



The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

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Nativity Stars – St Eithne’s PS Derry



Belfast Cross – Newtownstewart



Children’s Rosary – Claudy



Blessed Brunch & Books – Termonbacca

Synod 2021 2023

#ListeningChurch



“We need a listening heart in the Church today” – Fr Oliver Crilly (pgs 16-17)



Derry seminarian’s Papal commentary - Rome



Divine Child Novena – Termonbacca




Reflecting on 2021 – Marie Lindsay, Iskaheen


People in focus




Charlotte Gormley
- Banagher & Claudy




Dominic O’Hara RIP
- CBS Omagh



Fr John J Ryder RIP
- Muff



Fr Liam Donnelly
- Lavey



Francis Lagan RIP
- Maghera

Also featuring: Youth ministry news; ‘All or Nothing’ Termonbacca youth event; Young writers’ section; Synodal path continues; Catholic Education reflections; Irish Section; Children’s Catechism Club, Quiz...and much more...

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Bishop Donal reflects on Pope Francis' prayer intention for the month of January for true human fraternity:

"We pray for all those suffering from religious discrimination and persecution; may their own rights and dignity be recognised, which originate from being brothers and sisters in the human family"

Christ's solidarity with weak and marginalised must be obvious in our way of life

DURING the Christmas season, we repeatedly heard the scriptural passages about Emmanuel/God with us, the Word being made flesh and dwelling among us and Wisdom pitching her tent in God's chosen people.

Christmas is a message, not just for Christmas but for the whole year. It is a message of God in solidarity with us in Jesus. This is a God who humbles Himself even to accepting death on a Cross. And for this reason, He is raised by the Father.

That identification of God with us in Jesus is the basis of

the Gospel message that we are all brothers and sisters, invited to share the life of God through Christ's risen life.

Thus, human fraternity is not something invested by a modern secular world but a teaching that lies at the heart of the Gospel. But, so many people in the world do not experience that fraternity.

Power, arrogance and snobbery push many to feel that their lives or priorities are not as important as those of others. The economic system tolerates a level of collateral damage to the weak and marginalised as the price

of strength and security for the powerful. Every crisis is exploited by those who hold the levers of power.

The challenge for the Church is to model a different way of being human.

That means that we have to allow Christ's solidarity with the weak and marginalised to be obvious in our way of life. Only then can we tell others that they have to mend their ways.

It means trying to distinguish between what is Christ's way for the Church and what political forces might want us to say.

Brazil's Archbishop Helder Camara is quoted as saying that when he gave food to the hungry, people called him a saint. And when he asked why, in a rich country, there were so many hungry people, they called him a communist!

Pope Francis asks us to pray for solidarity between all people, not because that is a current political idea but because it is part of the divine dream for the human race.

Our most powerful political message is that we are all brothers and sisters. Our biggest challenge is to act as if we believed that message.



Bishop Donal

Behold Your Mother – A Lenten Retreat by Aoife O'Neill

AS a final gift, right before He died, Jesus gave His mother to His whole family, through giving her to the beloved disciple, John.

This was a gift for all of us, an exchange, and an expansion of the family circle of relationship. In this exchange, the tradition has long taught, He also entrusted all of us to her maternal care.

Jesus hungers, through Divine love, to include all of us in the 'family circle' of God.

As with so many of the treasures of the Catholic faith, the treasure of Mary is a gift to be received. Moving from the acceptance of Mary as the Mother of the Lord to Mary as 'my mother' requires the gift of faith.

This Lent, in Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat centre, Derry, there will be an opportunity to explore this and to look at Our Lady as a mother, model and teacher for women today.

The Servant Sisters, from the Home of the Mother, will lead a ladies' weekend retreat from

"Behold Your Mother"

John 19:27

Friday 4th– Sunday 6th March 2022

Ladies weekend retreat led by the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother.

This weekend will focus on Our Lady as a model, mother and teacher for women today.

For bookings/queries please contact Aoife on 02871262512 or email termonbaccaderry@gmail.com

Friday, March 4 until Sunday, March 6.

The weekend will cost £70, which includes

accommodation and all meals. This is a great opportunity to pause, reflect and focus at the beginning of Lent.

If you have any queries, or would like to book a place on this retreat, please contact Aoife at Termonbacca on 028 71 262512

or email termonbaccaderry@gmail.com.

Diary Dates

Catholic Schools' Week

Bishop Donal will celebrate Mass on Thursday, January 20, in St Eugene's Cathedral, at 10 am to launch this year's Catholic Schools' Week, which runs from Sunday, January 23 until Sunday, January 30.

Bloody Sunday

Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Donal in St Mary's Church, Creggan, on Friday,

January 28, at 7.30 pm for the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

New Sr Clare Mural

The new Sr Clare Mural, on the gable wall of Medicare Pharmacy at 68 Racecourse Road, in Shantallow, Derry, will be blessed by Bishop Donal on Saturday, January 29, at 5.30 pm.

Carnhill Holy Hour

The Abraham Community will lead an hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament for the National 5 Pathway in

St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, on Saturday, January 29, following the 6 pm Vigil Mass.

Men's Rosary

The next monthly Men's Public Rosary for the renewal of faith in Ireland will take place in Omagh on Saturday, February 5, at 1 pm, gathering near Danske Bank on High Street.

Blessed Brunch & Books

The monthly Blessed is She, Derry, Brunch & Books gathering for ladies in Termonbacca will take place

on Saturday, February 5, from 12-2 pm.

Omagh Prayer Group

Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group has extended an invite to people to join its weekly Zoom meeting on Thursday evenings, at 6.30 pm, for hymns, prayers of thanksgiving, scripture and prayers of intercession. The meeting ID and Passcode, which is the same every week, are: 753 1929 5586 (ID) and Prayer 1 (Passcode).

The ministry of

The NET

was dedicated to Our Lady, through the intercession of St Maximilian Kolbe, in a ceremony celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown on August 14, 2019.



The NET

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

Contacting us:

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

editorthenet15@gmail.com
or ring/text 07809292852

Banagher and Claudy welcome first faith formation coordinator

THE parishes of Banagher and Claudy are getting the New Year off to a good start with regards nourishing the faith of parishioners, having jointly appointed their first ever Faith Formation Co-ordinator just a few weeks before Christmas.

Northumberland-born Charlotte Gormley brings with her a wealth of experience, particularly in youth ministry, gained both in her home Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and in the Derry Diocese, through her past involvement with the Derry Youth Community and her former role as youth coordinator in the Cathedral and Long Tower Parishes.

Her arrival in these neighbouring parishes has caused a stir of excitement in the school and parish communities, with many already expressing a desire to help Charlotte in her role in whatever way they can.

Having spoken at the parish Sunday Masses to introduce herself, the 27-year-old has also become a frequent visitor to the schools in the parishes. While Banagher has three primary schools – St Canice's, Feeny, St Peter's & St Paul's, Foreglen, and St Mary's, Altinure – the Parish of Claudy has one primary school, St Colmcille's, and a post-primary school, St Patrick's & St Brigid's College.

Sharing some of her story with parishioners, Charlotte told them that faith had been an important part of her life for a long time: "I grew up in a Catholic family, going to Mass every week and attending Catholic schools. I really only took an interest in my faith when I was in sixth form, when I was given the opportunity to go on residential retreats at a youth retreat centre in my home Diocese of Hexham and

Newcastle.

"Once I finished school at the age of 18, I took a gap year, doing youth ministry at the Catholic Retreat Centre that I had attended in sixth form. This year gave me a strong passion for youth ministry and developed my own faith.

"I was able to stay on at this retreat centre and do a second year, and after that the opportunity came around for me to be one of the first members of the Derry Youth Community, in 2014. At this time, I moved to Derry and was part of the DYC for two years, during which we worked in many of the schools and parishes around the Diocese doing youth ministry, including school retreats, sacramental preparation and anything to do with faith and young people."

After two years in the DYC, Charlotte moved to Twickenham, where she did a degree in Theology and Religious Studies at St Mary's University.

"During this time", she continued: "I had the fantastic opportunity of visiting Rome and the Holy Land, spending time in Nazareth and Jerusalem. These experiences not only deepened my knowledge of the faith academically, but also deepened my own personal faith in a profound way."

After graduating from her Undergraduate Degree, Charlotte moved back to Derry and got a part-time job as the Youth Co-ordinator for the Cathedral and Long Tower parishes, whilst also studying for a Masters Degree in Christian Spirituality.

"I did that job and my Masters for two years," she said, adding: "Then came the opportunity of the role as Faith Formation Coordinator for the parishes of Banagher and Claudy.

"Working part-time while I was doing the Masters worked really well, but on completing it the hope was to move into a full-time position, and I had been praying that a job would come up that would be full-time.

"So, when I saw this post advertised I just thought that it was perfect timing in my life and a good opportunity that I felt I should go for. It was still close by but somewhere different and more out in the countryside, which was appealing to me as I am from the countryside and not really a city person. So, the post ticked all the boxes for this time in my life."

Talking about the role itself, Charlotte explained that she will be involved in the faith formation of all ages within both parishes, helping to develop faith activities already existing as well as introducing faith formation courses and other new activities.

Explore

"We are thinking of Adult Faith Formation with a social aspect to it, where people can get a chance to explore the faith in an open, safe and friendly environment, through using a video-series of faith talks that we will have discussion on. The hope is that this will help develop faith on a personal level and also as a community; learning from each other by sharing and getting conversation going about the Faith."

She has already struck up a great rapport with the Pope John Paul II Award participants within the Banagher and Claudy parishes, and is getting ready for sacramental preparation for the P4s and P7s.

"It is an exciting challenge as it is a brand new role created in both parishes," remarked Charlotte,

adding: "As well as meeting with the Parish Pastoral councils and staff in the schools, which are great, I have been meeting with some of the parishioners who are already involved in faith activities here to determine what is already offered, and then, with the priests, we will work out what else may be needed or that there is a desire for.

"I feel really positive for both parishes, which have very faithful and friendly parishioners. People have been most welcoming, so it has been easy for me to settle into the role. They seem excited to get involved and have been sharing their ideas. So, I am knocking at an open door.

"Both parishes have a wonderful community feel about them, which is a positive for me in that everybody knows everybody, and so people will know who would be interested in what and will help spread the word and get people involved. That is a real positive for the future."

Charlotte has also been introducing and developing parish social media platforms to share parish information and faith posts, such as prayers and inspirational quotes.

Claudy parish priest, Fr David O'Kane wishes Charlotte well in her mission and is delighted to have her on board, having witnessed her dedication and great faith.

He remarked: "Charlotte is a great worker, who already has an excellent relationship with the young people she has met, and brings excellent experience to the role. She is a great addition to the two parishes.

"My hope is that she will get more involved with the schools and in our Sacramental preparation for First Communion



Charlotte Gormley, newly appointed Faith Formation Coordinator for the Banagher and Claudy parishes.

and Confirmation, and think about programmes for the adult population. We are very blessed to have her."

Fr Micheal McGavigan, the administrator for Banagher, also expressed the delight of that parish to have secured Charlotte as its Faith Formation Co-ordinator, in partnership with the Claudy Parish.

"Charlotte will bring a wealth of

experience and talent to our faith-filled parish," he said, adding: "She has begun plans to implement the 'Do This in Memory of Me' programme for pupils preparing for First Holy Communion.

"She is also organising retreats for the children being confirmed this year and will launch a Catholicism Series for Young Adults in the New Year. We very much look forward to seeing the fruits of her labours".

A New Year message from Bishop Donal...

Together we can start to rebuild all that has been crumbling before our eyes

THE mica scandal has hung over much of Donegal for a number of years – and never more so than in 2021. Thankfully, an astute and very committed campaign has raised the matter to a national level.

But, for me, the story of crumbling blocks is also a metaphor for many things that we trusted and that have been disintegrating before our eyes.

For many people, the promises of a glowing future have morphed into fears and

dark clouds. Young people are told to not trust strangers and to fear environmental catastrophe. Such a gloomy picture takes its toll on everybody.

My wish for 2022 is that we can work with people in our parish communities to rediscover hope for our young people.

We are told to look back and see only bad things in the past. But that does not help us to imagine good things for the future. A gloomy view of the

past actually gives birth not to idealism but to fear.

If, however, we can love and forgive the past with its mistakes, then we can face the future with hope. That is what Christian faith means to me.

There is much rebuilding to be done – on solid foundations and with good materials. But together we can start to rebuild all that has been crumbling before our eyes.



AMERICAN mother, Dr Blythe Kaufman shares the story of her devotion to praying the Rosary and...

The birth of Children's Rosary



Dr Blythe Kaufman, founder of Children's Rosary.

IT is hard to pinpoint my first exposure to the Rosary. I remember getting a very beautiful rosary from my mother when I was very young. It was an aurora borealis rosary that sparked as you held it. There was a hard case it was kept in to keep it safe. I admired it and knew it was precious and given with love by my mother. It seemed so beautiful and delicate that it was tucked safe and sound in my bedroom drawer.



Yet this rosary is not the rosary I use today. Instead, I use a wooden rosary I purchased on a religious pilgrimage when I was in eighth grade. This rosary has become one of my most precious possessions.

For some periods of my life it got less use. Through college, I remember praying the Rosary to help me fall asleep. Through most of my twenties, I drifted away from the Rosary and became what some might call a lukewarm Catholic. I went to Sunday Mass but my prayer had mostly dried up.

Yet, there was a deep faith but it had been covered over by concerns for many worldly things, such as completing dental school training, getting into an endodontic residency, getting married, and then buying a home. I had become distracted by achieving 'success'.

But Our Lord and Our Blessed

Mother had not forgotten me even though I had stopped seeking to spend time in prayer with Them. They had some plans, it seems, that I had no idea about. To get my attention something drastic was needed, as I was fully immersed in my busy life. At age 30 I was married, an associate in a successful endodontic practice in Connecticut, we had purchased our first house, and we were expecting our first child. What more could we want?

Suddenly this idyllic picture would be turned upside down. During that year, a problem I had with my joints became worse, specifically in my hands. I began to suffer dislocations and had problems even opening doors. A geneticist made a diagnosis while I was pregnant that I had an inherited genetic condition affecting my collagen. Due to a defect in the collagen, he explained I should expect even more joint instability after the baby was born. What he described came to pass and my joints problems became so severe that I had problems walking and could not continue practicing dentistry.

More and more injuries occurred that resulted in further decline, which left me unable to drive or even open a refrigerator. Yet in my stubbornness, I continued to seek medical answers, thinking a simple medication could solve everything.

There came a breaking point where I turned to prayer and my despair began to immediately disappear. My body slowly started to stabilize but not bringing me back to normal. I would remain disabled, requiring help with almost everything involved with daily life: help squeezing toothpaste on my brush, help tying my shoes, help making meals. The list was long.

Shortly after our son was born, seeing how poor my health was, we looked in a new direction to grow our family through adoption. We adopted two older children, who were biological siblings from an orphanage in Kazakhstan. Alina was eight and her brother was four. We were now a family of five!

Hope

The prayer that had helped to bring hope back to my heart grew. I very much wanted to go to daily Mass, but with the joint instability in my feet I had a problem walking to Mass. Since I could no longer drive, this would be the only way since my husband who is a physician leaves early for work. After praying a novena for the intention to be able to walk to Mass, I found very soon that I could do this.

One day after Mass, I stayed to pray the Rosary with some women who prayed after Mass. This became my new routine: daily Mass and the Rosary. My long walks to and from Mass also became times of prayer. It was in the beginning of 2011 when I began to also pray the Rosary in the evening with my children.

Around the same time a call for help came from the pastor of our parish. He feared for the financial future of our parish as collections had declined. He asked for the parishioners to increase donations for fear the parish might merge with another parish or close. After a few months, our pastor returned to say not much had changed.

In prayer, an idea came. Maybe we should bring our children together to pray for our parish, as the prayers of children are so powerful. I wrote to our pastor to seek permission. This was granted, and on April 10, 2011, a small group of children gathered in our lower chapel to pray the Rosary for our parish.

Surprisingly, the weekend of the first Children's Rosary had a record collection, surpassed only by Easter and Christmas, for the remainder of the year. It seemed a signal grace of the power of the prayers of children.

After some discussion amongst the parents, we decided to not have this meeting be purely a one-time event. Instead, we decided to continue to meet monthly as a prayer group for the children. This was named: Children's Rosary. We continued to meet monthly in the Church.

On October 7, 2012, another Children's Rosary group formed on the other side of the United States. More and more groups would form in a grassroots way throughout the world. The goal of the prayer groups was to support

the prayer lives of the children.

The model was kept very simple. First each group was Consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the initial meeting. In this way, the groups were under the protection and guidance of Christ and His mother. Second, the children would meet in parishes to lead the Rosary as a prayer group with the permission of their respective pastors. Later we would see new groups also form in orphanages and schools. Through prayer we were led by Our Lord and Our Blessed Mother.

In the summer of 2019, our family of five travelled to East Africa to visit Children's Rosary prayer groups and help to start new ones. This trip in the planning phase seemed almost impossible given my health, but through the Rosary my trust had been strengthened and I was no longer afraid to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit that seemed too difficult for me. I knew if Our Lord was asking, then He would provide the grace to achieve such things.

It is with great joy that I share the most recent gift from Our Lord. Through the grace of God, I humbly share a new book. The book is entitled: Child Consecration: To Jesus through Mary — Following in the Spirit of St. Thérèse, the Little Flower. The book seeks to unpack the St Louis de Montfort Consecration

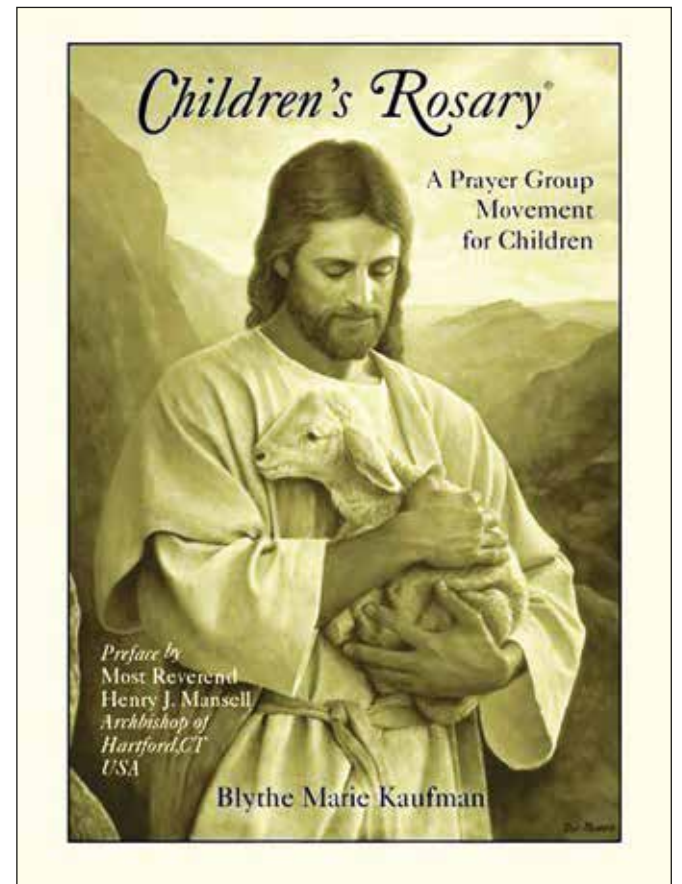
outlined in the classic text, True Devotion to Mary, in a way children can understand.

It is my hope and prayer that many children will be spared the toil of taking a very roundabout way to finding out how great Our Blessed Mother's assistance can be in reaching her Son Jesus. When one is young, time seems to be our friend but how happy one will be in the sunset of life to

have been guided from one's most tender years through entrustment to Jesus through Mary.

May we not fear exposing our children at the earliest of ages to the Rosary, Our Lady and also Consecration to Jesus through Mary.

For information about initiating a Children's Rosary, Blythe Kaufman can be contacted at blythe@childrensrosary.org.



"When the Holy Rosary is said well, it gives Jesus and Mary more glory and is more meritorious than any other prayer". (St Louis de Montfort)

Claudy parish Children’s Rosary a beautiful blessing



THE parish of Claudy, like others in the Derry Diocese and beyond, has been blessed during these troubling Covid times to have daily prayer led by volunteers from the sanctuary of its village Church, St Patrick’s.

The praying of the Divine Mercy Chaplet at 3 pm and the Angelus and Rosary at 6 pm continues to be a real source of comfort to many who tune in via the webcam, and as Advent 2021 got underway another beautiful blessing was bestowed upon the parish...the launch of Children’s Rosary.

A few weeks before, word had spread that there was to be an online gathering for anyone in

Ireland interested in finding out about the Children’s Rosary Movement that had been founded by a young mother in Connecticut, America, in 2011, and some mothers from the Claudy parish were amongst those interested in finding out more.

So impressed were they by the story of founder, Dr Blythe Kaufman and the growth of the Children’s Rosary, with prayer groups now established in over 30 countries, that they desired to have this powerful prayer time introduced to their parish and, with the blessing of parish priest, Fr David O’Kane, it was launched on the first Saturday of December,

when it was Consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Told by Blythe not to be disappointed if at first the number of children attending was in single figures, the ladies were delighted to see 17 children kneeling around the little statue of Our Lady at the front of the altar, as they prayed the Rosary.

And, when they didn’t expect as many at the second Children’s Rosary, on Saturday, January 1, with it being New Year’s Day, they were again pleasantly surprised when 12 children were accompanied by either their mother or father, in starting off

2022 with some special time in prayer with Our Lady and Our Lord, on the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God.

During the half-hour or so of prayer, the children are invited to write down any special intention they would like to pray for and put it in the Children’s Rosary Prayer Intention box, which is then placed before the altar, beside Our Lady’s statue.

The adult leader then begins the prayer, inviting some of the older children to lead the praying of the decades of the Rosary, with some of the younger children invited to lay a flower at the feet of Our Lady after each decade, while the leader

asks for the fruit of that mystery.

The prayer time ends with an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be for the Pope, and the singing of ‘We are the Rosary Children’, and on the way out of the Church, the children are offered a small snack to take with them.

The hope is that the Children’s Rosary will support the prayer lives of children and bring blessings upon their families and the parish, and add to the tapestry of prayer made up of the other Children’s Rosary groups around the world.

Warmly welcoming the launch of the Children’s Rosary Prayer Group in the parish, Fr David

commented: “It is a lovely, joyful occasion and is well supported. The children pray so well. I am very pleased with it and invite more families to get involved. It is not that long on a Saturday afternoon to just come down to the chapel to pray with the children.

“And, I commend those involved in getting it up and running in the parish and wish them every blessing in their work”.

The Children’s Rosary will take place at 2 pm on the first Saturday of each month in St Patrick’s Church, Claudy, and all are welcome to come along or join in online.



Special prayer time with Divine Child treasured during Termonbacca Novena



Kieran and Donna O'Neill, Derryview Terrace.

THE Novena to the Divine Child led by the Discalced Carmelite Fathers at Termonbacca in the run-up to Christmas was, once again, welcomed as a beautiful time of preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth.

The nine-day Novena began on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, with a team of volunteers setting out each night to carry the Divine Child statue in a procession of prayer from one house to another, in and around the City, before returning to the retreat centre on the ninth night for the closing Mass celebrated by Bishop Donal.

As well as in-person attendance at Termonbacca for the celebration of Mass and prayers to the Divine Child each night of the Novena, many tuned in online, with over 130 taking part virtually in the closing ceremony.

Fr Stephen Quinn, prior, thanked all who had taken part, especially those who so respectfully received the Divine Child statue into their homes and the team of nightly walkers, who were accompanied most nights by Fr Mike Spain ocd.

This year's route included Termonbacca to Rossville Street, then on to Derryview Terrace, Sevenoaks, Papworth Ave, Ballyarnett, Ardnamoyle, Caradale Park, Westway, and back to Termonbacca on December 16, where the child Jesus statue was

placed in the manger prior to the closing ceremony.

Dolores Murphy, of Rossville Street, in the Cathedral Parish, described having the 'Child Jesus' for 24 hours in her home as "absolutely great".

"I couldn't thank Him enough," she said, adding: "This blessing came at a great time for us and I was delighted. We always say our prayers but this special time of prayer brought a lot of light into our home."

"My family came during the day to visit and say some prayers beside the 'Child Jesus' statue, and the grandchildren thought it was beautiful. It was just a great time. I had been terrified of Covid, but having the Child Jesus here during the novena has given me a great peace of mind".

Leaving Dolores and Sean Murphy's home, the holy procession next arrived at the home of Donna and Kieran O'Neill, of Derryview Terrace, in Top of the Hill, in the Waterside.

Touched by the amount of prayer said by the team of walkers en route from home to home, each night, Donna said: "I just thought it was so prayerful the way the Child Jesus statue was brought into our home, with the amount of prayer that was said while on the way here and then the beautiful prayers that were said on the doorstep, and blessing with Holy Water, before entering

our home.

"Kieran and I carried the Child Jesus into our living room, where we had a place ready for it. It was beautiful. When we were on our own with it, we did the Novena prayers and then we prayed the Rosary, and I was so thankful to have a much needed prayer intention answered a couple of days before Christmas.

"Welcoming the Child Jesus into our home like this was a very prayerful and special time. I sat and pondered that because so many doors are closed to Him. The whole experience was wonderful".

"There was some beautiful prayer too when the statue was leaving and Fr Mike Spain gave our home a lovely blessing", continued Donna, "I couldn't help thinking as the procession left that it was like Mary and Joseph's journey towards Bethlehem".

Making its way to the Crescent Link home of Donna and Michael McConnell, the procession set out via Strabane Old Road and Trench Road, for a prayerful stop

off with Fr Sean O'Donnell, at Immaculate Conception Church, before proceeding through Knockwellan and onwards to the Crescent Link.

Donna McConnell said that it had been "a privilege" for her family to be part of the Divine Child Novena: "We can so easily get caught up in the busy commercialised side of Christmas, that the real meaning of Christmas can be pushed aside.

"There was such a sense of peace in our family home when we had the Divine Child Image with us, and we have had many blessings since then".

Donna expressed thanks to Fr Stephen Quinn, Fr Michael Spain and all who helped organise the Divine Child Novena, especially the group that carried the statue of the Divine Child through the streets of Derry.

Ballyarnett

A very special welcome awaited the procession when it arrived at Ballyarnett on its way to the home of Winnie Crumlish, with



Fr Sean O'Donnell, CC, Immaculate Conception Church, Trench Road, Waterside, and Fr Mike Spain ocd, Termonbacca



Ballyarnett Community.



Ballyarnett candle-light procession.



Dolores and Sean Murphy, Rossville Street.



continued from page 6

Winnie’s family and neighbours, carrying lit candles, greeting the group arriving with the Child Jesus statue.

“It was a beautiful experience to have the Child Jesus visit our home,” Winnie told ‘The Net’, adding: “The extended family and neighbours came out to meet the procession and everyone got a chance to spend their own time in prayer with the Child Jesus statue.

“It really was one of the most blessed experiences that I have had in my life and I am very thankful to Termonbacca for the honour and privilege of receiving the Divine Child Jesus into our home. The whole community here at Ballyarnett appreciated the experience, saying that it was a blessing to have this in our midst.

“It is something that I will never forget and everyone who came into our home to spend some time in prayer with the Divine Child statue said the same, that it was a very blessed time”.

Joanna Doherty, of Ardnamoye, Shantallow, also found it to be “one of the most beautiful blessings” she had ever got.

Saying that she had been very ill in hospital with Covid this year, Joanna added: “It actually was a blessing that it happened to me as the doctors discovered that I have Sleep Apnea. So, I greatly appreciated receiving the Divine Child into my home as I wanted to thank Him. I just felt that He was coming to my house so that I could spend that special time in thanksgiving to Him. It was beautiful, very special, and I had my little grandson over to visit Him too. It just gave me a great lift”.

The Divine Child statue was then carried to the home of Seamus and Helen McMonagle in Foyle Springs, and their son, Greg, told ‘The Net’: “It was an ideal time for my parents to have the statue in their home as my father went through a hard time a year ago with cancer, and he is now in remission.

“Other family members came along to spend time in prayer too. It was lovely to have this just before Christmas, with everyone gathered around and praying the Rosary. It gave everybody

a lift and my parents felt very privileged to have the Divine Child during the novena. It really was a brilliant time.”

This year’s Novena at Termonbacca was the first for Fr Mike Spain to be involved in and he was moved by how welcoming people had been in receiving the Divine Child statue into their homes.

“It was hard to believe how much it meant to people to receive the Divine Child into their homes,” he remarked, adding: “and there was a strong sense of camaraderie amongst those of us who walked along from house to house with it, praying.

“I missed the first two nights, but was able to walk with the group the other seven nights, and I found the whole experience a great witness to the strength and depth of people’s faith and their pure love for Jesus.”

Fr Mike was also delighted to note the range of ages amongst those who prayerfully walked each night, as well as those who received the Divine Child statue into their homes.

“In many of the houses, there were children involved too and there was a great sense of prayer,” he continued: “and all the walkers were very touched when the community in Ballyarnett formed a guard of honour as the Child Jesus statue was carried in. When we walked into the house there, the sense of excitement was tangible, not just amongst the children but the adults as well.”

Hoping to be fit enough to join the walkers again for next Advent’s Divine Child Novena, Fr Mike said it had been a great blessing to also have Bishop Donal celebrate the closing Mass, at the end of which he blessed a new statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Commenting on the hand carved image, the prior, Fr Stephen Quinn, explained that the gold in her brown scapular was a symbol of her glory, and the crown that She is queen and Mother of all the children of Carmel. He also pointed out that the statue of Our Lady is holding out the scapular to those devoted to her, beckoning them to share her life of pondering the mysteries of her Son and keeping them in her care.



Donna and Michael McConnell, Crescent Link.



Celebrating St Eithne’s PS Derry Nativity stars



THIS month, as our schools prepare to celebrate Catholic Schools Week, Gemma writes about her very fulfilling faith experience as a student at St Brigid's College, in Derry, and shares the St Brigid image she was encouraged to create.

Keeping on the education theme, Peter comments on the legacy of Nelson Mandela and his inspirational quote that "education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world".

Reflecting on some of Pope Francis' messages over the Christmas period, John writes about the importance of sustaining, defending and safeguarding the family, while Hollie considers the Holy Father's message for the 55th World Day of Peace, and Niamh looks at his comments to mark the UN's International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Jodie and Bronagh are drawn to write about the Pope highlighting the plight of migrants and refugees, while Zara focuses on his message at the Midnight Christmas Mass and how Jesus' humble beginnings make Him more relatable.



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



Niamh O'Kane - Co Derry Deanery. Gemma Gallagher, Derry City Deanery. John Augustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery. Zara Schlindwein, Derry City Deanery.

Gemma reflects on 'Living life to the full' theme for this year's Catholic Schools Week...

Faith experiences at St Brigid's very fulfilling

THE theme for this year's Catholic Schools Week is 'Living life to the full', and I have to say that during my time in St Brigid's College, Derry, I have felt very fulfilled in my religious experiences there thanks to our RE teachers, Mrs Fitzimons, Mrs McGill and Mrs Sharkey.

They have encouraged me to get involved in faith related activities in the school, such as reading at School Mass celebrations or doing paintings with a religious theme, which I have enjoyed greatly.

Last year, for the Feast of St Brigid, I did a painting of St

Brigid, which is now displayed in our School Oratory, where Mass is celebrated every Wednesday morning. This shows me how much they appreciate my artwork and encourages me to develop my talent.

I have found the RE teachers in our school to be very inspiring through their enthusiasm. It is easy to see God working through them in their kindness to each person they meet.

For this article, I have created a digital version of the painting I did as part of my RE course, to celebrate St Brigid's Feast Day.



Pope Francis calls for help amidst worsening migrant crisis

by Bronagh

AS of November 22, 25,700 migrants have tried to cross the channel by boat; more than double the figure released in 2020 (BBC news, 22/11/21). This number was made up of small innocent children, worried teenagers, frightful parents and wary grandparents, who fled their homes due to war, oppression, poverty and civil unrest.

They fled to a place which, from a distance, looked like it offered a peaceful, happier upbringing and lives for their families; one free from war and unrest.

However, these European countries that they flee to are un-welcoming and often do everything they can in order to stop, reduce or make it harder for migrants to reach the shores of the country safely.

Thousands die trying to cross from Poland to Belarus due to the sub-zero temperatures and icy winds. Twenty-seven people, consisting of 17 men, seven women, one of which was pregnant (BBC 25/11/21), died crossing the Channel this year in boats unfit for purpose or rubber dinghies.

These people, or those in similar situations, came from a war torn country with people who had organised a boat in order to "help" them flee the country. This was an illegal, money-making business which didn't have the safety or best-interest of these vulnerable people at heart. They saw an opportunity to transport people who couldn't see any light at the end of the tunnel, and seized it. This caused the untimely, unfair

deaths of 27 people, on this particular occasion, and many, many more throughout the year.

According to the BBC, in December 2021, it cost a migrant about £3,000 to board a boat to cross the channel to the UK, which makes the human trafficking of migrants a very remunerative business.

When people arrive in migrant camps while applying for asylum, they suffer extreme health problems due to the malnourishment and journey they have just undertaken.

Stathis Kyroussis, of Doctors Without Borders, says: "I have worked in many refugee camps before, in Yemen, Malawi, and Angola. But here on the island of Kos, this is the first time in my life that I have seen people so totally abandoned" (Vox 2015).

The people are suffering from hypothermia due to the cold and wind on the boats, infection due to overcrowding, and chronic anxiety and fear about the future, the past and their current living situation.

Pope Francis has called for local authorities and governments to work together and come up with a plan, a plan that will ensure the safety of migrants and guarantee them a better quality of life in Europe.

The Pontiff recently visited Greece and Cyprus and said that he "touched, yet again, the wounded humanity of refugees and migrants" (Vatican News December 21). He also reiterated that it is a crisis that concerns everyone and that no one is left



untouched.

Pope Francis has noted that the "power of gestures" should be much greater than the "gestures of power", reiterating the fact that governments should be taking action to tackle the migrant crisis and not sitting back in the position of power, onlooking the situation, which is worsening by the day (New Yorker/December 21).

As a result of the cooperation of Italian authorities, Pope Francis was able to relocate a group of migrants from Italy from during his apostolic visit.

The Holy Father also spoke positively about the relocation and medical rejuvenation of the one-and-a-half year old child whom he met in Afghanistan

during his trip. The child was relocated to the Vatican's Paediatric Bambino Gesù Hospital and treated successfully. The child was a migrant along with his family in Mavrouvini Refugee Camp from Afghanistan (Vatican News December 21).

These sparse, but special stories of migrants being welcomed, helped and integrated into society show that with government help, like Pope Francis has campaigned for, these kinds of things are possible and, hopefully, can become more popular than the heart-wrenching stories of migrant deaths, migrant refusal and hatred that we see so often today in our media and news outlets.

Pope Francis entrusts prayer mission to persons with disabilities

by Niamh

ON December 3, the UN's International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Pope Francis comforted those with disabilities in reassuring them that the Church is their home.

He stated: "We are called to be friends of Jesus", and encouraged all people to act, think and feel in a similar way that Jesus did in placing kindness and acceptance above all else. He said that living life according to Jesus and His example can lead to exuberance that "fills hearts and lives."

The Pope also reminded everyone that "all of us together, are Church, because Jesus chose to be our friend...Everyone has a part to play; no one is a mere extra."

He stressed that everyone within the Church was equal

and to be treated with the same kindness they deserve.

Pope Francis is very aware of the mistreatment that many people with disabilities face in our society today and strives to allow others to be aware of this mistreatment and to act with affection and kindness.

Stating that "no one can deny the sacraments to persons with disabilities", he said that we must strive to act in such a way that Jesus did, and that involved knowing that people with disabilities are worthy of knowing all of the sacraments in becoming closer to God.

The Pope urged those with disabilities to pray, saying that he believed the Lord will listen with great attentiveness and without judgement to those trusting in

Him.

He said: "Prayer is a mission, a mission accessible to everyone, and I would like to entrust that

mission in a particular way to you".

(Sources: Vatican News, Catholic News Agency)



Hollie comments on Papal celebration of 55th World Day of Peace...

Prince of Peace came down at Christmas to show people of God the way

ON January 1, 2022, Pope Francis' papal message for the 55th World Day of Peace was published, subtitled 'Dialogue Between Generations, Education and Work: Tools for Building Lasting Peace'.

As we reflected on the Scripture readings over Christmas, we recalled the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon His shoulders; and He is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6, NRSV).

The 'Prince of Peace' came down at Christmas to show the people of God the way, to restore the relationship between God and humankind, and, by His innocent example, He reminded us that life is sacred as we are all made in the image and likeness of God.

Pope Francis suggests that these three elements of 'Dialogue Between Generations, Education and Work' '(...) for building a lasting peace (...) "making possible the creation of a social covenant" (...) (World Day of Peace message, 2022, n.1). The concept of "a social covenant" provides a rich theological analogy mirroring the biblical covenants. The promise of "I will be your God and you will be My people" echoes throughout the generations, where we are relied on to be stewards of the earth and to love one another.

Sadly, the world is not at peace. Ecologically, human infliction is causing violence, war and destruction, hence also contributing to environmental disaster. This is not peace, however, by creating "a social covenant", we are agreeing to cease all violence and destruction by responding to God's vision of a race that cares for one another and nurtures His creation. One way in which we can resolve our conflicts is 'Dialogue'.

This is not the first time that the Holy Father has emphasised 'Dialogue', especially, Intergenerational Dialogue' which is mentioned in 'Christus

Vivit'.

During The NET's Young Writers exclusive interview with Sr Nathalie Becquart, the Under Secretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, I asked, "How can we bring the young and old together to discern the way forward? Is there anything we can introduce to our parishes with the aim of encouraging intergenerational relationships?"

Sr Nathalie responded: "I think what is difficult nowadays is that intergenerational dialogue/ encounter, is like intercultural dialogue (...) I think what can help intergenerational dialogue is to have people who can be bridge-makers/bridge builders, who know both generations".

Pope John XXIII spoke of "mutual collaboration" (Pacem in Terris, 1963, n. 98). 'Active Solidarity' in building bridges, using dialogue, not only bridges the gap between generations but between nations, and this can help to achieve and establish peace.

The next element that Pope Francis highlights is education. "Morality is the art of right relationship with each other and with the world around us" (Patrick Hannon, Moral Theologian). This definition of morality is an excellent example of how we discern what is right from wrong. We can recall from our childhood that morality was often black and white, however, as we grow up, we quickly realise that it is often grey/colourful. We are faced with more situations and are expected to make our own decisions.

Education is key to morality, as the child encounters this from a very early age. To strive for a peaceful world, we ought to guide our young people by helping them to build and develop their moral code.

Lastly, the third element that the Holy Father emphasises is "work". His Holiness states that "technological progress



increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment" (n.4).

The work place provides us with a platform to apply our skills and God-given talents to the service of others. It should be a place of interaction, progress, development and a sense of belonging, hence, it is also a place of encountering different characters, therefore, the challenge is in striving to work together, in peace, as one community in harmony.#

Finally, maintaining peace, justice and the right to work will impact the integral development and functioning of the world around us. To deprive someone of their right to work or to prevent them in responding to their vocation is a grave matter, as "We will never know what that one young man (or woman), upon whom Jesus gazed with love and to whom He stretched

out His hand, might have been for us, what he might have done for mankind". (Pope Francis, Christus Vivit, n. 251).

To conclude, as we now embark upon the new year of 2022, let us pray for peace in our own lives and in the world around us. And, as we embark upon our Synod, as a community on journey, let us reflect on the greeting and motto of St Benedict's monastic community, 'Pax' and 'ora et labora': 'Peace, Prayer and Work'. In St Benedict's rule, the prologue states "Seek after peace and pursue it". The centrality of a Benedictine life concentrates on "Peace, Prayer and Work", hence, we could take a leaf out of St Benedict's book, by striving to lead a life of peace, in dialogue with God and one another, and to put ourselves at the service of God and one another.

In addition, I note that Sr Clare Crockett quotes St Bonaventure in the context of Vocation: "Voluntas Dei Pax Nostra", that is, "The Will of God is our Peace".



We have to sustain, defend, and safeguard the family by John

ON the Feast of the Holy Family, December 26, Pope Francis reflected during the Angelus prayer time on how God "chose a humble and simple family to come into our midst".

He elaborated by saying that the "family is the story from which our own lives originate and have roots", and he reminded us that Jesus is also the son of a family story.

I think this is very important to understand, as the family today is often misunderstood or denigrated in ways which could not have been thought of before. Family is often seen as just a mere part of life, instead of what it really is: an integral part of our life.

All of us are part of a family, not just our own nuclear family, but the family of God and the family that is Church. But this fact or reality is not seen in our world today. Often family is seen as the last thing or something that is put aside in an unrealistic quest for success and fulfilment. It is in every sense maligned.

The putting aside of family has also affected the way we see the Church and our faith; something that is done as an extra...a cherry on the top.

The Holy Father also talked about the "need for openness, day by day, to learn how to be a family, since every day presents new challenges and opportunities that require flexibility and creativity".

He referred to the Gospel when "Mary and Joseph finally find Jesus with the teachers in the Temple", saying that the response Jesus gave them, that He had to be about His Father's business, was something not clear to them at the time. This, said Pope Francis, is important in our families as well as we try to face the "daily challenge that requires a good attitude, simple actions and loving care".

I think this is very important in our world today, whether it is about families or about simple relationships. All too often we break connections and friendships due to small misunderstandings and problems that have very little to do with the substance of the relationship.

The Holy Father, in essence, reminds us that it is very important to work on our relationships and persist through struggles, so that we can reach the other side in a way which the relationship is back to what it was in the beginning.

Overall, the Pope's message was very clear: we have to sustain, defend, and safeguard the family.

Our society is not made up of individuals; it is made up of families who are love and nurture individuals, so that they can become virtuous and thus make society. This cannot be forgotten.

We all need to do our bit to help migrants and refugees by Jodie

IN the lead up to Christmas, Pope Francis highlighted the terrible situation migrants are going through. For example, a recent migrant tragedy saw 160 people drown in the stretch of sea between Libya and the Italian island of Lampedusa, and there are many more tragedies like this going on right now.

The Pope pleaded for a joint effort in finding a solid solution

in guaranteeing the safety and protection of migrants arriving on the continent.

During his recent journey to Cyprus and Greece, the Holy Father said he had "touched, yet again, the wounded humanity of refugees and migrants", and discovered that only some European countries were "bearing the majority of the consequences of the migratory phenomenon in the Mediterranean

area, while in reality, it requires a shared responsibility, from which no country can exempt itself".

Sharing responsibility is stated in the Bible in Ezra 10:4..."Arise! For this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act".

This is reflected in the Pope wanting us to take up our responsibility in helping the migrants and refugees.

He stated: "There are many local Catholic Churches, religious congregations and Catholic organisations that are ready to welcome them and accompany them towards a fruitful integration".

So now, we all need to do our bit in sharing the responsibility for the unfortunate circumstances that these migrants and refugees are going through.



Peter comments on the legacy of Nelson Mandela and his inspirational quote...

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”

MAKAZIWE Mandela, who is the daughter of famous Nobel Peace Prize winner, the late Nelson Mandela, has been reflecting on her father's achievements of tackling racism and social injustice in South Africa, which was highlighted across the globe.

In an interview with Vatican Media, Makaziwe shares her thoughts of her father's legacy and, if he was still living in today's world, how he would act as a shepherd to the children who are fighting for social justice and against all forms of racism.

Speaking of her father's desire for all people to live a better life

and his belief in the importance of education to learn to live with one another in peace and joy, she said: “My father was not just talking about mainstream formal education. He believed that people could educate themselves through books; that they could travel far and wide with books and really understand how other people lived”.

Today, everybody who has known Nelson Mandela and his legacy would widely respect what he stood up for; to stand up to injustice, live together in peace and not be judgemental about others from different backgrounds,

race or religion. He was like the shepherd who led the ones who suffered injustice and the ones who didn't believe in injustice. They symbolised the lost sheep and Nelson Mandela led them into the light to equality and being at peace with each other; exactly how God wants His people to be.

Not only did Nelson Mandela change the political system in his country for the better, but he opened our eyes to see that we are all the same people that God created to help and achieve goals with one another and also inspire others, like Nelson Mandela did in achieving people's right to freedom

and that it should not be taken away from them.

Whenever I think of Nelson Mandela, I am taken back to a most inspirational quote that sums up what God wants from us, to learn to love our neighbour, “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”.

That is what Nelson Mandela stood for, enabling his daughter, Makaziwe to continue his legacy and help educate the children of the future to live in peace with others, and support them if they are in need; to shine the light on others who live in darkness, just like he did.



Reflecting on Pope Francis' Christmas message, Zara writes...

Jesus' humble beginnings allow us to relate to Him more

DURING Midnight Mass for Christmas, Pope Francis reflected on God's means of entering the world. God chose to begin His mission on earth as a tiny infant, as someone who could not yield power or intimidation, but rather symbolise the true beauty and vulnerability of all life on earth.

Jesus' humble beginnings allow us to relate to Him more, as it highlights His presence among humankind.

Celebrating the Christmas Mass, Pope Francis emphasised that the message of the Nativity is that “God does not rise up in grandeur, but lowers Himself into littleness”. He explained that littleness is the path God shows to draw near to us and to bring us back to what truly matters.

We must not be fooled by the grandeur that is ever present in our busy lives. Instead, we should seek peace through humble means and



appreciate the natural beauty that lies around us, without seeking to destroy it for personal gain. Only then will we be living by the true meaning of God's message.

The Pope then encouraged us to ask Jesus for “the grace of littleness,” by inviting God into our daily lives. He added, “Amid our ordinary lived experience, He wants to do extraordinary things. His is a message of immense hope”.

Jesus was born close to the poor and forgotten, and by doing so revealed Himself to them first,

rather than to those who are important in the eyes of the world. He recalled the dignity of all, and the need for the dignity of every human to be respected.

The Pope recalled that at the Christmas scene, we also glimpse the Magi coming to worship the Lord, the learned and rich, showing how Jesus brings together the rich and the poor: “Everything is unified when Jesus is at the centre: not our ideas about Jesus, but Jesus himself, the living One”.

Synod preparation for parish youth leaders *by Niamh McLaughlin*

SYNOD, or synodality, is described as a path along which the People of God walk together; they walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to lead towards a deeper communion, fuller participation and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world.

A synodal Church walks forward in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of each and every one of her members. The purpose of the Synod is to inspire the people to dream about the Church that we are called to be.

The theme for the Synod 2021-



23 is ‘For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.’ Through this theme, Pope Francis is calling on us to journey together, to listen, dialogue, pray, discern and make decisions together.

In light of this, Derry Youth will be hosting a course which will take place online and in-person. More information will follow in the coming weeks.

Derry youth ministry update *by Niamh McLaughlin*

THE Derry Youth Online Programme gets underway again on January 17 with a live event on the Derry Youth Instagram page at 7 pm. There will be a new theme and task given to participants.

This is a great way for the young people of the Diocese to get involved with their faith, particularly those who are currently completing their Pope John-Paul II award, who will receive Award ‘hours’ by taking part in the programme.

The Diocesan Youth Ministry is

encouraging as many young people as possible to try and get involved.

The Diocesan Scholarship programme, which proved very successful last year, continues meeting online.

Catholic Schools' Week will be marked in the Diocese this month, with Bishop Donal celebrating Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral on Thursday, January 20, at 10 am, which can be viewed via the webcam.



‘All or Nothing’ youth event at Termonbacca *by Aoife O'Neill*

THE Iona Retreat Centre at Termonbacca will be running a four-week event for teenagers, entitled ‘All or Nothing’.

Starting on Sunday, January 16, and running from 6-7.15 pm, the project will involve looking at the life of Sr Clare Crockett and discovering

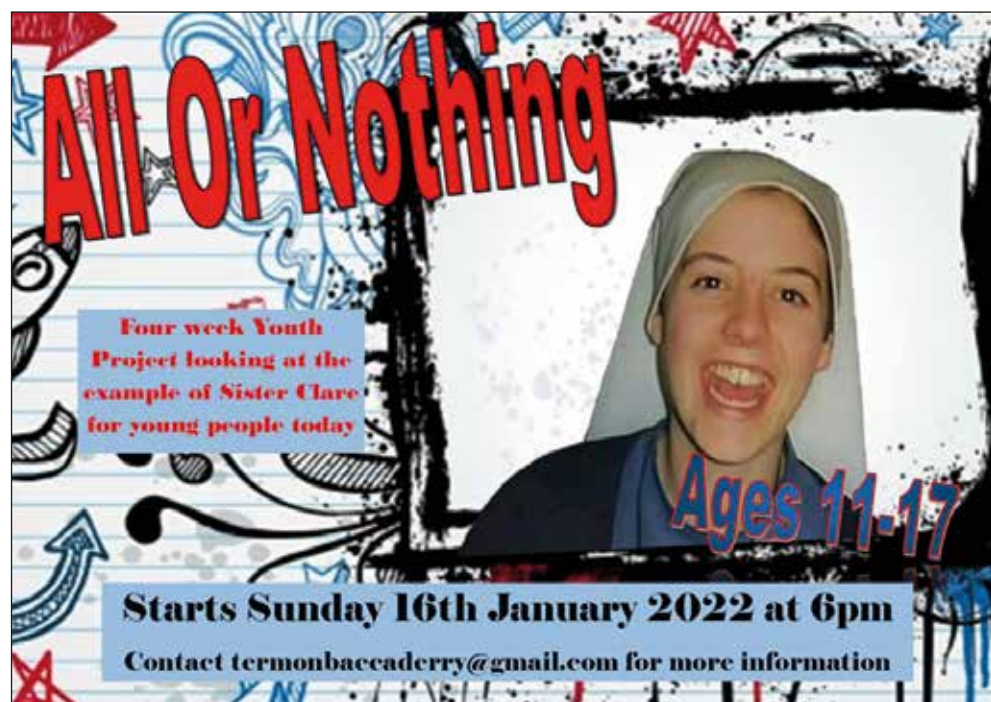
what can be learnt from her example for living today.

The programme is open for all young people aged 11+ to attend, and will include games, friendship building and faith exploration.

At the end of the four weeks, we hope to have a final presentation of

what has been discovered to share with others.

Any teenager interested in signing up, or finding out more, can contact Aoife at Termonbacca on 028 71 262512 or by email termonbaccaderry@gmail.com.



February gathering for Blessed Brunch & Books

by Aoife O'Neill

'BLESSED Is She Derry' will host their next ladies Brunch & Book Club meeting on Saturday, February 5, in Termonbacca, from 12 noon until 2 pm.

This is a gathering of women ready to seek a deeper relationship with Christ through community. These brunches are really beautiful moments in time where women get to enjoy the presence of each other

and really get to know one another. Blessed Brunches give women the opportunity to meet their sisters in Christ face-to-face, while strengthening the friendships that have already begun.

For those of us who feel a little more isolated when it comes to community, Blessed Brunches are a great way to meet like-minded women in your area!

The brunch will be followed by the spiritual book club discussion. The book we are exploring this month is 'The Screwtape Letters' by C S Lewis.

If you would like to join us, we would be delighted to meet you. To sign up, or if you have any questions, please get in touch by emailing termonbaccaderry@gmail.com.



Blessed Brunch and Books ladies enjoyed some tasty Christmas eats at their December gathering in Termonbacca.



Birth of a Naturalist

by Patricia McCormack

THE first, and most influential, naturalist in my life was my mother. Our small concreted backyard, no more than 9ft by 12ft, amid tight rows of terraced houses might appear to have been very unpromising territory, but it was big enough to open our eyes and minds.

Nothing was wasted. Any crumbs, crusts, or scraps were put on the back wall for the birds. The strutting pigeons and tiny sparrows all got their share. The eagle-eyed seagulls arrived within minutes, if not seconds, of any bacon rinds being left out. All were God's creatures.

My mother also listened out for

the song of the blackbird as she hurried to 7 am Mass in the Long Tower...already giving praise and thanks to the Creator. Her life of faith extended to the natural world.

She didn't live to see the publication of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. It articulated clearly what she instinctively understood; that "the entire material universe speaks of God's love, His boundless affection for us... everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (LS 84), and that each creature has "an intrinsic value which is independent of its usefulness" (LS140).

She would have understood and welcomed the urgent call to care for our common home, to address mindless exploitation and consumerism, to hear the interrelated cry of the Earth and cry of the poor.

Many of her generation... "before we had lost the run of ourselves"... lived simply and sustainably. Following Christ's teaching and Gospel values, they showed us that no matter how little you had, there was always enough to share with those less fortunate, if your heart was in the right place.

There wasn't much to spare in a family of ten, but the St Vincent de Paul box was never passed, the Missions were supported and the birds got their crumbs.

We face new challenges which require new responses. Our lifestyles have contributed to global warming, climate change and loss of biodiversity. Without immediate and sustained action, we will inflict irreparable damage on our planet, which will adversely affect the lives of our children and future generations. Millions of people are already suffering the impact of floods, droughts, extreme weather events and wildfires.

There has been a 60% decline of all wildlife in the past 50 years. Extinction is accelerating due to human activity. The fragile balance of ecosystems which sustain life are being disrupted and destroyed.

An important UN Conference on Biodiversity (COP15) is to be held in China, from April 25 to May 8, 2022. We can dismiss it as another occasion for "Blah, blah, blah" or we can grasp it as an



Patricia McCormack

opportunity to inform ourselves, to advocate for effective action and to commit to doing what we can in our own backyard.

The Steelstown Parish Eco Group have hung and maintained birdfeeders in the past year close to the entrance to Our Lady of Lourdes Church. It is a small action but it is also a significant gesture, highlighting a new awareness and commitment by our parish to find ways to care for the Earth.

- Remember to feed the birds especially in cold weather.
- Take part in the Annual Big Garden Birdwatch - January 28-30
- Spend just one hour counting the birds in the garden or wherever possible. (More information is available at rspb.org.uk.)
- Choose plants and trees which provide food and shelter throughout the year
- Read the poem 'St. Kevin and the Blackbird' by Seamus Heaney.
- Stop and listen to birdsong.

Know that God does not let one sparrow fall to the ground unnoticed.



Bird Feeder at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Steelstown.

Blessed Is She Derry

Blessed Brunch

& Books

Saturday 5th February 2022

12pm- 2pm

Termonbacca Carmelite

Retreat Centre

An opportunity for women of all ages to get together, eat, pray and journey through spiritual books together.

For bookings or queries please PM or email termonbaccaderry@gmail.com

Reflecting on almost six decades of priesthood, Fr Liam Donnelly encourages other men to consider it as a vocation, remarking...

I have loved the whole life of the priest

AS the 50th anniversary of Derry's Bloody Sunday draws near, Fr Liam Donnelly, in reflecting on almost six decades of priesthood, has recalled a memory that stands out for him from the aftermath of the tragic events that unfolded during the Civil Rights demonstration in the Bogside on January 30, 1972.

Retired now eight years and living in his home parish of Lavey, the 82-year-old recalled sensing that day that something was going to happen as he went about his ministry in the Waterside Parish, where he was also hospital chaplain.

"We were on the other side of the river but I remember there was an ominous feeling earlier that day," he said, adding: "It was a Sunday and my duty as curate was to say the evening Mass and then visit Altnagelvin Hospital. Shortly before the evening Mass, Fr Edward Daly, later to be Bishop Daly, rang me from the Cathedral Parish and asked if I was going to the hospital could I check the morgue and see how many people were dead.

"At that stage, the exact numbers who had died in the shooting that day was not yet known. I checked the morgue and there were 12 deceased persons in it. I then went into the hospital to carry out my duties, which were to hear the Confessions of those who were due for surgery the next day and give the Sacrament of the Sick to any person who was seriously ill".

"In one of the wards", he continued, "the nurse told me that one of the patients wished to talk to me. I sat down beside his bed. He was a calm and dignified man, who told me that he had been on the march and had been shot and was being treated for his injuries. As well as the dead, there were a number of people also shot and wounded that day.

"This man told me a very sad story. As well as having been shot himself, his son had been shot dead and his wife was also in hospital, having come in the day before with a heart attack. She was a patient in coronary care. My heart went out to him. He asked if I visited coronary care and I said 'yes'. I explained that we always give the Sacrament of the Sick to every person who comes in with a heart attack, because it helps in the healing process. I told him that I would check if his wife had been anointed the day before, and could speak to her if he wished, but he said, 'I would rather you didn't talk to her tonight. The nurses are taking me down to coronary care in the morning to see her and I wish to tell her myself that I'm a patient here and that our son is dead'. After 50 years, I offer my sincere sympathy to that man's family".

Ministering to the sick and the dying has always been of utmost importance to Fr Liam during his priesthood: "I always made sure to

go out to any sick calls in the middle of the night. Maybe an old person was dying and scared, and the family were maybe scared too, so I felt it was very important to go and comfort the person and make them at ease.

"The priest is usually the first one there, and the doctor may not know the person or family, so I always felt it was very important for the priest to be there as a familiar presence".

"I also feel it is important to never be in a hurry at a funeral," he added, "I always made a point of not starting until everyone got into the chapel, and of not getting annoyed if a funeral was late starting as you didn't know what had happened in the house before leaving, especially with a tragic funeral".

And he recalled taking the same patient approach to weddings if the bride was late: "It is a special day, with the girl needing time to get dressed and getting everybody ready for the road before she leaves the house. I always felt that it was important to have people as relaxed as possible to enjoy the Mass, which is an important part of that day".

Loving everything about the priesthood, Fr Liam said that the thought of a priestly vocation first came to his mind when he was about eight years old.

"A lot of boys thought about being a priest in those times. I always wanted to be a priest and always loved being a priest," he remarked, adding that his parents, Frank and Minnie, had been steadfast in practicing and passing on the faith to their seven children.

Fr Liam and his twin sister, Marie, were the eldest in the family of four boys and three girls, of which only he and his sister, Philomena (Fullan, Toomebridge) remain.

Rosary

Recalling his father, a farmer, always giving out the Rosary at night before they went to bed, he also found a good example of the faith and priesthood in Fr James McGlynn, whom he served in Lavey as an altar boy.

"Fr McGlynn was a very holy priest and was highly respected in Lavey," remarked Fr Liam, going on to name Fr Desmond Kelly, who had been his spiritual director when he was a boarder in St Columb's College, in Derry, as also having been a good influence on him.

"I knew Fr Kelly all through my life as a priest", he said, "and he became a curate of mine in Glenullin, after Fr James McKee. Like Fr McKee, he was a very holy man and the parishioners were delighted to receive another saint into the parish".

Thinking of others who had greatly impressed him on his life's journey so far, he recalled having to change primary school when it came to doing the Eleven Plus, as

the teacher who prepared pupils for the examination had taken a year off, and on arrival at Rocktown School, in Lavey, being sat down beside an Oliver Crilly, who is now priest-in-residence in Castlefin, Co Donegal.

"Oliver was very clever and a great artist," said Fr Liam, "We did subjects like Latin, Geography and Appreciation of Art, which Oliver was very good at".

Then, setting off to board at St Columb's College, he found himself sharing a cubicle with a boy called Seamus Heaney, from Castledawson, who later became a great poet and also a great friend of Oliver, who was the year behind as he was younger.

He went on to recall: "When Seamus was about 15, he started to write poetry in Latin, in line with that of Virgil, one of ancient Rome's greatest poets. Seamus and Oliver wrote poems in Latin and exchanged them. Oliver wrote a lot of Irish poetry too, while Seamus wrote many poems in English. They also wrote what are known as Hexameter poems, which were very funny. We studied a book called 'Daily Life in Ancient Rome' and these poems that Seamus and Oliver wrote were a parody of this, on daily life in St Columb's."

The fun that he had with the other boys and the abundance of football were a help in overcoming any feelings of homesickness, especially during his first year at St Columb's, though Fr Liam admits that while he missed his family, he didn't miss the farming!

"When I came home from primary school, I had to carry water to the cows and they would have drunk about six buckets each, so you would have to carry about 30 buckets of water. I said to myself that there must be an easier way through life than this! Between that and the turf, hay, spuds and lifting lint...farming never really appealed to me!" he laughed.

After St Columb's, he set off for the seminary in Maynooth as an 18-year-old and loved his years there compared to the College, which he had found tough.

"There was a lot of corporal punishment in St Columb's," he recalled, "but I loved Maynooth, with the beautiful summer weather, the Easter ceremonies which were celebrated in Latin, and High Mass every Sunday, which was broadcast across the country via Raidió Éireann.

"In Maynooth, it was lovely to meet people from every county, such as Kerry, Cork, Mayo, Galway, Kildare and Offaly. And I loved studying Church History. We had a brilliant lecturer called Dr Patrick Corish. We also had the late Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich for history and he was a brilliant lecturer too. There were about 600

students and he would have known them all by name. Even when you met him say about 30 years later, he would still have known you. He was a very affable man".

Ordained on June 21, 1964, in Buncrana Convent by Bishop Neil Farren, whose grand-nephew, Fr Brian McGoldrick, was ordained the same day, Fr Liam's first appointment was to the Parish of Coleraine, where he was also chaplain to Loreto Convent. From 1970 until 1977, he ministered in the Waterside Parish, and then in Bellaghy from 1977-81, followed by Ballykelly from 1981-89, before he was appointed as parish priest to Strathfoyle, from 1989-94, then to Ballerin from 1994-2008, before returning to Ballykelly as curate from 2008-2014, after which he retired.

The Waterside was his busiest parish, where he was also hospital chaplain, and he remembers one weekend getting up on the Saturday morning at 8 am and not getting any sleep until he went to bed on the Sunday night at 10 pm.

"At 11 pm on the Saturday night, I got a call out", he recalled, "a young girl had been killed and I had to go and tell her parents. On returning, as soon as I got to my bedroom the 'phone rang. It was a call from Altnagelvin Hospital. There had been a gun battle in Drumahoe between the IRA, the UVF, and the RUC. They must have been bad shots because the only ones injured were two men from Tamnaherin, who were on their way home from Derry and were struck by flying bullets. The two of them needed the Sacrament of the Sick, and thankfully they both recovered.

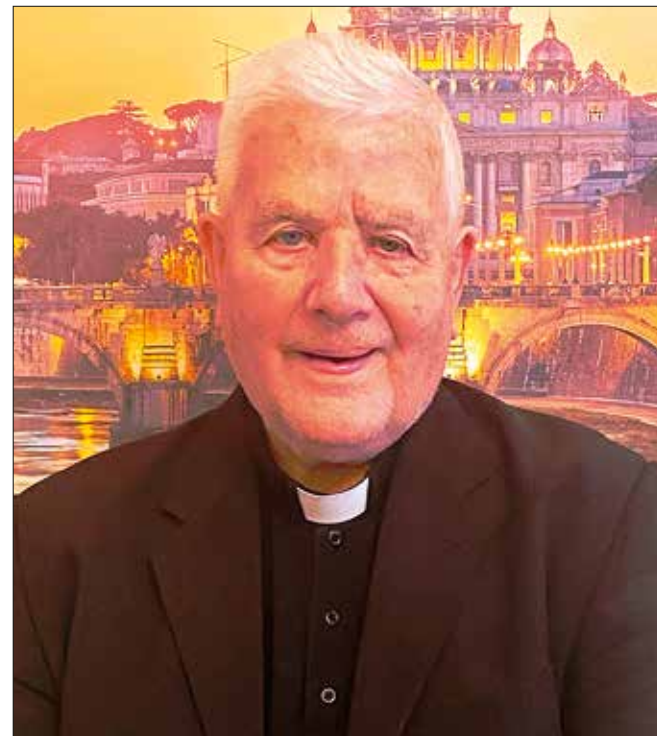
"Then, at 4 am, a classmate of mine from St Columb's, who played in a band, called me when he saw a fire at the chapel at Enagh Lough on his way home from a gig. The chapel was full of smoke and we had to have Mass in the local school".

Confession

"We had four or five Masses on a Sunday morning at that time, which kept us going", added Fr Liam, "and as chaplain, I was out on sick calls every night and maybe twice a night. Confessions would have been very busy too, in the Waterside especially, where we had two hours of Confession on a Saturday night and an hour in the morning and afternoon. There were large numbers going to Confession in those days.

"The older I got, the more reluctant I was to ask questions of people in Confession. You don't know what pressure you are putting people under or what fear they have".

He continued: "I was also chaplain to the United States Navy when I was in the Waterside Parish, and that was good fun. A lot of American sailors met Derry girls



Fr Liam Donnelly, Lavey

and got married, and we had to do their paperwork".

Adding that the Americans had been keen to keep out of the Troubles in Derry, and usually sent a Catholic captain to the base, Fr Liam said: "The sailors could go into the Bogside, but the British soldiers couldn't. Word got around one night that there was a riot and an American sailor visiting in one of the houses went out with the locals to throw stones at the British Army. There was a snatch run made and the Derry boys knew to run but the poor American sailor didn't and he was caught. The police handed him over to the base at midnight and the word was that he was then put in a fast car over Glenshane on his way back to Stateside, and was hopefully on a ship on the South Pacific! Those were the days."

He went on to recall a great coincidence when in San Diego for a Marriage Encounter event in the 80s: "I met up with a man who had been second-in-command at the Navy Base in Derry in my time. He invited me to his home and, when I got there, he had invited maybe half a dozen other men and women who had been in Derry when I was chaplain. We had great fun swapping stories".

Looking back, Fr Liam remarked that the best advice he had been given when he was ordained had come from his father: "In the 1930s, people were very poor and there was a man who came to our house every Saturday to do a bit of work to earn some money. His first name was Paddy but his surname wasn't known, so he was referred to as

Paddy Saturday.

"One day, my father was going to Castledawson and he saw Paddy lying dead on the road. So, he put his body in the back of the cart and bought a coffin for him. He asked the Lavey PP if he could bury him in Lavey graveyard, but he was told that he couldn't as Paddy wasn't from the area. He went to Bellaghy and asked the PP there the same question, and he also said no, as he wasn't from Bellaghy. So, he went on to Magherafelt and asked the PP there, who told him that he could bury him there and that those who had refused him a burial place would have to be buried someday themselves. My father's advice to me was not to do that to anyone. He must have travelled eight or 10 miles on a horse and cart to get that man buried – that's the way it was in those times".

These days, Fr Liam continues to enjoy his retirement: "I used to play golf but I have given it up now, or rather it has given me up! I do a bit of walking and I don't watch much television, but I read a lot of fiction or history. I am presently reading 'The Power and The Glory' by Graham Greene, and I have recently read two books about Pope Benedict XVI – 'Benedict XVI: A Life', Volumes 1 and 2, by German author, Peter Seewald. He has done a few interviews with Benedict. It is quite a good book. I have great admiration for Benedict. He was probably the most brilliant Pope in 500 years – a great scholar.

"I have also read 'The Song of Bernadette' by Austrian Jewish writer, Franz Werfel, who once had



Fr Liam with his parents on the day of his Ordination to Priesthood.

continued from page 14

been in danger of being sent to a Nazi concentration camp. Someone told him that the safest place for him to be was in Lourdes. He never became a Catholic but he believed in the apparitions to Bernadette and he promised God that if he got safely out of France into Portugal, across the Pyrenees and on from there to America, that he would write a book on Bernadette".

While in retirement, Fr Liam likes to help out in celebrating Mass in Bellaghy, Lavey and sometimes Dungiven, and enjoys meeting and talking to people afterwards, which is something he has been missing

Derry seminarian providing English commentary for Vatican ceremonies



Shaun Doherty in Vatican Media role.

FORMER Highland Radio presenter, Shaun Doherty is working with Vatican Media and is providing the English commentary at some of the main liturgies involving Pope Francis at St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Shaun, a seminarian for the Derry Diocese at the Beda College in Rome, was approached by Vatican Media when they were aware that he was living in Rome. Sr Bernadette Reis, who is a senior figure in Vatican Media and herself a familiar voice at Papal Masses, met Shaun at a function in Rome and not long after he was participating alongside her at the Solemnity of Christ the King, presided over by Pope Francis.

Sr Bernadette then invited Shaun to join the team and he recently provided the full English commentary for New Year's Eve Vespers for the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, at St Peter's Basilica, including Pope Francis's Homily on the night. He also provided commentary for the Pope's Mass in the Sistine Chapel on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, on Sunday, January 9, when the Holy Father baptised a number of babies.

Speaking of the great honour he feels after being chosen for such a huge task, Shaun said: "I feel deeply honoured to be serving the Church in this way and I am particularly proud to be doing this as a seminarian for the Derry Diocese".

He went on to speak of his family and the diocese: "My family

during Covid-19.

Hoping to celebrate 58 years in the priesthood this June, he encouraged more men to consider it, saying: "I loved the priesthood and the whole life of the priest. Everybody should be praying for vocations because, in 10 years, there is going to be a huge shortage of priests. When I was ordained, there were 75 priests under the age of 50, now I think there are 11 under the age of 50 who are active.

"I have enjoyed the whole journey so far...and hopefully I have a bit to go yet!

and friends, and my Columba Community Family, have listened to all the commentaries so far and they seem really happy for me, and Bishop Donal sent me a very warm message of support".

Bishop Donal is no stranger to Vatican Media as he has provided English commentary on Vatican Radio in the past.

Shaun's voice is being heard all over the world as Vatican Media provides its service to many international media outlets such as EWTN, Catholic Television Network, CBS News, Shalom TV, plus many online platforms and international radio stations.

He knows the power of the media having been involved in Radio for almost 30 years, and commented: "I know there are people tuning in who haven't been to Mass for a long time. Some of my friends who are not Catholic have contacted me, and one friend told me that he was raised as an atheist but he was really touched by the Mass and the Vespers Service, so you never know how God is working in people's lives. We have all been given gifts that can be put to good use by the Lord."

While Shaun feels comfortable working in the media again, his main focus is on his prayer life and study as he continues discerning his vocation, and he is very grateful for the prayerful support he is receiving from many people in the Diocese and in many other countries.

A Belfast Cross moves to Newtownstewart

by Fr Roland Colhoun

ON Tuesday, December 28, 2021, Newtownstewart unveiled a new Cross in the parish Oratory. It is new to Newtown but the Cross is 50 years old. This ornate item celebrates its Golden Jubilee by getting a new home in West Tyrone.

The restored crucifix is significant. It began life in Corpus Christi Church, Ballymurphy, Belfast, built in 1971. Corpus Christi hosted the funerals of the Ballymurphy Massacre victims in August 1971. There are photographs online of the coffin of Fr Hugh Mullan in the main aisle; the first priest to lose his life in the Troubles.

On Sunday, October 3, 1971, Mother Teresa of Calcutta attended Mass in Corpus Christi. This was the beginning of a two-year assignment by the Missionaries of Charity in Ballymurphy. Mother Teresa and her nuns set up a mini convent in two Corporation houses on Springhill Avenue. Accordingly, any time she was in Belfast, Mother Teresa attended Corpus Christi Church and prayed before this crucifix.

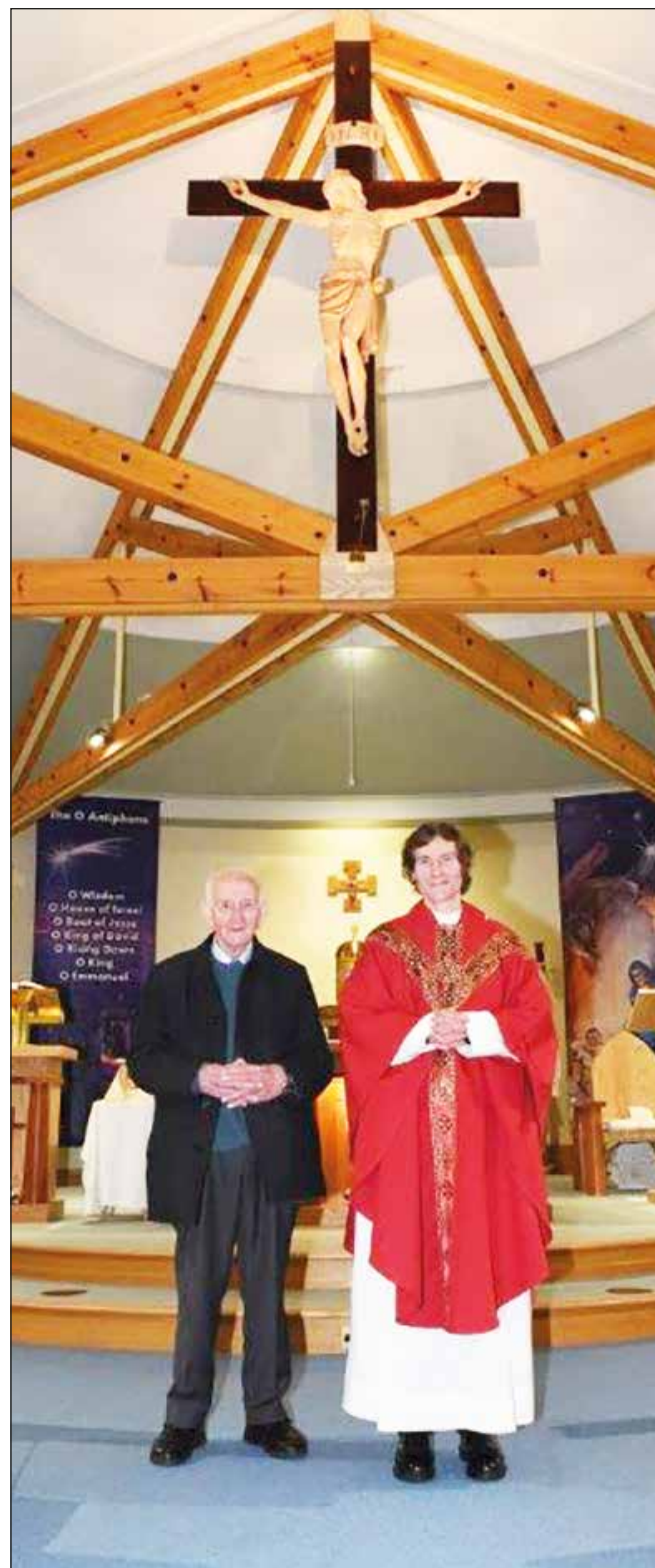
In the early years of the new millennium, the 1971 Church was demolished to make way for

a smaller building, which was opened in 2005. The big Cross from the demolished Church was surplus to need and a parishioner, Brendan Rogers, became its custodian for many years.

When he learned, in 2020, that Fr Roland Colhoun in Newtownstewart was looking for a new crucifix for the parish Oratory, Mr Rogers delivered it as a gift. It was restored free of charge by Specialist Joinery Group, Maghera, and installed at Newtownstewart Oratory, free of charge, by the talented tradesmen of the parish - Steven Canning, Steven Moore, Kevin Kerrigan, Barry McIvor and Kevin McNulty.

The mahogany Cross has been widened to fit the upright beam of the Oratory (8 inches/200mm). It now weighs 8½ stone (54kg). The 63-inch figure of Christ has an arm-span of 57 inches and was hand-carved in Italy in 1971. It is illuminated by two spotlights to show off its artistic and devotional beauty.

This Cross is part of Belfast's ecclesiastical history and hopefully it will become a little tourist attraction for Newtownstewart.



Crucifix installation team were these Newtownstewart tradesmen.

Brendan Rogers and Fr Roland Colhoun, Newtownstewart curate.



Loreto Convent Grammar, Omagh, receiving their Columbanus Award.



Christian Brothers Grammar Omagh receiving their Columbanus Award.

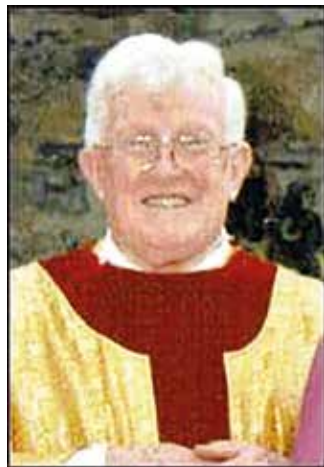
St Columbanus Omagh Awards

THE Knights of St Columbanus Omagh are delighted to support Omagh schools, Loreto Convent Grammar and Christian Brothers Grammar, on their recent project applications for the St Columbanus Award.

Congratulating both schools, their Religious Education teachers and pupils, the Knights found that the projects highlighted the commitment of Religious Education teachers in promoting the Catholic faith and their evangelisation amongst the young leaders of tomorrow.

The St Columbanus Award is continuing to be pivotal in projects such as these going ahead.

Remembering Fr John Ryder...a kindly teacher and exemplary priest



THE Holy Family community in Ballymagroarty, Derry, was saddened to hear the news of the death of Fr John Ryder, whom they had come to know and love during his 14 years of retirement in their midst.

The 90-year-old passed away on 'Gaudete Sunday', the Third Sunday of Advent, in Foyle Hospice Care after over 65 years of dedicated priestly ministry.

Born in Ture, in the Co Donegal parish of Iskaheen, John Joseph was the eldest of John and Margaret Ryder's family of three boys and two girls. Educated in St Columb's College before going to St Patrick's College, Maynooth, he was ordained on June 17, 1956.

Delivering the homily at Fr Ryder's Requiem Mass in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, Fr Colum Clerkin noted that he had spent his first year of his ministry in England, in the Diocese of Brentwood, where he served in the parishes of Tilbury and Walthamstow.

"This was back in the halcyon days when there was what we might call a super-abundance of priests in Derry Diocese, but with not enough places to send all of them immediately after their Ordination," remarked Fr Colum, noting: "While Fr John went off to England, other Derry priests went

on secondment to Scotland, and even as far as Australia – until their eventual recall by the Bishop when a vacancy occurred!"

He continued: "After his short, but enjoyable pastoral stint in Brentwood Diocese, John was recalled and, in 1957, appointed by Bishop Neil Farren to St Columb's College; where he was to teach for the following 20 years, both on the Bishop Street campus, and on the new Buncrana Road site, joining the ranks of 18 or so priests on the St Columb's College staff.

"His specialist subject was Mathematics, and as a past-pupil of Fr Ryder's Maths class, although myself practically innumerate to this day, through no fault of his, I still remember him as a kindly and conscientious teacher – and always very much the priest in his teaching role in school".

Joining the staff of St Columb's himself, some 50 years ago now, Fr Colum recalled finding Fr John to be "a most affable colleague, and always supportive and encouraging to the younger priests in the College".

When Bishop Farren's successor, Bishop Edward Daly sought to reduce the number of priests in St Columb's, Fr John was first appointed as curate in Malin and then parish priest of Greencastle.

Commenting on how Fr John had "relished the transition into full-time pastoral ministry", Fr Colum added: "In fact, John would later say that it was in parish life that he found his priesthood to be even more fulfilling; after 20 years at the 'chalk-face' in school".

Knowing Fr John as a keen gardener he went on to describe how wherever he lived "the whole place was surrounded by flowers and shrubs and potted plants – inside and outside!"

"So these two parishes in Malin and Greencastle were ideally suited to John," remarked Fr Colum, "he loved the rugged beauty of nature all around him, which he

also appreciated at a deeper level as a reflection of the beauty and majesty of God's Creation in all its wonder and variety – and in this place Pope Francis so often calls 'our common home'."

After retiring as parish priest in 2007, Fr John moved to live in Holy Family Parish, Ballymagroarty, where, Fr Colum said: "He enjoyed the break from active ministry, with its opportunities to read and also to travel more, not so much as a tourist, but more as an intrepid pilgrim to places that interested him, taking in visits to many of the Shrines of Our Lady in different parts so the world, with favourite trips to Rome and to the Holy Land".

St John of the Cross

With Fr John's Requiem Mass celebrated on the Feast of St John of the Cross, Fr Colum was reminded that, from his earliest days as a priest, John had attended monthly Days of Recollection for priests in the diocese.

He added: "Ever since the foundation of the Carmelite Retreat Centre in Derry, he rarely missed the monthly priest's Retreat in Termonbacca, with the talks given by the Discalced Carmelite Fathers of the Order of John of the Cross. John enjoyed not just the spiritual element, but just as much the company and camaraderie of his brother priests over lunch.

"And in more recent years, even with his health problems and mobility issues, John still liked to get to Termonbacca each month, up until the Retreats had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus restrictions".

"John certainly wasn't a recluse in his comfortable home in Whitehouse Park here in Ballymagroarty," remarked Fr Colum, "for he willingly and generously helped out during his retirement, always readily available to celebrate weekday and weekend Masses on a regular

basis here in Holy Family Church. He also helped out at the annual Penitential Services in parishes and schools in the City, and at the feasts and ceremonies of the Church's Year.

"And, I can say that it was Fr Ryder's express wish that his Requiem Mass should be celebrated here in Holy Family Church, where his ministry was so much appreciated and where he felt very much at home".

Saying that Fr John had also been very close to his own family down through the years of his priesthood, as they were to him, especially when his health began to decline under the burden of his years, Fr Colum added: "I know that his death will now leave a void in their hearts and in their homes."

He went on to pray for Fr John's sisters, Mary and Sr Mairead, his sisters-in-law, Eilish and Marie, as well as his nephews and nieces, and grand-nephews and grand-nieces who were all so devoted to him, as well as his many cousins and friends who mourn his death.

Referring to the Office of Readings for Christmas Day in the Prayer of the Church, which Fr John would have faithfully read each year from a sermon of Pope St Leo the Great, Fr Colum quoted: "Today our Saviour is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of Life. The fear of death has been swallowed up, bringing us the promise of eternal happiness".

"For Fr John Ryder, an exemplary priest, who died on Gaudete Sunday, at the end of his long life of devoted service in the priestly ministry for over 65 years," Fr Colum prayed that he will, indeed, 'Rejoice' "now and forever, in the glory of Christ's Resurrection, and in the company of Our Lady and all the Saints".

Fr John was laid to rest in his home parish of Muff.



Fr John's family share blessing of his life

During the Requiem Mass for Fr John, one of his niece's, Kate Clifford read the following tribute...

Uncle John,

As we accompany you on your final journey, we place on the altar this study for a painting by Derry artist Sr Aloysius McVeigh.

When a parishioner in Malin Head sent Fr John Ryder some money to commission an artwork for the church, he immediately approached a local artist and entrusted her to capture the essence of that community and their faith.

We present this painting today as it also symbolises the man we knew and loved: a brother, an uncle, a friend and a humble servant of God. It is a complex picture,

deceptive in its apparent simplicity. A reflection of John: a humble, unassuming, undemanding man, he was also highly astute, deep thinking, highly intelligent and wise.

The painting is of the Star of the Sea, representing his beloved parish of Malin Head. But the work also reflects his work in the parishes of Holy Family Ballymagroarty, St Patrick's Greencastle and Our Lady of the Wayside in Broughderg. Each of these places, Fr John called home. In each he was embraced and welcomed, and in each he quietly shone the light of faith in the dark

times of people's lives. He was their constant and their rock when their worlds and lives stopped making sense. He brought with him a deep devotion to prayer, but also a deep devotion to parish life and community.

When he was posted to beautiful, remote, wild Malin Head in the 70s, he was surrounded by nature and changing landscapes and a community with a strong sense of identity and faith. A harsh and at times unforgiving landscape fed his desire to make the church the centre of community life.

His subsequent move to Greencastle and Broughderg

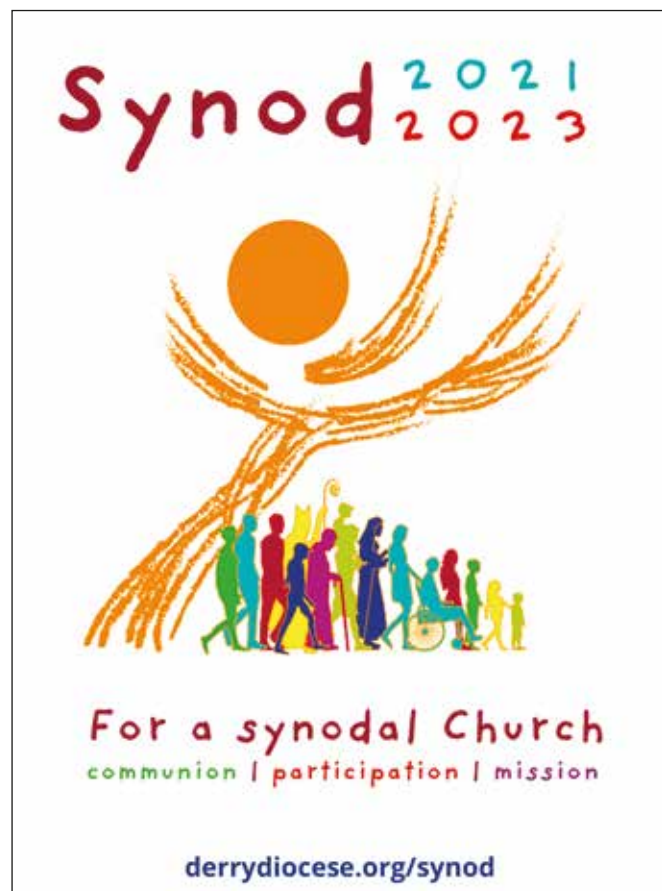
found him once again in a remote rural landscape, a beautiful but harsh upland area in a community where he was valued and loved as a parish priest, and where he thrived among a people who worked with him, and with each other.

The picture shows a connection between city life, rural life and the natural world. John had a deep love of Derry City, and he loved being part of the city community and its family of priests throughout his life. He was welcomed and embraced by the parish of Ballymagroarty in his later years, and while the move to the city was difficult for him, in this parish he found great peace.



Finally, central to the picture is a mother and child. It's a signal of his great devotion to Our Lady, but for us it's also a reminder of his love of family. John was our family, and he gave us all the gift of love. We will miss him, but we are blessed to have had him in our lives. And in each of us his light will continue to shine. We thank God for his life and his works.

Online deanery sessions highlight Synodal pathway challenges and hopes



WELCOMING a New Year and the fresh start that offers, the Derry Diocese has been holding a series of online introductions to the Synod on Synodality during January, for each of the four deaneries – Inishowen, Co Derry, Co Tyrone and Derry City.

Facilitated by Tony Brennan, the Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator, the main speaker for the introductory sessions was Janet Forbes, formerly from Lurgan, Co Armagh, and now living in Co Tyrone, who is a member of the National Synodal Task Group and well placed to explain the process for this very different synod that Pope Francis has called for, being the widest and deepest ever held in the history of the Church with everyone invited to get involved.

Acknowledging that even venturing to start out on this synodal pathway is proving to be very challenging to many, clergy and laity alike, with much anxiety about new words such as synodality, Janet highlighted what Pope Francis keeps emphasising

as being key to the entire process – praying, listening, dialoguing and discerning together, so that it is the Holy Spirit that is leading the way; inspiring and guiding thoughts, words and actions.

Synodality is a term in the Catholic Church that describes the process of fraternal collaboration and discernment. A study on 'Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church' by the International Theological Commission, published in March 2018, states that 'synod' is "an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of Revelation... it indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. Equally, it refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents Himself as "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14,6), and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called "followers of the Way" (cf. Acts 9,2; 19,9,23; 22,4; 24,14,22)".

It also states: "Since the first centuries, the word 'synod' has been applied, with a specific meaning, to

the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by".

Synodality is a central aspect of the papacy of Pope Francis, who, as a Jesuit, is familiar with the great fruits of Ignatian spirituality, which focuses on the presence of God in our world and our lives, and paves a way to deeper prayer, decision making guided by keen discernment, and an active life of service to others.

At the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by St Paul VI, Pope Francis said: "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium" (17 October 2015, AAS 107 (2015) 1139).

Encouraging the people of the Derry Diocese, as in others, to see this synod that is currently underway "as a conversational journey", Janet said: "The Holy Spirit is working in and around each of our lives. We have to feed into it as we try to discern what God is saying to us through the Holy Spirit in this time and place, in your parish and the Derry Diocese. It is important too that we each pray deeply ourselves, to see what is stirring in us, what dream for the Church God is dreaming in us, in our community. How are we being called to use our gifts in our parish?"

She added: "This is not just one consultation that we will engage with, it is the way we will operate, consult and make decisions as we move forward. Pope Francis is advocating for this to be a permanent way of being Church; praying and listening to each other as to the way to go as a national Church, Diocesan Church, and in our local parishes".

Taking into account those who have been deeply hurt by the Church, with some people having walked away, Janet highlighted the importance of creating a space to

engage with those on the periphery, and in which people can speak with courage and freedom. She also raised the importance of noting who is not at the table for this conversation, so that no one is left out.

"We are being called to listen at a much deeper level, and to respect others for who they are and the God who resides in them," said Janet, "we are being asked to move from 'I' to 'we'. When we come to meetings, do we come with our own agenda or that of our community, diocesan or national Church?"

"Be aware of the Holy Spirit and what moves in you as you listen to each person. What common themes are you hearing in conversations? What consensus is emerging? We are being asked to discern what is of God and what is not of God, and this is what is then fed through to Pope Francis for the 2023 Synod - A Synodal Church of Communion, Participation and Mission."

Janet went on to recommend Pope Francis' 'Fratelli tutti' and 'Laudato Si' as important documents to read for anyone wanting to learn more about synodality and what a synodal Church would look like.

She also highlighted the great resources on the Derry Diocesan website, including the official handbook for listening and discernment in local churches, 'Vademecum for the Synod of Synodality 2023', the Preparatory Document, which explains the Synod objectives and the consultation process, and a Listening Session Toolkit to assist priests and parishes, which includes examples of listening sessions, prayers and the questions for consultation in the Derry Diocese.

The Diocesan website also provides artwork for popup banner displays for parishes and Synod prayer cards, in English and Irish, which can be downloaded.

As part of the process, parishes will nominate a synod contact person, a listening facilitator and note keeper, and there will be training sessions for each parish listening facilitator.

Prayer for the Synod
We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance
lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity so that we may
journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the
Father and the Son, forever and ever.
Amen.



ONE HOUR WITH God

A monthly hour of Eucharistic adoration interceding for the National Synodal Pathway

29 JAN 26 FEB 26 MAR 30 APR

Following the 6PM Saturday mass

Join us for prayer, spiritual teachings, and worship - all are welcome

St. Brigid's Church Carnhill
Three Patrons Parish, Derry
abrahamcommunity@gmail.com
youhope.co.uk



Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during January for:

For true human fraternity::
We pray for all those suffering from religious discrimination and persecution; may their own rights and dignity be recognised, which originate from being brothers and sisters in the human family.

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:

Fr Alex Anderson (Jan 1st)
Fr Patrick Arkinson (2nd)
Fr Patrick Baker (3rd)

Fr Declan Boland (4th)
Fr Eugene Boland (5th)
Fr Francis Bradley (6th)
Fr Manus Bradley (7th)
All Priests (8th)
Fr Brian Brady (9th)
All Priests (10th)
Fr Thomas Canning (11th)
Fr Michael Canny (12th)
Fr John Cargan (13th)
All Priests (14th)
Fr James Devine (15th)
Fr Colum Clerkin (16th)
Fr Roland Colhoun (17th)

Fr Michael Collins (18th)
Fr Oliver Crilly (19th)
Fr Patrick Crilly (20th)
Fr Brendan Crowley (21st)
All Priests (22nd)
All Priests (23rd)
All Priests (24th)
Mgr Brendan Devlin (25th)
All priests (26th)
Fr Peter Devlin (27th)
Fr Fintan Diggin (28th)
Fr Brendan Doherty (29th)
All Priests (30th)
All priests (31st)

A Listening Heart *by Fr Oliver Crilly*

IN the early months of 2022, there will be a listening process in every parish in the Diocese. Groups will gather, in a parish meeting-place or on-line, to reflect on a series of questions, to speak about their faith, and to forward the results of their reflections to the Bishop of the Diocese, Bishop Donal McKeown.

This listening exercise is a local participation in a worldwide process which is connected to the preparation for the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023. The outcomes from the Diocese of Derry will feed in to the work of the Irish Bishops' Conference. They will collate the national responses and forward them to Rome.

There is a kind of echo in this listening process of the story of King Solomon in the Old Testament. God asked Solomon what gift he would like God to give him. God was pleased when Solomon asked for wisdom rather than more power or worldly wealth. In the original text in the Hebrew Bible, what Solomon asked for was 'a listening heart' - the foundation of wisdom. We need a

listening heart in the Church today.

What is happening in the Church now is the fulfilment of the vision of the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II spoke very clearly about the role of the laity in the Church, saying that every member of the Church shares "a genuine equality of dignity and action". The statement of the Council was repeated word for word in the new Code of Canon Law which Pope John Paul II published in 1983 (Canon 208).

Every recent Pope has re-stated that teaching. Pope John Paul II used the word 'communio' (communion) to express the unity - community - which links all the members of the Church; Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the 'co-responsibility' of laity and clergy; Pope Francis speaks of 'Synod' and 'the Synodal pathway' - as clergy and laity journey together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These Popes have all been speaking about all the people of the Church - Pope, bishops, priests, religious, and laity - walking together and

working together, on the one pilgrim journey.

This vision didn't begin with Vatican II: the Fathers of the Council reclaimed and articulated the vision of the Church which we find in the Acts of the Apostles: a community united in heart and mind, led by the Holy Spirit. We find the same vision in the early Irish Church. It is carved on the great stone crosses - the Scripture Crosses.

On the Moone Cross, in Co Kildare, we find the Crucifixion according to John, and just below it the panel of the Twelve Apostles, symbolising the birth of the Church from the side of Christ on the Cross. The same symbolism is expressed on the Maghera Crucifixion, where the disciples are gathered under the arms of Christ. On the North Cross in Castledermot, Co Kildare, the Crucifixion according to John is at the centre of the circle on the head of the cross, while the Twelve Apostles, representing the community of the Church, are gathered round it, three on each arm of the cross.



Bishop Donal praying with those gathered for a Finn Valley Pastoral Area gathering in January 2020.

Sharing ideas at a Finn Valley Pastoral Area gathering in January 2020.

The Synodal Path continues *by Bishop Donal*

IF the last 21 months have been characterised by lockdown, 2022 needs to be a time of rebuilding. And this cannot be merely a restoration of any perceived former glories or structures. The question is not just "how do we get people back to Mass?" or "How do we prepare to work with fewer priests?" Rather, we have to ask ourselves and the Lord, how we equip ourselves for bringing Christ to the people who most need it.

Church structures exist to serve the mission of 'making disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19). This was Jesus' last instructions to His disciples. The Church has no other purpose!

The synodal pathway is simply saying that parish communities and our diocese have to listen to the voice of lay people in order to discern where God is leading us.

As we face into 2022, I propose the following next steps to parishes - even though I realise that Covid regulations and weather conditions may subvert some of these.

A. Prepare the parish team to lead the local listening exercise.

- Name the parish Synod contact person and supply name and email contact details to the Diocesan Office.
- Name at least two parish listening facilitators and supply

names and email addresses to the Diocesan Office

- **Inform parish leadership teams and contact person** about their Introduction session to the Synod - January 2022

- **Inform parish listening facilitators** about the Introductory session and the facilitation training - January/February 2022

- **Inform these parish representatives** that they will be invited to participate in Diocesan discussion on key themes from listening sessions - March/April 2022.

B. Training provided by the Diocese.

- Four x 2-hour deanery-based evening sessions to prepare all priests and parish leadership teams/facilitators/contact persons to plan the process for their parish
- Four full day (Saturday) training sessions to offer facilitation training for those who will lead the conversations in your parish.

I propose the following schedule (all of which will have to be kept under review)

a. Inishowen Deanery

- a. Introduction - evening Monday January 10th (7pm 2 hours)
- b. Facilitation training - Saturday January 22nd (10am-4.30pm)

b. Co Derry Deanery

- a. Introduction - evening Wednesday January 12th (7pm 2 hours)
- b. Facilitation training - Saturday January 29th (10am-4.30pm)
- c. Co Tyrone deanery
 - a. Introduction - evening Monday January 17th (7pm 2 hours)
 - b. Facilitation training - Saturday February 5th (10am-4.30pm)
- d. Derry City Deanery
 - a. Introduction - evening Wednesday January 19th (7.00pm 2 hours)
 - b. Facilitation training - Saturday February 12th (10am-4.30pm)

The introduction sessions can be carried out via Zoom. However, the Facilitation training would be best carried out in person in a largish hall when a light lunch can be provided. However, I recognise that this may not be possible.

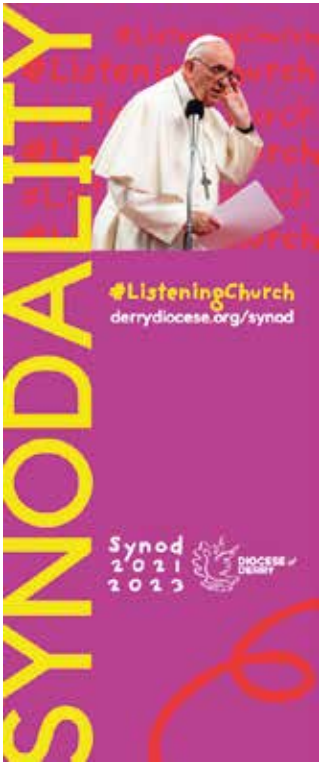
If the date for your deanery meeting does not suit an individual, attendance should be possible at another meeting. However, ideally, contiguous parishes will share similar issues and will need to be working together.

C. Synod resources and promotion materials

We will provide all training materials which will be distributed to you in early January.

The following resource materials

have been produced/in production and are/will be available at www.derrydiocese/synod: Parish Toolkit; Participant guide; Facilitators guide; Note-keeper notes; Synod prayer cards; Parish poster; Synod Popup Banners; Parish Bulletin notice templates; Social Media images and editorial; Vatican videos and materials.



Eangach

Ár nDúchas

Amhra do Cholmcille

(Dallán Forgaill, fl. 540 AD;
ceol le Pádraig Ó Mianáin.)

Curfá:

**Bíodh eadraibh choíche
fíor ghrá a's síocháin.**

Go saora Dia sinn
ar bhuan-pholl na ndeor.
'Snár ligidh Dia neimhe sinn
i mbuíonta an éimh.

Curfá

D'éag orainn ár n-ura,
taca na mbocht.
Cruit gan chéis anois é
cill gan ab

Curfá

B'aoibhinn leis
Briathar Dé
sa Sean Tiomna
sa Tiomna Nua.

Curfá

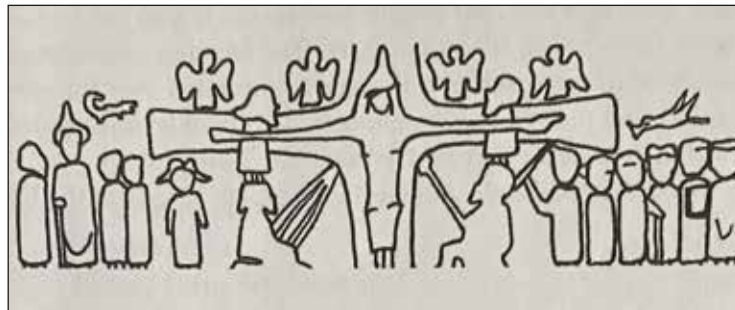
Saoi slán
seang Chríost:
ba naofa, ba gheanmnaí
ba charthannach.

Curfá

Beo ainm Choilm,
beo a ainm.
Ba bhinne a ghuth
san Aif(i)rinn.

Curfá

Croí le hÉisteacht



Críost Mhachaire Rátha

I mí Eanáir agus mí Feabhra 2022 beidh cleachtú éisteachta in achan pharóiste sa Deoise. Tíocfaidh grúpaí le chéile (in ionad éigin sa pharóiste nó ar líne) le machnamh a dhéanamh ar cheisteanna áirithe, le labhairt le chéile ar an chreideamh atá iontu, agus le toradh a gcuid machnaimh a chur



Díseart Diarmada.

ar aghaidh chuig Easpag na Deoise, an tEaspag Dónal Mac Eoin. Cuid áitiúil de phróiseas domhanda atá sa chleachtú éisteachta seo, a bhaineann le hullmhú do Shionad na nEaspag sa Róimh in 2023.

Tá cineál de mhacalla sa phróiseas seo d'achuinge an Rí Solamh sa Sean Tiomna, nuair a d'iarr sé ar Dhia: "Bronn orm croí le hÉisteacht". Bhí Dia sásta le Solamh nár iarr sé saibhreas an tsaoil nó breis cumhachta dó féin, ach croí le héisteacht — bunchloch na críonnachta.

Comhlíonadh Vatacáin II atá san iarracht seo. Labhair Vatacáin II go soiléir faoi sheasamh na bhfíréan san Eaglais, ag cur in iúl go bhfuil gach ball den Eaglais ar chomhchéim ó thaobh dínite agus gníomhaíochta de. Cuireadh ráiteas Vatacáin II focal ar fhocal isteach i gCód nua Dhlí Chanónda na hEaglaise in 1983, agus threisigh gach Pápa ó shin leis an tuiscint chéanna. Bhain an Pápa Eoin Pól II úsáid as an fhocal 'communio' (comaoin nó cumann). Bhain an Pápa Benedict XVI úsáid as an fhocal 'comhfhreagracht'. Baineann

an Pápa Proinsias úsáid as an fhocal 'sionadacht'. Tá siad uilig ag caint faoi bhaill na hEaglaise, Pápa, easpaig, sagairt, lucht na beatha rialta, agus tuataigh, ag siúl le chéile agus ag comhoibriú le chéile — ar an aistear chéanna faoi ionspioráid an Spioraid Naomh.

Ach téann seo siar níos faide ná Vatacáin II. Tá sé le léamh ar scéal na hEaglaise i nGníomhartha na nAspal. Agus tá sé le léamh ar scéal na luathEaglaise in Éirinn. Tá sé greanta ar na crosta móra a dhearaigh ár sinsir:

Ar ardchros Mhaoín Cholm Cille agus ar an chros ar an taobh ó thuaidh de Dhíseart Diarmada, tá an Céasadh de réir scéal na Páise i soiscéal Eoin, agus dealbhóireacht den dáréag aspal cóngarach dó, ag léiriú bhreith na hEaglaise ó thaobh Chríost ar chros a Chéasta, mar atá ar Chros Mhachaire Rátha. Ar chros an tuaiscirt i nDíseart Diarmada tá an Céasadh de réir Eoin i lár chiorcal bharr na croise agus an dáréag aspal cruinnithe thart, triúr ar gach sciathán den chros.



Cros Mhaoín Cholm Cille.

An Pósadh: Méadú an Ghrá

Cad a tharlaíonn san Eaglais lá an phósta? Tá sé socraithe cheana féin ag an lánúin seo go bhfuil siad ag dul a phósadh, agus tá sé sin fógraithe acu dá muintir, agus socraithe leis an sagart. Tá a fhios acu ar fad cheana féin go bhfuil siad ag dul an is toil a rá le chéile. Mar sin, cad é atá ag tarlú istigh i dteach an pbobail? Tá toil s'acu féin léirithe acu dá chéile, ach ag an phósadh tá an toil sin á léiriú don Eaglais, agus an grá sin atá acu dá chéile á bhronnadh acu ar an Eaglais agus ar an phobal, tabhartas an ghrá shíoraí. Tá siad a rá le chéile go mairfidh an grá sin eatarthu, ní amháin nuair

atá fonn orthu ach go speisialta nuair atá an grá sin de dhíth ar an duine eile.

Ní hionann an grá pósta agus grá de réir do mhéine, ach grá de réir an riachtanais,

*más fearr sinn, más measa
más saibhir, más bocht,
más tinn nó más slán
gach lá dár saol.*

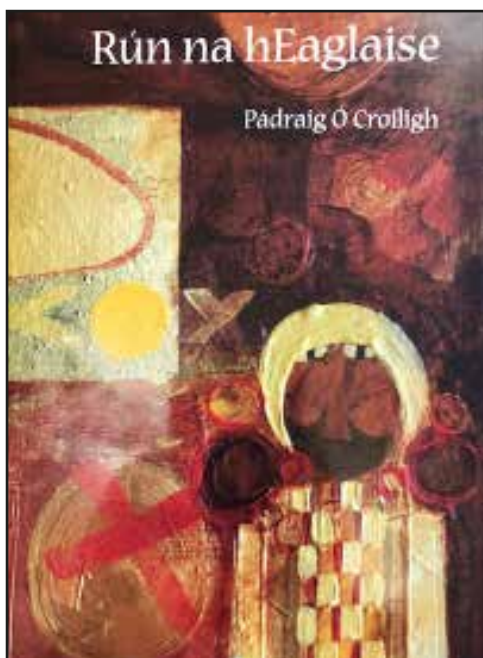
Tá grá ag an Eaglais do na daoine seo atá ag dul a phósadh, agus tá grá ag a muintir dóibh, agus ba mhaith leo sin a bheith cinnte go mbraithfidh siad an

grá sin gach lá dá saol, agus glacann gach páirtí den lánúin de dhualgas orthu féin a dhéanamh cinnte go gcuirfidh siad an grá sin isteach i saol an duine eile i gcónaí, agus ní de réir a méine féin, ná a riachtanais féin, ach de réir riachtanais an duine eile.

Tá siad ag geallúint go mbeidh muinín acu as a chéile agus sa dóigh sin go mairfidh siad faoi loinnir an ghrá, ag brath ar a chéile go deo. Dá mbeadh an domhan ar fad ag maireachtáil mar sin, nárbh iontach an saol é! Agus sin é an comhartha a thugann an lánúin agus

sacraimint an phósta. Scaipeann an lánúin sacraimintiúil grá Dé agus méadaíonn siad grá na hEaglaise nuair a mhéadaíonn a ngrá daonna féin.

(Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*)



Reflections on 2021 and prayers for a new year full of promise *by Marie Lindsay*

AFTER the bells and bubbly of New Year's Eve fade, we are left facing the long, bleak, bill-ridden month of January. Those of us who like to reminisce, will spend time thinking about the year that has just ended, its highs and lows. We will remember past Christmases and New Year's Eves spent in the company of loved ones who are no longer with us. Others will spend less time looking back, preferring to focus on a fresh start, a new year full of promise and resolutions.

Regardless of which best describes your approach to 2022, it's fair to say that 2021 was a tough year, with the pandemic shaping every aspect of our lives for the second year in a row. Most of us will wave goodbye to 2021 with a huge sigh of relief, except the Tyrone fans of course! So here are my 2021 standout people and events; some brilliant, some ordinary and some shocking, each with a little prayer to help me do better in 2022.

Global, national, and local news dealt us a tsunami of Covid-19 updates daily. The big difference between Covid news in 2021 compared to the previous year was the record-breaking speed with which vaccines were developed. The scale and efficacy of the roll out of the vaccination programme saw over 4.4 billion people (56% of the global population), vaccinated. By March, lockdown restrictions slowly began to ease as the vaccination programme kicked in. Some choose not to be vaccinated while others, often the poorest people, had no choice, as they did not have access to the vaccine.

The challenge in 2022 is to ensure that vaccines are shared more rapidly and more equitably with the poorest, particularly those in developing countries. At Easter, describing vaccines as an "essential tool" in the pandemic battle, Pope Francis called for a "spirit of global responsibility" to ensure poorer nations receive vaccinations.

Dear Lord, thank you for the protection that the vaccine is providing for my family and my community. I pray that, in the coming year, leaders in wealthy nations will have the moral courage to provide vaccines, funding, logistical support and leadership to developing countries to ensure that their citizens can be vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Respect

2021 saw us use a whole new vocabulary and more letters of the Greek alphabet than we knew existed. Vax was named the word of 2021 by the Oxford English Dictionary. The pandemic continued to bring new phrases into our everyday conversations including anti-vaxxers, remote working, WFH, the new normal, boosters, lateral flow test, antigen tests, PCRS, Covid-19 Variants, Alpha, Delta, and Omicron.

Other non-Covid-19 phrases that had us all talking included the Northern Ireland Protocol, the HSE Cyberattack, Merriongate, Golfgate, Mica redress and worryingly, some signs in health centres and businesses asking 'Please don't abuse our staff'.

Some of these phrases are controversial, as people have differing views. We know that the language we use creates our world, so, if I want to make our world better in 2022, I need to not just be careful with the language I use, but the way I use it, especially when I speak about those who have different views from me.

Lord help me to be a better listener, to have more empathy, to respect those with different views and to choose my words carefully. Help me to speak up for injustice and wrong wherever I see it but to do so in a respectful and generous way without bullying or belittling those whose views are different from my own.

Humanitarian

The pandemic was knocked from the headlines on several occasions, largely due to humanitarian crises and the wars that caused them. Several conflicts were to the fore in 2021, including those in the Middle East, Syria, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. For me, the images of the military coup in Myanmar, and the subsequent Rohingya refugee camp fire, and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan with the haunting images from Kabul of people clinging to US military planes before falling to their death, will stay with me for a long time.

Pope Francis has made the defence of migrants and refugees a cornerstone of his papacy. In early March, he visited Iraq, the first ever Papal visit to this war-ravaged nation. On St Patrick's

Day, he praised a nun in Myanmar, who knelt before security forces and persuaded them not to shoot protesters. In early December he visited the Greek island of Lesbos to refocus attention on the plights of migrants just weeks after 27 migrants drowned in the English Channel.

Closer to home, keeping the hard-won peace remained challenging in 2021. Difficult issues including the out-workings of Brexit and, in particular, the NI Protocol saw huge political upheaval and a return to trouble on the streets in the North. This and other contested issues, such as dealing with the past and ongoing dissident activity grabbed headlines on a regular basis. We all have a role to play in peace building. St Francis of Assisi says it best,

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Climate

2021 will also be remembered as the year of extremes weatherwise, from heatwaves and droughts to storms, floods, and wildfires. While we can't be certain that these are due to climate change, there is mounting evidence that global



warming is a contributory factor.

We enjoyed one of our best summers ever weatherwise, recording our driest summer in 21 years. A record breaking high of 31.3C (88.3F) was recorded at Castlederg on July 21, in a week that saw this record broken three times. This seems like very good news, but when we look at the weather extremes of 2021 globally, a more worrying picture emerges.

June saw record high temperatures in some unusual places including Russia's Koteln Island - one of the most northerly land masses on the planet, which rarely gets much above freezing. Several countries including Siberia, Russia, Belarus, Estonia, and Canada, all reported record highs and many wildfires started, particularly in Russia and Canada as a result of these soaring temperatures.

By June 2021, southern Madagascar had suffered a tragic 24-month drought which caused famine for thousands of vulnerable people. The crisis is still ongoing, as the cassava production is near zero and households are having to sell their livestock and produce in order to survive.

July was the hottest month ever globally and August also saw record high temperatures across Europe, with the all-time continental high of 48.8 C (119.8F) recorded near Sicily. In July, the Dixie fire became California's largest single wildfire in recorded history, sweeping across nearly one million acres destroying everything in its path. It was eventually extinguished in October. July also saw catastrophic flooding in Western Europe, including Germany and Belgium where 238 people lost their lives. Parts of China were also badly affected by flooding; 170,000 people were forced from their homes and over 300 were killed.

There is growing scientific evidence that climate change may play a role in earthquakes. In August, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti, the deadliest natural disaster of 2021. At least 2,248 people were killed and more than 12,763 injured. 650,000 people are still in need of assistance, and more than half a million children are affected by the disaster.

Later in the year, Hurricane Ida and the worst tornadoes ever seen ripped through the United States. Wet weather continued in October and November smashing rainfall records across the globe.

At the end of October, nearly 200 world leaders gathered in Glasgow in a bid to tackle climate change at COP26, the United Nations Climate Change Conference. It resulted in a 'Glasgow Climate Pact' even though India and China pushed through a last-minute change, replacing 'phasing out' coal with 'phasing down' coal. It was disappointing that the conference didn't address the financial support needed for nations already suffering the effects of climate change.

In the words of Pope Francis, help all of us to reflect on "the way we eat, consume, travel, or the way we use water, energy, plastics, and many other material goods," especially those which are harmful to the environment. "Let us choose to change!" "Let us advance with young people towards lifestyles that are simpler and more respectful of the environment."

I pray with gratitude for the many blessings in my life including this beautiful place we call home. Help me to have a greater concern for the world's poorest and most vulnerable. Help me to make more environmentally sustainable choices, avoiding waste of any kind. Help me to buy only the things I need



rather than the things I want, and to opt for a simpler, greener lifestyle so that our grandchildren can inherit and enjoy a more sustainable world. Lord, let us remember all those who have died in 2021, including those we knew, those who died from the pandemic, and those who died from natural disasters.

Extraordinary

2021 introduced me to many impressive people, including four fantastic sportspeople: Rachel Blackmore, Kelly Harrington, Leona Maguire, and Simone Biles. However, my top two are local: Jason Smyth who was narrowly pipped for my top spot by Ironman, Danny Quigley. It was incredible to witness Danny's stamina, courage, resilience, determination, compassion, and generosity in trying to make our community a better place for everyone, especially those with serious mental health issues.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have witnessed ordinary people doing extraordinary things, especially our frontline and key workers. A year on, we are even more indebted to all of them. I attended the 'Derry Journal People of The Year Awards' at the end of September. It was a brilliant evening celebrating people of all ages who are doing fantastic work in our community, often on a voluntary basis.

All the nominees are winners in my eyes and unsurprisingly, Danny Quigley was a very deserving winner in two categories. I was particularly impressed to see Tazmin White recognised for her efforts to have a much-needed

detox centre in Derry, alongside Gary Rutherford, Micky Doherty and Eve McIvor, who have all done incredible work to support people through the pandemic.

Anyone living the North West knows all too well the plight of families affected by the Mica scandal. It was hoped that the redress scheme introduced in 2020 would provide a solution, but it was flawed and proved too costly for the families. It was always going to be very difficult to get Mica Redress back on the Government's agenda despite the excellent work of the MICA Action Group. One man changed that. Paddy Diver is someone who never failed to impress me in 2021, from the time my son, Denis showed me his Facebook Mica posts last May. For me, Paddy's efforts to get 100% redress for all the Mica families is one of the best examples of standing up against injustice and being a good neighbour day in and day out.

Lord bless all those who give so freely of themselves to help others. Help me to be more caring, more helpful, more generous, and more compassionate. Help me to learn from the example of Danny, Tazmin, Eve, Gary, Micky, and Paddy. They are shining examples of what Pope Francis calls 'vaccines for the heart'. They are powerful reminders that one person really can make a difference. Bless them in all the work they do.

Faith

2021 saw us set up an Adult Faith Group in our parish of Iskaheen and Upper Moville. Fr John Farren did not specify what he thought we should be doing, so I suppose, in this



continued from page 14



way, he will never be disappointed that we didn't do what he asked.

We are a small group who have been meeting remotely since June. We wanted to give people an opportunity to talk about their faith and to shine a light on the faith-filled lives that we often take for granted in our parish. In September, we began to post weekly on the parish Facebook page. We interviewed parishioners about their life and the role faith plays in their lives. We alternated this with readings and reflections from the following Sunday's Gospel. The reaction has been great; people enjoy both taking part and listening to others' stories. It reinforces a sense of togetherness and community during these times.

For Advent, we had young children doing readings with

a Christmas theme. We asked people from different places to talk about Christmas traditions in their home country. We talked about Christmas traditions like the Advent Wreath. We had reflections celebrating children and all the new babies born in 2021. We also had a special reflection remembering our dead, especially those who died since last Christmas. We had some readings and reflections and carols in Irish.

We are very much learning by doing. We are keen to hear from other Adult Faith groups to share ideas. You can get in touch with me via email at marieglindsay@gmail.com. Hopefully we will manage to have more face-to-face meetings and events in 2022.

For me personally, 2021 was full

of blessings. We managed to have three family weddings in eight months. Fionnuala, our youngest, got married to Ross on the most spectacular snowy day at the end of December 2020, just before we all went into another lockdown. Like so many other couples, our eldest son, Lee and his fiancée, Nikki had postponed their 2020 wedding to March 2021. Denis and his fiancée, Maria had planned to marry on Easter Monday in 2021. Both weddings had to be postponed. Lee and Nikki were married in a beautiful setting near The Glen of the Downs, in Wicklow, in late June, and Denis and Maria tied the knot in the stunning Our Lady, Star of the Sea Church in Desertegney, in early August. Even though these were lockdown weddings with just close family, we celebrated in style. We had the best time with very special people, who really were wonderful company and the best of craic.

Collie and I were 40 years married in October. After all those very busy years, we are finally 'home alone'. I just love to see the 'wains' coming home. We were very blessed to all be together for Christmas and the New Year thanks to a never-ending series of negative lateral flows and

PCR tests.

Finally, I was honoured to receive several special recognitions to mark my retirement from St Mary's College. In May, I, along with Collie, Mrs Gay Durkan, Mrs Downey, Mr Mc Ginn and Head Girl, Kate Gallagher attended a lovely ceremony at the Guildhall, where Mayor Tierney presented me with a plaque to mark my contribution to education. It was a very thoughtful gesture and I'm very proud of the part of me that will always be a #DerryGirl.

I was humbled to receive the Inspirational Educator Award at 'The Derry Journal People of the Year Awards'. It was sponsored by Ulster University and presented by Prof Malachy O'Neill, Director of Regional Development. There is something very special about being honoured in your own place and receiving this award gave me that very special feeling.

Finally, I got the send-off of the century from Mr McGinn and the entire St Mary's family when they somehow persuaded the Pearson Teaching Awards team that I was worthy of a Lifetime Achievement Award. I still can't get my head around it and I still can't believe that Mr Mc Ginn managed to get

Ronan Keating and Bill Clinton in on the surprise. I experienced not so much what Pat Spillane called a Tyrone 'vacuum of information' but rather a Tyrone 'drip feed of misinformation' that landed me the surprise of my life! I am so grateful for the efforts they went to. It was brilliant and I had a ball.

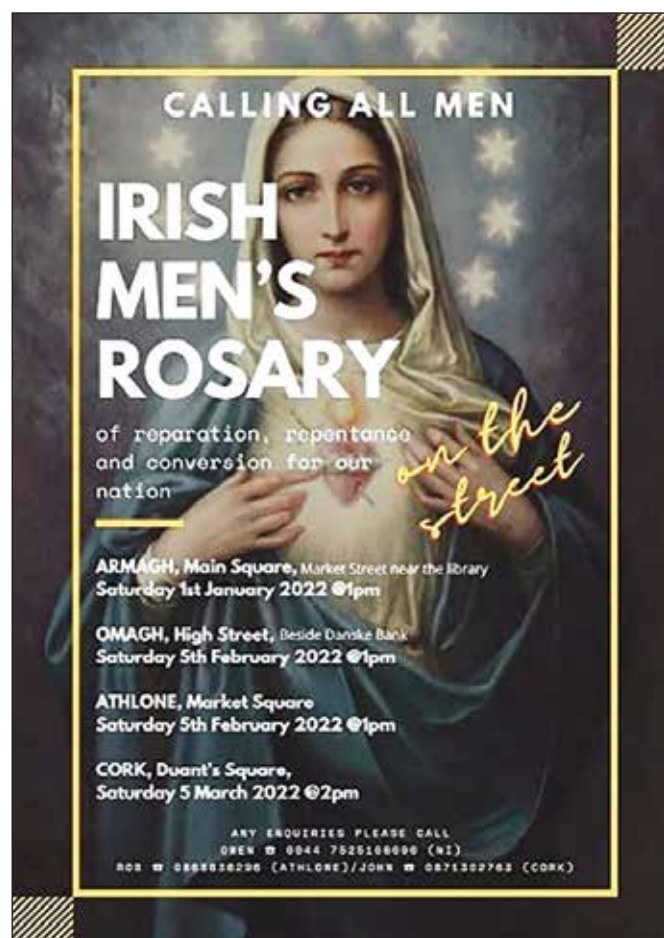
Winning it alongside my friend and colleague, Michael Allen, made it even more special. I know that I am truly blessed, and I am indebted to everyone who helped, challenged, and inspired me throughout my career. I owe my mother and father a great debt of

gratitude for educating me when it was neither popular nor profitable, and the money I could have earned in Lynch's shirt factory in Muff would have been badly needed in our home. I dedicate all this lovely recognition to them.

Thank you, Lord, for the blessings in my life. You have surrounded me with people who always look out for me. You have given me family and friends who bless me every day with kind words and actions. Help me to be a true friend, to look out for others, to support, encourage and challenge so that others may enjoy all that I have enjoyed. Amen.



Archbishop Eamon and fellow Derry men at Armagh Rosary



MEN from the Derry Diocese once again travelled to support the Men's Public Rosary for the reparation, repentance and conversion of the nation.

On New Year's Day, the Main Square at Market Street, in Armagh, saw a large gathering of

males kneeling to pray the Rosary together, including Archbishop Eamon Martin.

The next one will be on Saturday, February 5, at 1 pm, in Omagh, with the Rosary being prayed at High Street, beside Danske Bank.



Celebrating Christian Unity Week

CHRISTIAN Unity Week takes place this year from January 18-25 and this year's theme is: 'We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship Him'.

The 2022 theme was chosen by the Middle East Council of Churches, in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to evoke the experience of the Three Kings, or Magi.

During the week, Christians are invited to reflect each day on a specific theme, as part of the overall theme.

The daily themes are: 'We observed His star in the East'; 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?'; 'When king Herod heard this he was

disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him'; 'And you, Bethlehem...are by no means least'; 'Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising'; 'They saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid Him homage'; 'Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh'; and 'They left for their own country by another road'.

The world-wide celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be closed on January 25 by Pope Francis, when the Holy Father will preside over Vespers (Evening Prayer) at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls on the Solemnity of the Conversion of St Paul.

Novena in honour of St Patrick

A NOVENA in honour of St Patrick gets underway on January 19 to pray for the renewal of the faith in Ireland.

The nine-week novena will take place on Wednesday evenings at 7 pm, until March 16, starting with the celebration of Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral, in Armagh, by Archbishop Eamon Martin.

The time of prayer will also include Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary and Novena prayers to St Patrick.

Each Wednesday night the Novena prayers will take place in

a different church across Ireland, following in the footsteps of St Patrick.

Shalom World Prayer will broadcast the novena each evening at www.swprayer.org, and also ask people to make a holy hour in their Church each week in reparation for the sins of Ireland and for a renewal of the faith throughout the country.

Posters to promote the St Patrick Novena in churches or on social media can be requested by emailing joemonj@shalomworld.com.



Reflecting on the value of Catholic Education...

THERE is a saying, "You never miss the water 'til the well runs dry", that is, it is only when something is gone that we truly appreciate it.

With an independent review currently underway regarding education in Northern Ireland, and, with Catholic Education regularly criticised as being a relic of a divided past, the future of Catholic Schools is in question.

As we prepare to celebrate Catholic Schools Week from January 23-30, a number of people in the Diocese have shared their thoughts on the value of Catholic Education for our young people and society.

Considering the place for faith-based education in an increasingly diverse and secular Northern Ireland into the future, they have reflected on whether Catholic schools can be welcoming to pupils from all faith backgrounds and none, how Catholic schools in Northern Ireland can promote reconciliation and not be seen as supporting division, and whether one secular state system is the only way forward.

Catholic Education in Northern Ireland – Challenges and Opportunities *by Bishop Donal*

CATHOLIC Education is a worldwide phenomenon. And in many non-Christian countries, it is highly sought after. Catholic schools are not merely the product of a divided Northern Ireland society.

But in Northern Ireland, it has its own particular history. During difficult times, parishes so valued education that they found huge sums of money to invest in building primary and secondary schools. It is just over 30 years ago that the Government actually began to pay 100% of the building costs for Catholic schools.

For those communities, high quality was the way out of poverty and the results of discrimination. We are now reaping the benefits of education where there is a strong community dimension and buy-in.

Today we face new challenges...

- In a society which is more committed to reconciliation, how do we ensure that our schools actively contribute to that and do nothing to perpetuate division?

- In a racially more diverse society, how do we go beyond the tribal Catholic-Protestant stereotype?

- In the context of an agreed core curriculum, how can Catholic schools offer a distinct worldview?

- In a more secular society, how do we continue our contribution, even though some wish to remove any role for religious beliefs from the public sphere?

- In a society where too many young people do not experience success in their education, how does the Catholic sector, the highest achieving schools in Northern Ireland, be part of the remedy for this?

These are some of the questions that the Northern



Bishop Donal speaking at the Diocesan Religious Education Conference that was held in St Columba's College in January 2020.

Ireland Assembly's 'Independent Review of Education' (www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk) has to deal with. And they are inviting people to be involved in that discussion.

Firstly, as regards the challenges facing Catholic schools, we have to deal with an oft-repeated assumption that there are 'bad segregated schools' and 'good integrated schools'. The picture is much more nuanced!

Some of the officially 'Integrated Schools' have a good community balance – and some have a very poor level of mixing. Indeed, some of the schools with the most integrated communities are Catholic schools that are proud of their identity, such as St Columbanus College and St Malachy's PS in Bangor, and Loreto and Dominican Colleges in the Coleraine/Portstewart area.

For so-called 'newcomer children', 52% of them have opted for a Catholic school. Indeed, perhaps the most racially mixed schools in Northern Ireland are Catholic schools in Dungannon and Craigavon.

Thus, Catholic schools have shown that they can be active contributors to a more integrated educational provision.

Secondly, the simplistic

'segregated v integrated' dichotomy implies that there is the only way forward, namely making all schools 'Integrated'. But there is another model that the Churches here have agreed with the Department of Education, namely a Joint Church school. That would be a school that, like examples in England and other countries, is actively led by local churches. There are currently no examples of this in Northern Ireland, but we are working on it! Thirdly, diversity and choice are key elements of a modern society. It would be very strange indeed if we were to promote a 'right to choose' in everything, except parents having choices in the education of their children! Furthermore, various human rights conventions give parents the right to choose an education that is in conformity with their religious and philosophical convictions.

Fourthly, in every other jurisdiction, Catholic schools are chosen, partly because of the academic quality of their output and partly because they espouse a particular way of looking at the world.

Indeed, Pope Francis wrote in 2004 when he was still a bishop in Argentina, "if in our schools we do not develop a different way of being

human, a different culture and a different society, we are wasting our time!"

The challenge for our Catholic schools in a modern society is not to become more like everybody else, but actually to offer a distinct faith-based worldview and way of life. Otherwise, we have little to offer.

Thus, when it comes to the Independent Review of Education, the members face hard questions. How do we deal with underachievement? How do we get best value for the money spent in schools? How do we facilitate diversity?

Our children deserve nothing but the best quality we can offer, and Catholic schools, who make up the largest sector in Northern Ireland, expect only to have a place at the table and not to be told to sit in the corner with a dunce's hat on!

I encourage everybody to get involved in the discussion, making your views known to your local politicians.

Bishop Donal will be celebrating Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral on Thursday, January 20, at 10 am, to launch Catholic Schools' Week 2022, the theme for which is 'Living life to the full'.

Aim of Catholic school is to reveal Jesus as "The Truth, The Way and The Life"

by Martina Davidson



Martina Davidson, Head of Religious Education at St Cecilia's College, Derry.

WHAT makes a Catholic School distinctive is what makes the Catholic Church distinctive; a love for the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, a respect and love for Mary our heavenly Mother, and an appreciation of the saints, to name a few. The Catholic ethos of the

school should be evident in every aspect of school life, from morning prayer (Rosary and Adoration), assemblies and liturgical events, to retreats and pilgrimages.

The responsibility of a teacher in a Catholic school is to be a witness to the goodness of God. St John Bosco tells us, "Whatever you do, think of the glory of God as your main goal." We are compassionate, loving, forgiving and generous because we have a compassionate, loving, forgiving and generous God through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" In today's world young people are told by society and the media to "live your own truth." In an increasingly confusing world, it can be very difficult for young people to recognise what the truth is. Jesus, however, makes it clear that He is "The truth, the way and

the life."

In a Catholic school, it is our aim to reveal this truth to our young people. The truth is each and every one of them is "created in the image and likeness of God." A Catholic school makes a child fully aware of their true identity. They have a dignity and worth that is not based on what they say or do, but on the truth that they are a child of God. God has a plan for their life and a life with Jesus will be a "life of abundance." They belong to Jesus and His Spirit lives in them; to guide them, change them, strengthen them and heal them.

We prepare them for the reality that life will be hard. However, as followers of Jesus, they will not be alone. Jesus told us "pick up your cross (life) and come follow me." He will help them carry their cross and they will help others carry theirs.

As a follower of Jesus, they have a responsibility to be a light in the darkness. A light of hope, joy, peace and love within their homes, parishes and communities, while at school and after they leave. The purpose of their life is not the accumulation of material wealth or achieving accolades. The purpose of their life is to live a life pleasing to God, "To love God and to love others."

A Catholic school looks to Jesus for everything. Jesus is not someone we just talk about or teach about. His Spirit is the very essence of all we do. He is welcome in our classrooms. He lives and breathes and acts in every aspect of school life. Every decision that is made should be guided by the Gospel values and the teachings of the Church, because we are not just a school, we are a Catholic school.



Catholic Education shows how we fit into this world *by Brenda Deery*



Brenda Deery, teacher at St Mary's Limavady.

EDUCATION is an important aspect of our development as it enables us to function as human beings within this world during our many stages of life. Education is the acquiring of knowledge, skills and discernment tools needed to make important daily and life decisions.

Too often in our secular society, we are not encouraged to do the critical thinking and discernment before acting out our lives. We are being bombarded by images, ads, sound bites, lifestyles etc, and unconsciously manipulated to follow these fads and lifestyles. The busyness of life and the influences of technology and media are forcing themselves upon us.

Secularism, relativism, humanism, materialism, and the many more 'isms' are in vogue. Traditions are being slated as being out of touch or for the 'unenlightened' people of the past. We are now 'progressives' in our new world so all values of the past are being attacked.

As Cardinal Sarah pointed out about our society: "Good and evil no longer exist. Relativism, the terribly effective bleach, has wiped out everything in its path. Doctrinal and moral confusion is reaping its height. Evil is good, and good is evil. Man no longer feels any need to be saved. The loss of the sense of salvation is the consequence of the loss of the transcendence of God".

Thus, our long fought for Catholic education is being seriously undervalued, attacked and undermined. However, I believe the attack on our Catholic education stems from ignorance, fear and intentional anti-Christ sources. In our modern world, the new norms include power, money, success at all costs, self-centeredness, lies, anxiety, fear, control and aggression. In our present culture it is all about relativism and emotivism.

It is alright if I 'feel' it is right for me. "I think therefore I am", René Descartes's philosophy and moral

absolutes and divine truths are mocked, sneered at and viciously dismissed by our modernists. What do they offer in their place? Shallow temporal remedies which, too often, dismiss the rights and dignity of others. The modern world cannot deal with objective truths, silence, gentleness, truth, patience, forgiveness and love, to name but a few.

This is why there is such a desperate need for authentic Catholic Education, which is about the development of the whole person; intellect, spiritual, physical and emotional. Enabling each person to develop the values and beliefs needed to live a full life on this earth, with the knowledge, peace and contentment of knowing its end is to reach their true and eternal home with their spiritual family forever.

Biology teaches the stages of our physical life, theology teaches the stages of our temporal and eternal life. All these stages are gifts and are beautiful. Science is an amazing knowledge, but add faith to it and it becomes a life-enhancing knowledge that does not manipulate or exploit our fellow human being, especially the unborn, for economics goals only.

Blue print

Catholic education values all life not just some lives. Catholic education values all people not just the intellectually gifted. Catholic education enlightens all to look to their ancestors' story of salvation in order to make sense of their own. Catholic education takes note that the 'greatest human being' to walk on this earth, Jesus Christ, provided us with the 'blue print' on how to live a fully human life. Catholic education is rooted in God's work of salvation and shows us how we fit into this world today. It gives purpose and the life-plan

for all to ensure they understand their own dignity and worth and how they can assist in building up the Kingdom of God for future generations.

Catholic education is rooted in Christian anthropology as summarized:

- Men and women are made in the image and likeness of God as revealed in Sacred Scripture;
- Men and women are fundamentally disordered as a result of original sin;
- Men and women are redeemed by Christ;
- Men and women grow to their fullness in and through Christ's example and His gifts of faith, the sacraments, prayer (in its many forms) and charity;
- Men and women are called to communion (within the Trinity) and are trinitarian by nature;
- Men and women are created to be gifts to each other in their relationships and service of others (not self-serving).

When people understand their true nature and its meaning and worth, no matter where they live, they will live purposeful lives and add value to their culture and community. Many of our present problems in families and society are caused by our insecurities and lack of knowledge. We want to dominate, possess, control etc, simply because we do not want to comprehend that this world is passing. The secular world is doing everything to distract us in order that we live solely for their materialist, self-serving, secular purposes. They drown out moral discernment and eternal realities.

The only hope for our young people is Catholic education and catechesis. Our Catholic schools are there to ensure young people are enlightened and affirmed in the temporal and eternal truths as revealed in Scripture, passed

on through sacred traditions and taught by the Magisterium.

Within the Catholic school, students need to experience environments/cultures which radiate Christian values, provide rich communal living, promote prayerful experiences, impart wholesome knowledge, and encourage critical thinking. They need these foundations to enable them to make good decisions in their lives. They need hope and joy to be embedded within them as the chaos of our increasingly secular society inflicts them. They need to know the reality of sacrificial living in order to free themselves from the adversaries that attack them.

They need to understand the greatness of God and His Blessed Mother and the necessity of the 'Armour of God' (Ephesians 6:10-18) in order to embark on their life journey and navigate the spiritual battles that continue to play out in our world. They need to know their place within the universal church and their companions, including the saints and holy souls, who assist them on a daily basis. They need to understand the 'shelters' that exist for them in this world and how the 'manna' - Jesus Christ - is available to them to grow in love, wisdom, strength and hope.

Catholic education provides wholesome knowledge and the initial training necessary to ensure our young people always have hope in their heart, and know where they can go to receive direction, forgiveness and nourishment for their journey.

We must continue to fight to ensure our young people can have access to Catholic education; our ancestors fought this fight many centuries ago and we owe it to Christ to continue this battle to preserve authentic Catholic education.

Catholic schools instil values that allow young people to be influencers for good in society *by Marguerite Hamilton*



Marguerite Hamilton, former principal of Thornhill College.

ON the day I started to write this article, Pope Francis chose education for one of his daily reflections. He wrote: "Education is always an act of hope that, from the present, looks to the future." Elsewhere, he has described the principal role of education as being to teach us to be "generous". Schools are to be places that not only expand our intellect but help us to "reflect on the two fundamental values of freedom and service."

In my 39 years teaching in a Catholic school, I can honestly say that I taught alongside people who may not have articulated those principles so succinctly, but who tried to live them in their day-to-day interactions with young people and adults in the school Community.

Catholic schools will be able to point to all the additional programmes, opportunities that they give to their children and young people so that they will develop their gifts and talents. They will help them to develop that key skill, the ability to discern, to choose - this is what gives true freedom - and they will instil in them the values that will allow them to be influencers for good when they take their place in the wider society.

I use the term 'community' quite deliberately because I believe the call of every Catholic school is to be a nurturing place where we will care, challenge and help young people and adults to journey in discovering their unique value as children of God; God who reveals Himself in the Trinity, the community of love.

The Catholic school is, therefore, much more than a group of individuals coming together to learn and teach subjects, pass examinations and move on. It is a place where a committed community learns together the Gospel values of love, respect, forgiveness, and puts these values into practice.

How often as teachers have we been taught by the resilience of some of our young people, who in the most difficult of personal circumstances have shown such forgiveness and moral courage. How often at staff meetings have we heard our colleagues come up with

new and innovative initiatives that would provide opportunities for community involvement and the service about which Pope Francis talks.

This reaching out to the wider community, particularly the vulnerable, that we see schools involved in at all times of the year is faith in action and underlines our connectedness to and our inclusion of one another. It teaches children and adults to look beyond themselves to wider society and helps develop a sense of our responsibility to those in need.

To put it quite simply, this is what we do in Catholic schools because this is what Jesus wants us to do. Jesus as the motivator of all we do will allow us to see each individual made in His image and likeness; each individual with that unending potential for giving and receiving love, for giving and receiving forgiveness, and for making a difference in the world.

We unlock Jesus' vision of the Catholic school as we pray together, read His Word together and come to an understanding of what this means. When we celebrate our successes and stand together in solidarity, sharing another's grief and sorrow, we are expressing that oneness to which we are called. When we lead our young people in a living, lifegiving expression of faith, what a gift we are giving them.

This is a challenge in today's society that promotes the individual before the community, that tries to side-line faith as old fashioned and unnecessary. In the North, there is a crass, simplistic narrative emerging that would have us believe our divisions can be reduced to religious intolerance and, therefore, will be solved when we end denominational schooling and educate children together. This ignores the initiatives schools were and are involved in to promote mutual understanding and better community relations.

Catholic schools exist to help parents who are the first educators of their children. It is for Catholic parents to ask themselves is the Catholic school serving our child? Do you want the freedom to use your right as a parent to choose to have your child educated in a faith environment?

I am conscious that this brief article only allows me to touch on aspects of Catholic education. May I draw your attention to the work being done in support of Catholic education by the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre... reflections and updates are posted regularly on their Facebook page.





Values of Catholic Education in a diverse and pluralist society

by Michael O'Kane

PLURALISM affirms the diversity within a society and also views that there is more than one correct logic. I like to read back on the stories of the ministry of Jesus for inspiration and it always stands out to me the diversity of the followers of Jesus, as He travelled around places talking about how we should treat each other.

His disciples came from diverse backgrounds, with some even vilified by their communities, like Matthew the tax collector. His followers, both men and women, were fishermen, political activists and even sometimes sceptics of God's message. However, they came together and discussed, debated, argued and agreed, all while they helped Jesus with His ministry.

I like to think, while definitely not in any way comparable with the followers of Jesus, that I prescribe to the ideas around pluralism and diversity. I think my experience mirrors the make-up of the education system in the North of Ireland; I have taught children in controlled schools, integrated schools and maintained schools.

These schools exist in direct response to the rights of parents of school going children and, to me, it is no surprise that almost half of the parents of school going children choose to send their children to Catholic schools.

While not ignoring the geographical location of a number of schools within urban and rural communities, pluralism in the North of Ireland has resulted in the opportunity and, indeed, the right of parents to expect the educational community to reflect their particular beliefs and values.

I can't comment on children from any other school apart from my own, however, I can hazard an educated guess that all Catholic

schools in the North nurture and care for children from so many diverse backgrounds and countries, similar to our school in Claudy. Indeed, 53% of all newcomer children in the North attend Catholic schools. The distinct contribution of Catholic schools is extremely important in ensuring a society with respect, tolerance and understanding.

It is the values present within Catholic schools that resonate with me as a parent, as a teacher and as a principal. I first became aware of how to treat other people with respect when, at a young age at primary school, I listened to my teacher at the time tell us about the story of Jesus befriending Zacchaeus – regardless of his background.

It always amazes me how people spend thousands of pounds every year learning about leadership in life and work, when the example of Jesus, regardless of anyone's beliefs, is there for everyone to learn from. His caring approach, the way he developed and nurtured a team of people from diverse backgrounds, His strength through testing times and, ultimately, His servant leadership and how He put the needs of others ahead of His own.

In these very difficult times, with so much disinformation in the world, the need for strong effective links between home, school and the community have never been more important. Leaders with the courage, convictions and moral authority of Mandela, Marie Curie and Mother Teresa are now few and far between. We need to be looking closer to home and, indeed, at ourselves as parents and community members, at being strong, positive role models for our children.

In our Catholic schools, we strive to give children an unconditional

The strong roots of Catholic Schools

by Edel O'Connor



Edel O'Connor, Coleraine, RE Teacher Scoil Mhuire Buncrana.

"What a storm can do is terrify my roots and make me new." (Brendan Kennelly, 'The Willow')

CATHOLIC schools have faced many storms and challenges but they stay strong, rooted in the solid ground of their foundation – the person of Jesus Christ. In an age dominated by social media and during this time of pandemic, significant new pressures are brought to bear on children and adolescents, on families, on religious practice, on schools and on society. Change is the nature of life yet there is a constant – Jesus Christ.

Catholic schools continue the work of Jesus the teacher. Jesus is called 'teacher' on forty-six occasions in the Gospels. What did Jesus teach? He told the people that the reign of God was dawning in the midst and encouraged them to the call of Christian discipleship. Teachers are role models of the Christian values and they encapsulate the positive school climate and Catholic ethos of our schools.

Catholic schools aspire to create an open, happy, stimulating and mutually respectful community environment. The word 'Catholic' itself originates from a Greek word meaning universal. Inclusion is at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry. Catholic schools are open and welcoming to all cultures, faith traditions and to those of no faith.

Pope Francis encourages us to love as a safe base for them to feel happy in their surroundings. We serve them with as many opportunities as we can to nurture their gifts and talents. If we don't offer activities that suit a particular child's needs, we go out and find resources and services that do and bring them into our school.

We provide lots of opportunities in lessons for children to articulate their thoughts and views. Through sport, music, prayer, environmental activities and community celebrations, we give children an opportunity to integrate into the community, develop confidence and ultimately grow socially, emotionally, academically and physically.

It is of crucial importance that the impending Independent Review

"strive to ensure that Catholic schools are truly open to all". In fact, the increasingly diverse population in terms of culture, language and belief system are enriching our Catholic schools.

I am a teacher of Religious Education in Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana, which is a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School founded in the Sisters of Mercy tradition. As a Catholic school, the person of Jesus Christ is at the heart of our community and Gospel values permeate the whole school experience. As educators working in a Mercy school, we recognise our responsibility to develop our students to be agents of social change who will commit themselves to building a better world. The leaders of tomorrow are in our classrooms today.

Catholic Schools Week is an opportunity to celebrate the academic excellence, holistic development and faith formation found in our schools. The theme for

2022 is 'Living Life to the Full'. It is a privilege to be a Religious educator in Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana, and affording students opportunities to live their lives to the full.

Faith is seen in the bits and pieces of everyday school life. The students are not afraid to express their faith in various ways through prayer, charity works and involvement in the Pope John Paul II Awards. The students are willing to use their talents to interview people about their faith for their parish social media pages, and they reach out to the marginalised and engage in many social justice initiatives.

Catholic schools seek to transform not only the individual human lives of our pupils, but also, through them, the society which they will help to build.

In the Book of Proverbs, we are reminded that without a vision, people will perish. As we prepare to celebrate Catholic Schools Week, may we focus on the purpose, values and vision of Catholic

Education.

Catholic education promotes an explicit system of values based on the Gospels. It prepares people not merely for the world of work but for the challenges of life. Catholic education begins in the home, continues in the school and matures through involvement with the Christian community in the parish.

St Irenaeus reminds us that "The Glory of God is people fully alive". During Catholic Schools Week, may we acknowledge and celebrate the vibrancy and strength that Catholic schools bring to our communities.

Despite the storms and challenges, Catholic education remains alive, strong and renewed as they place their trust in the words of our Lord. "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed. For I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).



of Education here in the North recognises that respect for others, understanding for differing views and, indeed, an acceptance of parental views when preparing their findings. Pluralism, diversity and understanding are paramount for the success of our children and of future generations as they navigate this ever-increasing difficult world we live in.

I make no apologies in stating that I try my best to model the ethos and values that I have grown up with through my Catholic faith, those values I have mentioned in detail above. In the opinions of others, it may not be their way to live, and I have the utmost respect for everyone's opinion, but I think it is a great way to live.



Catholic schools part of global network welcoming 60 million pupils of all faiths and none

by Eugene O'Neill



Eugene O'Neill, Director of Workforce Planning and Governance in CCMS.

THE restoration of the local Assembly at the beginning of 2020 brought with it a series of agreements that were presented in a policy called 'New Decade New Approach' (NDNA). This was an ambitious and challenging programme that connected our public service and included the commission of an external, independent review of education.

The Terms of Reference for the review were wide and so open ended that it presents as a review of just about everything, but, in a nutshell, the Panel is being asked to "focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils, and the prospects of moving towards a single education system."

Before the onset of Covid-19, I attended an NAHT conference, where Professor Tony Gallagher quoted the American author and educator, Neil Postman, who wrote: "Children are the living

messages we send to a time we will not see." I think of that message often, especially when Bishop McKeown, who is the chairman of CCMS, challenges us to think bigger and always to strive to make things better for all children, irrespective of their background, for our shared society, and, to leave no child behind, especially those who are most vulnerable and in most need of our support.

We should never resign ourselves to merely making do. Rather, we should always aspire to do better with what we have.

It is in that context that I believe we should see the NDNA review as a long overdue opportunity, and be prepared to engage positively to create the shared future that we all want for those 'messages' that we are sending to that time we will not see.

That said, there is reason to be cautious but not afraid of aspects of the review. As long as it remains undefined, the vague ambition of 'moving towards a single education system' should pose some challenging questions for anyone who is even remotely committed to the concept of an education in a faith based tradition.

Of course, a single system might refer to a review of the administration and the plethora of management bodies behind schools, in which case one might say let's see where that takes us. Or, it might focus on how schools are governed or on the employment of staff in schools, in which case we might have something positive to offer from our own experience. Or perhaps more ominously, it might

signal an ambition to homogenise our diversity of schools by blending them into a mixture that is the same throughout, resulting in some form of single school sector where education in a tradition of faith, or in language immersion will no longer have a place of prominence, in which case, we must be prepared to consider how far we are really prepared to go.

Catholic and other faith-based schools exist across the world because parents have the right to choose education provision in line with their religious and philosophical convictions. They are not unique to Northern Ireland and our Catholic schools are but a small part of a global network of Catholic education in which 60 million pupils of all faiths and none are welcomed, cherished, and supported to realise their potential, and to contribute positively to the Common Good.

The vital and widely misunderstood ingredients to Catholic education are the underlying philosophy and characteristics that underpin our Catholic schools as they support all learners, regardless of ability, to realise and achieve their full potential. Catholic education encompasses all aspects of the education of children. It promotes the dignity and worth of every human person; the purpose and value of education; the relationship between education, family and the local community; and, the purpose and meaning of life itself.

Catholic education is inclusive and promotes listening, mutual understanding, trust,

reconciliation, healing, and peace. Critically, Catholic schools continue to exist because parents and carers have confidence in them and choose them because of their high quality, their academic excellence, and the holistic approach to the development of each and every child.

And yet, there are people here who see faith-based education as a stand-alone, unfamiliar entity. We hear repeated calls for 'a one size fits all' single system of education, the argument being that this will provide the cure for all that is wrong with our divided society.

Contradictory

Surely though, it is contradictory on the one hand to argue that our education system does not reflect a maturing and diverse society, and then on the other hand argue that diversity can only be realised if we remove the very diversity of choice that currently exists within our education sector.

We are all too aware of the challenges we face; our divided past and the scourge of sectarianism continue to be blights on our society, and we all long to live in a society that is fully inclusive and where everyone is respected, regardless of background or belief.

Are we convinced that the relentless pursuit of sameness will enhance every child's experience in school? Such viewpoints have the very real potential to exclude those who have a legitimate interest in the future of faith-based schooling, they gloss over the many examples of Catholic and other schools that already welcome a diverse range of pupils, and most importantly,

ignores the immense work that all of our schools have put in on the journey towards raising standards.

Leading and teaching in our Catholic schools is more than a job; it is a vocation that requires much more than the ability to raise academic standards and provide high quality learning and teaching, which our teachers do very well. The pupils in our schools get to experience teachers who are wholly committed to the pursuit of genuine excellence whilst being committed to the mission, values, and ethos of Catholic education. We have the most talented, dedicated and vocationally called people, who set the benchmark for those in their care, in terms of their own values, interpersonal relationships and commitment to Catholic education. Our teachers are faithfully committed to the ideal that no child should ever be left behind and they strive to educate and inspire every young person to develop themselves so that they can contribute to building the society and economy of our shared future.

The links between the family, parish, community, and the school are important and strong. We have Catholic schools that flourish in local communities where all children, young people, and their families, irrespective of their background, culture, or creed, are welcomed and supported. This wider sense of community helps to develop and enhance the core message of respect for diversity and inclusion across our wider society.

Why would a mature, diverse yet inclusive society that is

confident in itself ever consider compromising on excellence, or on the distinctive contribution made by our Catholic schools to the wider education system? Now, more than ever before, we must be prepared to contribute to a wider and hopefully respectful conversation in which we can be unapologetically clear about the role we see for our Catholic schools in a genuinely shared future.

Whilst every week in a Catholic school is special, this year January brings with it the celebration that we call Catholic Schools' Week. It is a week where we get to see our local Catholic schools showcasing everything they do that in one way makes each school unique. But, in another way Catholic Schools' Week also celebrates the fact that each one is part of a wider global community of high performing schools, where education in the Catholic tradition is embraced, valued and cherished by over 60 million children worldwide.

Why then, in this part of the world, do we constantly see Catholic education being held up as some type of relic of the past that is obstructive to the development of our society? Should parents, carers and learners not be granted the right to choose the school that best suits their needs and their philosophical beliefs?

(Eugene O'Neill is Director of Workforce Planning and Governance in CCMS, the employing authority for over 6,500 teachers in 450 Catholic maintained nursery, primary and post primary schools.)

Catholic schools help students apply faith to real world situations

by Sonya Darcy



Sonya Darcy, Religious Studies teacher and chaplain at Christian Brothers School, Omagh.

IT has long been recognised that the key purpose of a Catholic school is to put Christ and His teaching at the centre of all that we do, as in John 14:6 we read, "Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life".

From the outside, we may appear as places where students are equipped with the necessary training and skills for the

workplace and dutifully trained to become responsible citizens, something which is common to all educational institutions. In reality, Catholic schools are much more than this, they are communities of faith where the spiritual and cultural merge, and we provide an environment where the beliefs, values and language of our faith are taught, explained, modelled by staff, and nurtured to enable the students to take on the values and attitudes of Christ and make them their own.

In a 2018 speech to the Gravissimum Education Foundation, Pope Francis said: "Education is a dynamic reality; it is a movement that brings people to light."

Catholic education is becoming more challenging in an ever-increasing secular world, where the message of the Gospel is increasingly pushed to the margins or, indeed, rejected in favour of messages of individualism, consumerism and many other

forces that can draw us in and away from our fellow brothers and sisters, and away from God.

In this digital age, our young people are exposed to all sorts of misinformation. The online community has an addictive pull and offers many new and exciting opportunities with the promises of likes and follows, but it also has a dark side which isolates our young people rather than connect and tears down rather than build up.

Our Catholic schools unapologetically and steadfastly offer an alternative message, albeit in a quiet and often unassuming manner. We accompany our young adults on their journey into society as adults with a message which conveys: we are all children of God; we are all worthy of his love; life itself is a gift from God; we are a community of faith, united to one another through our Baptism in Christ.

We are communities where everyone belongs, offering hope, love and reconciliation, which

often contrasts with today's cancel culture. Education and faith are intertwined so that God is present in everything we do, and so it becomes possible for our students to apply the faith to real world situations and walk in the light of Christ.

Despite the headlines of falling numbers in Church attendance and decline in Church influence, in 2019 The Irish Times reported 28,000 Catholic schools in Europe educating over 8,500,000 pupils, highlighting the number of parents who still choose to send their children to Catholic schools, and view daily exposure to Catholic morals and beliefs as important in instilling character in their children, to guide them to make the right choices in their futures.

Catholic schools are known for their excellence in teaching and learning and the highest standards in academic success, but this is just a small part of what they have to offer. For they not only educate

the mind, promoting a spirit of enquiry and intellect, but they also educate the hands and the heart; teaching about social justice and promoting the common good, reaching out to the suffering and marginalised in our communities locally and globally, and practicing a living faith.

A repeated phrase found in mission statements of Catholic schools is that they are grounded in the Gospel values. This is something which is not simply taught in the Religion Studies class but must permeate every aspect of the school. The values of faith, love, service, hope, and community are witnessed in the interactions of visitors to the school, in how our staff and pupils interact with one another, in deciding the curriculum we offer to our students, in understanding that each student in our care is a child of God and has limitless potential, in celebrating their successes, and in dealing with pupil behaviour.

As I work in a Christian Brothers

School, which was founded by Blessed Edmund Rice, all aspects of school life are underpinned by our ERST Charter and five key principles: nurturing faith, Christian spirituality, and Gospel-based values; promoting partnership; excelling in teaching and learning; creating a caring school community; and inspiring transformational leadership.

It ensures that Catholic Education in the tradition of Blessed Edmund Rice continues into the future, adapting to the changing needs of the world, whilst remaining faithful to our mission and founding vision.

Listen

Pope Francis reported that young people have a desire for God, they want to develop their God given talents and use them to create beauty and to help others in our world, and he urged us to listen to our young people. From my own experience working as a Religious Studies teacher and in

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my Chaplaincy role, I have found that Christ is very much alive and active in our young people.

From Year 8 to Year 14, we work in partnership with home and parish, building on the foundations and helping them to further develop the knowledge, language and rich traditions of their faith, to ensure they have the confidence to take their faith forward into their adolescent years and beyond and make it their own. Heads of Years and Form Teachers hold weekly assemblies, both religious and pastoral, always beginning with our Blessed Edmund Rice Prayer. Pupils are encouraged to actively participate in liturgies and prayer services and in celebrating the sacraments.

Gospel values of faith and

service are instilled across all year groups and help to create the sense of community. In the words of Blessed Edmund Rice, "Have courage; the good seed will grow up in the children's hearts later."

Our senior students often take the lead in faith formation of our younger students. The senior students lead the Year 8s in Morning Prayer during the month of October and every morning of Lent, in St Brendan's Chapel, offering their time and passing on the traditions of our faith to our young students, who proudly keep their prayer cards and Rosary beads in their blazer pockets.

The senior students also take charge of our annual SVP Food Hamper collection, and each Form Class creates a family hamper and our staff contribute to the Giving Tree, both of which are then donated to our local SVPs; small acts of service showing compassion to those in need and encouraging the practice of almsgiving and living witnesses to the Gospel.

In his Synod for Young People in 2018, Pope Francis recognised that young people are spontaneous, open to peace, inclusiveness, and social commitment. They are committed to voluntary work, active citizenship and social

solidarity, as witnessed in the young people I have the pleasure of teaching. Catholic Education develops pupils who will use their talents for the common good and to work for a more just and caring society.

Our Charter promotes transformational leadership and responsibility in our students and, in practice, our students have launched their own Senior Faith Team, 'Solus', and delivered an in-house retreat to our junior students with the theme of 'Shine Your Light'; encouraging them to develop their talents and to use them to help others. Our GCSE Art Students worked on producing their own ceramic Stations of the Cross to pass down to future generations.

And, on a bittersweet day, our staff and pupils, both past and present, came together to raise funds for the Motor Neurone Disease Association with our beloved colleague, Mr Dominic O'Hara, when his son held one of his mini marathons in school. The day was a true testament to our caring school community, which extends way beyond those pupils currently enrolled. A humbling moment followed after the passing of our colleague, when our seniors quietly led the way once again and

asked to prepare their own prayer service as a tribute to their former teacher in Sacred Heart Church, Omagh, which they carried out with dignity and respect.

Catholic schools are inclusive communities that welcome all faiths, traditions, and beliefs. They celebrate the richness and diversity of the school community, while at the same time respecting the distinctive Catholic ethos of the school. This is demonstrated in our collaboration in the Omagh Learning Community, where students across a variety of schools in the area avail of subjects offered at Post 16 studies in their neighbouring schools, to ensure they have access to a curriculum which best suits their needs and prepares them for third level education.

In contemplating the distinctive nature of a Catholic School, I always find myself coming back to the phrase I first heard at university, that Catholic education provides a lens to view the world. In a world where our children are used to many filters and lenses, it is imperative that we continue to offer them ours, as it is the only one that offers a true encounter with Christ.

They will not find God by only looking inward, in selfies, on



Snapchat, or challenges on TikTok, but by looking outwards to their real relationships and connecting with those around them. They will not come to know Jesus online but in the scriptures and through their prayers. The challenge is for us to continue to guide our pupils to the

light, offering the hopeful message of the Gospel, and to constantly look for meaningful ways to engage our pupils and bring faith into dialogue with the questions that arise in the contemporary world.



Catholic schools...lighting the way towards a shared and inclusive future *by Sheila Fullerton*



Sheila Fullerton, Bellaghy, who teaches in St Louis, Ballymena.

WHEN considering the value or relevance of Catholic education and Catholic schools in society today, one must firstly consider the purpose of schools and the role of educators within such establishments, in general.

I think, and I'm sure you would agree, that a school, in and of itself, is a privileged place where

knowledge, understanding, information and skills acquired through learning and/or experience are imparted, with a view to shaping and enabling the formation of the whole individual.

Ergo, to be a teacher, an educator within this 'place' is also a privileged position – a vocation, if you like – which offers those within the teaching profession the opportunity to guide, shape and develop students in a holistic manner; a manner that is ultimately informed by the teacher's subject specialism, values, ideals, and experiences.

It is, therefore, reductive, and a little myopic, to regard a teacher as simply an imparter of knowledge, that is, simply being a 'teacher of a subject'; their values, be they religious or secular, will also inform their teaching style.

If we agree on the premise outlined above as to the purpose of schools and the role of educators, it would be, in my humble opinion, a grave error of judgement to suggest or advocate for the dissolution or abolition of Catholic schools. Schools and

their teachers, be that faith-based or secular, are firstly and foremost teachers of children, and because of this indisputable fact, faith-based schools, including Catholic schools, in any society will always be relevant.

Why, I hear you ask? Well, the answer to this question is a simple one. The Catholic ethos that pervades all elements of Catholic school life is Christocentric and, therefore, the values of Christ fundamentally shape its infrastructure, encompassing everything from: pastoral care; curriculum; management; collegiality between staff, students, and parents; external agencies and stakeholders, to name but a few elements.

And despite this, the 'popular' narrative around Catholic schools in Irish society is that they are 'relics of the past', however, nothing could be further from the truth! In a society where subjective morality prevails and attitudes towards absolutes such as Christian teachings and Divine Law are routinely challenged, dismissed, and ignored, the idea

that Catholic schools or, indeed, faith-based schools are defunct, deficient dinosaurs belonging to a bygone age, is wrong.

Irrespective of geographical location, the education sector has a duty of care to nurture students' physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual development. The Catholic school works in tandem with the home and Catholic church, a triad of support, to help students with each of the five key areas outlined above, to ensure that the children in their care are fully equipped to navigate the waters of an ever-changing and ever-evolving world.

Indeed, the importance of this security and certainty is perfectly and most succinctly encompassed in the words of St Teresa of Avila: "All things are passing; God never changes".

It is my experience currently, as a teacher in a Catholic grammar school in Northern Ireland, that never before has there been such a need dire need for spiritual security, certainty and sustenance amongst young people today, as they battle with the fall-out of

the Covid-19 pandemic, navigate the internet and social media where they are exposed to all sorts of influences, influencers and evils; issues of sexuality and gender, alongside a myriad of other complex issues and experiences, that are so vast, they are unquantifiable and, at times, unthinkable.

It gives me great comfort to know that at the helm of this ship (school), by virtue of its Catholic ethos, is Christ truly present guiding us as educators, and calming the storm that roars so very loudly around us.

However, it is also true that in the secular age we are living in, it is becoming increasingly difficult to openly identify with teachings of Christ in a professional capacity, even within a Catholic school. This is most especially evident when dealing with issues relating to the Christian vision of anthropology, which teaches that we are each created in the image and likeness of God. This teaching, therefore, establishes human sexuality as a fundamental component of personhood within this

understanding, providing a solid foundation to enable children within Catholic schools to explore sensitive and complex issues, such as human sexuality, in a safe, secure, and stable environment.

Yet, the tragic irony remains, that as our society purports to be exploring a move towards a more inclusive system of education, this inclusive system excludes faith-based schools. It is concerning that this bright future seems to seek to cancel and silence any narrative that differs from the 'popular' secular voice of the state. And as I reflect on this, I can't help but draw parallels with our Penal past, which made it illegal for Catholics to be teachers and for Catholic children to attend Catholic schools.

Penal

Despite the repeal of Penal Law centuries ago, it seems little has changed, as today the voice of Catholic teachers and voice of the Catholic school is being silenced, throttled, and choked. Rather, the move to consign Catholic schools as being 'relics'

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looks, feels, and smells very much like our Penal past. Its insidious reappearance, albeit re-branded under a different guise, has one notable exception, just like the new variants of Covid-19, this mutation's reach will be infinitely more devastating and damaging to future generations.

And so, it is our collective responsibility as Catholics – teachers, parents, clergy, and laity alike – to fight for our Catholic schools and defend our Catholic faith, to prevent this thinly veiled attempt to erase faith development from the education sector.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen reminds us: “The refusal to take sides on great moral issues is, itself, a decision. It is a silent acquiescence to evil. The tragedy of our time is that those who still believe in honesty lack fire and conviction, whilst those who believe in dishonesty are full of passionate conviction”.

And if the argument of faith is too flimsy or subjective for the secular mindset, then one only has to look at the currency of academic success that permeates the Catholic education sector across the board, at primary, secondary and third level; this success is easily quantifiable and measured. It seems almost like a societal attempt at self-harm to eradicate a system that produces such academic excellence.

This excellence in achievement is not an accident. Nor does it occur in an isolated vacuum. Rather, as I can testify from having been on both sides of the teacher's desk in the classroom, as a pupil and a teacher, in the Catholic school system, it happens because of the Christian values, whilst albeit invisible, are very much tangible, and transcend far beyond the boundaries of the subject classroom and school. The Catholic school system is one, therefore, that caters for

each child, regardless of academic ability, religious identity, sexuality, or gender, providing a platform for each child whom God has bestowed the gift of life most precious to thrive. Catholic schools do not discriminate!

We must also consider the place of Catholic schools and/or faith-based schools in an increasingly diverse and secular Northern Ireland – a Northern Ireland that, thankfully, is attempting to move away from its troubled past towards a brighter, more tolerant, and hopeful future. However, if we are to be truly objective, before we do this, we must attempt to deconstruct the complex relationship between politics and religion in Northern Ireland – not an easy task you'll agree, and not one that can be properly addressed within the remit of this article!

Northern Ireland's 'own-brand' of Christianity has to my mind been infected and tainted by politics throughout history, with

Irish Republicans and Nationalists within the six counties of Northern Ireland identifying as Catholic, and Unionists and Loyalists as Protestant. Sadly, we are still dealing with the aftermath of this toxic conflation of religion and politics within our society.

And so, as an Irish Catholic it has always been my view that it is not the Christian faith that has bred and inculcated such bitterness, but rather it is the very different and conflicting political ideologies of the majority and minority in this small geographical location. Religion and faith, and schools by association, have simply been caught up in the carnage, becoming collateral damage and, over the years, a handy 'scapegoat' to blame.

Indeed, when we examine the Christian religion shared by Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and all over the world, they have by virtue of their shared Christian faith much more

that unites than divides.

Therefore, it is an ignorant, oversimplification to suggest that the education system in Northern Ireland is sectarian and divisive. How can Catholic schools and the Catholic education sector, which as we've already established is Christocentric, be considered as being sectarian and divisive or feeding sectarianism and division? Did Christ not command us to: “Love one another as I have loved you”, and to “Love your neighbour as yourself”?

Catholic schools, therefore, are powerful advocates of respect, tolerance, and reconciliation, and as such, hold the keys to enabling Northern Ireland to achieve its objective of moving towards a more tolerant, hopeful, and inclusive future. Arguably, this relegates the argument that they are 'relics of the past' as being both ridiculous and redundant!

Ultimately, if a society is to be truly tolerant, diverse, and

inclusive, surely this means that there should always be a place for faith-based schools in society. And yet, the narrative echoing throughout society today appears to have overlooked this issue. You see, it is this very contradiction that exposes the ugly truth that beats at the heart of our increasingly secular society and its infrastructures – tolerance, inclusion and diversity apply to all and everything except faith and religion. Therefore, this contradiction is something that must be considered as part of the independent review regarding education in Northern Ireland.

It is a grave misconception, or perhaps even a grave deception, to suggest that there is no place for values, ideals and morality in schools – if this is the case, how then do we separate the secular values, ideals and morality from permeating the corridors of a one secular-state system of education?

Catholic Education - A positive impact on society *by Rory McGilligan*



Rory McGilligan, Dungiven, is a laboratory technician in St Columba's College, Derry.

A MOVE away from Catholic Education to a more secular system can only be considered as a regressive step. As mentioned in other articles that I have written for 'The Net', our church is in a state of transition; we are slowly moving from a church of maintenance to one of mission.

We are now asked to be more proactive regarding our faith. Pope Francis wants us to listen and engage with people who are not within our faith community, and hopefully we can share some common ground. As people of faith this listening or outreach helps us develop a deeper relationship with God.

Catholic schools can be considered as places of outreach. We welcome children into our Catholic schools, where their education will be rooted in the Gospel values of respect and love and hope.

Surely if we were not to have Catholic education would these

values that we espouse to dwindle within society? Surely society would suffer as a whole if there was less respect, love and hope, and goodness knows what the consequences would be not only for society but also for the individual.

In Mickey Hart's new book, 'Devotion', his son Mattie describes how his faith gave him hope, and this hope was able to help him especially at the time when his sister tragically died.

Maybe Catholic Education is not perfect and there probably are some parts which could be done better. However, it has a place in our future. Like myself, my children go to a Catholic school. I, like most parents, want my children to have the best start in life.

My faith is such a positive part of my life, it was given to me by my parents and enhanced and developed through my years at school. We prepared for the sacraments together, we learnt their importance, we saw from how much preparation the teacher put in that this was truly going to be a very important day.

The preparation and importance given to the sacraments, as well as important liturgical events throughout the year, has stayed with me, as it all happened during my formative years. That is why I don't want my children missing out; my faith has been my rock and has given me so much support through my life.

The children of the twenty-first century have more demands, more distractions and maybe even detractors. Bringing the children of today and tomorrow and educating them through Catholic schools

is a must to help on life's journey. In Catholic schools, those Gospel values of respect, love and hope will be in abundance and help them within a society that demands more from children emotionally than it ever did do.

Catholic schools, like Jesus, are welcoming. They endeavour to meet everyone where they are at. Children who may not be of the Catholic faith, or of any faith, will still benefit from the rewards of being educated in a Catholic School, where core values stem from the Gospel.

Having been a pupil of Catholic schools, as well as being employed in one for many years, I have only ever come across respect shown towards people who do not espouse to be Catholic. Catholic schools are inclusive towards people of a different faith or of none.

It may be easy at some level to think that we should, as a society move away from Catholic

education and have a more secular education system. To be honest, this may be considered superficial. It doesn't take long to dig down and see how Catholic Education is rich and rewarding. Pupils who attend

a Catholic school of the Catholic faith will learn the importance of receiving the sacraments; it will help children develop their faith. It will also help all its students to attain lifelong values of hope, love,

charity and respect for all.

Why would we rob our children, our society, of these values? Surely Catholic education can only be considered as having a positive impact on society as a whole.



Overcoming sheer lack of interest in faith values a major challenge *by Martin Harran*



Martin Harran, Urney & Castlefin.

WHILST these thoughts have been prompted by the review that is currently underway regarding education in Northern Ireland and its potential impact on faith-based education, the situation

South of the border is really not far behind with an apparently relentless attempt to drive religious education out of schools.

An immediate reaction is to want to fight these moves as something that will undermine the passing on of our Faith, but I think that before seeking to defend the status quo, we should perhaps ask ourselves how well that status quo is working and whether it is delivering real results.

Sadly, I think it is not delivering results as can be seen by the minimal levels of participation of young people in Mass and other church services. The poor attendance of children is well recognised – “We see them at First Communion but don’t see them again until Confirmation and then

until their wedding or funeral” is a common refrain. Perhaps even more worrying is the similarly minimal level of participation among young adults, the people on whom we are likely to depend for the provision of faith education outside of schools.

This is no reflection on the teachers in our schools, who work so hard to teach our religious values to our children but struggle against the fact that there is little or no interest in those values in the children’s homes, and the children are assailed from all sides by things that are, or appear to be, far more interesting.

Overcoming this sheer lack of interest is a major challenge and should be a key element of our reflection during the Synodal

Pathway. Teaching the Faith as just another school subject and, perhaps, trying to replace the current school-based approach with some sort of Sunday School framework is unlikely to give any better results than what we are currently getting.

In order to thrive, our Faith has to be part and parcel of what we are, an integral part of the lives we lead. That, to me, is the real challenge we face – getting our young people to realise the value that our Catholic Faith can add to their lives. If we can achieve that then, we will see a genuine appetite for a better understanding of that Faith and that appetite is surely what drives education and understanding.

As schools prepare to celebrate Catholic Schools’ Week, the staff of St Mary’s PS Glenview, Maghera, pay tribute to their late principal...

Francis Lagan - a man of faith who lived the ethos of Catholic education



The late Francis Lagan, who was principal of St Mary’s PS, Maghera, at the time of his tragic death on November 26, 2021.

IT is impossible to find words to truly express the amazing essence and spirit of Francis; his selfless generosity, uncompromising belief in all that is good and his unwavering commitment to family, friends and the school community of Glenview.

Sorrow fills our hearts, his loss is everywhere, tangible and real for everyone, but Francis

exemplified life, love, laughter and an irrepressible belief and faith in seeing the best in every situation... even loss.

We honour Francis by remembering how he played a unique and special role in all our lives.

Francis joined the staff of St Mary’s Glenview on November 5, 2018, as Principal, bringing with him enthusiasm, vibrancy, energy and his winning smile which remains imprinted on our hearts.

From day one, he gave commitment and inspiration to his staff and pupils. He was logical and systematic in his thinking, always willing to share his ideas and information strategies, which were to the forefront of his exemplary leadership and vision.

Albert Einstein said: “The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive”. In one word, Francis was a man who ‘gave’ generously of knowledge, expertise and skills.

Francis was a strategic thinker, a visionary who was innovative and creative. As such, he contributed much to the development of facilities in Glenview: our new 3G pitch, with funding received under the ‘One School One Club’ initiative; a fully resourced reading room and ICT suite; and a third Learning Support Centre.

He was deeply concerned with securing improvements and giving each child every available opportunity to become “The best version of themselves”, and experience success in all their endeavours.

Francis was a man of integrity, an individual with charm of personality, genuinely warm and compassionate towards his staff and colleagues in the education sector, and above all to his pupils. They were at the centre of all his hard work and we will lovingly remember his words, “It’s all about the weans”. He knew every child by name and, in a very short

time, became their “much loved principal”.

Francis was a man of faith and lived the ethos of Catholic education creating and maintaining an inclusive culture for people of all faiths. He established great community links and supported the principles of Shared Education, where differences were something to be celebrated. Faith formation of our pupils was of paramount importance to him.

His life was one that demanded notice; a life exemplifying brilliance, a life that inspired emulation, a life that burned brightly so that others’ paths were lit.

Francis Lagan was proof of how fine a person can be. He was sincere, loyal and empathetic, possessing an innate ability to connect with people, showing a genuine interest in their lives. He invested time, with unbelievable determination, in seeking solutions to assist in the plight of others.



Francis presenting flowers to Michelle McIlveen, Minister for Education, when she visited St Mary’s in June 2021.

Right: With Fr Patrick Doherty PP Maghera for the cutting of the ribbon to mark the official opening of his school’s 3G Pitch on November 5, 2021.

Below: The new 3G pitch at night.



Schools still have important role in instilling faith education in our children

by Sadie McSorley



Sadie McSorley, retired teacher of St Caireall’s, Aghyran, Co Tyrone.

RELIGIOUS Education (RE) was an integral part of our school day. After morning prayers some religious lesson or topic followed.

With me, every Friday and Monday was given to the Sunday Gospel. On Friday I read it and on the Monday we discussed it and, if suitable, dramatised it. In those days, most of us went to Mass.

The Sacraments were prepared for with the help of our priests and, as we thought, the foundation of a good Catholic Education was laid. Whether we succeeded or not may be under review.

Today, we live in a much more secular society. To many, religion is not that important. Many things have contributed to this: commercialism; Church scandals; media influence; and the belief that we can manage fine without the interference of the clergy.

The ceremony associated with First Communions, Confirmations, weddings and funerals is still widely adhered to, but there is not much attendance in between.

Schools still have an important role to play in instilling faith education in our children. The ethos and example set have always been recognised, but the home is the real educator. There, children learn by example and most parents do a fine job, but I feel that more co-operation between parents, school and Church is necessary.

There is so much change afoot that it is hard to be abreast of it! Only by pulling together, realising the solid foundation we have in schools, church and community, will we be able to face the challenges the future will surely bring.

Christian Brothers School Omagh pay tribute to much-loved colleague and teacher...

Dominic O’Hara – a dedicated, witty and loveable part of school life



The late Dominic O’Hara, CBS Omagh.

WITH his passing, Dominic O’Hara’s loss to his family and friends, and to the Christian Brothers’ Grammar School Omagh staff and pupils, past and present, was enormous. Not only was he a member of the Religious Studies Department, he was a dedicated, witty and loveable part of all aspects of school life, to which he brought his own unique energy.

Dominic was an alumnus of St Peter’s High School, Derry (1973-78) and St Columb’s College, Derry (1978-80). Before he was a teacher, he worked as a production trainee

manager in a shirt factory in Derry, as assistant manager at Olympic Sales, Bundoran, and as a sales representative in Donegal Town. His witty stories and observations of those times would provide a great source of entertainment to those fortunate enough to hear them.

He graduated with a BA Religious Studies and Education from De La Salle College, Manchester University, in 1984, and obtained a PGCE in Religious Education, Economics and Drama from Queens University Belfast (1989-90). He taught at St John Fisher School, Chatham, Kent from 1990-1993.

A native of Derry City, Dominic was the youngest of six children raised by Molly and Johnny O’Hara in Patrick Street. One of his greatest claims to fame was how he finished first in a Derry Féis, beating Feargal Sharkey into second place. The fact that Feargal Sharkey was suffering from a heavy cold rarely got mentioned.

His time in England came to

New beginnings

by Vera McFadden

I remember that people often wrote down New Year's resolutions, hoping to keep these efforts to mend their ways, but sadly the lists were too long and too ambitious.

When I was 13, I began to get very angry sometimes and shouted and behaved in a very aggressive manner. My father had died the year before. I do not know the reason for these occasional bursts of temper or why I acted in this manner. My oldest brother talked to me about them, often talking about St Columba. He was wasting his time.

Eventually, I began to think about all this. I knew that it was the wrong way to behave, probably a sin, so I went to confession. I was lucky that the priest was a very practical man and he told me, "the next time that you think you are going to get all angry, take a drink of cold water and hold it in your mouth until you calm down"; that was the solution and soon I was back to my more agreeable self – a new beginning.

All life is full of new beginnings and we can read of many important ones throughout



history. We can discover how mankind had to adapt to changing circumstances throughout the centuries, and Scripture tells of many important new beginnings and the necessity for them. The sacraments are new beginnings to help us in our spiritual lives.

When times of trouble come into our lives, we usually need people to help us to accept and develop new ways of coping, often having to change a lot in our own situation and have a new beginning, sometimes even in new employment or creating a new home. Think of the many people in the world who needed to flee from homes and escape from their country, just like the Holy Family.

There have been many new beginnings the history of the Church. Even the Old Testament contains plenty of examples of changes for the better, whether this comes from a prophet's preaching or some other reason.

One of the first new beginnings in the church happened when the Word of God was preached to the Gentiles. When the apostles saw the action of the Holy Spirit, they realised that the Gospel was to be also preached to the Gentiles, and anyway, hadn't Our Lord told them to go out into the whole world and proclaim the good news?

Pope John XXIII said that the Charismatic Movement was like a window being opened to let in fresh air. He called Brother Roger's Taizé Movement "a new springtime". When St Francis was answering God's call, Pope Urban had a dream in which he saw a man holding up a church

which was about to fall. The man turned his face towards him and it was little Francis. The church had been forgetting about the poor members of its congregation and Francis has been sent by God to help them and bring them back. The Pope's dream was confirmation of God's instruction to Francis, "rebuild my church which is falling into ruins".

I remember reading a book called 'The God of surprises'. Who would have thought that God would have chosen a happy-go-lucky young man (who, with his friends, went around Assisi serenading the young ladies) to rebuild the church? Or that he would choose a young man, a genius with a strong desire to become an actor, for the head of His Church at a very difficult time in the world? Who would have thought that He would choose a lively young girl, who avoided praying as much as she could, to be a powerful intercessor for others before the throne of God?

Insights

Catherine of Siena was a mystic since her childhood. Later, when the Church was divided, she was given insights to point the way to the Pope. He appreciated that God was speaking to him through her. He came back to Rome and continued to receive guidance from her and thus established a new beginning for the Church.

When St John Bosco was nine years old, he had a vision that showed him the work he was to undertake when he grew up; providing shelter, care and education for homeless boys who would otherwise have been exploited by businessmen or criminal gangs. These were new opportunities for the young people. The school that he founded, which included the teaching of trades and crafts,

and the books that he wrote on education were an inspiration that led to the establishing of technical colleges everywhere.

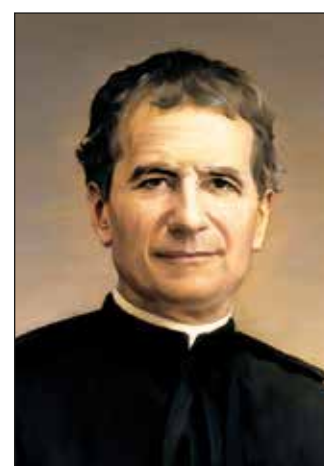
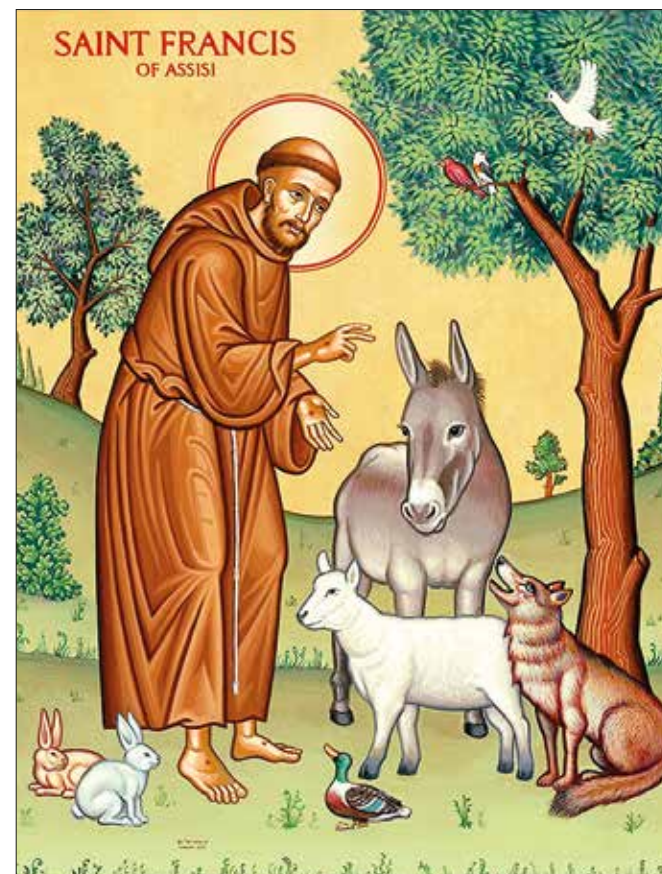
The apparitions of Our Lady direct us to prayer and earnest lifestyles. On my first visit to Medjugorje, we were told that Mary wanted us to grow in faith. The word 'grow' sounded difficult. However, because it was what Our Lady wanted, I kept the fasts and prayed the Rosary, as most of us did. Within two years, I watched the attendance at daily Mass grow from two or three to a large number. Mary's school of prayer was working worldwide.

For the past two years, we have been coping with two major threats; the pandemic and the need to change our lifestyles to protect our environments. We are all together in these situations but we are not all in agreement. We need to pray earnestly to the Holy Spirit, the source of peaceful unity. The scientists need to examine both these situations very carefully, for the sake of all mankind and future generations.

We may be unskilled and in need of guidance, but the Holy Spirit will bring the best guidance. In the meantime, when we are surrounded by warnings and guidelines on how to deal with the pandemic, we can develop a new timetable or something to make our indoor life style more interesting.

Of course, the scientists and others have been warning about climate change for a long time. The little man from Assisi, who was chosen by God to rebuild the Church, is also the Patron Saint of the Environment, most likely because of his outstanding interests in nature and his writing of the song of praise, 'Laudato Si'.

This was chosen by Pope Francis as the name for his



encyclical on climate change; a book that points out the dangers and suggests alternative ways of working. Unfortunately, not all of the big industrial nations have agreed to begin to practice these less harmful methods yet. As I said before, agreement and unity are necessary in these serious matters. Meanwhile, the rest of the world may do their best and pray for guidance and protection. Among the many other writers

who called for environmental change was Fr Sean McDonagh.

In our times of trouble, we are not alone. Jesus revealed that His help is always there, in His apparitions to Margaret Mary and Sr Faustina. So, if you are experiencing a new beginning, whether it is a happy occasion or one which you don't know how to deal with, just remember the old Irish proverb – God is nearer than the door.

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an end when the then principal, Br McCrohan told Dominic he was "bringing him home". He started teaching Religious Studies and Economics at Omagh CBS in September 1993. Lessons delivered by Dominic reflected his personality; they were lively, could involve music and were always great 'craic'.

He very quickly became an indispensable part of life in the school; rapidly becoming immersed in the extra-curricular activities of the school, with his long running involvement with the Young Enterprise Company his most noticeable legacy. Dominic led pupils to multiple awards, both regionally and nationally, and was rightly proud of 'bringing home the bacon.' He was presented with a lifetime achievement by the Young Enterprise Company in

April 2019. At Christmas time, he could be found dressed as Santa Claus for the Christmas Party with Arvalee School. He will be fondly remembered by past pupils for his energetic delivery of the RE and Enrichment Programme for senior pupils.

Dominic was an integral part of the Omagh CBS Community. He was loved by staff and pupils alike, with everyone delighting in his company. Staff members would flock around him during lunchtimes in the staffroom, as he held court and entertained all. The sound of infectious laughter emanating from the staff room when he was present was a daily event. Any troubles or concerns felt that day melted away into the background in time spent in Dominic's company. A one-liner would be delivered in lightening quick time and always in a good-natured way.

The person asked to be the Master of Ceremonies for numerous school events, including prize-giving, productions and concerts, was always Dominic. His eclectic musical interests were evident for all to see as he demonstrated his DJ qualities on Sports Day. A playlist ranging from Dean Martin to Britney Spears would always include something to please everybody. His attire for Sports Day was often a hot topic of conversation, with his bedroom slippers even making an appearance on an occasion.

He was an avid supporter of Derry City and Liverpool Football Club, and revelled in celebrating their intermittent titles and engaging in related banter with pupils and staff alike. He took great delight in seeing the improvement that the school has made on the soccer field in recent times. His knowledge of Gaelic Games was limited, a fact

in which he revelled. As a proud Derry man, he revelled in the county rivalry between Tyrone and Derry.

He was a loyal and supportive colleague. Wise words of counsel would be offered and appreciated by colleagues, particularly by younger staff members. First and foremost, his warm humanity ensured that all who met Dominic were treated with a kindness and decency that underpinned his caring nature. As a Year Head, his understanding, empathy and natural people skills helped many students in times of

pastoral and academic need.

He bore his recent illness with great bravery and dignity. He was surely comforted by his great faith and the unwavering support of his family and many close friends. On September 17, 2021, Omagh CBS hosted Emmett O'Hara, Dominic's son, in his fundraising events to raise money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association. The large turnout of Dominic's colleagues, past and present, is testament to the high esteem in which he is held and the love that so many had for him. Indeed, his wake and funeral

Mass was attended by those same colleagues and many pupils, both past and present.

Dominic, who lost his wife Dolores in 2009 following her own courageous battle with illness, is survived by his two children, Aimee and Emmett, his partner Grainne McGurk, and he was the beloved brother of Michael, Patricia, Denis, Pauline and the late Siobhan RIP.

His memory and legacy will live long within the Omagh CBS community.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.



What...Who...are you going to be when you grow up?

The Sacraments of Initiation *by Fr John McLaughlin ssc*

I can never forget my first Adult Baptism. In my late twenties, as a Reader/Chaplain (quite a low status!) in the Parish of Booterstown, and in digs in the Avenue with a lovely Dublin/Dalkey family, the Burkes, Norman had somehow been directed my way on his quest to become a Catholic, and he was just about my own young age. There, in the front room of the Burkes, I brought him through some aspects of the Catholic Church, guided by material from the Catholic Evidence Guild which was very well presented.

It was a series of conversations that accompanied us on the way to his eventual Baptism ceremony in the Church in Booterstown, and a joyful occasion for both of us. It was to be many years 'til I had a similar opportunity, which made it all the more memorable.

And seeing your good works, give glory to Our Father who is in Heaven...

Most of my celebrations of Baptism for many of the years ahead were not easy to recall, being largely ritual observances. The ritual was carried out in a little corner somewhere around the entrance to the Churches in Rialto, and later in Arklow, with only a small group present to hold the baby and hand over the piece of paper and the candle. And there was the small matter of the mother having to be 'churched' that led back to other beliefs and prevented her being present at the actual ceremony. I recall that in Our Lady of Fatima Church, in Rialto, in the Parish of Dolphins Barn, the mother presented herself for that rite by kneeling at the side-altar after the 12 o'clock Mass.

Lighted candle: He/she is to walk always as a child of the light...keep the flame of the faith alive in their heart...make the lives of their parents and grandparents examples of faith to inspire this person/child.

On one occasion there, still a junior chaplain/reader, I hurried over to complete this ceremony and get myself off to whatever football game I was to attend in Croke Park. A candle was lighted and the prayers were recited whilst she held the lighted candle. I wished her well with a smile and rushed off. The following day, the other priest of the parish finished the tale for me. It so transpired that the young aspirant was a visitor from Mexico and went back to her host family telling them about the exciting thing that occurred to her as she prayed

in front of the altar after the Mass! So there was a bit of slugging for me from the priests of Dolphins Barn and Rialto Parish!

During those years in Arkow, in the early seventies, the Ritual for the Sacrament of Baptism was completely transformed. Gone was the 'churched', so that the entire family were welcomed at the Church door and led to the font somewhere in the surrounds of the altar. This was a big change from earlier celebrations in that same Church of Sts Mary and Peter, when the local midwife, Nurse Weadick, came along with the baby, and maybe a teenager-Godfather with a sheet of paper containing the name, address and date of birth of the infant. All of which had to be checked out before the business of inscribing the details in the large Baptismal Books, which went back many years and inspired the enquiries of visiting Americans about their ancestral Catholics from the Parish. So the baby whose name was Mary or James could be Reilly or O'Reilly, Byrne or O'Byrne, and that was often a puzzle to be solved by further local enquiries.

In any case, I settled for the great moment in the introduction of the new Rite, opting for the First Friday after the evening Mass. Though some of the better-heeled wanted a ceremony apart, I held to the principle that Baptism was to be a public celebration of being welcomed into the Christian community and nothing secretive nor hierarchical about all that!

It was in my early years in Chile, as a Columban Missionary Associate Priest, that I came really to appreciate the nature and the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism. The family's first encounter was with the well-prepared parish secretary, who outlined the possible dates and chapels of their celebration, and gathered the details of the names and addresses of the candidates. The preparation encounters (loosely called charlas; a term that we tried to avoid using, as it often depicted an arid exposition of doctrine, rather than a meeting/encounter) were led by well prepared catechists, who had received their own formation in one of the Church Institutes, or at a Deanery or Zonal Summer School.

Encounters

In perhaps the third of the Encounters, the Godparents were invited to be present and received some orientation about their role in the life of the future Christian. In that period also, the babies would be presented by parents and grandparents to the worshipping Sunday Mass community, led to the front of the congregation by their proud catechist.

For the actual celebration of

the Sacrament, in their hands people would have the document-leaflet that included the words of some hymns they had prepared, the outline of the Rite, and the Questions and Promises, with the dates of encounters and place or chapel of celebration; that often became part of the history of the family's Christian Journey. So there was singing and a person appointed from the group to do any Reading or Prayers, and to keep the sometimes over-enthusiastic professional or family photographers in check!

Amongst the list of catechists that I came across, and assisted in their own preparation and bi-monthly revision, there springs to memory a long list of faces. Gilda Franco, in the Enrique Alvear Chapel in the Parish of San Columban, had a magical way it seemed, of preparing an enthusiastic group. When the initial Questions were put to each of the assembled families as to what they were seeking from the Church, and whether they were prepared to accompany their child in their growth as a Christian, there came a little more than 'Yes' and 'No'...with, that our child may become an active member of the Christian Community...live a decent and honest life...be an

Eyes and Ears: May He soon touch your ears to receive His word, and your mouth to proclaim His faith to the praise and glory of God our Father. This is our faith, we are proud to profess it.

example to others around them... face through the difficulties and imitate the life of Mons Enrique Alvear, patron of the Chapel... and other personal and well thought-out sentences on what they were about with their family and child. Of the seven chapels, each with a lively catechist, there was something similar to be picked up from the enthusiastic parents and Godparents.

On one occasion, I got my lines crossed on a Saturday afternoon of Baptisms and was missing for the celebration in Holy Family Chapel. There were no cell-phones and Eriberto and wife, Olga, took turns trying to get

Dignity of the Baptised: As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King so may you live always as a member of His body, sharing everlasting life.

someone around the parish house on the phone, while the other introduced another hymn in a hot November, summer atmosphere.



A group of teenagers after their Confirmation in Valparaíso Placeres Hill, with Fr John, in October 2005.

I did, of course, apologize to the group of families kept waiting, and was surprised at how calmly they all seemed to take the nearly half an hour of delay!

In the Chapel of San Columban in the Puente Alto Parish, I was always impressed with Erica and her husband when I visited the group in preparation, in a very poor area of La Lecheria. On the succeeding Sunday, the whole group was present at the Sunday Eucharist, and often took over the Readings and the Prayers of the Faithful.

There was, of course, the further joy in Baptism in the Catechumenate for Adults (RICA), which followed some of the pattern of the Early Church and took place over some months. At one point, there were groups of young and older adults being prepared in five out of the seven chapels in the Parish, and it was a pleasure to visit them and talk over the history of their growth in the faith, having missed out as children. On the Sundays in Lent, at a certain point in the Eucharist, the group would be presented for some of the rites of reception and interrogation. This was also a stimulus for the congregations in the chapels and entered easily into the Profession of their own faith in the Creeds. The Paschal Vigil then took on an added enlightenment as the Catechumenate members without Baptism were received into the Christian Community. It would correspond to the RCIA in our home dioceses. Later, they would receive the other Sacraments of Initiation; Confirmation and Eucharist.

The Adult Conversion Retreats, which I mentioned in another article, had the objective of reclaiming some ground lost in the practice of the faith along the way. And the Parish and Zones also sponsored an adapted form of the Ignatian Retreats, with supported weekends in a nearby

retreat house and lived-in from Friday night to Sunday afternoon. So the Sacrament in this parish, and others, was constantly being put forward as a Gift and a Challenge (Don y Tarea) and a long way from my early years in the priesthood.

Baptism makes us soldiers or disciples of Christ...in my opinion?

Karl Rahner was one of the great Jesuit writers and theologians of those years and I did read many of his very rewarding reflections. There was a much quoted sentence of his which I have lived long enough to, perhaps, experience...“The Christians of the Twenty First Century will be Mystics...or nothing at all”.

Vatican II

In Vatican II, we were presented with a new image of the Church: more of a series of circles than a pyramid structure. In our courses and meetings and parish gatherings, we tried to maintain the sitting in a circle facing one another on an equal level, rather than sitting behind a table on an elevated boarding. There were always events taking place in the national or local Church, or political community, to bring

The Saint for me today is the baptised person who...?

out some form of dialogue as to our Mission in the Church: a peace march; a national holiday like May 1st; Day of the Worker; a pilgrimage/walk to the Shrine of St Alberto Hurtado (and his much quoted phrase, “What would Christ do in my place?”); St Teresa of Los Andes, or the Patron of the Parish; on St Columban's Novena; the Month of Mary in November and devotions often in the open spaces around the chapels, leaving people free to join in or walk on. People were being evangelized and perhaps schooled

in Solidarity and Community, and assumed new roles all the time.

Somewhere along the way, there is born in us just how central Baptism is to us all, and the living of it is the key to our progress. Titles and roles are only the ways or conditions in which each of us lives out in community this great gift. Jaime Cisterna, in Valparaíso, is one of the animators in his small Christian Community of Virgen Peregrina. With his late wife Helga, he has been the focal point and animator of the chapel with his enthusiasm and energy and good humour. He also leads the Baptism preparations, integrating each new family presenting itself. There are people like him in all the chapels and parishes, and they radiate enthusiasm. Living thus to the full their own Baptisms, they give energy to priest or bishop or religious sister on the same path. Baptism, according to Pope Francis, mindful no doubt of the Aparecida Assembly of the Latin American Church, makes us Christians, Disciples and Missionaries.

The other parts of the Sacraments of Initiation – Confirmation and Eucharist – were similarly treated with respect and dignity. I joined in with one of the Confirmation groups, young adults in their late secondary-school age (15-18) and more interesting than the Irish model in many ways. With the Chapel of Cristo Resucitado, I was just one of the group and let the Monitor go ahead without interventions on my part. It was during a time of hardship and political oppression in the country and the group took up as its Lema, or motto, “Un rayo de sol bajo una nube de smog”...a ray from the sun under the cloud of smog (dictatorship and exploitation etc)! It indicated a real sense of commitment and searching from that group of young adults...some of whose weddings I was later to

be involved in.

In a later parish, something similar took place with those young adults. Their commitment (compromiso) was a threefold-one, and was given in their

There are two phrases in the Creed which often grab my attention in my Sunday Mass...

testimony on the occasion of the Celebration of the Sacrament: Commitment to their own family and faith, to the Church Community and its communal faith, and to the Patria, their homeland and its justice and peace and harmony in the rights for all. So you might say that each member of the group was an evangelizer to the others...and

always with an outwards focus.

In my early months in Mission, and my first Christmas, there were little gifts and cards from that Christian Community of Christ Risen. Amongst them was a card from Eugenia, a catechist, which had a verse from the Nobel poet, Gabriela Mistral, written out in her perfect handwriting, under the title 'El Placer de Servir' (The Pleasure of Service), and it stayed with me for many years amongst books and notes... Toda la providencia es un anhelo de servir. Sirve la nube, sirve el viento, sirve el surco...Aquél el que critica, éste el que destruye;

The most difficult moments so far, in trying to keep my Baptismal Promises were...

sé tú el que sirve.

"El servir no es una faena de seres inferiores.

Dios, que es el fruto y la luz, sirve.

¡Pudiera llamarse: El que sirve!

I can name this person as a Catholic who is living out very well his Baptismal vocation...

Y tiene sus ojos en nuestras manos.

Y nos pregunta cada día:

¿Serviste hoy ¿ A quién? ¿Al árbol? ¿A tu hermano?

¿A tu madre?

It is a simple enough but beautiful eulogy to a God who Serves...and the pleasure such service can bring us...Be you as one who serves!

There was a film back in the day, 'Amadeus', maybe by Ken Loach, on Mozart and his imitator – plagiarist, in which the guilty

This new Rite of Baptism could be better and more meaningful if...

one justifies his misconduct with the phrase in utter disdain..."I hate mediocrity!" Maybe, in this world where the winners and success are lauded with all kinds of galardons or medals, we might, early on, come to realize that our only real success is in living out well our Baptism and Sacraments of Initiation.

The Church is for the Kingdom or the Kingdom is for the Church?



Rembrandt's painting of the 'Return of the Prodigal Son': Part I...

The details of the Son *by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd*

THE Dutch master, Rembrandt van Rijn, painted the 'Return of the Prodigal Son' in the last two years of his life. It now hangs in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg in Russia. And to no less an art historian than Kenneth Clark, the painting makes a claim to be one of the greatest paintings ever. We are not interested in art criticism here, rather in how the Dutch master helps us to reflect on the renowned parable of Luke and, beyond that, on the Fatherhood of God.

As we ponder the painting, our eyes, our ears, and our attention seem to be irresistibly drawn to the details of the figure of the 'prodigal son'. It captures the son graphically. Careful perusal will throw up details that the master is trying to express. The first thing to look at is the hair style of the son; it is closely cropped, shaved down to the very roots. To us, in the 21st Century that seems to be a very acceptable hair-cut, but in Rembrandt's day, a day of wigs and large bushy hair-dos, such an image was evocative of a prisoner.

The clothes that the son is wearing amount to being little more than a sack of surge with only a rough piece of rope to hold it together; it is frayed, worn, and great holes gape everywhere. It is fairly easy to interpret that the master sees that the son has become little more than a pauper, and then there are the shoes, they show serious signs of wear and tear, signs that the son has just made a long, difficult journey. In fact, just at the moment he arrives at his father's house, one of them has given up the ghost and lies broken on the ground. The last point that the master is making is that the son has been reduced to some kind of serf, forced to make long journeys to find a living. The son is, as is known in our day, an immigrant or a migrant worker.

Rembrandt's illustration of the son has nailed down traits of his

character and nature very well: a prisoner, a pauper, and one forced to make a desperate trek across country. Rembrandt has created a space for reflection in which we can develop aspects of the son's life that we haven't considered heretofore. Before everything had gone wrong, before he had been reduced to this state, his life had been full of buying only the best of clothes, with all the finest labels, he had surrounded himself with a circle of so-called friends who encouraged him in all his most outrageous behaviours, he had thrown his money around like water and had been to these friends one who was good for a laugh.

His life had ever so quickly become one round of drinking and carousing. The wine made it so much easier to deal with himself and to forget the hurts

“**The son had, at that moment, of his own volition, taken a pair of sheers and cut through the most fundamental relationship in his life. He had taken everything that made him what he was and had thrown it up into the air.**”

and failures of the past, so he just kept on drinking. When he saw a pretty girl, he just went with the flow of his feelings. He used these women to satisfy an urge in him and before he knew where he was, he had a string of failed relationships behind him with no real prospects of a genuine relationship anywhere on the

horizon.

Then one morning, he woke out of a drunken stupor and, shock horror, there wasn't so much as a crumb of his inheritance left. Having an empty wallet was like a magic trick, hey presto, the women dried up, the no-good friends melted away, and he couldn't even afford cheap booze to drive away his blues. The place where the son finds himself cannot be imagined except by those who have been there. All that we can say about it is that it is a place of despair, decay, and death.

No matter how dramatic the events that had blown up in the son's life, his lifestyle choices, the wine, and the women, they were still not the real problem that ailed him, they were, instead, only symptoms of a deeper malady reaching into the heart of the son. Back at home, he had turned to his own father and asked for his inheritance. The unmitigated gall of the boy, he had, in effect, in that moment looked into his father's face and told him that he (the son) would prefer that his father be dead, right there and then, so that he could spend his money.

Root

The son had, at that moment, of his own volition, taken a pair of sheers and cut through the most fundamental relationship in his life. He had taken everything that made him what he was and had thrown it up into the air. With the destruction of that father-son relationship, it was as if there was no longer any root to him. He no longer knew who he was, he did not respect his own dignity, everything was cheapened and so, from then on, nothing went right, nothing kept its proper order.

The son went off in search of someone or something that would take the place of his father. The absence of his father left a gaping hole that he threw material

goods, no-good friends, sexuality, and money into. The funny thing about all that activity was, that no matter how much junk he could pour into that gaping hole, he could never fill the hole that was left behind.

He was addicted to giving his heart to things that could never love him in return and certainly could not love him as his father had loved him. Love is a funny thing; when it finds its rightful object it makes life free, beautiful, and great, our horizons open and everything seems possible. Put love where it should not be or cannot be, or if we love something that cannot love us back, then the son shows us the consequences of our actions, the exact opposite occurs, life becomes imprisoned, ugly and small.

One of our Discalced Carmelite saints, St John of the Cross, once wisely observed that we become like the things we love. The son loved small things like lifestyle, drink, and terrible relationships, and these objects deformed the son into their own likeness. His life became as small and trifling as these pursuits. His life started to revolve around these unworthy loves in ever tighter circles.

Hence, as Rembrandt paints, the son is a prisoner, a pauper, driven to ever more desperate lengths to get himself out of the hole he had made. At this juncture, let us for a moment come out into the open. That figure of the distressed and dying son that Rembrandt has painted, we know who he is all of a sudden, oh, we know him very well. He is each one of us, and each at one time or another in our lives could ever so easily slip into that position that he holds in the painting, and could have that shaved hair, the sack and the broken shoes, and all that those represent. We are all prodigals and have gone on being prodigals.

The Dutch Master does not wish



'Return of the Prodigal Son' by Rembrandt van Rijn

our reflections on the 'prodigal son' to quit with a realisation of our own imprisonment, poverty, and desperate migrations in search of an easy solution. He wants us to go on looking at his masterpiece and realise that it is precisely at this juncture, when the son is on his knees, fallen in the dust of the road, and seems unable to go any further, that Someone comes to meet both the son and us, unmerited, unexpected, and unlooked for. Rembrandt asks us to look beyond ourselves, to look beyond our problems, to look beyond the ragged figure of the son.

He asks us to literally look over the shoulder of the son and take a good look at the one who comes down the road to meet us, who comes to this worst of

places; to this place of despair and desperation. The father who long ago the son took his sheers to, that very same father comes running to meet us. We can see with the son that, even from a distance, his arms are open to us. And that he is ready to scoop us up into an intense embrace and a tender kiss. And he still has those extraordinary words on his lips, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

In Part II, in next month's edition, we will pick up precisely from where we have left off in the painting and start to look over the shoulder of the prodigal, to the loving father who comes to meet his son fallen in the road. We will draw out what Rembrandt has to say of him with his paints.

Saints we celebrate during January *by Bishop Donal*



St Thomas Aquinas

St Raymund of Penafort (died 1275) – January 7

He was a Spanish lawyer during the period when many of the new religious orders (Franciscans, Dominicans etc) were being founded. He joined that movement that was focused on renewal of the church and reaching out as missionaries. He is the Patron Saint of Canon Lawyers.

St Hilary of Poitiers (died 367) – January 13

He was a bishop in France during the early decades of the Christian emperor in Rome after Constantine. Pope Pius IX declared St Hilary a Doctor of the Church for his teachings about the divinity of Christ.

St Ita (died 570) – January 15

Ita, from Waterford, was one of the early generations of strong young men and women who dedicated their life to Christ. She founded a monastery in Limerick and was called 'the foster-mother of the saints of Ireland'. Strong women of faith have been central to Church renewal.

St Anthony (died 356) – January 17

This St Anthony lived in North Africa. He withdrew to live a life of prayer in the desert, and he is seen as the founder of Christian monasticism. Down through the centuries many other monastic traditions have developed, among the first being the similarly strict Irish monasteries.

St Sebastian (died c.305) – January 20

It is believed that Sebastian was a soldier and that he was martyred by being shot with arrows. He died under the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian. That was the last and most severe attempt to crush Christianity – but within the decade, Constantine had become the first Christian emperor of Rome.

St Agnes (died c.304) – January 21

Agnes was a teenager when she was martyred in Rome. Her name is similar to that for a lamb (Agnus Dei means Lamb of God). On her feast day, it is customary for two lambs to be brought in to be blessed by the Pope. On

Holy Thursday, the lambs' wool is removed and woven into the pallium that the pope gives to a newly consecrated archbishop as a sign of union with the Pope.

St Francis de Sales (1567-1622) – January 24

He lived and ministered during the fraught years of the Reformation in Switzerland. He was made Bishop of Geneva, where Jean Calvin had begun his strict form of Protestantism. Francis de Sales was known for his emphasis on holiness for everyone and his gentleness, even in a very fraught time of religious conflict.

The Conversion of St Paul – January 25

The story of this conversion appears three times in the Acts of the Apostles (Ch 9, 22 and 26). God can do miracles in anybody's



St Angela Merici

life! This day also marks the end of the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Sts Timothy and Titus – January 26

These were close followers of St Paul. Among the letters of St Paul are two to Timothy and one to Titus.

St Angela Merici (1472-1540) – January 27

St Angela dedicated her life to offering education for girls and young women. She founded a group of lay women who lived at home but who worked together for this purpose. Later the group became the first group of Ursuline Sisters, who are present in different parts of Ireland where they maintain that mission.

St Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) – January 28

Like St Raymond of Penafort (January 7), Thomas was also a Dominican. He combined Greek philosophical insights and Catholic theology, believing that Christian revelation and human knowledge cannot be in conflict with one another. He is patron of schools, universities, students and booksellers.

St Aidan (died 626) – January 30

This Aidan had studied in Wales but based his missionary activity in Co Wexford. He is patron of the Diocese of Ferns, whose cathedral is in Enniscorthy.



Bishop Donal

St John Bosco (1815-1888) – January 31

In the late 19th century, the Industrial Revolution was drawing huge crowds into cities. John Bosco worked as a priest in Turin (Northern Italy) where he founded the Salesian Order, dedicated to educating boys in the new urban environment. He emphasised love and gentleness, especially for those who were most in need of encouragement.



St. John Bosco

Beyond Christmas *by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR*

SO many of us live in a very small world of our own concerns. The big world beyond us can be of little concern to us in our daily lives. We hardly ever notice the beauty of creation all around us. We are seldom pained by the hardships of those who suffer hunger or who are caught up in violence and destruction.

We can get ourselves so worked up at the sacrifices we have to make at this time of pandemic, and the inconveniences of the restrictions that are necessary, that we may no longer feel the awfulness of the tragedy of those who are seriously ill in hospital and even those who may die because of Covid-19.

Beyond Christmas

The first part of the Liturgical Year – Advent and Christmas – has been leading us into the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan and the mission of Christ Our Lord to the world. The child born to us at Bethlehem is sent to turn the world upside down. He baptises us with the Holy Spirit and fire for that same mission.

The main characteristic of the Church has to be to live as a people on fire with love for God and for every human person; an

enthusiastic people, a hope-filled people, a humble people. How dare we attempt to reduce the whole thing again to religious practices carried out reluctantly.

May they all be one

January 18-25 is the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Praying for and working towards Christian Unity is not optional for us as Catholics. The Second Vatican Council made it a priority for us in the practice of our faith because of the intensity of Christ's prayer – found in St John's Gospel, Chapter 17 – that we would all be one.

As individuals and as parish communities of faith, we have a long way to go to take this call seriously. In the weeks of this month we have an opportunity again to think about it, pray about it, and find what we can do about it in practice.

The Church, Divine and Human

The Church is divine in its origin and Christ has always been with us, leading us and guiding us, through the Holy Spirit and through His prayer among us.

But the Church has also been

very human, made up of human beings with all their virtues and vices. She continues to be like that today. There will always be the pull of human conflict to deal with as we journey with Christ in His mission of gathering all of humanity and creation into the Kingdom of God.

Week by week in January

Week 1: January 2-8 Christ, the Wisdom of God

"He was in the world and the world did not know him."

It is always a source of sadness and distress when someone we love tells us that they no longer believe. There are very many reasons for this loss of faith and for the difficulty of believing in the first place. But then there are also many reasons for believing in Christ and following His way.

The best thing we can do for those among us who have left us is to purify our own reasons for believing, and to live our faith in a much more vibrant way. The heart of our Christian faith is that Christ is among us and His presence makes all things and all people sacred.

We are always walking on holy

ground, especially when we are with our loved ones or with other people. And this is true whether those others believe or not.

Week 2: January 9-15 The Baptism of Christ

John said to the crowd: "He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

This week, as we celebrate the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan, we also remember and renew our own baptism into Christ in the Church. And the baptism that we have been promised is a baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The Holy Spirit brings peace, joy, love etc. Is that how we live our faith or is it more with anxiety, fear, duty etc? Fire brings warmth, light, enthusiasm, hope. Is this how we present Christ to the world or is it more with coldness, lifelessness, joylessness?

The challenge of this time is to change our ways and to let the world we live in know the power of Christ's presence among us by the enthusiasm of our lives of faith. This must always begin in our homes and families, and the community of faith we belong to.

Week 3: January 16-22 Christ, the Church's Bridegroom

"Jesus said: 'Fill the jars with water'. And they filled them to the brim."

People often think of themselves as very ordinary and the place they live in as fairly insignificant. And yet it was for people like this, in a place like that, that Jesus worked one of His most famous miracles.

One of the keys to this happening was that the servants obeyed Jesus' command. In fact, they overdid it and they 'filled the water jars to the brim'. Jesus' command to us is to love one another as He has loved us. If we follow His command, great things will also happen in our lives and in the world we live in. But we also have to use the key and fill our love to the brim. We tend however to measure out our love.

This week we are asked to practice our love more intensely in our homes and communities, and let Jesus transform us.

Week 4: January 23-29 Good News to the poor

Jesus read from the scroll: 'He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of

favour'. Then he said: 'this text is being fulfilled today, even as you listen'.

This is surely the clearest statement about the purpose of the Church, and of our part in it, that could be made.

We don't just have a faith that is for us to make us comfortable. We have a power to transform the world we live in and living our faith is about doing just that. Our homes are to be places where each person finds healing and affirmation.

The same has to be made true of the faith community we belong to. It is time to move away from a sense of duty in regard to our faith and move into a sense of adventure for the Kingdom of God.

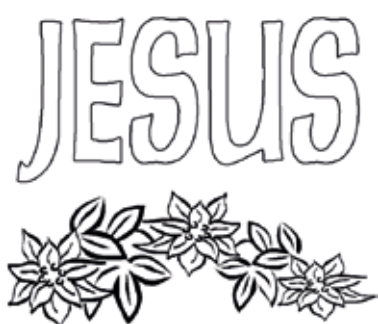


Fr Johnny Doherty

Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

HELLO children. C3 wishes you all a very happy New Year! Welcome to the month of January. The first day of January is very special. We begin a new year and we look ahead to new beginnings and hopes for the future. But it is also the day that we celebrate the wonderful feast of our Blessed Mother Mary, the Holy Mother of God (CCC 493). Mary received the Word of God in her heart as well as in her body and gave life to the Saviour of the world. We treasure and honour Mary on this day as a faithful servant of God and truly the Mother of Jesus.



The Holy Name of Jesus – January 3

This month is dedicated to The Holy Childhood and Name of Jesus. We remember the years that Jesus spent growing up with Mary and Saint Joseph. We celebrate the special feast, The Holy Name of Jesus on January 3. On this day, we honour the powerful name of Jesus. The name Jesus (CCC 430), which was commanded by God to be given to the Child, is a Hebrew word 'Yeshua' which means 'salvation'.

"In the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10).



Epiphany – January 6

The feast of the Epiphany (CCC 528) is on the 12th day of Christmas and is sometimes referred to as 'Little Christmas'.

The word Epiphany comes from a Greek word which means 'appearance' or 'to show oneself'. We celebrate this day in remembrance of how the three wise kings visited Jesus and recognized Him as the Saviour the world had been waiting on.

Traditionally, the kings are known

as Balthazar, Casper and Melchior, and it is believed that they were very clever men who probably studied mathematics and astronomy (the stars). They knew about the prophecies of the birth of God's Son and how He would bring salvation to the whole world. They looked for a sign in the stars for the birth of the baby. When a very bright star appeared in the sky, they knew that if they followed it, they would be led to where the baby had been born.

The bright star guided the kings to the stable where Jesus had been born. They brought with them special gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh. On the day of Epiphany, we give thanks to God for the gift of His Son and for all the other gifts and talents which we have received.



Tradition – Epiphany Chalk House Blessing

An ancient Catholic tradition on the feast of the Epiphany is to bless the home using blessed chalk. Blessed chalk is taken by a family member and used to write across the lintel of the front door 20+C+M+B+____. The last space is filled in with the numbers which make up the last half of the New Year.

20+C+M+B+22
Christus Mansionem
Benedicat

This is what the chalked markings on the door mean: The 20 is for the first two numbers of the year, the three letters are the first initial of each of the kings (Casper, Melchior, and Balthasar) and the last two



numbers are the last half of the year. The C, M, B also stands for the Latin blessing *Christus Mansionem Benedicat* which means, "May Christ Bless this House".

Chalking the lintel of the door is a way to celebrate and mark the occasion of the Epiphany and God's blessing of our lives and home. In time, the chalk will fade but we hope that the meaning of the symbols written above the door will sink into the depths of our heart and be visible through our words and actions. Remember the Latin words, *Christus mansionem benedicat*, 'May Christ bless the house'.

Saints of the Month

January 2 – St Basil

& St Gregory Nazianzen

January 17 – St Anthony of Egypt

January 24 – St Francis de Sales

January 28 – St Thomas Aquinas

Baptism of Jesus

The Baptism of Jesus (CCC 535) is celebrated each year on the Sunday following the Feast of the Epiphany. This feast day brings the Christmas season to a close. The Church recalls on this day how Jesus went down into the River Jordan and was baptised by John the Baptist. The baptism which John the Baptist offered moved people to confess their sins and repent. Jesus, however, was sinless and therefore did not need this baptism. But He did not hesitate to identify himself with humanity and our struggles and accepted the baptism from John. The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His public ministry.

Many of the aspects of Jesus' baptism happen at baptism today.



The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove; likewise, at our baptism the Trinity comes to live in our soul. At his baptism, Jesus was proclaimed Son of God; likewise, at our baptism we are called to be the adopted sons of God. The heavens opened at Jesus' baptism and through our baptism heaven is open to us. Jesus prayed at His baptism and we, too, are called to that special relationship of prayer which leads us to God.

Saint Agnes of Rome

Saint Agnes was born in 291AD, to a wealthy Christian family in Rome. She was beautiful and had many high-ranking men seeking her hand in marriage. However, Agnes had made a promise to God never to stain her purity. Her love for God was so great that she hated sin even more than death. She would always say to those who asked her to marry them that Jesus Christ was her only spouse.

Agnes lived during a time of great persecution when people were killed for being Christian. Legend has it that the young man Agnes turned away became so angry and insulted by her purity of heart and devotion to God that they began to give her

name to the Roman authorities as a Christian, a follower of Jesus.

The Governor's son, Symphronius was one of these angry men because Agnes refused to be his wife. She told him that the one she was betrothed to was Christ whom the angels serve. Symphronius was enraged and had Agnes brought in front of his father, with the charge of being a Christian. Agnes was put in chains, ordered to deny God, and commanded to offer incense to false gods. Instead, she praised God and endured all the suffering for the love of God. Tradition says that the executioner was reluctant to behead this tender young girl. However, Agnes courageously said to him, "Strike, without fear, for the bride does her Spouse an injury if she makes Him wait".

Agnes died a virgin-martyr at the age of 12 or 13. It was January 21, 304AD. She is buried in the Basilica named after her in Rome. The name Agnes means 'lamb', therefore, the lamb is the symbol of the modesty and innocence of the virgin-martyr. A time-honoured custom on the Feast of St Agnes is for the Pope to bless two lambs. One lamb is adorned with a white crown for the purity of the little Saint and the other wears a red crown, representing her martyrdom. On Holy Thursday, the lambs' wool is removed and woven into a pallium. A pallium is the Y-shaped woollen garment worn over the shoulders and chest by the Pope and by Archbishops; the bishops who have charge of a province within the Church. The pallium is a sign of the Archbishops' pastoral union with the Holy Father, as shepherds of the flock. The Pope presents it to new Archbishops on June 29, the Feast of St Peter and St Paul.

Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. Who presented the TV quiz show 'Blockbuster' in the 1980s and 90s?
2. Who managed Manchester City to their first Premier League title in 2011?
3. What is the capital city of Chile?
4. Cyril Ramaphosa is the current president of what country?
5. The drawings of English cartoonist, Ronald Searle, led to the creation of what comedy film series?
6. On what date is the Feast of the Epiphany celebrated?
7. The recent climate change conference in Glasgow was named COP26. What does that stand for?
8. In what sport is Nelly Korda the current World Number 1 player?
9. Who presented RTE's 'Late Late Show' immediately after Gay Byrne and before Ryan Tubridy?
10. Name the venue for the last two productions of the 'I'm a Celebrity...' TV show?
11. Who played the title role in the 2013 movie 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'?

Quiz Answers: 1, Bob Holness. 2, Roberto Mancini. 3, Santiago. 4, South Africa. 5, St Trinians. 6, January 6. 7, (26th) Conference of the Parties. 8, Women's golf. 9, Pat Kenny. 10, Gwyrch Castle. 11, Ben Stiller. 12, Cathay Pacific. 13, Seventeenth. 14, Emma Raducanu. 15, Hermes. 16, The Black Forest. 17, Shopkeepers. 18, Simon Coveney. 19, Emirates. 20, Agra. 21, Suzanne Collins. 22, Leg warmers. 23, Bosnia & Herzegovina. 24, June. 25, Five.

12. Which airline is the national flag carrier for Hong Kong?
13. In what century was noted English architect, Christopher Wren born?
14. Which British tennis player stunned the sport by winning last year's US Open title?
15. In Greek mythology, who is said to have had winged sandals which helped him move quickly to deliver the messages of God?
16. The Spa town of Baden-Baden is located in what landmark region of Germany?
17. According to Napoleon Bonaparte, England is a nation of what?
18. Who is Ireland's current Minister for Foreign Affairs?
19. Name the current sponsors of the FA Cup?
20. In which Indian city would you find the Taj Mahal?
21. What American author penned 'The Hunger Games' trilogy?
22. What fashion item was made popular by the 1983 movie 'Flashdance'?
23. Of which country is Sarajevo the capital city?
24. In which month does England's Queen Elizabeth celebrate her official birthday?
25. How many eyes does a honeybee have?

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamagagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

Let Your Light Shine!



Children's Rosary Song

*We are Rosary children,
with these beads we're building
a world of peace and love.
In the heart of Mary,
joy is all we carry,
so we can rise above
and live in His love.*

*Jesus waits for those who pray every day,
He calls your name listen to His voice.
There's no time left to lose,
you can choose to love right now,
listen to His voice.
We are Rosary children,
with these beads we're building*

*a world of peace and love.
In the heart of Mary,
joy is all we carry,
so we can rise above
and live in His love,
and live in His love,*



Claudy Children's Rosary a beautiful blessing

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,