction. One thing that struck me very forcibly was the great commissioning at the end of Matthew's Gospel in Matthew 28, where Jesus told the disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'. That sense of mission hit me between the eyes. It made me ask what am I doing, what is my place, or mission, in life?"

"I was pursuing the aeronautical engineering route, but as my time at university was coming to a close I began to think more about a religious vocation and made contact with the Kiltegan St Patrick's Missionary Society again. At the threshold of a new beginning that was looming for me after graduation, I wasn't preoccupied with finding a job. I could easily have got one in engineering. Instead, I felt something different. I can only describe it as a strongly felt sense of being called by a wee voice inside me, which was moving me in a different direction, a voice that was somehow sending me. So my first calling to priesthood was as a missionary not to the diocese. I also looked into joining the Columban Fathers."

An encounter with fellow Desertmartin parishioner, Fr



Meeting Pope Francis in Rome during the gathering of priests from parishes of the world



Fr Kevin and Fr Peter Madden PP Ballinascreen & Desertmartin amongst the five priests from Ireland at the gathering in Rome

continued from page 18

Brian Donnelly, who was a seminarian at the time for the Derry Diocese, however, gave him food for thought.

“One day, after Mass at home in Keenaught, I ran into Brian and he asked me what I was thinking of doing,” said Fr Kevin, “I mentioned aeronautical engineering but that I was also thinking of priesthood with a missionary order, and he asked me why a missionary order. His conversation with me that day gave me a wee nudge to give some thought to the Diocese if I was considering priesthood.

“I decided to follow through on his little challenge to me, and approached Fr Pat Crilly, who was the vocations director, as I knew him from St Pat’s Maghera. I journeyed with him for a period of six months or so, and he steered me very wisely and with great gentleness and understanding into applying for the Diocese. I applied and was accepted. Bishop Daly sent me back to Queens to study Philosophy for a year and then sent me to Rome for the rest of my studies for priesthood.

“I loved my time in Rome; it expanded my horizons. I had never been to continental Europe before then. Being exposed to the delights of Rome and Italy, with its history and art and architecture, drew me into contemplating God as well through the genius of art. That has been a restless pursuit of mine ever since. I use it in my teaching and preaching. Rome and Italy is full of it. That drew me into a whole new sphere; the magnificent Christian heritage that we have inherited, and that we are all part of.”

Ordained on July 2, 1989, by Bishop Francis Lagan, Fr Kevin was first appointed to Buncrana. After five-and-a-half years, on New Year’s Eve 1994, he received a call from the newly appointed bishop of the Diocese, Dr Seamus Hegarty, regarding a Diocesan change.

He recalled: “Bishop Hegarty asked me to come and see him early in the New Year of ’95 about becoming the Diocesan Secretary, which I was for 10 years. I worked at St Eugene’s, but lived in the Steelstown Parish.

Scripture

“After my time as Diocesan Secretary, I went off to university in the States to finish biblical studies that I had started in Rome before I was ordained. My interest in Scripture is what drove me there and I spent a year-and-a-half doing that. After finishing my studies, Bishop Hegarty appointed me to Cappagh Parish and I have been here ever since. I came to Cappagh as a curate in Strathroy and was appointed parish priest by Bishop McKeown, as his first appointment.”

Looking back on his 35 years of priesthood, Fr Kevin remarked:

“The life of a priest has changed enormously over the years, just as the Church and society has changed. I have changed as a person and, I hope, become more mature too. I have a different sense of what it is to be a priest now than when I was younger. I’d like to think that I have grown in wisdom, with a deepening sense of the place of the priest today.

“Even though the place of the priest in society is no longer one of privilege, I have become more convinced of the absolute necessity for priesthood today, and how we priests can somehow help people navigate their way through life in today’s world, with the profound sense of confusion and ‘lostness’ that many feel. I’m not one to be beating people back to Church, to Mass or to God, because that is an utter waste of time. I have grown to appreciate the depth and wisdom that there is in our Christian faith, and my passion is to try and unlock that, and do what I can to open people to being receptive of the richness and depth of our Christian tradition. Here, in Cappagh, adult faith formation is strongly rooted within parish life.”

Going on to talk about the decline in vocations being a very significant change for priests, he said: “It is somehow forcing us to collaborate more effectively, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with the lay faithful. The priesthood of all the baptised is something we have to reflect on more seriously today. Yes, there is a difference between the priesthood of the laity and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained, but more than ever before, we have to reflect on how they complement each other, how they can work together more fruitfully within the ministerial life of the Church. The synodal process is working into that as well.

“In the past, people would have said that Ireland was over-populated with priests, so when we see a decline we think it is terrible. We were a bit spoiled in the 60s and 70s.”

He continued: “The other big thing that has impacted more as a priest is the repositioning of the Church in society. I was ordained in 1989 and on the heels of my ordination many of the sex abuse scandals became public, which impacted severely on my newly ordained life.

“The Church had a high profile and an influential place in society locally and nationally, and that has diminished. The scandals have led to a repositioning of the Church as a body of influence in Irish society and being a priest in that changing reality has been challenging.

“Society in general has changed dramatically. Abortion, divorce and identity politics have wound their way into conversation, including conversation in the Church. We are grappling with the real role we have in Church with forming Christian living in

a deeply secular society.”

Accountability

He went on to say: “The whole child abuse issue has led to greater transparency and accountability being expected of us now, and that is a very good thing. The whole area of care and safety of people, and protecting the dignity of children and people in their vulnerability, is a positive thing to come out of some of the societal changes we have seen happening.”

Noting that the function of a priest is being redefined, Fr Kevin said: “In the past, the priest was at everything happening in the parish, from bazaars to concerts etc, but priests have had to pull back from some of the activities that people would have expected of them in the past. They have had to pull back to the essentials, the bread and butter of priesthood. The time and energy we have to devote ourselves to what priests did in the past has changed.

“We are also grappling with the decline in church attendance over the years, and with the impact of Covid on parishes. These are some of the challenges, but there have been tremendously positive things that have come out of it all. We are moving to a place where we are embracing priesthood of the laity in the pastoral life of parishes and the wider diocesan body too.

“The ordained priesthood was very much to the fore. The repositioning now has refocused our attention on the sacrament of baptism. By baptism, we have our Christian identity, but also our mission. Through baptism, we all share in the priesthood of Christ, the lay faithful and those of us who are ordained. We all have our role in the life of the church.”

Commenting on faith formation within parishes, Fr Kevin said: “We are looking more in earnest at lay-leaders for faith formation. That is a positive too. We just can’t rely on sacramental practice to carry people through their Christian life. We have to supplement it with good faith formation, not only in matters of doctrine and Church teaching, but in how we as Christians live in today’s world, in areas justice, social concerns and outreach, and so on.

“It’s a deeply, and some might say aggressively, secular world we are living in. But we have to see the positive. We have to focus on the positives and ask where the Holy Spirit is leading us. For certain, the Spirit is leading us somewhere, and we are trying to discern that in this time.”

Another challenge for many priests today, noted Fr Kevin, is having a lot more responsibilities now: “The church is more marginal in many respects. We are having to reconfigure how to minister in our parishes, as well as looking at co-operation between parishes and restructuring parishes within the

diocese.

“Some priests find this challenging, though it is a great opportunity too. It is quite daunting and the lay faithful feel this as well. The path ahead is not clear, but it can’t be. It is a journey that we have to make. Living with the unknown and uncertainty and unanswered questions is something that I have become more comfortable with as I get older; journeying in trust with the unanswered questions. Faith is not about certainty. It is the courage to live with uncertainty. Faith is never easy and is not about seeing the road ahead with clarity.”

Trust

Pointing out that the synodal process is founded on the journey to Emmaus, Fr Kevin said: “The Lord was walking with the disciples where they were going, even though they were going in the wrong direction; that is the thing, wherever we are going, one thing is certain is that the Lord is with us. To walk that in trust, without seeing too far down the road is maybe a good thing. We want to have a prudent degree of good judgement, but we can’t be absolutely certain.

“One of Pope Francis’ great gifts is discernment. The Church is discerning where the Holy Spirit is leading us and what the will of God is for the Church today. We have to reflect on the way of being Church we have been used to in the past, and even be prepared to let go of some things if we are to truly respond to where the Spirit is leading us now. We can only do that together.

“In the last couple of weeks, we have been reading at daily Mass from the Book of Revelation, which opens with question: What is the Spirit saying to the Church. The big question is what the Spirit is asking of us today. The priests or bishops don’t have all the answers, only as the whole Body of Christ together, united in common purpose, can we discern what the Spirit is saying.”

Fr Kevin is a member of the recently established National Synodal Team, which grew out of the National Synodal Group that co-ordinated conversation in parishes and dioceses at the beginning of the Synodal process. Those conversations fed into the national response to Rome, kick-starting the two Synod gatherings there.

He explained: “Ireland has set up a national synodal pathway. We are moving towards having a national assembly, akin to the gatherings that took place in Rome, within the next couple of years to reflect on where the Spirit is leading the Irish Church. Synodal teams in every diocese, including our own, will be feeding into preparing for the national assembly.

“On the Irish national synodal team of slightly over 20 members, there are four bishops, two diocesan priests, one of whom

is me, two representatives from religious orders, a permanent deacon, and the rest are very capable lay men and women from across the country.”

Fr Kevin’s membership of this National Synodal Team follows his involvement in a meeting of about 300 priests of parishes around the world in Rome, as part of the global synodal process to garner the collective voices of priests.

“Every Bishops’ Conference was invited to send a number of priests to the gathering that took place in Rome over a week at the end of April,” he explained, “and Ireland sent five, including two from the Derry Diocese, Fr Peter Madden and myself.

Fruitful

“It was a very fruitful and positive gathering of priests from around the world. We gathered outside of Rome, in Sacrofano, which is where the global pre-synod retreat took place. On the last day, we went to the Vatican to meet with Pope Francis. It was a good gathering in many ways. You got a different perspective on things, sharing with priests with common and varied experiences. Many of the questions and experiences of priests living here are similar to those of priests around the world. It underlined the role of priests and facilitated a more synodal expression of Church moving forward.”

Aware that the idea of a synodal church attracts negative comments, with some mistrust of it, Fr Kevin commented: “From its earliest days, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, the Church has been synodal.

“In some ways, there has

been a strong emphasis on the Sacrament of Holy Orders (priesthood) as the life-blood of the ministerial life of the church, while in fact it is the Sacrament of Baptism. It is the foundational sacrament and the synodal process is bringing us back to that; each of us journeying together according to our own calling, exercising our baptismal vocation. That was the call of Vatican II as well, to embrace the foundational sacrament of Baptism.

“The path of synodality that we are all called to reflect on and walk is bringing us back to reflect on what we are as a church, who we are as a church, how we are walking as a church, how to deepen the life of the church rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism.

“All Christians through their baptism have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the task of today – to walk together, to encourage one another, and to discern together what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church, not just globally, but what the Spirit is saying to our diocesan Church and to our individual parishes.

“And importantly, what the Spirit is saying to each of us individually - what each of us is being sent into the world to do, remembering those words of Jesus at the end of Matthew’s Gospel when He said: ‘Go into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, to the end of the age’.”



Following release of Final Document on Synodality... Bishop Donal invites parishes to approach Church renewal with prayerful hearts and openness to Holy Spirit

FOLLOWING the publication of the Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Bishop Donal has invited all parishes in the Diocese “to pray so that we can guided to renew the face of the earth in Jesus' name.”

In a note accompanying the Final Document on the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, which the Pope called for in October 2021 and ended in October 2024, the Holy Father entrusted it to the Church and called for creative implementation and a renewed commitment to communion, participation, and mission.

Pope Francis noted that the synodal path, beginning locally and going on to cross continents, languages and cultures, had been characterised by openness to the

voice of the Holy Spirit. With the Assembly concluded, he has entrusted the Final Document back to the local churches, inviting the contents to be reflected upon and implemented with discernment, creativity, and respect.

The Holy Father highlighted that the end of the Assembly was not the end of the synodal process, but rather marked the beginning of a phase of implementation by local Churches and their groupings, in different contexts, through discernment and decision-making processes foreseen by canon law and the Document itself.

And he noted that Bishops will “report on the choices made in their local Church concerning the indications

in the Final Document, the difficulties encountered, and the fruits achieved, and are called to report on progress during their ad limina visits, sharing both challenges and fruits of their efforts.”

Bishops are encouraged by Pope Francis to embrace this phase with courage, creativity, and humility, while the Holy Father acknowledged that it would take time to address certain issues that require consensus across the global Church.

Expressing the hope that the Holy Spirit will continue to renew and guide the Church, the Pope pointed out that the synodal journey “needs shared words to be accompanied by deeds.”

Commenting on the Final Document of the Synod, Bishop

Donal noted that it “was not focused on specific issues but on how we become a more synodal and missionary church.”

He added: “It stresses transparency and accountability in how we are church; parishes and dioceses will have to start planning their ministry in a more collaborative way, involving clergy, laity and religious; and will be expected to be accountable on a yearly basis for how they have used finance and promoted the mission of the church.”

“Furthermore, all that we do as church is directed toward forming communities of missionary disciples. Simply supplying religious services is not enough. This will be a major challenge for both laity and clergy, but the synodal document asks us to start



on that journey now.”

“All of this may sound very daunting,” remarked Bishop Donal, “but we are promised that, if we approach our mission with a prayerful heart and in openness to the Holy Spirit, God will lead us in the direction in which He wants us to go.”

“This is the beginning of a huge process of church renewal, not so that we will be strong but so that the harassed and dejected will hear about the mercy of the Father. So I invite all parishes to pray so that we can guided to renew the face of the earth in Jesus' name.”

The Final Document can be viewed at: Eng_final_document_Synod_2021_24.pdf

Seven men from Diocese on ‘Come & See’ Vocations weekend

A ‘Come & See’ weekend was held in the National Seminary at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, from November 15-17.

Organised by the Bishops' Council for Vocations for men currently discerning a vocation to the diocesan priesthood, there were 15 attendees, including seven from the Diocese of Derry.

The seminary staff, along with this year's group of seminarians, were on hand to meet and greet the guests, who included Fr Eddie Gallagher, CC Lifford, and Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Bellaghy/Greenlough, the Derry Diocesan Vocations' Director.

The weekend was introduced and opened by Deacon Eric Cooney, who led the group in a time of prayerful reflection, followed by a talk from Fr Willie Purcell, National Vocations' Director.

Fr Tomás Surlis, the Rector of the seminary, preached at the Saturday morning Mass, referring to the role of Mary, the

Mother of Jesus, in the life of the priest. He quoted from a recent Wednesday catechesis by Pope Francis, in which he referred to the old maxim of ‘Ad Jesum per Mariam’ - to Jesus through Mary.

Fr Shane O'Neill gave a presentation on seminary formation and answered some questions about seminary life.

The attendees took part in an Emmaus Walk, which entails going off in twos, like the disciples in the Gospel story who met Jesus on the road, to discuss their vocation story.

On Saturday afternoon, the guests were treated to a very interesting visit to the splendid College Chapel, which sadly isn't used much nowadays except for a small number of College events, including graduation ceremonies.

After Evening Prayer and Adoration, the visitors and seminarians enjoyed some time to relax and chat over light refreshments.

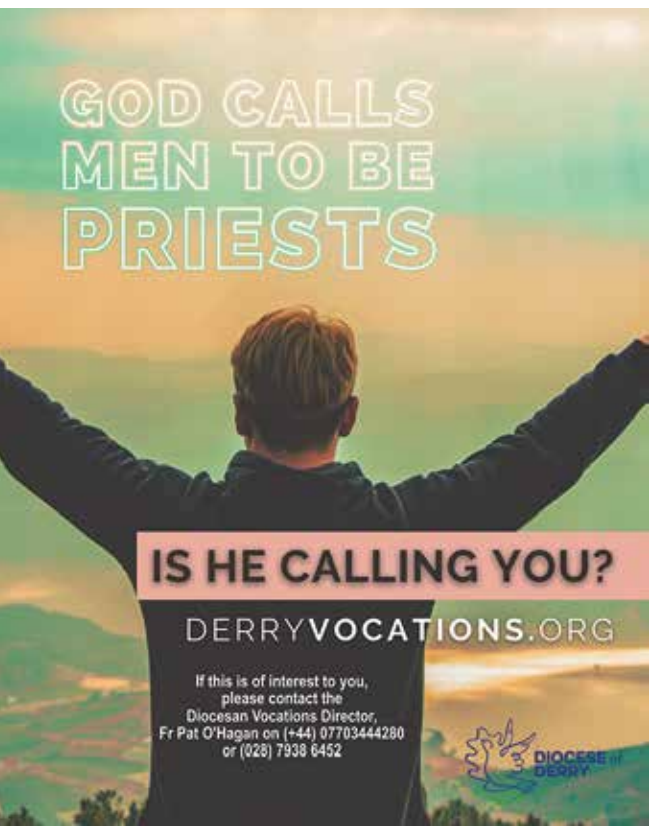
The Mass on Sunday morning



Some of the men from the Derry Diocese who attended the Come & See weekend, along with Fr Pat O'Hagan, Vocations' Director.

was celebrated by Bishop Phonsie Cullinan, Chair of the Council for Vocations, who encouraged the men discerning a vocation to pray, to talk with their diocesan Vocations Director, and to meet regularly with their Spiritual Director.

After a final discussion, with a Q&A session, the guests returned home to resume their normal lives of work or study, refreshed by the weekend, encouraged by what they had heard, and having made new friends who are on the same path as themselves.



Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during December for:

Pilgrims of Hope:
Let us pray that this Jubilee strengthens us in our faith, helping us to recognise the Risen Christ in the midst of our lives, transforming us into pilgrims of Christian hope.

Prayer for Priests
Heavenly Father, I ask you to bless our bishops and priests and to confirm them in their vocation of service.
As they stand before us as ministers of Your Sacraments,

may they be channels of the love and compassion of the Good Shepherd, who came not be served but to serve.

Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the courage to proclaim your Word of justice, love and truth. Bless, in a special way, Your servant Father, Send your Spirit upon him So that he may always walk in the path of faith, hope and love, in the footsteps of Christ, the eternal priest, who offered Himself on the cross for the life of the world. Amen.

Remember in prayer:
Fr John McDevitt (Dec 1st)
Fr Micheal McGavigan (2nd)
Fr Kevin McElhennon (3rd)
Fr Daniel McFaul (4th)

Fr Dermot McGirr (5th)
Dr James McGrory (6th)
Fr Brian McGoldrick (7th)
Fr Neil McGoldrick (8th)
All Priests (9th)
Fr James McGonagle (10th)
Fr Edward McGuinness (11th)
Bishop Donal McKeown (12th)
Fr Con McLaughlin (13th)
Fr Peter McLaughlin (14th)
Fr Anthony Mailey (15th)
Fr Peter Madden (16th)
Fr Gerard Mongan (17th)
Fr Colm O'Doherty (18th)
All Priests (19th)
Fr Patrick O'Hagan (20th)
All priests (21st)
Fr Kevin Mulhern (22nd)
Fr Kieran O'Doherty (23rd)
Fr Francis O'Hagan (24th)
Fr David O'Kane (25th)
Fr Peter O'Kane (26th)
Fr Arthur O'Reilly (27th)



Fr Michael Porter (28th)
Fr Sean O'Donnell (29th)
Fr Gerard Sweeney (30th)
Fr Joseph Varghese and Fr John Walsh (31st)

Vocations Society of St Joseph by Christina McLaren

VOCATIONS Society of St Joseph is the new name for what was formerly known as St Joseph's Young Priests' Society.

The name has been changed as it did not reflect the true nature of the Society, and The Charities Regulations in Ireland holds that the name of a charity must not be misleading.

The new name, Vocations Society of St Joseph more accurately portrays our primary purpose: “To foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life”.

It is not simply a society for young priests, but a society for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Nothing else has changed.

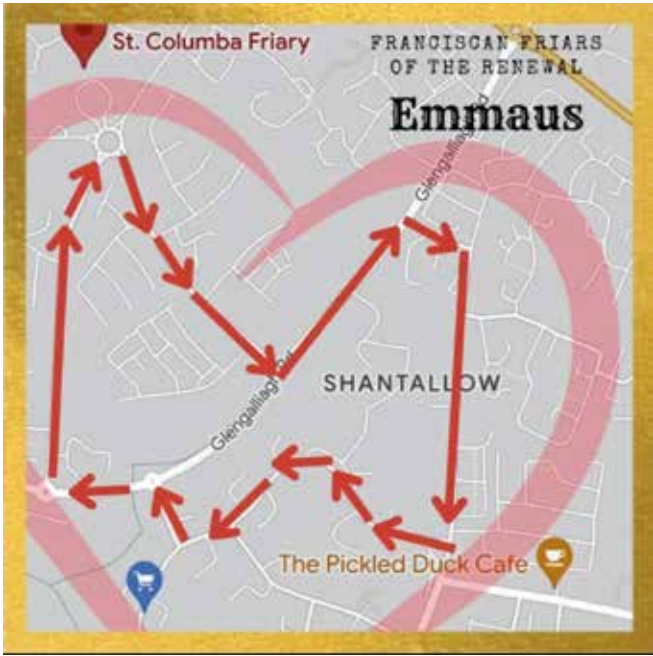
We have 14 branches of the society in the Derry Diocese, where faithful people come together once a month to pray for priests and vocations. They also raise funds for the students' education as it is very costly.

Unfortunately, many branches have closed due to members' health reasons or having other commitments, however, we are hoping that they may come back and that branches will open in other parishes.

The meeting lasts for less than an hour (not January, July, August) in an agreed place/time, usually in the church following Mass.

For details on opening a branch in your parish, please contact me, as Diocesan President, and I will be pleased to assist you with this. Mobile – 07772341236 or email - christinamclaren44@gmail.com.

Hundreds expected to join Franciscan Friars for Eucharistic Procession



ON the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Thursday, December 12, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in Derry will be joined by their fellow Friars and Sisters of the Renewal from around Ireland, and hundreds of lay people, for a public Eucharistic Procession.

Bishop Donal hopes to partake in the start of the procession, which leaves from St Joseph's Church, in Galliagh, where the Friars are based, following Mass there at 11 am. Along the route, the Friars and Sisters will be giving out blessed roses, medals, crucifixes and Rosary beads.

Looking forward to yet another public Eucharistic Procession in Derry, Fr Antonio Maria Diez de Medina CFR, of the Galliagh St Columba Friary, recalled their first neighbourhood procession back in October 2023: "This was to bless the land prior to October 31. It was called Emmaus. It came from a desire of good people here in Derry to do something more to both adore the Lord in a public manner, and also to evangelize and give witness in the wider culture."

A second Eucharistic procession, called Effatha Revival, was then held in Derry City centre in February 2024. Beginning in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, those gathered processed with the Blessed Sacrament through the streets to Guild Hall Square, where they sang the Divine Mercy

Chaplet before processing through the Bogside to pray for blessing and healing upon the land, the people, and their collective memory. The day ended with Benediction back in Long Tower, followed by a reception. This Effatha Revival also kicked off 40 days of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration globally.

Commenting on the forthcoming December 12 Guadalupe procession, Fr Antonio said: "Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of our Franciscan Friars of the Renewal community, so she is close to our heart. In the United States, we typically have a Guadalupe procession every December 12 in New York City (Bronx) or one of the surrounding cities where our friaries are located."

"My desire was to organise one here, with the CFR Friars from Limerick and the CFR Sisters from Drogheda coming here to Derry for December 12. I was originally planning on keeping it simpler, but with a great team to work with it grew into something bigger."

He added: "Our Lady of Guadalupe speaks to me of life, because she is pregnant with the baby Jesus, as indicated by the black sash, and she helped to overcome the Aztec cult of human sacrifice to pagan/demonic gods 500 years ago. Life today is under attack, we need Our Lady's intercession to lift Jesus Higher (cf. Rev 12). He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

her a cake and many cards.

Carmel has been blessed with good health and still cleans the chapel and helps run the bingo.

She has also visited many Holy Shrines and climbed Croagh Patrick at 70 years of age!

Carmel's life is centred on her faith. She attends all weekday Masses and our curate, Fr Paddy Baker asked for a round of applause at Sunday Mass in honour of her 90th year.

We in the parish wish her many more good years.

Roisin Doherty, a member of the organising team, spoke of her experience of the previous Eucharistic Processions led by the Friars: "These processions brought about a renewal of faith in so many Catholics. People shared their joy and delight with myself and others, proclaiming the new thing God is doing on our streets, and many said that they started going to Mass again, while some went to Confession for the first time in years."

"During the processions, as I walked beside Jesus in the Eucharist, I saw bystanders with tears running down their cheeks, some were kneeling in their front gardens, and people stopped their cars and leaned out to receive blessed roses, miraculous medals and prayer cards. Truly unforgettable."

She added: "This year, as lay folk and the friars build up to the next Eucharistic procession on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, on December 12, I have witnessed God's healing love amongst our community. People are working together to prepare the way for the Lord. We have been out doing a leaflet drop inviting others to the procession, covering over 2,000 households in the Galliagh and Carnhill neighbourhood, where the December 12 procession will be happening. Some of those we met thanked us for reaching out to them. Folks have been coming to their doors holding up the invitation that we posted through their letterboxes and saying it's wonderful, or that they are looking forward to joining us."

"It has been heart-warming to meet people who are encouraged by knowing that Jesus is coming to the streets outside their front door! Some have said that they are hoping to come to the procession to get a blessing from the Bishop or to receive prayer with the Franciscan Friars or Benedictines of Perpetual Adoration, Silverstream Monastery, who are coming as well. Others are saying that this is not to be missed as an experience of a lifetime. Personally, I'm very grateful to God for the amazing gift of unity He is again bringing among us, as we gather to make

a way for Him to be among His people."

Mark Kerr, who was instrumental in the organisation of the Effatha Revival Eucharistic Procession through the streets of Derry earlier this year, is also involved in the planning of the December 12 procession and is looking forward to a second Effatha Revival Procession in February 2025.

He commented: "I truly believe that God is calling His people, believers and non-believers, to unite. He wants His children to come back to Him. If Jesus was to come back tomorrow where would He go? I believe it would be out to the people who don't believe, who are lukewarm in their faith."

"A friend said to me one day, how do we bring people back to Jesus. I said, we don't, we bring Jesus to the people. This is how I see the Eucharistic Processions, Jesus going out to the sick and the lame and touching them. In a world of sickness and mayhem, we need Jesus now more than ever."

Sharon Gorman is also involved in preparations for the Procession and has already been feeling "a shift in the atmosphere", believing the Holy Spirit is reviving faithful hearts.

"The world is losing hope, but our hope is in our sovereign God," said Sharon, adding: "I believe a big part of this revival came from the first Eucharistic procession in the town at the start of the year, led by Fr Antonio."

"The Friars are a big part in the revival in Galliagh, working along with the community to bring Jesus back into the home. As we prepare for the coming walk with Jesus, let us step into the armour of God with fire in our hearts, ready to spread the word; come drink from the well of life, the Father's arms are open wide."

Following 11 am Mass in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, the procession will take place from 12.15-2 pm, with St Pio Café, near the chapel, open afterwards for refreshments. The procession route from St Joseph's is: Fairview Rd; Fern Rd; Glengalliagh Rd; Bradley's Pass; Racecourse Rd; Carnhill; Glengalliagh Rd; Moss Rd; St Joseph's Church.



Buncrana Novena helping prepare for Christmas and Jubilee Year

THE 'Throw Open The Doors to Christ' nine-week Novena in Buncrana has been running now since Sunday, October 27.

This is the second year of the Novena in honour of Pope St John Paul II, and the title is taken from the homily he gave at the Mass in 1978, at the opening of his Pontificate.

People from various roles in life have been giving a brief testimony as to what this means in their lives.

As well as preparation for Christmas, this year the Novena is serving as preparation too for the 2025 Jubilee Year. It has also

been integrated into the Parish Mission given by the Dominican Fathers.

It is a lovely moment on a Sunday evening, starting at 7 pm in St Mary's Church, Cockhill.

The remaining speakers are Bridget Frances McGill on December 8, Michael Kelly on December 15, and Fr Francis Bradley, PP, December 22.

Each evening comprises of readings, the Rosary, guest speaker, Novena prayer and petitions, a Eucharistic Healing Service and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Novenas

HUNDREDS of people have gathered for the past six Sunday nights in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, for the Solemn Novena of Healing to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

In this Year of Prayer, the theme of the 2024 Novena is 'The Power of Prayer', reflecting on each line of the prayer Jesus taught His disciples (the 'Our Father').

The Novena continues at 6pm on Sunday, Dec 8, when the guest speaker will be Fr Brendan McManus SJ, and Sunday, Dec 15, with Fr John Harris OP as guest speaker, and concludes on Sunday, December 22, with 'Carols by candlelight'.

The Our Lady of Perpetual Help Novena has also been running in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, in the Three Patrons' Parish, on Tuesdays, starting with Mass at 7 pm. As well as Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction, the Novena includes short reflections on the Evangelical Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The remaining reflections will be delivered by Jenny McGrath on Tuesday, December 10, on 'Mary most patient', and Gina McLaughlin on Tuesday, December 17, on 'Mary most merciful'. The last night of the Novena will include a Penitential Service.

Holy Family Parish, Ballymagroarty, has been gathering as well for a Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the lead up to Christmas. The Novena continues on Tuesdays with Mass at 7.15 pm.



Front cover photograph for the 2025 Burt Inch and Fahan calendar taken by James Gardiner of Lough Swilly and the Hills of Donegal, as viewed from Burt.

2025 Burt Inch & Fahan calendar

THE 2025 calendar for Burt Inch & Fahan is now available in local shops.

Costing €7, the proceeds will go to Donegal Hospice & Foyle Hospice.

It is packed with lovely photographs, and compiler Kathleen Grant, of Burt,

expresses thanks to all the photographers, amateur and professional, for allowing the use of their photographs.

For further information contact Kathleen on 00353/0863931426 or email kathleengrantburt@gmail.com.

Another big Burt birthday as Carmel McDermott reaches 90!

by Kathleen Grant



THE Parish of Burt, Inch & Fahan has had a special occasion to celebrate recently. One of its parishioners, a dedicated lifelong volunteer in helping at St Aengus' Church, in Burt, and raising funds for the parish through running the weekly Burt Bingo, has reached her 90th birthday!

This wonder woman is Carmel McDermott of Burt. Our parish priest, Fr Francis Bradley called to wish Carmel well in the hall, and bingo patrons and workers gave

Aghadowey lady, Assumpta McGill reflects on her recent Portuguese Camino walk to raise funds for DEBRA Ireland...

Platinum birthday pledge gifts over £2,000 for those living with skin fragile as butterfly wings

A 70th birthday pledge to walk the Portuguese Camino from Lisbon to Santiago for DEBRA Ireland was planned, but two willing partners could not come along through injury. My brother, John Bernard Mitchel, joined me at just three days' notice and, after an Aer Lingus flight from Dublin to Lisbon, we got to Lisbon Cathedral to collect our Camino Passports on a Sunday morning.

From there it was north on the central route, the only one until Porto, through the old city looking for faded yellow and blue arrow route markers to Santiago and Fatima. These are painted on walls, lamp-posts, street corners etc, but some are missing due to modernisation of buildings.

After four hours, we escaped the city to modernity, and then left it too behind to proceed through abandoned farmlands and rutted tracks, arriving at

a small village to find that the only Albergue accommodation listed in the guidebook had been long abandoned. Taxi and train to the next day's stop got us accommodation.

The following few days' trekking were on old paved, rutted roads, farm tracks, and along smelly canals and sewage treatment ponds. The Camino here, it has to be said, is not really supported except for the Albergue accommodation places. Pre-booking is definitely recommended, if you can speak the language by phone. Some places can be pre-booked online, not all. Few places offer breakfast.

When we got to Tomar, a beautiful medieval, yet modern town, it was time for a few days' rest. We took the bus to Fatima International Shrine on a dreary, wet day. Parishioners from home had sent petitions to be placed at Our Lady's Shrine,

and this was achieved. Candles were purchased and lit in the designated housings at Our Lady's Shrine for family and friends intentions and blessings.

Having had enough of the central route, we went west towards Porto for the coastal route. This is mainly along boardwalks, well maintained and away from traffic noise, and more user-friendly to the feet. After a few days plodding northwards in summer weather we are not used to, the weather took a turn for the worst. The remains of an Atlantic hurricane came in to northern Portugal and western Spain, where it rained for at least 10 days, and it was not possible to proceed as we could not get dried out to continue.

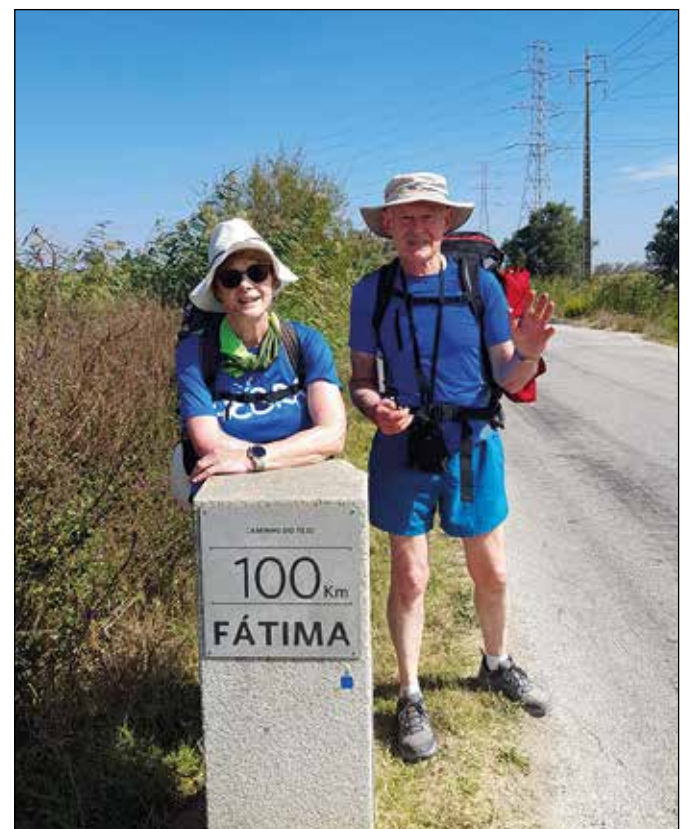
So, we had to commit to bus and train to Santiago, where the rain was worse in its intensity. However, we did get to Santiago Cathedral and to the separate

Compostella administration department outwith, and to the rear of the Cathedral, to receive our certifications from a retired fisherman from Greencastle, Donegal.

My big thanks and appreciation to all the sponsors who supported me, both at home and online by their generous donations to DEBRA Ireland. Donations so far have raised over £2,000.

This was my second Camino pilgrimage for DEBRA Ireland. Why DEBRA? From living with the result of childhood burns, my compassion is for children that suffer constant pain. DEBRA Ireland works for the fight against Epidermolysis Bullosa EB. The battle with EB never ends. It is a genetic condition that leaves the skin as fragile as butterfly wings.

You can help, go to www.debraireland.org



Holy Family Christmas Appeal by Elaine Noonan

AS we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ-child this Christmas, we are reminded so keenly of the incredible challenge that the Holy Family endured all those years ago. Mary and Joseph, far from home due to the census, faced uncertainty and rejection as they searched for a place to stay. They found refuge in a humble stable, surrounded by animals – a far cry from the modern comforts that we are all so used to.

Mary gave birth to Jesus in these humble conditions, laying Him not in a cot, but a manger – a feeding trough for animals. They lacked the basic comforts of a proper shelter, proper supplies and so many things that we all take for granted.

This humble beginning reminds us of the depth of their sacrifice and the profound message of Christ's birth – that greatness is found in humility, and love can shine even in the most challenging circumstances. Their story inspires us to find

hope and faith, even in moments of struggle, and to trust in God's plan for each of us.

The story of the vulnerable mother and her newborn baby also reminds us of families in our own time and our own country, who struggle to access essential baby supplies and resources.

Imagine the stress and worry of expecting a baby without the means to provide basic necessities, such as nappies, clothing, a cot, and other essentials. Sadly, this is a reality that many pregnant mothers in Ireland face every day.

Community Connect is Ireland's national Baby Bank – a registered charity dedicated to providing practical support to pregnant mothers and vulnerable families with small babies, who are struggling to provide for their children.

Community Connect exists to alleviate the burden on these expecting mothers, and new parents, by providing them with the baby equipment, clothing

and essential baby supplies they need to welcome their little ones into the world with love and dignity.

Baby Banks receive donations of essential items for babies and children and pass them on for free, from one family to another. They are a lifeline for families who need help, providing parents with support, and children with the items they need to thrive. This significantly reduces the financial burden of a new baby, but also can mean so much more to the families, bringing hope and comfort at a time which should be full of joy.

Community Connect currently has five larger hubs across the country, in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Kilkenny and Athlone, where we accept donations of pre-loved baby equipment, including buggies and cots, and redistribute these to families in need, along with bundles of clothing, blankets, sheets and many other basic items needed for a new baby.

We hope to expand to new hubs in 2025, and the North West is key among them. We are valued partners of many maternity hospitals, domestic violence shelters, IPAS centres and family hubs, social work teams and poverty relief organisations across Ireland.

We are proud to provide a beautiful gift package to every family we support. These include a BabyBox 'starter pack' of new items for newborn babies, and a MamaBag of essentials for the post-partum mother. We can also provide a fully equipped Hospital Bag to pregnant mothers who need one, containing the essentials she needs to bring into hospital when having her baby.

Can you give the gift of practical help this Christmas?

This Christmas, we are asking people to make a big difference to a mother and baby in need, by sponsoring one of these gift packages. Or give your family and friends the gift of giving, and

The Perfect Christmas Gift



Sponsor a Gift Package and help a family in need this Christmas

www.communityconnect.ie

Reg Charity No 20206555

sponsor on their behalf. Every package sponsored by December 20 comes with a beautiful Christmas card!

To sponsor a gift, please go to www.communityconnect.ie and click the Christmas banner.

With the Holy Family for inspiration, and with your help, we hope to support many more

families in need this Christmas and beyond.

Community Connect is a registered charity in Ireland no. 20206555

www.communityconnect.ie
info@communityconnect.ie

085 875 8366

Continuing the Sr Clare Crockett retreat talk series, this month's is from Stephen Gallagher, who had been a member of the youth faith group, COR at the same time as Clare...

You're called to be a saint – the challenge Sr Clare gave when I read her book

LET this be an act of love and not a performance. The first time I said those words before giving a talk was when I was about to give a talk at a youth group called COR, as a 15-year-old. Clare Crockett was part of that youth group as well and was in the room at Termonbacca when I gave that talk.

I was an acquaintance of Clare for about a year-and-a-half. It was my father, Thomas, who had organised the pilgrimage to Spain that Clare had gone on. My sister, Mary was on that pilgrimage too, along with my mother and father, and my uncles, Liam and Sean. I remember that time well. Clare thought she was going to somewhere like Ibiza, but discovered that she was going to a monastery outside Madrid. When my parents and sister came back home, they talked

“ I found Clare's story interesting and whenever different YouTube video clips came out from the Home of the Mother over the years, including Clare giving her testimony etc, I watched them, looking for little snippets about her. I kept tabs on her from a distance because I was intrigued by this girl that I knew who was now on this journey. There was just something special about it. ”

about Clare's experience in Spain of kissing the Cross on Good Friday and God speaking to her.

When my father said that Clare was going to be a nun, my siblings and I responded, half believing, "Alright dad, so she is going to be a nun!" At the same time,

however, I was intrigued because, as a young person, I had a similar experience with God when I was 11. God revealed Himself to me; I had an encounter with Him and I then knew that God was real. From the age of 11, I have known that God is absolutely real; that He is truly present with us.

I found Clare's story interesting and whenever different YouTube video clips came out from the Home of the Mother over the years, including Clare giving her testimony etc, I watched them, looking for little snippets about her. I kept tabs on her from a distance because I was intrigued by this girl that I knew who was now on this journey. There was just something special about it. Whenever I reflect on Clare's life, I can't help but look at the challenge that she set for me as well.

Special

I never saw Clare in person again after she went on that trip to Spain. Strangely enough, after living in England for 16 years, I was invited back to Derry to help out at a COR weekend towards the end of April, 2016, which was the same time that Clare's body came to her family home. I took some time away from the COR weekend to go to her wake and got speaking to the Servant Sisters who were there. I remember saying a prayer over Clare's coffin and thinking of how she had literally died in the service of God. I don't think that we were thinking in terms of sainthood at that time, but people seemed to be aware that this girl was extremely special. Her life was really amazing.

When 'All or Nothing', the



documentary on her life came out, I found it very interesting, but reading the book on Clare, 'Alone with Christ Alone', really gave me an insight into the person of Clare and the journey that she went through. I would advise anyone who hasn't read it, to do so.

When I read the book I heard Clare say to me, "You are called to be a saint, Stephen." I had heard that same call when I was 16 years old, when I read a book by another saint called St Therese of Lisieux, 'Story of a Soul'. I heard St Therese say to me, "Stephen, you are called to be a saint." And I said, "No chance! Not the way I lived my life." I just couldn't see it. I love St Therese and ask for her intercession all the time. She's my personal patron. She was unattainable. She was up there! How could I ever achieve what St Therese had? Then I read Clare's book. I had known Clare. I had sat opposite her. She had started at the same point as me.

Journey

I want to point out here that we have to be careful when we think about Clare. We don't want to think about her all the time as the end product; the person who Clare was when she died in Ecuador. I believe that she died a saint but we need to also think about Clare when she was

a young girl, when she first had that encounter with Christ, and the journey that she went on.

When I read her book, I no longer had any excuses. When I said to St Therese, on reading her book, that I couldn't be a saint, what I was really saying was that I didn't want to be a saint. But I realised on reading Clare's book that I can't be a saint, however, God can make me a saint. Clare Crockett couldn't be a saint, but she relied on God and God made her a saint, in my eyes anyway.

For me, the journey is the challenge and that is what I have really thought about ever since reading Sr Clare's book a few years ago; this idea that she had an encounter, but it wasn't easy. When God reveals Himself to you, life just doesn't suddenly become easy. It's not like "Eureka! I've got all the answers!" It is only the beginning of your story. We all know the story of Clare in the toilets and Jesus calling her back to Him. I guess that is the part where it dawned on me, because I was in the toilet. However, it took me a lot longer. I was in that toilet for many years, out partying and drinking, and doing a lot of things that many young people in Derry do.

Yes

It took me a long time to realise what Clare had realised at a very

young age, that I was not going to get happiness there. After a couple of years of battling, Clare finally gave in and said "Yes" to God. The difference between Clare and me is that when she said "Yes", she gave 100 per cent. She wrote a blank cheque to God every day and said, "Here it is."

When I think of myself at 17, 18, 19 years of age, I was in COR, I was walking to Knock, I was in Termonbacca doing Cursillo weekends and different other things, but I was giving 25 per cent, then maybe 50 per cent, and every now and then I might have given 90 per cent, but I never gave 100 per cent. Even when I stepped out for God, I was doing it for myself. I was doing it for whatever I was going to get from it. I was looking for some joy, an experience.

When Clare went to Spain, with her mother pleading with her not to go, that must have been so difficult, but she did it. It must have broken her heart. She did it because she gave 100 per cent. She didn't hold anything back. She co-operated with God's grace, and because she co-operated, God could then sanctify her. Clare couldn't make herself a saint, but by simply saying "Yes", God was then able to come into her life and transform her.

Transformed

The Clare that died in Ecuador was completely and utterly transformed by the grace of God. She was no longer the same person as she was when she kissed that cross. She changed because she said "Yes"; she co-operated with God's grace. God will not go against your will. Unless you say "Yes", He will not come in. You can give Him your 25 or 50 per cent, but the bit that you are holding back is a "No". It is saying "No God, I don't trust You enough." And God is not going to go against your will.

That is the challenge that Clare Crockett gave to me: "You're called to be a saint, Stephen."

And that is the challenge I want to give to everyone. It's not my challenge but the challenge of Sr Clare, the challenge of the Church, and the challenge of God...that everyone is called to be a saint.

I have done some research into who was the last Irish Catholic to be canonised a saint. It was St Oliver Plunkett in the 1600s. There have only been two Irish saints in the last 800 years recognised by the Church. Obviously, there is a lot more, they just haven't been recognised by the Church. I think it is about time we had another one. So I ask everyone to take Clare into your family homes, to your sick relatives, to those amongst your family and friends who are in despair, who are contemplating

“ When I read her book, I no longer had any excuses. When I said to St Therese, on reading her book, that I couldn't be a saint, what I was really saying was that I didn't want to be a saint. But I realised on reading Clare's book that I can't be a saint, however, God can make me a saint. Clare Crockett couldn't be a saint, but she relied on God and God made her a saint, in my eyes anyway. ”

committing suicide, who are struggling with depression and anxiety. Bring Sr Clare into their lives. Bring her into your work place, etc, and spread this cause, as I think it is absolutely about time that we had another saint from the island of Ireland!



Eternal Echoes... Timeless Truth for today’s hearts by Regina Deighan

Heavenly Food

GROWING up, we spent a lot of our time around a dinner table. We always shared meals as a family every night. We enjoyed having friends and extended family join us, but also just spent a lot of time sitting around the table...talking. The dining room in my parents’ house remains, in some ways, the most significant and memory-filled space in their home.

So much of life is centered around food. We plan meals to partake in fellowship with others; there are so many memories and traditions connected to food. In most homes, we even feature our tables and chairs in their own dedicated and decorated room. But beyond all of that is the simple fact that we must eat and drink to survive. The body requires nourishment; the rest is bonus. And if the body requires nourishment, so too does the soul. And given its eternal nature, perhaps even more so.

The Lord, in His selfless love, gave Himself to us in the

Eucharist at the Last Supper, and through His death on the cross. The Eucharist is the food for our souls, nourishing and sustaining us on our pilgrimage to Heaven. It is a gift that we are offered - this tangible encounter with our Lord - that can change everything for us if we approach it as such and allow it to transform us.

Advent and Christmas are full of traditions surrounding food. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that a foreshadowing of the Eucharist remains veiled within the story of the birth of Christ. The most important Food becomes the very reason for our celebration.

While it takes place nine months prior to the nativity, consider the Annunciation. In Mary’s ‘fiat’ to the Angel Gabriel, she agrees to become the Mother of God. From that moment, her body becomes a living tabernacle; the Bread come down from Heaven (cf. John 6) physically dwelling within her. Her body and soul as pure as the gold that forms our own church tabernacles, Mary is

a vessel that bears nourishment for the world. Mothers are able to nourish children from their very own bodies. With her body, Mary is able to provide food of the highest degree to every single one of the members of Christ’s Church through her consent to carry and bear Jesus.

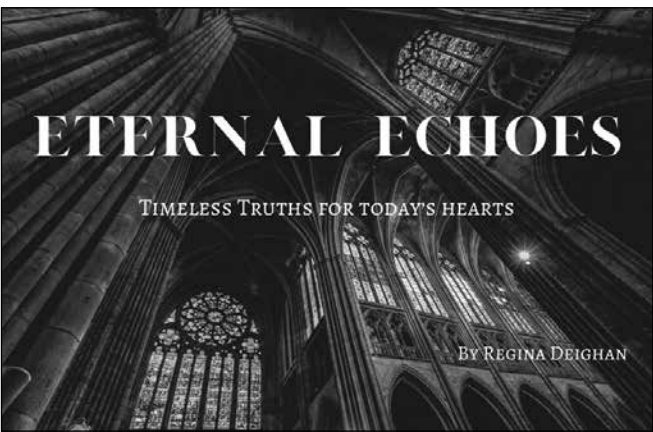
Manger

While the story of the nativity is endearing to so many of us who grew up listening to it, we may not question why it is that Jesus is laid in a manger. There is a rich two-fold reason for this. First, a manger comes from the Latin ‘mandere’, which means ‘to chew’, and the Old French ‘manguere’, meaning ‘to eat’. It is the title for a feed trough. He who will become the very food for our souls is laid among the hay of a feed trough. This also stands as a reminder that, when Jesus describes His Body and Blood as “true food and true drink” (cf. Jn 6), He does not mean in a symbolic way. Farm animals do not deal in symbolism.

Mangers are for eating. Why would the Body and Blood of Christ be merely a symbol and not true nourishment?

A final hint of the Eucharist is another aspect of the manger imagery. The fields surrounding Bethlehem, especially the area known as Migdal Eder, where shepherds reared the sacrificial lambs and sheep used in the Temple sacrifices...especially the Passover. If a lamb was recognised to be unblemished, fulfilling the requirements outlined in Exodus, a shepherd would wrap it in “swaddling clothes” and place it in a manger for both protection and inspection by the Temple priests. For those of us that know this dear story by heart, the recognizable language is exactly how the angels tell the shepherds they will find the Saviour. They understand the weight of this description. Jesus is the sacrificial Paschal lamb, laid in the manger, offering Himself at the Last Supper, and sacrificed upon the wood of the cross.

This is the sacrifice at which we



are present at every single Mass. This is the sacrifice that offers us eternal life. This is the sacrifice in which we are invited to partake by consuming the Body and Blood of the Lord for the nourishment and preservation of our souls. Be it in Mary’s womb, the manger, the cross, or the altar, the Lord provides the gift of Himself so that we might have life and have it abundantly.

During Advent and into the Christmas season, may we

approach the Eucharist with a deeper reverence. Perhaps, by partaking in Confession before receiving or consider receiving our Eucharistic Lord on the tongue. Christmas is a time of giving, where we remember the greatest gift ever given to the world. Yet, we do not have to reserve it simply for December 25. The greatest gift is available for us to receive every time we step into Holy Mass.

Derry Diocesan Chaplains in WW1

by Dr Seán Beattie

THE British Army claims to have a strong tradition of looking after the spiritual welfare of its troops. The motive was, perhaps, based on the need to maintain morale in the battlefield and to encourage recruitment. Army Chaplains have over the centuries, therefore, played a key role in the spiritual services provided for the armed forces.

Although the Catholic Church bitterly opposed conscription in Ireland in 1914-18, Irish men flocked to join the British Army and the church responded by appointing Chaplains. The Diocese of Derry had three outstanding priests who performed great acts of bravery in their capacity as military chaplains, while operating in the most horrendous conditions: Fr James McGrory (Inishowen), Fr Willie Smith (Moville) and Fr Willie Devine (Castlederg). All three were commissioned as Captains and fortunately survived to tell the tale.

Fr McGrory, Dunree, Inishowen

Fr McGrory is among the best known, as he kept a diary of his life while serving on the Continent over a three-year period, from 1914 to 1917. It was given a title: ‘The Shamrock Dugout, where Ypres once was’.

Born in Dunree, in Inishowen, in 1881, within sight of the military fort, now a museum, he studied at St Columb’s College, where he excelled as a footballer and even was good enough to take the field for Derry Celtic.

Ordained in 1909, he served in the Glasgow Archdiocese until

his appointment as Chaplain in 1914. At the time, the Chaplaincy was regarded as an attractive post, far from the slums of the Glasgow district, and the War was expected to end by Christmas. Returning home in 1917, he served in Coleraine, Limavady, Aughabrack, Donemana, Claudy, Carndonagh, Newtownstewart and Aghyaran. He died in 1952.

His diary records in great detail some of the monumental tasks he faced. In the main, he highlighted army inefficiency, exploitation of the Irish regiments and a failure to acknowledge their contribution to the war. This position was partly due to the hostility of the Irish population to attempts by Westminster to extend its recruitment campaign to Ireland.

Here is a typical excerpt from his diary...October, November 1914: The fight for Ypres began in October and continued night and day until 18 November 1914. The fierceness of it cannot be described. Words fail to convey the realities of what the eyes and ears conveyed to the intellect of those who witnessed these nights and days of battle for such an extended period...The loss of life will never be known. The English loss is said to be about 50,000 out of 150,000 men around Ypres, Belgian and French 70,000 and Germans 375,000.

He was appalled by the burning of churches, attacks on convents and the butchering of nuns, priests, women and children. He claimed that Catholic churches and convents were made special targets. The procedure was to burn

the church first and then demolish it by shelling. He accused British forces of being guilty, as they used churches as observation posts, thus making them targets. English forces were poorly equipped with artillery but the French were well armed. On the other hand, the Germans had an unlimited supply of shell ammunition.

He was also distressed at the loss of Irishmen in the British army. The Leinster Regiment arrived in France with 1,300 men. By January 1915, including several reinforcements, only 50 were left.

He commented: With desperate fighting to be done, the true value of Irish soldiers is remembered, but when rewards are to be given out and promotions granted, few Irish Catholics receive them.

In recent years, especially during the Decade of Centenaries, some recognition has been given to the role played by Irish Catholic soldiers in the British Army during World War One. I have a special interest in this story as my uncle, John, fought alongside British forces during the War. He immigrated to the USA as a young man but was drafted into the American army and dispatched to France. He survived the War and older folk have recalled seeing him walk down Carrowmena village in his Army uniform before he returned to America.

Fr Hugh Smith, Moville

Hugh Smith is a lesser-known Chaplain. He was born in Moville in 1884 and served in Liverpool after his ordination in 1908. Following service in

Newtownstewart and Castlederg, he served as a Military Chaplain from 1917 to 1918.

By way of change from the trauma of the battlefield, he returned to relatively quieter climes in the classrooms of St Columb’s College between 1918 and 1922.

Ironically, he witnessed the turmoil of the War of Independence and the Civil War at home, but on a lesser scale. His final parish was in Sessiaghoneill, and he died in 1926.

Fr Willie Devine, Castlederg

Fr Willie Devine had a higher profile in his career. Born in Castlederg in 1888, he was on loan in Australia following his ordination. From 1917 to 1920, he served as Chaplain to the armed forces there. He returned home for a few years, serving in Coleraine, Limavady and Dungiven, before returning to Australia in 1925 and later serving in China on missionary work, where he also engaged in teaching at University level.

He returned to Donnellyloop and Sion Mills for a period, before being appointed Chaplain to the Royal Navy during the Second World War. His last parish was Clonmany and he died in 1959, and where he is buried.

Because of his army and naval careers, his colleagues dubbed him “the Major”, a title he found quite amusing. He faced many challenges, including Gallipoli, and was awarded the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre. Never shunning the limelight, he



was a close friend of Archbishop Mannix of Australia.

Today, the role of the Army and Navy Chaplain remains an important one, and this is reflected

in the rank. Sadly, the media continues to ignore the role of Chaplain in war zones in our own time, for example, in Gaza, the Lebanon and Ukraine.

Your liberation is close at hand

Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR



Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR

MANY years ago, friends of mine offered me their cottage in Co Wexford to go and rest myself. At the time, I had been working very hard and had come close to the point of exhaustion.

The first morning I was there, I got the lounge chair out to the little lawn at the front of the house. It was a beautiful, sunny morning and I was looking forward to a few hours of doing nothing but sunning myself.

Shortly after I got settled, the gate opened and three people came in. They were Jehovah Witnesses. After introducing themselves, they began to talk about the terrible state of the world and how the signs were all pointing to the fact that the end of the world was coming.

The last thing I wanted to hear about just then was the end of the world. As they spoke, all I could think of was that if the end of the world was coming I hoped it wouldn't happen at least until I got my break!

I listened to them for a good while and then I thanked them.

I told them who I was. I said that as I listened to them, all I could think of was a vision of God from the prophet Jeremiah from the Old Testament – the vision of the potter and the vessel he was making. I had seen a potter at work once and it was a good experience.

In the process of making a vessel, every now and again it looked like the finished product was ready for the kiln. But the potter each time seemed to destroy it and start again, until he was satisfied that it was right. Only then was it perfect. That's how God is with the world. I think the three of them were glad to get away from me. I was certainly glad when they left and I enjoyed the rest of my break.

The end of the world

There was a time when predictions about the end of the world were two-a-penny among religious groups, especially fundamentalist Christian groups. Times and dates were often stated. These came and went and nothing happened. At times, these predictions were shown to be scams to get people's money. And, at times, they were successful in doing that!

Today, it is scientists who are making these predictions for the end of the world. Scientists point towards the effect of Climate Change that is bringing our world dangerously close to a point of overheating that it will not be possible to come back from. They, too, set dates and times. But, in spite of their warnings, the nations of the Western World especially refuse to do what is needed to avert

the disaster. This was evident in the COP 29 meetings that took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, last month, where these leaders were clearly playing with our future and the future of our world.

The Word of God for Advent

On Sunday, December 1, we celebrate the First Sunday in Advent. It is the beginning of a New Year in the life of the Church. The Gospel passage for this Sunday is also about the signs of the end of the world. Reading it, you would think that it was written for today's world. All that is happening around the world because of Climate Change is there: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth the nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves."

An amazing thing comes next then in the Gospel. Jesus says: "When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your liberation (redemption) is close at hand."

After this, the unfolding of Christmas and the next year remind us of how that liberation is going to happen. It begins with a baby born in a stable in one of the most remote places on earth, brought up in an ordinary poor persons' family home, totally unknown until He was 30 years of age, spent three years going around His native land preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God and doing good to the poor and marginalised. And finally, He died the death of a criminal on a Cross on the hill of Calvary. It is the most unlikely story of power

or success ever told - and retold to every generation for 2,000 years.

Our story

It is the very heart of our confident faith as Christians because death was not the end. The death of Christ saw a new beginning for humanity and for all creation because God raised Jesus from the dead after three days and he now lives forever among us and in us and around us and for us.

The story of Christ now is being told again to us today in 2024/25 and is being lived out in us and by us as the Church throughout the world in all that we do as individual followers of Christ and especially as communities of faith as we live out the commandments of Christ – love of God with our whole hearts and love of one another as Christ has loved us.

Signs of the times

Faith: We live in a world that increasingly denies the very existence of God. As followers of Christ, we believe that God not only exists but that God is in charge of all creation and of all human life. God is all-powerful and God is all-loving. That is liberation.

Peace: We live in a world that is increasingly being destroyed by wars and the rumours of wars. Every day, we hear of multiple killings in the slaughter houses of Ukraine, the Middle East, South Sudan and many other places. As followers of Christ, we stand for peace and justice – and ultimately love – as the only way forward for the human race. Peace, the central message of Christmas, the Birth of

Christ, is liberation.

Reverence for our Common Home: We live in a world where, day-by-day, creation moves ever closer to destruction because of greed. So many of the disasters of nature can be traced back to Climate Change caused by human abuse of nature. As followers of Christ, we reverence nature as our Common Home. It deserves reverence and respect from us as we believe it to be God's great masterpiece. That is liberation.

Love, the only way to full human living: We live in a world that tells us that self-interest and self-promotion is the only way to happiness. As followers of Christ, we live by Christ's word that love of God and of one another is the only way to live life to the full. This is true liberation, when we can put each other first and be servants to one another.

Family life: We live in a world where human relationships are becoming more and more destroyed by violence and lust; where sexuality is seen as a commodity to be bought and sold and people are used for pleasure and abused because of power. Pornography is one of the richest industries of the world. It is so destructive of the human spirit's ability to love. As followers of Christ, we know that it is in marriage and family life that people can find their greatest fulfilment in being loved as they are, and in having the privilege and great opportunity of loving in intimacy. This is liberation.

Human dignity: We live in a world where: the unwanted child

in the womb can be aborted; where the sick and the elderly can be euthanised because they are a burden; where the poor of our world are starving to death because they have no voice; and where wars are justified even where countless innocent people are being slaughtered. As followers of Christ, we proclaim that every human person, from conception until natural death and beyond, is made in the image of God and is to be treasured. Nothing is of more importance than the dignity of every person as each one is and can become. That is liberation.

Conclusion

Dag Hammarskjöld, because of his Christian faith, was able to pray: "So shall the world be created each morning anew forgiven – in Thee and by Thee." He was no stranger to the problems of the world in his day, which were similar to what is happening today. And yet, he had hope because he had faith in Christ risen from the dead and living amongst us.

We can easily be overcome by the enormity of all that is happening around us, both close to our lives and at a global level. We can lose heart. We can withdraw from it all and just look after ourselves.

We cannot ignore the state of the world. But, as followers of Christ, we hear His word to us: "When you see these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption (liberation) is at hand."

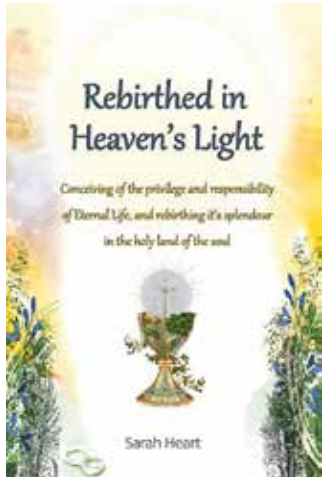
"Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." That is liberation.

December Liturgical Calendar

01 Dec First Sunday of Advent	18 Dec Third Week of Advent:
02 Dec First Week of Advent	O Adonai
03 Dec Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, Priest, Missionary	19 Dec Third Week of Advent:
04 Dec First Week of Advent	O Root of Jesse
05 Dec First Week of Advent	20 Dec Third Week of Advent:
06 Dec Optional Memorial of Saint Nicholas, Bishop	O Key of David
07 Dec Memorial of Saint Ambrose, Bishop, Doctor	21 Dec Third Week of Advent:
08 Dec Second Sunday of Advent	O Rising Sun
09 Dec Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Transferred)	22 Dec Fourth Sunday of Advent:
10 Dec Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Loreto	O King of the Nations
11 Dec Second Week of Advent	23 Dec Fourth Week of Advent:
12 Dec Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Guadalupe	O Emmanuel
13 Dec Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin, Martyr	24 Dec Fourth Week of Advent:
14 Dec Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest, Doctor	Christmas Eve
15 Dec Third Sunday of Advent: Gaudete Sunday	25 Dec Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
16 Dec Third Week of Advent	26 Dec Octave of Christmas:
17 Dec Third Week of Advent: O Wisdom	Feast of Saint Stephen, First Martyr
	27 Dec Octave of Christmas:
	Feast of Saint John, Apostle, Evangelist
	28 Dec Octave of Christmas:
	Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs
	29 Dec Octave of Christmas:
	Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth
	30 Dec Octave of Christmas
	31 Dec Octave of Christmas

Rebirthed in Heaven's Light

Review by The Author



WHAT does it really mean to be holy...or religious? What is our soul and how does it relate to our body and spirit? What is original sin? What is 'the world'? What is the paradox of truth? Who are the 'poor'? What

does it mean to search for God? What is holy love and holy fear? What is satisfaction? What is the difference between the 'old man' and the 'new man'? Who is our neighbour? What is charity? To judge or not to judge? Does my work matter to God? How do we discern suffering?

Anchored in Sacred Scripture and wrapped around the descent of God into time, Sarah Heart, in her beautiful, new, illustrated colour book, 'Rebirthed in Heaven's Light', sets about casting the essentials of the Catholic faith in an invigorating fresh light.

Drawing upon imagery of Light, conception, birth, marriage, gardening, and the nuptial Light-ring of the Homeland, she presents a wonderfully inspiring and equally challenging account

of the need-to-know essentials of the Catholic faith.

Written in a simple and accessible style, and amplified with quotes and insights from Church saints and mystics, she demonstrates God's designs upon and work within the soul, and what it means to offer a clean and stable space for His divinely creative works.

Shaking up everything from well-worn language and platitudes, false dichotomies, ideas of cheap grace and favour, and a 'what is not' bias for a 'what is' revelation of fundamental knowledge and dynamic action, she illuminates what it means to put on Jesus Christ.

From being aware of everything that we represent and expose, draw and tempt others to; to dynamically realize our full

potential – as far as we are willing and capable - by 'conceiving and birthing' the Spiritual state of the Kingdom [Jesus Christ] within our souls.

Whether returning to the faith or well-practised, this one-off essentials guide, complete with a comprehensive glossary of terms, has something for every reader. Insightful, expressive, and direct, it has all the ingredients to be a catalyst for a new conversation-conversion movement.

Previously published as limited edition title: 'Ever-Now Christmas in my soul'.

Available on Amazon and other online bookstores. Priced at c.£18.99/c.€22.99 - b&w paperback; £24.99/c.€29.99 - colour paperback; or £9.99/c.£11.99 – Kindle digital version.

Encounter the Lord in silent contemplative prayer by Aoife O'Neill

WHAT keeps us from getting to know God better? What gets in the way of us basking in the reality of God's love for us?

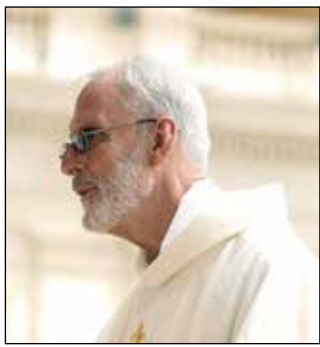
Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre, Derry, invites you to join us for a weekend free of the distraction of daily life

by way of the Silent Directed Retreat, from January 24-26. Directed by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, retreatants will be introduced to, and led through, teaching on methods of prayer, particularly meditation and contemplation.

If you would like to spend some time away from the distraction of everyday life, in beautiful scenic surroundings, and learn more about growing in your spiritual life through silence then this retreat is for you.

The weekend is done on a residential basis, is open to men and women, and costs £90, which includes all meals. For further information/booking contact Aoife on 02871262512 or termonbaccaderry@gmail.com

Being Church and Being Pastor *by Fr John McLaughlin ssc*



Franciscan, Fr Brendan Forde...a legend, who always worked in troubled areas and was expelled for speaking out.

THERE was a moment when it all became too much for Roxana to handle in choosing her religion. She was starting in the CFIVE programme with the families of those who were preparing for their First Eucharist and she had been listening to some of the many other voices which were putting in their efforts at proselytizing: Mormon; Jehovah's; and other groups, often called disparagingly 'Canutos'. She felt herself in a morass and wanted to give over her Catholic leanings.

It happened every day in those localities, and many families had lost members through the 'attractions' offered. So that with funerals etc, there might be a couple of those groups turning up at the house offering religious 'Resposos' or 'Velorios', because of the mixed parentage or allegiance of the deceased with one of the religions or sects.

And I had faced it often, as I awaited my turn to officiate, having been called by the Catholic part of the family, or vice versa, as the other officiant awaited my finish before entering with his or her group. So that all I could say to Roxana was to hang on and get herself a decent knowledge of her own baptism in this Catholic programme and then make her more informed decision.

It has not been an easy period for Pastors, lovers of their Church in recent years, with such as the Murphy Report in Dublin, my home Diocese of origin, and the Chilean Church where Karadima and his scandals became a household word for many and the Press left behind its love and respect for the Church in the Pinochet years. So many of us carried scars and a sense of anger and betrayal through those years. I remember on one occasion when even in only a very small capilla and community on the side of the Hills in Valparaíso, I felt it owed it to the congregation who were 'taking the flack' in their places of work, for the Church and its publicised scandal, that I should speak to the issue in the homily. Priests at home had already had to marshal their parish team and do the same. So in my turn, even

with poor and simple people, the sense of shame and anger made my voice quiver many times during the homily.

Humanity

Pope John Paul II used the phrase 'The Church Expert in Humanity' and I believed it, and still do. Right into this modern world of Pope Francis, we know that we must have 'the smell of the sheep' on us, as he says. 'Sacar la cara por la Iglesia', the Spanish says, show your face in the name of the Church. It became the norm in many circles for the enlightened to declaim their despalis for Church and their belief in their 'real Christ'.

It's still a relevant testimony for me, after all these years and still 'onboard'. And I have long known the words of Carretto from my time in the Jesus Caritas Fraternity; "One of them (says Fr Timothy Radcliffe in the Synod recently) quoted Carlo Carretto (1910 - 1988), a little brother of Charles de Foucauld. What Carretto said sums up the ambiguity of the Church, my home but not yet my home, revealing and concealing God: "How much I must criticize you, my church, and yet how much I love you! You have made me suffer more than anyone, and yet I owe more to you than to anyone. I should like to see you destroyed, and yet I need your presence. You have given me much scandal, and yet you alone have made me understand your holiness...Countless times, I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face - and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms! No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you. Then too - where would I go? To build another church? But I could not build one without the same defects, for they are my defects."

Power

I had two French Parish Priests, or Pastors as I prefer, since it best outlines the role, beyond the concept of power and control. P Carlos Muller had been a prisoner of war under the Germans in France and knew the rigours of life and asceticism as he wrote and prayed till the wee small hours, while never missing a parish or capilla event in the Chilean Parish of St Thomas More. He could be irascible, a terrible and distracted driver in his Citroen, while he continually inspired from his own Church and world view, on occasions like preparing adults for Confirmation or outlining the scheme for a national day of fasting and prayer in one of those Pinochet years. When would I have ever heard of the great Marian Prayer from the Eastern Church - The Akathist hymn - from any other source?

Later on in Cerro Placeres, in

Valparaíso, our chapels were part of the Asunciónistas Fathers' Parish of Lourdes and Padre Olivier d'Argouges. He had the touch of French aristocracy, as P Rainier, one of his fellow priests, explained to me, and he carried a gentle nobility - 'bonhomie' - and respect for people at Zonal or Deanery meetings, besides being a great host. He had a great sense of Church and Mission also, as his congregation produced many vocations from Africa and the Congo, who came to serve in that parish, and spoke the language better than ourselves, with their often radiant smiles.

Of course, in Dublin, I had also the great good fortune to have enlightened and down-to-earth Pastors, or PPs as they were announced. Fr Des McCarthy, in my time in Marino, led his team gently, of which I was by far the youngest curate. "When are we going to have another Canon or Monsignor in Marino?" said a little typed note in the parish Planned Giving, which came into my hands. After Mgr McArdle and the rather austere but revered Canon (Scotch) Kelly, Fr Des was never intended to hit those heights in his soft and easy manner. "John when you were away in Chile you received no letter from me but I offered my Rosary every day for you." And having come through a severe bout of Typhoid fever in those early months in Chile, I did believe him and occasionally cited it as one of the greatest gifts I had received from any priest. He had given me freedom to innovate and animate in my time there in the parish, and it must have been a little trying to make the adjustment for men nearly 30 years my senior.

Grow

I suppose that being Pastor meant for me to allow people to grow in their appreciation of and loyalty to Church. What with Ministers, Monitors, Catechists, Coordinators and Communities, there was plenty of opportunity around. The Jesuits in the Belarmino Centre in Santiago offered a workshop for pastors, which consisted of comparing the structures and climate of Industry and the Church. It explored the buy-in to the objectives of both, finding personal identity in that, the ways of achieving promotion, of dealing with tensions in the day-to-day living. There were remarkable parallels and it was a learning experience for the priests who took part. I recall one hand-out which I used and which went down well with the Pastoral Council. It involved a football field and the positions on it - forward, back, goalkeeper, midfield creator and midfield holder, attacking wingers. Being all well versed in the arts of the Great Game, the pastoral agents

readily set about finding where their role was on the field of the parish team!

Empowering was a word that many of us used frequently in conversations about the 'pastorale' and for me it was what brought me most satisfaction. On the other hand, there is no doubt that meant being vulnerable on many occasions, as some would take advantage of the sense of power held over others. It could be hurtful and stressful when I was faced with standing down a person and stripping them of their felt authority in the local community. I recall on one occasion a sense of sadness at witnessing the extreme vulnerability of Jazna, a member of the group of parents in the First Eucharist programme. Yvette and Sergio, very competent catechists, had been inviting me to the group and in my presence to talk about 'the joys in their lives', as a window on the Joy of the Lord. So there was a sharing and the young parents talked about occasions like their own First Communion, a birthday, getting a new job etc. But when it came to Jazna - not entirely to my surprise, having known about her deprived background - she said that she could not remember even one moment of joy. Fortunately, Yvette and Sergio did not press or embarrass her, and I knew she would be getting their special attention in the weeks ahead.

Silence

I have been reading on Kindle recently a book called 'The Silence of the Choir' by Mohammed Saar, who is from Sudan and whose book won a big literary prize in France:

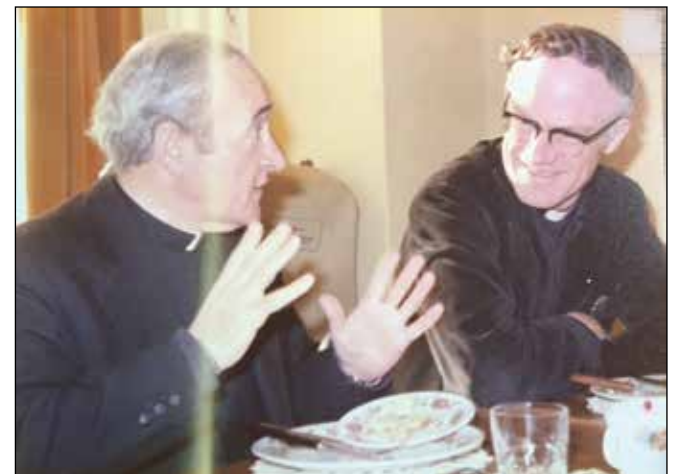
"Only thing that paradise and hell have in common: one is never alone there. One is never on one's own. There are people everywhere, people one has not chosen, and with whom one must compromise. It's called living." The priest fell silent. Everyone waited for him to continue speaking. The silence persisted. And it was just then, as the surprised congregation realized the sermon had ended, that Padre Bonianno collapsed at the foot of the pulpit. At the back of the church, those who hadn't seen the priest fall stood up and began solemnly singing a psalm. In the front row, Giuseppe Fantini, who had only come to surprise his old friend, who'd been so sure he wouldn't see him at Mass, was the first to rush toward his motionless body. He knelt by him and took his head in his arms. The old priest was still conscious, but his voice already spoke from beyond the grave. People clustered around them. The singing stopped. There was a call for silence, given the gravity of the moment. The storm could



A new Capilla Virgen Peregrina, including Bishop Gonzalo Duarte of Valparaíso, P Olivier PP, Fr John and Deanery priests...it was never to be so filled again



A whole Comunidad in Valparaíso, Chile.



Fr John with Fr Brian Fitzgerald



Fr John with Fr Barney Brady



Fr John's third construction - San Columbano Parish, El Bosque, Santiago, Chile.

be heard again, but it was no longer howling; its weakening breath seemed to harmonize with the dying priest's. In falling, he had lost his glasses. His eyes, wide open, seemed to have recovered a last light. His many deep wrinkles no longer wove a complex, labyrinthine web on his face; they seemed to find a sort of secret consonance there. His thin lips struggled to part as he murmured in Fantini's arms. And although only the poet heard clearly what he was saying, the entire church listened to the whispering that grew quieter and quieter, more and more inaudible. Everyone heard death embrace his voice. "Giuseppe...is that you, Giuseppe? How was I?... Not all that great, was I...Yes... I've been better..." (From "The Silence of the Choir" by Goncourt Prize winning, internationally renowned author).

"Keep them out, they'll come back. If we kill them, they'll be reborn, or their children will come. So, yes, perhaps taking them in is a collective hell, where no one understands anyone. But not to take them in is a solitary hell, where we don't speak to one another and where, therefore, we have no chance

of understanding each other. Between these two hells, I prefer the one where we are all together, speaking to each other, even if we don't understand. For it is that hell that offers the greatest hope. The hope that someday a new, shared language will be born. Everyone has their place in paradise. Everyone has their place in hell. That may be the only thing that paradise and hell have in common: one is never alone there. One is never on one's own. There are people everywhere, people one has not chosen, and..." (From "The Silence of the Choir" by Goncourt Prize winning, internationally renowned author).

Dilemma

It is one of those existential novels that shows up the human dilemma and, in this case, that of Padre Bonianno, the local parish priest in a small Sicilian community being challenged by the divisions caused in that small parish, by the arrival of a group of African immigrants and he debates the issue with the famed local poet, Fantini, and then in his Christmas Day sermon.

There was, of course, a much smaller prism when I was dealing with what were also 'existential issues', like the dictatorship of

Pinochet, and the distrust in some of the communities around certain people who were seen to be likely, 'sapos', or informers, when the Church was often on a collision course with the mechanisms of law and order in our own localities. Get the book and read it, if you want a good thought provoking novel!

A slight divergence maybe on my subject. For those who read Spanish, I would recommend 'El Camino' by Miguel Delibes, who has a rather gentler picture of the local parish priest!

On my final visit to Chile, some years back, I was impressed by a public declaration, 'La Iglesia que buscan las mujeres', which was an open and honest appraisal of the Church by a representative group of women active in the pastoral ministry. It valued the openness and clarity of many of its Church leaders and wanted to support its advances in practice, even while open to whatever might come on women deacons or married clergy. A flood of names and friends, from Church meetings, at chapel, parish, deanery and zonal levels, flashed before me in appreciation of their service and desire to be heard and accept responsibilities over the years.

Conversion Retreat

One of the many movements active in many parishes that I knew was the 'Conversion Retreat' movement, started off by a Santiago Diocesan priest, P Pepe Valdes, our neighbouring parish priest, and who was in our Deanery. Originally focussed upon giving taxi drivers an experience of Church, Pepe had acquired a couple of huts on the coast to which they were invited for a 'surprise weekend', and from which they returned with a new view of themselves and being loved and forgiven, with a desire to take part in their local chapels.

By my time, this had been extended to women for the first weekend and then the men, and I often participated with a sense of wonder and joy, as I witnessed people taking seriously the testimonies and the 'second chance' in their lives, closing with Confession and a final Mass on the Sunday, and then setting off home to their parishes or chapels, where a big welcome had been arranged for them even late in the night. At their weekly meeting in the Enrique Alvear chapel, I would join in with them on their own special hymn books - 'The Ninety Nine and the Lost Sheep, We're constructing



Rosa, Catechist for Baptismal preparation for many years in Valparaiso Hills.

the Church, because we are the Church.'

There is a proverb in Spanish that runs "no tan adentro que se quema, ni tan afuera que se resfrie", that might well apply to the stand-off attitudes to Church which I find far more in Ireland than ever in Chile: "Don't get so far in that you get burnt, nor so far off that you are left in the cold", and maybe that is just where we are at in Ireland especially.

I always preferred the language of 'Compromiso', or commitment, and 'Sacar la Cara por la Iglesia' that was the living witness of some many Pastors and Church communities. One of the Ken Loach films

was called 'Amadeus', where the guilty plagiarist solemnly justifies his guilt - 'I hate Mediocrity' - and so do I!

Clog an Aifrinn
le Diarmuid Johnson
(Seachtain ne Gaelige...agus ag maithneagh go doimhin...fos)
Ní théimse go teach Dé
'S ní ghéillim
Do bhriathar na cléire
Ach an lá a mbeidh
Clog an Aifrinn ina tost
An lá a mbeidh socht
Ar ghlór ársa na cille
An lá a mbeidh deireadh
Le gairm na tuaithe
Is uaigneach fuar an áit
A bhéas sa tír.

An Advent journey to Jesus through Mary by Fr Peter O'Kane



THERE is a beautiful Advent hymn-text that speaks of the journey of Mary to Bethlehem: Behold a virgin bearing him who comes to save us from our sin. The prophets cry: prepare his way! Make straight his paths to Christmas Day. Behold our hope and life and light, the promise of the holy night. We lift our prayer and bend our knee to his great love and majesty. As we enter into Advent, it is easy to get caught in the whirlwind of Christmas preparations, whether shopping, baking, party planning or everything in-between. And

yet, there is something in this hymn that invites us to rescue Advent - in the sense of by the way we live our lives in Christ who is our hope, life and light. This comes from our own experience of faith, our desire to prepare for Christmas well and our wish that others will know the true meaning of the feast. "Advent has a twofold character, for it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas, in which the First Coming of the Son of God to humanity is remembered, and likewise a time when, by remembrance of this, minds and hearts are led to

look forward to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight" (Norms 39). In some ways, these two aspects of Advent take on a new significance this year as we also begin the Jubilee Year of Hope on Christmas Eve, for the duration of 2025. This is a reminder to us that Jesus our Saviour came to the Earth, taking on human form, being like us in all things but sin, to bring us salvation, to bring us to Heaven. Even in our time, as we seek to prepare our lives for Christ coming again in glory, God continues to offer us His merciful love and compassion as we embrace the road of hope, responding to His invitation of life to the full. As Pope Francis says in the Bull of Indiction for this Jubilee Year: "The Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love". This is the journey of the Advent season as we reflect on the word of God which illumines our hearts, opens our ears and eyes and helps us to find Jesus in the midst of a busy world. So what do we say of the journey of faith that is renewed in Advent. Pope Francis tells us: "This journey never comes to an end. Just as in each of our lives

we always need to begin again, to get up again, to rediscover the meaning of the goal of our lives, so also for the great human family it is always necessary to rediscover the common horizon toward which we are journeying. The horizon of hope! This is the horizon that makes for a good journey. The season of Advent restores this horizon of hope, a hope which does not disappoint for it is founded on God's Word". With our eyes focussed on being pilgrims of hope, we are invited during the Advent season to turn to Mary, the Mother of God, as the model of hope. Everything that the Church teaches us about Our Lady is intended to help us grow closer to Her Son Jesus Christ, and lead us into a deeper understanding of who He is and what He has done for us. Pope Francis encourages us to imitate the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary: "She is able to recognise the traces of God's Spirit in events great and small. She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives. She is the woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town 'with haste' to be of service to others" (EG288). The Blessed Virgin Mary leads us into a deeper understanding of the call of the disciple and the life-giving response which exudes from this obedience and selfless giving. In the story of the Annunciation, St Luke offers the figure of Mary as a model disciple, as the angel

revealed the plan of God to Her: "Do not be afraid." And indeed, not being afraid, Mary was the model of all disciples - because She loved with Her whole heart. In the Gospels, we hear few words from Mary - but we know that Her reaction in many situations was very simple and typically motherly, as she 'treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.' No doubt, these treasured memories permeated Her mind, emotions and thoughts as She watched Her young baby grow, the life of the child Jesus at the family home in Nazareth, as He embarked on His public ministry, as She witnessed great miracles through His hands and listened to words echo from His mouth. Her heart must have been torn as She watched Her son being rejected and dejected and condemned to death; tears streamed from Her face as He died on the cross; but what joy when She was a witness to His glorious resurrection; as She witnessed the risen Christ in Her midst, as She heard new words of encouragement, as She watched His disciples work miracles in His name, bringing new life to those around Her - signs to Her that Her child was indeed the great I AM, the God at the centre of Her life. As we continue on our earthly journey, we look to her for support and encouragement to be faithful disciples of Christ as we prepare our hearts and our lives for the Christmas celebration. Because Mary worked through the difficulties in Her life; despite

confusion and without fully understanding all that was going on, She remained committed in faith, with complete trust and confidence in the plan of God. On the Advent journey, the figure of Mary gives the perfect model of discipleship. She encourages us to live our lives inspired by God, to enter more deeply into the mystery of salvation by following Her pattern of perfection and allowing Her to give hope and comfort in the midst of our lives. Looking to the history of the Church, there are so many examples of holy men and women who sought to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, learning of Her virtue, following Her example of commitment and patience, living obediently like Her, so that, in the words of Saint Louis de Montfort, "to Jesus through Mary". Walking through Advent as people of hope, we are invited to embrace the journey of Jubilee in 2025, where our lives will echo the joy and faith of those who have gone before us. This will help prepare us for a diocesan journey of prayer and commitment in January 2025, when Bishop Donal will guide the families of this diocese on the road of consecration to Jesus through Mary. See other articles in this month's 'The Net' to begin preparation for this journey. For all these opportunities of prayer and preparation - Advent, Christmas, Consecration - are moments where we call out with hope: 'Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!'

Parish Post-its

Aghyaran

Parish Bazaar: After a five year gap, the Parish Christmas Bazaar will take place once again on December 15.
Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Thursdays after 10 am Mass, and finishes at 12 noon.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, and 11 am.

Ardstraw East
(Newtownstewart)

Zoom Catechism: All are welcome to join Catechism by Zoom on Mondays, from 7.30-8.15 pm. Email: ardstraweast@derrydiocese.org to get the link. Learn how to answer hard questions.
Pope John Paul II Award – Sessions for Pope John Paul II Award participants takes place on Thursdays at 6.30 pm, in the Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.
Holy Hour: 6.30 pm, Thursdays, Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.
Weekend Mass Times: 11:30 am, St Eugene’s Glenock.

Badoney Lower
(Gortin-Rouskey)

Adoration: Adoration takes places in St Patrick’s Gortin, after the 12.30 pm Mass until 5 pm on Tuesdays, and in St Mary’s, Rouskey, after 7.30 pm Mass on Wednesdays.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s, Gortin; 10 am, St Mary’s, Rouskey.

Badoney Upper
(Plumbridge-Cranagh)

Wreath-making Workshop: ‘Friends of St Brigid’s’ PS, Cranagh are hosting a wreath-making workshop in the school on December 12, at 7 pm. All material will be supplied and everyone will go home with a wreath. The cost is £25 per person. Contact the school to book a place – 028 816 48418.
Adoration & Confession: Adoration and Confessions take place in St Patrick’s Cranagh after the 7.30 pm Wednesday evening Mass, until 9 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s Cranagh; 10 am, Sacred Heart Plumbridge.

Ballinascreen

St Pio Mass: Mass in honour of St Pio of Pietrelcina is celebrated on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm, in Holy Rosary Church. The Novena prayers and Rosary are recited at 7.10 pm.
Confessions: Holy Rosary Church every Saturday at 5.30 pm, before the Vigil Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, Holy Rosary; 9 am in St Columba’s Straw; 11 am in St Patrick’s, Sixtowns; 12 noon in St Eugene’s, Moneyneena.

Ballymagroarty

Parish Novena: The annual Parish Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help continues on Tuesdays at 7.15 pm.
Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, every Sunday, from 1.30 - 6 pm.
Padre Pio Prayer: The Holy Family Padre Pio Prayer Group meets on the first Tuesday each month at Holy Family Chapel, Ballymagroarty, Derry. It starts with the Rosary at 6.45 pm, followed by Mass at 7.15pm, and Novena to St Pio directly afterwards. There will be a first class relic available for veneration.
Confessions: Saturdays from 10.30-11.30 am & 5.15-5.50 pm; Tues & Thurs 6.45–7.10 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil; and 9.30 am, 11 am, and 12.30 pm on Sunday.

Banagher

Adoration & Chaplet: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Divine Mercy Chaplet take place in St Mary’s Church, Altinure, Thursdays, 10.30-11.30 am; St Joseph’s Church, Fincairn, on Fridays, 10–11 am.
Confessions: St Mary’s Church, Altinure, Thursday 10.30 am; St Joseph’s Church, Fincairn, Friday 10 am & Saturday 6.30 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil in St Joseph’s Church, Fincairn, 10.30 am in St Mary’s Church, Altinure, and 12 noon in St Peter’s & St Paul’s Church, Foreglen.

Bellaghy

Community Café: The Open Door Community Café is open on the last Sunday of each month, from 11.30 am until 1 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil in Bellaghy, 10 am in Ballyscullion, and 11 am in Bellaghy.

Buncrana

Novena: The ‘Throwing open the doors to Christ’ Novena, for the nine Sundays before Christmas, continues in St Mary’s Church, Cockhill. Starting at 7 pm, the ceremony comprises of the Rosary, a talk by invited speaker, the Novena prayer and petitions (which can be placed in a box at the door of the church), a Eucharistic Healing Ceremony and finishing with Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

(The Holy Hour each Sunday evening in St Mary’s Oratory will cease for the moment, resuming after Christmas.)

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament now takes place in St Mary’s Oratory every Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, 6 am-10 pm, and on Sundays 2-10 pm.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed each weekday at 9.30 am in St Mary’s Oratory, prior to 10 am Mass.

Guided Holy Hour: A Guided Holy Hour of Adoration in Honour of the Holy Face of Jesus takes place on Sundays, 6-7 pm in St Mary’s Oratory. All welcome.

Rosary for Priests: Three Rosaries are prayed each Tuesday, between 1-2 pm, in the Oratory for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

AA: Alcoholics Anonymous Amazing Grace Group, Buncrana, has five meetings per week: Sundays – 8 pm, Tuesdays - 8.30 pm, Thursdays - 11.30 am, Fridays 8.30 pm, and Saturdays at 11.30 am. If you think you may have a problem with alcohol, please come along. Venue for all meetings is St Teresa’s Room.

Al-Anon: The Al-Anon Group, for anyone whose life is or has been affected by someone else’s drinking, meets in St Teresa’s Room on Thursdays at 6:45 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: St Mary’s Oratory – Vigil 6 pm, 9 am and 12.30 pm; St Mary’s Cockhill – Vigil 7 pm, and 11am; Star of the Sea, Desertegney – 10 am.

Burt, Inch & Fahan

Adoration: Adoration in St Mura’s Parish Church, Fahan, takes place each Friday after 10 am Mass.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10.15 am, St Aengus’ Burt; 9 am, Our Lady of Lourdes, Inch; 7.15 pm Vigil, 11.30 am, St Mura’s, Fahan.

Cappagh
(Killyclogher)

Eucharistic Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesday from 8-9 pm in Christ the King, Strathroy, concluding with Night Prayer, and on Sunday from 3.30-6.30 pm, in Christ the King.
Rosary: The Rosary is prayed in St Mary’s Church, Killyclogher, Monday-Saturday at 9.15 am, and in Corpus Christi, Mountfield every Thursday evening at 8 pm.
Legion of Mary: Legion of Mary meets every Monday after 10 am Mass in St Mary’s Church, Killyclogher. New members always welcome.

Anyone wishing to welcome the Pilgrim Statute of Our Lady into your home and pray the Rosary is asked to contact Rosaleen on 07917421119 to make arrangements with the Legion of Mary, Cappagh Group.

St Pio Novena Devotions: Novena devotions through the intercession of St Padre Pio take place on the first Wednesday of the month in Christ the King Church, Strathroy. Rosary at 7 pm, followed by Mass as 7.30 pm. Veneration and blessing with relic will be available after Mass.

Polish Mass: Mass is celebrated in Polish in the Church of Christ The King, Strathroy, Omagh, on the first and third Sunday’s of each month at 10 am.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 12 noon, Christ The King, Strathroy; 9 & 11 am, St Mary’s, Killyclogher.

Carndonagh

Weekend Mass Times: Vigil 7 pm; Sunday 9 am & 11 am.

Castleberg & Ardstraw West

Adoration: Adoration takes place following 10 am Mass in St Patrick’s Church on Fridays, until 12 noon.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil and 11 am, Castleberg; 9.30 am Dregish; and 12.30 pm Drumnabey.

Claudy

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place from after the 10 am Mass until 8 pm on Tuesdays in St Patrick’s Church, Claudy, and on Wednesdays in St Joseph’s Church, Craigbane.
Living Word: There is a ‘Living Word’ gathering in the Upper Room in St Patrick’s Church on Thursdays, 7-8.30 pm , for a time of reading and reflection on the Mass readings for the following Sunday. All welcome.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed on the Parish webcam from St Patrick’s Church, Monday-Thursday, at 6 pm.

Divine Office & Chaplet: The Divine Office (Mid-day Prayer of the Church) and the Divine Mercy Chaplet are prayed on the Parish webcam, from St Patrick’s Church, Monday-Friday, at 3 pm.

Holy Face Devotions: Holy Face Devotions will be prayed on the Parish webcam in St Patrick’s Church, Claudy, every Friday, beginning with Divine Office (Evening Prayer) at 6 pm. All welcome to join.

Society of St Joseph: The Vocation Society of St Joseph prayer meeting takes place on the first Thursday of each

month, at 6.30 pm, in the Upper Room, St Patrick’s Church.

Children’s Rosary: Children’s Rosary continues in St Patrick’s Church, Claudy on the first Saturday of each month, at 2 pm. All are welcome.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s; 10 am, St Joseph’s; 11.30 am St Patrick’s.

Clonleigh (Lifford)

Other Jubilee Events: Nativity Concert on Sunday, December 15, at 7 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 11 am.

Clonmany

Parish Pilgrimage: A Parish Pilgrimage to Lourdes will take place from June 10-14, 2025. Staying at Hotel Padoue, the cost will be 760 Euro per person sharing, full board. Enquiries to the Parish Office.

Exposition: Exposition of The Blessed Sacrament in St Michael’s Church, Urris, on Fridays, 3-6 pm (Rosary at 5.40 pm); in the Oratory of the Assumption, Ballyliffin, on Tuesdays, 7.30-8.30 pm; and in St Columbcille Village, Cleagh, on Wednesdays, 3-4 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: St Mary’s Church, Clonmany, Vigil 6.30 pm (Rosary at 6.10 pm); Sunday 11:30 am; St Michael’s Church, Urris, Sunday, 10 am

Coleraine

SJYP Meet: St Joseph’s Young Priests’ Society meets on the last Monday of each month at St John’s Church Sacristy, after the 10 am morning Mass, and is open to everyone. New members are welcome at any of the meetings, which support praying for and assisting to support the vocation to priesthood and the religious life.

Exposition: St John’s Church Monday Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Wednesdays in St John’s Church, from 2-4 pm. with Rosary at 3:45 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 11 am, St John’s; 7.30 pm Vigil, St Mary’s Dunboe; 9.45 am, Our Lady of the Assumption, Aghadowey.

Creggan

YOUCAT: The YOUCAT Programme is underway in the Parochial House Conference Room on Wednesdays at 7 pm. All welcome.

Adoration: Exposition of Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Divine Mercy Chapel on Sundays from 1.30 pm - 6 pm, Mondays from

10.30 am - 7 pm, and Tuesday – Saturday from 10.30 am - 12 pm.

Bereavement Support: Parish Pastoral Bereavement Support. The Parish Pastoral Bereavement Support Group meets on the second Sunday of each month at 3 pm in the Parochial House community room. All are welcome to share a cup of tea, have a chat, remember and talk about their loved one and find support with others experiencing similar feelings. In addition to the group, there is an ongoing opportunity to speak on a one-to-one basis with an experienced grief counsellor . The contact number for more information on the group or to arrange one to one support is 07907085178.

Polish Mass: Mass for the Polish community will be celebrated at 4 pm every second and fourth Sunday of the month in the Divine Mercy Chapel, at St Mary’s Church.

Confession: Monday - Friday 5-5.30 pm, Saturday 10.30 am & 5.30-6.20 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil; 10.30 am; 12.15 pm.

Culdaff

Good as New Shop: St Mary’s Church Bocan Re-decorating Committee has the ‘Good as New Shop’ now open in Carndonagh. All proceeds are for the Re-decorating Fund.
Weekend Mass Times: 8 pm Vigil; 10 am Sunday.

Desertmartin

Knit & Natter: Knit & Natter classes take place in Knocknagin Hall on Tuesdays at 7.30 pm. Bring your own project or you can help with knitting for local charities.

Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil in St Patrick’s, Keenaught; and 10 am in St Mary’s, Coolcalm.

Confessions: Saturday evenings in St Patrick’s, Keenaught, from 6.30–7.10 pm.

Donagheady
(Aughabrack & Dunamanagh)

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Mary’s, Aughabrack, on First Fridays, after 10 am Mass until 12 noon.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s, and 10.30 am, St Mary’s.

Drumquin

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed each Tuesday morning at 10 am in St Patrick’s Church, Drumquin.

Eucharistic Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays from 6 pm – Mass at 7.30 pm. Weekend Mass Times: Vigil 6.30 pm, and 11 am.

Drumragh (Omagh)
125th Celebrations:

The 125th anniversary celebrations for Sacred Heart Church continue with a special visit by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor to celebrate Mass there on Sunday, December 8, at 12 noon, with Bishop Donal. The parishioners and priests of Drumragh Parish will be happy to welcome visitors to celebrate this Mass with them. Refreshments will be served after Mass in St Joseph’s Hall beside the church. There, Archbishop Montemayor will re-launch a special edition of Rev John J McGlade’s book, ‘Five Years Tour in America...’ first published in 1906.

Fr McGlade was parish priest of Newtownstewart when the book was published, and was later appointed to the parish of Limavady. Less than five copies of the original publication have been found, so this is an opportunity to purchase an historical document. Fr McGlade spent five interesting years raising funds in America and other places. He was the nephew of Mons Bernard McNamee, parish priest of Drumragh, when Sacred Heart Church was built.

Prayer Group: The Charismatic Prayer Group meetings take place in The Pastoral Centre on Thursday evenings, with Rosary at 7.30 pm and prayer meeting at 8 pm. All welcome to come and pray.

Legion of Mary: The Legion of Mary Men’s meetings take place on the first, second and last Monday, and third Tuesday of each month at 7.30 pm, in St Vincent’s Hall (beneath Sacred Heart Church Sacristy). Contact: Sean on 07730671370.

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Sacred Heart Church on Wednesdays following 10 am Mass.

Rosary of Reparation: On the first Saturday of each month, a Rosary of Reparation will be prayed at 1pm on Main Street, Omagh. All welcome to join.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 12 noon, Sacred Heart Church; 10.30 am, St Mary’s Drumragh.

Dungiven

Parish Post-its

Prayer Group: The St Canice’s Charismatic Prayer Group meets each Thursday at 7 pm, in the Parish Committee Room, and invites anyone who wishes to deepen their faith through shared Scripture, Prayer and Praise.

St Pio Healing Mass: A St Pio Healing Mass is celebrated monthly, on the first Tuesday, in St Patrick’s Church at 7 pm. SJYP: the St Joseph’s Young Priests’ Society meets on the second Tuesdays of the month in the Committee Room, after 10 am Mass in St Patrick’s Church.

Children’s Liturgy: Children’s liturgy recommences on Sunday, October 20 and will continue every third Sunday of the month at 11.30 am Mass. Children from P2-P4 are invited to participate. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 11.30 am, St Patrick’s; 10.15 am, St Matthew’s; and 4.30 pm, Immaculate Conception. **Confession:** Confession is available in St Patrick’s Church at 11 am on Saturdays.

Errigal
Christmas Bingo: Christmas Bingo will take place in Errigal Hall on Sunday, December 15, at 8 pm. Raffle/Spot Prizes. All proceeds in aid of Errigal Hall Development. **Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Mondays after 10 am Mass in St Mary’s Church, Ballerin, until 2.30 pm. **Rosary & Chaplet:** The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet are prayed in St Joseph’s Church, Glenullin, every Wednesday evening at 6.30 pm. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil, St Joseph’s Church, Glenullin, and St Mary’s Church, 10 am, St Mary’s, Ballerin, and 11.30 am in St Joseph’s, Glenullin.

Faughanvale
Rosary: The Rosary is prayed every Friday at 7 pm in Star of the Sea Church. **Weekend Mass Times:** 5 pm Vigil, 12 noon, Star of the Sea; 6.30 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Mary’s.

Granaghan (Swatragh)
Advent Prayer: In preparation for Christmas, Morning Prayer of the Church is prayed in the Church at 10am on the Tuesdays of Advent. This ancient prayer is recited by clergy, religious and a growing number of laity all over the world. The Prayer of the Church is on-going, so when we pray the Morning

Prayer in Granaghan other groups on the planet are praying the Evening or Night Prayer. **Weekend Mass Times:** 12 noon & 7 pm Vigils; 10.30 am.

Greencastle
Divine Mercy: The Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayed on the First Tuesday of every month at 12.15 pm before Mass in St Patrick’s Church, Greencastle. **Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in St Patrick’s Church on Thursdays, 6-10 pm. **Stations of the Cross:** The Stations of the Cross are prayed after 7.30 pm Mass on Fridays in St Patrick’s, Greencastle. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s, and 11.30 am, Our Lady of Wayside, Broughdery.

Greenlough
Rosary: Tuesday Night Rosary is prayed at 7.30 pm in the Church. **Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Oliver Plunkett’s Church from 9 am-5 pm on Thursdays. **Weekend Mass Times:** 5.30 pm Vigil, and 9 am.

Iskaheen, Drung & Muff
Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Tuesdays after 10 am Eucharistic Service, until 2 pm, in St Patrick’s Church, Iskaheen. **Divine Mercy:** Divine Mercy Devotions take place on Wednesdays after 10 am Mass in Sacred Heart Church, Muff. **St Peregrine:** The St Peregrine Novena Prayer and veneration of relic takes place on the first Friday of each month, alternating between the three churches. **Confessions:** Confessions are available in Iskaheen on Saturdays, 9.45-10 am, and in Muff on Saturdays, 6 pm, and after 6.30 pm Vigil Mass. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6.30 pm Vigil, 11.30 am, Sacred Heart Church, Muff; 8 pm Vigil, 10.15 am, St Columba’s, Drung; 9 am, St Patrick’s, Iskaheen.

Kilrea
Eucharistic Adoration: Mondays, from 12 noon - 7pm, at St Mary’s Drumagarner. Concludes with Public Prayers. **Stations of the Cross:** The Stations of the Cross are prayed on Sundays in St Anne’s Oratory at 7 pm, with Confessions beforehand from

6.30-6.50 pm. **SVP:** The St Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop is open on Saturdays from 10 am -1pm. **Confession:** Confession is available immediately after the 7 pm Vigil Mass in St Anne’s Oratory each Saturday. Alternatively, feel free to request the sacrament before or after any weekday Mass. **Weekend Mass Times:** 7 pm, Vigil, St Anne’s Oratory; 10am St Mary’s, Drumagarner; 12 noon, St Mary’s, Craigavole.

Killygordon
Live Crib: The Home of the Mother Servant Sisters will be presenting Carols by Candlelight in St Patrick’s Church on Sunday, December 15, at 5 pm. This will be followed by a Live Crib across the road at the Parochial House, and hot chocolate! **Holy Hour:** Prayerful reading of the Scriptures & Rosary with the Home of the Mother, Servant Sisters every Tuesday from 6.30-7.30 pm at St Mary’s Church, Sessiaghoneill, Ballybofey, and every Thursday from 7-8 pm at St. Patrick’s. **Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Patrick’s Church, Crossroads, every Thursday after 9.15 am Mass. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Patrick’s; 8 pm Vigil, 9 am & 11 am, St Mary’s Sessiaghoneill.

Lavey
Bambinelli Blessing: On the Third Sunday of Advent, children and adults bring their Baby Jesus figurines (Bambinelli) from their homes to St Peter’s Square, where they are blessed by the Pope. All children and families are invited to bring the ‘Baby Jesus’ figurine from their cribs at home to be blessed at all our Masses, the weekend of the Third Sunday of Advent (December 14&15). **Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Fridays from 9.30 am until 5 pm. **Confession:** Confessions are heard from 5.15–5.45 pm on Saturdays. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 11 am.

Leckpatrick
Advent Prayer: In preparation for Christmas, there is a time of prayer on Wednesdays, December 11 and 18, from 8–9 pm in Sacred Heart Church, Derry Rd. **Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays from 8.30 am

Mass until 5.30 pm. **Weekend Mass Times:** 5 pm Vigil, St Mary’s Church, Cloughcor; 9.45 am St Joseph’s Church, Glenmornan; 11.15 am, Sacred Heart Church, Derry Road.

Lifford
Adoration: 9.30 am-12.30 pm. **Confessions:** Saturday, 6-6.15 pm **Weekend Mass Times:** 6.30 pm Vigil; 11 am.

Limavady
Advent Programme: Sunday, December 8, Eucharistic Healing Service in St Mary’s Church, 6 pm; Friday, December 13, Parish Breakfast in the Bethany Community Centre, 7.30-9.30 am; Sunday, December 15, Carol Service in St Mary’s Church at 6 pm; Monday, December 16, Penitential Service in St Finlough’s Church at 7 pm; Tuesday, December 17, Walking Carol Service at 7 pm; Wednesday, December 18, Penitential Service in Christ the King Church at 7 pm; Sunday, December 22, Exposition & Confessions in Christ the King Church, 3-5 pm. **Advent Talks:** Talks on ‘Connecting Luke’s Gospel to the Old Testament’ continue on Tuesday, December 10 and Monday, December 16, from 6.30-7.30 pm, in the Chapter Room above St Mary’s Church. For more information ring Seamus on 07729355068. **Adoration:** Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Sundays in Christ the King (with Confessions) from 3-5 pm. **Children’s Prayer:** A Children’s Prayer Group is held in the Drummond Hotel, Ballykelly, on the First Saturday of every month, from 2.30-3.30 pm. All welcome. Contact: Kathy on 07538749627. **Weekend Mass Times:** 4.30 pm Vigil, 9 am, 12 noon, Christ the King Church; 6 pm Vigil, St Finlough’s Church; 10.30 am, St Mary’s Church.

Moville
Christmas Concert: The St Eugene’s Hall Christmas Variety Concert takes place on Friday, December 6 at 7.30 pm. Tickets on sale in: Lynott’s Shop; Moville Post Office; Greencastle Post Office; Charity Shop (beside the chemist) and in Londis. Admission €10. **Bazaar:** Tickets for the big prizes are also on sale now as part of the Annual Bazaar, which takes place on Sunday, December 15, in St Eugene’s Hall. Tickets are €2 or €10 for a book of 6. **Stations of the Cross:** The Stations of the Cross are prayed after 10 am Mass on Fridays. **Prayer:** The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet will be recited in St Pius X Church, Moville, at 7.30 pm every day, from Sunday – Friday. **Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Mondays, from 2-9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6-9 pm, in St Pius X Church. Confessions: Confessions are available on Saturdays, 6.15–6.45 pm. **Weekend Mass Times:** 7 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Pius X Church. 12 noon on Sundays as follows – St Mary’s Ballybrack, 1st and 3rd Sundays; St Columba’s Ballinacrae, 2nd and 4th Sundays; St Pius X 5th Sunday.

Maghera
Healing Service: During Advent, there will be a Healing Service on Sundays at 6 pm, in St Patrick’s Church, Glen. **Novena:** The Our Lady of Untier of Knots Novena continues on Wednesdays at 7.30 pm in St Mary’s Church. **Pray & Play:** The Maghera Parish Pray and Play for Parents, Grandparents & Tots (three years old and younger) meets every Friday, in the Fairhill Youth Centre, after the 10 am Mass. It runs from

10.30 am until 12 noon. **Confession:** Daily after morning Mass (except Sunday and Holydays), and St Mary’s at 7 pm on Wednesdays (before evening Mass) and Saturdays at 11am/12noon and 5.30pm/6.15pm **Weekend Mass Times:** 6.30 pm Vigil and 11.30 am, St Mary’s; 9.30 am, St Patrick’s.

Malin
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, and 10.30 am, St Patrick’s Church; Vigil 8 pm, Star of the Sea Church; 9 am, St. Mary’s Church.

Melmount
Carols by Candlelight: Carols by Candlelight will take place in St Mary’s Church, Melmount, on Sunday, December 15 at 5.30 pm in aid of The Kevin Bell Repatriation Trust. **Exposition:** Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the church on Mondays after 10 am Mass until 6 pm. The Rosary will be recited prior to closure of Adoration at approximately 5.40 pm. Everyone is welcome. **Weekend Mass Times:** 7 pm Vigil, 10.30 am and 12.30 pm.

Moville
Christmas Concert: The St Eugene’s Hall Christmas Variety Concert takes place on Friday, December 6 at 7.30 pm. Tickets on sale in: Lynott’s Shop; Moville Post Office; Greencastle Post Office; Charity Shop (beside the chemist) and in Londis. Admission €10. **Bazaar:** Tickets for the big prizes are also on sale now as part of the Annual Bazaar, which takes place on Sunday, December 15, in St Eugene’s Hall. Tickets are €2 or €10 for a book of 6. **Stations of the Cross:** The Stations of the Cross are prayed after 10 am Mass on Fridays. **Prayer:** The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet will be recited in St Pius X Church, Moville, at 7.30 pm every day, from Sunday – Friday. **Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Mondays, from 2-9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6-9 pm, in St Pius X Church. Confessions: Confessions are available on Saturdays, 6.15–6.45 pm. **Weekend Mass Times:** 7 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Pius X Church. 12 noon on Sundays as follows – St Mary’s Ballybrack, 1st and 3rd Sundays; St Columba’s Ballinacrae, 2nd and 4th Sundays; St Pius X 5th Sunday.

Sion Mills

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Fridays, from 11 am-6.50 pm, ending with Benediction before 7 pm Mass. **Legion of Mary:** The Legion of Mary meets in the Green Room, behind the church, each Monday evening at 7.30 pm. This is open not only to members of the Legion but to anyone interested in joining. Anyone can come along to the start of the meeting for the Rosary. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil; 9 am & 11 am.

Steelstown & Culmore
Advent Adoration: There will be Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Sundays during Advent, at 6 pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. **Tea & Chat:** During Advent, after the 11am Mass each Sunday, all are invited for a cup of tea or coffee in the Conference Room. **Lectio Divina:** Lectio Divina is a way of praying the Scriptures together and takes place every Wednesday after 10 am Mass, in the Parish Conference Room. All welcome. **Adoration:** Fridays after 10 am Mass until 6.50 pm. Stations of the Cross: Come along to reflect on the Way of the Cross on Fridays at 7.30 pm. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6.30 pm Vigil; 9 am, 11 am, and 12:15 pm.

Strabane (Camus)
Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place every day, from 10.30 am-1 pm, in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis of Peace), which is situated at the back of the Church. **Prayer Group:** The Contemplative Prayer Group meets on Mondays at 8 pm in the Prayer Room in the Parochial House. All welcome. Entry by Parish Priest’s front door. **SJYP Society:** The St John Vianney branch of the St Joseph’s Young Priests’ Society (the three combined Strabane parishes) meets on the first Tuesday of the month, excluding January, July and August, with Rosary in the church after 10 am Mass and continues in St Patrick’s Hall. More people are encouraged to join in this prayer for new students to join the priesthood. The Society assists Irish and overseas student. Please contact Margaret Harte on 028 71 883159. **Padre Pio Mass:** The Padre Pio Mass takes place in the Church on the first Wednesday of the month at 7

pm, with Rosary beforehand at 6.40 pm. **Grotto Rosary:** The Rosary is recited at the Grotto on the last Sunday of each month. Everyone is welcome. **Weekend Mass Times:** 6 pm Vigil, 9.45 am & 12.15 pm.

Templemore – St Eugene’s
Advent: Morning Prayer of the Church will be prayed in the Cathedral each morning at 7.45 am, Monday to Friday. In preparation for Christmas, there will also be an opportunity for Confession and Adoration each Monday, from 5-7 pm. **Christmas Tea:** There will be a Christmas Afternoon Tea on Saturday, December 7, at 1pm in the Cathedral Hall. Join Anne Marie Hickey and friends for a Festive Afternoon Tea with music and verse. Cost £25. Pre-booking required. Call into the Parish Office or ‘phone 028 71262894 or email cathedral@derrydiocese.org. **Parish Advent Pilgrimage:** There will be a Parish Advent Pilgrimage on Thursday, December 12, with Morning Prayer in the IOSAS Centre followed by refreshments, Mass in the Chapel of Ease in Fahan and lunch in the Inishowen Gateway Hotel. Price £40 includes transport, morning tea and lunch. The bus leaves the Cathedral at 9.30 am and returns approximately 4.45 pm. For more information, or to book a place, call into the Parish Office or call 71262894 or email cathedral@derrydiocese.org. **Carol Service:** St Eugene’s Cathedral Carol Service will take place in the Cathedral at 4 pm on Sunday, December 22, with the Cathedral Choir leading the singing. Children are invited to bring presents of new unwrapped toys and adults to donate sweets, biscuits, vouchers or cash. St Vincent de Paul Society will distribute the gifts. **Eucharistic Adoration:** Every Sunday, there is Eucharistic Adoration from 3-6 pm and every Tuesday from 10.30 am until 7.20 pm. **Matt Talbott Mass:** The Matt Talbot, Freedom from addiction Mass takes place on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm in St Eugene’s Cathedral. **St Dymphna Mass:** The St Dymphna Mass with Anointing of the Sick takes place on the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm. This Mass is to give thanks to God for positive mental health and to pray for those

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Parish *Post-its*

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who are struggling with mental health issues and those who care for them.

Cathedral Club: The Cathedral Club meets after the 10 am Mass each Thursday in the Cathedral Hall. Everyone is welcome to this parish social group. Refreshments will be served.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.15 pm & 7.30 pm Vigils; 9.30 am, 11 am, 12.30 pm & 7 pm.

Templemore – Long Tower

Novena: The annual Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help continues in St Columba’s Church on Sundays at 6 pm, until December 22. The remaining December speakers are: Fr Brendan McManus SJ, author of Ignation Spirituality, December 8; and Fr John Harris OP, Prior Provincial of the Irish Province of Dominicans, December 15.

As this year has been dedicated as Year of Prayer by Pope Francis, the theme for the Novena is ‘The Power of Prayer’, reflecting on the ‘Our Father’. The programme includes the Rosary, a guest speaker, petitions, Eucharistic Healing, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The Novena will come to a close on Sunday, December 22, with a Christmas reflection and Carols by Candlelight.

Mental Health Mass: A monthly Mass for Mental Health, and a mini-Vigil to midnight, takes place on the first Thursdays at 7.30 pm. This Mass is to give thanks to God for positive mental health, and to pray for those struggling with mental health issues and those who care for them. After Mass, Adoration will follow until midnight.

Lectio Divina: Praying with the Scriptures, using the method

of Lectio Divina for the Sunday Gospels of Advent, continues downstairs in Aras Colmcille on Tuesdays, December 10 & 17, from 8-9 pm, and Thursdays, December 12 & 19, from 11 am to 12 noon. All welcome to attend. Leaflets will be provided.

Purple Hearts: The Purple Hearts group gathers every Tuesday in Aras Cholmcille after 10 am Mass in Long Tower, for a cuppa, conversation, and some activities such as dancing, knitting, bingo and organising day trips. All welcome.

Long Tower & Brandywell Memories: A collection of old cine film transferred to DVD, taken from 1950’s onward. The pack contains a double DVD with many clips of Derry in the 50s up to 80s. Much of the footage was filmed in the Brandywell area and the Long Tower School. Cost £10, available from Parish Office and Aras Cholmcille.

Children’s Rosary: Children’s Rosary takes place in the Long Tower on the last Saturday of every month, at 3 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10 am & 12 noon.

Three Patrons

Advent Reflections: Advent Reflection with Adoration takes place in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, on Sundays from 4-6 pm. Confessions will be available from 4-5 pm, followed by Evening Prayer at 5 pm, Healing Service at 5.30 pm, and Benediction & Angelus at 6 pm.

Healing Night: There will be a Healing Night with a Uganda Mission Team in St Joseph’s Church, on Friday, December 6, at 7 pm.

Eucharistic Procession: An Our Lady of Guadalupe Eucharistic Procession will take place on Thursday, December 12,

beginning with 11 am Mass in St Joseph’s Church.

Novena: The Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help continues in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, on Tuesdays until December 17. Beginning with Mass at 7 pm, and followed by a talk, Exposition and Benediction.

Children’s Rosary: Children’s Rosary takes place in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, on the second Saturday of the month, at 2 pm.

Legion of Mary: The Legion of Mary meets on Mondays, from 1-3 pm in the Meeting Room at St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh.

Folk Group: The Carnhill Folk Group meets on Mondays from 7-8.30 pm in St Brigid’s Church.

St Brigid’s Choir: The 10.30 am St Brigid’s Choir meets on Thursdays from 5-5.30 pm in St Brigid’s Church.

Bible Study: Bible Study takes place on Tuesdays after 11 am Mass in the Meeting Room, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh.

Men’s Bible Study: Men’s Bible Study takes place in the Upper Room in St Brigid’s Chapel, Carnhill, on Tuesdays from 7.30-8.30 pm.

Women’s Bible Study: Women’s Bible Study takes place on Wednesdays from 7-8 pm, in the Upper Room, St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill.

God Club: God Club is an opportunity for teenagers to learn together about their faith. It takes place in the Kildare Room, Carnhill, on Saturdays from 11.30 am until 12.30 pm.

Family/Youth Mass: A Family/Youth Mass is celebrated every Sunday at 6.30 pm in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. Everyone is welcome.

Be Still: Be Still is a Men’s Prayer and Friendship Group that meets every Thursday night from 8.15-10 pm in Our Lady’s Chapel, within St Joseph’s Church building, Galliagh. Its mission as a group is to provide a safe place where men can pray and share

pm sharp.

Live Crib: The Home of the Mother Servant Sisters will be presenting Carols by Candlelight in St Patrick’s Church, Crossroads, Killygordon, Co Donegal, on Sunday, December 15, at 5 pm. This will be followed by a Live Crib across the road at the Parochial House, and hot chocolate!

Termonbacca Faith Talks: The Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre monthly talks on different elements of the faith are on Thursdays led by Fr Cajetan Ikedi Apeh OCD. The talks are aimed at leading the participants towards personal development through meditative prayer and convivial discussions of the Church doctrines. The planned themes for the remaining talks are: December 10 - “I believe in the Resurrection of the Body”; and February 13 - Purgatory and the purification for Eternal Life. These nights are open to everyone aged 18 and above who has an interest in growing more in their personal faith development.

in a confidential and supportive setting. All men are welcome.

Holy Hour: A Holy Hour for the Unborn & Expectant Mothers takes place on Thursdays at 7 pm in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. All welcome.

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, on Tuesdays from 11 am until 7 pm.

It also takes place seven days a week in the Adoration Room in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, from 8 am until 6 pm, and in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, on Wednesdays from 10.30 am – 7 pm.

Youth Prayer Group: A Youth Prayer Group takes place on Thursdays, from 7.30-8.30 pm, in St Pio Centre, Galliagh.

First Saturday: On the First Saturday of each month, after 11 am Mass in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, there is Adoration and Rosary, ending with Divine Mercy and Benediction at 3 pm.

Living Disciples: Living Disciples meet on Tuesdays at 7.30-8.30 pm in St Pio House, St Joseph’s Church grounds, for Praise & Worship, friendship and a cup of tea. All welcome.

Holy Face Devotions: Devotions to the Holy Face of Jesus takes place every Tuesday after 11 am Mass in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. All welcome

St Pio Mass: A monthly Mass in honour of St Pio takes place on the first Monday at 7 pm in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn.

Healing Night: A Healing Night with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal takes place monthly on the first Friday, from 7-10 pm, in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. Everyone welcome.

Holy Souls Prayer: Under The Gaze of Our Lady of Montligeon, the Holy Souls of Purgatory Prayer Meeting takes place on Mondays after 11 am Mass in Our Lady’s Chapel, within St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, in the presence

Anyone who wishes to know more can speak to Fr Cajetan by calling 02871262512.

Ladies’ Bible Study: Ladies interested in coming to a deeper understanding of scripture are welcome to come along to the Ladies’ Bible Study in Termonbacca, Derry, every Tuesday evening from 8:30-9:30 pm. It is led by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, who is currently working through the Gospel of Mark, which is the Gospel for Mass for this year. This Bible Study is open to all women who are interested in coming along. There is no need to book, you can simply show up. For further information contact Termonbacca on 028 71 262512.

Servant Sisters: The Sisters of the Home of the Mother are hosting weekly formation meetings on Tuesdays, at 7.30 pm, in the Parochial House at Cross, Killygordon, (F93PN0X), and the weekly Holy Hours on Thursdays at 7 pm.

of the Blessed Sacrament. The next monthly meeting for the intercession of Priests takes place on Tuesday, December 10, at 12.30 pm in Termonbacca.

Vocations Society: The Vocations Society of St Joseph hold monthly meetings on First Fridays after 10 am Mass, in the Emmaus Room, Pennyburn. New members welcome.

Women’s Laugh & Craft: The Women’s Laugh & Craft Group meets every Monday from 7-9 pm in the Kildare Room, St Brigid’s, Carnhill. £3 per class. Spaces limited.

St Pio Café: St Pio’s Café, in the St Pio Centre, Galliagh, is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11.30 am-2.30 pm.

Confessions: Confessions takes place in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, on Tuesdays from 6.15-6.45 pm, Saturdays from 6-6.30 pm, and Sundays from 5.30-6 pm; in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, on Wednesdays from 6.15-6.45 pm, and Saturdays from 5-5.30 pm; and in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, on Thursdays from 6.15-6.45 pm, and Saturdays after 11 am Mass and from 5-5.30 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.15 pm Vigil & 9.45 am, St Patrick’s, Pennyburn; 5 pm Vigil, 10.30 am & 12.30 pm St Brigid’s, Carnhill; 11 am, 12.30 pm (An tAifreann Naofa), and 6.30 pm Youth Mass, St Joseph’s Galliagh.

Urney & Castlefinn

First Saturdays: The First Saturday Devotion and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will take place in St Columba’s Church, Doneyloop, from 12 noon until 1 pm on the First Saturday of each month.

Adoration: Weekly Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St

Anthony’s Chapel every Tuesday, from 12 noon until 8 pm.

Cenacle: The Cenacle for Priests takes place every Tuesday in St Anthony’s Chapel immediately after the 7 pm Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Columba’s, Doneyloop; 10.30 am, St Mary’s Castlefinn.

Waterside & Strathfoyle

Vocations Prayer: Holy Hours for Vocations to the priesthood in the Diocese of Derry will take place on Wednesday evenings at St Columb’s Church, Waterside, on December 11, January 29, February 19 and March 12, starting at 8 pm.

Lectio Divina: Reflect on the Scriptures with Lectio Divina in the side chapel in St Columb’s Church, Chapel Road, on Thursday nights, starting at 8.15 pm.

Eucharistic Adoration: There is Eucharistic Adoration in St Oliver Plunkett Church, Strathfoyle, on Mondays, 11.30 am-12.30 pm; in Immaculate Conception Church on Thursdays, 1-6 pm; and in St Columb’s Church on Fridays, 1-6 pm.

Confessions: St Columb’s – Saturday after 10 am Mass, Monday–Friday at 7 pm, before evening Mass; Immaculate Conception, after 11 am Mass every Saturday and at 5.30 pm before evening Mass on a Saturday; St Oliver Plunkett, Every Saturday 5.30 pm, before the Vigil Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil, 10 am, 12.30 pm & 6 pm, St Columb’s; 6 pm Vigil, 10.15 am & 12.15 pm, Immaculate Conception; 11.15 am, St Oliver Plunkett.

...other Diary Dates

Christmas Wreath Workshop: A Christmas Afternoon Tea & Wreath-making Workshop will take place in Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre on Saturday, December 7, from 12-3 pm. The price is £30pp, which includes all materials. All proceeds will go to Anam Óg youth group.

ADVENT RETREAT: The Columba Community are leading an Advent Retreat at St Anthony’s Retreat Centre, Dundrean, Burnfoot, Co Donegal, at 11 am on Sunday, December 8. Find stillness, experience guided prayer, with Adoration & Eucharist. Booking is essential Tel: (00353)0749384866. A Lght lunch is provided, suggested donation £20.

Christmas Bingo Bonanza: Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre will have a family Christmas Bingo bonanza with Santa and friends on Sunday, December 15,

at 3 pm. Refreshments, raffles and lots more on the day. Bingo books are £5 per adult and £3 per child. All proceeds will go to the Anam Óg Youth group. Pre-booking required. Contact 02871262152.

AWC Mass: All are welcome to a Mass being celebrated on Tuesday, December 10, at 12 noon in the Advocate Women’s Centre, First Floor, Embassy Court, 3 Strand Road, Derry, BT48 7BH. Afterwards, there will be a Vision Tour explaining about AWC’s mission to save mothers and babies from abortion.

SPARK: The next SPARK weekend in Termonbacca for young people will be on January 17-19, 2025.

Ireland Consecration: The Consecration of the Island of Ireland to Our Lady the ‘Immaculate Conception’ will take place on December 9 in St Patrick’s Church, The Glen, Maghera, at 5

Advent at St Eugene’s Cathedral

Week One
(First Sunday of Advent – December 1)
***Monday - Friday, December 2-6,** at 7.45 am: Morning Prayer of the Church.
***Monday, December 2:** ‘On the Way Home’ – Confessions at Adoration from 5-7 pm.

Week Two
(Second Sunday of Advent – December 8)
***Monday – Friday, December 9-13:** Morning Prayer of the Church at 7.45 am.
***Monday, December 9:** ‘On the Way Home’ – Confessions at Adoration from 5-7 pm.
***Thursday, December 12:** Advent Pilgrimage to IOSAS Centre, with Mass celebrated in Chapel of Ease, Fahan, Co Donegal. Lunch served in Inishowen Gateway Hotel. This event must be pre-booked.
***Thursday, December 12:** Rosemount Primary School Carol Service at 6 pm.
***Friday, December 13:** St Eugene’s Primary School Nativity Play at 1 pm.

Week Three
(Third Sunday of Advent – December 15)
***Monday - Friday, December 16-20:** Morning Prayer of the Church at 7.45 am.
***Monday, December 16:** ‘On the Way Home’ – Confessions at Adoration from 5-7 pm.
***Wednesday, December 18:** St Anne’s Primary School Carol Service at 1 pm.

Week Four
(Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 22)
***Sunday, December 22:** St Eugene’s Cathedral Parish Carol Service at 4 pm.
***Monday, December 23:** ‘On the Way Home’ – Confessions at Adoration from 5-7 pm.



Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

Hello children. C3 welcomes you to the month of December. This is a very exciting time of year as we prepare during Advent for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, which is celebrated on December 8.



Immaculate Conception
On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception we celebrate and honour the holiness and innocence of Mary. Our Catholic faith teaches us that God kept Mary free from original sin. She was conceived immaculately, which means that from the moment of her conception she was free from original sin and in a state of grace, pure enough to be the Mother of Jesus (CCC 490-493). She was a fitting tabernacle to hold within Her the body the flesh and blood of Jesus our Saviour. When we receive Holy Communion, we also hold within us the Body and Blood of Jesus, so we should try not to sin and to be pure and holy like Mary.

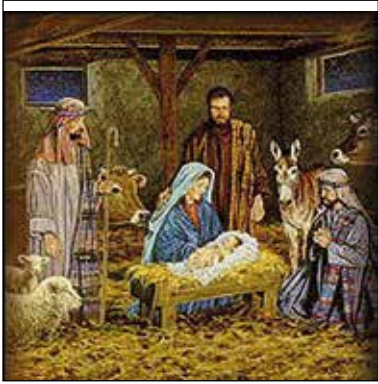


The Advent Wreath
The use of the Advent wreath with the five candles has been a tradition for hundreds of years. The wreath is a symbol of the four weeks in which we prepare for the birth of Jesus, with a candle being lit each week, three purple candles and one rose candle. The green branches remind us of the new life we have in Jesus, the circle signifies the eternity of God's love for us (with no beginning or end) and the candles represent hope and light, which Jesus brings into a dark world. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Day, as a symbol of Christ, born as the Light of the world.

Saints of the Month
St Ambrose – December 7
St Lucy – December 13
St Stephen – December 26
St John – December 27



Jubilee 2025 Pilgrims of Hope
Pope Francis has announced that 2025 will be a Jubilee year – an event that happens every 25 years. The Jubilee year will begin in Advent 2024 and will run until the Feast of the Epiphany in 2026. A Jubilee or Holy Year is a special year of forgiveness and reconciliation, in which people are invited to return to God, with one another, and with all of creation. The theme for the Jubilee year is 'Pilgrims of Hope'. Pope Francis has invited Catholics to a renewal of hope in God and to recognise the goodness in the world.



Christmas Day
Christmas Day is celebrated every year on December 25. The word 'Christmas' comes from the combination of Christ and Mass; it is the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ (CCC 525). This was the day that Jesus was brought into our world to reveal God to us. Christmas is a very special feast, and it is one of only three feast days of which the Catholic Church celebrates birthdays. The other two are the births of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. All three of these birthdays have one thing in common – John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus were all born without Original Sin.



Christmas is a special time when we gather to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. We exchange gifts in our homes and give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of His Son to us.



Comites Christi - Companions of Christ
The Catholic Church celebrates the Christmas Octave each year, an octave means eight, like the word Octopus, which has eight legs, or an octave in music, which has eight notes. In the Church, the Christmas Octave means eight days beginning on Christmas day and ending on January 1, with the feast of Mary the Mother of God. During this time, we not only remember the importance of Jesus coming into the world but we also celebrate the feast days of several saints. You might think it is rather strange to be celebrating other feast days near the time of our Lord's birth, but the Church in her wisdom deliberately positions them here as they have a special connection to Christ. The feast days immediately following Christmas Day are known as the 'comites Christi', 'the comrades of Christ'. The Latin word, 'Comes' not only means 'companion', but is also the Latin word for the noble title of a 'count'.



The Church is suggesting that the 'comites Christi' are somehow closely spiritually connected to Jesus in the same way that royal associates are close to their king. The companions which accompany



Jesus are Stephen, the first martyr, on December 26, John the Apostle and Evangelist on December 27, and the Holy Innocents, the children Herod had killed, on December 29. These feast days show us what it is like to be a companion of Jesus and how we should always be prepared to accept any consequences which we may meet for the sake of Jesus' friendship. Some also feel that these feast days represent the three forms of martyrdom; voluntary and executed (Stephen), voluntary but not executed (John), and executed but not voluntary (Holy Innocents). A martyr is someone who suffers voluntarily to die for their beliefs or endures great suffering for their faith. St Stephen was the first martyr; he suffered a red martyrdom as he was stoned to death for his faith. St John suffered a white martyrdom as

he was exiled to the Island of Patmos. The Holy Innocents suffered an innocent martyrdom as they were born at the time of Christ and Herod had them all killed in an attempt to find the baby Jesus. The Holy Innocent did not choose martyrdom, they not only died for Christ but instead of Him and for this reason they are known as the 'flores martyrum' - the 'flowers of the martyrs'. St Augustine speaks of them in a beautiful way: "They are the first buds of the Church killed by the frost of persecution."

Feast of the Holy Family
The Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated on the first Sunday of Christmas. This feast day is dedicated to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We ponder their life together in Nazareth and pray for our own families. The Gospels do not tell us anything about Jesus' life when he was growing up in Nazareth. The last story St Luke tells us is the finding of Jesus in the Temple (Lk.2:41-52), and so we have the hidden years of Jesus' life (CCC514). We know that during this time, Jesus' relationship with Mary and Joseph helped Him as He grew to maturity, increased in wisdom, and found favour with God. The Holy Family provides us with a perfect model of how to live: they loved God and one another. Families are like 'schools of love', for within our families we learn how to receive and share love (CCC 2207). God's love is transmitted to us through the love of our families, through the ordinariness of family life, God is present. The family has been described as the 'domestic church' (CCC 2204) - a place of ecclesial community and a communion of persons, an image of the Truine God.

Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. In which traditional Christmas movie is George Bailey the main character?
2. In which country is Eggnog said to have been invented as a beverage?
3. In what two separate colours was Santa Claus portrayed before his now traditional red?
4. What is the name of the 'Christmas Witch' who is said to deliver gifts to children in Italy?
5. In what year did Michael Schumacher suffer a serious Christmas skiing accident in the French Alps?
6. From what Christmas Carol do the lyrics 'And laid within a manger upon this blessed morn, the which His Mother Mary did nothing take in scorn' come?
7. How many Scrabble points are awarded for the word 'Christmas'?
8. What festive song does US Chart firm, 'Billboard' claim has over 130,000 different versions?
9. In what year was Chris Rea first 'Driving Home for Christmas'?
10. In what country does FC Santa Claus Rovaniemi play?
11. What do Spaniards traditionally consume for good luck on each strike of the clock at midnight on New Year's Eve?
12. In what festive pantomime does 'Widow Twankey' appear?

13. Which chocolate from the 'Quality Street' range has been voted the UK's favourite?
14. In what country was St Nicholas born?
15. With what song did The Beatles claim the first of their four Christmas Number 1 singles?
16. Which iconic ice hockey player appeared on 'The Simpsons' episode entitled 'The nightmare after Krustmas'?
17. By what name was Palestine known in Biblical times?
18. Who, in 2005, became the first 'X-factor' winner to have a Christmas Number 1?
19. In 'The 12 days of Christmas', what is the first gift given that doesn't involve birds?
20. Listed alphabetically, which is the last of Santa's team of reindeer?
21. Who played 'Bad Santa' in the movie of the same name?
22. What famous cricketer became the first bowler to take 700 International wickets on Boxing Day 2006?
23. The city of Tromsø is said to have no daylight hours in the month of December. In what country would you find it?
24. Which current political leader was born on Christmas Day 1971?
25. For what 1979 Christmas song, once voted the worst ever recorded, is Paul McCartney said to earn more than £250,000 each year?

Quiz Answers: 1, It's a Wonderful Life. 2, England. 3, Tan and Green. 4, La Befana. 5, 2013. 6, God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen. 7, 16. 8, Silent Night. 9, 1988. 10, Finland. 11, A grape (12 in total). 12, Aladdin. 13, The green triangle. 14, Turkey. 15, 'I wanna hold your hand'. 16, Wayne Gretzky. 17, Judea. 18, Shayne Ward. 19, Five gold rings. 20, Vixen. 21, Billy Bob Thornton. 22, Shane Warne. 23, Norway. 24, Justin Trudeau (Canadian PM). 25, 'Wonderful Christmastime'.

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnybrook, Drumquin, Dunamnanagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

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Following in the Spirit of St. Thérèse,
the Little Flower

33 DAYS OF Family Prayer

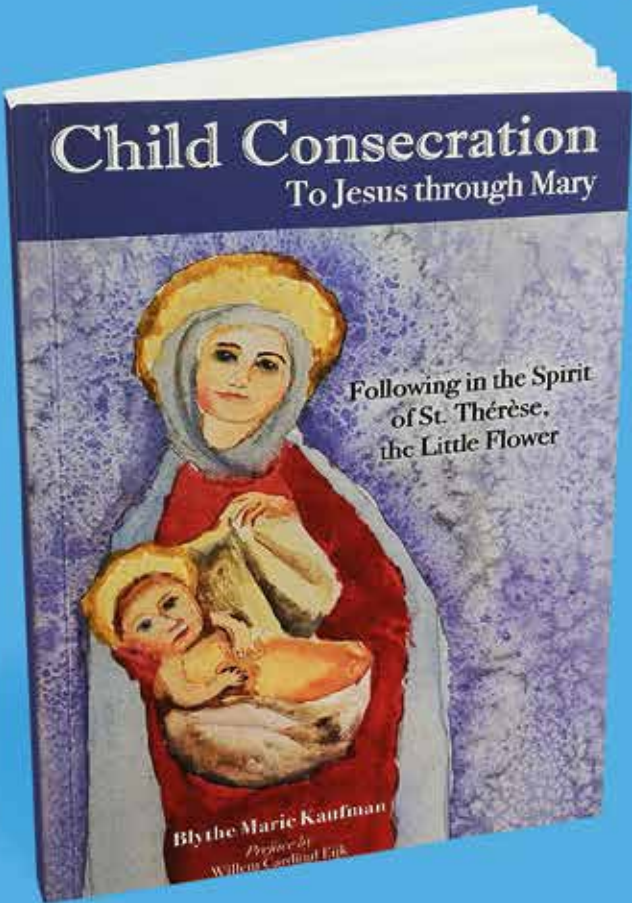


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