



# The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 84. APRIL 2023

Bishop Donal welcomes 'The Net' back into print



No Fixed Charge. Donations welcome.

See inside...



Hope-filled Mission – Aghyaran



Powerful Mission inspires – Bellaghy & Greenlough



Prayerful Lenten Programme – Coleraine

“I pray that Easter 2023 will be one more stage on the Resurrection journey of our diocese – and that each person may be surprised by Easter joy.”

– Bishop Donal (see p2)



Sun rising in Holy Land during recent pilgrimage with Bishop Donal



Wishing all a Blessed Eastertime.



God Club – Long Tower



St Patrick's Bell – Lavey



GIFT strengthening community – Greenlough



Girls Get-Together – Killygordon

People in focus



Kevin Moore – Derry



Sr Anne McWilliams – Coleraine



Sr Mary – HoM Killygordon



Sr Rocio – HoM Killygordon



Late Sr Annette O'Gorman – Long Tower-Limerick

Also featuring: Young Writers share thoughts; Youth 2000; NET Ministries; Children's Catechism Club; Annual Sr Clare Retreat returns to Long Tower; Fr Michael McCaul's first Masses in Cathedral & Killyclogher; Irish Page; Divine Mercy; Holy Land pilgrims reflect on experience; Parish Post-its; Diocesan Diary; Diary Dates; Quiz and much more...

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Sr Deirdre Mullan RSM reflects on the Pope's prayer intention for April:  
"We pray for the spread of peace and non-violence, by decreasing the use of weapons  
by States and citizens"...

## Each of us is responsible to make the choice for peace



Sr Deirdre Mullan RSM.

AT a time when most world citizens yearn for peace, Pope Francis' intention for April is both timely and necessary.

Every day, news media outlets are filled with horrific stories detailing our inhumanity to each other – in Sudan; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Israel and Palestine;

Ukraine; Nigeria; North Korea; USA; and we in the North of Ireland are no exception!

Many years ago, I read a book by Eric Lomax called 'The Railway Man' – a story of cruelty of which only humans are capable. It is also a story in which the protagonist reflects on making peace with one of his tormentors. 'The Railway Man' is a story of survival and courage when the author comes to the realization that sometime the 'hating has to stop'.

Countries and regions do not hate. People hate. No child is

born hating another, and so we ask: Where does hatred come from? The destructive politics of family life are well known.

Children learn to carry out in action the unverbilized, and often subconscious, feelings of their parents and grown-ups.

Until I was 18 years old, I did not interact with other

traditions and communities. Why? Because the Northern Ireland population was deliberately structured to live separately. Whenever we become so much part of one tradition alone, the ideologies of the other tradition are seen/ viewed as flawed and hence we have a scenario for suspicion, fear and ultimately violence.

Speaking recently to the UN General Assembly, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, called on all states to seek ways to find peace.

Archbishop Caccia stressed that the inhumanity of modern warfare is on display in Ukraine for all to see, as each life lost leaves behind a grieving family, with parents forced to bury their sons and daughters, and children left orphaned, a status that "has no nationality".

Particularly reprehensible is the reliance on tactics that treat soldiers as expendable objects, rather than as human beings with inviolable dignity. However, peace is always possible and necessary, and all parties must remain open to dialogue lest they risk closing off "the only reasonable door to peace".

As our world tips once again towards a possible world war, the words of writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel come to mind:

"Let us not forget that there is always a moment when the moral choice is made. Often because of one story, or one person, we are able to make a different choice, a choice for humanity, a choice for life."

The Railway Man knew this when he made his choice and concluded that the hating has to stop. As world citizens, we cannot wait for this to happen.

Each of us is responsible, wherever we are in our world, to make the choice for peace.

The motto of the Irish Association, set up in 1938 by Major Hugh Montgomery with the assistance of members of the Unionist and Nationalist communities, was an attempt to replace passion and prejudice with good will and harmony.

Their motto could indeed be adopted by all states today – "In respect for diversity lie the seeds of harmony."

I pray that the Pope's intention for April will fill each of us with "strength against those who would freeze my humanity, would drag me into a lethal automaton, would make me a cog in a machine... Let them not make me a stone."

Archbishop Caccia, Eleventh Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, 17th Plenary Meeting, New York, 22 February 2023.

Welcoming 'The NET' back into print, Bishop Donal writes...

## We need to hear and share good news



MANY years ago, I remember speaking at a Christmas celebration with a

group of young people who had learning difficulties. I wondered what sort of God would be born in a stable. A little voice piped up to address my stupid question, "God lives, God loves, God laughs". That put me in my place!

Those who know the Joy of the Gospel have come to know a God who lives and loves and wants us all to be able to laugh.

In an age of constant bad

news and scandals, of angry public debate and little inspiration, I welcome 'The Net' and what it has tried to do over the last eight years, since Easter 2015 - 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.

We hear much negative comment about Church and about the future of faith in Ireland. One point that I have heard repeated is that the sharing of good news has helped people to discover just how many good little things are happening among people of all ages across the Diocese.

That can be a source of hope and encouragement for young people of all ages!

That is intended as an antidote to persistent negativity and discouragement. 'The Net' aims at sharing positive news. It is not a place where angry criticism of others is featured. There are already enough outlets for that!

Since the beginning of COVID in 2020, 'The Net' has been online, constantly encouraging people of all ages to share their faith journey. Now 'The Net' has taken two big steps at the one time. It is again being published in a print copy – and is being offered for free through parishes.

Obviously, it will cost more money to print papers and distribute them than it did to publish on-line. The editor has decided to step out in faith – and trust that enough voluntary contributions

will come in to cover costs. Dominus providebit, the Lord will provide.

It is appropriate that 'The Net' began at Easter 2015 and is returning in paper form at Easter. Christian faith celebrates new life in the midst of Holy Week sadness.

The scripture readings at Mass during the Easter season have two great themes that predominate in the Acts of the Apostles.

Firstly, God is constantly bringing life in unexpected places. The Good News about Jesus is driven out of the locked upper room in Jerusalem, then into Samaria, to pagans, and finally to Rome. The Holy Spirit is at work unsettling the limited imagination of the Apostles.

Secondly, God uses

unexpected people to hear the Good News – Paul, Cornelius the centurion, the Ethiopian eunuch.

We are standing somewhat nervously on the threshold of a new era of Church in our diocese. We need to hear and share good news. Our parishes are called to be generators of good news and hope. We believe that Resurrection grace is at work. Discernment simply means having a prayerful ear to hear the signs of new life in unexpected places.

I pray that Easter 2023 will be one more stage on the Resurrection journey of our diocese – and that each person may be surprised by Easter joy. We believe in a God who lives, loves and laughs! The world needs to hear that core Christian message.



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.

### Donating

#### Bank Transfer

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Via PayPal: paypal.me/thenetderry  
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By Cheque: Payable to 'The NET'

Send cheques: The NET, via Bishop Donal McKeown, Diocesan Offices, St Eugene's Cathedral, Francis Street, Derry, BT48 9AP

The ministry of

**The NET**

was dedicated to Our

Lady, through the

intercession of

St Maximilian Kolbe, in

a ceremony celebrated

by Bishop Donal

McKeown

on August 14, 2019.

 **The NET**  
Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

**Contacting us:**  
If you have a story that you would like to share or an event you would like covered by The Net, just drop an email to  
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or ring/text 07809292852

# Young people loving ‘Tweeting with God’ at Long Tower ‘God Club’

THE ‘God Club’ is the latest faith initiative in Derry City for young people, giving them the opportunity to come along on a Saturday morning to learn more about their Catholic faith, ask questions they have about it, and have discussions.

Gathering in St Columba’s Church, Long Tower, for 10am Mass as a group, they then make their way across the grounds to the tea-room in Aras Colmcille to start the session with a cuppa at 10.30 am.

The facilitators are Lida Bulf, a catechist who lives within the Three Patrons’ Parish, and Roisin Doherty, of the Cathedral Parish, who has plenty of experience in working with youth as a mother of five and a facilitator for the Sunday night Youth Mass in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, the Young Adults’ Faith Group that meets afterwards in St Pio House, and the Monday night Youth 2000 Group, which also meets in the St Joseph’s building. Roisin is also involved in facilitating a group of 30 young people, including those who attend the God Club, and about 10 leaders, to travel to Co Kildare for a week at the end of June, to take part in the annual Camp Veritas at Clongowes Wood College.

Roisin and Lida got to know each other when Roisin wanted to learn more about her faith, so that she would be more knowledgeable in passing it on to her children, and asked Lida to help her learn more of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

“That was three years ago,” recalled Roisin, going on to say: “I found that it brought my faith to life in a such a new way, so I wanted my kids to get the same fire, love and joy for their faith. When I got more grounded in the faith, I asked Lida if she would teach my children too. However, I ended up working with more young people and said to Lida that

the teaching would possibly be for more than just my children.

“Lida had been praying about helping people who wanted to learn more about the Catholic faith as she is a teacher, so we talked about what was the best way to go about it and where to run it. We knew Fr Gerard Mongan from his time in Three Patrons and he was happy to let us use the Aras Colmcille premises.”

She added: “We thought it would be good to start the session by going to Mass together at 10am in the Long Tower, with an opportunity afterwards for Confession for those who wanted to avail of the Sacrament, and then downstairs in Aras Colmcille for a bit of socialising over cup of tea and biscuit to settle us in.

### Depth

“The young people chat about their week and then there is some teaching. They can ask about things that came up for them during the week and Lida talks to them about that. It is great to have Lida on board because she has a wealth of information and can give answers based on the teaching of the Catholic Church. I don’t think many people are aware of the depth our faith.”

Just started since the beginning of January, Roisin and Lida are happy they have between 10 and 15 young people, aged from 11 years up into the 20s, coming along for the hour-and-a-half session each Saturday morning.

Recalling the idea for the Club evolving from a conversation with Roisin in February last year, when she mentioned that a number of teenagers were asking her questions about the faith and had no-one to answer them adequately, Lida said: “I remembered that I had a book called ‘Tweeting with GOD’ (#TwGOD), which I had received as a complimentary copy. I had realised that it was a solid book but I didn’t know how I could



use it. I had mentioned it to a couple of parents with teenagers, but nothing happened, and then Roisin spoke to me about her young people, and now I have an outlet for it with the God Club.”

She explained: “The book is a collection of over 200 tweets by young people, asking questions about the Catholic faith, and it is pretty much organised in the same way as the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It is a very different approach in style but it is teaching the same Catechism.

“Tweeting with GOD is based on five tools: the book; a website and app, which enable young people to interact with the team of young people supporting it; social media, through which they can connect with their peers, and funny videos.

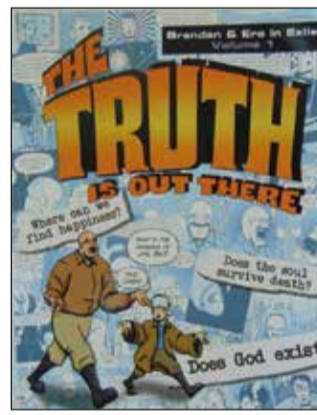
“In each chapter of the book, there is a reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its Compendium, and the YouCat, so the young people can look up for themselves. It is a very good book that appeals to young people today, and it was initiated by a Dutch Catholic priest called Fr Michel Remery, who has a group of young people working with him on the programme and who interact with the young people when they tweet their questions.

“Bishop Donal has met this

priest and he is 100 per cent with us in this venture. He suggested that we ask Fr Michel to do a quick YouTube video for us to encourage us, and Fr Michel has done that.”

Remarking that the young people attending the God Club seemed to love the discussions that come up from their learning of the Catechism, Lida said: “They are pretty challenging and amazing in the questions that they ask. So far, we have covered questions on the chapter entitled ‘Creation or coincidence?’ such as the Big Bang, did the Adam and Eve business really happen, evolution or creation, and could there be only one truth.

“During our sessions there are no big silences but some good laughs. We are reading the book in little chunks, followed by



discussion, to keep it light after their week at school.”

Any young person interested in joining the ‘God Club’ Saturday

morning sessions in Aras Colmcille are very welcome to come along and check it out.

## Anam Óg – faith, fun & friendship by Aoife O’Neill

THE Anam Óg faith group, for young people aged 10-14, continues to meet on the first and third Sunday of each month in Termonbacca. Led by Fr Patrick Lagan and the Carmelites, the aim is to journey together in fun and friendship while exploring matters of the faith, making time for prayer and accompanying our youth through these important years.

Following Confirmation, it is easy for young people to drift away from faith and God. These years can be very difficult for young people as they try to figure

out who they are and what they believe in a world that makes little or no room for God.

We hope to provide a place where they can come and hear the truth about God and the Catholic Church. Where they can meet friends and enjoy some wholesome fun.

We welcome young people from anywhere in the Diocese to come and join with us. If you are interested in finding out more or signing up please contact Aoife on 028 71 262512 or Fr Patrick Lagan on 028 71 262894, or email [termonbaccaderry@gmail.com](mailto:termonbaccaderry@gmail.com).

## Youth 2000...

### Ulster retreat in Maghera by Declan Laverty

AT the end of this month something special will take place in Maghera, when a slew of young people will gather in St Patrick’s College, in the St Mary’s building, to celebrate and deepen their relationship with Jesus over the weekend of April 28-30.

This is not an unusual sight for Youth 2000, or Y2K as it is sometimes known, which has been nourishing interest among young people, aged 16-35 years old, in the faith for years in Ireland and across the world.

Started by Ernest Williams after attending World Youth Day in 1989, where he was inspired by

Pope John Paul II calling the youth to be “the light, the truth and the way”. Ernest founded Youth 2000 to gather young people together to pray, and the movement spread wide from there to over 20 countries, changing the lives of thousands of young people.

In 1993, Youth 2000 first came to Ireland and has been going strong since.

In Ireland, Youth 2000 run four retreats, or ‘festivals’, during the year that young people come to; two National retreats (the Summer Festival and the Winter Retreat) and two provincial retreats (autumn and winter).

Y2K’s aim is to ‘lead young people to the heart of the Church’ by focusing on three main things: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, Mary the Mother of Jesus, and teaching.

One of Youth 2000’s defining characteristics is the real emphasis put on Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament by taking part in Adoration. For the duration of the weekend, young people spend time in the presence of Jesus, and something new is often sparked in the hearts of many people.

There are lots of stories of people going just because a friend invited them, but they found their lives

and their relationship with Jesus changed. They leave ‘on fire’.

Maybe on a final note, it may be helpful to know what others who attend normally say about their experience...

“You have a chance here to actually meet the God who made you and loves you, to be given a real joy that you get nowhere else. ‘Come and see.’”

For more information, look up <https://youth2000.ie/> or contact the ‘Youth 2000 Ireland’ Facebook page.

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# NET youth ministry a phenomenal experience that changed my life so much for the better



Kevin Moore

APART from meeting his wife-to-be, being involved in challenging young Catholics to love Christ through his time with NET Ministries is one of the best experiences 24-year-old Derry man, Kevin Moore says he has had in his life to date.

Originally from Galliagh, Kevin is currently living in Letterkenny with the NET (National Evangelisation Team) community based there, helping them out occasionally with retreats while he works on building his business as a personal trainer and prepares for his wedding this summer.

The middle child in a family of eight born to Michelle and Joseph Moore, he reflected on the faith journey that brought him into contact with NET Ministries as a teenager.

A past pupil of St Therese PS, Lenamore, and Oakgrove Integrated College, Kevin described his family as being “Catholic mostly by name”. He recalled: “My dad tried to drag us to Mass but my older siblings broke his spirit, so I wasn’t too much of a practising Catholic. My auntie, Jo-Jo would have had the biggest impact on my faith. She is a very holy woman, who goes to Mass every day. She will talk to everyone and anyone about the faith and hand out Divine Mercy Prayer Cards to people she meets around the town. She is just a really beautiful, sweet woman.”

On leaving school at 18, Kevin said he became “a bit of a gym lad and sports guy”, adding: “I was going to the gym to look good to impress girls. So going to the gym for 3-4 hours during the day and clubbing at night was pretty much my lifestyle.

“There was a girl I liked who went to St Brigid’s, Carnhill. She was in upper sixth and the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

had asked her year if they wanted to volunteer for the Veritas Camp in Kildare. She asked me if I wanted to go. She didn’t know that I fancied her, so I said I would love to go.”

“I arrived at the Camp not really knowing what was going on,” he added, “It turned out that I was an actual volunteer camp counsellor. I was given the older group as it was my first year to go to something like this. The lads in it were 17/18 years old.

“We had sport during the day and at night we had Praise & Worship, Mass and Confession. It was the first time I had gone to Confession since I was in primary school, and it was about four or five years at that stage since I had been at Mass. I loved the sense of community and how nice everyone was. It was like feeling a presence bigger than myself. It was a real experience of God’s love for me at that Camp.

“I heard of other retreats like it, such as Youth 2000, and about a month later I decided to give that a go. It was something the same, but every time I returned home from these camps I went back to the gym and clubbing scene. I often thought about how I had spent a week a real saint and then had gone home not changed at all.”

A year-and-a-half later, Kevin discovered NET Ministries when he got talking to some young people who had gone on NET retreats and recommended that he try it. Amongst these was the son of NET Ministries Ireland director, Tony Foy, who is based in Ballybofey, Co Donegal.

“Tony came up to Derry to interview me and I was accepted onto NET,” recalled Kevin, adding: “I was seeing a girl about a month before I was to go, so I said that I couldn’t do it that year

to see how that relationship would go, but that I would definitely do it the following year. So the next year, I was going out with a different girl and when I talked to her about NET, she said for me to go and do it.

“It is difficult going on to NET when you are in a relationship, but they were very supportive of it, encouraging me to write letters to her, as NET limit the time you can be on your ‘phone. So, instead of texting, I wrote a letter every week, as well as speaking to her on the ‘phone for a couple of hours.”

Again, not really knowing much about what he was getting into, other than that he would be working with young people in a retreat setting, Kevin joined NET Ministries in the summer of 2019.

Commenting on his experience, he said: “I was introduced to Charismatic Renewal and became more aware of the Holy Spirit, and that helped make my faith more of a reality. It gave substance to my faith as something that I should act on.

“As time went on, I began to ground my faith more in intellectual thoughts, ideals and morals, and not just feelings at a retreat, which it was like for me before NET. I became aware of sacrifice for the faith; to surrender myself to God’s Will for the betterment of the people I was living with.”

Kevin went on to explain: “In NET, you live in community with other young people. Living with people of the opposite sex, I found that you butt heads a lot, get annoyed with each other, but that is how God refines us to bear with each other more patiently. Even if we have an idea that we are stuck in, we are to offer it up, as someone else might have a better idea.”

He continued: “I was put on the Road Team after six weeks of intense NET training, but some of the hardest weeks where also the best of my life. On the road team, you are travelling around the country in a van, going into schools, holding retreats, and we did this in England as well as in the north and south of Ireland.

“We held Surf, Sand & Son Retreats, which are weekend surfing retreats in Rossnowlagh for young people and are one of the best parts of NET ministry. It was great to see what young people thought about God change over the three days through the retreat. That was very powerful.

“It was incredible to see how we impacted the young people in living a Christ-centred life. We loved each other on the team, even though we didn’t always get on, and the young people picked up on that and that had a positive effect. They told us a lot of times

that they had never felt love like this, and that was from our team together being so happy and positive.”

Visiting many schools to run retreats as well, Kevin reckoned that he had encountered a couple of thousand young people during this ministry.

## Personal prayer

Recalling a typical day for NET Road Teams, he said: “We would wake up around 4.30 am and spend an hour in personal prayer, which was the most important part of our individual day, as it really grounded us in Christ so that we could reflect Christ to others.

“Then, we had breakfast together as a team when possible, before travelling two or three hours at times to get to the schools and minister to the young people. When we finished for the day, we had dinner and group prayer, which would be very Charismatic-centred with Praise & Worship.”

Explaining that they stayed with host families when on the road, Kevin added: “Different families opened up their homes to us and, after our day of retreat leading, we would return and minister to them and their kids by doing dishes, talking about Christ, listening to them and praying.

“One time, the parents of the host family that I was staying with had a son who was really into sport. He was only 15. I saw a lot of myself in him. I spoke to him about saints like Pope John Paul II, and the awesome Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, an Italian Catholic activist and a member from the Third Order of St Dominic, who died aged 24 and had a big impact on Pope John Paul II.

“I told the young lad about how Pier would have gone out to a bar with his friends and said that if he won a game of pool, they would come to an hour of Adoration with him, but if they beat him, he would have to buy them a pint at the bar. He wouldn’t just say this to friends but to random people at bars to get them to Adoration.

“The host family had a little pool table, so I suggested to the young lad that we play and if I won then he would say the Rosary with me, but if he won then I would give him money equivalent to the price of a pint, as I wasn’t going to be buying him a pint! I won every game and he prayed the Rosary with me for the first time in a long, long time and his parents were very grateful. The family prayed the Rosary every night, but he had been avoiding it as he got older.”

Kevin went on to recall a heart-warming moment at the end of the last NET retreat he had been

involved with before the Covid lockdown in early 2020, saying: “It was a retreat with some kids in a school for two days in a row. At the end, one kid in my group came up and looked at me before hugging me, and said that it had been the best couple of days doing this stuff, praying, and that he would never forget me. That had an impact on me. He was about 13/14 years old. With safeguarding, we are not allowed to hug, but he hugged me while I awkwardly stood there.”

During Covid, the NET Road Teams were split up, with members joining the NET Discipleship Teams, which are based in parishes where they run youth groups and lead Religious Education classes in the schools there, in an effort to keep journeying with young people after the initial encounter.

Kevin explained that he had been on the same Road Team as his now fiancée, Irene Zelinka, who is from Pennsylvania, America, and when the team was split up they were both selected to go to the same Discipleship Team in Knocklyon, Dublin.

He recalled: “Before this, Irene and I weren’t that close. We were bearing with each other in Christ. We butted heads a lot on the Road Team, but in Dublin we were on a team with four other people that we weren’t as familiar with as each other, so we naturally clung to each other and made memories from spending time together. I didn’t know it, but I was falling in love with her.

“I still had a girlfriend back in Derry, so I didn’t cross the unfaithful line. About two months later, when I went home to Derry, I realised that my heart was pretty taken by Irene, so I split up with my girlfriend from Derry. NET was on a break during the summer and Irene had gone to Castlebar to do ministry with a team there. I thought it would help me through the break-up to join the Castlebar youth ministry with Irene. That was the summer of 2020.

“We were mostly working with young adults, aged 18-23 years old, as the schools were closed. We had day trips with them and I started up a Theology of the Body Study Group, which is an amazing study and was my most favourite part of youth ministry. The young people really enjoyed it and one of them joined NET a year later.”

“At this point in my life, I was smitten with Irene,” added Kevin, “I told the NET leadership and they were very understanding and let Irene and I come on ministry for another year, but it became too much pressure for us. I was put on the Letterkenny team and Irene

had been on a Cork team, and the separation was too much for me. You can’t date someone who is also on NET and that proved a bit too difficult for me, so that Christmas I left.

“NET were very supportive and helped me through a difficult time. They let me stay with staff in Ballybofey so that I wouldn’t be out of community too quickly. So I did this for a couple of months.”

## Love found a way

When Irene’s NET year finished she returned home to America, in May 2021, but Kevin wasn’t able to go with her because of Covid. However, love found a way.

“I tried everything that I could think of as I felt that God had put Irene in my path for a reason,” said Kevin, “I found a loophole where if I went to Croatia and stayed for three weeks before flying directly from there to America, then I could enter the country. So that is what I did. I went through Croatia and stayed in America for 88 days; the limit on my visa was 90 days but I didn’t want to risk overstaying.

“It was a great time. I basically knew for sure to take the leap and ask Irene to marry me, which I did at a retreat centre house where she had grown up in her faith. It had a little chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe and I was given permission from the sacristan there to expose the Blessed Sacrament, as I had been trained as a Minister of the Eucharist. I got one of the NET Road Team members who lived in Atlanta to come up and lead Irene towards the Retreat Centre, while I told her that I was at a Men’s Conference in the City that was happening.

“When Irene came in, I was playing some Praise & Worship music on the guitar. She was very stunned, as she didn’t know what was going on. I got down on one knee and proposed to her and she said ‘yes’. That was October 2021 and now we are getting married in July.”

Saying that he had felt there was no better place to surrender his life to the woman he loved, than in front of Jesus in the Eucharist, who had surrendered His life for love of us, Kevin went on to comment on his love of Eucharistic Adoration: “Adoration is spending physical time with Jesus. The Eucharist is His Body, Soul and Divinity. When we are in front of the Eucharist, we are literally in front of Jesus. It is where Heaven and Earth meet.”

When Kevin tried to go back to America in the winter of 2021, he was denied entry by the Border Police as he had been there previously for so long. In 2022, he

## Sessiaghoneill-born NET Ireland director looking forward to celebrating 20 years of youth ministry



Tony Foy, NET Ministries Ireland executive director.

NET Ministries Ireland will be celebrating 20 years of youth ministry next year, and its Ballybofey-based executive director, Tony Foy is looking forward to marking the anniversary.

Founded in America, NET first came to Ireland in 2004, establishing bases in Dublin and Co Donegal, and following a prayer-group encounter with the first NET missionary to come to the Emerald Isle, Tony and his wife, Sheena found themselves on a most uplifting and rewarding journey in encouraging young people in their faith lives, that still continues today.

Chatting in NET Ireland's Donegal base, in The Courtyard, Ballybofey, Tony shared how his own faith had been strengthened in childhood by his late father's example in the family home within the Sessiaghoneill Parish, which borders Ballybofey.

The 53-year-old recalled the effect a Marriage Encounter Weekend that his parents, Liam and Ann, attended had on his father, saying: "The weekend isn't for couples struggling but for those who want more out of their marriage, and it had such a profound effect on my father that I, as a small child, noticed the difference.

"He started telling us that he loved us. For an Irish father to be telling us that in the 70s, that he loved us, was something. The effect of that made me think as a child that I wanted to have what he had.

"He would go to Adoration and would invite us along, and so I encountered the Lord in Adoration as a young fella and my faith grew from there."

An accountant by trade, with a Masters in Leadership, Tony had his own life-changing experience, along with Sheena, his wife, when they offered one

the first NET missionaries in Ireland accommodation in their home until she could make other arrangements.

"Sheila Trainor was on the first NET missionary team to come to Ireland in 2004, from Canada," said Tony, adding: "and when she came back again in 2006, Sheena met her at a prayer group and discovered that she was having difficulty with her accommodation and was for heading home. My wife said to her to go home for Christmas and to then come back and stay with us until she got her accommodation figured out, and she ended up staying with us for five years.

"Through being exposed to Clare, we were exposed to the ministry of NET, and before she left, Sheena and I went from volunteering on the board because of her to giving up our business, Foy & Company, and coming on board full-time.

"We started full-time with NET on January 1, 2012, and have enjoyed every experience that we have had through it and are very grateful to be involved. Since then, a lot of really wonderful people have come through our doors.

"We are about spreading the

Gospel and, as an unavoidable consequence of that, the formation people get is very good. The fruit of that is seen in vocations to priesthood, religious life and marriage amongst our missionaries and staff."

The father of seven children, two of whom are married and one engaged, went on to say: "Those of our children old enough to do a year of mission with NET, decided for themselves that they would because they wanted to do something amazing, and they got a lot from it."

Appreciating the support of Bishop Donal, who comes along to celebrate Mass with them whenever he can, Tony expressed gratitude for the bishops and priests who work with them.

Looking forward to celebrating the 20th anniversary next year, Tony also expressed the hope of spreading the NET ministry further, saying: "We have an office in Clarendon Street, in Derry, and hope to be training missionaries there this August and September, 2024, and would love to engage with more parishes. If anyone would like to find out more, we would encourage them to talk to their parish priest and contact us."



## NET youth ministry a bridge of trust back to the Church

NET Ministries evolved in the 1980s from a youth programme that had been organising youth retreats in Minnesota, in America, and after spreading to Australia, Canada and Uganda, came to Ireland in 2004, with the first Irish director, Tony Foy, who helped set NET up in Scotland, taking lead of the Irish ministry in 2012.

An acronym for National Evangelisation Teams, NET is a Catholic organisation and its Catholic missionaries regularly attend Mass, Eucharistic Adoration and Reconciliation, and share Jesus' Gospel message with young people during retreats in schools and parishes across Ireland.

NET Ireland's head office is in the Co Donegal town of Ballybofey, and it has Discipleship Teams in Dublin, with the Jesuits on Gardner Street, in Limerick with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, in Delvin, Westmeath, and Letterkenny, in the Raphoe Diocese, working with Fr Philip Kemmy, who is now the parish priest of Killea and Newtowncunningham.

Teallia Gorman, from Connecticut, USA, is NET Ireland's Ministry Development Coordinator and Recruiting Team Manager, and is based in the Ballybofey Headquarters.

Commenting on the ministry of the Discipleship Teams, using the example of the community living in Letterkenny, Teallia said: "They come to our Ballybofey premises every Wednesday to hang out with the youth after school. We have couches and ping-pong table, etc. What they do here is a good benchmark of what we do in a lot of places, as a lot of young people are not ready for faith-based activities.

"It is really relational ministry. It is building friendships and having good wholesome fun. This would be across our entire ministry that we do events like this. They don't out rightly look faith-based, it is more hanging out, but it is a bridge of trust back to the Church and, ultimately, to Christ."

She added: "For students more eager and looking for more, we have youth groups. These can be in the evening in parishes for primary school and secondary

school students. We also do Religious Education classes in schools.

"Our ministry is mostly with Transitional Year students, Confirmation pupils and First Holy Communicants, and we do school day retreats."

Remarking that wherever else there are opportunities to meet young people, you should find a NET team, Teallia spoke of the NET ministry in Delvin, Westmeath, as a successful example.

She recalled: "About 11 years ago, when the Delvin team started, there was not only no youth ministry, but not any youth activities at all for young people. They hung out at the chippy, so when the NET team arrived they hung out with the kids at the chippy. Now, in that very small town, they have 30 young people consistently every week in the youth group.

"That is an example of something that we see time and time again with NET. It is not what people perceive youth ministry to look like, but it is what it has to look like in this day and age. It is not about setting up a youth club and being satisfied with that, you have to go out and meet young people where they are at as well.

"The NET youth club has a faith element, with it starting and ending with prayer. You need both the games and the prayer to build relationships."

Highlighting NET's national retreat weekend, entitled 'Surf, Sand & Son', as being their most popular event with young people, Teallia noted that the next one will be in Mullaghmore, Co Sligo, from May 12-14, and it is open to all secondary school students.

"The young people come for the surfing," she said, "but we have incredible stories of young people meeting Jesus on these weekends through Adoration and small group discussions."

The registration link for the upcoming 'Surf, Sand & Son' retreat is - <https://surfsandsun.eventbrite.ie>

For further information about NET Ministries, the Ballybofey office can be contacted via email, [office@netministries.ie](mailto:office@netministries.ie) or by ringing 00353 749190606.

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settled into studying to become a personal trainer and got part-time work in a grocery shop. All the while, he did his best not only to continue practising his faith but to share it with others.

"While I was at work, I tried never to lose the faith that was deeply instilled in me with the help of NET, and I was very vocal about my beliefs on chastity and self-control, particularly with male co-workers and young guys in my class on the course," said Kevin, adding: "I talked to them about respect for the body, marriage and God, as much as I could in a secular world.

"That went on all that year and every couple of months Irene came to visit from America, as I wasn't able to go to her. It was a tough year but a good year as regards personal development and having courage in being vocal about my faith. I was a bit hesitant at the start of the year in talking about faith, but by the end of the year I was wearing t-shirts with messages like 'Fight the New Drug', which is fighting against pornography, and 'Porn kills love'. I wore these at college and it almost always led to a conversation with someone."

After recently finishing his personal training qualification, Kevin was contacted by NET Ministries about moving into the NET household in Letterkenny as a support for the young Discipleship team members there,

while he worked on plans for his career as a personal trainer.

He commented: "I am trying to surrender all to God at this uncertain time in my life, trusting that He will provide. I am unemployed and in search of part-time work so that I can focus on my personal trainer business and prepare for getting married.

"Irene is back in America at the minute working in a leather shop. When we get married in July, in St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny, we will live here while I wait for my Green Card. I will hopefully have work as a personal trainer and Irene hopes to get work in handcrafts or something she enjoys, and we both also have an interest in working in youth ministry.

"We're both open to whatever God puts in our path. We are praying hard and discerning. Since moving back into a NET house, my love for youth ministry has been fired up again. I am basically like a big brother in the house; someone the NET team members living in community there can look up to and approach for advice."

Highly recommending the experience of ministering with NET, Kevin said: "It is great for formation and to grow in your faith. It is a phenomenal experience that changed my life so much for the better. It is difficult and challenging at times, but if you are open to that it could be the best thing you ever do."



# Remembering the much-loved Sr Annette O’Gorman

THE great love felt in the Long Tower Parish for the late Sr Annette O’Gorman, who died towards the end of last year, was evident in those who attended the special Eucharistic Celebration in her memory in St Columba’s Church, Long Tower.

The Limerick-born Nazareth Sister was 81 when she passed away, and though she had long left her adopted Derry City home, where she loved teaching for 16 years in Nazareth House Primary School and sharing her time and talents in the Long Tower Parish and Nazareth House Care Home, memories of her loving, caring, happy nature are still strong and her impact on the Nazareth House school community is still nourishing the lives of the pupils there today.

Children and staff from the school were to the fore for the Memorial Mass, which was celebrated by Fr Gerard Mongan, Long Tower Adm, with them taking part in the Liturgy and the school choir in fine voice as they led the singing.

In his homily, Fr Gerard spoke about how the “scene in the stable of Bethlehem sets the story of our Saviour’s life on earth, the beginning of the Holy family of Nazareth and the beginning of all that Sr Annette stood for,” remarking how she, “like Our Lady, pondered and treasured all these things in her heart and why she gave her all life to the Sisters of Nazareth.”

“For in that humble stable of straw,” he added, “we all have our dignity as human beings, where God came down out of love for us to the level of a stable floor to become one of us as a vulnerable little baby - who lived among us and showed us not only our dignity but our destiny too - the way to Heaven from the crib to the cross and beyond the tomb to the new life of resurrection. Sr Annette gave her whole life to this faith we have in Jesus Christ.”

“We glorify and praise God,” continued Fr Gerard, “for all we have heard and seen in this lady, who had a great sense of humour and who loved people and accepted everyone with her open mind and heart, who loved everyone and who welcomed

every child she ever taught for they were all her children. Everyone was the same; she saw the good in everyone, making sure everyone got a chance. She always stood up for you and I know she was a source of comfort to so many people and so many people feel blessed to have had her as their teacher.

“She always got her message across in such a kind way, giving so many children a love of books and learning. And of course, preparing children for the sacraments in P4, she made sure everyone was rigged out for First Communion and well prepared. I know she could hardly get walking through the town or in Foyleside for youngsters hanging on to her!

“No wonder she left Derry with a broken heart. And all of us who knew and loved her have broken hearts in thinking about her today. May we all treasure in our hearts, like Mary, the truths of our faith, our destiny given to us by the Holy family of Nazareth. And as we treasure the memory of Sr Annette, may she enjoy the company the Holy Family of Nazareth in whom she placed her trust and served so faithfully, in every child she taught and every colleague she taught with.”

Giving a post-Communion reflection on their dear friend, Nazareth House RE Coordinator, Mrs Jennifer McGill began with a quote from Colossians 3:12, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

## Legacy

She went on to highlight: “When Sr Annette left Derry to take up her new path and join the Sisters of Nazareth in Dublin and be nearer her family, her name, her legacy remained so strong to this day, in Nazareth House Primary School and within the wider Long Tower community parish.

“She was a faithful Eucharistic Minister in this very Church, and taught in the Nazareth House Primary School. She also had a pivotal role in the Nazareth House Care Home, where she cared so fondly for all the residents, young

and old.

“There was always a warm, welcome on the mat when you visited her in the residential care home. She gifted everyone with her time, patience and her wisdom. She cared so much for each individual that crossed her path, even after they departed. This was evident when she adopted her little dog, ‘Teddy’ after his owner passed away.”

“Now even though Sr Annette had transitioned to her new role in Dublin,” continued Mrs McGill, “she kept in touch regularly, to check in on the pupils and their families and her many good friends from the parish community. She was always particularly keen to hear how the sacramental classes were going. On our sacramental days, First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation, we were rest assured that Sr Annette would be praying for us and still guiding us, from a physical distance, but a close heart.”

Speaking of Sr Annette’s great love for nature and poetry, she said: “She loved to feed the birds and rightly gained the title ‘Mary Poppins of Nazareth’. She immersed herself fully in the local culture, participating in the Derry Feis, with her many winning choral verse speaking groups. However, her compassion, her kindness and genuine care for each individual who crossed her path, left a distinctive mark on many a heart here in Derry City. Sister Annette was a true woman of God and pure in heart.

“For the gift of Sr Annette’s contribution, we, as a community, are truly grateful that she ventured all the way from her family in County Limerick, to our city to spread God’s gentle love and compassion in her unique way. Her name, presence and legacy will live on in her loving memory.

“We hope and pray that she has now been reciprocally embraced with an abundance of God’s eternal love and care, in her new eternal resting place, for we believe, ‘Happy are the pure in heart. They will see God’.”

The reflection ended with pupils, Erin and Aodhan leading

everyone in the Nazareth House PS prayer in honour of Sr Annette and in gratitude to the Sisters of Nazareth.

Speaking on behalf of school principal, Mrs Blackery, the Key Stage 2 Co-ordinator, Mrs K McDevitt welcomed Sr Annette’s family, who were taking part in the Mass online, and the Sisters of Nazareth who were present in the congregation, and thanked all involved in the beautiful celebration of the Mass in memory of Sr Annette.

Afterwards, everyone was invited to Aras Colmcille for refreshments and a chat. Amongst those who gathered was Elizabeth Melaugh (nee McKee), who recalled from her time working in the Nazareth House Care Home that Sr Annette “always had time for you and wanted to hear all about you, and was very kind”, and was “very devoted to her work in the school and with the residents of the Care Home”.

Mrs Margaret McKee, who had worked in the Nazareth House PS canteen for about 14 years, also had very fond memories of Sr Annette, saying: “She was lovely, and very jolly and placid.”

Jim Doherty remarked that Sr Annette was “just great”, recalling: “I worked in the Nazareth House Care Home and part of my job was to take ‘Teddy’ the dog out for a walk!”

Mary Meenan, a past-pupil Nazareth House PS who went on to work in the Nazareth House for years, recalled Sr Annette being “shy and private in her own way”, and her “helping a lot of people privately”.

John McNamee said that he had known Sr Annette for a long time through the Nazareth House Care Home, remarking: “She was a great woman. There will never be another like her.”

Ann Downey and Bridie McCormack recalled Sr Annette’s “great smile and sense of humour”, saying: “She was just always a happy, smiling face”.

And John Rodgers also shared memories of Sr Annette being “very kind towards people”, saying: “If she could help you, she would.”

May Sr Annette rest in peace.





# Prayerful Taizé evenings in St John's Coleraine a highlight in Lenten programme

by Fr Neil Farren

WE had our first Parish Taizé Evening at St John's Church, Coleraine on Wednesday, March 22, beginning at 7 pm and ending at 7.45 pm. It was an open invitation to the Parish Community here in Coleraine, and to anyone else who wished to attend.

The Parish has a wide catchment area, from Dunboe, St John's and Aghadowey areas.

The St John's Church choir agreed to sing the Taizé chants, as they would have sung them from time-to-time at the 6pm Vigil Mass in St John's Church. With the aid of the Church choir, it was decided that we would go ahead with a Taizé Evening.

We placed a few extra candles around the sanctuary area in a safe manner, to bring that sense of Taizé presence with us in the Church. The evening began with the Taizé bell being rung, played via You Tube. Then, throughout, we had the Taizé Chants sung as well as Scripture Reading, Psalm and prayers of praise prayed in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

The choir excelled in bringing the great Taizé chants to life with their various harmonies and solo parts, and there was a special prayerful presence felt by all in those 45 minutes of prayer and singing of chants. So much so, it was decided to return to St John's Church on Spy Wednesday Evening of Holy Week at 7pm for our second Taizé Evening.

We will have this evening on

our St John's Chapel, Coleraine, YouTube channel. Feel free to join in with us. Better still, do feel free to come to St John's Church, Somerset Drive, Coleraine, on Spy Wednesday, April 5 for the 7pm Taizé Evening. All are welcome and, on that evening, we invite everyone who comes to make their way up to the front seats of the church.

### Lectio Divina

Throughout Lenten Thursdays, we also had 'Lectio Divina Evenings' at St John's Church, Coleraine, from 7-7.45pm. The Lectio Divina Prayer is a way of praying the Gospels with an eye on its role in our daily lives.

During these Thursdays of Lent, we reflected upon the upcoming Sunday Gospels. It was agreed by all present, that too often at Mass, people sometimes forget the Gospel text nearly as soon as they sit down after the Gospel is read, and so its impact on lives becomes negligible.

Lectio Divina enables all who pray over the Gospel text through this format, before the Gospel is read at the Mass they attend, to have a deeper understanding of the Gospel message for them in their day-to-day lives. It is a great prayer tool and gives a focus on a time of prayer that is spiritual and can be an active agent in assisting us in our day-to-day lives.

Lectio Divina enables us to contemplate the Word of God in a deep and meaningful way. By working through the

recommended four movements of Lectio Divina, we allow ourselves to be guided toward a deeper understanding of God's Word, where we can enter into a contemplative form of prayer that seeks to nourish, feed and enlighten our hearts and minds by meditating and reflecting on Scripture.

The late Fr Eltin Griffin O Carm gave an excellent presentation at Gort Muire, Carmelite Retreat Centre, Ballinteer, Dublin in 1995, along with the late Fr Chris O'Donnell, O Carm.

Talking about Lectio Divina, the Divine Ladder of Prayer, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, Fr Eltin spoke about how the Holy Spirit assisted the reader to read and understand the Bible.

Giving the four steps of the Divine Ladder of Prayer, he explained that Lectio (Reading) was the first step where you read a biblical text over and over until you almost learn it by heart, listening attentively to what is being said. The second step, Meditatio (Meditation) brings out the 'hidden truth' of the text being read, digging deeper and deeper "until you find the hidden treasure", which is done by analysing the text, relating it with other biblical passages, and trying to discover what God is telling you, for you personally, for your community, and for the Church today.

The third step, Oratio (Prayer), he explained, is now your turn to speak to God, to respond to

His Word, about what He has told you in the biblical text. This response can take the form of praise, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, repentance, a desire to serve God better. And, the fourth step is Contemplatio (Contemplation), where the text is read again, savouring what you have discovered.

Fr Eltin concluded that the aim of Lectio Divina is "to hear God's Word and do it. You may, therefore, end your prayer by fixing in mind a word or phrase from the text which you would like to remember, that it may help you do God's Will in your daily occupation".

Fr Chris O'Donnell held that Lectio "is instrument of great power to bring people to holiness", and that if Lectio is to be important "we must integrate our whole lives, including our moral behavior".

He also said that just as the priest's words of consecration on the Mass brings about a change in the bread and wine, "so too in the reading of scripture the Holy Spirit comes on us and the dead letter of the book becomes the living word of God."

### Guided Prayer

On the Tuesdays of Lent, at St Mary's Church, Coleraine, Sr Rosemary also gave reflective evenings on Scripture, guiding those who came in a reflective manner on Scripture Passages.

Fr Neil Farren, PP Coleraine, with Sr Anne McWilliams (right) and parishioner, Margaret Timoney

## Special memories of Taizé...a family-friendly place of living Christianity

*THE Taizé evenings during Lent in St John's Church, Coleraine, were a particular delight for Sr Anne McWilliams, who met Taizé founder, the late Bro Roger when she visited the monastic community in Burgundy, France, in 1986. Sharing her experience, the Loreto Sister and former principal of Loreto PS, Omagh, writes...*

After nine years teaching in Gibraltar, I was going back to teach in Ireland and decided to travel home overland on a solo mini Pilgrimage! In July 1986, I travelled by bus through Spain and by train to Lourdes, and on to Lyon on an overnight train to Dijon, where a mini-bus picked up any Taizé-bound pilgrims!

A warm multi-lingual welcome awaited us! As all was booked in advance, I was taken to a lovely bed in dormitory-style accommodation! Simple, basic, but enough for two nights! Catering was well organised for large numbers, with plenty of places for tea, coffee, etc, and a larger area for main meals. There were serviced sites for camping, caravans and car parking. Prayer sessions seemed to go on all day, again catering for all age groups and preferences.

It was great to see the inter-nationality of Taizé, as well as

all faiths and none. Many people came for the experience of Taizé, itself, and what it had to offer in a non-judgmental setting. Central to it all was the visionary founder, Brother Roger Schutz, a young Swiss layman, from the Reformed Church.

At night, the real Taizé prayer with scripture, chants, reflections, short in-put from Brother Roger, other leaders and quiet time for prayer, was held in a large marquee, exactly as seen on television and media.

It was a joy and great privilege to meet and greet Brother Roger, who was so sincere and simple in his approach to everyone.

A family-friendly place of living Christianity, it was a memorable and a privileged experience that has remained with me to this day. Any chance I get, I try to promote the Taizé prayer as a special way of praying, especially for young people.



# Bellaghy & Greenlough faithful to build on powerful Mission by Franciscan Friars



AT the invitation of the Parish Pastoral Councils of Bellaghy and Greenlough, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal conducted a Parish Mission at the beginning of March. The Mission had been preceded by a visit from Fr Charles and Br Benedict, who spoke at Masses on the weekend of January 14-15, and by times of quiet prayer for the Mission in the three churches of the parishes in the week leading up to the Mission.

The six-strong team of Friars, Fr Francesco, Fr Thomas, Fr Charles, Fr Isaac, Br Seraphim and Br Benedict were present for the weekend Masses on March 4-5, and met informally with parishioners both after Mass and at a gathering in the Open Door Complex in Bellaghy, at 5 pm on the Sunday.

Over 100 people attended that meeting, at which the parish priest, Fr Pat O'Hagan said that the number present augured well for the expected attendances during the rest of the Mission. His expectations weren't disappointed, with large numbers of people at the 7 am and 9.30 am Masses each day, and at the evening Services, which took place at 7.30 pm.

The Friars visited two of the schools during the week of the Mission, and some pupils were amongst the congregation at the morning Masses.

The theme on the Monday evening was God's Love; on Tuesday all considered God's mercy, and a large number of people celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation; on the Wednesday there was a Service of the Anointing of the Sick at noon, for which the church in Greenlough was full of people praying for healing, and a similarly full church in Bellaghy on the Wednesday evening for a celebration of the Eucharistic healing power of Jesus.

The Gospel reading for that Service told the story of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was instantly healed of her haemorrhage. Those present were invited to pray in

front of the Blessed Sacrament as it passed by them, and to touch the vestment worn by the priest who held the Monstrance.

On the Monday, the Friars had lunch in the Open Door Complex, in Bellaghy, where lunch is served every Monday at 12, and it is attended regularly by a large number of people who live alone and by some senior citizens who use it as an opportunity to meet with friends, neighbours and other parishioners.

The final day of the Mission saw two morning Masses and the closing Mass, again attended by a large number of parishioners and visitors from outside the parishes, and also by Fr Gabriel Mary, a Friar visiting from the United States.

At the end of Mass, Fr Pat reminded the people that two of the Friars had said during the week that the real Mission was

beginning as the Friars returned to their Friary in Galliagh, Derry, and that it was the job, the mission, of all parishioners to put into action the things they had heard and seen in the preceding days, becoming visible signs and agents of the Love, Mercy and Healing power of the Lord.

In his homily on Our Lady and the Holy Spirit, Fr Francesco had said that one of the most important things to carry from the Mission was the words of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, namely that "The Lord is with you."

May the Lord be with the people of Bellaghy (Ballyscullion) and Greenlough as they face the future, assured of the prayers of the Friars and of the loving, merciful and healing presence of God in their lives.



The staff and pupils of St. Conor's College (Senior School) attended the 9.30 am Mission Mass on Monday, March 6. Photographed with the Friars are Mrs Áine Bradley, Principal, Mrs Gráinne McCallion, Head of RE, the Head Girl and Head Boy, and Fr Pat O'Hagan. The pupils of St. Mary's PS, Greenlough, and the senior pupils of St. Mary's PS, Bellaghy, also attended Mass during the week, and the Friars visited St. John Bosco PS and St. Mary's PS, Bellaghy, to speak with the pupils there.





# GIFT programme strengthening community in Greenlough Parish

THE Growing in Faith Together (GIFT) programme has been re-activated in the Greenlough Parish for the first time since the autumn of 2019, running for six weeks from February 6 and coming to a close with a wonderful celebration at the Vigil Mass for the Feast of St Patrick.

Overseen by a team of six volunteers, the programme is for those in Year 8 at second level schools, and the 19 young people who took part really engaged in the activities and conversations, making it a very fulfilling experience for all involved.

One of the leaders, Christina Carey shared her experience with 'The Net', and how she first got involved in youth ministry when she was a member of the Greenlough Pastoral Council and chose a role in the ministry of Children & Young People.

"Under the Children & Young People banner, I started up Children's Liturgy and worked with the Pope John Paul II Award participants, though I work less with them now," said Christina, adding: "When GIFT came along, I thought this was a better age to try and engage the young ones. I did the training with others, including Shauna Lynn, Grainne Rocks, Kathy McErlean, and Josie Toner, and apart from Kathy who was unable to commit further, the rest of us have kept involved. We also had Bridin Henry and

Gemma McNally volunteering along with us, and two of our Pope John Paul II parishioners, Aimee Toner and Chloe McGarry helped out some nights."

With 19 lively young people to engage with, Christina said that it greatly helped to have such a strong team of volunteers on board, and that they had been very fortunate in getting great people to come along and lead some of the fun activities, including Anne McPeake from the Camogie Club, who did some outdoor keep-fit training one night, Dan who helped them to make pancakes, Cormac O'Neill, from the Gaelic Club, who took the youngsters for basic training on one of the nights, Ronan Gilchrist from ALPS (All Lives are Precious), who talked about Mental Health, Katie Carey who led them in Yoga, and Jean Connolly and Noreen who got everyone on their feet for some Ceili Dancing on the Monday night they met before the Feast of St Patrick.

"We also did activities from the GIFT folder, such as making stained glass window pictures, which turned out beautiful, and we made St Brigid's Crosses," recalled Christina, adding: "We, the leaders, sometimes took part in the activities led by others and the young people had a good laugh at what we had difficulty doing. They took great craic too out of the Ceili Dancing, which

a couple of leaders joined in, and found it hilarious if they met us during the Waves of Tory.

"We also enjoyed rehearsing the hymns for the closing GIFT Mass, singing them as we did some activities, such as while we were making the St Brigid's Crosses. We sang 'This Little Light of Mine', 'Joy in My Heart', and managed to learn a verse of 'Hail Glorious St Patrick', which the congregation joined in singing at the Vigil Mass."

She continued: "During the closing Mass, we had two of the young people dance, while others read, sang the Psalm and brought up the Offertory Gifts, and all were involved in the singing for the Mass. It was a much more public closing Mass this time, with it being the St Patrick's Vigil Mass, but it all came together well.

"While it is exhausting, there is a great sense of achievement, particularly in closing with this Mass to celebrate St Patrick. Afterwards, we had a cup of tea with the parents, who went out of their way to tell us how much their children had enjoyed it, and Fr Pat came in and mixed with the parents and children."

Delighted that the children had shown enthusiasm during the prayerful aspects of the programme, Christina said: "We got some brilliant answers from the boys when talking to the

group about Lectio Divina. Some of the leaders had children in the group and they were amazed at the responses."

She was also uplifted by how much this engagement between the young people and leaders had created new friendships within their community, remarking: "I would have nothing to do with that age-group as my children are now grown up and left home, and so it's lovely when I am out and about and some of them see me and wave.

"While helping us to be more known in the community, it is also wonderful the joy they get at seeing us outside of the GIFT programme. When they go to Mass, they see us doing things like reading or Eucharistic Minister, etc, and this will hopefully encourage them to get involved in their parish."

Remarking that the GIFT programme seemed to be extremely popular with the children, Christina said: "This year's P7s are aware of it and are keen to do the programme, so we hope to do GIFT 1 next year, and we are considering whether to progress to GIFT 2 as well.

"We had some difficulty securing premises to run the programme, but St Oliver Plunkett's GAC offered us the use of their pavilion, which we greatly appreciated."



WE welcome another new member to *The Net's Young Writers' team* this month in **Seán McLaughlin**, from the *Urney & Castlefin Parish in the Co Tyrone Deanery*. **Seán** is a Year 12 student at *St Columb's College, Derry*, and in his first article he writes about the need to take time out from busy lives to value family and faith.

Reflecting on their experience of Lent, **Ella** comments on the 'blip of breaking Lent' and how there are other ways of connecting with Jesus with the help of supportive family life and school community, while **Bronagh** writes about how her school community at *St Colm's, Draperstown*, embraces the season as an opportunity to try and draw closer to God and fund-raise for Trocaire.

**Shea** shares his view on Lent and Easter and his efforts to offer some sacrifice and spend more time in prayer in recognition of what Jesus did for us, and **Jodie** reflects on how our acts of kindness can have a really positive impact on others.

Commenting on Pope Francis' recent visit to South Sudan, **Niamh** highlights how the Holy Father is tackling discrimination and teaching forgiveness, while **John** shines a light on Eastern Catholic churches.



Hollie Frystal, Co Tyrone Deanery. Bronagh Doherty, Co Derry Deanery. Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery. Jodie Kennedy, Derry City Deanery. Eimear Doherty, Derry City Deanery.



Niamh O'Kane, Co Derry Deanery. John Augustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery. Zara Schindwein, Derry City Deanery. Shea Doherty, Derry City Deanery. Evan Curran, Derry City Deanery. Seán McLaughlin, Co Tyrone Deanery.

## Acts of kindness can really go far by Jodie

IN her new book 'Lumina and New Lumina', Adrienne von Speyr writes of how "Sacrifices are the most tender flowers; they lose their fragrance as soon as you speak of them."

Since COVID-19, as a result of isolation, our world today has mainly become about looking out for yourself and no one else. However, we need to get back into the line of sacrifice: making sacrifices for our friends, family and even strangers.

Acts of kindness can really go far and will be something that people will always remember. You can easily make someone's day through a small unspoken act of kindness.

Even if you find yourself stuck about what you can do, there are many resources where you can find ideas, such as the Random

Acts of Kindness Foundation, which provides numerous simple ideas such as, be a good listener, have a judgement free day and smile.

They promote making kindness the norm. This motto aligns with what Speyr is talking about as, at the end of the day, sacrifices don't need to be anything big like world peace, they can be something simple and significant that will make someone's day.

So, with this quote from her new book, we can really learn from Speyr to make more sacrifices in our life that can benefit others. Whether it's being kind in our actions or in our words, we can always benefit the lives of others. All we have to do is sacrifice any doubts or judgements and be kind.



## During Lent St Colm's school community tried to draw closer to God and fund-raised for Trocaire by Bronagh

LENT in St Colm's High School, Draperstown, is a very special time and a time where we make efforts to fundraise for Trocaire and bring ourselves closer to God.

Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during the Lenten season, we have morning Mass at 8.40 am that finishes just before school starts. It is led by sixth form pupils doing the readings and our school chaplain, Fr McGirr and Fr Madden, our parish priest.

This Mass is open to the public and school community and is a lovely way to grow our relationships with people in the community and offer up our prayers for our special intentions.

As a school, we make a Lenten promise to attend Mass and it is attended in large numbers every morning by staff, pupils and parishioners. There is also a special Stations of the Cross Mass, celebrated this year on Wednesday, March 29, which is led by the Head Boy and Head Girl.

Full school Masses are a great opportunity to unite the school through prayer and special intentions in the build-up to Easter.

Our school is a very community-centred school in

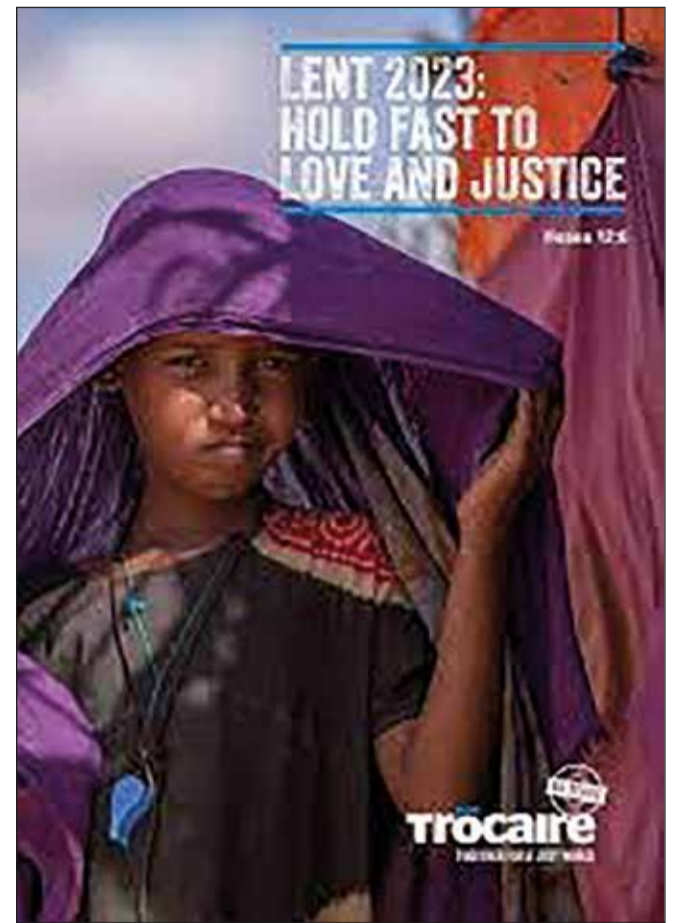
our own community and further afield, and during Lent we make a commitment to fundraising for Trocaire. Each year group has a specific event to get sponsorship.

In Year 8, they have a sponsored silence, which is a class where they get to read their library books and the money they raise goes towards Trocaire. In sixth form, we are doing a sponsored 'Give it Up', where we are giving up something we love, eg phone/computer etc for 24 hours to raise money. In Year 9, they take part in a wacky walk, where they dress up in costumes and take part in a sponsored walk.

As the environment is a growing issue, all over the world, St Colm's are doing their bit by reducing single-use plastic in the canteen, and reminding pupils regularly to use the bins and not to litter in the school grounds, which we share with many groups in the town.

This is the 50th anniversary of Trocaire, and this year their focus is on the food crisis. This crisis is more real than ever; due to the rising cost-of-living people are struggling to buy food for their families.

St Colm's is raising money to help Trocaire fight world-hunger. Trocaire is the Irish word for



'compassion' and we were living by this motto for Lent 2023.

St Colm's made a Lenten promise to care for the

environment, community and to show compassion towards others in our school and through Trocaire.

## Pope Francis tackles discrimination and teaches forgiveness by Niamh

POPE Francis was joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Right Reverend Iain Greenshields, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for an ecumenical visit to DR Congo and South Sudan in February.

The three jointly answered questions put to them by journalists covering the Apostolic journey, and during this Pope Francis emphasised the

"injustice" of the criminalization of homosexual people, and addressed polemics surrounding the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who died on December 31, 2022.

The Pope said that his death was "instrumentalized" by people "who took political sides rather than that of the Church."

His anger towards those engaging in discrimination against others is evident, as he

teaches forgiveness at his sermons and meetings, not suffering.

At the outset of the press conference, Pope Francis reiterated the ecumenical nature of the visit to South Sudan.

"I wanted the two of them to be in the press conference," he said, "especially the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has a years-long history along the path toward reconciliation" in South Sudan.

Pope Francis and the

Archbishop of Canterbury focus on the importance of forgiveness, following the teachings of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 6:14, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."



## A supportive family life and school community can nurture a teenager's relationship with Jesus by Ella

DURING the season of Lent Pope Francis' message encouraged us to listen to Jesus. From an early age, I always saw it as a time to give up my favourite sweets or crisps, and during my primary school years I had the thought of 'going on' something as well, such as keeping my bedroom clean or doing the dinner dishes. These tasks and sacrifices of my favourite treats always began with good intentions but never really lasted the distance.

'Breaking Lent' is a small blip in our preparation towards Easter and, as I have grown up, I have realised that there are other ways of connecting us to Jesus. A supportive family life and school community can nurture a teenager's relationship with Jesus.

St Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that whoever "loves God is known by God." (8:3)

Jesus understands how it feels to be tempted in life and He understands what it is to have people hurt you or betray you.

In a world of social media and online bullying, friends can betray one another in various ways; Jesus, however, will never walk away.

Hebrews 13:5-8 states: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." This could bring relief and comfort to us, and it could even be a demonstration of other people in our lives who are a consistent, positive presence, such as parent, grandparents or siblings.



We may think that a certain number of 'likes' or followers on social media platforms is necessary in order for what we say to matter, and sometimes we may feel that no one actually listens, but Jesus wants to hear from us and He is always listening.

Whilst teenagers are still young

enough to be learning many life skills, we can get overwhelmed as more is expected of us as young adults. It is, therefore, important for us to be reminded that Jesus meets us in our times of greatest need, and provides us with the strength and courage to move forward no matter the situation.



Figure 2: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Ordination of a Bishop. Source: <https://www.cssr.news/2020/06/lviv-bishop-ordination-of-mykola-bychok-cssr/>



Figure 3: Ordination of a bishop in Ukraine. Source: <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/never-cease-to-be-a-spiritual-father-head-of-the-ugcc-to-bishop-mykola-semenyshyn-during-his-ordination-255/>



Figure 4: Pope Francis (when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires) at a Byzantine Catholic liturgy. Source: <https://twitter.com/CatholicSat/status/1133759234028515333>



## Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us is great news! *by Shea*

THIS month, I am going to write about Lent and Easter and what these mean to me in my faith journey.

As a Catholic, for me Lent is about making a sacrifice for Christ because He made the ultimate sacrifice for us and our sins, which to me is great news! Something that I have begun to realise in the past few years is that there are people who don't understand stand what Lent is for, and actually do Lent for the wrong selfish reasons.

This year, I decided to pray during Lent. I asked the Holy Spirit to guide me and help me choose my sacrifice for Lent and

the promise this year that I chose. I decided to stay off fizzy drinks and made other personal and more spiritual promises, and I did that to try and strengthen my faith.

Easter, to me, is about recognising what Jesus did for us in being crucified on the Cross and His Resurrection.

I also try to be as reverent as possible when praying during Lent, Holy Week and Easter, because of the events we are celebrating during this time.

And, during our Easter celebration, I also enjoy the time off work to spend time with my family and relax.

## "The light of the East" *by John*

WHEN we think of the Catholic Church, in an Irish context, we often think of the Roman Catholic Church; we think of devotions like the Rosary and Adoration, we think of a particular way of celebrating the Mass, etc. However, this is not the only way that the Catholic Church looks or operates.

This may seem obvious to many of you, but I am not talking about the Roman Catholic Church, I am not talking about how Roman Catholics worship and do things in other countries. No, I am talking about another group of Catholics, who are in union with the Pope in Rome, but are different to their Roman (or Latin) Catholic brothers and sisters. I am talking about Eastern Catholics.

Some of you may be asking yourselves the question, "Are

these Catholics, really Catholic or are they just another version of the Orthodox?" Well, I hope to answer these questions and more as I introduce to you what St Pope John Paul II called "the light of the East".

In the Catholic Church, there are 24 (sui iuris) different churches. This may sound quite confusing at first, but the term church in this context means a group of Christian faithful who have their own particular liturgy, theology, laws, and customs and are self-governing (that is, they have their own bishops and dioceses).

Most of these churches are made of the descendants of Eastern Orthodox faithful who came back into communion with the Pope. Some churches, like the Maronite church, have always been in communion with the

Pope. Nevertheless, the history of these churches, as well as their particular traditions and customs, are great riches for the church. Instead of explaining through

words what the Eastern Catholic churches are like, I think it would be better to show them through some pictures, with some interesting facts in between



Figure 1: Greek-Catholic Cathedral in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. Source: <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/never-cease-to-be-a-spiritual-father-head-of-the-ugcc-to-bishop-mykola-semenyshyn-during-his-ordination-255/>



Figure 7: The Divine liturgy being celebrated according to the Ethiopian rite. Source: <https://cnewa.org/an-ethiopian-odyssey-the-challenges-of-the-church-50476/>



Figure 10: Maronite Qurbano. Source: [https://www.miamiarch.org/CatholicDiocese.php?op=Article\\_maronite-catholics-convene-in-miami-2019](https://www.miamiarch.org/CatholicDiocese.php?op=Article_maronite-catholics-convene-in-miami-2019)

## Your attitude in life is how people remember you...take time to value family and faith *by Seán*

WHEN was the last time you just stopped? Took a quiet moment? Just slowed down?

If you're a person who adores their work and gives it value by effort, then you'll understand and be aware that it takes concentration, dedication, and coordination. But often times, such work, may it be in education or employment, takes up so much time and energy, so much so that often times you simply don't have enough of either to give attention to two vital things in life – family and faith. Both of which can be the highlight of our lives and what really matters.

What I am trying to imply is that sometimes we have to take a break from our vigorous work, so that we clear our minds, and spend time and put in effort with those we love and in thinking about our faith, and how we can improve it through peace and tranquillity.

Although work is a necessity in life and is vital to make the world better, it is far from beneficial when it is done excessively for long periods of time. From my own personal experience, even though I am young, I find that if I intensely work from morning to night, with only a couple of short breaks, then the quality of my work drastically decreases; it can drop far more than you'd think.

A quiet period on a Friday night, after a long week, or a peaceful Sunday morning and afternoon

never goes amiss. Taking those sort of breaks can help us to regain composure, and to maintain a good standard of work, whether that be in study in school, your job, mental stability, or even physical health.

Another huge impact of overworking is the effect that it has on you as a person, and how others view you. Too much work at such an intense and fast rate can affect you personally, as well as negatively impact the quality of your work. What I mean is that it can drastically have an effect on you, your interactions with your environment and those in it, whether that be your family, or those you work with.

Your attitude in life is how people remember you; how you act and how you treat those around you. In a place of study, you are around the same people for years, and in a place of work it can be for decades. In both scenarios, it is vital to acquire and maintain healthy relationships with those around you from the very beginning.

If you unnecessarily burn yourself out through excessive work, then your mood grows negative, and with that also the respect that you normally should have for classmates and colleagues. It's not good to have people who see you almost every day having a grudge. If you take time, now especially in the run-



up to the Easter period, to try to be closer to how Jesus was; mostly calm and dignified, and always willing to be kind and caring towards others, even when they were not towards Him.

This is all very well and good, but work still needs to be done, it is what keeps the world going. But how would you do so much work when you are also taking breaks? Work is a gradual and precise practice in most cases; it requires time and dedication, as I've said before.

As simply as I can put it, work requires, requires, structure and coordination. It isn't something that you can approach without a plan or ideas, no matter what kind of work it is. You have to have a fair idea of what you're going to do, and without that, just going into a blind rush will only result in hours of confusion and no progress.

Just think about it like this: what if God had had no plan for Christ on earth? His journey wouldn't have been so good in that case. I like to compare a well-planned

work to a miracle of Christ – a major one, at that. When Jesus was told that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha was ill and near death, He was in no rush to get to Bethany where Lazarus lived, but waited for the right moment, anticipating the events in His clear mind, knowing when to carry out such a stunning act. Even when Jesus was urged to hurry on to cure Lazarus from his illness, He merely said, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble for he sees by the world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, because he has no light."

What good work can be done in the vague darkness, when the sight of your mind is unclear? But if we just stop and be composed for just a little while, it can make all the difference to what we do here. With the plan that we peacefully establish, we can in a shorter time create work that is of far higher quality, and that method can apply to everyone.

# Feeling of hope that faith in Aghyaran in good hands after inspiring Mission Week

THE pews of St Patrick's Church, Aghyaran, in Co Tyrone, were packed with parishioners, leaving some to stand as the closing Mass got underway for the week-long Mission that had evidently impacted well on the many who had turned out for the various ceremonies, and augurs well for a future full of hope, which was the Mission theme.

During the week, there was Mass celebrated by Fr Kevin McElhennon, Cappagh PP and VF for the Tyrone Deanery, each morning at 6.45 am, then the Rosary followed by Eucharistic Adoration and the Angelus Prayer from 11 am until noon, and an Evening Talk & Reflection. The speakers included: Marie Lindsay, on 'Faith and Family'; Peter Harte, on 'Faith and Football'; Marguerite Hamilton, on 'Finding God's Purpose for Me'; Brenda Bannon on 'Using Our Gifts in Parish Life'; Richard Moore on 'Forgiveness'; and Fr Kevin Hayden OSB on 'The Art of Listening'.

As well as times of prayer, there were occasions for the parishioners to come together socially, with the opening Mass on the evening of Sunday, March 5, followed by refreshments in the nearby GAA Centre, with a Magician and Puppet Show treat for the children. After listening to Peter Harte's evening talk on the Monday, all were invited back to the GAA Centre again for the opportunity to meet Peter and the enjoyment of some traditional music by local artistes. And, following the closing Mass on the evening of Sunday, March 12, celebrated by Bishop Donal, it was back to the GAA Centre for some refreshments and a variety concert.

Commenting on the Mission theme, 'A future full of hope', in his homily at the closing Mass, Bishop Donal said: "Christian hope is not based on the confidence that my plans will come true...Christian hope says that God led His people through the desert and that Jesus was victorious over death. We tell a story that the church has come through apparent defeat and terrible mistakes with renewed burst of life and creativity. It is trust in the faithfulness of God, despite our mistakes and stupidity, that gives us hope in

every generation...What you have been doing this week is listening for signs of places where God is at work – and then being open to being led."

He went on to say: "When we think that all is lost and that God has abandoned us, faith says that He is simply preparing us for something better that we do not expect. It is just that our limited vision cannot see over the horizon or around the corner."

Remarking that there may be a temptation after the Mission "to go back to what passes for normal parish life", Bishop Donal told those gathered that "renewal will come, not merely through occasional excellent events but by a restructuring how we are parish."

"Our direction of travel in this Diocese is not merely towards rationalising Masses," he added, "It is about building a parish community that is actively bringing new young people to love Jesus, helping them grow in faith and then enabling them to share their faith. Your mission has shown that there is a thirst for the good news of forgiveness and healing."

### Confidence

"You will have seen people growing in confidence in their faith. You will have seen a desire to know more about God and our faith. You will have become aware of wonderful young people who want to do something outstanding with their lives. Now, the hard work of planning the next stages of the journey begins. And the Diocesan offices are gearing up to support each parish in that journey. Just let me know what training and support you need. Make sure that this week was not just a flash in the pan, good but quickly forgotten."

Commending the Parish on its busy week, Bishop Donal said: "As a faith community, you deserve huge credit for venturing out. You did not fly in speakers from far away. You enabled local people to tell their story of how they have experienced God. And each of you has a story to tell about how God has encountered you in unexpected places and how your thirst has been slaked, perhaps especially in times of sin and embarrassment. Know your story. Do not be ashamed



of the deserts in your life. That is where we are most often able to encounter Jesus."

Thanking all involved, Fr Paul Fraser, PP, pointed out that he "was a small cog in the wheel that made the Mission happen", adding: "This Mission happened as a result of the synodal conversations we had in this Parish. When we met to analyse those conversations, we didn't know what to expect but we certainly didn't expect to be organising a Mission."

"There are great people of faith here, which gives me great hope as parish priest, and I hope that it gives you great hope as well in your families. The Mission team members came from among you, and I am so grateful to the team and their families."

"I am very grateful to those who enriched us with their talks during the week. They each brought something unique. Wherever I went, either here or in Castlederg, I heard people talking about the night before and that is what we need to be doing; talking about the Church in a positive way."

Delighted at the response and the very positive feedback from people, Eibhlin McAnaw of the Mission Team relayed the comments of the team members:



"The great numbers that attended the 6.45 am Mass, morning Adoration and evening services reflected the joy in the Parish during the Mission."

"People have commented on the variety of speakers throughout the week and that there was 'something for everyone'. Many people felt that the evening prayer services were refreshing and rejuvenated their faith. Parishioners talked of how 'ordinary' speakers were capable of extraordinary things."

"The Mission was very successful in bringing our community together in such large numbers, from babies, children, teenagers and adults. The Covid had a very bad impact on this community and the Mission truly showed our strength and faith. We met and talked to friends and neighbours, with whom we had very little contact for the past three years, and the weather didn't stop us from joining in this special time in the Parish."

"The week also highlighted the variety of talent present in our Parish, and people were delighted to play a part in it, including the local school whose singing was so impressive. There is a feeling of hope, in Aghyaran, that the faith is in good hands."



## Comments from some of the Mission Team

“The idea of the Mission emerged from the findings of the Synodality listening sessions. The Synodality journey was my first experience of volunteering in the Parish. It has been wonderful, yet nerve wrecking! We wanted to deliver something that would be enjoyed but also leave the parishioners of Aghyaran inspired and encouraged. It was a big task, but we need not have been nervous at all! We had a great team and were really supported by Fr Paul and all of our speakers. There was a real ‘buzz’ during the entire week of the Mission! I hope that we achieved our aim and did leave the parish ‘Full of Hope’, and also may be kindled a little spark of inspiration or a nudge of encouragement too! Now to build from here!” *(Naomi McSorley)*

“From the initial Synodality meetings over a year ago that led to many discussions and planning for our Mission, it has been quite a journey; one that, as a Parish, we will never forget. The meaning of Synodality is ‘Journeying Together’ and that is what our Mission has been about, what a parish community is all about and, in Aghyaran, we are so fortunate it is something we excel at. Our Parish Mission was a great success, from the astonishing numbers that attended the early morning Masses, daily Adoration, the evening talks with inspirational speakers, and the lovely gatherings in our GAA Club. It was a unique Mission. There was something for everyone and, like our message said, we are indeed looking towards a ‘Future full of Hope’. The involvement from

people throughout the Parish was amazing; everyone showed such a willingness to be a part of it. The guest speakers were so relatable, relevant and the humility shown is something that we will remember for a long time. I’m confident that we as a Parish will continue to ‘Journey Together on this Synodal Pathway’, continuing forward as a close, faithful community that will secure our Parish for the future.” *(Martin Baird)*

“My experience began when I attended the synodal meetings within the Parish. After this, I was asked to take a leadership role at the next meeting by Martin, then Naomi asked me to be on the Parish Mission team. I was delighted to be asked and, as a ‘younger’ parishioner, I felt that I could bring a fresh perspective. It was a wonderful social opportunity for me, meeting so many people in the parish who I may never have spoken to before. There were a lot of meetings to discuss the feedback from parishioners and then decide on the format of the Mission. We wanted to ensure that were a variety of themes and speakers, so that there was something for everyone. It was lovely to have a focus on Parish involvement, and anyone I asked was delighted to volunteer their time and share their talents. I felt huge pride during the week as so many parishioners supported us by attending the event or showing support via social media. As we look forward, we hope to widen the net and ask many more people to take on more practical and leadership roles within our parish to ensure a ‘Future full of hope’ for Aghyaran!” *(Eibhlin McAnaw)*



## Lavey folk hear story of link with national treasure...St Patrick's Bell



IN the lead up to the Feast of St Patrick, there was a great night of traditional music and talks regarding ‘St Patrick’s Bell, the Mulhollands and the Mayogall Connection’, in Lavey GAC/ Termoneeny Centre.

Those gathered heard internationally renowned expert on Early Medieval Art and Religious Object, Cormac Bourke, speak about St Patrick’s Bell, one of the greatest religious objects of medieval Ireland, and its beautifully decorated Shrine, which are now on permanent display in the National Museum, in Dublin, and how the Lavey Parish, and in particular the townland Mayogall, had been a place of guardianship for many centuries for this national treasure.

It was uncovered in the townland of Mayogall in the early 19th Century, where it had been under the care of its hereditary keepers, the Mulholland family, and Clady-born archaeologist and historian, Thomas McErlean, who has family connections to the Mulhollands, gave his input to the spellbinding story of St Patrick’s Bell and the Mayogall connection.

The St Patrick’s Bell is a small

iron hand bell, about 8-10 inches high, which is one of 50 iron bells that survived and were in the use in the time of St Patrick. However, Cormac explained that these bells really came into use in monastic communities, and were “accessories to the monastic way of life.”

Noting that there are a few bells called St Patrick’s bells, like the one associated with Donaghmore, in Co Tyrone, Cormac stated: “The real thing is the bell associated with the Parish of Maghera, with Mayogall at a later stage of its history. This is the bell that goes by the name of the Bell of the Testament (or Will), the idea being that Patrick had left the bell in his will either to his successors or probably to the Church of Armagh.”

He added: “It is reputed by tradition to be St Patrick’s but we can be confident that he never actually handled it.”

Commenting on the Shrine made around the year 1100 to hold the bell, Cormac said: “The Shrine of St Patrick’s Bell is of huge independent interest and obviously raises the status of the bell, as about a dozen or 15 of the 50 iron bells that survived were enshrined.”

He added: “The inscription on the back is of interest to us as it connects the Mulhollands with the bell and then, ultimately, with this area. It asks for a prayer for the Abbot of Armagh, for the King of the North, who was an O’Lochlainn, and for the craftsman and his son, who made the Shrine, and then also asking a prayer for the Mulholland keeper – Chathalan U Maelchalland.

“We don’t know how long the Mulhollands had been already keeping that role, but certainly 900 years ago they had it.”

Highlighting the great

significance of this discovery, Cormac said: “This Bell and Shrine are not just part of the three insignia of the Abbots of Armagh, but one of the great national treasures of Ireland. The total story of the Bell isn’t just its making or association with the particular Abbot and King, or with Patrick by tradition, it is its entire history, and this adds a certain richness to any particular place because they are part of the lore and what differentiates one place from another that makes it special.

“While St Patrick’s Bell and Shrine are locked up in the National Museum in Dublin, their significance can still be unlocked, and the local import and value can still be there to be unlocked in some kind of local reference or representation.”

The talks were followed by music from local traditional Irish musicians, and refreshments. Donations on the night went towards the Turkey and Syria earthquake and humanitarian crises.



At the end of the evening of talks on St Patrick’s Bell, the Mulhollands and the Mayogall connection, in the Lavey GAC, Termoneeny Centre, tributes were paid and presentations made to retiring club legend, Mary Convery, who had been an integral part of the events team there for over 25 years.



## Servant Sisters share their vocation stories...

WITH the annual Sr Clare Crockett Retreat taking place in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, later this month, 'The Net' is featuring the vocation stories of the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother Order that the late Sr Clare had belonged to, and which has recently set up community within the Derry Diocese.

This month, Sr Mary, who is the Local Superior of the Home of the Mother House at Crossroads, Killygordon, in Co Donegal, and Sr Rocio share the faith journeys that led to them following a religious vocation and to the Servant Sisters Community.



## First time I felt call to holiness, and that it was possible for me to live it, was on reading 'Story of A Soul'



SISTER Mary Donovan, the head local servant of the Home of the Mother Community recently established within the Derry Diocese, in the Killygordon Parish in Co Donegal, first felt the draw to a religious vocation after reading about the life of St Therese in 'Story of A Soul' as a teenager. A Servant Sister now for 17 years, she shares her story of answering God's call as a 19-year-old university student and the journey she has no regrets about setting out on.

Born in Delaware, USA, Sr Mary is eighth in a family of nine girls and two boys. Her mother, Grace, is from Argentina and grew up in the Catholic faith, while her late father, Ed, was American with Irish roots, and grew up in the Protestant faith.

"My mother was raised Catholic, however hers wasn't a practising Catholic family, but she took the Catholic faith as her own when she was in college, and my father converted to the Catholic faith when he was in his 20s, through the example of a good priest and his best friend who was Catholic," said Sr Mary, adding that they were both practising Catholics when they first met.

She continued: "We were raised going to Mass on Sundays and on occasions prayed the Rosary, but we never discussed faith within our family circle, so it wasn't something personal to me. However, our parents made a big

sacrifice for us to have Catholic education, as it is very expensive in America.

"A lot of schools were not actually giving faith formation, and my mum had got a sense through a parish friend that we weren't learning about our faith through the Catholic School system. She heard about a small school that was run by Catholic lay people who wanted their kids to really have the faith. Mum took me and my little sisters out of the large Catholic school system into this private Catholic school, and it was there that I had my first experience of God and of making the faith something personal."

"My first religion class changed me," recalled Sr Mary: "The teacher walked into the room and went over to the Whiteboard and drew a short line, a dot, and a long line with an arrow at the end. He asked what we thought this was and then explained: the short line represented all of history and creation before we came into existence; the little dot signified our life from conception to death, whenever that might be; and the longer line with the arrow was eternity. He further explained that even though our life seems so insignificant compared to the "big picture," our decisions in our life determined what that long line as eternal life was going to be like. When he said that, something rang true for me.

"That year, in the summer, we

had to do book reports. One had to be a classic and the other on the life of a saint. I wasn't into reading. I was into sport. I went to my mum's holy shelf and looked for a small book on a saint. I stumbled upon the 'Story of A Soul' about the life of St Therese. She was the same age as me when she entered Carmel as a nun, while I was just looking to have a good time. Her life really struck me.

"I think that was the first time that I felt the call to holiness and that it was possible for me to live it. I think that was the seed of my vocation; that was the first time that I felt God could be calling me to something different. Vocation wasn't discussed in my home, but I thought, after reading this book, that it was a possibility. I was 13 or 14 years old, and that is when I took the Catholic faith as my own."

She continued: "I went through secondary school in that same school and my faith grew. The thought of a religious vocation was always there in the background, but I never talked to anybody about it. I had no example of a nun or religious in my life. I was quite into sports and normal social life, boys etc, so I wasn't really thinking about a vocation but, at the same time, I couldn't get the thought out of my head."

On finishing secondary school, Sr Mary went to the private, Catholic university, Ave Maria, in Florida, to study Theology and Philosophy.

"My thinking was that the vocation thing would disappear and that I would meet my future husband and have my kids," recalled Sr Mary: "However, when I arrived on campus, I almost immediately ran into the Sisters from the Home of the Mother, who were doing Campus Ministry at that time. When I saw them I realised that I had actually seen them before. The founder of Home of the Mother, Fr Rafael had come to the school I had switched to when I was 14, and given a talk. He had come over from Spain on an Apostolic Visit. One of the Sisters at the campus had been on that trip with him and she remembered the visit. So, the whole idea of vocation kept coming up."

She added: "The Home of the

Mother priests and brothers were there too, doing Campus Ministry with the university students. The Sisters started to invite me to different things they had on, like faith formation and retreats, and I didn't know how to say 'No' to a nun!

"There was one retreat in particular during which one of the priests said that many times we go before the Lord and say that we want to do God's Will and be open, but we are so scared of what He might say that we put bananas in our ears. I realised as soon as he said this that that was me. So, I made a decision to really, truly open myself up to God and ask what He wanted of me.

### Wall

"Later, there was a time of Adoration, with the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and I remember looking at Our Lord and truly opening my heart. I asked Him, 'What do you want of me?' I had taken down the wall. I very clearly heard the Lord say in my heart, 'You know what you have to do. Do it.' When I heard that, all I knew was that I had to go to Confession and say to someone that I thought I had a vocation.

"I got speaking to a good Irish priest there and he really helped me a lot. As soon as I said that I thought I had a vocation, I felt this whole load lift off me and I started crying. He asked did I know where and I didn't have to think about it as I didn't know any other Sisters; God had put the Home of the Mother Sisters in my path.

"That same weekend when the retreat finished, Fr Rafael and our Superior General, Mother Ana, were visiting the Sisters on Campus. They had come from Spain. So, I was able to speak to them both about what I had experienced, through someone who translated for me. They saw that I could very well have a vocation and they encouraged me to go to Spain in the summer and visit, and if I wanted I could enter the community."

Aged 19 at the time, Sr Mary decided to enter the Community of Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother as a postulant and then did another year of university before leaving.

"I didn't finish my studies," she

said, adding: "I went over to Spain that summer as a candidate, which in our community can last anywhere from six months to six years. I was a candidate for one year, followed by two years as a novice and the process of temporal vows. Normally in our community we take vows for one year, then renew again for a year, then renew for three years, and then finally take perpetual vows. I was 27 when I made my final profession in 2013.

"I have never looked back. It was hard for my parents and the whole family at first, but thankfully they always supported me, although when I first entered my dad didn't really speak to me for three months, except to ask me how I was and if I had a boyfriend yet. My younger sister is also a Servant Sister and is called Sr Stacey. She is now in Jacksonville, Florida, and was formerly a missionary in Ecuador.

"We don't do home visits but family can come and visit us. However, there can be special exceptions. I was home when my dad died, three months after being diagnosed with cancer, and it was a huge grace to be there. He said to Sr Stacey and me at one stage during that time that he wanted us to know that he never thought our life as Sisters was a waste, but rather a huge blessing for the family."

During her 17 years as a Servant Sister to date, Sr Mary was based in Florida for eight years and Belmonte, in Spain, for two years, before being sent to Ireland, where she spent four years in Cork before being sent to head up their new community in Crossroads, Co Donegal, in the Derry Diocese.

Commenting on the response of the Irish to their ministry amongst them, the 37-year-old remarked: "The reception has been very good. The people are so open. There is a hunger for God. There is a great history in this country regarding the Catholic faith, with all the sacrifices and prayers of our ancestors, and while the faith seems to be disappearing, the embers are still burning and the fire can still be lit."

The arrival of the Servant Sisters in the Derry Diocese, on November 13, coincided with Sr Clare Crockett's 40 birthday.

Recalling her initial meeting with Sr Clare during the first summer she had gone to Spain, in 2005, Sr Mary said: "She was a novice at the time and was one of the few English speakers, so I spoke a lot to her. She was very funny. Later, I coincided with Sr Clare in Florida as Sisters. We were never in the same community but we coincided in camps and also during the summer at Home of the Mother formation house in Spain. Later on, our community in Jacksonville went over to spend Christmas in 2015 with the Sisters in Ecuador, so I was with Sr Clare for her last Christmas."

Saying that there was great international interest in Sr Clare, she added: "We have people come to stay who want to visit Sr Clare's grave, including groups of Spanish, American, and German girls on pilgrimage."

Since arriving in Crossroads, Killygordon, the Servant Sisters have been doing primary and secondary school visits within the parish and local area, as well as some family visits, 'Get Togethers' for girls aged 8-12 years old, which are held in the CAKE centre (Cross and Killygordon Enterprise centre) and their own house. They have also led a weekend silent retreat for adults in Ards Monastery, as well as family encounters and other activities open to people from the local area and others around the country.

"We offer Adult Catechesis in the parish," said Sr Mary, "We had 20-30 people for a four-week catechesis in the house on Tuesdays, and we also did this for five weeks during Lent, which was open to everybody, not just within the parish. We have also been invited to different places to give talks and testimonies.

"On the second Friday of each month, from 7.30-9.30 pm, we lead a 'Sisterbucks' night for young, adult women, aged 18-35, who come to the house for tea and a chat, and some faith formation and prayer time."

Thoroughly enjoying their ministry in the Diocese, the Sisters are looking forward to meeting more people and groups, and can be contacted on (+353) 74 914 9194 / derryshm@homeofthemoth.org.

## Catholic faith in Ireland not very deep but people are open and seeking God



calling me to the Servant Sisters. I had known already about them, but I didn't want to enter there initially because they were just starting up and I wasn't sure how this would turn out to be. But, I then understood that the Lord was calling me there.

"I was 23 years old when I entered, and had just finished my studies, and now I am 32 years in the Order."

Sr Rocio was a member of the first Home of the Mother community that opened in Spain, which was followed by the opening of another two houses in her home country, and when they opened a house in Rome, she went there for seven years, during which time she worked in the Vatican.

THE latest arrival to the Home of the Mother community in Crossroads, Killygordon, is Sr Rocio Galmes, from Madrid, in Spain, who has great hopes for the awakening and strengthening of the faith in Ireland following a visit to a local Mass Rock from the Penal times.

The 55-year-old Servant Sister is over 30 years in the Order, and reflecting on her call to religious life she spoke about growing up in a "very good Catholic family" of five.

"Our parents brought us up in the faith and we went to Catholic schools, so my two brothers and two sisters and I grew up in a very good Catholic environment," said Sr Rocio, recalling that when she was around 14 years old she became more conscious of her faith and made it more of a personal matter.

She added: "I entered a group that helped me a lot to grow in my faith, and I was in that for a few years. We were taught that we had to ask what the Lord wanted us to do. So, I would ask the Lord what He wanted for me."

"First, and for a couple of years, I thought that I was called to marriage. I was happy as that was what I wanted as well. Then, one day when I was studying at university to be a pharmacist, I received a grace of knowing that the Lord was calling me to religious life."

"At the beginning, I found it difficult to accept as I had my life already planned but, since the Lord had made clear what He wanted, I couldn't say 'no' to Him."

After two years discerning what congregation the Lord was calling her to, Sr Rocio said: "I understood that the Lord was

# Annual Sr Clare Retreat returns to Long Tower

'LIFE in the Seven Sacraments' is the theme for this year's Sr Clare Retreat in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, in Derry, which will run from April 17-23.

Since her sudden death on April 16, 2016, aged only 33 years old, when an earthquake in Ecuador caused great damage to the building she was in, there has been huge worldwide interest in the story of the late Sr Clare Crockett, who grew up in the Brandywell area of the City, living a life that no-one ever thought would lead the former actress to a religious vocation.

With a well-supported campaign in her home City, and further afield, to have the 'All or Nothing' Sr Clare declared a Saint, many are patiently waiting on the Nihil Obstat from Rome to officially open her cause. All the testimonies have been provided by her Order, who are waiting to hear back from the Vatican as to whether she will be declared a Servant of God.

The retreat programme includes the celebration of Mass at 7 and 10 am, and a Benediction Service, with guest speaker, at 7.30 pm, Monday-Friday. The 7.30 pm ceremony on Thursday, April 20, will be a Benediction & Healing Service, and the ceremonies on the Saturday and Sunday will take place at 3 pm, with Bishop Donal celebrating the closing Mass.

The great line-up of speakers for the week includes Martina Davidson, a Religious Education teacher at St Cecilia's College, in Derry, which Sr Clare had attended as a pupil. Martina will speak at the Monday evening ceremony about the influence that she sees Sr Clare's story having on her pupils. Fr Gerard Mongan will be the celebrant for the Monday evening devotions, when the topic will be Baptism.

Andrea Corr, of the Corr Sisters, will speak on the Tuesday evening, with Fr Joe Gormley speaking about the Sacrament of Confession, and on the Wednesday, a night of Eucharistic Healing, Fr John Joe Duffy, based in Creeslough, Co Donegal, will

speaking on the Eucharist.

Fr Colum Clerkin will give a talk on the Sacrament of the Sick on the Thursday evening, before anointing those who are sick amongst the congregation.

Cora Sherlock, a spokesperson for the Pro Life Campaign in Ireland, will be the guest speaker on the Friday evening, when the service will be led by Fr Philip Kemmy, PP Killea

& Newtowncunningham, Co Donegal, who will speak about the vocational sacraments.

Home of the Mother Servant Sister, Sr Elena will give the talk at the 3 pm ceremony on Saturday, April 22, when the service will be led by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, who will talk about Confirmation.

The week of prayer and talks will come to a close at 3 pm on Sunday, April 23, when Bishop Donal will

be the main celebrant.

Alongside the retreat, the Discalced Carmelites at the Iona Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, are offering a programme of spiritual exercises and prayer, with opportunities for day trips, such as guided tours taking in Sr Clare's grave and murals in the City, and sites connected to St Columba.

Day	Time	Event
MON 17th - FRI 21st APRIL	7.00am	Mass
	10.00am	Mass
	7.30pm	Benediction Service with Guest Speaker
THURSDAY 20th APRIL	7.30pm	Benediction and Healing Service
SATURDAY 22nd APRIL	3.00pm	Benediction Service with Guest Speaker
SUNDAY 23rd APRIL	3.00pm	Closing Ceremony celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown

Day	Speaker
Monday	Martina Davidson
Tuesday	Andrea Corr
Wednesday	Fr John Joe Duffy
Thursday	Fr Colum Clerkin (Healing Service)
Friday	Cora Sherlock
Saturday	Sr Elena (Home of the Mother)
Sunday	Bishop Donal McKeown

To view online visit [www.longtowerchurch.org](http://www.longtowerchurch.org)

## Girls enjoy Get-Together with Servant Sisters in Crossroads.



*Speaking at the ceremony to welcome first class St Faustina relic to Convoy, in neighbouring Diocese of Raphoe, Sr Benedetta, a Sister of the Merciful Jesus, urged...*

## Trust and you will see miracles!



A beautiful ceremony of Divine Mercy prayer took place in St Mary's Church, Convoy, in the neighbouring Diocese of Raphoe on Mother's Day, Sunday, March 19, to welcome a first class relic of St Faustina Kowalska from Krakow, in Poland, and a number of Divine Mercy devotees from the Derry Diocese were amongst the congregation.

This was the first time for the relic to come to Ireland and, after a lengthy process, permission was granted for it to remain permanently in an alcove of St Mary's Church devoted to the Divine Mercy message, to the delight of Fr Eamonn Kelly PP.

There was a great turnout to welcome the relic, with a procession to the Church for the prayer service, during which a Divine Mercy talk was given by Sr Benedetta, of the Sisters of the Merciful Jesus, the Order that was founded after the Second World War by Sr Faustina's spiritual director, Bl Michael Sopoćko according to the reported apparitions of Faustina, with the mission of promoting the Divine Mercy message.

Introducing Sr Benedetta, Fr Eamonn told those gathered that the ceremony was not about St Faustina but the message that she was given for the world.

Opening her talk noting that Fr Sopoćko had done extensive research to find whether what Faustina was talking about had grounds in the Scriptures and in the teaching of the Church, Sr Benedetta added: "For many years, when the devotion was forbidden in the Church, he would talk about Divine Mercy on that ground, not mentioning Sr Faustina at all."

Remarking that it was impossible to talk about Divine Mercy without talking about the need for Mercy – our sin, Sr Benedetta, whose community is based in Letterkenny, began by

talking about The Fall, the story of Adam and Eve that shows the way sin works

Created by God, in His image and likeness, Adam and Eve, she said, were "meant to walk side by side, as partners, in a relationship where none is better or rules over the other...They are given the wonderful Garden of Eden to live in and its plants to eat. They live in complete openness, transparency to one another and to God...They also share an amazing intimacy with God, live in His closeness."

"But," she continued, "there's the serpent. And he sows doubt. He's very clever. He doesn't act directly, he doesn't say, 'eat the fruit, because that's contrary to God's command'. No, he's cunning: 'Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

"He attacks trust! He shows the command that God gave, which was given to help Adam and Eve, not limit them, as an act of selfishness, lack of generosity, jealousy. He twists the image of God, making Him look as if He isn't good, as if He's a selfish tyrant!"

"We know what happens next: there's the fall, the relationship between man and woman is damaged - there's an immediate accusation game happening: it's not me, it's her...etc; they are no longer living in complete openness and transparency. Instead, when they hear the voice of God they hide in the bushes!"

"In short," said Sr Benedetta, "what has sin done to them, and what do our personal sins do to us? Sin destroys our inner beauty; it binds us - one sin follows another, once we've allowed the first one to happen and then it's hard to get out of that spiral. It weighs us down, cuts us off, in the case of mortal sin, from God or damages our relationship with Him, distorts our image of God. Instead of seeing Him as Merciful, as a loving Father, we start to fear, hide, run away from Him. It also destroys or damages our relationships with ourselves and with others."

"And this is where the great mystery of Divine Mercy comes in! Right after the fall, God promises Adam and Eve that He will hold a rescue mission. The descendant of Eve will crush the head of the serpent."

"Through the paschal mysteries, which we will be soon celebrating, God opens for us a new path, an amazing, miraculous way. The suffering and death of Jesus, His resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit, open wide the path of Mercy!"

### Obedience

She added: "In his death, Jesus is the new Adam. We see Him in the garden of Olives, just before His Passion, accepting God's plan, entering into God's will. Jesus sees what lies ahead of Him, and yet He chooses the will of the Father above His own. Not without struggle, as He is fully human and fully divine. But He comes out of this moment saying to the Father: 'Thy will be done'. St Paul writes: 'Just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous' (Rom 5:19)."

"During His passion, the curse of Adam, namely sweat on his brow and thorns, was placed squarely on the head of Christ, first in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he sweated blood, and then in Jerusalem, when he had a crown of thorns placed on His head."

"Instead of shaking off the blame, like Adam after the fall, He takes on the blame; He takes on every single sin ever committed. St Paul wrote: 'For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:12)."

"We see Him going through every step of His Passion in a gentle, loving, non-accusing way," continued Sr Benedetta, "When carrying the Cross He reaches Calvary, He is stripped of His garments. That too, is reversing what Adam did: Jesus stands before God, in complete nakedness and openness, carrying our sins, not denying or trying to hide them. As if He's saying to the Father: This is the condition of mankind, I want it to return to You!"

"And just as death came to all through disobedience concerning a tree (Genesis 2:17), life came to all through obedience on a tree... the Cross. Adam sinned once, and thus doomed humanity. Jesus died once, and thus covered over a multitude of sins. The damage wrought by Adam pales in comparison to what Jesus Christ has accomplished on behalf of those for whom He dies."

"How to avail of this great Mercy, how to immerse yourself in that stream of grace which gushes from the pierced heart of Jesus?" she pondered, before going on to say: "As a baptised Catholic: go to Confession. Both St Faustina and Bl Michael Sopoćko very clearly state that the greatest miracles happen in the confessional box! There a soul, which can be dead

because of mortal sin, is raised back to life, restored in its dignity and beauty, even more beautiful than it was before."

"Jesus said to St Faustina that it pains Him when souls don't come to Him to receive His graces. He says that the flames of Mercy are burning Him. Confessing your sins actually not only gives Jesus joy, not only quenches His thirst, but also glorifies God's Mercy. Want to really glorify God in His Mercy? Go to Confession regularly."

"OK, but someone might object that their sins are too great to be forgiven," remarked Sr Benedetta, adding: "That's exactly the lie that Satan wants you to believe! Once he's tempted you and seen you fall into sin, he will do everything to make you stay there. He will do everything to prevent you from going to Confession. What do you have to do then! Fight that new temptation by trust!"

"Trusting in God's Mercy means that we acknowledge that He is greater than our sin, that the sacrifice of Jesus and His resurrection are victorious! The devil will want us to run away from God after we've sinned. God invites us to do the opposite: run towards His outstretched arms. Look at a crucifix! If you ever doubt, even for a second, the greatness of God's Mercy, look at the crucified Jesus – His arms are open wide to receive you."

"Jesus, who died on the tree of life known as the Cross, commands us to eat the fruit from that tree, his flesh and blood, so as to give us eternal life. By eating the fruit of the cross, the flesh and blood of Christ, we 'shall live forever,' as Jesus said. The Holy Eucharist is one great act of Mercy – God gives Himself to us. He comes so close, that we actually eat Him! He becomes one with us. That's a mind blowing mystery of mercy!"

"Once we have received Mercy, God's immeasurable tenderness and forgiveness we can give mercy to others. What I want to stress today is: receive Mercy, go to Confession. I can't say it loud enough! God is waiting for you! Glorify his Mercy by receiving it! Trust and you will see miracles!"

At the end of the ceremony, there was an opportunity to receive a blessing with the relic by Fr Eamonn, and there was a special moment for 14-year-old Faustina Gibson, from Glenmorman, in the Leckpatrick Parish, Co Tyrone, when she was invited to come forward and carry the relic from the Sanctuary to the Divine Mercy alcove within St Mary's Church.



Annie Mullan, Claudy, who helps lead Divine Mercy prayers in her parish each week, receiving the St Faustina Relic.



Faustina Gibson, Glenmorman, Leckpatrick Parish, who had the honour of placing the St Faustina relic in the

## Celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday

DIVINE Mercy Sunday involves people gathering to celebrate Holy Mass at which God's mercy is proclaimed.

Observance of this Feast of Mercy involves: Celebrating it on the Sunday after Easter; Sincerely repenting of all sins; Placing complete trust in Jesus; Going to Confession, which does not have to be on Mercy Sunday itself, as St Faustina made her confession in preparation for Mercy Sunday on the day before (Diary 1072); Receiving Holy Communion on the day of the Feast (or its Vigil); Venerating the Divine Mercy Image; Being merciful to others, through actions, words, and prayers on their behalf.

To receive the Extraordinary Graces of this Feast, the only condition is to receive Holy Communion worthily on Divine Mercy Sunday (or the Vigil celebration) by making a good confession beforehand and

staying in the state of grace and trusting in His Divine Mercy.

A Plenary Indulgence can be obtained by fulfilling the usual conditions[2].

(Source - <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/celebrate/howessentials>)

[2]The extraordinary graces promised to the faithful by our Lord Himself through St. Faustina should not be confused with the plenary indulgence granted by Pope John Paul II for the devout observance of the Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday). The Decree of the Holy See offers:

A plenary indulgence, granted under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of Supreme Pontiff) to the faithful who, on the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday, in any church or chapel, in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for a sin, even a venial sin, take part in the prayers and devotions held in honour of Divine Mercy, or who, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed or reserved in the tabernacle, recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. Merciful Jesus, I trust in You!)..."



# Eangach

## Ár nDúchas

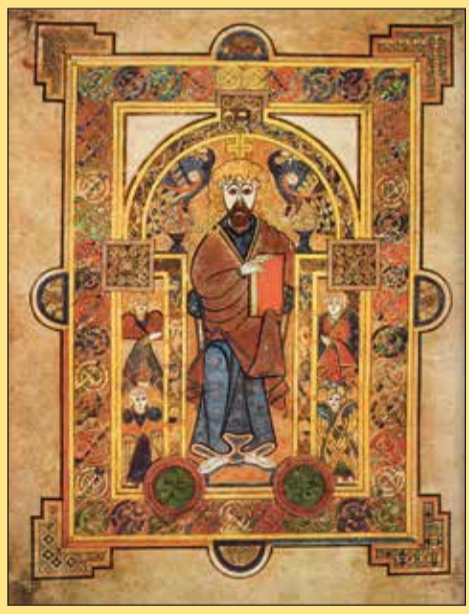
### Míle Glóir leat

A Íosa mhilis a d'fhulaing an Pháis,  
ar chrann na croiche 's tú cloíte ag an bhás,  
ba mhór do dheacair do dtáinig an lá.  
Is daor do cheannaigh tú peaca shíol  
Ádhaimh  
Och, och í  
Och och ó  
Och och í  
'S e mo bhrón go deo!

### Rí an Domhnaigh

Míle fáilte romhat, a Rí an Domhnaigh,  
A Mhic na hÓighe, a rinne an t-aiséirí.  
A Mhic Mhuire, fóir orm,  
A Íosa, 'Mhic Mhuire, déan trócaire orm.  
Glóir do Dhia, glóir do Dhia,  
glóir do Dhia naofa.  
Céad glóir leatsa, a Rí an eolais.  
Is tú mo mhórghrá, a Mháthair Íosa.

A Bhanríon na bhFlaitheas 's a Bhanríon na hÓighe,  
Is leatsa 'nám mo chasaoid, maidin, eadartha  
's trathnóna.  
Múin dom an bhealach is taispeán dom an t-eolas.  
Tabhair leat sinn chuig na Flaithis, Cathar gheal na Glóire.



## Óige 2000: Féile Chúige Uladh i Machaire Rátha

Ag deireadh na míosa seo (28ú – 30ú) beidh rud éigin speisialta ag tarlú i Machaire Rátha nuair a thiofáidh sluaite dhaoine óga le chéile ag Coláiste Phádraig (foirgneamh Naoimh Mhuire) le ceiliúradh a dhéanamh agus lena gcaidreamh le hÍosa a dhoimhniú. Ní rud ar bith é seo atá neamhghnách i dtaca le gluaiseacht 'Óige 2000' (Youth 2000 nó Y2K a ghlaotar uirthi i mBéarla) atá ag cothú suime sa chreideamh i measc na n-óg (idir 16 agus 35 bliana d'aois) ó bhliain go bliain in Éirinn agus go hidirnáisiúnta.

Tosaithe ag Ernest Williams i ndiaidh Lá Domhanda na nÓg 1989 – áit ar spreag an Pápa Eoin Pól II é ag impí ar an óige taispeáint don domhain gur é Íosa “an solas, an fhírinne agus an bhealach” – bhunaigh sé Óige 2000 chun daoine óga a chruinniú le chéile chun bheith ag guí agus spréigh



Bhí níos mó ná 1000 duine i láthair do Fhéile 2000 an tsamhraidh seo

an ghluaiseacht go níos mó ná 20 thíortha, ag athrú shaolta na mílte daoine óga. Is in 1993 a thosaigh Óige 2000 in Éirinn agus tá ag dul ó shin.

In Éirinn, cuireann Óige 2000 ar siúl ceithre 'féilte' nó cúrsaí i rith na bliana a dtriallann daoine óga orthu, dhá cheann náisiúnta (Féile an tSamhraidh agus Féile na Nollag) agus dhá cheann eile (fómhar agus earrach) lonnaithe i ngach cúige. Is í aidhm na gluaiseachta ná “an t-aos óg a thabhairt go croí na hEaglaise” fríd bhéim a chur ar 3 rud; Íosa sa tSacraimint Naofa, Muire Máthair Dé, agus teagasc.

Is é ceann de na tréithe is suntasaí faoi seo ná an bhéim a leagtar ar Íosa sa tSacraimint Naofa tríd Adhradh a thabhairt dó ansin. Le linn an tréimhse, caitheann daoine óga am i láthair na Sacraiminte Naofa. Músclaítear rudaí i gcróithe na ndaoine óga seo go mion minic. Is iomaí scéal faoi dhuine a chuaigh ann mar gheall ar chuireadh carad amháin, ar athraigh a saol agus an caidreamh a bhí acu le hÍosa mar gheall air. Bíonn siad 'ar lasadh' go fírinneach dá bharr.

Mar fhocal scoir, b'fhéidir gur fearr díriú ar an fhianaise a thugann daoine óga iad féin: tá deis agat anseo bualadh leis an Dia anseo a chruthaigh tú agus a bhfuil

grá aige duit, le háthas a fháil nach bhfuil le fáil áit ar bith eile. “Tagaigí agus Feicigí”.

Chun tuilleadh eolais, thig amharc ar <https://youth2000.ie/> nó teagmháil a dhéanamh le leathanach Facebook Youth 2000 Ireland.



## An Cháisc Bainte Amach

Tá an chargas thart! Tá an tréimhse feithimh tagtha chun críche anois agus tá an streachailt san fhásach, ag díriú ar ár gcaidreamh leis an Tiarna, déanta agat. Anois, tá an Cháisc á cheiliúradh againn, agus í ar an fhéile is tábhachtaí dá bhfuil inár gcreideamh, ar bhealaigh. Ach cad chuige?

Níl aon dabht ann faoi, is í an Cháisc rishuntasach agus rithábhachtach. Cad é atá i geist

leis an fhéile seo? Is é a cheiliúraimid ná Aiséirí Chríost ó mhairbh, agus is é seo atá i geist.

Is é bun agus barr ár gcreidimh an rud a tharlaíonn ag an Cháisc. Tús agus deireadh an scéil atá ann! Agus é ag lua faoi thábhacht an ghné seo, deir an tEaspag Barron murach an tAiséirí, bac heart dúinn éirí as seo uilig! Is pointe é seo a bhí déanta ag Naomh Pól ina litreacha: ‘...mura bhfuil Críost aiséirithe tá ár bhfogairt gan bhonn agus tá

bhur gcreideamh gan bhonn mar an gcéanna. Am amú a bheas ann. Seo é ceann de na rudaí is iontaí faoin chreideamh. Dearbhaíonn tú gur éirigh Críost ó mhairbh, rud neamhghnách ar fad. Áfach, is léir gur chreid na deisceabail agus na chéad chríostaithe ann. Chreid siad chomh mór sinn ann ná go raibh siad toilteanach a bheith curtha chun báis ar a shon, rud a tharla do gach n-aon acu ach duine amháin.

Nuacht Fíormhaith atá ann

dúinn. Dea-nuacht atá ann. Cad chuige? Tá a fhios againn anois go bhfuil Dia ann a bhfuil grá aige dúinn comh mór sin gor fhulaing sé agus fuair sé bás ar ár son, toisc go ndéanaimid peacaí, fulaingimid agus faighimid bás. Áfach! Tá tuilleadh den scéal fágtha. Fuair Íosa an bua air sin uile. Ní deireadh an scéil iad ár lochtanna, ár gcruatan agus ár lochtanna. Mar gheall air Íosa Críost.



# Great reception for Fr Michael at first Masses in Cathedral and St Mary's Killyclogher

IN the first few days after his Ordination, Fr Michael McCaul was kept busy celebrating his first Mass in his home parish of St Eugene's and in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher, in Omagh, Co Tyrone, where he had ministered in the lead up to his Diaconate. Large numbers of well-wishers turned out for both Masses, taking the opportunity to receive Fr Michael's first blessing before enjoying some refreshments and conversation in the parish halls afterwards.

Celebrating Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral on the Feast of St Aidan, January 30, in thanksgiving and in memory of his father, Michael, the newly ordained priest spoke on the reading from St Mark's Gospel about the Demoniac being made whole again after an encounter with Jesus, which he noted left him "with his dignity as a Christian fully restored".

"Jesus is the One in control of events and lives. It's interesting that the demons know this rightly and know who Jesus is, yet we sometimes don't recognise Jesus, the Living Son of the Most High God present and at work in our lives every single day," remarked Fr Michael, adding: "So let us undo the chains that shackle us and try to separate us from our loving Father.

Let us run to Jesus not from a distance, but from exactly where we are at this very moment of our journey in life. Let us humbly kneel before our Healer and Saviour and let us proclaim from top of our voices who Jesus really is... 'Son of the Most High God'."

He went on to point out that when the Demoniac was healed,

Jesus sent him out to proclaim the Good News, and reminded those gathered that the "same healing and privileged encounter" awaits them at each Mass, saying: "If we are ready to accept this healing, then we can go out like the restored Demoniac and spread the Good News of what Our Lord Jesus Christ, 'Son of the Most High God', has done for us."

At the end of the ceremony, Fr Michael expressed heartfelt appreciation for all the love, support and guidance he had received on his journey, saying: "Thank you for helping me to believe in myself. It was the strength of your faith and prayers for me that kept me going."

On behalf of the parish, Fr Paul Farren, Adm St Eugene's, congratulated Fr Michael on his ordination and for celebrating his first Mass with them in the Cathedral, which drew a loud and long applause from the congregation.

The overflowing St Mary's Church, in Killyclogher, for the Vigil Mass celebrated by Fr Michael, on Saturday, February 4, was a wonderful tribute to the impact he had on the parish community during his ministry there prior to his ordination.

Joined on the altar by the parish priest, Fr Kevin McElhennon, Fr Declan McGeehan, curate, and Rev Stephen Ward, deacon, Fr Michael told those gathered that was truly delighted to be amongst them again, adding: "This is a place very dear to my heart, since I spent so much formative time here, including the celebration of my Diaconate."

Commenting on the Mass

readings for the Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time, he spoke to the congregation about the Church being "a light in the dark", saying: "She reminds her children that the light will be brighter if all Christians live a life of love through, with, and in Christ, together as one Spirit."

Noting what the Prophet Isaiah had said we must do for our light to shine, "Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the homeless, and cloth the naked," Fr Michael said: "These are what the Church calls the corporal works of mercy. These are the necessities of life and their depravation robs humanity of her dignity and leaves her in perpetual darkness. Therefore, we must be as the Psalmist encourages us, 'that good person, who is a light in the darkness for the upright.'"

Going on to comment on St Paul having been the light through which the pagan Corinthians saw the light of Christ, he said: "Therefore, our encounter with people must leave them better than we met them. It must wipe off the dust of worry, shame,

despair, and disappointment. It must liberate them and help them to appreciate the truth by drawing close to God."

Remarking that 'charity begins at home', Fr Michael continued: "We must first be light and salt in our homes and communities. And only then will our world feel the positive effects of our light. We must not starve it of the sweetness of our testimonies and good works."

Delighted to have Fr Michael back in the Cappagh Parish celebrating Mass, Fr Kevin said: "It was wonderful to have been involved in a small part of Michael's journey to the priesthood."

At the end of the ceremony, an Icon of the Crucifixion that was commissioned for Fr Michael on behalf of the parish was consecrated with the Oil of Chrism, with Fr Kevin expressing the hope that meditating on the Icon would draw the newly ordained priest more into the mystery of Christ and into a life of prayer."



Following his first Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral, Fr Michael McCaul received a Stole from Christina McLaren, Derry Diocesan President on behalf of St Joseph's Young Priests' Society. Included are Fr Patrick Lagan, who assisted at the Ordination ceremony, and SJYP Society members, Margaret Curry, Celine McDaid, Anna Peake and Marian Tosh.

## Cathedral



# Killyclogher



## Vocations News

WITH a successful Year of Prayer for Vocations having come to a close in the Diocese on St Patrick's Day, Holy Hours to pray for Vocations will continue to be held on the second Friday of each month.

The next will take place on Friday, April 14, in St Eugene's Cathedral at 8 pm, and will be led by Fr Patrick Lagan, CC Waterside.

The National Year of Prayer for Vocations will be launched on April 25, the Feast of St Mark the Evangelist, with theme 'Take the Risk for Christ', and will begin a few days later, on April 30, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, which is Good Shepherd Sunday.

The launch will take place during a conference on Evangelisation & Vocation in Maynooth, which has as its theme 'Priesthood in a Synodal Church'. Before that, there will be a Vocations Weekend Retreat in Drumalis Centre, Larne, from April 21-23. Those interested in attending need to register in advance and can get further information by contacting the Diocesan Vocations' Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan on (028) 7938 6259 or at pgoh2111@gmail.com

Evangelisation & Vocation Conference  
**Priesthood in a Synodal Church**  
 April 25<sup>th</sup> (Feast of St Mark the Evangelist)  
 Renehan Hall, Maynooth, 10 am – 4 pm

Keynote Speaker  
**Archbishop Rino Fisichella**  
 Pro-Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelization

Panel

 Wendy Grace Inmate & Broadcaster Moderator	 Bishop Phelim Cullinan Chair of the Irish Bishops' Council for Vocations	 Fr Brendan Kilcoyne Team Archdiocese Regular Broadcaster	 Dr Gavin Ashenden Former Anglican Priest and Bishop	 Jennifer Kehoe Wife and Mother
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Further Information & Registration visit the Vocations Website  
[vocations.ie/conference](http://vocations.ie/conference)

NATIONAL VOCATIONS OFFICE  
 IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Conference Free of Charge - Please register as soon as possible as spaces limited



**DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD FROM WITH FOR ALL**

A PRIEST IS FROM, WITH, AND FOR ALL. DO YOU WANT TO GIVE YOUR ALL?

21-23 April 2023 @ Drumalis Retreat House, Larne  
 Diocese of Armagh, Clogher, Derry, Drogheda, Down & Connor, Kilmore and Raphoe  
 Directed by Fr Stephen Langridge



## Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during April for:

**A Culture of Peace and Non Violence:**

We pray for the spread of peace and non-violence, by decreasing the use of weapons by states and citizens.

### Prayer for Priests

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

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

Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the courage to proclaim your Word of justice, love and truth.

Bless, in a special way, Your servant

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

### Remember in prayer during April:

- Fr Michael McCaul (April 1st)
- Fr Con McLaughlin (2nd)
- Fr George McLaughlin (3rd)
- All priests (4th)
- Fr Peter McLaughlin (5th)
- Fr Kevin Mulhern (6th)
- All Priests (7th)
- Fr Peter Madden (8th)
- Fr Anthony Mailey (9th)
- Archbishop Eamon Martin (10th)

- Fr Gerard Mongan (11th)
- All Priests (12th)
- All Priests (13th)
- All Priests (14th)
- Fr Kevin Mullan (15th)
- All Priests (16th)
- All Priests (17th)
- Fr Sean O'Donnell (18th)
- Fr Seamus O'Connell (19th)
- All Priests (20th)
- Fr Colm O'Doherty (21st)
- Fr Kieran O'Doherty (22nd)
- All Priests (23rd)
- Fr Francis P O'Hagan (24th)
- Fr Patrick O'Hagan (25th)
- Fr David O'Kane (26th)
- All Priests (27th)
- Fr Peter O'Kane (28th)
- All priests (29th)
- Fr Arthur O'Reilly (30th)



## Holy Land pilgrims bring “a glimpse of Easter hope and joy” to its suffering Christians

OVER 70 of the 110 pilgrims who visited the Holy Land in February, with Bishop Donal as their spiritual director, were from the Derry Diocese, and some of them have shared their experience in this feature.

The nine-day pilgrimage was organised by Marian Pilgrimages in conjunction with ‘The Irish Catholic’ newspaper, with the aim of showing prayerful solidarity with the Christians of The Holy Land.

In a message to the pilgrims, Omagh-born Michael Kelly, of ‘The Irish Catholic’, told them: “Our presence with God’s people here is much appreciated. It reminds them that they are not forgotten and it brings to the gloom of their suffering a glimpse of Easter hope and joy.”



## I hope Holy Land pilgrims have been renewed in faith and able to enrich others as we journey as disciples of Jesus by Bishop Donal

CATHOLICS often think that they know little about the Bible. It is true that reading the scriptures was not as big a part of our tradition as it was in other parts of the Christian family.

But, we have all grown up with a remarkably visual familiarity with the Bible stories – through stained glass windows, holy pictures, memories of songs and stories from school days, and even films. And, of course, the Bible is proclaimed during the scripture readings each day at Mass.

We know the names of Jesus and His Apostles. We have heard about Moses, Mary, Zacchaeus, and the blind beggar at Jericho, and so many other biblical figures. And, we have heard the parables, those great word pictures that Jesus painted. However, these are often fragmented elements of the Bible story.

A pilgrimage to the Holy Land can help us get a first-hand view of the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan, the wilderness of Judaea and the Mount of Olives. And to tie together the scattered pictures that we have in our heads.

So much has changed over 2,000 years in the famous towns of Nazareth, Capernaum, Jericho, Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

And yet, when we visit the holy sites and remember the

extraordinary events associated with them, we can prayerfully enter into the mystery of the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. We can celebrate the Annunciation in Nazareth and the Nativity in Bethlehem. It is powerful to wait patiently in a queue to see the spot where Calvary was and where Christ’s tomb is believed to have been.

It is good at the end of a pilgrimage to go through the 20 mysteries of the Rosary, and to see in our minds a place that is associated with each of them. That can be a real help when we come to pray and meditate upon the mysteries of Christ’s life in the company of the one who loved Him most, His first disciple, His mother Mary.

But the most important part of a pilgrimage is something deeper. Jesus did not come merely to give people a series of places for lovely photos, or information for a quiz on biblical trivia.

In these holy places, He still wishes to talk to us about our need for hope and healing, for forgiveness and a fresh start. He still says to us: “Peace be with you, do not be afraid.”

Not everyone can get the chance to be a pilgrim in the footsteps of Christ. But I hope that those who were with us in recent weeks, from February 12-20, will have



At the River Jordan.



been renewed in their own faith and be able to enrich others as we journey as disciples of Jesus. Jesus still calls us all to come, follow him – and to be fishers of people. If we have received much, much is expected from us (Luke 12:48).

## A busy and memorable pilgrimage to the Holy Land by Collette Carlin

EASTER 2022 passed in a blur for me, as my Mum passed away peacefully on Good Friday, the same day as Jesus, so I had missed all the Easter services in our Church for the first time in my life. When I spotted a Facebook post in September 2022 to visit the Holy Land on a Pilgrimage in February 2023, led by Bishop McKeown, I just knew it was a message from Mum to say you missed them at Easter, so why not go and experience it in reality, and that is what I did in the company of my cousin, Geraldine and 105 other pilgrims.

### Day 1

This Pilgrimage was organised by ‘The Irish Catholic’ in conjunction with Marian Pilgrimages, and began on February 12 with a car trip from Donegal to Dublin airport for our 4.45pm flight. Our first stop was Istanbul after a flight of four-and-a-half hours, and then after a one hour stop we continued to Tel Aviv Airport, a further two-hour flight. After passing through strict protocols at the airport, we then met our Tour Guide, Louis, who guided us to the bus. After

a 90-minute bus journey, we arrived at the Ramada Hotel in Nazareth at 6 am! Now Israel is two hours ahead of us and it had been a long day and night, but we all managed to get some well needed rest before our wakeup call at 8.30 am on Monday!

There were two groups of pilgrims, BUS A and BUS B.

### Day 2

Our first Mass took place around the altar in the beautiful Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth at 11 am, celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown assisted by Fr Barry Mathews, Armagh, and Fr John Carroll, Wexford. In his homily, Bishop McKeown spoke of the surprises we would get as we travelled on our pilgrimage in the Holy Land and how right he was! Our newly assembled choir added so much to this ceremony. This church has a beautiful mosaic depicting the apparition of Knock, which was a gift from the Irish Catholics in Nazareth. This is one of many amazing mosaics in the Church.

Nazareth is the general area where the Holy Family lived and it is hard to imagine it as a

small bustling village in early AD compared to the densely populated city today of over 70,000 residents, with buses and all nationalities visiting here.

We then visited the nearby St Joseph’s Church and St Mary’s Well, which was the only source of water in Nazareth at that time for the Holy Family to get water. I filled a little bottle with water to take home. In the afternoon after our lunch, we travelled by bus to the Franciscan Wedding Church of Cana. Bishop McKeown celebrated a lovely service of Renewal of Wedding Vows, blessing of rings and presentation of Certificates. It is thought this Church represents where the Wedding Feast of Cana and Jesus’ first miracle took place. We went downstairs and viewed some of the excavations, including a large stone jar similar to the one that Jesus asked them to fill with wine. On the return walk to the bus, some pilgrims had the privilege of some wine tasting. A weary group of pilgrims returned to the Hotel for some rest and our evening meal. Friendships were beginning to form and noise level beginning to rise in the restaurant!

### Day 3

Early rising and busy days were becoming the pattern for our trip. We departed the hotel at 7.30 am to travel to the Sea of Galilee. Bishop McKeown travelled on our bus today, as he alternated each day between both groups. This visit was one of the high points of the trip for me. All 107 pilgrims boarded the Boat Noah and sailed on the Sea of Galilee. The Irish Flag was raised and flew beside the Israeli Flag while Amhrán Na bhFiann was sung. The water was calm, the sun shone and it was so difficult for me to really believe that we were actually on the water where Jesus had walked. It was just so overwhelming and a beautiful experience.

We then travelled to Tabgha to the Church administered by the Benedictines, with the beautiful mosaic of the Loaves and Fishes representing the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, which took place near here. Then on to the Franciscan Church of the Primacy of St Peter, which is built on the shores of Lake Galilee. The rock in front of the altar is reported by tradition



Collette Carlin, Urney and Castletfin Parish

to be where Jesus laid the fish He cooked for His apostles after the Resurrection. This is also the place where Peter was re-confirmed as Vicar of the Church, following in Christ’s Footsteps. I was able to bathe my feet here as the sea ebbed and flowed on the shore. We also paid a short visit to the Mount of Beatitudes with a stunning view and entered the octagonal church with the eight beatitudes commemorated in stained glass.

We then travelled to Magdala, where we stopped for a very special lunch. We were served

Peter’s Fish and there were also other choices, but most pilgrims tasted the special fish which was a delicious, delicate white fish. Next stop was a visit to Magdala, but unfortunately one of our pilgrims had a fall and I accompanied her and her sister to the Medical Centre in Tiberius to get medical attention. We spent a number of hours there and got excellent attention and returned to our hotel later that evening by taxi.

### Day 4

After a 6.30 am wake-up call and breakfast, we departed our hotel

*continued from page 18*

at 8 am to travel to Mount Tabor, where we were transported by minibus taxis in groups of 12/14 up the winding hill to the Church of the Transfiguration for 10am Mass, which was celebrated with pilgrims seated all around the altar. It was a beautiful setting, as the altar is situated in part of the crypt and we had to climb down steps to be seated. In his homily, Fr Matthews spoke of the short prayer he recites several times a day: Trust, Surrender, Believe, Receive. This prayer really appealed to me.

After our service we visited the churches of Isaiah and Moses on either side of the entrance to the Main Church. There were fantastic views over the surrounding valleys. We descended the mountain in the taxis again and I happened to be in the taxi with student priests of the Legionnaires of Christ, who were studying in Rome. They were from Peru, Argentina and other countries throughout the world and they spoke reasonably good English.

After a lunch break, we returned to Nazareth to the Church of the Assumption, where we had some free time to wander and do some shopping. This was our last evening in Nazareth, so some packing had to be done after dinner before the next stage of our pilgrimage.

#### Day 5

We departed Ramada Hotel and headed towards Bethlehem. First stop was the River Jordan where Bishop McKeown celebrated a lovely service renewing our Baptismal Vows and blessed us all with holy water from the Jordan. We were able to fill water bottles with water from the River Jordan, the place where Jesus was baptised by his cousin, John the Baptist. Then we travelled to Jericho, where we celebrated another lovely Mass in a little church adjacent to a primary school. It was lovely listening to the excited voices of the little children as we entered the Church.

Onwards again to the Mount of Temptations. There were beautiful views of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. We could also see on the opposite side the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Temptation, which can be accessed by cable car. I tasted wee glass of freshly squeezed pomegranate juice. The wee lad doing it was making a fortune at €5 a glass! The usual scarves, bags and knick-knacks were on sale



in the local shops and, of course, there were camel rides available here as well.

We then travelled through the town and stopped briefly to view Zacchaeus' Tree and continued our journey to Qumran, where we stopped for lunch. This is the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1948 by a Bedouin Shepherd tending his flock. Unfortunately, due to time restraints we didn't investigate this site. We continued then to the Dead Sea, where a lot of pilgrims, including myself, entered the water for a swim, as I thought, but with the buoyancy we just floated! The water was warm and muddy with a few rocks underfoot that I was lucky to avoid. Photos were taken of many pilgrims covering themselves in mud, which has special minerals which are supposed to be beneficial for the skin! This experience was also another highlight for me.

We then travelled to Bethlehem, through very busy traffic in Jerusalem, to St Elias Hotel, where we stayed for another four nights. At this stage, we were a weary group of pilgrims and, after dinner, it was an early night for everyone.

#### Day 6

After a 6.30 am wakeup call and breakfast, we departed the hotel at 8am to travel to Jerusalem, with the first stop at The Mount of Olives. Here, we saw the Dome of the Ascension and the Pater Noster Church where Jesus taught His disciples the 'Our Father', and there are translations of the prayer in lots of different languages displayed on the walls here. We continued to the Garden of Gethsemane and the Dominus Flevit Church, and just beside the Church a small tree shaped as the Crown of Thorns. Our Group B photo was taken here.

After lunch, we proceeded to Mount Zion to the room where Jesus celebrated The Last Supper, the Tomb of King David, and

the Church of the Dormition of Mary, where Mary was assumed into heaven. The crypt area has steep steps and is heavily adorned with thuribles and lights in the Greek Orthodox style. Then to the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu, where Peter denied Jesus three times. Mass was celebrated here at 3 pm. A highlight of this Mass was our soloist, Elaine singing 'Jerusalem' at Communion time. Her strong voice just filled the Church. After Mass we went downstairs to the dark dungeon where Jesus was held on Holy Thursday night. This was a very moving experience to be in the exact spot where Jesus was the night before he died.

We returned to the Hotel for Dinner at 7 pm.

#### Day 7

We returned to Jerusalem and entered the Old Town through the Muslim Gate and proceeded to the beautiful St Anne's Church. This is the site associated with Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne. We went downstairs and viewed beautiful icons associated with Our Lady and her parents. When we came up again our group assembled on the altar area and sang the 'Bells of the Angelus'. The acoustics were amazing and a few tears were shed here. Adjacent to here is the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed the paralytic. After another group photo when we received The Cross, we began the Via Dolorosa, led in prayer and song by Bishop McKeown. Groups of five or six carried the Cross to each of the 14 Stations through the narrow, busy and market-filled, paved streets. This was another highlight of my visit.

After the Stations, we arrived at the busy Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is the site of Calvary. We saw the Stone of Unction and it was very moving to see pilgrims of different nationalities with their heads bowed low to the stone where the body of Christ was prepared for burial. We celebrated another beautiful Mass at this Sacred Site. After Mass, we queued for just over two hours (a long stand) to visit the tomb of Jesus. It was very interesting watching the reverent traditions of the various faiths that share this Church, as we stood in line.

Louis, our guide, was as tired as us at this stage of the day and so we didn't hear many 'Hurry,

hurry's', and we went for lunch, as we were starving! After lunch, we proceeded to the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. It was interesting watching as men and women were separated by a partition for worshipping at this holy site. We observed civilian soldiers carrying rifles and Jews wearing their traditional headgear and clothes which denote various forms of wealth.

After a long, busy day, we returned to our hotel.

#### Day 8

After another early wake-up call, we travelled the short journey to Manger Square and the Milk Grotto for the last Mass of our pilgrimage. It was very fitting that this Mass was here, where it is reported the Holy Family took refuge in a cave to escape the Slaughter of the Innocents, before fleeing to Egypt. We had a beautiful celebration of Mass, which again was enhanced by our excellent choir. After Mass, we visited the Church of St Catherine of Alexandria and then travelled by bus to the Shepherds Fields. We returned to Manger Square again and visited the Church of the Nativity, where we queued again to go downstairs to the Cave of the Nativity. To the right is an image of a Star set in a marble floor and to the left is the Grotto of the Manger.

After Lunch in a Christian restaurant on the Square, we then travelled by bus to Ein Karem, which is associated with John the Baptist and his family. We visited the Church of John the Baptist and then crossed the road and began the trek up the steep, stepped hill to the Church of the Visitation, where Mary greeted Elizabeth. Outside the Church, there are beautiful images of the Magnificat displayed. There are beautiful frescoes decorating the upper church at this site. This was a beautiful visit to conclude our pilgrimage

#### Day 9

An early wakeup call at 1.30 am, we departed Bethlehem at 3 am and travelled to Tel Aviv to begin our journey home, arriving in Dublin Airport at 3 pm.

I had been in the Holy Land in 2018 with Sister Perpetua and wanted to return again at some stage, so was delighted with this opportunity. Many thanks to Bishop McKeown, Fr Barry and Fr John for the beautiful celebrations of Mass each day, also to all my fellow pilgrims who made this visit so special, and not forgetting our wonderful choir led by Maire, who added so much to our celebrations.

I better not forget to mention our excellent Guide, Louis whose mantra of 'Hurry, Hurry', or 'Brostaigi, Brostaigi', will live long in my memory. As a Palestinian who lives in Bethlehem, he gave us a special insight into what life is really like living in Israel. I will keep them all in my prayers.

## The Via Dolorosa – a realisation that Jesus has shown us the Way and need to follow that, difficult as it may be *by Bernard Farren*

GOING to the Holy Land was something that had always been on my mind to do and I was sure would happen one day. Originally, all places were instantly sold out for this trip, but two months before departure date the 'phone rang and it was game on.

The intensity of the trip and the very busy daily itinerary meant that we were caught in a whirlwind, with little time to absorb fully the enormity of the places and the ancient history embedded in the hills, rivers, lakes and towns of this most beautiful countryside, not to mention our only reason for being there, namely to see where Jesus walked and taught mankind, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God, His Father, had come near.

One of the many things that occurred to me was the relationship that already existed between God and these ancient people long, long before the birth of Jesus. The Temples and Synagogues are all over the towns and various districts, enshrining the earliest Old Testament books where they were read amidst sacrifices to God, with incense and customs even familiar to us, today.

We heard Fr Eamon Kelly, in the Magdala Centre, explain to us that our Christian tradition has its roots in the Synagogues of ancient Judea, and this is something that really fills a void in my limited understanding and is very reassuring; that understanding fits very well.

Mankind has a clearly established link with God from time immemorial and it has been seamless since the beginning of Creation. It also became clear that the prophets of the Old Testament were the guardians and keepers of this relationship, and the arrival of Jesus on earth brought this to completion and perfection, heralding a new teaching of love and forgiveness.

Christmas time and the Bethlehem story will be forever more special now, as this relationship with God comes out so well at the birth of His most precious Son. The Angel appearing to the shepherds, announcing the birth of the shepherd of Man, and the Christmas star rising in the east, guiding the Magi to Bethlehem to pay homage to the new born king, all take on a completely new significance and understanding.

Every site visited was a highlight in itself, but one that stands out was our boat trip on the Sea of Galilee. A large part of the area and mountain side around there appears as it was in the time of Jesus and the Apostles, unspoilt countryside and pristine waters

of the lake. We had St Peter's fish for lunch, which was absolutely delicious and probably the very same as caught by the fishermen of the day.

Bishop McKeown read the Gospel passage where Jesus calmed the storm on the lake, thus reassuring His disciples and every single one of us that no matter what storm rages in our lives faith in him will do the calming for us.

In exploring the areas around Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee and Bethlehem, there is, without doubt, a tremendous feeling of the huge potential and opportunity for happiness and contentment that good relationship with God through Jesus has to offer each one of us.

This all changes when we visit Jerusalem and walk the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrow, along to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Garden of Gethsemane and Calvary, and visit the tomb of Jesus, and realise that this good relationship is no easy matter at all, but at the same time realising that Jesus has shown us the way and the need for us to follow that, difficult as it may be.

We go to the Ascension Dome, the highest point on the Mount of Olives where Jesus ascended into heaven, and realise that He has completed with perfection His earthly ministry and returns to the perfection of His heavenly Father.

It would be marvellous to return to the Holy Land again, sometime in the future, and maybe next time to do a smaller area and savour once more all that this most holy place has to offer us.



Bernard and his wife, Briege, from Fahan, Co Donegal.



# Entering Our Lord's tomb we could imagine the Angel say to the women...

## “He is not here, He is Risen!” by Elaine Noonan



Elaine Noonan, Dublin, formerly of Urney and Castletin Parish, with her father, Brendan Durning

A TRIP to the Holy Land had been on my mind for some time. I had hoped to be able to go during the year of my 40th birthday, but then lockdowns happened and that birthday came and went. So, when life finally started returning to normal, it felt that this was the time. I was delighted that my Dad was very enthusiastic about being my travel partner when I asked him; it was funny how a lot of people on our pilgrimage assumed that he had persuaded me to go along – when in fact, it was the other way around!

Things really seemed to fall into place when we heard about the pilgrimage with Bishop McKeown of the Derry Diocese. And not only that, but the dates fell during mid-term, when my children would be off school and could go to stay in Donegal with my mum. It seemed meant to be.

So, we set off, not really knowing what to expect, in February 2023. And it certainly was an experience of a lifetime. I am sure that we could all write a book about the things we saw, the places we visited and the things that touched our hearts and souls, but I will pick out a few of the ones that stand out most in my memory.

We began our trip in Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee area. We had the privilege of taking a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee (actually a lake, which we all realised was about the size of Lough Neagh – that was a surprise!). There was a moment in the middle of the lake when the Bishop was saying some prayers and reminding us of Jesus' miracles on the lake, such as when He walked on the water towards the apostles in their boat. When Bishop McKeown had finished speaking and praying, the boat engines were turned off and the most peaceful and intense silence descended. To be on the very lake where Our Lord performed such miracles, beside where He multiplied the loaves and fish, looking at the villages from where He gathered many of His disciples and where He himself lived during His ministry, was really breathtaking.

Another beautiful experience in that area were our trips to the excavated towns of Capernaum and then Magdala. In Capernaum, we saw the ruins of the house of Peter's mother-in-law, where Our Lord ate and slept and prayed and performed miracles. And in Magdala, we were reminded of all

the strong women in the Bible and in the Church.

A special moment was when my Dad and I were allowed to touch a beautiful mosaic of Jesus curing Jairus' daughter, and the photographs really make it seem as though my hand was in Jesus' hand, as He reached out, and with my father behind me. What a lovely moment for a father and daughter to share!

### Gethsemane

From Nazareth, we moved on to Bethlehem and Jerusalem. For me, the most moving experience of the entire trip was stepping into the Garden of Gethsemane. A profound sadness came over me in that place, and looking at the olive trees which were standing there from over 2,000 years ago, it made everything that Our Lord suffered so real, as He took all of our sins on His shoulders.

Built into the beautiful church is the rock where He lay prostrate as He wept and asked the Father to “take this cup from me, but not my will but thine be done”. And all this on the Mount of Olives, overlooking His beloved city of Jerusalem, where His own people rejected Him and put Him to death.

To then also move on to see the places where He was imprisoned, where Peter rejected Him, where He was scourged, and to walk the Via Dolorosa (Way of the Cross) in His footsteps was just a surreal experience.

I must say I was surprised by the mad hustle and bustle of market stalls and people all along the Way of the Cross. We could barely get space to stop at each Station, but we all supposed that it was probably an accurate reflection of what it was like when Our Lord carried His cross along that route, bruised and beaten, through the crowds who mocked and jeered and humiliated Him at every step. It was not a quiet, prayerful journey for Our Lord, and neither was it for us.

We ended the Way of the Cross at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where we waited in a very long (and not very orderly!) queue to enter the tomb of Our Lord, where we could imagine the angel saying to the women, “He is not here, He is risen!”

We were also able to visit the spot where His cross stood on Calvary and the stone slab where He was laid when He was taken down from the cross; all three of these surprisingly very close to each other.

I was blessed to be able to sing my heart out all week, along with a great group of pilgrims, all in fine voice! To sing ‘Jerusalem’ in the church at our Mass in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and to sing ‘Silent Night’ inside the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem, were incredible privileges that I will

never forget.

Another beautiful moment for me, personally, was during our visit to The Shepherds' Fields, where the angel announced to the shepherds that the Saviour had been born. In the small church there, I sang ‘Gloria in Excelsis Deo’ at the top of my voice, and it really felt like such a joyful moment in a joyful place.

Praise God!

It would be remiss not to mention the absolutely wonderful people we met along the way. Among over 100 pilgrims, we found so many genuine friendships and shared so many prayers and joys. I feel truly blessed to have been able to go on this amazing journey, and sharing it with my Dad was the icing on the cake.

Of course, arriving home just at the beginning of Lent must have been God's perfect timing. The Gospels have a whole new perspective now and the Mysteries of the Rosary have a whole new context as real events that happened in real places.

Now, when can I go back?

## Touching healing hand of Jesus on Raising of Jairus' Daughter mosaic a special moment for my daughter and I by Brendan Durning

MY daughter, Elaine had been talking for some time about how she would love to visit the Holy Land, and so, when the opportunity arose with Bishop Donal leading the Pilgrimage, I was delighted to accompany her, as my wife, Celine had offered to look after the children, with it coinciding with the mid-term break.

As we arrived at Dublin Airport, we identified fellow pilgrims from their Marian Pilgrimage badges, and so, straight away we were getting to know people from different parts of the country. As we proceeded through the airport, we met with more and more pilgrims, and Bishop Donal was busy welcoming everyone with his usual friendly chat.

Michael Kelly and Brandon, of The Irish Catholic, were on hand to direct us and so the group for the first flight came together, with everyone looking out for each other and making sure that anyone who needed help got helped.

Just a few weeks prior to the trip, I had been asked to put together a short talk for Cursillo entitled, ‘The Upper Room’, and I was looking forward to seeing how my perception of the Upper Room measured up to the real location.

I have to say that being there and just recalling the Bible stories of all the happenings around the Upper Room really brought everything to life and made it so much more real. The Upper Room is such a significant part of our Christian faith: the meeting place of the Apostles, the venue for The Last Supper and, of course, Pentecost, where God revealed His mission to the disciples. In truth, this is where the Church was born.

We were privileged have a wonderful guide in Nabil, who kept us really well informed on all the sites, everywhere we went. He also did his best to explain, or help us to understand, the on-going conflict, the disputed territories, and the struggle to control the minorities, and so, nothing has changed in two thousand years, it is just the same as when Jesus



Brendan Durning, from the Urney and Castletin Parish, with his daughter, Elaine touching the healing hand of Jesus.

walked these roads with His disciples.

The Sea of Galilee features so much in the Bible, even though it is really only a lake roughly the same size as Lough Neagh. Going on that boat trip gave us a wonderful perspective of all the sites associated with Jesus around the lake, before visiting Capernaum, the Rock of Peter, the Church of the Beatitudes, and so many more amazing places.

The Church at Magdala on the Sea of Galilee, with Irish-born priest, Fr Eamon Kelly and his sister, from Co Clare, was really impressive. When seated in that Chapel, which has an altar shaped just like a traditional fishing boat and a huge glass window behind the sanctuary, you are looking at a fishing boat on the sea. So impressive!

The Church at Magdala also has four side Chapels with amazing mosaics, one of which depicts the raising of the daughter of Jairus. This was special for us, as Elaine and I were encouraged to touch the healing hand of Jesus - together - to cement the bond between Jesus, father and daughter.

Fr Kelly also showed us all around the Church and the on-going excavations, where they continue to find more and more artefacts from the time of Jesus.

We were blessed with good weather, especially on the day we

went to the top of Mount Tabor, the site of the Transfiguration. That Mass, with the wonderful rendition of ‘Our Lady Of Knock’ ringing out on the top of that mountain, is something I will not forget.

I am so grateful to the people who shared their photos and videos on our return home, so to help us relive the experience of different sites, and to that gentleman, Pat from Co Cork, who shared his vast knowledge and expertise on the history of the Holy Land.

One of the last and most memorable places that we went to was the site of the Visitation Chapel in the Hill Country of Judea, where Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. I could have stayed there all day. It is a most beautiful church, with all its amazing icons and paintings to mark such an important event and location in the history of the Church.

I wish to highly commend the organisers of the trip, and most especially our own Bishop Donal, who gave of his time unreservedly to meet and talk with each and every one on the pilgrimage. He is a true leader of our time.

All in all, it was a most memorable trip. We made friends with so many wonderful people and, hopefully, we can meet up with many of them again, God willing.



# My trip to the Holy Land

by Fiona Garrity



Basilica of the Annunciation

AFTER all the excitement and trepidation of preparing for the trip to The Holy Land, the day came very quickly. I made my way to Dublin with a few others to begin the journey for eight days. It is a trip I will never forget and one of the highlights of the trip

was being accompanied by Bishop Donal McKeown.

On February 12, we flew from Dublin to Tel Aviv via Istanbul and we arrived at our hotel in the early hours of the morning. We were very warmly welcomed at the Ramada Nazareth Hotel.

The next day we began to visit various sites in Nazareth. The highlight for me in Nazareth was the Basilica of the Annunciation and where the Angel Gabriel visited Our Lady.

In every church the icons were amazing and each one told a story. As we visited every site, we read the scripture related to each place, which made it more real for us.

The Sea of Galilee was my next highlight of the trip. I will never forget my experience there. We had the opportunity to have a boat trip and I imagined Jesus walking on the water. As I looked out on to the Sea of Galilee it was all so overwhelming.

We continued on our way to other sites, and when in Cana we visited the Wedding Church, where couples in our group renewed their wedding vows. What a special place to be able to do this.

The Boat Chapel, which had an

altar made in the shape of a boat, had a beautiful view of the Sea of Galilee. This scene reminded us of Jesus preaching from the boat.

For the last few days of our trip we stayed in Bethlehem and in the St Elias Hotel, where we were very well looked after.

The next highlight for me was being able to get into the River Jordan where Jesus was baptised. We also renewed our baptismal vows. The River Jordan

It was sometimes hard to imagine that we were walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

The Dead Sea was a lovely experience for me as I lay on my back in the water and relaxed. After this, I covered myself with the mud from head to toe, and when I showered it off my skin was like baby skin. It is a pity it would not stay like that.

We visited so many more sites which I have not mentioned, but I cannot forget the Garden of Gethsemane and the dungeon where Jesus was held the night of Holy Thursday. To contemplate the sadness of it all because of our sins is very moving.

The Stations of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa followed the way Jesus walked carrying His cross. Although the narrow streets were very busy with the hustle and bustle of people buying and selling, Bishop McKeown was still able to lead us in prayer while we carried the cross. What an experience it was!

We visited the Western Wall where the Jewish people pray. This wall is known as the Wailing Wall, as the Jewish people are wailing because their temple was destroyed. We were able to walk to



The River Jordan

the wall and pray too. The Jewish people were so reverent, which impressed me so much.

I have not forgotten Jesus' birth place and Calvary, two more important places to visit. We had to queue three hours to enter the manger and Jesus' birthplace. It was a special, quiet moment for me but, unfortunately, we had to stay for a short time as there were so many more people waiting to enter.

I felt I was on Calvary as we climbed the very steep steps. This was another very special moment, visualising what Jesus suffered before He reached here. It made me more aware of the distance Jesus had to carry His cross before He reached this point.

As we went from place to place, thinking about the Bible scenes I was reading made it all come alive. The Bible was no longer imagining scenes but actually living them.

I could not have asked for a better group. There were 110 of us and everyone was so kind and helpful to each other. They were also a fun

group. I had so many great laughs with them. When I say laughs, I mean real hearty laughs, which does the soul good.

Bishop McKeown chatted to everyone and no job was too great for him. I found him to be very kind and humble in every situation.

Finally, our food was excellent. Our choice of food for breakfast and dinner was varied so that everyone could eat something. For breakfast there were cereals, fruit, vegetables, salads, breads, pastries, eggs and fish. At lunchtime, we had falafel or chips, and dinner consisted of a wide choice of meats, with rice, chips, salads and much more specialities of the country. Their desserts were delicious... traybakes and gateaux, which were hard to resist.

Overall, the trip was a huge success and one of the best trips I have ever gone on. There is a lot more I could say about it, but I hope this gives you a little idea of what a trip to The Holy Land is like.



Sailing on the Sea of Galilee.



Alice Higgins, Redcastle, Co Donegal, with a striking image at the Magdala Centre

# To be on Sea of Galilee that Jesus walked on and cooked fish beside was amazing

by Alice Higgins

THIS was my second pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and this time rather than engaging with the historical aspect, I reminded myself that I was walking in the land where Jesus had walked.

The buildings and road structures, and so on, weren't there 2,000 years ago, so I tried to imagine what it was like when Jesus lived on this land: when He was baptised in the Jordan; when He walked on the water in the Sea of Galilee; and when He taught the disciples on what is now known as the Mount of Beatitudes.

It was phenomenal that I had the privilege, health and wonderful company of the group I was with to walk that walk.

Since coming back home, my experience has transformed my being at Mass because I now understand better that the Body and Blood of Jesus is truly the New Covenant. Jesus came on this earth, suffered and died for me, for us.

It was a totally new spiritual experience for me. When I woke up in Bethlehem, I looked out the window and the sun was rising at six o'clock in the morning, and I just thought, 'I am in Bethlehem. I am in the location, the town land, where Jesus was born and that is the same sun shining on me that shone on Him'.

I had to keep reminding myself not to rush through the pilgrimage, with the doing and getting from 'A' to 'B' in the coach, but just to be present to such experiences as looking at the sun and thinking that is the sun that shone on Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and the Apostles, and that shone when Jesus was dying on Good Friday.

I made a point of bringing myself to an awareness of being there, in the places where Jesus had walked, rather than it just being an excursion. It was a beautiful experience.

My first pilgrimage to the Holy

Land was 30 years ago, and our guide had been a non-Christian Jew. This time, our guide was a Catholic Arab. So, it was good to experience both. The first guide didn't say, for example, this is the stable where Jesus was born, but rather that it could be. I was a lot younger at that time and I was looking for certainty.

However, on my second pilgrimage there, I felt that it wasn't important if that was the spot. It meant more to me that I was walking on the same land that Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and the Apostles had walked, and where Jesus had suffered and died.

To be on the Sea of Galilee that Jesus had walked on and had cooked fish beside was just an amazing experience. It was phenomenal to allow ourselves to think that we were actually there, breathing that air and seeing that sun.



Via Dolorosa



The Garden of Gethsemane



Sun rising in Bethlehem

# My Holy Land experience!

by Mia Harkin



Mia Harkin, Bridgend, Co Donegal.

MY name is Mia Harkin, I am 12 years old and I live in Bridgend, Co Donegal. A few weeks ago, I returned from an eight-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I'll be honest, when my mum first mentioned we were going, I really didn't know what to say. I wasn't even sure I would like it or how I felt about going. My Uncle was also born in Bethlehem, so he gave me some idea of what to expect.

Our trip was led by Bishop Donal McKeown, who is both the Bishop of Derry and Down & Connor. He was assisted by Fr Barry Matthews and Fr John Carroll. We started off our pilgrimage in Nazareth, which is the largest city in the northern district of Israel.

During our time there, we visited the Church of the Annunciation, which I loved because the Feast Day of the Annunciation is on March 25, which is also my mum's birthday! In the Church sits the grotto of the Annunciation where, according to our Catholic tradition, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that she would conceive and have a baby called Jesus.

I've only heard this story in Mass or in school during religion classes, but being there, it was like adding pictures to a story that had none.

Another highlight of my trip was when we went to the Dead Sea, which is a salt lake, bordered by Jordan to the East and the West Bank and Israel to the West. It is called the Dead Sea because no fish or water plants can live in it because of the high salt content. We were able to go out and float in it, which was an amazing experience, as you couldn't sink in it, just float. The River Jordan flows into it, where John the Baptist baptised Jesus.

My favourite part of the trip was going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is located in the Christian quarter of the old city of Jerusalem. Inside the church, there are two Holy sites, one is where Jesus was crucified, known as Calvary, and the tomb where Jesus was buried and resurrected from the dead. The church itself is shared between several Christian denominations - Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and the Coptic, Syrcyriac and Ethiopian Orthodox churches.

It was a great experience and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me.

During the pilgrimage, we walked the Via Dolorosa, which means 'way of suffering', which is a route in the old city of Jerusalem that Jesus would have gone on His way to His Crucifixion. It has 14 Stations of the Cross, nine of which are in the streets and the other five are in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. All the people in our group got a chance to carry the cross through the streets.

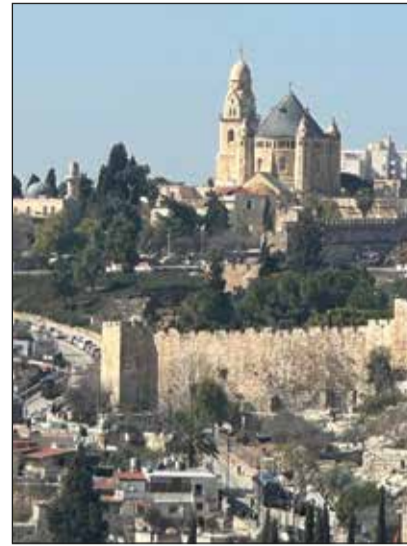
When we were in Galilee, I got to read at Mass on Mount Tabor. I was really nervous but glad to get that experience. We had to get a minibus up to the top of the mountain because the road up was extremely steep. Mount Tabor is also known as the Mount of Transfiguration.

We stayed in two different hotels during our trip, which were both lovely. The food over there wasn't much different than ours. They eat a big breakfast, a small lunch and a regular-sized dinner, which is different to the way we do it.

Some people on our pilgrimage sang in the choir or got a chance to read during one of the daily Masses. The choir was amazing, and everyone who read was fantastic!

Before we went on this pilgrimage to the Holy Land, readings during Mass were almost like stories rather than things that actually occurred, but being over there and seeing where these stories happened was almost like I was there when they happened.

Now that I have come back, I can 100% say that it was worth it and I would recommend it to anyone who has the chance, young or old, to see it!



Leonard Quinn - Leonard, centre, Ardmore, with Bishop Donal and fellow pilgrim, Alex Orr, Steelstown

# Holy Land pilgrimage an experience that strengthens Catholic faith

by Leonard Quinn

THIS was my third time to visit the Holy Land; my two previous pilgrimages there were with Sr Perpetua McNulty.

What draws me back is the wonder of walking in the footsteps of Jesus. I get renewed inspiration every time and it strengthens my faith.

The highlight for me is visiting the Crucifixion site. Every time I go there I get the same feeling that I did the first time I went to Lourdes. It is like a shiver that goes through me. Jesus was crucified for us.

I also love visiting the site of Jesus' birth and I always look forward to renewing my baptismal vows at the River Jordan.

I love the experience of the Holy Land so much that I would go back again. It is like a second home to me. When I go there, I feel like I am going home, that I am in the company of friends when I am there.

Sr Perpetua's pilgrimages didn't include the Dead Sea, so this was my first time there. I had always wondered if it was actually possible to stay afloat in the Dead Sea, so I took the opportunity to go in this time and I was amazed that I did float. I loved it. It was another highlight for me this time; I was just floating on air for a while afterwards.

Everybody that I was talking



to during the pilgrimage said that they loved it and had a great experience. I would highly recommend anybody thinking about going to the Holy Land to go. They won't regret it. It is an experience that would strengthen any Catholic's faith.





# Allowing the 'surprise' of the pilgrimage to influence our journey

by Geraldine Casey



Geraldine Casey, Letterkenny, Co Donegal

MY Holy Land experience came about with a chance meeting with my cousin who had just booked

her place on the pilgrimage. I thought, "Yes, that's something I want to do", especially as I had received a photo two days before from friends, taken on the Sea of Galilee and my response had been "It's on my bucket list".

I didn't have a lot of time to prepare for the pilgrimage, as a close friend died in the New Year, and it was a place I knew he had visited many years ago. We had a shared love of the Angelus prayer, which we prayed twice each day, whether we were together or apart. On the first morning of pilgrimage, we visited the Church of the Annunciation. I cried through all of the Eucharist, knowing that I was in a very special place and that my friend had visited here also. We prayed the Angelus in the sunshine with Fr John at noon.

I had listened to Bishop Donal's words at the start of our spiritual journey, when he directed us to allow the 'surprise' of the pilgrimage to influence our journey.

Little did he know that it was he himself who touched my elbow as I was walking very slowly, head bowed and contemplating, in the magnificent building at Magdala. I heard his voice saying, "Are you ok?" I'm not sure exactly what I said, but it was something like, "I'm very sad. I've lost my best friend. I'll tell you about it another time." His response was, "You don't have to." We then stood and listened to the guide and I was very conscious of Bishop Donal's presence behind me, supporting me, that was my 'surprise' moment.

A priest friend who knew that I was travelling to the Holy Land asked me to specifically remember him at the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu. I volunteered to read at our Celebration of Eucharist at 3 pm that day. This was another very special moment.

Our eight days were busy, but for me these three moments will stay with me as I continue my journey and remember my Soul mate who walked these paths before me.



The Migdal Synagogue, dating to the first century CE, is the first synagogue discovered in Galilee



# My faith is a lot stronger since the Holy Land pilgrimage

by Sean Laird

A few things stood out for me during my pilgrimage to the Holy Land. One was the privilege it was to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, visit Mary's Well, the Manger, Christ's Tomb, the Crucifixion site, and all the other sites that we visited. They all touched me in different ways.

Another thing that stood out for my wife, Mary and me, was the people on the pilgrimage with us. Everyone was so amazing, friendly, and had a great faith that they willingly shared with us.

Our guide, Nabil, was unbelievable in the knowledge that he has and his pride in sharing it with everybody.

I thought Bishop McKeown and the priests, in their own ways, were incredible. The singers were amazing and made some of the visits very special for Mary and me.

I know that my faith is a lot stronger since this pilgrimage, and I find myself listening more to the Readings at Mass because I can relate to them, having visited these sites.

This experience will stay with me all my life and I thank God for the safe journey there and back.

I have lots of memories in my head and my heart, and also on film and in photographs.



Sean and Mary Laird, Ballinascreen Parish, with Bishop Donal during the Holy Land Pilgrimage.



# The Holy Land... 'Dominus Flevit' by Fr John McLaughlin ssc

"The story of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus...and the debate on God's decision and interventions. A dispute over the ritual purity of a certain oven. One position (Eliza) is that its use is permissible. 'On that day, Rabbi Eliezer brought all the proofs in the world, but the other masters would not accept them. He said to them: If the law is according to me, let this carob tree prove it. And the carob tree moved a hundred cubits. Some say four hundred cubits! They said to him: We don't learn proofs from a carob tree. Then he said to them: If the law is according to me, let this stream of water prove it. And the stream of water turned and flowed backwards. They said to him: We don't learn proofs from a stream of water. Then he said to them: If the law is according to me, let the walls of the House of Study prove it. And the walls of the House of Study began to topple.

"Then he said to them: If the law is according to me, let the heavens prove it. A voice came forth from heaven and said: Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer? The law is according to him in every case. Rabbi Joshua rose to his feet and said: It is not in heaven. Rabbi Jeremiah said: The Torah has already been given once and for all from Mount Sinai; we do not listen to voices from heaven. For You have already written in the Torah at Mount Sinai: 'After the majority must one incline' (Exodus. 23, 2). Sometime later, Rabbi Nathan came upon Elijah. He said to him: What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do at that moment? Elijah said to him: He was smiling and saying: 'My children have defeated me, my children have defeated me'." (Talmud, Bava Metzia 59b)

The Rabbis were human and often humorous people as they talked about the relationship between God and His People. Rabbi Kushner, in one of his books, 'Bad things happen to good people', personalizes some of the drama of human nature around his own experiences and the story of the Book of Job in a very gentle way.

Rabbi Jonathan Lord Sacks has a book that I recall sharing with Fr Paddy Mc Goldrick, 'Not in God's Name', and leaves one with many surprises around the way we interpret the Bible.

They are part of what we are today, as practising Christians, and they also encourage us to look at the Israel and Palestine of today, at least in my case. I read some of Marc Ellis (liberal rabbi of New York) on Palestine and 'Israel Out of the Ashes'; not an easy but certainly a rewarding read from what appears so far, and gratifying in its honesty. But there are also the Palestinians on that same strip of land bordering on the Mediterranean, and events of today and yesterday confront us with harsh realities.

"Palestinians, samud, and nonviolent resistance."

Marie Dennis recently formed part of a Pax Christi International delegation to Israel/Palestine. (Pax Christi USA program director Roxana Bendezi also participated.) During the 10-day visit, the delegation met with Pax Christi members in Bethlehem (known as the Arab Education Institute), as well as several sister organizations: the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel; the Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center; Kairos Palestine; Youth Against Settlements; to name a few.

While still there, Marie sent the following report on the dire situation of Palestinians trying to live in what the United States call "the only democracy in the Middle East," Israel.

"This has been a packed, heartbreaking, but also hopeful week...We have heard from so many people (mostly Palestinians but also Israelis) the same devastating story of occupation, apartheid, shrinking space and outrageous behavior on the part of the far-right Israeli government.

"We have seen recently demolished houses and heard so many stories of people trying to hold on to their homes and land. We have heard about Palestinians who had tried for 20 years to get a permit to repair their house, who found out that an Israeli settler had a permit to build on their same plot of land. We saw so many places where the Israeli Wall separated families from their land and from each other, children from their schools, people from their olive trees.

"The new infrastructure of tunnels, huge bridges and new highways to connect settlements to Jerusalem is shocking. Relentless insults like the new sewage vent that regularly releases foul odors right next to a Bedouin elementary school classroom.

"Most have no hope at all in a two-state solution and think one state is impossible also. The stories of heartbreak are not old stories; they are ongoing... We heard again and again specifics about the deliberate, horrific control/exclusion of the Palestinian people that has to be clearly identified as carefully orchestrated apartheid. That is not anti-Semitic; it is the truth."

Compare that dire situation with a remark written by columnist, Thomas Friedman in the February 13 opinion page of 'The New York Times'. Approving of President Biden's recent warning to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to proceed with diminishing the principal corrective place which the Judiciary has in that country, Friedman affirms the following: "If Israel engages in some human rights abuses against the Palestinians, Israel often tells

us we should cut it some slack." Some human rights abuses!

Unsurprisingly, Marie, who leads the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, found hope in the people of Palestine. She continued in her report: "The people stay. I have been deeply impressed with the significance of samud (steadfastness) as an expression of nonviolent resistance. I have had many conversations about nonviolence here, trying to understand what role, if any, nonviolence had/can have in the struggle."

Marie's conclusion from these conversations: "People and communities affected by the violence have to decide for themselves whether or not nonviolence is useful in their circumstances."

## Explore

Way back in March of 2006, I had time and opportunity to explore some of those areas, 'to walk the land', as we say in Ireland. I include a piece that I wrote at the time, published in the Columban Far East...

## A Palestinian Parish: Aboud

It was the Feast of St Joseph which was being celebrated on that Sunday in the Parish church. Fr Firas Aridah was giving due prominence to all who bore the name of that 'just man'. During the homily, he invited them to come forward and, of different age groups, they proudly received their little 'momento'. The nine o'clock Mass was very well attended and today there was the additional attraction of three more priest celebrants and two religious sisters. We were here to accompany them; we wished also to hear their story.

And after the Mass, the whole congregation invited us to join them in the little hall adjoining the church and the school. Aboud is a small village in the north of the West Bank, quite near to the Palestinian city of Ramallah. It has about 2,500 inhabitants, equally divided between Catholics and Moslems, and they live peacefully and happily together. The Catholic Community is largely formed from the members of four large families. We shared some minerals and biscuits with the people.

Fr Hugh Hanley, a Scot who works with groups of senior teens, introduced us, by name and places of origin, to the parishioners; he used some well-prepared Arabic phrases, which certainly went down well. Some of the men wore the Arab garb, and seemed to be the elders of the community. Mahmoud, a member of the community, in his brief few words, spoke of the problems of the area: the lack of work; the checkpoints; the land being taken over from the settlers; and harassment of the youth of the area by the Israeli soldiers. (Fr

Firas had gone out to remonstrate yesterday evening as the soldiers seem to 'play around' with the documents, keeping the youth waiting for their good disposition; "They were just laughing at us," he said). Others, from amongst these parishioners, spoke individually to us, sharing their own feelings and indignation about what has been occurring.

So, we were next invited to take a walk through their village and its surroundings. The overall land surface is about 15,000 donms, but construction of houses is only allowed on 1,000 donms. And the rocky hillside, upon which the people have made their livelihood, is now ringed around with a very hostile fence.

Aboud has two Israeli settlements built upon its historic lands: Beit Arye, founded in 1980 as a military area and then extended to occupy 800 donms of their lands, and then Ofarim, established in 1982, first as a military area and then transformed into a large Israeli settlement. The two will occupy about 3,500 donms of the lands of Aboud. About 35% of these lands had been cultivated with olive trees and were mostly owned by Christian families. These settlements, like so many others in the West Bank, are ringed around by fences and have their own private roads. The Green Line, outlining the boundaries of the occupied territories, no longer represents the limits for either side, neither the Israeli nor the unfortunate Palestinian, hemmed-in, as they are on so many sides.

So, it was a sad little walk over that rocky hillside, where we viewed the cultivated ancestral olive trees, now removed from the use of their perennial owners by the alleged security needs of these settlements constructed over against the small town of Aboud.

The Christian Faith has been for nearly three millennia the inspiration of the majority of these people. Local tradition has it that the Holy Family sometimes took this route when coming to Jerusalem from Galilee. The Church has mosaics that date back to early Byzantine times, with some of the capitals bearing the images of cross and palm branches. There is also a Greek Orthodox Church and a mosque.

The whole community, Christian and Moslem, celebrates the village patron, St Barbara, on December 17 each year. Out upon that hillside where we walked with the members of the Catholic community, we entered a burial cave, adjacent to the ancient Byzantine Church of the saint. Local people had helped to restore it after earlier damage caused by the Israelis. And here we lit our candles and joined in prayer with the parishioners who accompanied us.



Fr Firas with Fr. Hugh, seminarian Tony and parishioner.

Later, at a pleasant lunch hosted by Fr Firas, we learned more about his efforts to keep this community alive, despite the loss of many of their ancestral lands; a very courageous and dedicated priest, his answers were patient on all sorts of topics.

They have a JOC (Young Christian Workers) for youth on Saturdays and also meetings for women on Wednesdays. The Fence, though, remained the principal topic and one came to understand the enormity of this project as we saw what is does to a young and small community. I found it more than painful to watch the video and listen to the people share on this event and its implications. Other members of our visiting group were equally sombre and reflective through the narrative. We saw the footage recording the local protest on the occasion of the closures, with signs of brutality by the soldiers, blood and tear gassing. One young man was beaten for much of the three hours in which he was held captive.

Another loss in this sector has been the water, a valuable commodity in the area and with about 25% of the water of the West Bank in this area. They have a school run by the Latin Patriarchate, the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher and Caritas, and they are trying, Fr Firas said, to follow the rule 'can't close a parish, can't close a school'.

Some of the young people, with whom we walked upon that rocky hillside, have University scholarships in the University of Bereetz, in Ramalla, which may keep them in or around the area in the time to come. There is a project to market the Olive Oil Soap, which (like the scholarships, at \$1000 a semester) we were encouraged to promote in our places of origin.

The Olive is part of Palestine, having many uses, such as light, worship, cooking, as we had been learning on our trips around the country. Fr Firas had the Ambon of his Church carved from an Olive tree, being a symbol of their determination to struggle on. The priest is a Jordanian, like many other Catholic priests in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem,

and he crosses the Jordan often to return to the quiet of his native village and seek relief from the tremendous stress and tension to which he and his parishioners are subject.

Leaving him then, we set off, guided by the parish seminarian Ala, also a Jordanian, to visit another parish nearby, in Jifna, passing on the way that of Birzet, Our Lady of Guadalupe. They had just celebrated Confirmation, so we greeted the Bishop and the priest of the parish, with some of his people, then we had a look at the Church and heard that the name of the place comes from the biblical 'Ofni' (Jos.18.24). The village has about 1,500 inhabitants, and it is Moslem and Christian.

It had been a day spent with Catholic Palestinians; a day like no other in our course in the Holy Land. And we carried with us some of the feelings and warmth of that Palestinian community, like many others, under siege and living in uncertainty.

Phrases of Fr Firas' Declaration, presented to Cardinal Theodore E Mc Carrick on his recent visit, will remain with all of us who were in that group:

"We announce publicly and decisively and under all that circumstances that we completely refuse the building of this segregation wall on the lands of our village or on any parts of the Palestinian territories. This Wall will affect largely and negatively all the aspects of life which in turn will reflect themselves on the village and its people... will swallow up thousands of donms of the lands of Aboud... will separate it from other surrounding villages, will affect social and educational aspects of life in the town...block our large areas of grasslands of farmers and shepherds...will put under Israeli control resources of ground water, which are about 20% of the ground water in the West Bank...will prevent the spread of construction despite the natural increase of the population...will have a bad psychological effect upon the people...We will arrange for peaceful demonstrations and protests against the wall."

### Mending Wall

And Sr Theresa, a USA member of our group, later quoted for us, from 'Mending Wall' by Frost:

*He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'*

*Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder*

*if I could put a notion in his head: 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it*

*where there are cows? But here there are no cows.*

*Before I built a wall I'd like to know*

*what I was walling in or walling out,*

*and to whom I was likely to give offense.*

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,*

*that wants it down'.*

### Hebron

On another occasion, some of us were encouraged (not officially!) to take a trip to Hebron, which has all sorts of biblical references, going back to King David, and now houses the tombs of some of the Hebrew Patriarchs. Here is what I wrote...

"Trip to Hebron this Saturday evening with Tsri from Bombay; a Mennonite:

My guide book, 'Frommer's Israel', gave a note of caution about visiting Hebron. Having talked about an outbreak of expulsions of Israelis in 1929 and the killing of 63 long-time residents there, it told of the killing in 1994 of Moslems at prayer in their Mosque of the Patriarchs, with an appalling number of dead and wounded. "Today Hebron is the most socially conservative and religious of West Bank major cities. Tensions are constant between Hebron's Arab citizens and Israeli settlers, who have returned to live in houses in the center of the town that had been previously occupied by Jews before the massacre...in 1929. The nearby settlement at Kiryat Arba is among the most militant in the West Bank; both sites are occasionally a flash-point for violence. Check with the Gov Information Office before you go."! So we had been warned and our own Institute had taken on no trips there in recent years for the same reasons!

This was a trip that we will not forget, for those who set out from the Institute with Tsri, who had graciously offered to share his experience with us. And, indeed, he proved a worthy and wise guide. With his knowledge of the terrain and of some of the language, he handled well all the situations that arose during the evening.

We got the local bus outside the Institute at 1.00 + and from there to the checkpoint well beyond the tunnels. Here we took a taxi/van and were fortunate in our driver, who proved himself patient and responsible. Tsri handled all the question of the money, about 50NIS for the whole evening.

So, as we drove along, he

pointed out to us the growing number of (Jewish) settlements, all illegal technically, with their own security, system of private roads and easy access through the checkpoints. All built upon prominent hilltops, and with the tell-tale trailers at a lower level indicating the continuing growth and building in progress. No sign there of the Agreement of Camp David, nor of any good will on the part of the Israelis with their propaganda for the sale of these properties.

On entering Hebron, through the bypass road, which is not at all convenient for the people of the area, we left our driver. We made our way along a narrow 'suk', where we could not but be taken by the system of hanging nets, filled with the refuse thrown from the upper floors occupied still by Israelis; they were ugly and oppressive by any standards. There was no trade in progress and shopkeepers tried to obtain our interest.

The idea was to get to the Mosque and the Synagogue, but the soldiers at the checkpoints there within refused us because they said that there was worship in progress in the Mosque. So we went around the block, led by Tsri, and came to the apartment occupied by the CPT, a peace group of international church membership and participation. George and Beth were the two in-residence and received us graciously with details of what they have taken on. They accompany children to their schools, acting as a vigilante group for the settlers under threat. They come on a visitors' visa for three months and some repeat for three years. George is an Anglican and the lady is a Buddhist, from New York. Some of their members have been beaten up by the Israeli settlers, who are arrogant and possessive.

And, unfortunately, this is not in the history of the historic city of David and Abraham and Isaac, whose tombs we visited in the Mosque later on. Up 'til 1930, at least, there was harmony between the two peoples and neighbours who took care of the other in later conflicts. These new settlers would have no such ties, coming from New York, etc, to a place that has only a symbolic value for Jews, as it has for Christians and Moslems.

Nowadays, with the forceful expulsion of so many Palestinians since 1967, when the Jordan West Bank control ended, there is continuous pressure on those that remain. And there are more and more Israeli settlements within the city limits, all with their private roads and their private guards, as well as 1500+ soldiers to look after their security (recent figures talk of 450 + settlers) in the city itself. So, we saw and heard from this CPT house, and its roof top; the buildings were clearly outlined against the sky, the troops on various rooftops and, later on, the small guarded and marshaled groups of women and

children coming up the deserted (private) road to their place of worship, which they now share with the Moslems, dividing that building in half and having days exclusive to each. They seemed rather threatening and some of their calls were offensive to us, as we managed to obtain permission to walk along that road, as a group of pilgrims about to visit one of the prophet's tombs, as we said.

So, when we bade farewell to George (from Syracuse in Upstate New York, who said that he felt he had to just get up and do something after hearing some testimonies) and B, we made our way once more to the entrance to the Mosque and were let pass through the control point. The keeper of the Mosque received us well and allowed our photos, taking off our shoes and listening then to his explanations. He told of the 'mad German Jew, Goldstein', who (in 1989?) ran riot in the Mosque killing many people, and he showed us the bullet holes in the rear walls. We worshipped at the tombs of Sara and Abraham and Isaac there within. Theresa and Fran had to don suitable habits in order to gain entrance and appeared quite the religious in the process!

Then we came around to the other side but were unable to gain entry to the Synagogue and complete our worship. Some groups, by this time, were being led down from the settlements and met us on the way back up on their private road. This in itself, as mentioned earlier, was rather threatening to us. And so we stuck together as a group, taking only a few photos on the way. On the road, we were shown to two young foreigners, like ourselves, sitting watching; members of the CPT, a voluntary group of

international observers, alone in that strangely hostile street. A little way down the road, we saw where the fruit market, recently owned by a Palestinian, was now empty and his tenure will not be renewed despite his appeal in court. A similar situation was faced by the owner of the petrol station a little further along this now private road. Both have been amongst the many deprived of their homesteads and livelihoods.

We stood outside those checkpoints on the Palestine side, on a Saturday afternoon, which seemed so unreal a few meters behind us. All of us were moved by the experience and wondered just what we could do to improve the situation, at least by informing others of the deep injustices being committed daily there in that city. Our taxi turned up and drove us to a Pottery factory, and with the prices on offer and some beautiful pieces, we bought small plates, ashtrays, clock faces, with some well-known biblical scenes coloured into the work. After this, we visited briefly a glass factory, and were easily tempted to buy some glasses, plates and vases, and all at excellent factory prices.

It was a short trip, but it seemed to be a turning point for many of us as we faced a harsh reality that has few redeeming features."

### Weep

During my walks around Jerusalem in those weeks, I learned how to get to the little tear-shaped chapel of 'Dominus Flevit', passing Gethsemane, the Church of the United Nations, the Jewish cemetery on the Jericho Road, and climbing up a sharp hill. It offered a great view of the Dome of the Rock and a reminder of that huge division and place of conflict for Jews and Moslems,

and it certainly evoked strong feelings in me and made me want to return and weep a little with the Lord, on the atmosphere in His Jerusalem.

These days, as I admire the constant visits and declarations of the English and Scottish Bishops and their faithful, I post them on to the social media and imagine myself, spiritually, once more walking up that hill to 'Dominus Flevit' to make my own prayers and lower my strong feelings and indignation, at least for the moment.



Fr Firas.



Parishioners of Aboud



Settlement ... and fence in the distance

## Lord that I may see by Vera McFadden

I am partially sighted. It is hard when one loses sight, it is hard to accept, but I know that God can give me my sight at any time.

When my sight began to go, different people told me of powerful intercessors. One man told me that many people who had sight problems came to St Columba's Church in the Long Tower to pray to St Lucy, and some received healing.

St Lucy was a martyr. When she died, her killers removed her eyes, but the story goes that they returned to their rightful place.

I prayed to St Lucy, but to no avail.

A lady told me to pray to Raphael the Archangel. In the Old Testament, we are told that Tobias, son of Tobit who was blind, was walking with the Archangel Raphael towards Media. As they passed the river, Tobias went into the stream. A large fish brushed his foot and Tobias caught it and brought it to the bank, where Raphael told him to take out its gall, heart and liver.

Raphael told Tobias that the gall from the fish could be used as an

eye ointment to cure dimness of vision, and that the heart and liver could be used for other cures. Tobias took the gall and put it on Tobit's eyes and his sight was restored.

Of course, on this occasion it worked. Once I bought a statue of an Angel holding a fish, and a pupil told me that this statue represented Raphael. He had been told the story by his teacher.

One of the Holy brothers in Rosnowlough told me to pray to Bartimaeus. He was the blind man near the roadside. When he heard that Jesus was passing, he called out, "Jesus son of David have mercy on me." He was told to be quiet but shouted louder. Jesus asked that he was brought to Him, and asked him: "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said: "Lord that I may recover my sight." And Jesus said: "Recover your sight, your faith has made you well."

My friend, Winnie lost her sight after a fever at the age of three years. A few years later, her mother asked Fr Conway to come and bless the house, which he did and anointed



Winnie's eyes. Winnie opened her eyes and looked around the room. She was able to enjoy the beauty of nature with us all from then on.

Many times there have been healings after recitement of the priest's Office, and many have had their sight returned after visiting the Holy well in Lourdes.

One of the miracles happened after the American Capuchin priest, Fr Solanus Casey, attended to a husband and wife. The wife was blind and being guided by her husband's arm. After praying with Fr Solanus, her sight was restored.

Most blind or partially sighted people do not get their sight back. The story is told that a man

asked Padre Pio would his sight be restored and was advised not. However, there are still many miracles around the world.

The gift of acceptance is still a gift from God and we can still remember beautiful scenes from the past.

"Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change..."

Padre Pio said: "My past Oh Lord to your mercy. My present to your love. My future to your providence."

We can always hope. Wisdom could be called great insight...

"...courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." (Serenity Prayer)

# What makes a Saint?

## *The life of Discalced Carmelite Friar P re Jacques of Jesus*

by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd

THE writer Kenneth Woodward asked the rhetorical question, "What is a saint?" In answer to his own question, Woodward came up with this answer: "The story of a saint is always a love story. It is a story of a God who loves, and of the beloved who learns how to reciprocate and share that 'harsh and dreadful love.' It is a story that includes misunderstandings, deception, betrayal, concealment, reversal, and revelation of character. It is, if the saints are to be trusted, our story. But to be a saint is not to be a solitary lover... It is to enter into deeper communion with everyone and everything that exists."

From Woodward's definition, we can re-work an understanding of what it is to be a saint. The saint is not some angel who floats through life, the saint is not some picture perfect humanity, nor is the saint a plaster cast model of real life. Rather, a saint is one who from the depths of their own reality, a reality that is stricken with failure and fragility, engages in a dynamic interaction with the Divine Persons.

The saint is never a self-made man/woman or a do-it-yourself expert in life, rather the expertise is always God's. God always initiates the dialogue by speaking first to the person. As the eminent Swiss theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar pointed out, God chooses saints, He chooses people to share His intimate life with, in choosing He picks great and small, known and unknown, pious and sinners, lay and clerical. God's choice is made in complete freedom and comes from the depths of who He is. The choosing is a complete grace, no one, and no thing that person can do, will ever earn it, no person is ever worthy of it, and never ever does any person do holiness on their own.

When God initiates the dialogue, He has some purpose or mission in mind. As He thinks and loves the person, so He gives each of the saints their own particular task to be carried out. At the exact moment He begins to show them their mission in life, He starts to give them the grace for the task to be carried out and completed. The holiness of God in a saint begins to be a dynamic life-giving force when the saint listens intently to what it is that God offers them, and responds in freedom. The saint responds in the form of surrender; they give a full throated 'Yes!' to not their own programme for life but to God's.

The 'Yes' the saint utters does not remain as a singular experience. It has to be repeated over and over again. Each time they grow in the awareness of the extent of the mission and how much it asks of them, they have to make another

affirmative response. Nothing in the life of a saint is simple or straightforward. The 'Yes' is not at all times equally strong, at times it is watered down, sometimes it is a matter of 'not now but later', at times the person will stumble or hesitate, even at times the 'Yes' will fail to live up to the ideal.

Each time the saint falls into the dust of their own fragility, God bends down to them, tends their wounds and gets them to their feet. God will pull their poverty ever further along the path to the mission that He set for them.

### Possession

A saint will never take possession of the mission God gives them, rather, the roles are reversed and the mission takes possession of the saint's life and directs the course of that life. The mission can be just about anything: a mission to prayer; to suffering; active involvement with the poor; involvement in a small prayer circle; to friends in need of support; or to a family. The mission can make the saint stride onto the World stage, or it can be so hidden that it is apparent to no one but the saint themselves. It really does not matter if the mission ends in success or failure, but what is truly important is that the saint is faithful to what he or she has heard God ask of them and that they have surrendered themselves completely to it.

The Paris Province of Discalced Carmelite friars is busy with the work of preparing a request to the Holy See petitioning that a process be opened into examining the saintly life of the Discalced Friar, known in religion as P re Jacques of Jesus. The life of this friar is not well known in this country, and I would like to take some time to examine the important events of that life.

P re Jacques' baptismal name was Lucien-Louis Bunel. He was born almost on the very stroke of a new Century; January 1900. He was born in Normandy, in the north of France, in the community of Barentin. Lucien was the third child of Alfred and Pauline Bunel. The Bunels were very consciously members of the

urban working class. Alfred was a spinner of fabrics, who through hard work and long hours worked himself up to the level of foreman.

As a worker, he had also been active in the formation of unions to lobby for fairer wages and more healthy conditions. In a gilded age, when the gap between the rich and the poor was so wide, and when drastic measures could easily be used to prosecute agitators, it showed a daring and social responsibility that Alfred passed onto his children. Pauline came from rural peasant stock and had come into the city for her marriage.

The Bunels being working class is significant, both in a historical and theological sense. Since the beginning of the French Revolution in the 18th Century, in 1789, the cause of the Church particularly in France had come to be identified with the monarchy and aristocratic elites. The church was seen as conniving with those elites to keep the poor in their place and with only a gospel of deference and suffering to offer the working class. That potent stereotype of the Church's position had significant ramifications. The entire 19th Century had seen a slow eking away of the urban poor from the pews to left wing revolutionary and Marxist parties and unions.

Alfred Bunel was a notable exception; he went to morning Mass before work every morning and it was noticed that between the Church and the factory, he prayed his Rosary. All the children of the family had fond memories of learning their Catholic faith on their mother's lap in the kitchen of their small home. The two parents' firm, yet generous' faith inspired all their children to embrace the life it offered for themselves.

Lucien was by all accounts a "normal" child, getting into the same antics, games and scrapes as other children. He was not above having a fight with one of his brothers over some minor, childish issue but, overall, his family noticed that in his character there was affection, patience, and a positivity that showed itself up with brotherly advice and a word of encouragement at the right time. From an early age, his daily communicant father had encouraged him to be an altar server. As an altar server, he came into close contact with his parish priest, Father Ternon.

### Dedicated

Fr Ternon was a particularly dedicated pastor of souls. Interestingly, he consciously directed his ministry to the working classes, he was attuned to the people in his care, and could hear the voices that were

influencing them out of his parish pews. He wanted to offer the working class and their children an alternative to left wing political answers. The bishops of France had worked out a generic response to these problems; they emphasised the significance of the family and that the family was always going to be the primary agent of the evangelisation of the young.

Fr Ternon threw himself enthusiastically into creating youth groups, sodalities and confraternities, a scouting movement and vacation programmes. At the core of these groups was the catechism and the sharing of the Gospel, all placed into the context of shared physical exercise and outdoor activities.

Lucien saw Fr Ternon's zealous efforts to evangelise from close quarters, both as an altar server and as a participant in many of the programmes himself. The ministry of Fr Ternon became a form of language that God was addressing to Lucien, and he was hearing it and translating it for himself. Lucien was so enthralled by Fr Ternon's example that he saw his own personal mission start to appear and grow.

In the aftermath of his first communion, in 1912, Lucien told his parents that he wanted to be a priest. There was a problem immediately presented by such a request, as a requirement of being a priest was a grammar school education, and a grammar school education at the beginning of the 20th Century was not free. In order to send Lucien to the minor seminary, it would take every penny that Alfred earned and more to pay the school fees. Alfred went to the diocese, to the parish, and even to the factory owner, in order to get bursaries to assist the payment.

Each child in the family that could work was pushed into a job and each worked to support Lucien's place in the seminary. With so much family effort going in one direction, there could very well have been a contest of jealousy. His oldest brother, Alfred owned up, "Lucien...we should have been jealous but on the contrary, we respected him like he was a great person, so much was there of gentleness in his manner and character." Siblings seldom are fooled to the reality of those with whom they share so much of their lives with, nor are they blind to the character of their loved ones, so this quote speaks volumes of what Lucien's family was seeing in him, the 'greatness' of God at work. So much so, that they were prepared to put themselves on the line in order to give Lucien his chance to listen to the voice of the Spirit



Fr Pier with his parents

and to try his vocation in the seminary.

Maybe at this point, it would be appropriate to say something of the character and nature of the young Lucien. One part of that nature Fr Ternon made a commentary on, by raising Lucien to the status of being the head altar server, an honour that denotes Ternon's confidence in Lucien's competence, reliability and leadership skills. In his primary school, Lucien demonstrated other traits; he came top in his class, a class of up to 60 other children, and that speaks of a concentrated application of himself, a high level of intelligence, and a real capacity for hard work. These traits enabled Lucien to rise to the top and would prove to be a potent mix that the seminary could work with, and so form him into a priest.

### Seminary

In October 1912, Lucien entered the St Romain Minor Seminary for the diocese of Rouen. Seminary at the beginning of the 20th Century was, indeed, a grey institution, an institution that had stringent rules that governed the minutiae of the lives of its students. Stringent rules were joined with a demanding academic curriculum that was purposefully set to test the seminarians to the limit. Seminary was set to be demanding because it attempted to drive home a human, academic, and spiritual formation that would create men who would be conscientious, responsible, and skilled. From the Minor Seminary, Lucien graduated in October 1919.

We have seen so many of the

positive aspects of Lucien's nature, let us take some time to ponder the other side of that nature. We can turn to some of the eyewitnesses who shared his life in the seminary to find it. Father Bance was a member of the teaching staff at the seminary, and he astutely discerned Lucien's character, "His will was strong, almost fierce. His bursts of energy, his swiftness of speech, his rapidity of action won him immediate recognition from his classmates. His intelligence was sharp; his diligence was extraordinary. He strove for success and achieved it in everything, even in recreation... His voice was already so clear and so powerful that he quickly became our best reader. His natural gifts were abundant, but he required long, painful effort to overcome those faults of disposition, pride and obstinacy that threatened to be his ruin. However, he was so faithful in prayer and so responsive to advice that I never had any doubts about him, not even in those difficult days of adolescence."

A Fr Vivien, who was ordained with him, made this significant commentary on Lucien, that he was a "go-for-broke character," an all or nothing type, who would, Vivien believed, "achieve either singular success or utter failure." Both these men give us revealing observations that offer a lens into the heart of a man who is separated from us by 80 years. They offer us not just the strength that Lucien contained but also the weakness that he harboured within. If you ever truly want to know a saint, seek out their real humanity, the fragility that

retards their response to what God is asking of them, and seek to know the weakness that turns all their heart and strength to dust.

These two contemporary witnesses speak of a potential danger that, like a rotten apple, threatens to wreck the whole barrel. Pride is the mother of all sin and all separation from the Almighty. Adam and Eve had believed that they could set aside all the Words that God had asked of them and do it their way. They had fallen for the false belief that control of their own matters would make everything work so much better for them, but their control simply turned what had been an Eden into dust. All Lucien's intelligence, his catalogue of skills, and the self-confidence that they brought him, threatened to inculcate in his thinking and heart a blindness to the danger of his own cocksureness. The assumption that he could do everything on his own, that he could be self-sufficient, that he had the power to control and manipulate himself through most every situation, was a sure fire way to keep the Good God at a distance.

#### Pride

Pride could have turned his many gifts inward and be used to exalt himself and to deny God the actual truth, that everything came from God and that those gifts were really for God's glory. Obstinacy was simply a daughter sin of pride in Lucien, a protective measure used to reinforce the belief in his own competency, and to keep bashing his head against the brick wall of his own impotency. This fragility inveigled its way into Lucien's heart, and it would find expression with hardly a second thought, at times he seemed quite helpless to do anything about it. Lucien did not, however, turn a blind eye to this weakness; he sought to make

awareness of himself his best ally against this danger, to almost feel the movements within him, in order to be able to respond to the power of this sin as soon as he could.

Given all his intellectual aptitude, it almost goes without saying that he was an avid reader. Lucien required large quantities of 'fuel' to feed his natural curiosity and intelligence. St Jerome once wrote that when we pray, we speak to God but when we read, we listen to God speaking. Lucien would have been in profound sympathy with St Jerome. The seminary held up the life of John Mary Vianney as the model for priesthood. Lucien read biographies of the Curé de Ars but found himself not so interested in the exteriors and successes of the mission of Vianney, but rather in the interior fabric of the life of the Curé. Lucien found himself fascinated by the holiness of Vianney, a holiness that was sourced in Vianney's own deep encounter with the living Christ, in his profound listening to the meaning of God's Word, and his wholehearted response in loving surrender.

From this engagement with Vianney, Lucien sought in his reading to engage with the holiness of God that is the creative source behind every saint and their mission. In the writings of the Benedictine Abbott, Columba Marmion, Lucien found the teaching of the centrality of the mysteries of Christ and that these had to be assimilated and lived in an individual's own interior life. In Dom Jean Baptist Chautard, a Cistercian monk, Lucien discovered that without a real personal union with God, no vocation nor apostolic effort would ever bear lasting fruit.

In reading the life of the ex-soldier, Charles de Foucauld, who abandoned everything to live as

an obscure hermit in the Algerian desert, Lucien discerned that the heroic setting of the African desert was only about assisting making a very simple yet interior surrender into the loving hands of God. In the autobiography of St Therese of Lisieux, Lucien encountered just as magnificent a surrender lived out, not in drama, but in the small, ordinary, and everyday things that make up every person's reality.

In these witnesses, Lucien did not hear simply information and artful writing, but the voice of God speaking to him about the mission God asked of him, of Words that God was directing personally to him, and what God thought about his life. The Words were addressing him about a loving surrender of his whole life into the love of God. Only with time would he understand were these words of God would take him.

Lucien moved steadily through the formation process at St Romain Seminary towards ordination as a priest. He received his first orders with tonsure in 1922, then porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte in 1923, subdiaconate and diaconate in 1924, and finally priesthood in 1925. He received ordination from the Archbishop in the Cathedral at Rouen on July 11, 1925. The following day, he offered the holy sacrifice of the Mass for the first time in the Bunel family parish Church at Maromme, at his side was his brother and his father, Alfred, serving the Mass for him. It was, indeed, an appropriate thing that a vocation that had begun with his father praying the Rosary on the way to work, that this stage of the vocation would conclude with this same father praying the Mass beside him, for he would have been nothing without the prayers of both his father and mother.

## Diary Dates

**Anam Og Easter Fun:** On Friday, April 14, from 12-4 pm, Anam Og will have a free Easter Fun Day at Termonbacca for young people aged 10-14 years old, and membership of the group is not necessary for this. There will be games, crafts, lunch, prayer and an Easter egg hunt. To book a place please contact Aoife on 02871262512 or email [termonbaccaderry@gmail.com](mailto:termonbaccaderry@gmail.com)

**Sr Clare Retreat:** The now annual Sr Clare Retreat takes place in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, from April 17-23.

**Youth 2000:** The next Ulster Youth 2000 retreat will be held in Maghera from April 28-30, in the St Mary's Building of St Patrick's College.

**National Adoration Knock Pilgrimage:** The annual National Adoration Pilgrimage to Knock Shrine, with the Apostolate of Eucharistic Adoration, takes place on the weekend of April 22 & 23, when the key speaker will be Fr Pat Collins CM, an international author and speaker.

**College Memorial Garden:** St Caolumba's College Memorial Garden will be blessed and dedicated by Bishop Donal on Wednesday, April 26, at 4 pm. The Garden is in memory of all deceased members of the College community, particularly Reuven Simon and Joseph Sebastian, who tragically died on August 29, 2022. Those wishing to attend are asked to email: [rsvp@stcolumbscollege.org](mailto:rsvp@stcolumbscollege.org) by 3.30 pm on Wednesday, April 19.

**Catechism Workshop:** A workshop on the Catechism of the Catholic Church/Youcat will take place at Knock on Saturday, April 22, from 9.30 am until 5 pm, with Fr Vincent Twomey SVD the spiritual director. This workshop will be of interest to anyone planning to start/join a Study Group. For more information/booking, contact

Mairin Ni Shuilleabhain BA Div (Coordinator Adult Studies Catechism of the Catholic Church). Email: [mairin991@gmail.com](mailto:mairin991@gmail.com), tel. 00353 87 7950325 or visit [www.catechism.ie](http://www.catechism.ie).

**Grotto Rosaries:** The 'Rosary at the Grottos' will be running this year for the month of May. Each evening at 8 pm, or a time that suits, people are encouraged to gather at grottos all over the island to pray the Rosary for Ireland. Last year, the Rosary was prayed during Mary's Month at over 300 grottos throughout Ireland, and it hoped to build on that this year as a gift to Our Lady.

People are invited to register their grotto at [www.coastalrosaryireland.ie](http://www.coastalrosaryireland.ie)

**Education Conference:** A Catholic Schools Diocesan Education Conference will be held in St Columba's College, Derry, on August 29 for Post Primary and August 30 for Primary, with the theme: 'Go Make Disciples of all Nations'. The keynote speaker will be David Wells, an internationally renowned speaker with a background in Education, and there will be a number of workshops and a session looking at how, as Catholic schools, rooted in Jesus, a culture of dialogue and forgiveness is encouraged in all our relationships. A full programme of events, with booking forms will be issued in the coming months.

**Stations of Cross:** On the First Friday of each month, after 10 am Mass in St Eugene's, there is a silent procession from the Cathedral to St Columba's Church, Long Tower, meditating on the Stations of the Cross.

**Coastal Rosary:** Rosary on the Coast for world peace and the protection of unborn babies takes place at Lisfannon Beach, Buncrana, on the first Sunday of every month at 3 pm, and at Benone Strand on the third Sunday

of every month, at 3 pm.

**Men's Rosary:** The Men's Rosary takes place on the first Saturday of every month in Market Street, Omagh (opposite Primark) at 1 pm. All Welcome!

**Rosary Rally:** The All Ireland Rosary Rally takes place in Knock on Saturday, June 3, from 1 pm. As well as praying of the Stations of the Cross and the Rosary, there will be a Rosary talk in the Basilica, at 1 pm, by Bishop Oliver Doeme, of Nigeria, who has a powerful personal testimony about the Rosary to share, and Mass will be celebrated by the Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin.

**Sr Clare Mass:** Mass in honour of Sr Clare Crockett is celebrated on the second Sunday of each month, at 7 pm, in Termonbacca. All welcome. The Mass is streamed live via Termonbacca YouTube channel, and the next one is on Sunday, March 12.

**Reading with the Carmelites:** The Carmelite Fathers at Termonbacca hold a monthly session of 'Reading with the Carmelite Saints', to explore learning friendship with Christ through the example of the Carmelite Saints. It takes place on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30 pm, with the next being on Thursday, April 27.

**Healing Night:** The monthly Healing Night with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, in Derry, takes place on the First Friday of each month, at 7 pm.

**Sr Clare Rosary:** The Sr Clare Rosary continues every Monday night, at 8.30 pm, in St Joseph's Room, at the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca.

**Matt Talbott Society:** The Matt Talbott Society Mass, praying for those suffering from addiction, is offered for those enrolled on the first Monday of every month in St Eugene's Cathedral, at 7.30 pm.

## National Adoration Pilgrimage to Knock

THE annual National Adoration Pilgrimage to Knock Shrine, with the Apostolate of Eucharistic Adoration, takes place on the weekend of April 22 & 23, when the key speaker will be Fr Pat Collins CM, an international author and speaker.

It gets underway on the Saturday evening at 7 pm in the Basilica with Rosary, followed by a talk and healing session at 7.30 pm by Fr Pat Collins CM, an international author and speaker, and ends with Mass at 9 pm.

The main programme takes place on the Sunday, getting underway at 11 am with an hour of Guided Adoration led by the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal, in the Parish Church. Confessions will be available from 11 am until 2.30 pm. There will be a 'Children

of the Eucharist' programme in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel led by Antoinette Moynihan, from 11.45 am until 2.30 pm.

The keynote address for the pilgrimage will be delivered by Fr Pat Collins on 'The Eucharist and the Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith'. This will take place in the Basilica, from 1-2.30 pm, and will be followed by the celebration of Mass at 3 pm, with Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly the chief celebrant and homilist. The day will come to a close with Benediction and a Eucharistic blessing.

The Claudy Eucharistic Adoration Committee is organising a bus for pilgrims, which will leave the car park beside St Patrick's Church in the village at 7.30 am and travel to



Knock via Donemana, Strabane, Lifford, Stranorlar/Ballybofey, and Donegal Town. Anyone interested in travelling on this bus can contact Pauline O'Neill on 07738873492 (NI) for further information.

## Diocesan Diary

**Vocations Holy Hour:** The next monthly Holy Hour for Vocations will take place in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, at 8 pm on Friday, April 14, and will be led by Fr Patrick Lagan.

**World Youth Day:** Derry Diocesan Youth is taking a group of over 18s on Pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Lisbon, from July 25 to August 7. Limited places available. To register or find out more information contact Lizzie Rea on [lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org](mailto:lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org).

**Lourdes 2023:** The 2023 Derry Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes, led by Bishop Donal, will take place from July 3-7. Going direct from City of Derry Airport, the pilgrimage consists of four nights'

full board in the Hotel Agena, costing £745 sharing, with a £35 single supplement. Travel insurance up to age 79 is available at £39, and £78 for age 80 to 94 (pilgrims may wish to use their own insurance). For further details and payment arrangements contact the Lourdes Pilgrimage Office, 164 Bishop Street, Derry, [derrypilgrim@outlook.com](mailto:derrypilgrim@outlook.com), telephone 028 71 260293.

**ACCORD:** Accord Derry Marriage Preparation Workshops will take place on the weekends of April 17-18, and May 22-23. These virtual courses can be booked at [www.accordni.com](http://www.accordni.com).

Accord NI Catholic Marriage Care Service is recruiting Marriage Education Facilitators to provide

Sacramental Marriage Preparation for couples in the Diocese. For further details and an application form, please contact Brenda at 028 9023 3002 or email [info@accordni.com](mailto:info@accordni.com)

**Catholic School Leadership:** The Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre, in partnership with St Mary's University, Twickenham, offers a Masters in Catholic School Leadership. An information session via ZOOM will be held on Monday, May 8, at 3.30 pm. If you require any further information, or wish to register for the information session, please contact the Catechetical Centre on 004428 71264087 or email [tferry@derrydiocese.org](mailto:tferry@derrydiocese.org)

**City Cemetery Sunday:** The Annual Service of Intercession for the Dead will take place in the City Cemetery on Sunday, June 25, at 3 pm.

# Parish Post-its

## Ardstraw West & Castlederg

**Prayer Group:** The Parish Prayer Group will meet in St Patrick's Hall, Castlederg, on Friday, April 21, at 8 pm. Everyone is welcome to come along for time of prayer, conversation and reflection on the Scripture Readings.

## Badoney Lower (Gortin-Rouskey)

**Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Sundays in St Patrick's Church, Gortin, from 3.30-5.30 pm.

## Ballinascreen/Desertmartin

**Divine Mercy:** Leaflets for Divine Mercy Novena, Good Friday to Sunday, April 16, are available in the parish churches. A recording of the Divine Mercy Chaplet and Novena Prayers for each of the nine days will be online at [www.parihofballinascreen.com](http://www.parihofballinascreen.com) and on the Ballinascreen Parish Facebook Page. The Feast of Divine Mercy will be celebrated in Holy Rosary Church on Sunday, April 16, at 3 pm.

**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.

## Ballymagroarty

**Adoration:** Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, every Sunday, from 10.30 am - 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.

## Banagher

**Adoration & Chaplet:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Divine Mercy Chaplet take place in St Mary's Church, Altinure, on Thursdays 10.30 am - 11.30 am, and in the Grotto Chapel, Fincairn, on Fridays, 10-11 am.

**Parish Golf Day:** Banagher Parish Golf Day will take place on Friday, May 19, at Moyola Golf Club and is a Fundraiser for the Parish Hope Camp. Tee times can be booked by contacting Sean McGrellis on 07590188129. Anyone who would like to Sponsor the Golf Day can do so by contacting either Sean or Fr Micheál.

## Bellaghy

**Community Café:** The Open Door Community Café is open on the last Sunday of each month, from 11.30 am until 1 pm.

## Buncrana

**Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place daily in St Mary's Oratory after Mass until 1 pm (Monday-Friday), 11 am - 5 pm (Saturday), 1.30-7 pm (Sunday).

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

**Guided Holy Hour:** The Guided Holy Hour of Adoration in Honour of the Holy Face of Jesus will continue 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.

## Burt, Inch & Fahan

**Adoration:** Adoration in St Mura's Parish Church, Fahan, takes place each Friday after 10 am Mass.

## Cappagh

**Divine Mercy:** Divine Mercy Sunday will be celebrated in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher on Sunday, April 16, starting at 2.30 pm.

**Parish Dance:** A dance will be held in the Parish Centre, Killyclogher, on Friday, April 14. Dancing from 9.30 pm to Country Sensations. All welcome.

## Carndonagh

**Donagh Choir:** The Donagh Choir will join the Donegal Chamber Orchestra and the Conwal singers in a concert of 'Music from the Movies' in the Grianan Theatre, Letterkenny, on Thursday, April 27 at 7 pm. Tickets available from the An Grianan box office or the website [angrianan.com](http://angrianan.com)

## Claudy

**Divine Mercy:** A Divine Mercy ceremony will take place in St Patrick's Church, Claudy, on Sunday, April 16, at 3 pm.

**Adoration Pilgrimage:** The Claudy Eucharistic Adoration Committee is organising a bus for pilgrims to Knock for the annual National Eucharistic Adoration Pilgrimage on Sunday, April 23. It will leave the car park beside St Patrick's Church at 7.30 am. Anyone interested in travelling on this bus can contact Pauline O'Neill on 07738873492 (NI) for further information.

**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, Craighbane.

**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.

## Creggan

**Vocations Prayer:** There will be Vocations Holy Hour in St Mary's Church, Creggan, on the second Friday of each month, running from 8-9 pm.

## Dungiven

**Healing Mass:** A St Pio Healing Mass takes place on the first Tuesday of each month at 7 pm in St Patrick's.

**Rosary:** The Rosary is prayed at 9.35 am in St Patrick's Church from Monday-Friday.

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

## Errigal

**Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Mondays after the morning 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.

## Fahan

**Adoration:** Adoration takes place in St Mura's Parish Church each Friday after the 10 am Mass.

## 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 after 12.30 pm Mass on Tuesdays until 5 pm.

## Iskaheen

**St Peregrine:** The St Peregrine Novena Prayer and veneration of relic takes place in St Columba's Church, Drung, after the 10.15 am Mass on the first Sunday of each month.

## Kilrea

**Fr Cargan Anniversary:** First Anniversary Mass for Fr John Cargan will be celebrated in St Mary's Church, Drumagarnier, on Friday, April 14, at 7.30 pm. All are welcome.

## Lavey

**Youth 2000:** Youth 2000 Prayer Group, for 16-35 year olds, meets in Lavey Parochial House, opposite the chapel, on Friday evenings at 7.30 pm.

## Leckpatrick

**Adoration:** Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays after 10 am Mass until 5.30 pm.

**Cloughcor 200th:** For the 200th anniversary of St Mary's Church, Cloughcor, preparations are underway to create a display in

the Church. Anyone who has old photos, which will be copied for the display, or any items of historical interest, is asked to contact Fr Gerry.

**Cemetery Blessings:** Blessing of the Graves will take place in Leckpatrick Parish as follows: St Joseph's Cemetery, Glenmornan, Sunday, May 7 after the 10 am Mass; St Mary's Cemetery, Cloughcor, Saturday, May 20 after the 6 pm Mass; and Sacred Heart Cemetery, Derry Road, Sunday, May 21 after the 11.30 am Mass.

## Maghera

**Memorial Concert:** A Concert in memory of the late Marie McGuckin will take place in St Mary's Church, Maghera, on Friday, May 5, at 8 pm, featuring such artistes as Liam Lawton, Malachi Cush, Karl McGuckin and Cathy McLernon.

**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, and will resume on April 14.

## Malin

**Charity Shop:** Malin Parish Charity Shop will be upstairs in G & S Supermarket, Carndonagh, from Monday, May 15 for six weeks. Items for the shop and staff volunteers are needed. Contact Martin on 086 8606 890.

## Melmount

**Blessing of Graves:** The annual Ceremony of the Blessing of Graves will take place in Melmount on Sunday, May 14 at 4 pm.

## Moville

**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.

## Omagh

**Knock Pilgrimage:** Bus to Knock for the Annual Eucharistic Adoration pilgrimage on Sunday, April 23. Bus picks at Crevenagh Park and Ride or Omagh Bus Station at approximately 8.15 am. Bus fare £15, breakfast & three course evening meal 35 euro (optional). Contact Una 07743575969 or Mona 02886737954. Early booking advisable.

**Prayer Group:** The Charismatic Prayer Group meetings take place in The Pastoral Centre on Thursday evenings, with Rosary at 7.40 pm and prayer meeting at 8 pm. All welcome to come and pray.

## Sion Mills

**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.

## Steelstown

**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:** Spend some quiet time before the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament each Sunday 6-7 pm. Adoration also continues each Friday after 10 am Mass to 6.50 pm.

**Stations of the Cross:** Come along to reflect on the Way of the Cross on Fridays at 7.30 pm.

**Craft Group:** The weekly Craft Group will resume on Thursday, April 20.

## Strabane (Camus)

**Adoration:** Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place all day 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 welcome.

**Cemetery Blessing:** The annual ceremony of the blessing of graves will be held on Sunday, June 4, at 3 pm.

## Templemore - Long

### Tower

**Divine Mercy Novena:** The Divine Mercy Novena runs from Good Friday until Divine Mercy Sunday, April 16, and there will be Divine Mercy Devotions in St Columba's Church, on April 16 at 3 pm, preceded by Confessions from 1.30-2.30 pm.

**Sr Clare Retreat:** The Sr Clare Retreat takes place in St Columba's Church from April 17- 23. Mass at 7 am & 10 am (Monday to Friday). Each evening at 7.30 pm, there will be Benediction, with a guest speaker (Monday-Friday). On Saturday 22, there will be

Benediction at 3 pm, with a guest speaker. The retreat will conclude on Sunday, April 23 at 3 pm with Mass celebrated by Bishop Donal. God Club: Young people wanting to learn about their Catholic faith are welcome to come along to the 'God Club' in Aras Colmcille, in the grounds of Long Tower Church, on Saturdays, starting at 10.30 am.

**Padre Pio Mass:** A Padre Pio Mass for healing in mind and body takes place on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm, in Long Tower Church. It is hoped at the end of each Mass to give a Blessing using a First Class Relic of Padre Pio. The Mass will be streamed via the parish website: [www.longtowerchurch.org](http://www.longtowerchurch.org) then click on the link for the webcam or alternatively by logging on to [www.churchmedia.tv](http://www.churchmedia.tv) Everyone is welcome to attend and the next one will be Monday, May 1.

## Templemore - St Eugene's

**Matt Talbot 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 Therese Novena:** The annual St Therese Novena at St Eugene's Cathedral will run from May 6-14.

**Cathedral Voices:** Cathedral Voices is a singing group for people living with dementia and older members of the community. The singing club takes place every Thursday from 1.30-3 pm. A great chance to socialise, listen to music, have a cup of tea and a chat and a bit of craic. If you are interested in attending, please contact the parish office on 028 71262894.

## Three Patrons

**Be Still:** Be Still is a Men's Prayer and Friendship Group that meets every Thursday night from 8-9.15 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 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 on Mondays after 11 am Mass, until 11 pm, in St Joseph's Church, 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.

## Waterside

**Lectio Divina:** Reflect on the Scriptures with Lectio Divina in the Church of the Immaculate Conception on Thursday nights, starting at 8.15 pm. This will return after Easter.



Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

# Let Your Light Shine!

*“Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy.” (Diary, 699)*

*“My gaze from this image is like My gaze from the Cross.” (Diary, 326)*

*“Souls perish in spite of My bitter Passion. I am giving them the last hope of salvation; that is, the Feast of My Mercy. If they will not adore My mercy, they will perish for all eternity.” (Diary, 965)*

*“The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls... These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonised Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross... Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him.” (Diary, 299)*

*“I am mercy itself for the contrite soul. A soul’s greatest wretchedness does not enkindle Me with wrath; but rather, My heart is moved towards it with great mercy.” (Diary 1739)*



*“Every soul believing and trusting in My mercy will obtain it.” (Diary, 420)*

*“Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity.” (Diary, 699)*

*“I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My Mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment.” (Diary, 699)*

*“I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: ‘Jesus, I trust in You.’” (Diary, 327)*

*This prayer will serve to appease My wrath. You will recite it for nine days, on the beads of the rosary, in the following manner: First of all, you will say one OUR FATHER and HAIL MARY and the I BELIEVE IN GOD. Then on the OUR FATHER beads you will say the following words: “Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.” On the HAIL MARY beads you will say the following words: “For the sake of His sorrowful Passion have mercy on us and on the whole world.” In conclusion, three times you will recite these words: “Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world” (Diary, 476).*

## **Divine Mercy messages from the Diary of St Faustina.**

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamagagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,