

# The NET

*Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese*

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See inside...



Lectio Divina - Maghera



Celebrating Catholic Schools - Kilrea



Grandparents' Day - Steelstown.



## “Ask the Lord of the Harvest to send labourers into His Harvest”

*– Our Diocesan ‘Year of Prayer for Vocations’ ends on St Patrick’s Day, but monthly Holy Hour for Vocations to continue*

Ordination Mass of Fr Michael McCaul, in St Eugene’s Cathedral.



Ministry to Sick Prayer - Cappagh.



Pope John Paul II Awards - St Eugene’s



St Brigid Crosses - Desertmartin.



St Brigid Drama - Carnhill.

### People in focus



Fr John McLaughlin ssc, Moville



Fr Michael McCaul, St Eugene’s Derry.



Melany Francisco-Lawless, Hexham & Newcastle



Shauna Clifford - Holy Family, Ballymagroarty.



Sue-Anne McKiernan, St Columba’s PS Kilrea

*Also featuring:* Catholic Schools’ Week; Youth News; Young Writers’ Section; Children’s Catechism Club; Consecration of Shauna Clifford a blessing for the Diocese; Parishes celebrating St Brigid; Reflections from across the Diocese on Bishop Donal’s Pastoral Letter; Irish Section; Diary Dates; Quiz **and much more...**

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## Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope's prayer intentions for the months of February and March...

"For parishes. We pray that parishes, placing communion at the centre, may increasingly become communities of faith, fraternity and welcome towards those most in need"...and...

"For victims of abuses: We pray for those who have suffered harm from members of the Church, may they find within the Church herself a concrete response to their pain and suffering."

## If we can die to selfishness during Lent, we can rise in communion at the Resurrection – and help others to experience Easter after their own terrible Calvary

WE live in a culture which emphasises the individual. The positive side of the emphasis on the individual has been the centrality of human rights and dignity. The negative result has been a widespread fragmentation of communities and a lot of loneliness.

That is the cultural context in which we are asked to live as communities of faith.

Belonging is very important. We can have a sense of identity and we meet people who share our interests.

But belonging is not always healthy and life-giving. Identity can sometimes cut us off from others who do not match our beliefs exactly. So many wars and conflicts are based in creating identities that hate others and generate antagonism.

Pope Francis asks us to pray, not just for communities in our parishes but for a sense of communion that helps us to reach out. Christ's communities build bridges, not walls. As Jesus said in the 'Sermon on the Mount', we are salt to the earth and light to the world. The Church exists for the evangelisation of the world and not merely for our own security.

Pope Francis uses the word

'communion' for what should be at the centre of parish life. He is echoing a phrase used by Pope St John Paul II in 2001 when he wrote that "to make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us." (Cf Novo Millennio Ineunte, para 43-45.)

He emphasised that this is not merely a question of feeling friendly to one another. The saintly Pope John Paul II saw the need for shared responsibility in the church for discerning the way forward. "The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them a priori in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion."

Thus, this spirituality of communion is at the origin and heart of the synodal process. Synodality is a spiritual journey together, not a competitive secular parliamentary process. It takes seriously those rich biblical images about who we are as church – the People of God, the Body of Christ, living stones in the Church.

And Pope Francis asks

us to pray that parishes will instinctively look out. Communion takes root in the heart. It is not merely a question of structures. Again, St John Paul II writes, "unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, 'masks' of communion rather than its means of expression and growth".

The Kingdom of God will be built by those who can live a spirituality of communion, with Christ and with one another. In a lonely world, the parish can be what the Second Vatican Council taught - the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race. (Lumen Gentium, 1).

Communion is not just a context which helps us grow in faith. Communion is part of the content of the faith that we live and hand on. And care for one another spills over into care for those in need. A self-preoccupied church is not Christ's church.

In our desire to be credible witnesses to Jesus, one of the



Bishop Donal

challenges that we face is the reality that abuse of various sorts happened at all levels in the church. And it was covered up, often by people who had senior and respected roles in our parishes and dioceses. That has severely damaged our ability to speak credibly of God's love and of a supportive community.

Communion has to reach out in service to those who have been scarred by abuse. Sorrow has to be real – and support tangible. Any inability to accept painful truths simply damages the Church's integrity. Where serious damage has been done, Christ's followers have to take up the Cross of compassion (suffering-with) if we are to walk with those who

have been crippled by the scars of abuse.

Pope Francis asks us to pray that those who have been hurt in the Church will find there a concrete response to their pain and suffering. Nevertheless, in this time of both fragmentation and widespread poverty, Pope Francis calls us to build our faith communities in hope and never to hide our light under a barrel. Show what we stand for in Christ – and people will give glory to our Father in heaven. (Cf Matthew 5:13-16).

If we can die to selfishness during Lent, we can rise in communion at the Resurrection – and help others to experience Easter after their own terrible Calvary.

## Maghera Parish embraces Lectio Divina



ON January 28, several members of the Derry Diocese attended the Faith Development Conference held in Belfast at the Crown Plaza Hotel. This was organised and run by the Living Church Office of Down and Connor Diocese.

There were well over a hundred people attending, most of whom were from Down and Connor, but there were also participants from other dioceses in Northern Ireland and even some attendees from Dublin.

The course was extremely well run, with a variety of different

presentations throughout the day. However, the key areas and contribution for the two members of Glen parish, Maghera, who attended, Brian Holloway and Julie Zeoli, were the presentation and resources given for the implementation and practice of Lenten sessions of 'Lectio Divina' - or 'sacred reading'.

These sessions are meetings to pray and reflect together on the meaning of sacred scripture. The passages chosen in this presentation are the Gospel readings of each Sunday of Lent and these meetings for Lectio Divina

should take place on any day in the preceding week.

In St Patrick's Church, Glen, Maghera, we now meet on Mondays at 7.30 pm in the Pastoral Centre. Our meetings began on the Monday before Ash Wednesday and are well attended, with over twenty persons present, including some young people who are doing the John Paul II Award.

The materials given to us

at the Faith Development Conference are excellent. They include a Parish Programme Leader's guide, which is very thorough and supportive, and prayer cards to hand out to all attending, which outline the process and main stages of a meeting for Lectio Divina: reflection, meditation, prayer, contemplation.

Our gathering together for these special prayer meetings has given us much joy. It is a way of more deeply

understanding and entering into the meaning of the Word of God, a way of growing closer to the Lord and to one another.

Great support and encouragement is given to us by our parish priest, Fr Paddy Doherty.



Maghera Lectio Divina group leader, Julie Zeoli with parish priest, Fr Paddy Doherty.

The ministry of

**The NET**

was dedicated to Our

Lady, through the

intercession of

St Maximilian Kolbe, in

a ceremony celebrated

by Bishop Donal

McKeown

on August 14, 2019.

**The NET**

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

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Having enjoyed celebrating Catholic Schools Week, RE Coordinator at St Columba's PS, Kilrea, Miss Sue-Anne McKiernan shares how...

# Catholic values very much threaded through each school day to help children make good choices in life



Miss Sue-Anne McKiernan, RE Coordinator at St Columba's PS Kilrea.

SCHOOLS throughout the Diocese enjoyed celebrating their Catholic identity during Catholic Schools Week, which included inviting grandparents to come along for a visit on Grandparents' Day and making St Brigid's Crosses to mark the Feast Day of one of Ireland's Patron Saints.

The recently appointed Religious Education Coordinator for St Columba's PS, in Kilrea, Miss Sue-Anne McKiernan took time out to talk to 'The Net' about this special week in the school calendar and how the Catholic

faith is celebrated throughout the year in St Columba's.

Following in the footsteps of previous dedicated RE Coordinators in St Columba's, the Kilrea-born teacher highlighted that the school had a very strong pastoral and spiritual team that worked well together to incorporate the Catholic ethos into school life.

She remarked: "There is a very strong Catholic ethos in our school. Every month, we celebrate events in our religious calendar through school assemblies and in our sacred spaces.

"We have a designated school display every month and each class takes its turn in preparing this display, based on whatever religious event is being celebrated in our religious calendar. We call this our sacred space in the school.

"We also have a different class attend Mass every week in St Anne's Oratory, using a monthly cycle from P4-P7, and daily prayer with the children is very important to us."

"Every big religious occasion is celebrated, and quite often through drama performed in St Anne's Oratory, such as Lent, when we pray the Stations of the Cross, Easter and Christmas,

when we have the Nativity drama and a Carol Service.

"Catholic Schools Week is another highlight in our calendar, and this year Nursery pupils had 'Stay and Play for Grandparents', Year1 & 2 had a special assembly for Grandparents, our P3s made St Brigid's Crosses with their grandparents, and the grandparents of our P4-P7 children were invited to join us for a special Mass."

"We also celebrate the Rosary months of May and October by praying the Rosary in school," added Mrs McKiernan, saying: "Our Catholic values are very much threaded through our daily work in St Columba's in the hope that we equip our children with good Catholic morals that will help them to make good choices in life."

Paying tribute to the support of the Diocesan Catechetical team, she particularly commented on the online preparation programmes for children preparing for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, saying that the children really enjoy them.

"Sacramental preparation is very important within the school, and our priests are greatly involved with that," remarked Mrs

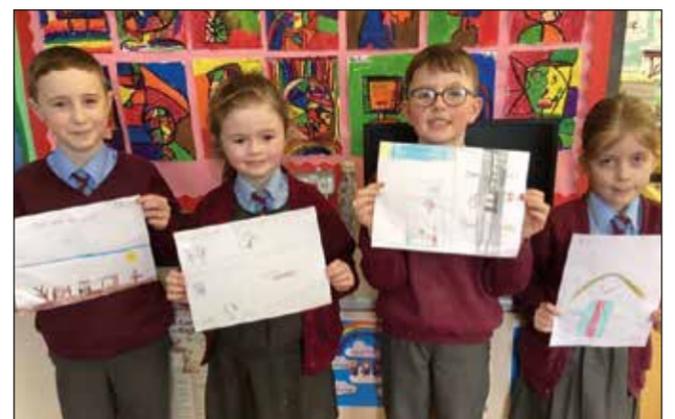
McKiernan, adding: "We try to keep the relationship between the school, the home and the parish very interlinked in whatever we do."

Commenting on the loss of Fr John Cargan as their parish priest, she said: "There is never a week that goes past that we don't think about Fr Cargan. He called here every week and was very attentive as our chaplain. He was greatly involved in the school, facilitating us and making every Mass very special.

"We now have Fr Brendan Crowley and Fr Christopher McDermott and they have become part of our school family, and have been very accommodating and welcoming in the chapel for religious celebrations, and attentive in leading us in our faith."

St Columba's has a new principal now, Mrs Ciara Henry, following the retirement of Mrs Celine Kielt in June 2022, having given 32 years of service, with the last eight as principal.

"We thank Mrs Kielt for her leadership during her eight years as principal," said Miss McKiernan, "and wish our new principal, Mrs Ciara Henry all the best in leading us in the years ahead."



*Celebrating Catholic Schools Week in the Diocese, Bishop Donal commented on this year's 'Walking Together in Faith and Love' theme...*

# We need to walk together as some prefer we just packed up our message and went away

BEAUTIFUL works of art by schools across the Diocese, depicting parish churches, adorned the steps of the altar in St Eugene's Cathedral for the special Mass to launch Catholic Schools' Week 2023, the theme for which was 'Walking Together in Faith and Love'.

Welcoming the school pupils and staff members, Bishop Donal praised the very creative artworks, and noted that the theme linked in with the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Cathedral, reflecting on walking together in faith and love as a parish.

In his homily, the Bishop spoke about the importance of taking time to ask the important question, "Who and what are we trying to be as Catholic schools in Ireland in 2023?", saying: "Many people are not sure whether Catholic schools have any role to play in modern Ireland. Schools were set up many years ago to respond to the circumstances of the time. Nowadays, lots of people are very happy with their Catholic school, but like it mainly because it is a good school rather than because it has a church connection."

He added: "This is an important time for us all to have conversations as to what changing role a Catholic school might play in Ireland today, and when our current pupils are deciding where to send their own children for their education."

Noting that parishes "do not put so much time and energy into our schools, just to enable people to compete better in a nasty rat race for power and success," Bishop Donal went on to say: "Our local

communities want to develop young leaders for the present and the future, people who will serve the Common Good and not just help themselves to whatever they can grab. Education in community is about building community builders, because communities build people. Education that is mainly about exam results is a poor education for a mature adult life."

He added: "Our schools are committed to being part of a community that builds up people. But in a very individualistic world, that model of education faces many cultural challenges. Young people are growing up in a culture that is marked by violence and division, and we see how many young people suffer stress and distress because a fragmented, self-centred culture offers little hope or meaning."

"The modern culture plays up the importance of looking good on the outside, but also tells us that the body is of no real value as it is just something to be played with and obeyed. Indeed, there are those who would want to prevent young people from hearing about the dignity of the human body and the belief that we can be good people and not just people who are good at things."

"Our schools tell young people to expect great things from themselves and not just good grades or big salaries," continued Bishop Donal, "The world around may say that all you need to do is just have fun. Your main job is just to be a consumer who keeps the marketplace booming, whatever the cost to people or to the environment. But Jesus says



that you can be great and do great things.

"Saints were people who believed in doing little things well, and making a difference. Saints will work to make a world where little people can blossom. They will do more good for people than will Elon Musk and Bill Gates put together."

He added: "Our schools want young people to believe that God's grace is close at hand to help them on their journey to greatness. Our theme this year is 'Catholic schools - Walking Together in Faith and Love'."

"I hope that, by walking together as a family of schools, we can become more aware of Christ's vision of human dignity that we want young people to hear. That message is not meant to limit or restrict. It is meant to help young people flourish by learning to make good and generous choices in life, and to believe that

forgiveness is readily available when they make mistakes.

"We need to walk together as there are those who would prefer if we just packed up our message and went away. This is a time to fan into a flame the gifts that God gives us, to be salt to the earth and not to hide our light."

"Celebrate your identity with pride. Don't be ashamed to talk of parish and community, of love and forgiveness, of wholeness and holiness. We are communities who walk together in faith and love. Never be ashamed of trying to do that."

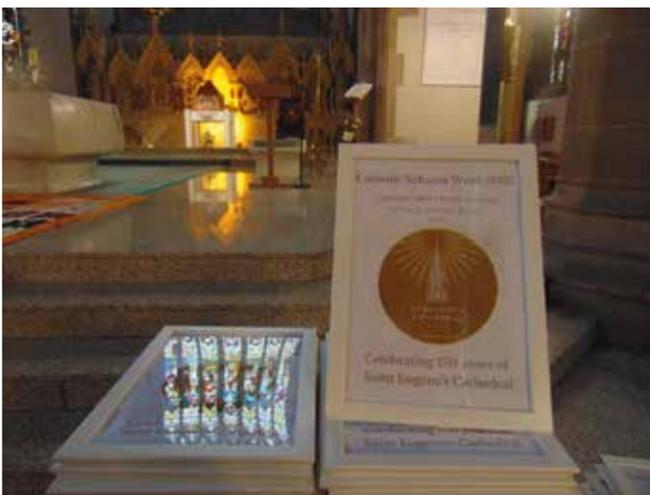
The congregation was led in singing by the sweet-sounding Faughanvale PS Choir, directed by Ms Niamh Moore.

Organised by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre team, the ceremony included each school being presented with a framed design marking the Cathedral's 150th anniversary.



*Pictures by Stephen Latimer Photography*





# Steelstown Primary pupils celebrate precious grandparents

STEELSTOWN Primary School hosted a lovely celebration of grandparents during Catholic Schools Week, when the school community gathered with grandparents in Our Lady of Lourdes Church for a beautiful Thanksgiving Mass concelebrated by parish priest, Fr John McDevitt and Fr Peter McLaughlin, on the Feast of St Brigid.

St Brigid Crosses were blessed at the end of the ceremony, and Fr John led the congregation in the Prayer of St Brigid.

Afterwards, the grandparents were invited across the road to the school for some refreshments and musical entertainment from the children.

Welcoming everyone, the principal, Mrs Siobhan Gillen said that she was a grandparent too and appreciated seeing the

different stages of children's development through different eyes, adding: "You have a bit more time to enjoy and savour your grandchildren than you had your children as a parent."

Thanking God for all the grandparents, and especially remembering those who were unable to attend through sickness or had died, Mrs Gillen told them: "What you do for your grandchildren is very precious. Keep going. You do amazing work and your grandchildren talk about you and look up to you."

Mrs Moran, one of the grandparents was invited to speak on the others, and she commented on the "crucial role" they played in their grandchildren's lives, saying: "We have the opportunity to not only love and support them but also to shape their future."

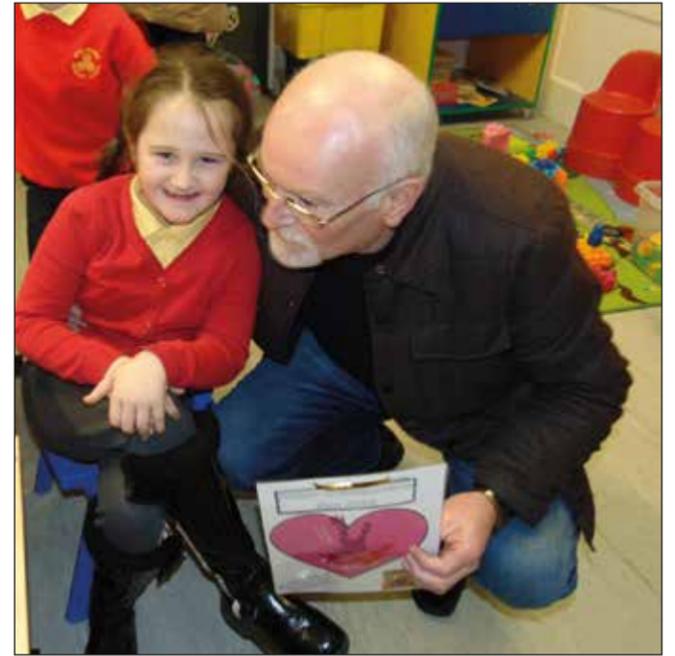
She noted: "The school that they attend plays a vital role in their educational development. It is a place where they can learn, grow and explore things that they enjoy doing."

"Education, however, also involves the spiritual and moral development of our grandchildren. It is our duty, therefore, to shape our grandchildren's values and beliefs."

"By sharing our experiences and wisdom, and by giving them love and support," added Mrs Moran, "we can help them develop a strong foundation in life."

"So, let us celebrate our role as grandparents and the impact we have on our grandchildren's lives."

She concluded by asking the children to look after their



grandparents, remarking: "We also need a lot of love and support from you."



# Story of St Brigid celebrated through Carnhill youth drama

THE Three Patrons Parish in Derry had a wonderful day of celebration on February 1 to mark one of their Patron's Feast Day, that of St Brigid.

Local school children and parishioners gathered in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, for Mass celebrated by Fr Sean O'Donnell, and joined the choir in the beautiful singing for the occasion, led by Evie McGinley.

Fr Sean encouraged those gathered to do as St Brigid did, saying: "Give Glory to God first and foremost."

During the ceremony, young people from St Brigid's College acted out the story of St Brigid, which was read by Mrs Noirin Boucher.

The story told how St Brigid was born in Faughart, near Dundalk, in Co Louth, in the year 453, following the introduction of Christianity to pagan Celtic

Ireland by Patrick. Her father, Dubhtach, was a wealthy pagan chieftain, while her mother, Brocessa, was a Christian slave.

With Brocessa sold to a Druid soon after Brigid's birth, she grew up without her mother and as a slave of her father, spending her free time caring for the animals of the forest. Her charity to the poor, sick and elderly, as she grew older, angered her father and, intending to sell her, he took her to Dunlaing, the King of Leinster, when she was 12 years old. However, when the king, who was a Christian, saw her take pity on a beggar at the palace gates, moving her to give him her father's jewelled sword so that he could barter it for food, Dunlaing appreciated her generous heart and persuaded her father to grant her her freedom, telling him: "Her merit before God is greater than ours."

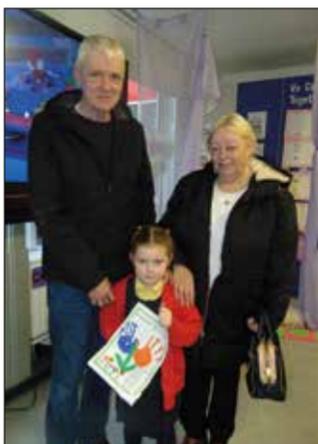
When she was 16, Brigid left home forever, deciding never to marry, and other young girls joined her in devoting their lives to the service of God and the poor. Bishop Mel of Ardagh placed a nun's veil on their heads and together they formed Ireland's first women's religious community. The site of their first religious house overlooked the Curragh.

During one of her many travels by foot around the country carrying out acts of healing, Brigid nursed a pagan Chieftain who was dying. Picking some rushes from the floor while she sat with him, Brigid wove a cross and used it to explain the Passion and Death of Christ. Moved by what she said, the chieftain asked more about Jesus and was baptised before he died. The St Brigid's Cross is now an accepted Christian symbol.

The ministry of St Brigid and the other sisters led to more communities being founded, the most famous of which being Cill Dara - The Church of the Oak, in Kildare. Sometimes known as Mary of the Gael, Brigid died at this convent in her seventh decade. It is said that when she died a great flame was lit on her grave and kept burning for a thousand years.

Devotion to St Brigid spread all over Europe and, even today, there are over 700 Sisters of St Brigid working throughout the world, continuing to spread the message of Christ.

At the end of the story, the congregation gathered to celebrate St Brigid prayed that the people of their parish would also spread the love, compassion and light of Christ.



Young people at 16th annual Pope John Paul II Awards ceremony encouraged to...

## Stay Awake...use your voice to spread the Good News with guidance of Holy Spirit



Guest speaker at the JPII Awards 2023, Melany Francisco-Lawless, Youth Ministry Team, Newcastle.

THIS year's recipients of Pope John Paul II Awards in the Derry Diocese heard an inspiring talk from guest speaker, Melany Francisco-Lawless, formation leader at Emmaus Youth Village in Newcastle upon Tyne, who shared with them a quote from the late Fr Dermott Donnelly, former chair and youth service director for the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle... "Live a life not just of success or survival but of significance."

Serving in Youth Ministry for 23 years, Melany now works with Youth Ministry Team, which gathers young adults from across the world to do a Youth Ministry Internship, helping provide opportunities where young people can experience the love of God in their lives through mission work, faith festivals and pilgrimages.

Originally from the Philippines, she recalled doing mission work in the Creggan Parish, through YMT, back in 2003, when she first met Fr Paul Farren, and explained that she was familiar with the Pope John Paul II Award, which the Derry Diocese had introduced to the Hexham & Newcastle Diocese.

Melany told the young people: "Completing the Award is an outstanding achievement...but for me, the most important thing is that we all can testify to the power of the encounter. Imagine all the interactions you have had and all the opportunities you have created to be like Christ, or to see Christ in others, whilst completing the Award.

"I remember meeting a young person doing the award scheme in our Diocese. She volunteered at the care home where I was also speaking. I was there for the day, sharing the works of YMT and leading a retreat for them. During the lunch break, I witnessed the joyful interaction between a young person serving the food

and the residents. So, I asked her how come she was so joyful. She said that not only did she get to add points to her sheet, but she also gained grandparents! After she left, I asked the people at our table about her, and one lady replied, 'She smiles a lot, so I feel I have to smile back, but she gives me a reason to come down for my lunch instead of having it in my room'. I can only imagine almost 350 stories of encounters like this. I hope this Diocese continues to create even more opportunities for this encounter to happen.

"Nothing is more powerful than the encounter that happens when the wisdom of the old (mature young ones) collides with the energy of the Youth!"

She went on to note that Pope St John Paul II had been passionate about letting the youth experience the message of Christ through the Church, and that the World Youth Day gathering was one of his legacies.

"Started in 1985, WYD is a gathering of youth and young adults for prayer, worship and Eucharistic celebrations of the Catholic faith," explained Melany, saying: "Millions of people attend it, and the Philippines still holds the largest number of five million."

Recalling attending WYD 2000, where she encountered the wisdom of the old meeting the energy of almost two million attendees that year, Melany said: "I remember the words of St Pope John Paul II vividly, as if he was speaking to me directly. One of his messages was... 'Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium!'

"It was the new millennium and some believed it was going to be the end of the world, but for me, it was only the beginning of a new one because there, amid the sea of young people all listening to his Holiness, I heard a personal call.

A year after that, I left a marketing research job at a pharmaceutical company to volunteer full-time for Youth Ministry. I wanted to see where this call to serve would take me! And, perhaps, 23 years after, He led me here to share my faith journey with you."

### Life

Telling the young people that when she was 18 her father had been murdered while trying to save another man's life, she continued: "A man was shot after his van was gunned down by robbers. He ended up crawling on the side of the road asking for help and my father happened to pass by. He tried to pick the injured man up and take him back to his truck, not realising that the robbers were still there. So, they turned to him and shot him. His interruption gave the injured man another chance to live. He saved his life, but we lost our father, and my mother lost her husband.

"You can imagine how hard it was for us to continue with life after a tragic event, but life continued. We had to move on as painfully as we could, one day at a time. Losing someone in your life creates a hole that cannot be filled. We just learn how to live with it. However, grief can be a grace to recreate a life of longing into a life of living. In my grief, my faith and life with the Church strengthen me. I can say, looking back, God held me like a child being comforted by a loving parent.

"My testimony is that my faith healed my past, comforts my present and holds my future. I saw and felt the spirit of God moving my family and me to places where we could heal and feel whole again."

Melany went on to share her thoughts when Fr Paul Farren asked her to speak at the Awards ceremony: "I was waiting for a train to Paris, in London. After I put the phone down, I felt nervous just thinking about what I was going to say. As I was waiting for my train for that journey, I heard the announcement regularly repeated at the station, 'See it. Say

it. Sort it.' Then I thought, often in our journey in life, God does regularly announce this message in our lives. See the grace of God working in our lives. Proclaim His goodness and do good so everyone can have a little heaven down here. See it. Say it. Sort it."

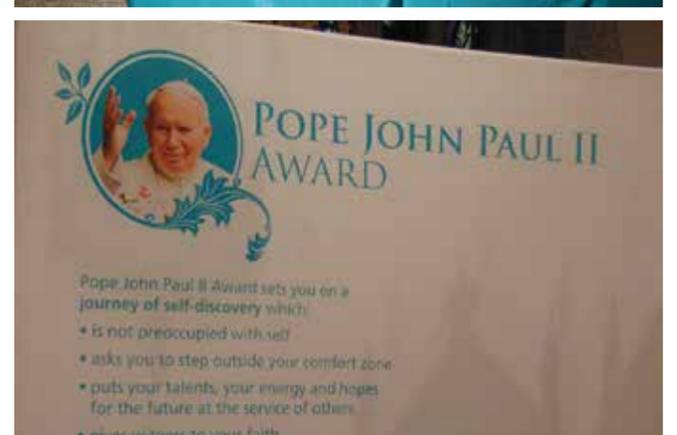
She added: "Today will only happen if you have seen the works of the Lord in your life and or if you have shared the good news with others. You have fully acted on it and sorted it out. That is why you are rewarded for it."

Commenting on her experience of having worked with many young people and adults in her life, Melany said: "I have worked alongside them doing outreach mission work in parishes, poor communities overseas, and even in prison ministries here, in England and the Philippines. I have witnessed this generation of young people being fearless. They are not afraid to be seen and heard."

"You are not afraid to be the saints of this millennium," she told the young people gathered, adding: "My prayer is that you stay courageous in seeking first the Kingdom of God in your lives. I pray that you have eyes that see God in, sometimes, what appears to be a godless world, and to speak in truth and with courage, even when your voice is shaking.

"And finally, to act like Christ; walking in this world holding the truth in your heart, knowing that you are loved and that no matter what your past, present or future maybe, you are always loved. It is a non-negotiable truth about the good news. You are loved. See it, say it and act with love."

Congratulating the young people and thanking them for what they have done for the Church, Melany said: "You are our hope and future", and left them with a quote from Maya Angelou, the American poet, civil rights activist and world famous author, who died in 2014: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."



Guest speaker, Melany Francisco-Lawless with JPII Award Patron, Bishop Donal McKeown.

# Over 300 young people receive Pope John Paul II Award

OVER 300 young people from across the Derry Diocese and beyond received the Pope John Paul II Award at this year's ceremony in St Eugene's Cathedral, with three receiving the Papal Cross Award.

Guest speaker, Melany Francisco-Lawless, of Youth Ministry Trust in the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle, made the 328 presentations alongside Bishop Donal, Award Patron, to young people from 21 second level schools in the Diocese, who represented 44 parishes within the Diocese of Derry and 13 parishes outside of it.

Founded in Derry, the Award was launched in 2006 by the then Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop

Lazarotto, and over the 16 years since it has been introduced in 23 dioceses throughout Ireland and continues to be the largest youth movement in the Irish Church.

The Award has also been introduced in the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and, recently, in the Diocese of Portsmouth, with the support of the Award's international coordinator, Tony Brennan.

For further information on the Award contact Lizzie Rea on [lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org](mailto:lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org) or contact the Diocesan Catechetical Centre on +44 28 71264087.

[www.thepopejohnpauliiaward.com](http://www.thepopejohnpauliiaward.com)  
[www.catecheticalcentre.org](http://www.catecheticalcentre.org)

Photography by Stephen Latimer.



*THIS month, we welcome on board Ella McDermott, from the Banagher Parish in the Co Derry Deanery, who is a Year 13 student at Thornhill College. For her first article, with Grandparents' Day having been celebrated during Catholic Schools' Week, Ella has reflected on the role of a grandparent in a teenager's life.*

*Jodie has chosen a Lenten theme and writes about Lent being a time to remember that we rely on God, while Evan shares how his recent experience of 'Lectio Divina' is giving him a better understanding of the Sunday Gospel readings.*

*Having completed and received her Pope John Paul II Gold Award, Bronagh recalls her very rewarding experience and highly recommends the Award as a great way of young people getting involved in their parish.*

*Niamh shares her thoughts on Jesus loving people with disabilities just as they are, and John focuses on the Father of the Big Bang – Monsignor Georges Lemaître, of Belgium.*



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.

## The Father of the Big Bang! by John

FOR this month's article, I thought I might do something quite different. My day job at the moment is studying Physics. I have loved Physics, or rather to say, I have loved the idea of understanding how the world around us functions, since I was a little child. However, amongst the many reasons why I chose to pursue Physics, one of them of was because I was inspired by a quaint and relatively unknown Belgian Monsignor.

Georges Henri Joseph Édouard Lemaître was born in Charleroi, Belgium and he went on to receive a classical education at a Jesuit Secondary School. From a young age, he was attracted to the priesthood as well as to the sciences, but the First World War (in which he served as an artillery officer and received the Belgian War Cross) interrupted his studies.

After the war, he continued with his studies in Theoretical Physics, received a PhD with a thesis on pure mathematics, and was then ordained as a priest in 1923 by Cardinal Mercier, a prominent Thomist of his age.

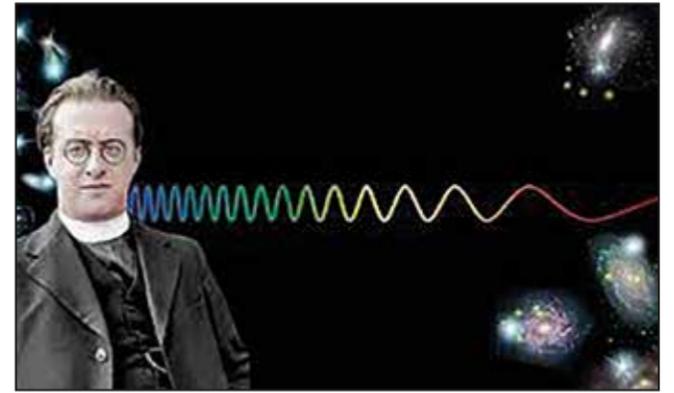
He went onto then study at Cambridge under Sir Arthur Eddington, a prominent

cosmologist, and then at Harvard and MIT, to further his studies in astrophysics. It was during these studies that he would encounter evidence regarding an expanding universe.

To give some context, at this time in history, most scientists believed that the universe was static, that is, that it didn't change at all in size or shape. Events can happen inside this space called the universe, but it wouldn't change its dimensions. However, with Einstein's theory of General Relativity, this static view of the universe became increasingly hard to hold. Einstein, himself, found the idea of an expanding universe disturbing, and so he came up with a cosmological constant that would mitigate the effects in his theory that caused expansion.

Lemaître, on the other hand, did not see a problem with this. He was confident to take the data and the theory as were presented to him and to come up with a theory of an expanding universe, which became to be known as the Big Bang Theory.

His ideas were revolutionary, but it would not be until the 1960s when his theory would be proven with evidence of Cosmic



Background Radiation, that is, radiation left over from the big bang.

Despite his theory being consistent as it was, many scientists did not take his word for it. They could not understand how a man who wore a cassock could have an unbiased assessment on the beginning of the universe.

Lemaître's response to this was pretty succinct: "Should a priest reject relativity because it contains no authoritative exposition on the doctrine of the Trinity? Once you realize that the Bible does not purport to be a textbook of science, the old controversy between religion and science vanishes...The doctrine of the Trinity is much more abstruse than anything in

relativity or quantum mechanics; but, being necessary for salvation, the doctrine is stated in the Bible.

If the theory of relativity had also been necessary for salvation, it would have been revealed to Saint Paul or to Moses...As a matter of fact neither Saint Paul nor Moses had the slightest idea of relativity."

In the end, Lemaître would be honoured by the International Astronomical Union in 1981, when they renamed Hubble's Law (the law regarding the expansion of the universe) to the Hubble-Lemaître law.

Monsignor Georges Lemaître is a person who looked for the truth and beauty of God in nature, whilst keeping his faith intact. He truly matches St Anselm's maxim Fides quaerens intellectum.

## Jesus loves people with disabilities just as they are by Niamh

POPE Francis has called for loving and caring for people who suffer from mental illness, and has reassured them that Jesus loves them just as they are.

He spoke to participants during a study day on 'Siblings: Sisters and brothers in disability and mental illness', which was held at the Sala Troisi and organised by L'Arche Community in Italy, which cares for people with neurodevelopmental disorders.

The Pope acknowledged that disability impacts the entire family and said that God loves us just as we are.

Jesus is never ashamed of us, the Pope stressed, saying the Lord makes our problems His own: "Jesus loves us just as we are, with our talents and with our frailties and disabilities."

This Lent, we must reflect on how we can better ourselves as Christians and as followers of

Jesus by showing those with disabilities compassion and genuine care, as Jesus, in Mark 16:15, commands us to: "Go into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

This implies restoration of disabled people's rightful inheritance in Jesus Christ and their rightful place in the church as part of the 'Body of Christ.'

Disability is attributed to God. The general view of the Old Testament writers is that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions for sin or as an expression of God's wrath for people's disobedience. This, however, today should not be accepted by Christians as God loves everyone and created everyone in His image, thus all of His creations are perfect and Jesus calls us to love people with disabilities, as He does.



"GRANDPARENTS have a divine responsibility to share the love of the Lord with their children and grandchildren. It's a responsibility that should be seen as a blessed opportunity to share the Gospel with the next generation." (2 Timothy 1:5)

Many feel that the universal experience of early adolescence can unfortunately dampen a child's relationship with their parents and grandparents, but I believe it is a period one has

## A grandparent's role in a teenager's life by Ella

to experience in order to truly appreciate the familial love and support their elders can provide.

During this period of time, some teenagers believe their parents to be 'uncool' and rather annoying, some of them finding solace in their grandparent's arms during these hormonal teenage tantrums.

At the time, some people cannot seem to understand why their mothers can't be more like their grandmothers. However, it is not until they reach their later teenage years and begin to encroach on early adult-life that they begin to understand that 'Mummy' is, indeed, 'Granny' in her own little ways.

Through their years of parenting, our grandparents pass down snippets of their own beliefs and personalities to our parents, and in-turn we too receive these

small yet beautiful parts of them through our mothers and fathers.

Eventually, we realise just how vital their role is in our development as civil members of a secular society, as well as strengthening our role as children of God.

The Bible holds a high view of grandparents, as seen in Deuteronomy 4:9, "Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

I know my own grandparents have embraced this verse wholly, whether conscious of it or not. Between learning to drive, attempting to balance my school and work life, and trying to map out my desired career,

their unshakeable love and faith has contributed beautifully to the development of who I am today, and how I manage life's challenges.

A grandparent's influence and love of prayer will stick with you through your life, and I believe that we, as their grandchildren, should show our appreciation through the reciprocation of the teachings of Jesus and The Word of God.

This may be achieved by accompanying them in prayer, or even something so simple as taking time out of our day to spend quality time with them and take advantage of the time we have together.

I truly believe that a bond so unique as the bond between grandchild and grandparent can never be broken, especially one grounded in faith.



## Lent is a time to remember that we rely on God by Jodie

AT the start of Lent 2023, we received our ashes. Pope Francis says that ashes remind us of the truth about ourselves.

When getting our ashes, we always think about how we can better ourselves. We can try to do this by going off things, going on things, or even fasting.

Pope Francis also reminds the faithful of the three great paths of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, that are traditionally encouraged during Lent. He says that ashes

initiate the start of our "return journey" to God.

Lent is a time to remember that we rely on God. Fr Patrick Mary Briscoe, Dominican Friar and Editor, Our Sunday visitor, references to this in saying: "We are not in charge. Our lives are not our own. The greatest secret of the spiritual life is learning how to surrender to God, to embrace His plans, and be led by Him." Just like when God led Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 4:1-11. The

Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil, where He fasted for forty days and forty nights.

Jesus helps us, similarly, get through our Lent, whether it's something simple like going off junk food or doing something more meaningful for yourself.

"Let us not neglect the grace of this holy season," said Pope Francis, "but fix our gaze on the Cross and set out, responding generously to the powerful

promptings of Lent."

So, having celebrated Ash Wednesday, we can feel inspired to focus on improving ourselves and being our best selves.





## 'Lectio Divina' gives me better understanding of Gospel readings

by Evan

OVER the last few months, my parish in the Waterside has offered the faith nourishment programme, 'Lectio Divina', which is Latin for 'Divine Reading'.

This is a meditative way of reading the Bible, where we let go of our own agendas and open ourselves to the voice of God.

The group meets every Thursday, at 8.15 pm in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, and it is led by Fr Patrick Lagan, and the deacon, Rev Stephen Ward.

We reflect on the upcoming Sunday's Gospel reading, and I have personally found that it has really opened my mind to

the Gospel and allowed me to understand what Christ is trying to say through it.

Pope Francis tells us: "For us Christians, meditating is a way to encounter Jesus. And in this way, only in this way, we rediscover ourselves."

I totally agree with His Holiness, for it has definitely increased my spirituality and also given me a different outlook on life.

All are welcome to come along on a Thursday night to join in. I would highly encourage people to come and experience 'Lectio Divina' as I am sure that you will leave with a better understanding of the Gospel of Christ.



## Bronagh reflects on the 16th Annual Pope John Paul II Award... An experience I will never forget

ON February 6, 2023, St Eugene's Cathedral in the heart of Derry welcomed 328 pupils from 21 different schools to receive the Pope John Paul II Award. I was lucky to be one of these pupils who got to experience the wonderful ceremony celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown and to receive my Gold PJPII Award.

Three pupils also received the Papal Cross Award, and 57 parishes participated in the Award ceremony, 13 of which were parishes outside the dioceses. This year was the 16th year of the Diocese's involvement in the Award. That is 16 years of young people getting involved in their parishes and communities, helping spread the Word of God and kindness.

The guest speaker, Melany Francisco-Lawless drew upon her own personal experiences and her journey with God following the tragic death of her father.

She spoke about her experience at World Youth Day and how this sparked her career in youth ministry and led her to follow her faith. She now lives and works in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, leading the youth ministry.

Melany spoke words of inspiration and everyone in the Cathedral could relate to her accounts of the rewarding feeling of getting involved with your community and parish.

The Pope John Paul II Award is one of the most rewarding programmes that I have taken part in. It has encouraged me to get involved in my community, from which I have made friends from all generations and have been involved in many events.

One of the most poignant moments was when I was told by an elderly lady about how it "gives her hope for the future" when she sees the young of the town helping



and giving up free time for others.

I didn't realise on starting the Award programme how giving up such a small portion of your day can mean so much to so many. I think everyone else who took part in the PJP II Award could agree, that it teaches you skills that will benefit you for the rest of your life.

I believe that it taught us all the true meaning of community, working together, and how, when a parish works together,

wonderful things can happen.

I have continued many of my volunteering activities since I finished my Award, and hope to continue for as long as possible.

I urge anyone considering the PJPII Award to do it. You won't regret it and you will gain experiences, friendships and connections within your parish and community to last you a lifetime.

## Dungiven JPIIs make St Brigid Crosses

THE Pope John Paul II Award participants in the Dungiven Parish enjoyed celebrating the Feast of St Brigid.

After some special prayers, Clara, Cara, Ashlyn and Shane got started on weaving their St Brigid's crosses, with JPII leader, Marian Murphy left very impressed by their efforts.



# Surf Sand Son

May 12 - 14 2023

See you there!

Meet new people, explore your faith, and learn to surf. Join us for a Surfing Retreat Weekend. Open to all secondary school students. Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo

For more details go to [socials](#)

Lenten Programme

Lenten Online Programme  
'Be Still'  
Sign up below.  
Monday's of Lent 7:30pm

Great way to gain PJPII Hours  
Meet new People  
Learn more about our Faith

Derry youth

WORLD YOUTH DAY AUGUST 2023

Derry Youth are hosting a meeting for those registered for WYD in Lisbon this year

**Sunday 26th of March**  
**1pm**  
**Cathedral Hall**

## Derry Youth News by Niamh McLaughlin

DERRY Youth are hosting a new online Lenten programme called 'Be Still' for students partaking in the Pope John Paul II Award.

This programme will run over the six Mondays of Lent. 'Be Still' focuses on the different ways that we can pray; for example, drawing with Scripture, Lectio Divina, Visio Divina and so on.

Each week, we will focus on the

different ways and explore how each method of prayer can help us this Lenten season.

The Pope John Paul II Award annual national pilgrimage to Knock Shrine is taking place on Tuesday, March 28.

All young people from across the diocese of Ireland are invited to attend the day, which will be filled with prayer, catechesis, reflection

and celebration. The day begins at 11 am and will finish with Mass at 2.30 pm.

The Derry Youth Scholarship Programme continues with the young people currently partaking in a 'Foundation in Youth Ministry' course provided by Aspal.

The young people are also working closely with Mary's

Meals and learning about key aspects of their faith.

World Youth Day 2023 is ongoing. We will be having our first meeting with those registered on the 26th of March at 1pm in St. Eugene's Cathedral Hall. We are looking forward as a diocese to supporting these young people in their journey to World Youth Day.

# Celebrating the ordination of Rev Michael McCaul, Bishop Donal advised...

## Be a man of prayer, letting Christ form your heart in silence

ORDAINING Rev Michael McCaul, of the Cathedral Parish, to the priesthood, Bishop Donal McKeown warned him that without a constant experience of personal conversion, his ministry “could be reduced to that of a religious service provider”, and that “Jesus expects much better than that from His Church”.

Explaining that that is why the synodal journey for the church “is not about adapting ourselves to the current cultural preoccupations of our society”, Bishop Donal added: “Synodality is about seeing where we have to repent of worldly ideas and allowing God to reign in His Church and in our hearts. Jesus wants to save us from ourselves and our low expectations.

“We are not capable of being our own saviours. Only the Cross can offer that salvation. That is where every synodal conversation begins and ends. That is why we ask the Holy Spirit to unsettle us so that we can glimpse what someone has called ‘the upside down Kingdom of God’. We are reborn as members of God’s kingdom.”

The Bishop went on to speak of “the temptation to be proud of our own faith and look down on others whose life experience may have been very different from ours”.

Pointing out that Jesus “was counted among the sinners”, and

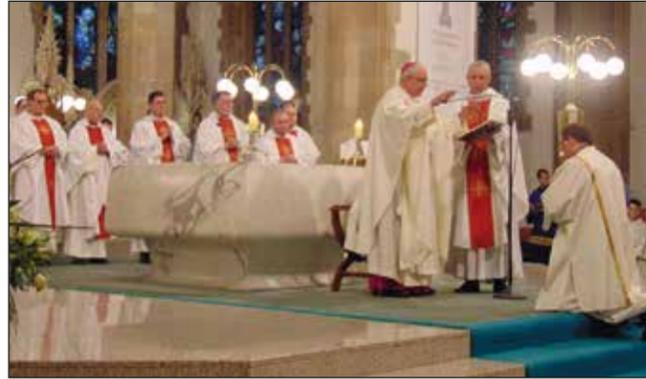
had “lived, ate and died among them”, Bishop Donal urged Rev Michael to “avoid the temptation to feel superior to anyone” and to “never support groups who think they are a cut above the rest.”

Referring to the Gospel reading on The Beatitudes, he remarked that Jesus was “not merely issuing a set of guidelines about how we should live”, but also stating that it is possible to live with these values.

“With grace, our human nature can do great things,” said Bishop Donal, adding: “We see that in the lives of the saints. Our cultural role models very often imply that those who are poor in spirit, gentle, merciful and peacemakers are losers, they are missing out on all that life has to offer. Jesus encourages those who are looked down on to believe that they are blessed, for – in the long run – they will be shown to have been wise.”

He continued: “Jesus was victorious over sin and death in His Resurrection. Those who follow the Beatitudes will be on the winning side. They will not only be blessed but be a blessing on their communities. We all know people who inspire us because of their leadership and courage.

“In a frightened world, where anger is often seen as a virtue, we are blessed by those who sow seeds of hope and reconciliation.



As church, our task is never to look down on those outside or blame them for not being active in their parish communities.”

“The Beatitudes,” noted Bishop Donal, “challenge us to show that our relationship with Jesus fills us with grace to be outrageously gentle, poor in spirit, merciful and peacemakers, and so, point to who Jesus is and to what we can all become in Him.”

Telling Rev Michael, to live his life generously and to give people “a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God is like”, he stated: “Today, you don’t merely receive a sacrament. You become a sacrament.”

Remarking that the country had “suffered much over the centuries with conflict, oppression, poverty and even famine”, Bishop Donal commented: “In 2023, we face division, anger and uncertainty about the future. That sort of message is frightening for so many young people, so many of

whom are very anxious.

“The church and our society will be renewed when Christ’s followers are driven to look outwards with peaceful hearts that are formed by the Beatitudes.”

He concluded by urging Rev Michael to “be a man of prayer, letting Christ form your heart in silence. In your own weakness, bring good news to neighbours and strangers. Show how God’s grace has changed your life.

“The beatitudes challenged Jesus’ followers to believe in his Kingdom. He challenges us today to let grace flow in our time and place in Jesus’ battle against sin and its power. That will not be easy in an age that says we ought to pamper ourselves. With Peter and Andrew, James and John, you are asked whether you prepared to take Jesus seriously, wherever it may lead and whatever it may cost you.”





Newly ordained Fr Michael McCaul recalls blessing of his late father as he sets out on priestly ministry...

# God go with you!

THE ordination of Rev Michael Patrick McCaul to the priesthood, on the last Sunday of January, was a joyous occasion not only for his family and friends who gathered in St Eugene's Cathedral for the ceremony, but the faithful across the Diocese.

Rev Michael's family were very much involved in the liturgy, with his brother, Eamonn, and sister, Rosemary doing the Readings, and nieces and nephews presenting the gifts, while his niece, Emma Murray beautifully sang 'The Deer's Cry' after Holy Communion.

Feeling truly blessed to have been called to the priesthood, the newly ordained Fr Michael had a special message of thanks for all who were part of his journey, and entrusted his vocation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Offering praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of his vocation, he asked for others to join his prayer that he may "truly love and serve others in imitation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ with, in and through the Holy Spirit".

In a special message to his mother, Philomena, and family, Fr Michael thanked them for all their "unconditional love, prayers, support, wisdom, and guidance", adding: "I thank you for listening to my ranting and raving! I thank you for the gift of your faith. I thank you for believing in me,

especially when I didn't even believe in myself! For what am I, if not pieces of you all?"

And, he finished with words of blessing used by his late father, Michael, "God go with you!" and a Prayer for Perseverance from the Confession of St Patrick:

*I now entrust my soul to God, who is most faithful, and for Him I am an ambassador in my humble station.*

*For God has no favourites and He chose me for this office to become one of His ministers, even if among the least of them. What return can I make to Him for His goodness to me?*

*What can I say or what can I promise to my Lord since any ability I have comes from Him?*

*Suffice it for Him to look into my heart and mind;*

*for I am ready and indeed greatly desire it that He should give me His cup to drink, as He gave it to others who love Him.*

*My only prayer to God is that it may never happen that I should leave His People who He won for Himself at the end of the earth.*

*I ask God for perseverance, to grant that I remain a faithful witness*

*to Him for His own sake until my passing from this life.*



Welcoming Shauna Clifford's consecration to a life of virginity as a blessing for the Church in Derry, Bishop Donal remarked...

# All growth and renewal come from our intimacy with Christ

THE many friends and well-wishers who gathered in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, for the institution of Shauna Clifford into the Ordo Virginum on Friday, February 10, were deeply touched by the beauty of the ceremony celebrated by Bishop Donal.

Shauna is the fourth female in the Diocese to formally unite herself to Christ through being consecrated to a life of virginity, and the other Consecrated Virgins, Grainne McGroarty, Ann Walker and Lida Bulf, were present to join the Holy Family parishioner and her family on her special day.

Shauna's beautiful gentleness shone through as she sat in front of the altar dressed in white, while Bishop Donal and Fr Joe Gormley, Holy Family, Ballymagroarty PP, guided her through the Rite of Consecration of Virgins living in the World.

On being called forward at the start of the ceremony so that, through Bishop Donal, the Lord might consecrate the resolution she had formed in her heart, Shauna responded: "Now with all my heart I follow you, reverence you and seek your presence. Lord, fulfil my hope: show me your loving kindness, the greatness of your mercy."

Next followed the homily, in which Bishop Donal highlighted that it was the Feast of St Scholastica, who, along with her brother St Benedict, lived at the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth.

"It was a time of huge turmoil in Italy," noted Bishop Donal, remarking that, at such times, strong figures come to the fore.

"In the face of invasions and war," he added, "Scholastica and Benedict chose not the sword but a community life that was based on prayer and learning. Scholastica is credited with founding the first community of Benedictine

Sisters."

With the first apparition of Our Lady to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, in 1858, to be celebrated the following day, Bishop Donal spoke about how Bernadette would later "dedicate the remainder of her relatively short life to God by joining the Sisters of Charity of Nevers".

"She became a saint," he noted, "not by becoming very important but by recognising that littleness is great in God's eyes, and by believing that God's ways are wise beyond our comprehension."

He continued: "Challenging times bring out the best in some people. When the Church wants to take the path of least resistance, it does not bear witness to Jesus who took the road less travelled to Resurrection via Calvary."

Acknowledging the many challenges Shauna has faced in life, Bishop Donal commented on the "huge level of human determination and God-given faith" she has shown, adding: "Because of grace building on your nature, you are a strong woman. And, like so many women in different situations and in different ways, you wish to publicly dedicate your life to Christ."

### Witness

"That witness of yours is a blessing for our local church in Derry. In an age which sees having fun as the greatest good and which tends to put enormous value on bling and Botox, you are publicly stating that there are other values and ideals that are beautiful."

Referring to the recent Sunday Gospel reading on the Beatitudes, the Bishop said: "Jesus used them as indicators that the Kingdom of God is close at hand and can take form in the lives of people. You are witnessing today to the grace of God in your life. You are



responding to a call to become a sign of the Kingdom of God being very near to us in Derry in 2023."

He went on to comment on one of the Bible images of Church being the bride of Christ, saying: "That is a very daring image to use. It can apply to individuals who fall in love with Jesus. But your decision today is making a statement about who we are as a church. All growth and renewal come from our intimacy with Christ."

"And the sacraments emphasise that intimacy which touches our body and spirit. Our bodies are blessed with water and oil at Baptism and Confirmation. In the Eucharist, Jesus comes to us in very concrete form. And our bodies can be anointed when we are ill. And then we have this strange belief that our bodies are precious enough to be raised up on the Last Day."

Finishing off with some words from Pope Francis, written in 2020, indicating that Shauna's lifestyle will be a model of how the Church should be, Bishop Donal quoted: "Love everyone, especially those in need. Your consecration dedicates you to God without separating you from the setting in which you live and in which you are called to bear personal witness by a lifestyle of evangelical closeness. By such closeness to

the men and women of our times, your virginal consecration helps the Church to love the poor, to discern forms of material and spiritual poverty, to help those who are weak and vulnerable, those suffering from physical and mental illness, the young and the elderly, and all those in danger of being marginalized or discarded." Remarking that it was an important day for Shauna, Bishop Donal highlighted that it was also "a celebration of who we are as a Diocesan Church", and thanked her for enriching the Diocesan Church by her commitment to Christ and her determination to see this day of consecration.

Before Bishop Donal prayed the Prayer of Consecration over her, Shauna offered herself to God, saying: "Father, receive my resolution to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity which, with God's help, I here profess before you and God's holy people."

On receiving the insignia of Consecration and a newly consecrated book containing the Prayer of the Church from Bishop Donal, Shauna proclaimed: "I am espoused to Him whom the angels serve; sun and moon stand in wonder at His glory".

After the ceremony, all were invited to join Shauna and her family for some tasty bites and a lovely slice of celebration cake.





## Keep praying for Vocations

THE Diocese of Derry is still rejoicing following the ordinations of a deacon and a priest in January, as well as the dedication of a Consecrated Virgin in February this year.

We look forward to two more priestly ordinations this summer/autumn. As already mentioned in earlier news, this year we have two men from the Diocese who have begun their formation for priesthood in Salamanca, Spain, and one other who has gone to Rome to continue his studies there.

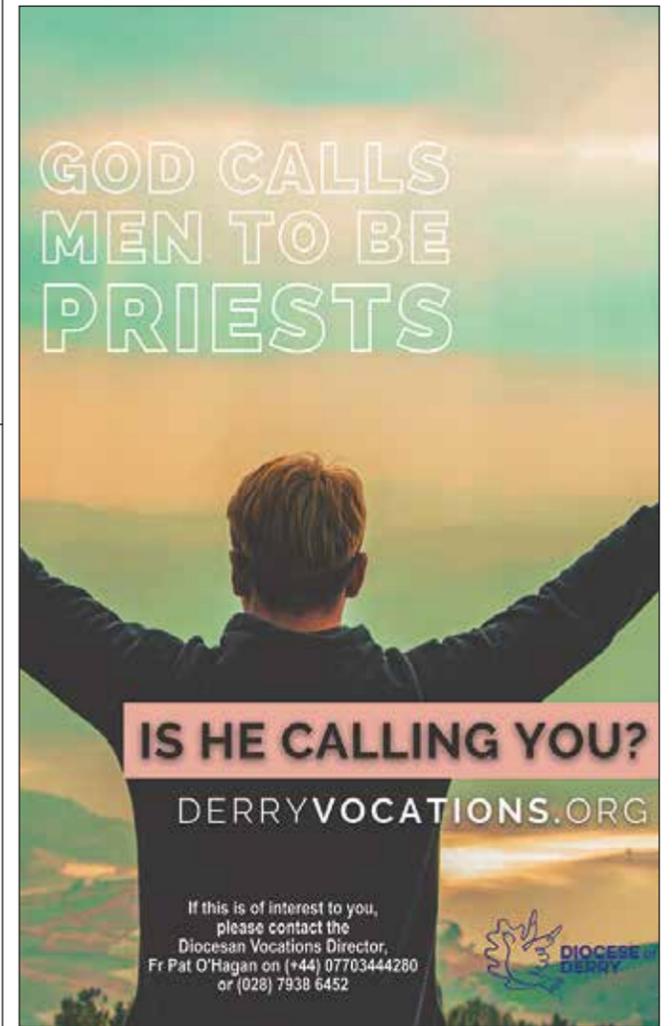
There will be a Vocations weekend in the Drumalis Centre, in Larne, from April 21-23. Anyone interested in attending Further information will be

available from the Diocesan Vocations' Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan, who can be contacted at (028) 7938 6259 or at pgoh2111@gmail.com

The Derry Diocesan Year of Prayer for Vocations will end on St Patrick's Day, but the need for ongoing prayer for this intention is very strong, so the monthly Holy Hour for Vocations will continue in St Eugene's Cathedral, at 8 pm on the second Friday of the month.

There will be a National Year of Prayer for Vocations, beginning on Good Shepherd Sunday, April 30.

Please keep Vocations in your prayers. As Jesus said: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest."



## National Year of Vocations to Diocesan Priesthood

THE Irish Bishops' Conference has announced that a Year of Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood will get underway in April, with the theme "Take the Risk for Christ".

One of the main aims of this year of focus on diocesan priesthood is to encourage conversations within families, with priests and in parish communities about the beauty of the vocation of priesthood.

Organised by the Council

for Vocations of the Bishops' Conference, the Bishops have found that feedback from newly ordained priests indicates a strong correlation between their calling and encouragement received from a priest about their ministry.

The year of promotion for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood will run from Vocations/Good Shepherd Sunday, April 30, with the awareness campaign opening on April 25, the Feast of St Mark

the Evangelist, with a special conference in Maynooth entitled, 'Evangelisation and Vocation'.

The keynote address for the conference will be delivered by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pro-Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelisation.

During the course of the 12 months of the campaign, it is planned to host events in parishes and at pilgrim sites around the country, and to provide resources for homes and schools.

Next April 30 also marks the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations, which was instituted by St Pope Paul VI in 1963 during the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

With answering God's call to priesthood counter-cultural in these times, heightening the need for courage, the Bishops are aware that future priests will all the more need support to discern their vocation.

### Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during February and March for:

#### Parishes:

We pray that parishes, placing communion at the centre, may increasingly become communities of faith, fraternity and welcome towards those most in need.

#### Victims of Abuse:

We pray for those who have suffered harm from members of the Church; may they find within the Church herself a

concrete response to their pain and suffering.

### 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 February:

- Fr John Doherty (Feb 1st)
- All priests (2nd)
- Fr Michael Doherty (3rd)
- Fr Patrick Doherty (4th)
- Mgr Andrew Dolan (5th)
- Fr Brian Donnelly (6th)
- Mgr Joseph Donnelly (7th)
- Fr Liam Donnelly (8th)
- All priests (9th)
- Fr John Downey (10th)
- All priests (11th)
- Fr Malachy Gallagher (12th)
- Fr Jack Farrell (13th)
- Fr Paul Fraser (14th)

- Fr John Farren (15th)
- Fr Neil Farren (16th)
- Fr Paul Farren (17th)
- All priests (18th)
- Fr John Forbes (19th)
- Fr Edward Gallagher (20th)
- Fr Dermot Harkin (21st)
- Fr John Gilmore (22nd)
- Fr Joseph Gormley (23rd)
- Fr Eamon Graham (24th)
- Fr Gerald Hasson (25th)
- Fr Karl Haan (26th)
- Fr Eugene Hasson (27th)
- All Priests (28th)

### Remember in prayer during March:

- Fr John Irwin (March 1st)
- Fr Charles Keaney (2nd)
- All Priests (3rd)

- Fr Patrick Lagan (4th)
- Fr Michael Keaveny (5th)
- Fr Seamus Kelly (6th)
- Fr Edward Kilpatrick (7th)
- All priests (8th)
- Fr Charlie Logue (9th)
- Fr Paul McCafferty (10th)
- Mgsr Bryan McCanny (11th)
- Fr Michael McCaughey (12th)
- Fr Andrew McCloskey (13th)
- All Priests (14th)
- Fr Peter Madden (15th)
- Fr Noel McDermott (16th)
- Fr Eamon McDevitt (17th)
- Fr John McDevitt (18th)
- Fr Anthony Mailey (19th)
- Fr Kevin McElhennon (20th)
- Fr Daniel McFaul (21st)
- Fr Dermot McGirr (22nd)
- Fr Micheal McGavigan (23rd)
- Fr Brian McGoldrick (24th)

- Fr Neil McGoldrick (25th)
- All priests (26th)
- Fr James McGonagle (27th)
- Dr James McGrory (28th)
- All Priests (29th)
- Fr Edward McGuinness (30th)
- Bishop Donal McKeown (31st)



# Three Patrons' parishioners enjoy weaving St Brigid's Crosses

THE tradition of making St Brigid Crosses to celebrate our national Patron Saint's Feast Day was continued in many parts of the Diocese again this year, and also formed part of the celebrations in the Three Patrons' Parish.

On the Eve of the Feast of St Brigid, there was an afternoon of cross making with rushes in St Pio House, Galliagh, organised by members of The Living Disciples Group, and a similar gathering hosted by Fr Sean O'Donnell took place in the Kildare Room, beside Carnhill Parochial House, later in the evening.

There was a great turnout of

parishioners, from the young up to more senior members of the parish community, in the Kildare Room, who enjoyed a cuppa and some tasty treats as they chatted and wove their St Brigid Crosses of various sizes and designs.

Over the generations, the Cross of St Brigid has been regarded as a symbol of peace and protection, protection of animals and from fire and disease, and a blessing for the home.

The evening came to a close with a sing-song when some parishioners arrived with their musical instruments to join in the celebration of their Parish Patron.



# Eangach

## Ár nDúchas

A Naomh Bríd a Mhuire na nGael,  
scar orainn do bhrat  
A Naomh Bríd a chroí na féile,  
stiúir sinn ar an mbóthar ceart.  
A Naomh Bríd gheanúil ghrástúil,  
ar ár namhaid cosain sinn.  
A Naomh Bríd a bhean rialta álainn,  
ar uair ár mbáis glaoigh orainn.

## A Mhuire 'Mháthair

A Mhuire 'Mháthair  
Is é seo mo ghuí  
Go maire Íosa  
Go deo im' chroí.

Ave Maria,  
Mo Ghrá, Ave  
Is tusa mo Mháthair,  
Is Máthair Dé



## Mí Feabhra: Athrú, Féilte agus Tús Nua

Tá athrú nó aistriú ag baint le Mí Feabhra. Go traidisiúnta, dearcadh ar thús na míosa seo mar a bhí tús an earraigh ann. Is cinnte, ag an am seo den bhliain in Éirinn, tá athrú le sonrú san aimsir. Is é Lá Fhéile Bríde an chéad lá den mhí seo, agus go traidisiúnta, agus an chéad lá den earrach.

Is mór an grá atá ag na Gaeil do Bhríd Naofa le fada. Iníon le rí págánach, síltear gurb é Naomh Pádraig féin a bhaist í. Óna hóige, bhí an cineáltas agus mórmhian le Dia a leanúint, le feiceáil go soiléir. Thug sí seod luachmhar do bhacach gan airgead, agus fuair sí íde béil óna hathair. Nuair ba mhian lena hathair a cleamhnas a dhéanamh, dhiúltaigh sí fear a phósadh agus d'éirigh sí ina bean rialta. Bhunaigh sí institiúid eaglasta ag Cill Dara. Ní amhras go ndeachaigh Naomh Bríd i bhfeidhm ar na Gaeil ag an am. Mhair cuimhne uirthi i mórán de phaidreacha coitianta, in amhráin agus in ainmneacha.

Ilár na míosa, ar 11ú, ceiliúraimid teacht Mhuire go Lourdes na Fraince. Sa bhliain 1858 i sráidbhaile i ndeisceart na Fraince, thaispeán Muire í féin do chailín bocht sna déaga; Bernadette Soubirous. Dar le Bernadette gur bean álainn a bhí inti, a spreag í chun guí. D'iarr sí uirthi fillleadh ar an áit, rud a rinne sí go dílis arís is arís eile – 18 n-uaire san iomlán – le Muire a fheiceáil. Níor chreid mórán í ar dtús siocair í a bheith 'simplí' agus 'gan oideachas' ach chuaigh Bernadette go dílis ar cuairt ar 'an bhean', mar a chuir sí síos uirthi, agus thagadh na sluaite. Nuair a d'inis Bernadette do na sagairt gur chuir 'an bhean' an teideal 'Gan Smál' uirthi féin, teideal a bhronn an Eaglais uirthi bliain roimhe, bhí a fhios acu go raibh Muire feicthe aici. Ní raibh bealach ar bith eile a mbeadh eolas



Bernadette Soubirous, a chonaic Muire ag Lourdes

dá leithéid ag cailín óg tuatach. Inniu, tá grá ag na mílte do Naomh Bernadette agus do Mhuire Lourdes, agus téann na mílte ar oilithreacht ansin gach bliain.

Ag deireadh Mhí Feabhra tá muid tosaithe leis an Charghas. Sa séasúr mór seo, ag toiseacht le Céadaoin na Luaithre, dírimid ar ár gcuidreamh leis an Tiarna.

Bíimid ag dul isteach san fhásach le hÍosa, ag guí, ag troscadh agus ag brath ar Dhia amháin, ag súil le dóchas, leis an Cháisc.

## Cogadh san Úcráin – Bliain ar Aghaidh

Ag deireadh Mhí Feabhra 2023, tá suntas ann sa mhéid – faraor – is gurb é comóradh ar thús na lán-chógaíochta idir an Rúis agus an Úcráin. Ar 24ú Feabhra 2022, chuaigh arm na Rúise isteach san Úcráin agus, i bhfaiteadh na súl, athraíodh saolta na ndaoine sa tír go tobann agus go buan. Ba léir don saol mór an fhirinne searbh gur imigh mórán imeacht óna mbailte, roinnt acu a tháinig chun

na tíre seo. Bhí an deis ag cuid againn Carghas cearta a chleachtadh tríd soláithrí a bhailiú ar son na dteifeach a bhí anois ina sluaite in Oirthear na hEorpa.

Ag an tús, bhí an chosúlacht ar an scéal go nglacfaidh an Rúis seilbh ar an tír iomlán go gasta. Ní mar seo a tharla sa deireadh agus de réir a chéile, bogadh fócas an chatha i dtreo oirthir na tíre, an áit a bhfuil sé greamaithe inniu,

míosa ina dhiaidh. Nochtadh dúinn i rith ama, roinnt de uafás atá mar thoradh ar an síorchath milteannach seo. Tá teannas ag ardú go hidirnáisiúnta fosta, idir thíortha an Iarthair agus an Rúis, faoina bhfuil ag titim amach san Úcráin.

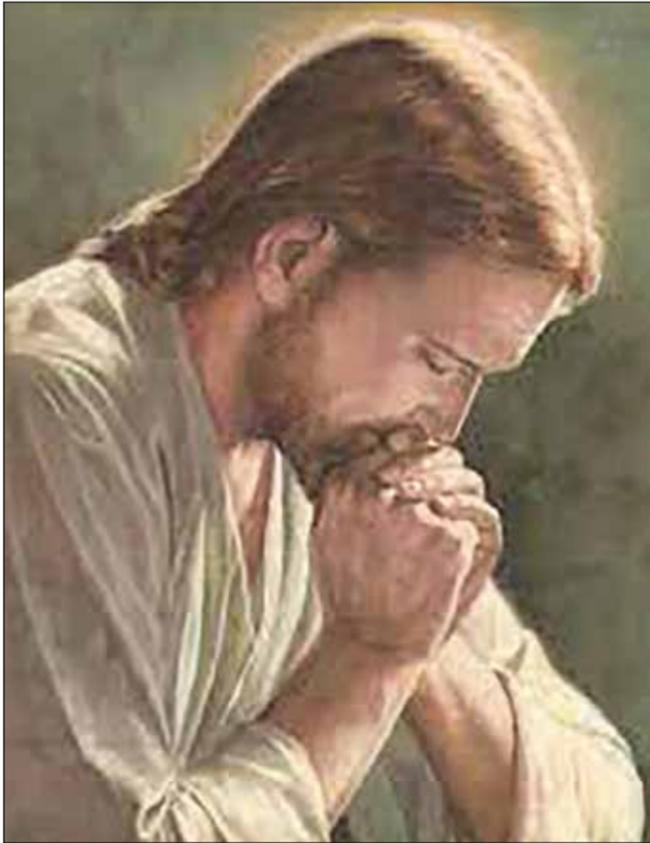
Cá bhfuil an dóchas le fáil againn agus an imreas seo ann? Caithfimid fánacht dírithe ar an Tiarna. Caithfimid eiseamláir Chríost a

leanúint fosta, le maireachtáil ina ghrá-sa. Cén rud eile atá de dhíth i ndomhain agus in am bhfuil achrann agus gráin le feiceáil go soiléir? Is rud é seo a thig an saol mór a athrú go mór. Ní mór dúinn guí chuig Dia agus chuig na naoimh, is leis an Tiarna an bua sa deireadh.

A Mhuire, a Bhanríon na Síochána, guigh ar ár son.



Seasann dealbh den Ardaingéal Mícheál i lár Kyiv.



## If we listen for the voice of the Lord, we can enter into His peace

*At the end of his Pastoral Letter regarding the way forward for the Church in the Diocese, Bishop Donal writes: "In a context of prayer and of openness to the Holy Spirit, I invite the parishes of the Diocese to set out on this mission of renewal, believing that if we listen for the voice of the Lord, we can enter into His peace. Like generations of missionaries before us, we walk into the future, filled with hope, that the Lord had already prepared for us."*

*A number of people from across the Diocese have been reflecting on Bishop Donal's letter and share their thoughts here...*

# "When you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me" (Jer 29:14)

by Noel Bradley

BISHOP Donal's recent pastoral letter opens with the encouraging words of the prophet Jeremiah: "I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans of peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you". If we could only take those words as personally addressed to each of us, it would give us hope that God has a good plan for us. We need hope in our world and in our Church in order to continue to make things better.

The letter does not tell us what we have to do. It is an invitation to consider a few questions and suggestions. The opening suggestion is the key focus. He would like "the parishes (and that means the laity and the priests) to set out on a mission of renewal". Something NEW.

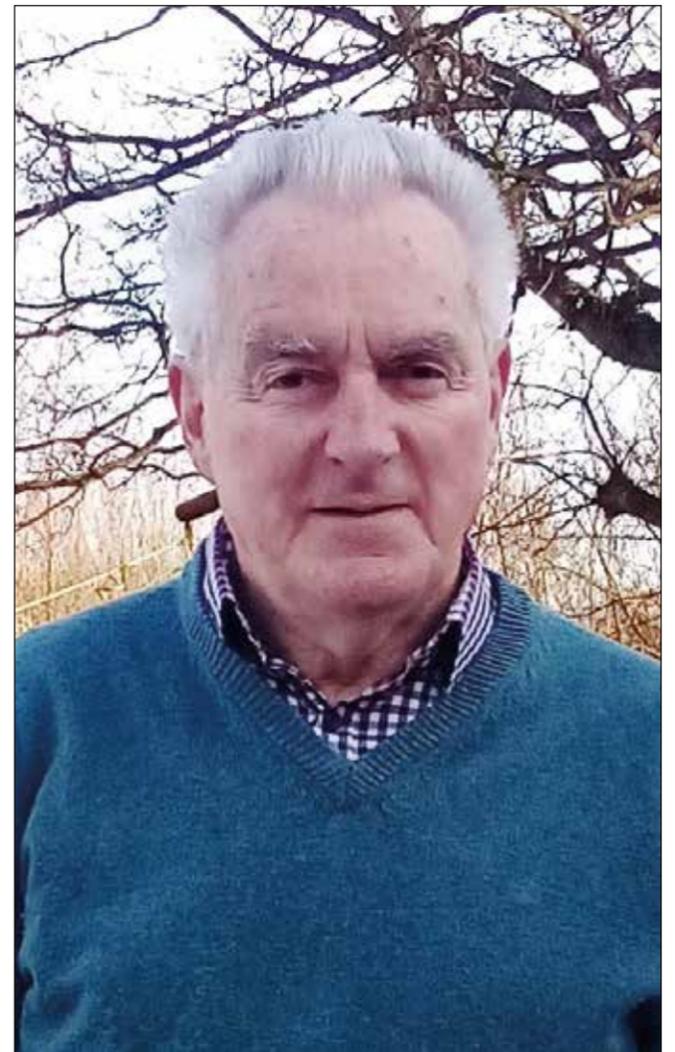
We live in a 'time of change' and the old way of understanding and practicing our faith is not working well enough for our modern world. This is the same call of over 50 years when Pope John XXXIII convened the second Vatican Council with the cry of 'aggiornamento' (bringing up to date). The Church over the centuries must have got out of date and behind the times. Pope John wanted a 'leap forward', so he called a universal Council of the whole Church.

It can be helpful for us older people to remember how, over the centuries, the Church became a kind of fortress against all the changes that were happening around it, for example in the

Enlightenment, in the natural and social sciences, in the movements for more democracy.

For most of us who can remember an older model of Church, it was one in which we thought that the Church was the priests and the bishops and, to lesser extent, the nuns; they had much less power. Many, unfortunately still think that. It is not an exaggeration to say that the laity were for the most part passive, there to receive the sacraments and teaching from the priest and to 'pray, pay and obey'. It was a priest-centered Church. Obedience to authority was the key virtue. Now, we the laity, are being asked to take more responsibility for our parishes and for the overall mission of the Church to change the world into 'a new creation', one that corresponds more to the dream or 'Kingdom' of Jesus. What a monumental shift is being asked of the priests and laity!

This was brought home to me when I heard of a priest recently who, after a long sermon, asked for comments from the congregation. A long silence! Nobody spoke except someone who eventually said "Thank you Father for your sermon". He said that was not what he was looking for. I am sure the priest was disappointed. It would be great, I think, to have a dialogue sermon occasionally, if the group was not too large and people were willing to speak up, but most of



Noel Bradley, Buncrana.

the laity are not confident to do this or used to speaking about their faith, especially in a public Church.

The story brought home to me how strange it is for most of the explore and review our way of being Church". This is in line with the process of synodality that was initiated recently by Pope Francis in every diocese of the world, and is still ongoing.

### The Word, The Sacraments and The People

In this invitation to renewal, the question we have to ask, according to the Bishop, is "how do we use our resources and people so that we make new disciples for Christ?"

The resources we have are obviously the Word of God in Scripture and the Sacraments. Both of these can't be 'just out there'. They need to be embodied in people. The letter mentions families, lectors (readers), catechists, religious, deacons, parish councils, priests etc.

His question to us is "How do we use these resources?" A short answer might include the following: We can always improve the quality of communicating the Word. Priests can be helped with their sermons if they are open to that, with other priests and even some laity. They can be supported and helped to participate in scriptural

laity to have conversations about their faith and the meaning it might have for their lives. This is what the Bishop is asking of the laity, "to have prayerful discussions about how each can faith-sharing with other priests and with the lay members of the parish, if they are open to that. They can improve the way they celebrate the sacraments. They may not presume that the way they have always done things is always and for ever the way it should be done. They can learn from other priests and even from lay people. They can learn to listen better to what lay people say and help to empower them to take co-responsibility with them for the parish and the wider mission of the Church.

The laity can learn to pray Scripture better and to find their own voice and unique call from God. Finding their voice will mean having the courage - a favourite word of Pope Francis' - to speak up and share their questions, reflections and insights with the priests and each other.

The main point here is that all this can be done if priests and people are open to some help and training in some of these things. A lot depends on our openness. "When you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me" (Jer 29:14).

## We need to find out more about God's plans by spending time with Him in prayer by Anne Friel



Anne Friel, Waterside.

THE title of Bishop Donal's letter is 'God has plans for His people.' How life-giving, exciting and comforting this is to know at a hard time in many of our lives. This letter is a wonderful signpost to the path we must follow; a path of prayer, a path of having real conversations in our parishes, a path on which we discover what we are being called to do, a path of doing.

Firstly, we need to find out more about God's plans by spending

time with Him in prayer - individually and in our parishes. We are not being asked to begin by making lists of things to do; we are being asked to begin by simply listening to God, hearing what the Holy Spirit is calling us to be as parish. Central to all of this is getting to know Jesus better, to listen to Him in love. Only then will we realise how important this mission of renewal really is!

During the synodal listening sessions last year, people spoke of their great love of God, of their faith and of belonging to their parish communities. They spoke proudly of the many great things that were happening. We need to build on this love, praying about what our parishes will be like in five or ten years' time and what we need to do to get there.

People also expressed a great sadness. We heard that many people wanted to learn more about their faith, about Mass and the Sacraments, about prayer, about how they can have

conversations about God with their children and grandchildren. We also heard that many of us do not feel comfortable or knowledgeable enough to talk about our faith. Now is the time when we can learn together and ask what may seem like basic but important questions.

Bishop Donal speaks of us becoming a ministry-rich Diocese. This is not because we have less priests but because it is what each one of us is called to do through our baptism. He mentions specific roles such as Catechist and Acolyte - terms I had to look up! While these are specific ministries within the Church, we are all called to make Jesus known and loved. It is not just the role of the bishop, priests and deacons, not just the role of teachers and members of Parish Pastoral Councils. Each one of us has been called to a particular role and that can be hard to hear, to take in, and it can be frightening. Also, we, as the people of God,

must start to call people within our parishes, not solely to a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life, but to their vocation as a baptised person. Think about what we believe as Catholics and then what does that call us to do? We may need to grow in knowledge, give more time and do things that initially may feel out of our comfort zone. We can do that.

Praying together and having conversations about our hopes for what our parish will look like in 10 years' time needs to start now in all parishes, not just those outside Derry City. Let's further build up our parishes as places of prayer, where priests and people work and pray together, where we provide a warm welcome, and from where we can help each other and the wider community to know God more. From there, we can go out to others and spread the good news. The Season of Lent is a great time to start.

# “Wherever there is someone who has been baptised that is where the church is”

– *St Oscar Romero* by *Ann McCay*

I would love to encourage more people to come to Mass. I would like the holy sacrifice of the Mass to be celebrated more often outside in the open air. For people who haven't been to Mass or haven't been inside a Church for a long time, it might be a way for them to return. We know how Jesus the Good Shepherd went out to find the lost sheep; this might be one of the ways the Church could go out in search of those who have wandered away.

I would like the Eucharist to be celebrated in Chapel grounds but also beyond there, in villages, in housing estates, in towns, among people where they live and work. Imagine gathering people together to pray in their own neighborhoods, acknowledging the reality of Jesus present in the places and people we encounter in our everyday lives.

I would love to see the Blessed Sacrament being carried with reverence through streets, lanes and walkways, through countryside and coastal areas, through forests and parks, around hospitals and care homes, into places of education, so that all can experience the healing presence of the Eucharist, come to know the power of God's love and give Him praise.

I would like the Word of God to be held up before the congregation and celebrated during the Liturgy of the Word.

I would like women from all backgrounds and walks of life to have a more prominent role in decision-making and leadership in the church.

There is a powerful hidden ministry the Church can tap into, that of those confined to home, to bed, to nursing homes, for whatever reason, who can offer their time in praying for the needs of the church and the world. It is a ministry to others which is already being carried out; this quiet, faithful army, by their constant prayers, daily assist those in positions of responsibility, those in need of rescuing, and those who are far from God. What a gift this is to all of us.

Looking back, I realise I often reaped the benefits of my mother and father's constant prayers, the significance of which I was unaware of at the time. Over the years, I have come to realise it and I am grateful.

Many a fall from grace has been reversed, many an unexpected opportunity has presented itself, many a hurtful situation or relationship has been avoided because of the prayers of parents who prayed constantly for their children.

Introducing lay people to

praying the breviary should be encouraged.

As part of the Columba Community, I have learned that there is so much to be gained by lay people reading and sharing the Word of God in small praying groups together. Let us open our bibles, begin to study the Prophets of the Old Testament, the life and work of Jesus; what treasures await us there.

In the Acts of the Apostles and letters to the various churches, we read about what happened after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and ask ourselves how did these followers of Jesus put into practice all that Jesus taught them. We take our cue from them as we begin to move forward together. The transformation in these early Christian men and women once the Spirit came among them and entered in to them, and the many gifts the Holy Spirit brought, are all to be discovered as we read and share together. God has never withdrawn these gifts from His people. Those gifts are still present in the Church and are available to us in our day.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4: 12 NIV)

The Prayer ministry to the sick and those in need; visiting the sick, praying for the sick at home, in hospital, praying with others as part of a prayer team, praying for others in intercession before the Blessed Sacrament, are important gifts. Prayer ministry was one of the ways to serve God and others that I learned after attending ‘Life in the Spirit’ Seminars.

Over the past more than 45 years, since I first joined Charismatic Renewal, and then became a member of Columba Community, one of the greatest privileges I have had is being part of a prayer team praying with others for healing, for anointing, for direction. It is a very fulfilling ministry. Then, of course, I was able to avail of these ministries when I was ill myself. I believe that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to serve God and His people in this way if it had not been for Charismatic Renewal and for Father Neal Carlin being so committed to the role of lay people in the spiritual life of service in the church. I have served and I have been served, I have given and received, and I have benefitted from both.

I was also involved in the Music Ministry and Liturgy group, and enjoyed being part of developing Liturgies for the different seasons

of the church year, and I gained a lot from the experience.

## New ministries

I have to confess that I am not familiar with words like Catechist, Lector, Acolyte, or what qualifies a person for these roles. The words are new to me and I suspect a lot of lay people would be the same. Maybe we could have the roles explained to us if these are to be new Ministries for lay men and women in the Church. I remember when the Eucharistic Ministers were introduced, we all took time to adjust but now it's like they always existed.

I would hope that men and women, single or married, from all backgrounds and walks of life, will be considered as having something to offer the Church. With their knowledge and experience of life, which would come from a different perspective to that of the priesthood and religious life, this group of people have great potential to enhance the life of the church.

Recognising the role grandparents play in family life, particularly passing on the Faith to their grandchildren, has been a great success and has shone the spotlight on a very important part of Church and family life.

I recall there used to be special thanksgiving services in Church once a year for those in the caring, nursing and medical professions, mental health professionals, those providing services for children and adults with additional needs, and those involved in educating our young people, those in the teaching profession. These roles were seen as a calling, not just a job but a vocation too, and during the service people were called forward to receive a blessing for the year ahead.

Fr Jim Burke, a Dominican Father from Chicago with roots in County Cork, visited our Columba Community annually over many years. He told us stories of time spent with the poor communities in South America, including Santa Cruz Bolivia where local women, though poor themselves, would care for the street children there. I remember clearly him encouraging us to “Follow the way of love and ardently desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit but especially that you should prophesy so that we would be of some good to others. For the one who prophesies edifies the church, speaks to people, strengthens, encourages and comforts.” (1 Corinthians 14)

St Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador in El Salvador, was a martyr and defender of the poor. He spoke out against the injustice and abuse suffered



Ann McCay, Columba Community.

by the underprivileged in his country. He was murdered while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980. He was a great advocate for lay people and the part each one plays as members of Christ's body: “Each one of you has to be God's microphone. Each one of you has to be a messenger, a prophet... wherever there is someone who has been baptised that is where the church is. There is a prophet there. Let us not hide the talent that God gave us on the day of our baptism, and let us truly live the beauty and responsibility of being a prophetic people.” (St Oscar Romero)

It will take time to build up confidence as the church grows and develops. Some people can feel excluded, but there is a unique place for everyone who wants to belong. I would like to think that we can avoid developing a hierarchy of laity and, with careful thought and prayer, we can create a place where everyone feels equally valued and everyone who wants to serve feels that their service is valuable and valued, in serving one another.

The task is to make sure everyone feels that they have gifts to offer and those gifts are useful in building up the Church, the people of God.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12: 21- 27)

## Lent...an opportunity for quiet time with the Holy Spirit by Anne Kelly

BISHOP Donal's pastoral letter invites us to reflect on where we are as a parish community and calls us to find new ways of proclaiming the Gospel.

Do we continue with our familiar pattern of church or do we remain comfortable, complacent and oblivious to the increasing secular culture around us?

Are we brave enough to travel new pathways so that our estranged sisters and brothers can experience the love and Mercy of God?

Our faith has been handed on to us by the courage and generosity of our ancestors and, today, we are blessed and served by hard working priests. So, as baptised Catholics, we have the obligation to keep our faith alive for future generations.

Regarding the paragraph in the pastoral letter entitled, ‘A Ministry Rich Church, A Faith Rich People’, I believe our parishes can rise to this challenge.



Anne Kelly, Omagh.

The bishop reminds us that to undertake this new journey we must be steeped in prayer.

Lent is now upon us. Through the power of the sacraments and prayer we have the opportunity for discernment and quiet time to listen to the Holy Spirit.

With the gifts of the Holy Spirit reawakened within us, our faith is strengthened. Renewed in the celebration of Easter, we can look to the future with joy and confidence.

## Let's pray to open our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit and together enjoy fruits of renewal by Noel O'Sullivan

“Unless changes in Church are rooted in the foolishness of the Cross, they will be built on the shifting sands of human agendas.” – Bishop Donal

I feel very lucky and blessed that we have such a wise, brave man as Bishop Donal leading us in this time of change. The big issue we all have is human agenda and, no matter how we try, we are always pulled to what we think is right and what suits us best.

Bishop Donal encapsulates the mission ahead so well, unless we truly trust and are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit we will sink in the shifting sands of human agendas.

Being lucky to be involved in the Synodal process, I was surprised and disappointed to hear a lot of the issues are genuine but how to deal with them are very swayed by the usual media sound bites, almost taking the teaching of Christ out of the equation to solve the problem.

Hands up, it is very easy to get sucked in by the popular cries of seemingly obvious quick-fix solutions.

For example: “Let priests marry, it's unnatural to expect anyone to live like that!” It is as if being a priest is a punishment. We don't hear enough about the gift of the Priesthood, the sacrament of



Noel O'Sullivan, Bellaghy.

Holy Orders, the bridegroom of the church.

Priesthood is not any ordinary job; it is the living out of a sacrament, rooted in the example of Christ. A priest, through love, dedicates himself to the church. The key is sacrament, ordained by Christ. We must not forget the divine nature of the sacrament, the Priesthood and the great joy a priest receives through their journey.

I am not saying the issues cannot be discussed, but they need to be given the respect they deserve and not with the blinkers of the secular world, but with grace of the Holy Spirit.

Let us all pray that we open our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit and together enjoy the fruits of renewal.

# I moved from a 'stale' Catholic to one that is inflamed with God's Love

by Rory McGilligan

OVER the last number of years I have often wondered how the Church was going to survive due to falling attendances and lack of priestly vocations. I had, in fact, titled this problem a 'cliff edge' scenario, with the numbers of laity and priests in decline. It looked to me like the church hierarchy were not addressing the problem.

Some people suggested "we will just be a smaller church", but to be honest this did not sit easy with me. I don't think that it is in God's plan that less souls should have the chance to get to know Him and love Him. I believe God loves us all and He wants souls to share in His love and be with Him for eternity. Are we not created in His image out of love? I think just because our society has decided to turn its back on God that doesn't mean that God has turned His back on us. God still calls all men to Him.

Bishop Donal's letter was an honest account of the problems within the church, as well as external issues which affect the faithful, causing the decrease in Mass attendance. It was also, in many ways, a letter of hope.

He quotes from Jeremiah that although things look bad, God has a plan and that we should never stop trusting God. I agree with Bishop Donal that, as people of God, we must adapt and change; not to be more PC or in vogue with the latest social trends, but we must move in a way which brings us not only as individuals but as a church in closer union with God. Our relationship with God can no longer be consigned to 50 minutes on a Sunday morning, where the priest feels too afraid to proclaim the Word of God due to social pressures and the remaining faithful just going through the motions.

It would be unfair of me to say that everyone in the two groups just mentioned have this type of passive relationship with God, but I do think that it is quite dominant within the church at present at most levels. Are we now a lukewarm church? Are we just ticking the appropriate boxes regarding our Catholic duty? There are many souls baptised into the Catholic Church that don't know God or love Him. It is becoming merely a tribal marking or something of a legacy issue as some people in this part of the world have become 'motorway Catholics'. They pull in once in a while maybe to receive a sacrament (Holy Communion and Confirmation), then stay away from God and His bride, the church, for years at a time. How can you love God if you don't know Him?

Bishop Donal believes that the church in its current form is

not fulfilling its role, and this I agree with. He suggests we build ministry rich communities, but how can this be done with the remaining faithful and clergy? We are all afraid of change and this form of church is the only type we know, and if we are still here it must have worked in some respect for us.

People may argue about the existence of God but I think there are a lot of people searching. To quote, or badly quote, Fr Mike Schmitz - Your body tells you when you are hungry, you know you need food, your body tells you that you need to rest, you know you need to sleep. Here's the important part: your body tells you that you have to get to know and love God when you start searching for more meaning in your life, when you realise material goods and other selfish habits that we may have will never bring true joy, true peace and true love into our lives. Remember we are made in this image that's why many poor souls are trying everything from mindfulness to illegal drugs. They are like sheep that have lost their shepherd.

## Pilgrim

On my pilgrim journey, I was blessed to believe in God and His presence in the Holy Eucharist, but something inside me would not rest. I caught the faith. I was not taught the faith. I knew what we believed in but not why I believed it. The following is a journey I undertook, and I think it may help get from where we are now as a church to where we need to be.

I have been looking for God's love for years but I didn't have a map to show me how to receive His love. Yes, I attended Masses, went on the occasional pilgrimage, went once or twice a year to confessions and even the occasional visit to the Blessed Sacrament. I still did not have peace; my soul was still searching for God, to know Him and love Him. In early 2019, I read a book St Louis de Montfort wrote about the importance of the Rosary. Every day since, I say the Rosary, however, whilst saying my Rosary the search for God's love intensified to the point that I asked a priest in the Diocese to help me learn more about God, to understand my faith better.

I joined a group of men all wanting to increase their relationship with Christ. I was at last starting to form an active relationship with Christ. I was getting passionate about His love, why He died and rose again for me. I started to fully appreciate how much God loves us. Over the past two years, I have talked and received direction from good priests who are men of faith, who don't deny Christ, and who have

guided me in the truth; truth which does not offend but truth which helped me love God more and more.

By God's grace, He introduced me to a prayer group in my own parish, a small yet vibrant faith community where we meet once a week for Adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament, as well as praying the Rosary and Divine Mercy. I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit work among the group. I love Adoration; being in front of Jesus. I go to Confessions now at least once a month. I now see the clutter of sin that tries to prevent me getting close to God. We also now pray as a family, faith is not just my thing...there is so much joy when it is spread.

This is just a small glimpse of my journey; it describes how I moved from a 'stale' Catholic to one that is inflamed with God's love. I am passionate about my faith and about the Holy Eucharist. I go to Jesus as a friend, asking Him to guide my life for His glory. I go to our Mother Mary asking Her to keep me close to Her Son. I am thankful to God for the life He has given me and the people in my life that He has blessed me with.

This journey is on-going; it has taken decades to get to this point. I am not saying that this is the way you must travel to bring you closer to God, but it is the path God wishes me to travel now. I am no longer searching; my faith is about increasing my love of God and being thankful for the blessings bestowed on me.

God has a plan, as Bishop Donal tells us, maybe my experiences shed some light in having an



Rory McGilligan, Dungiven.

active faith but, in the end, God's Way will endure no matter what it is.

I leave you with the following thoughts: Pray the Rosary daily, go to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament once a week, spending no less than an hour. If you can pray as a small group in front of the Blessed Sacrament all the better. Go to Confessions every month and attend Mass more than just once a week. Become aware that you are receiving Jesus in the form of the Eucharist, then act accordingly. Give thanks to God for all your blessings.



# Jesus reassures us that a small amount of faith... even as tiny as a mustard seed... is enough to move mountains

by Robert Glackin

WHILE a lot of Catholics put an emphasis on prayer, fasting and penance, there are as many whose emphasis is on attending daily Mass and receiving the Eucharist. We can all remember huge crowds at Mass in all our churches in the 60s and 70s, and even in the 80s. With an abundance of priests, there were also long queues outside the confessionals as people prepared themselves to celebrate Easter and Christmas in a fitting way.

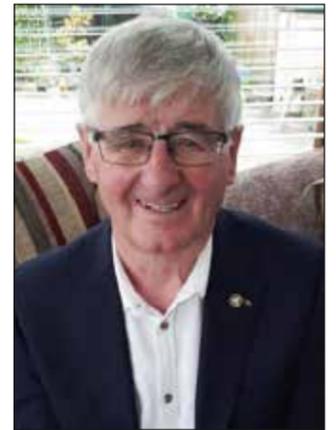
How different things have become in the years since; fasting has practically become a thing of the past, the crowds at Mass and Communion and in the confession queues have dwindled to much more manageable proportions, and maybe this is just as well as the numbers of priests have also gone down dramatically; where before, parishes had three or four priests now they are lucky to have one.

In many cases, parishes have been amalgamated in order to make life easier for the lone priest. With the help of ordained deacons this system works well, but there is still a need for more priestly vocations.

The current position of the Church represents a sea-change from those huge crowds of the recent past, so what is responsible for the change?

It is easy to make comparisons with our situation in Ireland, for the same scenarios have been working in our country over the last 30 or 40 years. Then there was that surge of economic success which Ireland enjoyed, and is enjoying again, and how aptly Christ describes how people in that situation get so carried away by the worries and riches and pleasures of life that they do not reach maturity.

Christ gives His accolade to those who 'through their



Robert Glackin, Waterside, Derry.

perseverance' yield a rich harvest. These have been tempted by the riches of the world, and yet persevere in their Faith. Jesus once said, whoever is faithful in small things will be faithful in big things. When we involve God in our everyday choices, it will be easier to do also in our big decisions. Jesus reassures us that a small amount of faith, even as tiny as a mustard seed, is enough to move mountains.

In today's world, the lack of harmony has led to stark divisions...those who have too much, those who have nothing and those who haven't even been born. We need the spirit of unity to regenerate us as Church, as God's people and as human family. The Holy Spirit brings together those who are distant, unites those far off and brings home those who are scattered.

The Spirit shapes the Church and the world as a place of sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. St Paul explains this well. When speaking of the Church, he often repeats a single word, 'variety'...varieties of gifts, varieties of service, varieties of activities (1 Cor 12: 4-6). We differ in the variety of our qualities and gifts. The Holy Spirit helps us to use them proactively.

## Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*Come Holy Spirit, fill my heart with your Holy Gifts, let my weakness be penetrated by your strength this very day, that I may fulfill all the duties of my state conscientiously, that I may do what is right and just, that my charity be such as to offend no one, and hurt no one's feelings, so generous as to pardon sincerely any wrong done to me. Grant me, O Holy Spirit, all my trials of life, enlighten me in my ignorance, advise me in my doubts, strengthen me in my weakness, help me in all my needs, protect me in temptations, and console me in afflictions. Graciously hear me, O Holy Spirit, and pour your light into my heart, my soul and my mind. Assist me to lead a holy life and to grow in goodness and grace. Amen.*



## A shared passion for the common mission of evangelisation

by *Dympna Kelly*

POPE Francis is clear that the church is in continual need of reform. He has a vision of the church today as a synodal church, which demands that the church be in a permanent state of 'ecclesio-genesis', of re-birth and re-incarnation. The situation in which we find ourselves in the church in Derry diocese and in the country presents an opportunity to revisit some of the elements of the Second Vatican Council.

### People of God

The first document from Vatican II, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, affirmed the role of all the baptised in the liturgy. Fully conscious and active participation is the right and duty of all those who are baptised in the Church. It recognised the dignity of baptised individuals as members of the people of God. Further documents recognised that the people of God share a oneness as a result of their baptism and this precedes any distinctions as a result of different roles within the church.

Throughout most of the second millennium, there was a marked distinction between the clergy and the laity. At Vatican II, these ideas were overturned, recognising that the baptised are consecrated as a holy priesthood. The two ideas of priesthood, baptismal priesthood and ministerial priesthood, are not pitted against each other. Instead, they are recognised as being different, with ministerial priesthood placed within the priesthood of the faithful, at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful.

Specific roles, ministries and ways of life arise from the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the mission of God.

### Charisms and Ordained Ministers

In Vatican II, there was a rediscovery of 'charisms'; the gifts given by the Spirit to all the faithful and the richness this offered to the Church.

There was a distinction between hierarchical gifts, which referred



Dympna Kelly, Drumragh Parish, Omagh.

to stable church structure, and charismatic gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Despite this distinction, the two cannot be at odds as they are both granted by the Holy Spirit.

Priests must acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity and their place in the mission of the Church. Pope Francis acknowledges the cooperation needed between priests and people of God in a synodal church.

Ordained ministers must not be afraid to listen to the people. In a synodal church, this is the basis of participation - a shared passion for the common mission of evangelisation and not the representation of conflicting interests.

### The Near Future

At the start of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII addressed those who were pessimistic about the outlook for the church. His words are as relevant today. We must confound the 'prophets of gloom'.

In Omagh, the parishes of Drumragh and Cappagh have met to consider the changes proposed in the Tyrone deanery and how we - the two parishes, and clergy and laity - can work more closely together.

The benefit of increased participation by the laity has long been recognised. With proper formation, we, the people of God, will be prepared and equipped with the necessary gifts and skills to accept the responsibility we have as baptised people.

## Adoration of Blessed Sacrament key to way forward

by *Rhonda McColgan*



Rhonda McColgan, Iskaheen & Upper Moville Parish.

BISHOP Donal wrote to all parishes in the diocese recently inviting us to pray with openness to the Holy Spirit as we set out on this mission of renewal. He reminded us that if we listen to the voice of the Lord we can enter into His peace, just like generations of missionaries before us.

He pointed out how our Diocese, like most of Europe, faces many difficulties. Moreover, reaching people to share the love of Jesus is challenging in these times. He mentions that problems such as, the smaller numbers now attending Mass, the damage caused by abuse scandals, our failure to spread the Gospel and the secular culture we now find ourselves in, have all added to the church we see today. He also mentions the upcoming challenge of the diminishing number of priests and that, by 2032, we may have about 35 priests for our 51 parishes.

So how do we overcome these challenges that we face in a church that was told by Jesus to "go out and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19)?

As I pondered this reality, I found myself thinking of how blessed we are here in the Derry Diocese to have a bishop that is totally aware of his vocation as a shepherd of the flock. Bishop Donal, without falling into flattery, is very much aware, in my opinion, of the sacrificial love that is involved in the role of a shepherd. He has continuously poured himself out to demonstrate what it is to be Christ-like and, through his witness, has encouraged many to follow. It is impossible not to see by his joyful expressions as he leads, that he truly 'gets it'. During the year you can't help but notice all the ways he is leading through things like, the Walk to Knock, the three-day Lough Derg Pilgrimage, the annual Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage, leading groups to the Holy Land, the numerous meetings with the youth, encouraging the JPII and Papal Cross students, his own official duties and much, much more.

Yes, this is a man who knows

his vocation and understands the difference between that and that of a profession. Sometimes, I like to go to 8 am Mass in the Cathedral and recently got a surprise to find him celebrating the early Mass. He, like the carpenter and his foster father, from Nazareth, is a worker. He's a humble man of no airs and graces, driving around town doing his shopping in his wee car. Nothing flashy or boastful, but obviously an extremely intelligent man with a huge gift of Knowledge. How refreshing! I often wonder how he finds the time. But it dawns on me how many times I have seen him in some quiet side of the Cathedral during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. So, I understood that that is precisely the key to the way forward in our diocese and, indeed, every diocese. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added onto you" (Mt 6:33).

Change, you see, begins with the one, with self. A universal call to holiness, as stated by Vatican II, begins with us. It is only when we each spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament, allowing Jesus to pour His transforming love into our hearts, will we radiate His love to others. We are told to "Be Holy as your Heavenly Father is Holy" (Mt 5:48). In other words, to become saints. If we're wondering what God's Will is for us, then that is the answer. To become saints through our state in life.

Prayer and fasting, reading Scripture, attending Mass, receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, regular Confession and Adoration, all help us to grow in Holiness. The blood and water that gushed forth from Jesus' side will shower us with all the graces we need to build and grow. In the diary of St Faustina, Jesus told her: "Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him" (Diary, 299).

Fr Chris Alar, of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (MIC), explains the significance of these rays. He says that sin and death are Satan's two weapons. Sin is washed away by the waters during baptism and in Confession. Death is removed by life. The Blood is life-giving that we receive in Holy communion; Jesus' true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, (Understanding Divine Mercy).

### Discern

Overtime, we learn how to discern the Lord's voice and, if we cooperate with His Grace, He gently takes our hand and leads us as we place our child-like trust in Him. On my own journey of getting to know Jesus through the Scriptures, I have discovered His

healing power. If we walk with Him gently in the cool breeze of the evening we will hear His voice. Personally, I felt that He was gently convicting me of sinful patterns in my life that helped me to get to the root causes.

I am always amazed by some suggestions on how we should change certain teachings of the Church. I'm often gobsmacked by what some people understand our faith to be and yes, mainly Catholics themselves. I often say that if I believed what they believe to be true then I probably wouldn't even be a follower. Personally, I know how my life changed when I started to understand the true teachings of our Catholic faith. Only by attending Bible study run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFR) and carrying out my own personal study, did my spiritual blindness get restored.

We are dying with hunger as a church, spiritual hunger. We don't know our Catechism and, therefore, come up with all sorts of ideas on how we should change our church to suit a generation that thinks 'Love', to quote a certain speaker, is found in a place called 'Love Island'. Most now haven't even heard of the richness found in the 'theology of the body'. We, at times, are criticized that it was Vatican II that modernised our church teachings. However, Vatican II never set out to modernise our teachings, but rather to explore how we could reach out and convey our faith to a modern world. We haven't managed that very well.

We sometimes get caught up in human behaviour that comes across like a finger-wagging, heartless Judge. It is in having a sense of belonging, in knowing that we are loved, will hearts open to this invitation to journey together. Only when we experience Love and Mercy in that encounter with Christ do we start to radiate His love that invites others to come and see.

Jesus met the woman at the well with love, acceptance and mercy first. He met the woman caught in adultery with Love and mercy first. Truth and love should be two sides of the one coin. We are always yearning for

Love and God is love itself. Every time we overeat, drink too much, try to control, watch unhealthy material, and even enter a brothel, we are actually looking and yearning for the love of God. For it says in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "The desire for God has been written in the human heart because Man is created by God for God" (Cat 27). Everything else is just filling a void.

The way forward must be to first journey within. To explore the road less travelled to where our maker dwells. We must first be transformed individually by the flame of His love. To surrender all to Christ allows Him to bring us into the depths of unity with Him. St Elizabeth of the Trinity said: "To love, to love all the time, to live by love, that is, to be surrendered" ('He is my Heaven', Jennifer Moorcroft).

By organising church missions without first being renewed ourselves runs the risk of nothing more than superficial gatherings and box ticking personal ambition. This life of transformation at times is not easy. Purification will come in the form of trials. Jesus warned us of this: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Trials burn away the dross and help us to love from a pure heart. In the Book of Sirach, we're told to prepare for trials when we come to follow the Lord, "For in fire gold and silver are tested" (Sir 2:1-11).

So, to conclude, we as a church body are clearly in this trial of cleansing and purification. God is calling us back. He stands at the gate waiting for us, ready to embrace. So, let's take heart and never cease to pray. Pray in groups, especially for our priests, support them, mind them. And to priests, please become Holy. Spend time in Adoration and prayer, seek first the Kingdom of God. He will provide all that we need for our future if we trust in Him.

God certainly does have plans for us to enter into our promised Land! Will it be two weeks or 40 years!



# We need to ask ourselves that age-old question... "If not you, then who? If not now, when?"

by Aoife O'Neill



Aoife O'Neill, retreat facilitator at the Iona Retreat Centre, Termonbacca.

IN a recent Pastoral Letter, Bishop Donal called upon the parishes of the Derry Diocese to pray and reflect on how we move forward as a Church.

As Catholics today, we live in an age of noise and distraction. Due to technology and social media, we have a lot of information coming at us. Division and dissatisfaction, confusion and misunderstanding have been sown among the faithful by media reports, people taking quotes out of context and spinning stories to match a particular narrative. Since the Covid pandemic, talk of end times and the anti-Christ has reached new highs. It is certainly not an easy time to be Catholic.

Today's society is becoming ever increasingly secular and social order is in disarray on many fronts. In the world, our appetite for power and comfort has become paramount and anything which threatens that is cancelled, shut down and cast away. The Church and religious freedom are always under attack because of this.

The world seems to want to put Christ and His Lordship, His Church and all to do with Him back into that upper room it sprang from on the day of Pentecost. It seems to want to lock up the Good News behind the walls of Churches, monasteries and that what is said there should not disturb anyone outside that space.

Radical individualism has taken hold in the world. Society seems to have fallen hook, line and sinker for the lie that we don't need God - that we are self-sufficient. How often do we hear people declare, "I'm spiritual, but not religious"? Moral relativism, and each person believing the truth is what they

make it, has become the norm.

However, we know the real truth. Truth is so much more than just a moral guide. Truth is not something we can change, but rather it changes us. Jesus told us: "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 14:6). Jesus didn't tell us He would show the truth or teach us the truth. No, He declared that He is the Truth. He is the source of all truth - truth personified.

As followers of the Truth that is Jesus Christ, we are invited to share the mission of His Church.

In his Pastoral Letter, Bishop Donal gave three points of focus for the Church:

- Build an open and welcoming community, reaching those who feel like outsiders in our churches;
- Grow in faith together throughout our lives; and
- Make Jesus known and loved.

I believe that in order to move forward, we need to look beyond structures and hierarchies. We are not called to renovate the Church, but to restore it. To move forward as a Church, we need to recover and restore the identity of the Church. Those first disciples had no structures, no buildings, nothing to rely on except the power of the Holy Spirit, and they were able to set the world on fire.

Before any of us can recover the Church's identity, we need to recall our own. The only thing any of us has the power to change is ourselves. If every Catholic in the Derry Diocese rediscovered their true dignity as children of God and His love for them, we would see change in the Church.

We need to create opportunities for sound catechesis and for people to come together as supportive, prayer filled communities, helping one another to follow Christ. I think we lack understanding of the Holy Spirit, and many of the gifts and talents in lay people today are dormant and unused, as people do not realise the power available to them. Taking time to help people discover and learn more about the gifts of the Holy Spirit would be a worthwhile task. We see from Pentecost what can happen with even a handful of people alive in the Spirit.

Throughout history, God has never failed to preserve the Church and to provide people who could do what was needed to move forward. St Francis of Assisi

# The beauty of the Church is in the stories of the lives of God's people

by Kathleen Cullivan



Kathleen Cullivan, Derry.

IN looking at the future of the church, I like to think of Pope Benedict's words on St Augustine. He describes St Augustine as dedicating himself completely to the ordinary man and to his city, renouncing his spiritual nobility, he preached and acted in a simple way for simple people.

To live for Christ means allowing oneself to be drawn into his being for others. For Augustine, this meant a totally new life. "The gospel terrifies me", producing a healthy fear which prevents us from living for ourselves and compels us to pass on the hope we have in common. He says that Christ intercedes for us, otherwise I should despair. (Pope Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, 29).

St Augustine also interprets God as being so great that He is always new and we never finish our searching. This is all I can quote from Pope Benedict, as I found his writings very difficult to understand. His last words were "Jesus, I love you". I believe that maybe this sums up all his writings. That in the end was is all that mattered.

If purgatory is a process of purification, then perhaps we are experiencing it now. I think there is little doubt that we are going through a time of purging and purification. While full churches of people were seen as a sign that all was good, we know now that was not the case. We got caught in our own humanity and maybe a little complacency.

In my role in the secular life, I have been given a great opportunity to bring healing to people. Part of this role also was to manage aspects of the services. I was trained that I could not depend on past training to

is a prime example, one man who following the Holy Spirit 'rebuilt' the Church at a time when it was at risk of collapse. We can have trust that God will raise up exactly what is needed for our Church today also. Every single one of us, as Catholics in this Diocese, has a part to play. We are not there

solve any change which might come along, that I must always be involved with the future; anticipating where problems might evolve and our responses to that. I believe this to be true of all aspects of life.

If, as St Augustine says, our searching for God is never finished and He is always new, then we are always looking towards Him. I am sure most of us, in hindsight, can look at situations that came into our lives but which we didn't choose. This convinces me that we are always undergoing change and need to be open to it.

Our Church has often been created anew before. St Francis was asked by God to re-build His Church. Mother Theresa answered and followed a similar call, where she served God by dedicating herself to the poor, and her order flourished. In our daily lives we can continue to both love and serve God.

Maybe the simplicity is where the answers dwell. We seem to have created structures that are imprisoning our expansion of any growth.

I recently read a book by Richard Moore, who was blinded by a rubber bullet at age 10. He expressed great gratitude for the goodness of the people around him and the many good friends he made. What struck me about this was his conviction that it was the physical touch that was born out of love that created these lasting and deep friendships. If he only went for a cup of coffee, somebody had to touch his hand and guide it to the cup, so he could get a sense of where it was. He described blindness as being very physical. Even to sign a letter, he needed someone to lay his fingers at the spot where he needed to sign. He even had to be accompanied to the bathroom. Within structure, affluence and the pursuit to be independent, we have lost some of what is precious.

I often think it was inevitable that we would lose our way. We are a people who knew great poverty and oppression. Then came the Celtic tiger. For the first time in our history we had money, and it became a mantra that our children would have all the things that our parents and grandparents didn't have.

In a study done recently, it was

simply to warm the pews in the Chapel; through our Baptism we have been commissioned to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15)

Pope Francis, in his pontificate, has been calling for lay people to assume responsibility for mission

discovered that obesity is often linked to having a fear of not having enough food, which is historical. This study also revealed that not only do we inherit the genetic code of our parents but, in our emotions, we also inherit their wounds and their hurts. This is not just the case where we have heard and listened to the stories, it was also evident where people had not heard the stories. They would become very angry or emotional about issues presented to them which had affected their previous family, even though they had no knowledge of it. We are truly a people still finding our way.

Bishop Desmond Tutu discovered the truth in this out of the suffering of his own people. In his book, 'The difficulty with forgiveness', he described when South Africa got its freedom as being the time it was at its most dangerous. There was a generational collective rage which could now be released and the people were about to implode. His church, with others had to find a way to address this. They devised a four-fold plan which was designed to enter people on the road to forgiveness. What arose from this is just how complicated human beings are. Moving with the people's needs was paramount.

I fear that as long as the present structures within church exist there will be good conversations about change, but little of it. What I see in my world of church is decisions still being made with little regard for the effects on others. Dialogue and transparency are the bedrock for harmony. This especially happens at the parish changeover of clergy. This saddens me greatly as there is so much good work in process. I am excited to see it come to some fruition.

In looking at how the church is today, it is inevitable that I look back at my own choices. I grew up in a very good Catholic home, which formed me in many ways. I was never drawn to religious life as we know it, but I was drawn from an early age to want to serve people in some way. I also wanted the beauty of family, particularly children. I was blessed that I found a ministry, coupled with the joy of family which allowed me to give of all of my God given

gifts. This has led to a deep sense of fulfilment, even with all the problems that came also.

The Eucharist was, and is, very important to me, and I feel particularly frightened by the slow drip of fewer priests, mainly because that has implications for me receiving the Eucharist and Mass. I also feel frightened at the slow pace with which any actual change is happening in the Church.

Many good suggestions come forward. If the house is on fire there is no time to lose. One of those suggestions came from the Jesuit, Fr Hans Zollner, who believes that the exclusion of women from seminary formation needs to change. He says that there are many qualified women able to take up posts and that our fear and protection of sexual issues has not worked.

To conclude, I would like to return to another passage in Richard Moore's book. He states that he never felt anger or resentment towards the soldier who blinded him. He can only put that down to how his parents lived out forgiveness in their own lives. Their love for him was never affected by resentment or bitterness, although they suffered much. He also felt this love from the community around him.

What I take from this is where love flourishes, the church exists. This is the ointment which calms the wounds. Too much structure constrains us and inhibits growth. The beauty of the church is in the stories of the lives of God's people. I long and hope for a simpler church.



Rome - fresco of st. Augustine and his mother St. Monica

that we pray and listen to what God is asking of us. Ask yourself that age-old question... "If not you, then who? If not now, when?"

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

and evangelization. In a letter reflecting on the role of the laity, he said that if lay people failed to do this "the prophetic fire that the Church is called to light in the hearts of her peoples will be extinguished."

Every one of us has a part to play in keeping that fire alive. It is vital

# A new model of Church *by Sr Margaret McConalogue RSM*

IN Bishop Donal's pastoral letter of January 23, 2023, we are asked to engage in "prayerful discussion" in our homes and parishes, about how each of us can discover our way of being church into the future, and how a new model of church might look in our diocese.

The task is:

- To build and open and welcoming community, reaching those who feel like outsiders in our churches
- To grow in faith together throughout our lives
- To make Jesus known and loved

The invitation is based on the encouraging words of Jeremiah (29:11-13), who inspired the Chosen People of the Old Testament at a time when all seemed lost for them, and they were in the depths of despair. But God saw things differently!

God spoke to His people through Jeremiah saying: "I know well the plans I have made for you – plans for your welfare, not for disaster: plans to give you a future full of hope!"

When you call me, when you pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord."

From a human point of view, all was disaster. The Chosen People had seen their holy city, Jerusalem, knocked to the ground, and their leaders exiled to Babylon. They

had given up hope of ever being a light to the nations, as God had asked of them. In the midst of such disappointment God spoke His vision for them. Through Jeremiah, God proclaimed to His people that despite appearances God had great plans for them, and a future full of hope.

Does this event ring any bells for us? Can we trust that God will do the same for us as Church? Church practice has declined, vocations have dropped, many young people (and older) have disengaged from the way of faith. We see violence all around us, and hear of ferocious wars in Europe and elsewhere, huge economic worries affecting the cost of living, world and local poverty issues, homelessness, as well as deep existential fears about climate change and the future of our planet. Where is our God in all of this? Where is God's plan for us?

Bishop Donal reminds us that the message of Scripture is always one of hope. God still has plans for His people. Faith means believing that God is at work – even in difficult times. Faith involves discerning where God is to be found – in the midst of our fears and loss, anger and division. It is God's world, and we must take to heart the promise of Jesus, "I will be with you always until the end of time".

We must prepare ourselves to see, judge and act on God's plan for us, as of old. This we do by

prayerful discernment – through attentive listening to God and to each other.

## A future full of hope will always involve change

Bishop Donal reports that in our synodal conversations so far, there has been recognition of the need for change in our faith community, for example in relation to the role of women, the disconnect between life and faith, who should be ordained and sexual morality. All important questions. But change is not about trying to maintain current structures, eg, the times of Masses, etc. Real renewal is about "making space for grace" so that God's plans, and not our limited imagination, can renew the mission of the church. Merely tinkering with the current system is not what is needed.

## The Mission of the Church

We hear Jesus describe clearly the mission of the Church, in His final commissioning of the Apostles before He returned to the Father (Matthew 28:19). "Go teach all nations". That is our mission too.

The question posed by our bishop is: How do we best do that in our world today? How do we use our resources, and people (our most important resource) to make new disciples for Christ in this diocese?

The church belongs to God and not to us, so we have to discern

where God wants us to go in 2023. That is why all our parish conversations need to be synodal, and steeped in prayer. Otherwise we end up with our limited answers to our narrow questions!

## Our Model of Church

Bishop Donal reminds us that the church's role is not just to provide religious services to those who attend. St Paul's image of the Body of Christ is that of a body of people where we are all living cells, and each person is uniquely gifted because of her/his Baptism.

At Baptism, each of us receives the seeds of Christian life, which grow and develop our relationship with God during the course of our lives. We all have a role in building up the Body of Christ, and in searching out God's way forward. This is a very different model to the one where the laity listened and the priest or bishop spoke, which many of us grew up in.

## A ministry-rich Church, a faith-rich people

1. From its very foundation, the church has been about outreach, sharing the God news of Jesus with others, in word and action, with special attention given to the poor and needy. The church is missionary by its very nature. And so, Bishop Donal's hope for our diocese is that we be blessed with many:

- Families which hand on the faith
- People of all ages exploring and

developing their faith

- Lay people with the official ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist

- Consecrated virgins- who publicly dedicate their lives to God, but live and work among their fellow parishioners

- Female and male Religious
- Permanent Deacons
- Ordained priests

## New structures to serve Mission

Bishop Donal foresees that by 2032, we might expect to have about 35 priests for our current 51 parishes in our diocese. He proposes, in consultation with our priests, that city parishes will remain as individual parishes with at least one priest, while parishes outside the city will form "missionary pastoral communities" with at least two priests in each. The emerging church is called to be rich in ministries, to include:

- New ministries of lay Catechist, Lector and Acolyte
- Consecrated Virginity
- Male and Female communities of consecrated religious
- Permanent diaconate and Ordained clergy

All of this implies major changes for clergy and lay people... around...

- The celebrations of Masses, Funerals, Baptisms etc
- How parish communities work to teach and hand on the faith
- Developing new ways of



Sr Margaret McConalogue RSM

learning and practising our faith

- Developing new ways of gathering as parish for prayer

- How Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Financial Councils work to plan the ministry of their community

Clearly, this model of parish will require careful planning, good adult formation and prayerful discernment, theological understanding and reflection based on deep prayer at personal and community levels.

"When you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you" (Jeremiah). As St Pope Paul II put it, each parish community must become a "school of prayer".

This period of transition will require many conversations at local and diocesan levels. Above all, it will require a new openness to the Holy Spirit...to hear what God is speaking into our world of the 21st century, to listen and to act accordingly.

"Behold I make all things new" (Book of Revelation 21:5).

# A listening ear and a pondering heart *by Brenda Deery*

SPRING-TIME is the best time of the year to encounter change and see the vision of new life arising out of bleakness. A watchful eye, together with a listening ear and a pondering heart are very important 'tools' to appreciate nature's cycles. Following the reading of Bishop Donal's pastoral letter, the same faculties are required. They are even more necessary for the discernment of our spiritual world and our Catholic Church in today's world.

To witness and understand the seismic change which has taken place, we need to have a proper catechetical foundation. Without this 'tool', discernment of our Catholic Church today could be askew. For all of us to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying and asking of us in our parishes, we must first be, as Bishop Donal asks for, a prayerful and sacramental parish.

Alas, since the scourge of Covid, many people have departed from the parish sacramental life, intentionally or unintentionally only they know. What we do know is they are missed. As St Paul said to the Galatians: "I am astounded that you should be so quick to desert one who called you to the grace of Christ, and go

over to another gospel; this can only mean that certain people are causing disquiet among you, in their eagerness to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 2).

I believe with this 'heaviness of heart' experienced by Bishop Donal and our faithful priests, it is time to gather up the flock again and bring them back to true pastures. "Do you think it is man's favour, or God's that I am trying to win now? Shall I be told, now, that I am courting the favour of men? If, after all these years, I were still courting the favour of men, I should not be what I am, the slave of Christ" (Gal 2).

Bishop Donal, in his pastoral letter 'God has a Plan for His People', asks us to ponder and reflect on our parish dynamics and structures in order to rebuild God's Church, the Body of Christ on earth. I believe we must first, as parishes, enter a time of prayer to form the minds and hearts of the respondents. We all know there are 'wolves' present in our world today who are deceiving many, especially the weak members of our parishes. This is tragic and heartbreaking for all. A listening ear must identify what is false and contrary to God's teaching and Will.

We are blessed with much

wisdom within the Church and writings of our saints. All listening and pondering cannot and should not be done in isolation of Holy Scripture and our Catechism – both great gifts to navigate us through this present turmoil.

Our world cries out for listening ears and pondering hearts...too many are rushing ahead and believing everything and everyone they hear. In today's world, we are bombarded with information, messages, opinions, celebrities all competing for 'likes', 'subscribes' and followers. Idle time and idle minds can be consumed by this and be swept away with whatever tide/fad is in fashion. People can be so consumed by the secular that they have less time for family matters, church matters and are stressed with fitting in all their 'to dos'. Life is busy and does pull all of us away from what should be important – our spiritual lives and our salvation.

What really matters in a Christian's life is worship of God: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work He had done in creation."

When we move away from worship of God we lose our direction. During these last 50 years, we have big-time lost our

direction. God has been replaced by materialism, secularism, nihilism, egoism and many more isms. A beginning point, to renew our parishes, may be to strive to bring worship of God to the forefront of all our efforts; through true reverence and authentic worship. The knowledge that God's presence is among us, and He is walking with us means that He is operating the 'helm' of the Catholic Church.

As Bishop Donal recommended, prayer in all its forms but, in my opinion, most importantly worship of God in and through our Holy Mass, "Do this in memory of me", are vital. The fire will not ignite or spread if we do not put the proper fuel into it. God is at the helm, but we are also required in the work of salvation.

Do we really believe that Jesus is present in the Holy Sacrament? If yes, why are we paranoid about Covid, masks, the future, etc? All we need to do is "bow down and worship Our God". I believe we have lost our faith in Jesus' presence in the Blessed Sacrament and this is a vital beginning point and our biggest problem. Let's awaken our faithful to this true and great treasure and all God desires will unfold as a result.

The older members of our

parishes are invaluable in the work of evangelization. I remember times in Russia in the late 1980s, when we encountered so many young adults who had been taught their prayers by their 'babushka' (grandmothers). The flame was fanned through great persecutions, so now required ignition through receipt of the sacraments. When approached by us, they were thirsty to meet with our priests for instruction and receipt of the sacraments. Their listening ears and pondering hearts, fueled through prayer, left them ready to receive God's graces. Since they had been denied the freedom to worship God, they were yearning deep in their heart for this reunion.

Also, in my humble opinion, we are where we are due to our stubbornness to listen to our Heavenly Mother and Her Son and follow their directions – pray the Rosary, repent and believe. Mary is necessary in the work of our salvation, only because God allowed it to be this way. God does not abandon His people; He may appear to be sleeping at the 'helm' but He is waiting on us to surrender all to Him. God shows us the way, we have a blueprint for it in Jesus and His Blessed Mother; only when we humble ourselves



Brenda Deery, Faughanvale Parish

and do His Will will the Church flourish. "Listen to the voice of the Lord and enter into His peace."

So, as Bishop Donal recommends, we need to establish prayer communities within all our parishes. These must be encouraged and supported by our priests; we must get back to the real essence of our mission to love and serve God and our neighbours, and not get blinded by worldly affairs, monetary gains and trivial things.

Without good, spiritual, holy, Christ-centred leaders the flock will scatter. It is not 'opinions, fads, fashions, agendas etc' that will build our parishes, but 'truths' given by Jesus Christ and Our Holy Catholic Church which will ignite the flame and bring souls back to God.

# Being Missionary *by Fr John McLaughlin ssc*

AS a very young boy growing up in Moville during the War years, we were awake to the world through the movement of navy and aircraft over the Foyle. Some of us still around might recall the day of the end of the War and the shouts that "Montgomery won the war"; this from the activities and gun salvos on the same Foyle.

In that same year, on August 6, there came news to the town of the death of Columban missionary priest, Fr Harry Gillen, of a fever (enteritis, as later came out) and, perhaps, under house arrest by the Japanese. Even as a very young boy, I can recall the sadness and the commentaries, as we lived directly opposite in the street and the Gillens were even then one of the big footballing families in the town. In recent years, I learned that some his correspondence on the long sea journey and subsequently are in the possession of a family in the town, and I have been anxious to get a look at it!

Fast forward and I found myself in the year 1980 in the month of April, in Santiago, Chile on my first missionary assignment with the same Columban Missionary Society, having obtained temporary release from the Dublin Diocese for which I had been ordained.

The missionary seed had been well planted by events like the family Rosary, where we prayed nightly for the 'Conversion of China' and, in the Spiritan Blackrock College, the final hymn on the Sunday Benediction was "Go ye afar, go teach all nations...", and also by the many Maynooth priests of the time who sought permission from their bishops to spend time in Brazil or Peru or Chile or Africa, and whose example spurred many of us to seek to follow them, at least for five or six years.

So I had been 'knocking at doors' in my own passion, as had contemporaries like Fr Tommy McGowan on his part, to get to Africa with the Kiltegan Fathers. And, in that final sending audience from Bishop Dermot Ryan, he justified his decision by remarking that every bishop is responsible for every diocese in the world, such being the vision of pastor that was stressed to them at their ordination. So that, he said, even "though we still need priests in Dublin", the need is greater with Cardinal Arns in Brazil and others, like Cardinal Silva in Santiago, whom I would be serving under with the Columban Fathers. After writing some articles and knocking away, the doors had been open to me, having originally pushed for Brazil where my classmate, Fr Tony Conroy was amongst those I had visited on a trip with the Missionary Union in the previous year.

But it was not destined to be an easy 'Insertion'. For shortly after my first Lent and Easter in the

parish of San Luis, in Santiago in 1980, I felt that what was troubling me had to be more than just the strain of language and culture-shock, and the doctor discovered the typhoid fever, quite a common and often killer disease in Chile at the time, which also meant that medicine around it had developed and, perhaps unlike in the time of Fr Harry Gillen in Korea at that time, remedies were well advanced in the health services.

And so followed a long period of treatment in the Columban house, which was a few minutes' walk only for Dr Dooner, a man with proud Westmeath roots, who treated me through the weeks and months that followed the delirium and the weakness that came heavily with the typhoid fever that I had contracted from nobody knew where. And Columbans of the time were moved to seek injections to avoid what they were witnessing in my mind – and loose tongue and body.

## Culture-shock

All this by way of illustration to indicate that getting 'inserted' into mission is not like changing your clothes or just speaking a new language. Culture-shock came with a huge challenge to me, struggling to recover my mental and physical health in a very strange environment. For others, it could be just the difficulty of a new language, a new way of being Catholic, a distinct manner of emerging from one's own comfort zone in places where poverty was obvious, and racial, ideological and political distinctions were radical. So that, while there might be a short honeymoon period, there came the moment for most of adjusting to and getting insertion in the hard reality, maybe feeling like a little child as the words you uttered did not seem to impress people in the way you might have hoped for in a previous environment. Language and culture, and other forms of shock came at different moments to most of us, and living openly in community meant being alive to what was going on with your companions as well as in your own orbit.

The Chilean theologian with a Liberation streak, Fr Segundo Galilea, who was known to Columbans and wrote a lot and gave retreats, had a phrase that stuck with me from those years. He called it the process of 'Insertion' that involved openness and humility and, of course, patience. He might not have been great at the patience bit himself, because as a Holy Cross missionary in Cuba under Fidel Castro, he did not, or was not allowed to, stay the course, and had to return to Santiago ministries!

With a good entry of priests and sisters and lay people into the Columban missionary parishes in

Chile, there was a wide variety of testimonies around the challenge of 'Insertion'. Sometimes, I noticed that it had to be more difficult for lay missionaries like John Hayes, Oisín Kenny, Kevin Sheeran, and Jack Cesar, to name only some of the young Irish men who volunteered to join us for a fixed period contracted. Because, in many ways, they had to find their own identity or role that a priest or religious might not. Columbans did not, unlike Maryknoll, believe in taking in specialist nurses, doctors, teachers, etc, for specific situations. John Hayes, for example, had a very distinct 'Insertion'. He was a very active member of the religious dance group, 'Bailes Grupo San Andres', in the Comunidad of Santa Ana, where he will be remembered. The only foreigner I ever heard of to enter in to that fraternity.

One of the many lay missionaries that impressed me mightily was a young lady from Fiji, Tilaila Tanumi, who stood out amongst her Fijian volunteer companions for her mature sense of vision, decision and humour. In our mission in Valparaiso, she shone in her leadership qualities and quiet disposition, and young and old, and women all warmed to her calm and gentle, yet spirited sense of mission, amongst them that of the Missionary Infancy movement, which was well organized in that Diocese and others in the Chile of the time. It was inspiring to see (the young participants in the 'Infancia') them with their motivation and grasp of the realities and cultures of other countries, at that post-Communion age, and the young Columban lay missionaries fed in to that enthusiasm right across the dioceses.

Fr Eddie McColgan, a Columban from a well-known Iskaheen family here, would have been a friend to the mother of Tila, in Fiji, and explained to me on one occasion, in Dalgan, just how assured and independent a woman she was, which explained a lot!

In that same Diocese of Valparaiso, one of the great propagators of Mission and Ad Gentes was the then Vicar General, P Jaime Fernandez. He was the diocesan representative for the Propagation of the Faith (Peters Pence), and his little talk to the clergy on the occasion of Mission Sunday every year was sincere and perfectly attuned to the missionary emphases of the time. A delightful person to meet on clergy and other occasions, he was a cousin of Teresa Fernandez, later St Theresa of Los Andes, the Carmelite Saint. Columban, Fr Gerry Bellew, who was the national secretary of the Propagation of the Faith, based in Santiago, used to tell me that the first person to arrive with the Diocesan Peter's Pence collection

was always Mgr Jaime Fernandez.

## Missionary

"The community of the disciples of Jesus is born apostolic and missionary. The Holy Spirit moulds it outwardly – the Church that moves out, that goes out – so that it is not closed in on itself, but turned outward, a contagious witness of Jesus – the faith is also contagious – reaching out to radiate His light to the ends of the earth. It can happen, however, that the apostolic ardour, the desire to reach others with the good news of the Gospel, diminishes, becomes tepid. Sometimes it seems to be eclipsed; there are 'closed-off' Christians, they don't think of others. But when Christian life loses sight of the horizon of evangelization, it grows sick: it closes in on itself, becomes self-referential, it becomes atrophied. Without apostolic zeal, faith withers. Mission, on the other hand, is the oxygen of Christian life: it invigorates and purifies it. Let us embark, then, on a process of rediscovering the evangelizing passion, starting with the Scriptures and the Church's teaching, to draw apostolic zeal from its sources. Then we will approach some living sources, some witnesses who have rekindled within the Church the passion for the Gospel, so that they may help us to rekindle the fire that the Holy Spirit wants to keep burning within us." (From the Catechesis of Pope Francis a few days ago: Evangelisation. Pope Francis. Jan 12, 2023)

"Our proclamation begins today, there where we live. And it does not begin by trying to convince others, no, not to convince: by bearing witness every day to the beauty of the Love that has looked upon us and lifted us up. And it is this beauty, communicating this beauty that will convince people – not communicating ourselves but the Lord Himself. We are the ones who proclaim the Lord, we don't proclaim ourselves, we don't proclaim a political party, an ideology. No: we proclaim Jesus. We need to put Jesus in contact with the people, without convincing them but allowing the Lord do the convincing. For as Pope Benedict taught us, "The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by 'attraction.'" (Homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Aparecida, 13 May 2007). Don't forget this: when you see Christians proselytizing, making a list of people to come, these are not Christians, they are pagans disguised as Christians, but the heart is pagan. The Church grows not by proselytism, it grows by attraction."

From the same address of Pope Francis, a few weeks ago, in his Gospel commentary, the Spanish



Despedida – going away meal - for Tila and Nia-Lay, Missionaries from Fiji

writer. Jose Antonio Pagola, stressed the notable world level 'lack of interiority of so many' which precludes a life of Christian prayer and reflection and the need for it to be challenged. The new generations are losing the capacity to pray. We have cut away the time for reflection and inner life, but the most serious is thing is that people seem to be losing the capacity of interior reflection; they are not capable of finding their own inner self, are distracted by a thousand sensations choked up interiorly, chained to a rhythm of life that is overwhelming. They are abandoning the attitude of prayer before God. On the other hand, in a society that accepts primarily and only efficiency, the immediate utility rendered. Prayer has become devalued as useless, and in frail fashion what is important is "life", as if prayer belongs to the world of "death". 17 Tiempo ordinario – C (Lucas 11,1-13)." A sobering reflection that rings true to many of my generation, that sounds like the Call from Pope St John Paul for a New Evangelisation at the end of the last Millennium.

It was clear to me at the time of the funeral of Pope Benedict that so few people were capable of quoting a word or idea of his beyond the usual tags of conservative and progressive. And, with my own little group of the Legion of Mary, I took the trouble to read with them some of his words on Prayer, given at the appendix of his Encyclical on Hope, 'Spe Salus',

which is eminently readable; and I also referred to the occasion on which the Archbishop of Dublin +Dermot Martin, spoke at the Magill Summer School in Glenties on the themes and ideas of his Social Encyclical, 'Caritas en Veritate', which contains much that appeared later in the world-wide need to face Covid on an international and solidarity basis.

## Eucharist

I have also been citing the Instruction of Pope Benedict on the Eucharist, 'Mysterium Eucharisticum', where the teaching hinges around the three points: The Mystery to believe in – the Mystery to be celebrated - and the Mystery that has to be lived; all Three being mutually interrelated and interconnected, as I often preached on the occasion of First Communions, as being more than relevant for many who appeared at those celebrations and only on such rare occasions.

On another angle, I have been led into the Missionary/ Evangelisation themes while reading the autobiography of the writer, columnist and biographer, A N Wilson, 'Confessions - a life of failed promises'. Baptised as a Catholic in the northern English pottery region and after early schooling with the Dominican sisters, whose friendship he treasures, he goes on to study in Oxford and has friendships with the Oratorians and the spirit and teaching of Newman. He later enters Divinity School with the Anglicans, edits the Spectator, is



Community members of Capilla Virgen Peregrina upper Valparaiso

unfaithful to his young wife – and scholar – and their children, and brings us through publications that my generation read, such as *Private Eye*, and authors of my own taste such as C S Lewis and John Braine.

“I find as I grow older that agnosticism is for the most part predominant. Norman (his father) knew two long poems by heart. One was Gray’s *Elegy*, which, at the wheel of the Bentley, he could ponderously recite for the whole journey from Stone to the works. The other, which I much preferred, and always hear in his voice when I read it, was Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám: ‘Myself when young did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint – and heard great argument about it and about – but evermore – Came out by the same door as in I went.’” (Note 1 Chips Channon, *The Diaries*, vol. 1, p. 419)

And, on Fr Michael Hollings, well-read and listened to in my early time in Dublin Diocese (Dublin Diocesan Retreat too) I seem to remember:

“...it is probably foolish to make league tables of people in life, saying such and such a person was the cleverest, wittiest, prettiest etc, etc, ever known. Yet it must be true that Michael Hollings was the most remarkable, extraordinary man I ever knew. It was the

capacity for self-giving. It was his utter self-giving to God, and to others. Hard to think of anyone less like myself in this respect. He was on fire with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Anyone can see that the Gospel is an uncompromising call, for the death of self, for the transformation of every soul into God’s likeness, for the bringing to pass of His Kingdom on earth. You can’t get anything more revolutionary than that. Most of us are seeds scattered here and there, struggling to grow by the wayside. The seed which fell in good soil, bringing forth fruit a hundredfold, flourished not only because it was destined or lucky. Such souls are alive with the idea of spiritual adventure.”

For myself after a long life, it is great to recall religious and lay people past and present, who could veritably fall in to the same category for their missionary zeal and constructive pastoral ability.

“Tolstoy’s Western contemporaries had spent the nineteenth century agonizing about whether the Bible was compatible with modern science. Tolstoy, with his bigness, was asking the much more urgent and radical question, are the Gospels morally true? Can we respond to their radical demands? What survives of him in the sheer moral magnitude of his work is this series of searching questions, and

the questions will never go away, whether we consciously try to drown them out with trivialities or whether we allow them to puzzle and nag us.” (‘Confessions: A Life of Failed Promise’).

#### Passions

These, perhaps, are the questions that are not being asked today, nor do the searches or seekers appear to carry the same passions about Mission and the Kingdom etc, which is why I found Wilson so interesting and maybe more honest than cowardly, as he seems to see himself.

One priest in our time in Santiago Chile, was Fr Mariano Puga. Born into a well-known political family, Mariano qualified as an architect and could speak many languages. He chose to follow the call to the priesthood, and to live amongst the Poor. During troubled political times of social unrest, Padre Mariano knew people in the movements of dissent, led meetings and protest marches animated by his accordion, and presented courses in Liturgy and Scripture in the summer courses. He was the national and World Responsible for the De Foucauld Fraternidades and died having faced down his cancer for a number of years. On courses, on the thirty days of Fraternidad Month of Nazareth, and on vacation, I would

have been witness to his zeal, talents and wit, as were many Columbans of the time. Books are now appearing bearing witness to his impact on the national level in Chile.

Finally, I recall Archbishop McQuaid, who ordained me a priest for the Dublin Diocese, remarking on the importance of reading and reflecting upon the Fathers of the Church, which I have come to do more often in recent years! So that, in the Prayer of the Church of Monday, January 16, I was struck by the directness of the commentary by St John Chrysostom...

“The Light of a Christian cannot be hid”

“Nothing is colder than a Christian who does not care for the salvation of others.

You cannot plead poverty here; for the poor widow who put in two copper coins will be your accuser. Moreover,

Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I have none’, and Paul was so poor that he often went hungry and lacked necessary food.

You cannot plead lowliness of birth; for the apostles also were lowly men and of humble parents.

You cannot allege want of education; for they too were unlearned men.

You cannot plead infirmity, for Timothy was of delicate health and was frequently ill.

Everyone can be of profit to his neighbour, if he will fulfill his role.

Look at the trees of the forest: how strong they are, how beautiful, how large also, and smooth, and of great height, but they do not bear fruit. If we had a garden, we should much rather have pomegranates or fruitful olive trees. The others are for the delight of the eye, not for profit, which in their case is very small.

Men who are interested only in themselves are like the forest trees; or rather they are not even so good. In fact they are fit only for the fire, while the forest timber can be used for building houses and palisades. Such are the foolish virgins of the parable, chaste indeed and decent and modest, but as they are of no profit to anyone they are rejected. Such are they who do not nourish Christ.

Observe that none of these

are charged with particular sins of their own, with fornication, for instance, or with perjury; in short, with no sin but that of being without use to another. Such was the man who buried his talent, showing indeed a blameless life, but not being useful to others.

How can such a one be a Christian? If yeast when mixed with the flour did not raise the whole batch, would it be yeast at all? Again, if a perfume could not be perceived by those around, could it in any sense be called a perfume?

Do not say, ‘It is impossible for me to induce others to become Christians;’ for if you were really a Christian, it would be impossible for you not to do so. As all nature acts in accordance with its own properties, so in this case too; this is part of the very nature of being a Christian.”



Columban Lay Missionaries from Fiji.

# Living forwards, learning backwards

by Fr Peter McCawille SMA - Dregish

ON my way to celebrate Mass in St Francis of Assisi Church, Drumnabey a few Sundays ago, I was listening to a lady being interviewed on RTE about the contents of her recent book in which a few adult siblings reflected on a nostalgic journey back to their childhood days. In the course of a discussion on the book’s contents, the writer commented that as we proceed through our lives we “live forwards while we learn backwards.”

Over the past few days those few words have been reminding me that we can look back at the path of our own life’s journey and, in retrospect many years later, we can notice a thread linking together a series of what appeared at the time to be unrelated events.

At several stages, we may have hesitated or even at times considered a change of direction. Thankfully, wiser heads advised us to be patient, to make a few adjustments and to keep going. It was only years later that we were able to see the hand of God guiding and directing us, without us being aware of it at the time.

Similarly, it is only when we read through the findings of the National Synthesis Document, which signals the completion of the first phase of the Synodal ‘listening process’, that we can realise how many of the

conclusions of Vatican II, which ended on December 8, 1965, chime more than fifty years later with many of the Synodal findings. Another reminder to us that, if we are prepared to listen more attentively to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and ‘learn backwards’, we should at this stage of the Synodal journey be better prepared to respond more positively to, and participate more willingly in, a model of Church which is different to the model to which we have been accustomed in the past.

It was my good fortune to get an early introduction in 1976 (when I took up my first appointment as a missionary in Nigeria) to the important role which lay people should have always been encouraged to participate in living out a vision of the Church which recognised the Church as the People of God.

After six months learning the local language, I was appointed to a parish where there were twenty-five villages, each with its own church. The parish priest and myself were able to celebrate Sunday Mass in each village about four times a year. For the other forty-eight weekends and during the week there was a Liturgy of the Word conducted by a group of local trained catechists and lay leaders. The people were never used to Sunday Mass every

Sunday and so appreciated the opportunity to attend a service conducted by their own village people, who had volunteered and pursued an extensive training programme which equipped them to lead the liturgy with confidence.

I can still remember with delight how the parish priest and myself marvelled at the enthusiasm and commitment that those faith communities in each village showed in their daily lives, not just in their active participation in liturgy in the church but in their daily lives in the wider village community.

#### Renewed

Here, in Ireland, the availability of a plentiful supply of priests in the past ensured that parish life was maintained through the celebration of regular daily and weekend Masses. However, over the past 50 years, the scarcity of vocations to the priesthood and religious life has created the need for us to learn about and feel comfortable with a different model of Church, a renewed model in which lay people will have to play a more active role than they have ever been used to in the past. It is a model which some people may initially resist or even resent. Getting used to a new way of doing things is rarely initially welcomed. We only

have to recall the outrage at the announcement many years ago that the government intended banning smoking on buses and in restaurants!

The new model of Church will require lay people, women and men, to function as lay ministers who are publicly recognised and accepted by the Church, and appointed by each diocese to minister alongside a diminishing number of priests and deacons in leading the liturgy for both children and adults, helping with adult formation programmes, and accompanying parents in preparing children for the reception of the sacraments.

In his recent pastoral letter, “God has plans for his people. Join in the Mission of prayer, exploration and renewal”, Bishop Donal McKeown states: “This is a time where we need to make space for grace so that God’s plans – and not our limited imagination – can renew the mission of the Church. Merely tinkering with the current system is not the divine solution”.

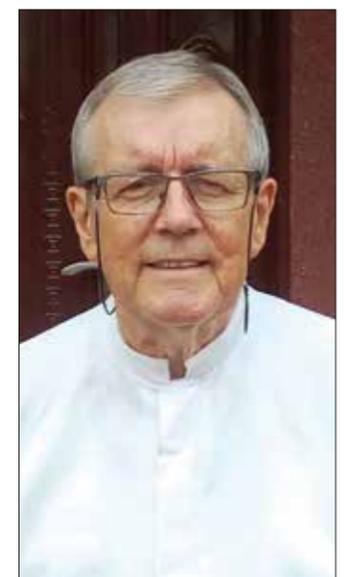
If we are prepared to “learn backwards”, we will realise that a renewed mission of the Church was already anticipated all those years ago in the documents of Vatican II, No. 28, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (titled in Latin ‘Lumen Gentium’ which means ‘the light of the nations.’), when it states in Chapter IV

on the role of the Laity, “Thus, every lay person, through those gifts given to him (or her!), is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself” (No.33).

As we ‘live forwards’ today in the face of not only ageing and retiring priests, scarcely any vocations to the priesthood and religious life, but also declining numbers who actively practise and live their faith, we will surely cherish this long overdue opportunity for the lay faithful to eagerly engage with the demands of the new model of Church.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that in a recent meeting with the presidents and representatives of Episcopal Commissions for the Laity to discuss the theme, ‘Pastors and lay faithful called to go forward together’, Pope Francis commented: “In recent times valuing lay people in the Church is not the result of some ‘theological novelty’ or functional solution for the shortage of priests, or worse still a sort of ‘revenge’ for those who have been put aside in the past. Rather, it is based on a correct vision of the Church: that is the Church as the People of God, of which the laity are full members together with ordained ministers.”

Pope Francis added: “Although the laity are mainly called to live their mission in the secular



Fr Peter McCawille SMA, Dregish.

realities in which they are immersed, this does not exclude that they also have the ‘skills, charisms and competences to contribute to the life of the Church: for example, in liturgical animation, formation, in government structures and the administration of Church goods.”

It may be very fitting that Pope Francis’ prayer intention for February is that “parishes, placing communion at the centre, may increasingly become communities of faith, fraternity and welcome towards those most in need.”

## Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR writes...

# You are ... The Salt of the Earth ... The Light of the World



Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR

JESUS said to His disciples: "You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world." These extraordinary words were said to very ordinary people, and they were meant!

The first disciples of Jesus were mostly fishermen, along with a number of other women and men. They lived in a very remote part of the world at a time when most people did not move very far from their own village or district. And yet we today, 2,000 years later, are professing the same faith that they received, lived, and handed on.

During those 2,000 years, people in every part of the world also heard those words of Christ addressed to them. And they lived by them. Generation after generation of Christ's disciples have radiated the love of God and the goodness of human life by their ordinary lives of faith, hope and love, making sure that we would benefit from this in our turn.

And those words are being said again today to us, the present disciples of Jesus, and they are still meant! We, too, can see ourselves as very ordinary people and yet Christ puts His trust in us to show

to our world the presence of God, the love of God, the compassion of God, the forgiveness of God, by the way we live in love.

It is through us that those who come after us will be able to know the greatest secret of human life – God is madly in love with us. This is shown so powerfully in the death and resurrection of Christ.

### Salt

Salt is used to season food. As the Church, our task is to give a good taste to the world in which we live. We do that by the ways we live our ordinary everyday lives in our homes and families and in our faith community.

In our part of the world, at this time of the year, salt is also used to keep us safe on the roads and walking on the footpaths. As the Church, our task is also to show Christ as the way, the truth and the life, so that everyone can navigate through life with a sense of certainty and security.

### Light

Light brings comfort and joy. It also brings welcome and a sense of wellbeing. As the Church, these also are our tasks for the world in which we live, and how much our world needs these at present.

How can we be salt and light for our world today?

The world we live in is, in so many ways, a wonderful world. We are fortunate here to be relatively well off, although the cost of living at present is stretching many of us to the limit. We have relative peace in our communities, although this is often fragile and could easily

be lost. We are almost in full employment, although there is understandable unrest about fair pay for most of our workers and so many strikes to ensure justice for workers.

On the wider canvas, there is a lot of trouble in our world: wars, especially in Ukraine; starvation in many parts of Africa; the threat of climate change to parts of the East especially, but ultimately to the rest of the world if we do not turn it around.

### Back to basics

It is difficult to not despair as we hear day after day about the state of the world. We can feel totally helpless in the presence of so much suffering and hardship. It can seem more and more that only the powerful and the rich can do anything to change the direction the world is moving in. But they are often a major part of the problem.

However, the greatest power of all, one which we all have, is the power to attend to the basics of human life and build a world of hope, of peace, of joy, of healing, based on the faith that we have in Jesus Christ.

### Marriage and family life

We do this first and foremost through the way we live in our homes, by making our relationships of marriage and family life ever more alive and joyful.

There is a veritable tsunami of controversy around these relationships today, with questions of gender and sex, of sexual orientation, of abortion etc, threatening to take centre

stage. We cannot let this distract us from our belief in the vital importance of marriage and family life as basic to human life and development.

- Christian tradition sees marriage as a life-long commitment between a man and a woman. This comes from the Scriptures of both Testaments and is based on the complementarity of the sexes as created by God in God's own image. This, of course, is challenged today by the call for same sex marriage. We have to find our way around this complex question without compromising our beliefs.

- Our Catholic tradition acknowledges marriage within the community of the Church as one of the seven Sacraments. This is a huge act of faith in the importance of this love relationship. We recognise this relationship as different from all other relationships and that it is vital for the health and wellbeing of both Church and society. This is challenged by the phenomenon of so many couples living together without marriage. We have to find our way around this equally complex question without letting our vision for Church and society become diminished.

- We proclaim marriage as a permanent commitment – 'all the days of my life'; 'until death do us part'. Divorce is a very real part of our world. Many marriages break up for all kinds of reasons. How do we hold our belief in the permanence of marriage while being compassionate towards those whose marriages don't work out?

- We hold that marriage is an

exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. Many societies allow for polygamy, where there can be multiple marriage partners. There is no doubt that our world could easily go in this direction too. How can we hold up our vision of a permanent, exclusive marriage relationship of a woman and man that becomes a Sacrament within the context of the Church without ignoring the realities of the world we live in and without alienating others? It is indeed a very difficult challenge today.

The one thing we can and need to do today as a faith community is to honour and support all those couples who are married among us. As part of their commitment to one another we, as a community, have committed ourselves to them to recognise their special grace for the Church and for the world, and to support them in their love for one another. When marriage is being worked at by couples and supported by the community around them, they can truly be salt of the earth and light to the world.

### The Domestic Church

In our Catholic tradition, we recognise the family home as the Domestic Church – the place where the Church is at its best, and sometimes at its worst! Family life is also one of the basics of life that we have to attend to.

It is in family life that new life is most welcomed. It is also there that life is most fully nurtured. It is there that individuals have the greatest chance to know that they are loved and cherished and valuable.

It is in family life that different generations meet each other and share life together in love. And it is there that people, as they grow old, find the reassurance that they are loved and cherished and looked after.

This is what can make life worth living, not just for the people in a family, but for all those who come in contact with a family that is truly alive to each other. That is what being salt of the earth, light of the world means in practice.

### Faith Community

We also respond to Christ in our faith community by developing the Church as a welcoming community where everyone is treasured and cared for; where everyone is helped to know how much they are loved by God and how precious they are in His sight.

Each parish is called a family of families. It is there at the service of each family to help them to grow in radiance and love. But it is also there to let the gathering of family life shine out to the world around it so that God can be glorified.

The parish is called to be a community of faith where each one has a place of honour. It is also called to build a community where everyone can find a home. In the midst of all the confusion of today's world, the parish should be, above all other places, a haven where each person can find a home as he or she is without judgement or condemnation.

This is how the Church of the parish lives as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, because it is Christ who lives in us and among us, drawing all people into the love and mercy of God.

## The Good News by Vera McFadden

JESUS came to bring the Good News to the poor, to lift the heart and spirits of the downtrodden and let them know their real worth. He wants us to do the same.

We all have been 'poor' at different times. When I was anxious about financial stress, I went for a walk one day in Brooke Park. The words 'wait in joyful hope' came into my head. The next day at Mass I heard the same words as if for the first time. I thought to myself, 'You are a hypocrite; you are going to Mass but not doing what you have been told. You are supposed to be living in joyful hope not worrying.'

Another time, when I was about 60 years old, I was a patient in hospital and I wondered what was going to become of me.

When I read the Bible later I came upon these words, 'When you were a child I carried you, I will still carry you in your old age.'

One day, a lady from a certain religious community group told me that they would understand

Scripture better than me. I looked at the person and wondered what I would need to do to further understand Scripture. Then a Scripture passage number came to me and when I checked it, it read, 'All you have to do is act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.'

Another virtue is called 'prudence', which is knowing who to trust. I once was talking to a Donegal priest who was the spiritual director on a retreat about trust and other people. He told me that when you get a hurt, just to look at the Sacred Heart and say, 'Thank you for loving me, and the hurt will go.'

This advice helped me and two of my friends, who were in similar positions.

We are to bring the Good News to the poor. Nowadays, even though the world seems more secular, there is a lot of good happening and consideration for other people.

In times of great need, we see the

emergence of food banks, groups offering to pay for fuel, those helping the homeless and those with addictions, those giving help to the Third World and offering accommodation to those fleeing from wars and seeking a more peaceful life.

There is a great spirit of

generosity, which totally fulfils the teaching of Christ to bring the Good News to the poor.

(This is a shortened version of Kevin Mayhew's hymn, 'God's Spirit is in my Heart')

The spirit of Christ is still very prominent in today's world.

## God's Spirit is in my Heart

God's Spirit is in my heart,  
He has called me and set me  
apart.

This is what I have to do,  
what I have to do.

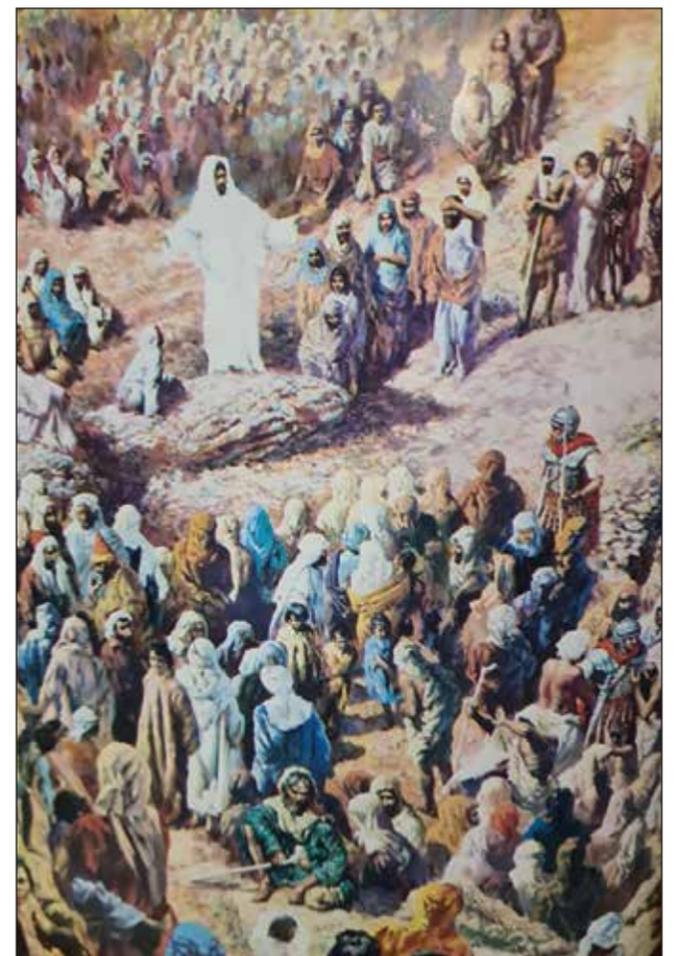
He sent me to give the Good News  
to the poor,

Tell prisoners that they are  
prisoners no more,  
Tell blind people that they can see,  
And set the downtrodden free  
And go tell everyone the news that  
the Kingdom of God has come,

And go tell everyone the news that  
the Kingdom of God has come.

Just as the Father sent me,  
So I'm sending you out to be  
My witnesses throughout the  
world,  
The whole of the world.

Don't worry what you have to say,  
Don't worry because on that day  
God's Spirit will speak in your  
heart,  
Will speak in your heart.



# Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR writes... Where are you?



Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR

APART from a few days at the end of February and another few days at the beginning of April, the month of March makes up the season of Lent this year.

We began this season on Ash Wednesday, February 22, with many of us accepting ashes on our forehead in the sign of the Cross. We will end the season with the joy of the Resurrection of Christ, won through His suffering and death on the Cross of Calvary.

What happens in between these two signings of the Cross can be very significant for ourselves, individually, and for our families and communities. Or it can be a time that we ignore or waste on wondering what it is all about.

## Where are you?

Where are you? This is the first question that is asked in the Bible. In the story of God's creation of the world, this question is asked of those whom we call our first parents, Adam and Eve. They had disobeyed God's word and as a result they were ashamed and, when God came looking for them, they hid themselves.

This question is now put to us on the first Sunday of Lent as a kind of agenda for the six weeks ahead. Lent is a time for us to get in touch with who we are at our best and most loved, and to stand in the presence of God and accept God's love.

## Temptations

On the First Sunday of Lent, the Gospel passage is the story of the temptations of Jesus before He set out on His mission to the world. These are basically the temptations that posed the question for Jesus of 'where are you?'

His first temptation was towards power – the power to change the nature of things. His response was: "We do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God". That is the only source of real power.

His second temptation was to prestige – a wonder worker who could claim that God was with Him. His response was: "You must not put the Lord your God to the test". Only God is all powerful.

And His third temptation was to public display – He would have possession of all the kingdoms of the world if He would worship the devil who was tempting Him. But His response was clearly from His deep faith in God: "You must worship the Lord your God and serve God alone".

Each time Jesus met His temptations with the firm conviction that God was with Him and He could face everything in His life with that faith and knowledge.

That is the faith that Jesus also wants us to have. It is the faith that He is leading us into at Holy Week and Easter in a few weeks' time. It is the faith that we are preparing for during these weeks of Lent.

## Lent for us

We have reduced Lent to giving up a few things – and maybe only half-heartedly. Some of the things we give up are things that damage our health, or our weight, or that we cannot afford at present because of the cost of living today.

While all that is good in itself, it is not what this season is about. Lent raises the question: "In what ways am I imprisoned so that I am not totally free to love God with my whole heart, my whole soul, my whole mind, and my

whole strength; and to love my neighbour as myself?" Jesus tells us that this is the only way to full human living. Our temptations lead us to live other ways which cannot work for us. It leads us to the question posed by the first reading mentioned above: 'Where are you?'

## Where are you – in relation to God?

There is no doubt that God wants to have a close, intimate relationship with each of us. We are made in God's image; we are temples of God's Spirit; we are living members of Christ's Body, the Church.

Wherever you are in that relationship, Lent is a time to strengthen it further, especially through prayer. If you already pray each day, take special care of the time you spend in prayer, or maybe add a little more time to it during Lent. If you do not normally take time each day, Lent is a time to begin doing this, even 5-10 minutes each day will make a huge difference to your relationship with God.

## Where are you in your relationships with others?

If you are married, is your marriage your priority or just another part of your life? In the Scriptures, the love of husband and wife is the first relationship that is blessed by God, not just in time but in priority. And in our Catholic tradition, marriage is a sacrament, one of the major ways that Christ is present and powerful in the world.

It is vital that couples work on growing in their love for one another and in their commitment to one another.

If you are a parent, Lent is a time to look at how you are caring for your children and what your priorities for them are. Parents are generally very generous with their children with everything, except their time and affection. These are the most important gifts that you can give to them.

Also, this is a time when parents need to look at how important is handing on the faith to your children to you and what do you

do to ensure this. Family prayer is a very important part of handing on the faith and yet this is often missing in our family homes today. What can you do about this during these weeks of Lent, with a view to continuing it in the months and years ahead?

If you are on your own, where are you in relationships with other people – family, friends, neighbours? Isolation is one of the great illnesses of our world today. It happens to so many people and not just those who are on their own. However, it can be a bigger danger for those who are alone.

It is vital for all of us to seek appropriate support for our lives and for our faith in today's world. There are many support groups available, both within the Church and within society. Look for those that would be helpful for yourself and take part in them. This will help not just yourself but many others around you, as you also bring your gifts and make them available to others.

As a community of faith – where are you? Lent is not just for us as individuals but very much for us as communities of the Church. These communities are all made up of individuals, as well as families and couples. The task for every faith community is to build a community in which there is room for everyone. This is

a wonderful privilege and a great responsibility.

The central key to this is the Sunday Eucharist. It is vital that everyone be there – individuals, couples, families, extended families and communities. Unfortunately, many people no longer are present and the whole community is weakened.

The next vital thing is that each one takes part in building this community of faith for the world we live in, according to each one's gifts and opportunities. Again, so often active involvement in building the community is left to the few and ignored by the many. The vitality of the community is greatly lessened by the lack of response.

## Lent: A time to change

Lent is a time to change. The three powers for change are given to us as Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. It is up to each of us to take these on for the six weeks and see how God will bring us forward beyond that.

Between the sign of the Cross with ashes on Ash Wednesday and the sign of the Cross on Calvary on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we can let God's Spirit transform us individually, as couples, as families, and as a community of faith, hope, and love.

## Men's Rosary in Clonmany



**Calling all Men, Women and their Families**



**St Patrick's Day Rosary and Mass at Slemish Mountain Mass Rock. Ballymena, Co. Antrim.**

**March 17th 2023. Rosary 1pm. Mass 2pm.**

The Mass rock is located about 300m from the Slemish car park along an uneven path up a slight incline. There is no parking at Slemish on St Patrick's Day but free shuttle buses run from the Michelin Tyre factory (on the Broughshane Road, Ballymena) to Slemish car park from 9am to 3.30pm every 15 minutes. There are no stewards available on the day so please do remember to look out for your children. Contact Owen 07525166090.

## Thinking about food during Lent by Patricia McCormack

SOMETIMES skipping a meal comes easily, when we are absorbed in work, sport, computer games, or keeping vigil at a sick bed. But when I was asked to fast on Ash Wednesday, I found it difficult not to be thinking about food all day!

It was humbling to think of past generations going without milk, butter and eggs in an already simple diet and, not so long ago, conscientiously having one meal and two collations a day for the whole of Lent. It was sobering to think of the many people living on subsistence rations, or less, not

by choice and not just for one day.

Trocaire's Lent 2023 campaign focuses on Somalia, where prolonged drought is causing a devastating food crisis. Repeated failed rains have led to nearly eight million people, almost half of Somalia's population, struggling to find food.

The desperate plight of Nasteha and her family highlights the human cost of drought, famine and displacement. Countries like Somalia are experiencing the worst effects of climate change even though they have contributed least to global

warming.

### It is not just not fair.

We can be generous in contributing money to Trocaire's appeal and return our wee Trocaire boxes at Easter to help fund relief work. But is that enough? Trocaire's goal for the past 50 years has also been to highlight justice issues. Climate justice must be our concern.

We are aware that heating our homes, fuelling our cars and flying, releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, which in turn causes climate change. We are not so aware, however, that

our diet, especially if it is based on meat, can have a similar impact.

The production of meat in our world contributes up to 20% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Meat production also demands high levels of grain and water.

Ten tons of wheat would sustain 50 people for a year; but if it is fed to pigs, poultry and cattle it will feed only five people.

Most of the animal is discarded in the belief that only the best cuts are worth eating.

All year round availability of a wide range of foods involves huge air miles, refrigeration and

packaging. One third of all food produced is wasted.

This Lent, we need to think seriously about food and to examine what changes we could make...

\* Eat less meat.

\* Choose locally produced food in season.

\* Cut out waste – plan meals & shopping, store carefully.

\* Measure accurately, only cooking what's needed.

\* Grow some fruit, veg and herbs

\* Buy Fair Trade products

\* Support local food-banks

\* Say Grace – giving thanks.



A Lenten 'Pray, Fast, Share' display in Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Steelstown.

# Parish Post-its

## Aghyaran

**Mission:** A Mission programme with the theme, 'A Future Full of Hope' is underway in the Aghyaran Parish, running from Sunday, March 5 until Saturday, March 12, when it closes with Mass at 6 pm. From the Monday to Friday, there is morning Mass at 6.45 am, celebrated by Cappagh PP, Fr Kevin McElhennon, with Rosary followed by Eucharistic Adoration from 11 am until 12 noon, and then an evening talk and reflection time at 7.30 pm.

The Mission speakers include: Marie Lindsay (Sunday) on the theme 'Faith & Family'; Peter Harte (Monday) on 'Faith & Football'; Marguerite Hamilton (Tuesday) on 'Finding God's Purpose For Me'; Brenda Bannon (Wednesday) on 'Using Our Gifts in Parish Life'; Richard Moore (Thursday) on 'Forgiveness'; and Fr Kevin Hayden OSB (Friday) on 'The Art of Listening'.

On Saturday, March 12, morning Mass will be at 10 am, and will be followed by Adoration. After the closing Mass at 6 pm, to be celebrated by Bishop Donal, there will be refreshments and a variety concert in the nearby GAA Centre.

**Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Thursdays after 10 am Mass in St Patrick's Church, and finishing at 12 noon.

## Ardstraw West & Castlederg

**Prayer Group:** The Parish Prayer Group will meet in St Patrick's Hall, Castlederg, on Friday, March 10 and 24, at 8 pm. Everyone is welcome to come along for time of prayer, conversation and reflection on the Scripture Readings.

## Badoney Lower (Gortin-Rouskey)

**Stations of the Cross:** During Lent, Stations of the Cross are on Wednesday nights at 7.30 pm, alternating between St Mary's Rouskey and St Patrick's Gortin.

**Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Sundays in St Patrick's Church, Gortin, from 3.30-5.30 pm.

## Badoney Upper (Plumbridge-Cranagh)

**Lenten Reading Group:** The Lenten Reading Group is reading 'Mere Christianity' by C S Lewis, and is meeting each Wednesday during Lent, after the 7.30 pm Mass, at 8 pm, in St Brigid's Primary School, Cranagh. The book can be purchased online.

**Parish Meeting:** Following a plenary meeting with Ardstraw East, Badoney Lower and Greencastle, to begin the process of lay participation, there will be a parish meeting for Badoney Upper on Thursday, March 23, at 7.30 pm in Plumbridge Parish Hall.

## Ballinascreen/Desertmartin

**Lenten Programme:** During Lent, Mass will be celebrated on: Mondays at 11 am in St Mary's, Coolcalm, and 7.30 pm in Holy Rosary, Ballinascreen; Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 7 am in Holy Rosary, Ballinascreen, 8.40 am in St Colm's High School, 11 am in St Eugene's, Moneyneena, and 7.30 pm in St Mary's, Coolcalm. There will be Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Rosary, Ballinascreen, on Mondays during Lent from 12 noon until the 7.30 pm Mass, and in St Mary's, Coolcalm, on Thursdays during Lent from 12 noon until 7.15 pm, with Stations of the Cross at 7 pm.

**Scripture Evenings:** Scripture Evenings for Lent, using the Lectio Divina method, are taking place in The Community Hub, 50 High Street, Draperstown, on Fridays at 8.15 pm. Light refreshments are served and all are welcome.

**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

**Fr Paddy Anniversary:** There will be an Anniversary Mass in Holy Family Church for Fr Paddy O'Kane's first anniversary, on Tuesday, March 28, at 7.15 pm. In addition, Parish secretary, Fiona, and some parishioners are doing a cold water dip on Sunday, March 26, at 11am in Ludden, Lisfannon, in memory of Fr Paddy and are raising money for ZEST a local mental health charity.

**Lenten Prayer:** During Lent, Masses will be celebrated at 10 am and 7.15 pm, Monday to Friday, with the Stations of the Cross prayed after the Tuesday evening Mass.

**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

**Stations of Cross:** Stations of the Cross Devotions for Lent take place in St Joseph's Church, Fincairn, at 8 pm on Wednesdays, after evening Mass, and in St Mary's Church, Altinure, at 6 pm on Sundays.

**Sycamore Faith Programme:** The Sycamore Faith Programme for adults takes place on Tuesday evenings, from 7-8 pm, in the

Grotto Chapel, at Fincairn, and will continue until Easter. Each session involves a short film and some time for great conversations, and there will be a cuppa to enjoy too.

**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.

## 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

**Lenten Reflection:** During Lent there will be a time of reflection each week on the Seven Last Words of Christ, with one in Christ the King Church, Strathroy, on Mondays at 7.30 pm, and another in the Cappagh Parish Centre, Killyclogher, on Thursdays at 10.45 am.

## Claudy

**Lenten Devotions:** Lenten Devotions take place on Sundays at 6 pm in St Patrick's Church.

**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, Craighane.

**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.

## Culmore

**Developing a Parish Vision:** For the four Wednesdays of

March, Culmore parishioners are invited to come along to Hollybush PS from 7.30-9 pm for an evening of discussion and prayerful reflection on the theme 'Into the Future - Developing a Parish Vision'. Running on March 8, 15, 22 and 29, the evenings will begin at 7.30 pm and finish at 9 pm.

## Dunboe, Macosquin & Aghadowney

**Taize Night:** St John's Church choir is to sing chants at a Taize Night to be held in St John's Church, Coleraine, on Wednesday, March 22.

**Penitential Service:** A Penitential Service for Dunboe will be held at 7 pm on Monday, March 13, and in St John's Church on Monday, March 20.

## Dungiven

**Lenten Programme:** The Lenten Programme for St Patrick's Church includes the Sacrament of the Sick Anointing on Sunday, March 12, at 5 pm; a Holy Hour on Sunday, March 26, starting at 5 pm; and a Penitential Service on Sunday, April 2, at 5 pm.

**Adoration Mass:** A Mass will take place for all members of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel on Monday, March 13, at 7.30 pm in St Patrick's Church.

**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.

## Granaghan (Swatragh)

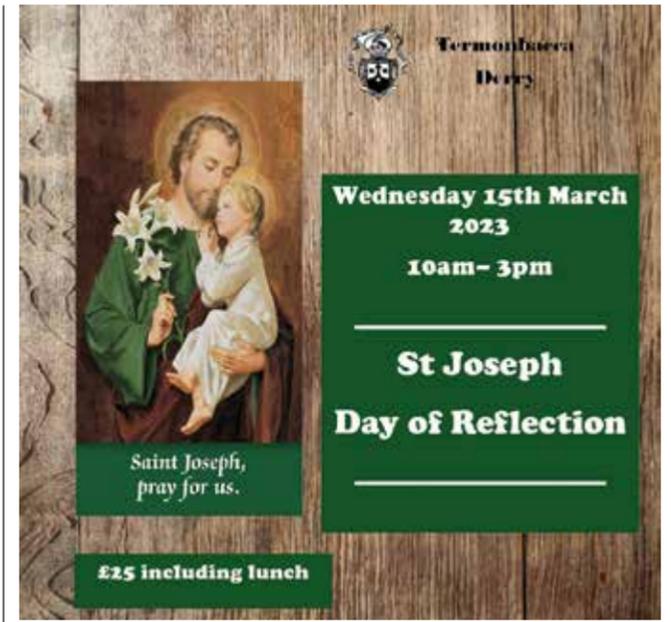
**Morning Prayer:** During the Tuesdays of Lent there will be Morning Prayer at 10 am.

## Greencastle

**Divine Mercy:** The Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayed on the First Tuesday of every month at 12.15 pm before Mass in St Patrick's Church, Greencastle.

**Adoration:** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in St Patrick's Church after 12.30 pm Mass on Tuesdays until 5 pm.

## Greenlough



**GIFT:** The Growing In Faith Together (GIFT) Programme continues in the Football Pavilion each Monday from 7-9 pm.

**JPII Awards:** Pope John Paul II Gold Awards will be presented to the young participants during the 5.30 pm Mass on Saturday, March 11.

## Iskaheen

**Faith Conversations:** The Adult Faith Group in the parish is holding a series of faith conversations over the next few months, on the last Monday of each month at 7.30 pm, in Warren View Manor. The evenings are informal, with an opportunity to join in the conversation and will last approximately an hour. There will be a cup of tea afterwards.

**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.

## Killygordon

**Lenten Prayer:** The Stations of the Cross will be prayed every Thursday of Lent at 7.30 pm and Mass will be celebrated every Friday morning of Lent at 6.30 am.

## 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.

**St Patrick's Bell:** A night of history, music and song will take place in Lavey/Termoneeny Centre on Friday, March 10, starting at 7.30 pm, with a talk on St Patrick's Bell and the connection to Lavey.

## 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.

## Limavady

**Parish Mission:** There will be a Parish Mission running from March 18-25.

**Fatima Pilgrimage:** Mgr McCanny will be leading a pilgrimage to Fatima from June 1 for seven nights. Cost £799 per person sharing. Contact: Patricia 07743936548 or Anne 07784953408.

## Maghera

**Lenten Lectio Divina:** The Maghera Parish is running Lenten sessions of 'Lectio Divina' on Monday nights at 7.30 pm in the Pastoral Centre. All welcome.

**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.

## Malin

**Coffee Morning:** There will be a Coffee Morning in the Parish Hall, in Malin Town, on Saturday, April 8, from 11am-4pm to raise funds for the repainting of Aughaclay Church.

## Melmount

**Lent Opening:** During Lent, the Church will open from 6.30 am Monday - Friday.

**Blessing of Graves:** The annual Ceremony of the Blessing of Graves will take place in Melmount on Sunday, May 14 at 4 pm.

**Holy Cross Mass:** Mass will be celebrated in Holy Cross College at 8 am on Friday, March 10. All are welcome to come to this Mass.

## 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

**Lenten Programme:** During Lent, Mass will be celebrated Monday to Friday at 10 am and

7.30 pm, with Mass on Thursday, March 9, at 6 pm, and on Saturday at 10 am. Sunday Mass in Sacred Heart Church Vigil is at 6 pm (Saturday Vigil) and at 9 am and 12 noon on the Sunday. Mass will be celebrated in St Mary's Church, Drumragh, at 10.30 am. Stations of the Cross will be prayed on Sundays at 6 pm in Sacred Heart Church.

**Life in the Spirit:** The annual Life in the Spirit Seminars organised by Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group are currently underway on Thursdays at 7.30 pm, in Omagh Pastoral Centre, at Brook Street, BT78 5HD. The seminars so far have included those on God's Love, Salvation, and New Life, and continue with Deacon Pat Buckley speaking on Receiving God's Gifts on March 9, Fr Eddie McGee speaking on Baptism in the Holy Spirit on March 16, Fr Charles Cross CP speaking on Growth on March 23, and finish with Antoinette Moynihan speaking on Transformation on March 30.

**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

**Lenten Masses:** During Lent, weekday Masses will be celebrated at 10 am on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and at 11 am on Wednesdays.

**Forty Hours:** Forty Hours Eucharistic Adoration will begin after 11 am Mass on Sunday, March 12, and finish with Devotions at 5.30 pm.

**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

**FairTrade Cuppa:** There will be a FairTrade Coffee (and tea) Morning, with scones, in the Conference Room after Masses on Sunday, March 12. Organised by the Parish Ecol Group, all donations will go to the Trocaire Lenten Appeal.

**Stories of Hope:** The Steelstown Parish invites people to come along to Our Lady of Lourdes Church on the Tuesday evenings of Lent, at 7 pm, to hear about personal journeys of hope, and afterwards enjoy some live music and a cuppa. The speakers include: Marie Lindsay, March 7; Geraldine Mullan, March 14; Archdeacon Robert Miller, March 21; Richard Moore, March 28, and Baroness Nuala O'Loan, Friday, March 31.

**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.

#### Strabane (Camus)

**Lenten Programme:** During Lent, Mass will be celebrated at 7 am and 10 am Monday-Friday, as well as at 7 pm on Wednesdays,

on Saturdays at 10 am and 6.30 pm, and Sundays at 10 am and 12 noon. Confessions will take place on Saturdays from 11-11.30am, and 6-6.20 pm, and there will be a Eucharistic Healing Service before the Blessed Sacrament every Sunday during Lent at 4 pm. The Stations of the Cross will be prayed every Friday after the 10 am Mass.

**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.

During Lent, this Group meets every Wednesday at 8 pm in the Prayer Room in the Parochial House to pray the Bible (Lectio Divina), prayerfully meditating on the readings of the coming Sunday. All welcome.

**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

at 7 pm, and Church of the Sacred Heart, Omagh, Monday, March 20, at 7.30pm. All, especially Pioneers, are invited to attend these Masses.

**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 Avena, costing £745 sharing, with a £35 single supplement. Travel insurance up to age 79 is

programme from March 13-14. The Monday programme gets underway at 5 pm and includes Catechesis based on the Gospel, the Rosary of the Triune Love, Mass at 7 pm, and the Laying of Hands from 8.15 p. The Tuesday programme starts at 2.30 pm and includes Adoration, Prayer, Catechesis, Rosary of the Triune Love, Mass at 7 pm, and finishing with the Laying of Hands at 8.15 pm.

**Life in the Spirit:** The annual Life in the Spirit Seminars organised by Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group are currently underway on Thursdays at 7.30 pm, in Omagh Pastoral Centre, at Brook Street,

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.

#### Templemore - Long Tower

**Sr Annette O'Gorman Memorial:** A Mass in memory of Sr Annette O'Gorman, formerly Nazareth House, Derry will be celebrated in Long Tower Church on Tuesday, March 14, at 1 pm. The children and choir of Nazareth House Primary School will also participate to honour Sr Annette's years of service to the school and community which she loved so much. Refreshments afterwards in Aras Colmcille. All welcome

**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.

**ACCORD:** Accord Derry Marriage Preparation Workshops will take place on the weekends of March 27-28, April 17-18, and 22-23 May. These virtual courses can be booked at [www.accordni.com](http://www.accordni.com).

BT78 5HD. The seminars so far have included those on God's Love, Salvation, and New Life, and continue with Deacon Pat Buckley speaking on Receiving God's Gifts on March 9, Fr Eddie McGee speaking on Baptism in the Holy Spirit on March 16, Fr Charles Cross CP speaking on Growth on March 23, and finish with Antoinette Moynihan speaking on Transformation on March 30.

**Earthquake Appeal:** A Trocaire Earthquake Appeal Tea Dance will take place in An Grainan Hotel, Burt, on Sunday, March 19, from 8-10 pm. Admission is 10 Euros.

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.

#### Templemore - St Eugene's

**Lenten Programme:** Morning Prayer of the Church at 7.45 am Monday to Friday. Lunch-time Mass at 1 pm, Monday to Friday. Late openings on Mondays to celebrate the Sacrament of Confession, and spend some quiet time in the presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament from 8-10 pm.

**Tuesdays:** Why is my presence at Mass important? Fr Paul Farren will lead a series of talks in St Eugene's Cathedral from 7-7.20 pm.

**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

**Lenten Prayer:** A time of Prayer and Reflection with Thornhill Ministries takes place in the Emmaus Room, in the grounds of Pennyburn Church, on the Wednesdays of Lent from 6.30-7.15 pm. Everyone is welcome to this time of prayer.

**Forty Hours:** The Annual Solemn Exposition of the Blessed

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

Sacrament begins on Sunday, March 12, in St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn, after 12.15 pm Mass, concluding with a Holy Hour at 8 pm. Exposition will resume on Monday, March 13 at 7.45 am, with a pause for 10 am Mass and will conclude at 2.45 pm. Everyone is welcome.

**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.

**Fatima Pilgrimage:** A Pilgrimage to Fatima, led by Fr Sean, will take place from October 5-11, 2023, for seven nights. Cost is £799 pps, staying at Hotel Cinquentenario. To be paid in full by May. Optional insurance & single supplement. Contact Patricia 07743936548 or Anne 07784953408.

#### 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.

**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.

## 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, March 10. It will be led by the Diocesan Vocations Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Bellaghy and Greenlough. Everyone is welcome to attend or to follow the Devotions via the Cathedral webcam.

**Temperance Mass:** The next Temperance Mass, highlighting

the virtue of temperance and focusing on the Pioneer promises of moderation in all things, particularly in the use of alcohol, takes place in St John the Baptist, Swatragh, on Saturday, March 11, at 12 noon. All, especially Pioneers, are invited to attend. Organised by the Diocesan Pioneer Council, the other Temperance Masses will be in Church of the Sacred Heart, Carndonagh, Tuesday, March 14,

## Diary Dates

**Lenten Programmes:** On Thursday nights during Lent, there is a Carmelite Retreat in Termonbacca entitled 'A Time of Grace and Prayer' Starting at 7 pm, the retreat consists of talks by different friars from across the province and a discussion held afterwards. This is open to women and men.

On the Mondays of Lent, Fr Stephen Quinn, Prior at Termonbacca, is leading people through the Bishop Robert Barron's 'Pivotal Players' series, looking at the lives of some well-known Saints

and Catholic people. Starting at 7.30 pm, this is also open to all.

**Irish Women's Rosary:** There will be an Irish Women's Rosary on Saturday, March 11, in Portadown, meeting at 1 pm at Market Street, in front of St Mark's Church of Ireland building. The prayer intention is for the reparation, repentance and conversion of the nation.

**Fr Rosario Palic:** Fr Rosario Palic, an Italian Exorcist Priest, will be ministering in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, Derry, for a two-day

**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.

# Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

**HELLO children. Welcome to the month of February. This month is dedicated to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. The Holy Family is where Jesus spent the time from His birth until He started His public journey telling us about God. The Holy Family is our best example of love, hope, faithfulness, and joy (CCC 533).**



During the month of February, we celebrate The Presentation of the Lord – Candlemas Day (CCC 529). The Presentation of the Lord is the story of Jesus being brought to the Temple in Jerusalem by Mary and St Joseph. It was customary for Jewish parents to present their child in the temple 40 days after birth. When St Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple they met Simeon, a devout Jew who had prayed that he would live to see the coming of the Messiah. Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit, took the baby Jesus in his arms, blessed Him and proclaimed that He was truly the Son of God.

The Feast of the Presentation is also known as Candlemas or Candle Mass Day. It is given this name because Christ is the light who has come into the world to chase away the dark and drive out sin. Since the seventh Century, candles have been blessed before Mass and used in the year ahead for celebrations like baptisms and prayers in the home.

## Saints of the Month:

February 1: Saint Brigid of Ireland

February 3: Saint Blaise

February 5: Saint Agatha

February 10: Saint Scholastica

## Feast of St Brigid of Ireland

St Brigid, one of the most loved saints in Ireland, was born during the fifth century. There are many stories about Brigid, especially her generosity to others. One story



tells how St Brigid, after giving her mother's whole butter supply away to the poor, prayed to God that the butter would be replaced. And it miraculously re-appeared!

Brigid founded a monastery under an oak tree in Kildare. The monastery quickly grew in numbers. Many men and women came there to study the faith and learned the skills of ornate writing and religious art.

In Ireland, we have special devotion to St Brigid's Cross. Tradition speaks of how Brigid went to visit a dying pagan who needed to hear the Gospel. The man was very unsettled so she sat and prayed with him and, as she prayed, Brigid lifted some straw from the floor and weaved it into a cross. When the man had become quiet he asked her what she was doing. Brigid explained the Gospel to him with the use of her cross made of straw. He immediately came to believe in Jesus. Brigid baptised him before he died. Today people still make St Brigid's crosses out of rushes and place them in their home to ward off evil and welcome Christ.

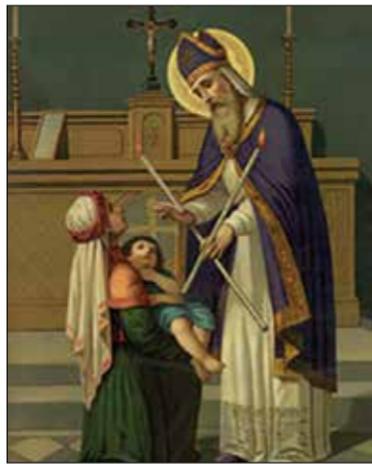


## Saint Blaise – The Blessing of the Throats

The Feast of St Blaise is celebrated on the third day of February. Blaise was a doctor before he was consecrated Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia. He was imprisoned for his faith during the persecutions of Licinius. While in prison, he miraculously cured a young boy who was choking to death on a fishbone lodged in his throat.

From the sixth century, people who have been sick with diseases of the throat have prayed to St Blaise asking for his intercession.

The custom of the blessing of throats arose from this and is practised every year in our churches.



The priest holds two blessed candles over the head of the faithful or touches their throats, while he says the prayer of the saint and imparts God's blessing.

The priest says:

“Through the intercession of St Blaise, Bishop and Martyr, may God deliver you from all ailments of the throat and from every other evil, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

We should also ask St Blaise to protect us against any spiritual illness showing themselves through our tongues, such as cursing, gossiping or making unkind remarks. St James, in his Letter (James 1:26), reminds us that our tongues should be used to praise God and not to curse others. Therefore, we pray to St Blaise to protect us from all physical and spiritual ailments which attach to our throats.

## Our Lady of Lourdes

We celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11. This feast celebrates one of the most famous apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It took place in Lourdes, in southern France. On February 11, 1858, a young girl named Bernadette Soubirous was out collecting firewood with her sister and a friend near a grotto. Suddenly, Bernadette saw a vision of a beautiful lady. This was the first of 18 appearances.

During these visits, the Lady, who did not immediately identify herself as the Blessed Virgin Mary, asked for a chapel to be built on the grounds, so that Bernadette could pray for the conversion of sinners. She also asked Bernadette to drink the spring water that was revealed to her at the grotto.

The news of the apparitions spread rapidly and caused quite a commotion in the town. As a result, Bernadette was detained, interrogated and harassed by the civil authorities and treated as if she were a common criminal. The villagers, however, came to Bernadette's rescue and demanded that she be released. Through all these difficulties Bernadette was given an interior strength.

Many of the townspeople believed that it was the Blessed Virgin Mary who was appearing to Bernadette,

and they came down in large numbers to the grotto to pray. The spring which the Lady asked Bernadette to drink from at the grotto quickly revealed itself to give forth blessed water with miraculous healing properties.

On March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, the Lady appeared at the grotto again, this time identifying herself as the Immaculate Conception.

“With her two arms hanging down, she raised her eyes and looked up at the sky, and it was then that she told me, joining her hands together now at the height of her breast, that she was the Immaculate Conception. Those were the last words she ever said to me.”



The Marian Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (CCC 490-493) had been announced by Pope Pius IX a few years previous, on December 8, 1854. This infallibly defined dogma, which stated that the Blessed Virgin Mary, “from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.”

Lourdes has become a place of pilgrimage and healing, but even more of deep faith. A beautiful church has been erected near the grotto. The shrine of Lourdes is visited by millions of pilgrims each year. It has become one of the most prominent places of pilgrimage in the world. The water of Lourdes is readily available to all pilgrims and numerous miraculous healings of Lourdes have been medically documented. Many people who visit Lourdes return home with renewed faith and a readiness to serve God in their lives.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

## February 14 - St Valentine's Day

“...and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13)

February 14 is always a very special day as we celebrate the love which



we have for each other and we remember especially the love that God has for us.

According to Catholic history, there were two saints named Valentine who were both martyred. Little is known about the lives of these men, but tradition does speak of their great love for God and for others.

## Lent

Lent begins every year with Ash Wednesday, and this year it falls on February 22. The word 'lent' means to lengthen and is also an old English word for Spring. The season of Lent lasts 40 days (not including Sundays) before Easter. During Lent, people give things up like eating chocolate, biscuits, or maybe try to do something which helps others, like helping out at home.

Some adults fast and pray as part of their penance, so that they can prepare themselves better to celebrate Easter.

Lent, then, is a time when we have the opportunity each year to change our thoughts and actions so that we can open our hearts to Jesus at Easter.

On Ash Wednesday, the priest places the mark of a cross on our forehead with blessed ashes. The ashes are made out of the burnt Palm branches from Palm Sunday the year before. The ashes are a symbol of sadness and death, while the cross reminds us that we belong to Jesus, who died for all humanity on the cross.



# Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

**Hello children. Welcome to the month of March. This month is dedicated to Saint Joseph, the spouse of Mary and foster father of Jesus. In Saint Matthew's Gospel, Joseph is described as a just man. This means that he was a true and faithful person, filled with justice and virtue. Joseph was given a very important task by God; he had to protect Mary and Jesus, to work hard to provide for them, to teach Jesus and lovingly watch over Mother and Child. St Joseph fulfilled this family mission beautifully. As a result, he has been loved and celebrated down the centuries. St Joseph, pray for us!**



for six years he took care of sheep and pigs. The young Patrick was very lonely and prayed to God all the time.

Eventually, he escaped from his captives and returned to Britain. He studied to become a priest and teacher. His studies may have been in France. In 432AD, he returned to Ireland as a Bishop to teach the love of the true God. Bishop Patrick used the shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity. A shamrock has one stem and three leaves. There is only one God but God is three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Patrick worked many miracles as he preached and converted people all over Ireland. He baptized and confirmed thousands and ordained many priests. As a result, many kingdoms within Ireland converted to Christianity. He lived in poverty and did constant penance, especially in places such as Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick. After a life of prayer and many sufferings, St Patrick died on March 17, 461AD. He is buried

in Downpatrick, the little town that bears his name.

## The Annunciation of the Lord

On the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord (CCC 494), March 25, we celebrate that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary of Nazareth with a special message. The Angel Gabriel announced to Her that She was full of grace and the Lord was with Her. God had chosen Her to conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Angel said He must be called Jesus. The Baby would be unique. He would be the Saviour of the world, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-33).

Mary, trusting in God, replied "Yes" to what the Angel Gabriel had told her. She was meek and obedient to God's will. We can learn from Mary how to live humble Christian lives and to be always ready to say 'yes' to God, as She did.



4. A cross is marked on our foreheads with blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday.
5. We only do fast on Ash Wednesday.
6. We are supposed to do almsgiving during Lent, which is giving to the poor.
7. We are supposed to do abstinence during Lent, which is praying and meditation so we can become more like Jesus.
8. We do fast and abstinence on Good Friday.
9. Lent ends on Good Friday.
10. Lent is the time before Christmas.

### Answers

- 1.T, 2.T, 3. F, 4.T, 5.F 6.T, 7.F, 8. T, 9. F, 10. F.

### Saints of the Month:

- March 4 – St Casimir
- March 9 – St Francis of Rome
- March 17 – St Patrick
- March 19 – St Joseph

### Saint Patrick

St Patrick is the patron of Ireland, but he was born in Britain. When he was 16 years old, he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave, where

to participate in the special season of Lent. It helps us to purify our bodies and souls in preparation for the wonderful Feast of Easter, when



Christ overcame death and rose from the dead.

### Lent - How Much do you Know?

#### True or False?

1. Lent starts on Ash Wednesday.
2. During Lent we fast, which is to go without food on certain days.
3. Lent recalls the time that Jesus and the disciples were out in the desert.



### Lent

The season of Lent (CCC 540) continues during the month of March. Catholics are asked to do humble acts of penance like abstaining from meat or some other food, making more time for family prayer, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, praying the Stations of the Cross, or helping the elderly or lonely. Everyone is encouraged

# Cappagh re-launches Ministry to the Sick by Bernie Doody



The McAteer Family, Siobhan, Cora and Cormac, with their prayer to St Peregrine.

TO coincide with a Week of Prayer for the Sick leading up to February 11, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Cappagh Parish re-launched its Ministry to the Sick and appealed to parishioners to come forward to help.

As well as visiting individual homes, the Parish administers to the Sick in Omagh Hospital, the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, as well as 14 residential care homes.

The hope is to team up with the neighbouring parish of Drumragh to invite parishioners there to participate, so that as many as possible can be reached through this ministry.

Fr Declan said that ministering to the Sick can be in the form of bringing Holy Communion or simply by your presence in a visit.

To mark the re-launch, the parish had a Triduum of Prayer for the Sick. On the first evening, Sr Mary Jo Corcoran, a

Loreto sister who is Chaplain in Antrim Area Hospital, and supervisor and director of the Clinical Pastoral Education training programme for chaplains in healthcare, led in a reflection on sickness as an invitation to see Christ in others.

Sr Mary said that we are all called to the ministry of Christ. In our ministry to the Sick, we can be a light and a crutch of support to the Sick. She said that it was important that the carer is also supported and to always refer to our 'guide-book', that is, the Bible, and to pray.

On the second evening, Br Alphonsus Ryan, a Capuchin friar based in Ards Friary, Co Donegal, reflected on the life of Padre Pio, helping us to see sickness as an invitation to unite our suffering with Christ.

Br Alphonsus has journeyed with Padre Pio for 50 years. He said that uniting one's suffering to that of Christ's, transforms it. He has seen many miracles through Padre Pio, but the greatest miracle is the



Sr Mary Jo Corcoran

conversion of the soul. Relics of Padre Pio were available for veneration at the service.

The Triduum concluded the following evening with Fr Vincent Finnegan OFM, a Franciscan priest based in Rosnowlough, reflecting on sickness as an invitation to trust in God and to hope in His healing power.

He asked parishioners to reflect on what wounds they were carrying, and how they have responded...through faith and hope

or with fear and anger?

Fr Vincent spoke about St Peregrine Laziosi and his miraculous healing from cancer. He is the Patron Saint of Cancer Sufferers, and parishioners were able to receive a blessing from a relic of St Peregrine after the service.

The very powerful week of prayer concluded on the Sunday evening with Eucharistic Adoration and the Anointing of the Sick.

Fr Vincent Finnegan OFM



## Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. What movie featured Art Garfunkle's 1978 hit 'Bright Eyes'?
2. In which country would you find the city of Kandy?
3. Which TV presenter recently left the 'Pointless' show to host his own 'House of Games'?
4. Hollywood actors, Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, have recently taken over as owners of which UK football club?
5. In which US state would you find the song-famous city of Amarillo?
6. In the periodic table, for what substance is SN the chemical symbol?
7. Celery, Apple, Walnuts, Grapes and Mayonnaise combine to make what dish?
8. What is the Christian name of the UK women's tennis star Raducanu?
9. In which US state was Joe Biden born?
10. What is the main language of Brazil?
11. Which band's first hit single was 'Supersonic'?
12. Who was the author of the Hunger Games books?

13. In which part of the human body would you find the smallest bone?
14. Kate Thornton was the first presenter of which popular TV show?
15. Who recorded the bestselling music album 'Back to Bedlam'?
16. In what year did the Euro first become an official currency?
17. In 'The Simpsons', what musical instrument does Lisa play?
18. Which footballer holds the record for the quickest goal ever scored in the English Premier League?
19. Who painted 'A Cafe Terrace At Night'?
20. What is the capital city of Slovakia?
21. Which sporting superstar has the real Christian name 'Eldrick'?
22. Who plays 'An Idiot Abroad'?
23. What type of food is often referred to by Americans as 'Baloney'?
24. In what country did the fictional siblings 'Hansel and Gretel' originate?
25. Who is the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?

**Quiz Answers:** 1, Watership Down. 2, Sri Lanka. 3, Richard Osman. 4, Wrexham. 5, Texas. 6, Tin. 7, A Waldorf Salad. 8, Emma. 9, Pennsylvania. 10, Portugese. 11, Oasis. 12, Suzanne Collins. 13, The Ear. 14, X-Factor. 15, James Blunt. 16, 1999. 17, Saxophone. 18, Shane Long. 19, Vincent van Gogh. 20, Bratislava. 21, Tiger Woods. 22, Karl Pilkington. 23, Italian sausage. 24, Germany. 25, Chris Heaton-Harris.

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Bunrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

# Let Your Light Shine!

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, Duramannagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,



*St Brigid & St Patrick  
pray for us*



*Desertmartin keeping the St Brigid's Cross tradition alive*

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,