



The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 113, DECEMBER 2025

No Fixed Charge.
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Christmas Village - Long Tower.



St Colmcille's Christmas stories and songs
- Claudy



Parish Survey & Treats - Kilrea.



“Jesus invites us to walk with Him as the King who reigns from the Cross”
– Bishop Donal (see p12-13)

Wishing all a blessed Christmas celebration

Bishop Donal leading Benediction at Ebrington Square, to close the Christ The King Eucharistic Procession celebration.



Ecumenical Carol Service - Maghera.



Baby Jesus Blessing - Bellaghy.



Hollybush PS Grotto - Culmore.



St Colm's Rosary Club
- Draperstown.

People in focus

Emma Gallagher
- Derry-Australia.

Fr Gerard Mongan
- Long Tower.

Michael Cavanagh
- Greencastle.

Ryan Butcher
- Magilligan.

Sean Woods
- Ardmore.

Also featuring: Young Writers' section; Magilligan Shoebox Appeal; Claudy & Lavey JPII Commissioning; Broadbridge PS Angel; Sessiaghoneill Advent Tea; Newtownstewart Oratory celebration; Greenlough Carol Service; Waterside Hope talks; Greencastle boat tragedy anniversary; Omagh Holy Souls talk; Strathfoyle Church Golden Jubilee; Irish Page; Children's Catechism Club; Parish Post-its; Diocesan Diary; other Diary Dates; Quiz... and much more...

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Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope’s December prayer intention for Christians in areas of conflict:

“Let us pray that Christians living in areas of war or conflict, especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace and reconciliation and hope.”

Greatest gift God wants for all is peace within ourselves...peace with our neighbours...and peace in the world

IN this diocese, we have lived through the experience of being an area of conflict. Our communities suffered pain, loss, uncertainty and fear over three decades.

It is not surprising that many people here feel great sympathy for those suffering in the unnumberable conflicts around the world.

The press coverage of death and destruction is beamed into our living rooms and onto our devices. And the endless destruction can be depressing and frightening.

Firstly, Pope Leo asks us to pray for Christians in these

conflict zones. They need to know our support for them and solidarity with them. It is important for them to sense that they are not forgotten.

That is especially true in the Holy Land, the place where Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again. The Christian population is small and can be overlooked in the conflict between Israel and Palestinians. For this reason, many of their young people opt to leave and seek a home elsewhere.

It would be awful if, after 2,000 years, there were to be almost no Christians in the

land where the main events of our salvation took place.

Secondly, those who lived through our own conflict know that hope was often in short supply. But some people of courage worked hard, often behind the scenes, to make some sort of peace process possible. Pope Leo asks that those who follow the Prince of Peace would be beacons of hope – no matter how dark situations may seem. The theme for this Jubilee Year cannot be limited just to 2025.

Thirdly, it is not sufficient just to be hopeful that war will cease, or peace break out.

The Holy Father wants us to be ministers of reconciliation, peacemakers. After all, we are those who have been reconciled to God in Jesus. And we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. (cd 2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

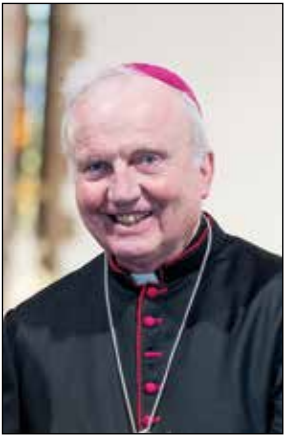
We know from our own history that, even when open conflict stops, there is still much bridge-building to be undertaken. It takes a lot of time to deal with the legacy of war and loss. It is not possible simply to draw a line under the past and move on. Broken bodies and shattered dreams cannot be fixed. But broken

hearts can need time to be healed by love and grace.

Furthermore, there are those who would create new enemies to be hated. They spread news about awful foreigners coming here to attack us. This poisonous language has no place in Christ’s Church, which asks us to go beyond man-made barriers and to sow seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope.

The greatest gift that God wants for all humankind is peace within ourselves, peace with our neighbours and peace in the world.

It is what Jesus came to bring.



Eucharistic Adoration in the Diocese

Aghyaran: Thursdays, 10.30am–12 noon.
Ardstraw West & Castlederg: Fridays, 10.30am–12 noon, St Patrick’s Church.
Badoney Lower: Tuesdays, after 12 noon Mass until 5 pm, St Patrick’s Gortin; and Wednesdays, Mass 7.30 pm, Adoration and Confession until 9 pm, St Mary’s, Rouskey.
Badoney Upper: Wednesdays, after 7.30 pm evening Mass until 9 pm, St Patrick’s Cranagh.
Ballinascreen: First Mondays, from 12 noon–7.30 pm, in Holy Rosary Church, Draperstown.
Banagher: Thursdays, 10.30–11.30 am, St Mary’s Church, Altinure, and Fridays, 10–11am, St Joseph’s Church, Fincairn.
Bellaghy: Every Friday, from 10 am until recitation of Rosary at 7.30 pm, in St Mary’s Church.
Buncrana: Mondays, Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 6am–10pm, Fridays, 6 am–10 pm and Sundays, 2–10 pm, St

Mary’s Oratory.
Cappagh: Wednesdays, 8–9pm, concluding with Night Prayer, and Sundays, 3.30–6.30 pm, in Christ the King, Strathroy.
Claudy: Tuesdays, after 10am Mass until 8 pm, St Patrick’s Church, Claudy, and Wednesdays, after 10 Mass until 8 pm, St Joseph’s Church, Craigbane.
Clonmany: Tuesdays, 7.30–8.30 pm, the Oratory of the Assumption, Ballyliffin; Wednesdays, 3–4 pm, St Columbcille Village, Cleagh; Fridays, 3–6 pm (Rosary at 5.40 pm), St Michael’s Church, Urris.
Coleraine: Wednesdays, in St John’s Church, 2–4 pm, with Rosary at 3:45 pm.
Creggan: Sundays 1.30 pm–6 pm; Mondays 10.30 am–7 pm; Tue–Sat 10.30 am–12 pm, Divine Mercy Chapel.
Donagheady: First Fridays after Mass until 12 noon, St Mary’s Church, Aughabrack.

Donaghmore: Tuesdays, 10.30 am–7.30 pm, St Mary’s Church, Sessiaghoneill; Thursdays, after 9.15 am Mass, St Patrick’s Church, Crossroads.
Drumquin: Wednesdays, 6 pm until Mass at 7.30 pm.
Drumragh: Wednesdays, following morning Mass, Sacred Heart Church until 5.30 pm.
Dungiven: Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays, 9am–6 pm, and Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9 am–8 pm, in Adoration Chapel.
Errigal: Mondays, after the 10 am Mass until 2.30 pm, St Mary’s Church, Ballerin.
Fahan: Fridays after 10am Mass, St Mura’s Parish Church.
Greencastle (Tyrone): Thursdays, 6–10 pm, St Patrick’s Church.
Greenlough: Thursdays, 9am–5 pm, St Oliver Plunkett’s Church.
Iskaheen: Tuesdays, from after 10 am Mass until 2 pm, St Patrick’s Church.
Kilrea: Mondays, 12 noon–

7pm, St Mary’s Drumagarnier. Concludes with Benediction.
Lavey: Fridays, after 9.30 am Mass until 5 pm.
Leckpatrick: Wednesdays from 8.15 am–5 pm.
Lifford (Murlog): 9.30 am–12.30 pm
Limavady: Sundays from 3–5 pm in Christ the King (with Confessions).
Magilligan: Wednesdays, 3–7 pm; First Sundays, 3–6 pm, St Aidan’s Church.
Melmount: Mondays, after 10 am Mass until 6 pm.
Moville: Mondays, 2–9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6–9 pm, St Pius X Church.
Newtownstewart: Thursdays, 6.30–7.30 pm, Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.
Sion Mills: Adoration takes place in the side chapel (Oratory) and will be available every day during the Church’s opening hours, moving to the main body of the chapel on Fridays, from 11am–6.50 pm, ending with Benediction before 7 pm Mass.
Steelstown: Mondays, from

after 10 am Mass until 6.50pm.
Strabane (Camus): Every day from 10.30 am–1 pm in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis of Peace), at the back of the Church.
St Columba’s Long Tower: Wednesdays, after 10 am Mass until 7.30 pm Mass.
St Eugene’s Cathedral: Sundays, 3–6 pm, and Tuesdays, 10.30 am–7.20 pm.
Three Patrons: Tuesdays from 11 am–7 pm in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh; Wednesdays from 10.30 am–7 pm, in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, and seven days a week in the Adoration Room in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, from 8 am until 8 pm.
Urney & Castlefin: Tuesdays, 12 noon–8 pm, St Anthony’s Chapel.
Waterside: Mondays, 11.30 am–12.30 pm, St Oliver Plunkett, Strathfoyle; Thursdays, 1–6 pm, Immaculate Conception Church; Fridays, 1–6 pm, St Columb’s Church.

Please send any additions/amendments via: editorthenet15@gmail.com or 07809292852.



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



The NET

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

Supporting us:

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

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

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

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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.

Young Magilligan sacristan delighted with response to Shoebox Appeal



Ryan Butcher, St Aidan's Church sacristan

YOUNG Magilligan sacristan, Ryan Butcher has been inspirational to his fellow parishioners of all ages since he took on the role in St Aidan's four years ago, as a 16-year-old!

Possibly the youngest sacristan in the Diocese, Ryan, now aged 20, recently overseen the collection of 74 shoeboxes filled with gifts by parishioners for the Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child Charity.

He recalled getting the idea one night as he sat scrolling through his phone and came upon an advert for the Samaritan's Christmas Shoebox Appeal. It reminded him of the times that he, and other pupils, had contributed to this while at St Anthony's Primary School, and later at St Mary's, in Limavady.

"The following night I was at Mass," said Ryan, "and mentioned to Fr Frank O'Hagan, our retired parish priest who is now priest-in-residence in Magilligan, that I would like to organise a Shoebox Appeal for the Samaritan's charity in the parish.

"He gave it his blessing, so I put a message on the parish Facebook page and in the bulletin to say that I was organising the Shoebox Appeal. I went into St Aidan's Primary School too, and asked the principal if it was ok for the children to do it."

Delighted with the response, he added: "There were 74 shoeboxes filled and sent off, so it was a great success. All being well, I hope to organize it again next year.

"I did it because I wanted to help people coming up to Christmas. There are a lot of wars going on in

the world and many people don't have very much, so I thought that this might be of some help. I thank everyone who contributed."

Sharing how he came into the role of full-time sacristan at such a young age, Ryan, who is the second eldest in his family of two sisters and three brothers, said: "When the chapel was opening up after the first Covid lockdown, my father was asked to help sanitise it after each Mass, and I went along to help him.

"I saw that there was no-one in the sacristy, so I just started organising everything for the Mass. I had been an altar server, so I had an idea of what to do from watching the sacristan at that time, Sheila Crawford.

"Sheila's daughter, Kerry, was standing in for her while she was sick and when she arrived, she checked to see if everything was done. After that, I went up every night there was Mass to help her, and she gradually stepped back and I took over."

Enjoying the role, he explained what all was involved: "As sacristan, I am responsible for getting everything organised for the celebration of Mass on Monday,

Wednesday and Friday nights, as well as the Saturday Vigil Mass and the Sunday morning Mass. I also help organise for weddings, funerals and anniversary Masses.

"I like being there to help Fr O'Hagan and enjoy helping people if they have any enquiries or want to book Masses. In preparing the altar for Mass, it makes you feel involved in bringing people closer to God. And, there is always a chance that other young people, seeing me as a young person getting the altar ready for Mass, may be led to think about what they could do in the parish, such as an altar server or choir member."

Confidence

Ryan has also found that his confidence has grown since becoming sacristan: "I used to be quite shy in big crowds, so much so that I would be shaking. At first, as sacristan, it took me some time to get used to big crowds at Mass, but now it is not a problem for me, and that is down to the Lord. I have also become more outspoken; if there is a problem, I speak out about it now, but growing up I would have kept it to myself."

Reflecting on his faith journey,

Ryan spoke of the great influence his grandmother, the late Mary Butcher, had been: "My earliest memory would be from the lead up to my First Holy Communion, when my nanna told me all about the Mass; what happens and why it is so important. She taught me how to say the Rosary when I was about five or six years old. I stopped praying it when she died. I was about 15 years old and I was so sad that she had died.

"Up to that, I would have been saying it on my own. I said it before I went to bed, or throughout the day in my head, or if I had big exams in school.

"I got a sense of calm after I finished praying the Rosary. My thoughts weren't as busy and I felt peaceful inside. Now that I am sacristan, I pray the Rosary again; not as much as I should, but as often as I can."

Ryan went on to highlight Fr O'Hagan as another person he looks up to regarding his faith life: "He has been the priest here in Magilligan for as long as I can remember, and I served on the altar with him."

And so, when the thought of priesthood came into his head

after his first Easter Vigil Mass as sacristan, it was Fr Frank that Ryan spoke to about the possibility of being called to a religious vocation.

"At first, I sat on it for a while and then I told Fr O'Hagan," he recalled, "and he informed me about what was involved in becoming a priest, and day-to-day life as a priest.

"But the thought just left me when I went to the North West Regional College to do a Cabin Crew course, in the hope of becoming a flight attendant. Afterwards, I applied for a position with Ryanair but failed the last exam, so I am going to try for it again. However, if the Lord wants me to be a priest, He will have me."

In the meantime, he is growing in his faith by reading the Bible now and then, which he finds an excellent read, and saying his prayers.

Blessed that his friends also attend Mass, Ryan says that he is proud of his Catholic faith: "If someone asked me what faith I am, I would proudly say that I am a Catholic, not in a bitter way though. I am just thankful for my Catholic faith."



Claudy parishioners commissioned for Pope John Paul II Award service

DURING the vigil Mass for the Feast of Christ the King, on Saturday, November 22, Claudy Parish had the commissioning ceremony for the new Pope John Paul II Award students for 2025-2026.

The aim of the Award is to enable young people to play an active role in their parish and local community. For these young people signing up to do the Pope John Paul II Award it is the beginning of a new phase in their journey with Christ, and the commissioning ceremony marked that new beginning.

Claudy parish welcomes the joy and enthusiasm these young people will bring as they volunteer and put themselves forward to work in our Church and local community.

The following young people have enrolled to complete the Award within Claudy Parish: Lucy O'Neill; Aoife Brannan; Emma Hasson; Conor Sharkey; Emerald McGonigle; Erin McKenna; Niamh Gallagher; Scott O'Neill; Sophie Holmes; Leah Doherty; Conor Rosborough; Donal Mullan; Allannah Gormley.



The newly commissioned Pope John Paul II parishioners with Claudy Faith Co-ordinator, Charlotte Deeny, right.

St Colm's Draperstown Rosary Club

St Colm's Draperstown launch Rosary Club *by Bernie Lynch*

ST Colm's High School, Draperstown, in the Ballinascreen Parish, have launched their new Rosary Club, which is a welcoming space open to both pupils and staff. This special initiative reflects the school's ongoing commitment to faith, reflection, and the wellbeing of everyone in our school community.

Building on success of 'Decade a Day'

The launch of the Club follows the hugely successful, whole-school Rosary competition, 'Decade a Day', held throughout October to mark the Month of the Rosary.

Pupils from every year group took part with great enthusiasm, reciting decades at home or in school. The competition sparked a renewed interest, and pupils were rewarded for their dedication at whole-school assembly.

Inspired origins

The idea for the Club first blossomed through work with our much-loved former colleague, Mrs Peggy Maguire. Her gentle guidance and uplifting spirit encouraged our Pope John Paul II Award pupils to think creatively about enriching the spiritual life of the school. From these conversations, the pupils envisioned a weekly Rosary Club, somewhere peaceful, supportive, and open to all.

Today, that vision has become a reality. The Club is being lovingly led by our dedicated Year 13 Pope John Paul II Award pupils. Prayer is led by Cliona Kelly, and she is working closely with Orlagh O'Hagan, who is currently working towards the prestigious Papal Cross Award. Their commitment, warmth, and

leadership have been the driving force behind the Club's early success.

To celebrate the launch, every child received their own set of Rosary beads to keep and bring along each week. During the gatherings, pupils begin by watching short, inspiring videos about the power and beauty of the Rosary; videos that spark curiosity, strengthen faith, and set a reflective tone.

Afterwards, everyone comes together to pray as a group, creating a calm and comforting moment in the school week.

Supporting spiritual and school life

Staff have warmly welcomed the Rosary Club, praising it as a wonderful addition to school life. It offers a quiet space where pupils can pause, breathe, and step away from the pressures of a busy day.

The Rosary is widely known for bringing calm, focus, and emotional wellbeing; an invaluable support for young people managing both academic demands and personal challenges. Miss Conway (Senior Leader) noted: "Praying side-by-side strengthens bonds, nurtures compassion and builds the sense of shared purpose that lies at the heart of St Colm's Catholic ethos."

Leadership beyond the school

The spirit of service doesn't stop at the school gates. In addition to leading the Club, our Pope John Paul II Award pupils will also guide the Rosary at the St Pio Masses in Holy Rosary Chapel on the first Monday of each month, extending their faith leadership into the wider parish community.

We are extremely proud of our pupils' efforts.

Special blessing for Bellaghy 'Baby Jesus' figurines

BAMBINELLI Sunday was celebrated in St Mary's Church, in Bellaghy, in the Parish of Lavey, with a special blessing of Baby Jesus figurines by Fr Pat O'Hagan.

This Advent tradition of blessing the Christ Child was instituted by Pope St John Paul II, when he invited children and adults to bring the Baby Jesus figures from

their homes to St Peter's Square for him to bless after his Sunday Angelus address.

The tradition has been continued, with parishes around the world joining in the celebration, which helps children to make the connection between the Nativity set at home and their parish church.



Hollybush PS and the Power of Prayer

by Feargal Friel

IN January of this year, Hollybush grandparent, Vincent Doherty had a life-altering injury while working with horses on an icy morning. His recollection of that morning is sketchy, but what followed was a stay in hospital lasting months, and some of the medical prognoses were less than comforting, to put it mildly.

At Hollybush PS, in Culmore, the school of Vincent's three grandsons, Ollie, Ronan and Shane, the pupils did what they always do when a member of the school community is experiencing difficulty; they prayed.

At assembly each morning, without fail, all 400 pupils prayed fervently for Vincent's full and speedy recovery. As we all know, the prayers of children are strong and, on this occasion, they were fully answered. Vincent has made a dramatic and unexpected recovery. His journey has been long and very challenging, but he could feel himself enveloped in the

prayers of those who loved him and cared for him.

Vincent and his family credit his recovery to the prayers of the community, especially the school community.

As a token of his appreciation, he has built a grotto in St Columba's Peace Garden, in the grounds of Hollybush. The grotto, which is strikingly beautiful, is situated between two large trees and facing the Celtic cross; an ideal place for a quiet prayer or a moment of reflection.

The pupils and staff of the school are thrilled at Vincent's recovery, and thrilled to receive such a precious addition to our school grounds.

At the grotto blessing, Fr Declan McGeehan, of Steelstown and Culmore, assisted by Fr John Farren of Iskaheen, dedicated the grotto to Our Lady of Healing; an appropriate dedication for a perpetual reminder of the healing power of prayer.



Beautiful Broadbridge Angel for Eglinton Festival features every child's handprint

AMONGST the entries for the St Canice's Church of Ireland 'Festival of Angels', in Eglinton this month, was a beautiful six feet by four feet angel created using the handprints of all 376 children attending Broadbridge Primary School.

The creative brain behind the entry was that of classroom assistant, Julie McLaughlin, who lives in the village.

Having successfully created a whole-school entry for a previous St Canice's Festival focusing on the nativity, Julie felt that this was best, as it was a way of having all the children involved.

"I had an idea in my head of how the Angel should look, using the handprint of every child in the school to create," she explained, adding: "So, we got them all cut out and I took them home, laid all out on the floor and started placing them in layers to give a feathered appearance. Some were white for the body and others gold for the wings.

"We made good use of the final image because it was ready in time for our school open night, and available for our nativity play as well."

Saying that she enjoyed creative projects like this, Julie recalled relishing the challenge of creating a whole school nativity entry for a previous St Canice's Festival: "I took every child's photograph

and did a montage, using different background colours for the photographs, such as brown for the stable, blue for Mary and green for Joseph. I sketched the nativity scene on grid paper and worked out how many browns, blues and greens I needed to create the image. We got highly recommended for it."

The Broadbridge Angel entry this year was accompanied by a poem, written by Mrs Tracey, and an explanation of what the image symbolized, which read: "This piece symbolizes the unity, spirit and protective embrace of the Broadbridge School community. Each hand represents a unique voice and contribution, coming together to form a beautiful and powerful whole. It is a true testament to collaboration and the bright future held in the hands of our children."



Our Broadbridge Angel

(by Mrs Tracey)

From our school community, a vision takes flight,
An Angel of Broadbridge, shining so bright.
Six feet she stands tall, with grace in her pose,
A spirit of hope that lovingly grows.

Julie, our guide, had a wonderful plan,
To capture the spirit of every young hand.
Three hundred and seventy-six prints we can see,
The wings and the body of our angel free.

Every child contributed, big hands and small,
Joining together to stand strong and tall.
A symbol of unity, clear to behold,
A future of promise, more precious than gold.

She spreads out her wings, made of love and delight,
A guardian for Broadbridge, shining her light.

Bishop Donal comments on UK Supreme Court RE ruling

LAST month, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the Christian-focused Religious Education (RE) taught in Northern Ireland's state schools is unlawful, for failing to be "objective, critical, and pluralistic".

Commenting on this, Bishop Donal stated: "The Supreme Court judgement refers to a case brought by a pupil in a Controlled primary school, which is officially a state school.

"The issue revolves around the Core Curriculum for RE, which the four main churches were asked to devise. In practice, the

Catholic RE text books cover a much wider range of topics than the limited content of the statutory Core Curriculum, and it remains to be seen whether there are any implications for an explicitly religious school such as a Catholic school

"Our Catholic schools actually have a remarkable amount of experience with pupils from other cultural and religious backgrounds.

"Trustees will be consulting with colleagues in GB regarding their experience."

Diocesan school community embracing Advent Calendar of Kindness

by Finbar Madden

DURING the four weeks of Advent 2024, the staff at the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre gathered each Monday morning to share an Advent Reflection. On the week that this reflection was led by our Youth Director, Lizzie Rea, we were introduced to the Advent Calendar of Kindness. The Calendar proved to be such a hit within the Centre that, when it came to helping our primary and post-primary schools prepare for Advent 2025, we decided to introduce the Calendar to our entire diocesan school community.

Bishop Donal McKeown enthusiastically endorsed this idea, and so the Advent Calendar of Kindness - along with a daily examen - is now available for use, and is already being used by staff and students across the Diocese.

The introduction of the Calendar follows on the heels of the launch of the Catechetical Centre's latest Sacramental Preparation resources, which have been designed to help primary school pupils across the Diocese to prepare with their families for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Communion (Friends of Jesus) and the Sacrament of Confirmation (Disciples of Jesus).

Sacramental preparation

Both resources have already been successfully piloted as part of the Centre's Sacramental Preparation outreach. As of December 2025, preparation afternoons/evenings for parents/guardians and pupils have taken place in many of our schools or parishes. Further preparation evenings will take place post-Christmas, and will be supplemented with the Centre's online preparation programmes for First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation.

As part of its ongoing outreach and support programme, the Catechetical Centre has already delivered 'In Service' training to RE primary co-ordinators and post-primary heads of department. These days were preceded by a successful 'Day of Reflection' for primary and post-primary principals. Those in attendance at these events were addressed by Ms Marguerite Hamilton, director of the Columba Community, who spoke with great insight on the topic of 'The Gift of Silence in the Catholic School'.

Throughout this term, our Youth Department has been fully immersed in preparations



for the 19th Pope John Paul II Award Ceremony, to be held on Wednesday, January 28, 2026. At the same time, the Youth Department is continuing to deliver a range of activities for the Pope John Paul II Award students to avail of online.

Parish training sessions have also been delivered, especially for parishes looking to develop their outreach to post-confirmation pupils. A one-off Advent Programme for Post Primary

pupils is currently being delivered in one parish in each Deanery. If anyone would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Youth Department.

(Finbar is Post-Primary RE Advisor for the Diocese - finbar.madden@derrydiocese.org. Therese Ferry is Primary RE Diocesan Advisor - tferry@derrydiocese.org. Lizzie Rea is Diocesan Youth Director - lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org. Lauren Doherty is Diocesan Youth Co-ordinator - lauren.doherty@derrydiocese.org)

Kilrea parishioners enjoy sweet treats while filling parish survey

KILREA parishioners enjoyed an Advent Coffee Morning in The Marian Hall, while filling out their parish survey forms. Hosted by the Parish Pastoral Council, there was a great turnout for the occasion and 101 responses to the survey were received on the day.

The efforts of the committee members and Hall volunteers were much appreciated, as well as delicious festive treats provided by Ann Marie Henry.

Copies of the survey are still available in the porches of the three churches in the parish, up until Christmas, so there is still time to have your say if you haven't already! Completed copies can be placed in collection boxes at weekend Masses or returned to the Parochial House.



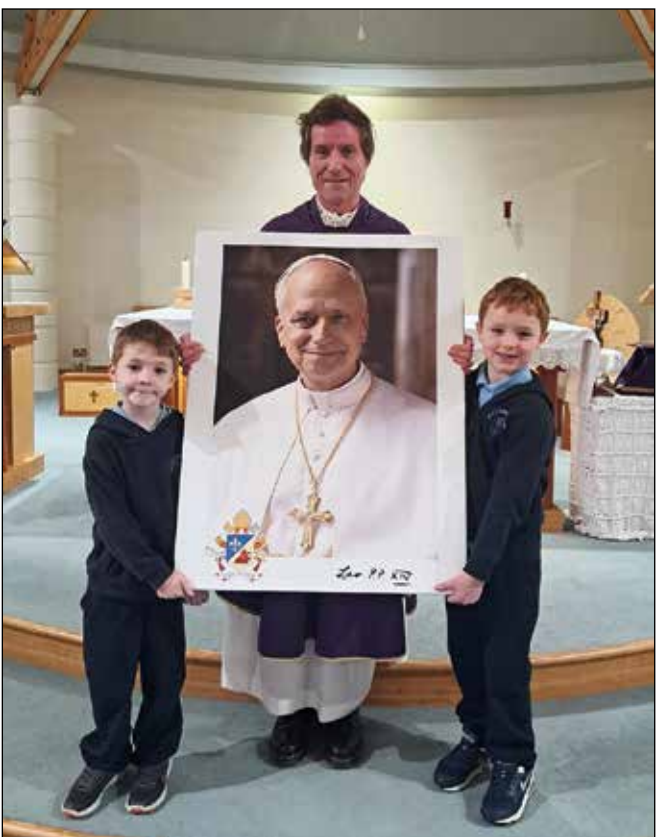
Lavey young people take up JPPII challenge to spread Christ's light.



Wonderful Carol Service by St Colmcille Claudy KS2



Newtownstewart Oratory Silver Jubilee celebrated



FR Roland Colhoun with two P4 children of St Patrick's PS, Newtownstewart, unveiling a new picture of Pope Leo XIV in the Oratory of Mary on November 30. The Oratory of Mary Mother of God marked its Silver Jubilee on November 12. Pupils: Cadain McCormack and Bradley Sammons.



Maghera community come together for Ecumenical Carol Service

Photography by Damian Sweeney.



The comittee members of Maghera branch of Cancer research, which received donations from the Carol Service.



Rev Jonathan Brown, Rector of St Lurach's Church, Maghera, with Fr Paddy Doherty, PP Maghera, and Fr Kieran O'Doherty



The choir of St Mary's Church, Maghera, under the direction of Andrea Kelly and pianist, Bronagh Doherty

Long Tower grounds transformed into wonderful Christmas Village

THE grounds of St Columba's Church, Long Tower, were turned into a beautiful Christmas Village for a wonderful start to the festive season.

From carol singing on the Church steps by the Village Singers and Gateway Singers, to Santa and Mrs Claus bearing gifts, a beautiful Christmas tree, the delightfully decorated Aras Cholmcille, stalls galore

by local vendors, and delicious hot chocolate and tasty treats in Cloisters Café, the air was filled with a happy buzz.

And, it was all down to the combined efforts of the Long Tower Parent-Teacher Association and Long Tower Parish, and the essential input of the many volunteers who worked so hard to make it happen.



Irish flavour to Greenlough Carol Service

THE sanctuary of St Oliver Plunkett Church, Clady, in the Greenlough Parish, was transformed into a stage for a wonderful Carol Service on December 7, the Second Sunday of Advent.

On behalf of the parish, Fr Pat O'Hagan, Adm, welcomed everyone who was in the church and those who joined the Service via the parish webcam. Local man, Willie Loughlin, was MC for the evening and introduced the very talented singers, musicians, and Irish dancers, including pupils of St Mary's Primary School, Greenlough.

There was a very Irish flavour to the evening, with the dancers, the tin whistles, and the fiddle players, and with the singing of the first verse of 'Silent Night' as Gaelge. Clare Doherty whistled a spellbinding rendition of 'Hark! The Herald Angels sing.'

The finale of the Carol Service saw all of the singers and musicians join together to lead

the congregation in singing 'O Come, All Ye Faithful'.

The proceeds from a voluntary collection taken up on the night went to the construction of a Grotto in the grounds of the church. The Grotto Committee are extremely grateful to all those who have contributed, not just financially, but also their time and energy as well as many of the materials being used in the construction. With the rest of the parish, they look forward to the Blessing and Opening of the Grotto as a place of prayer and peace.

At the end of the evening, Fr Pat expressed his wish that the event might just have been "the first annual Greenlough Parish Carol Service!"

Those in attendance were invited to the Parochial House, or to the marquee set up in the grounds of the Church, for refreshments, including mince pies, shortbread, and mulled wine.



Young Writers share thoughts...

IN this month of December when we are preparing for Christmas, Cara-Leigh shares her love of the O Antiphons in the hope that others may be encouraged to pray them and experience their beauty, while Erin reflects on Advent as a wonderful time to prepare our hearts for Christ's presence in our lives now, and renewing our hope for His return.

Having taken part in the Diocesan Youth Team's youth leadership training for young people, Niamh shares how the experience has encouraged her to think about how she can contribute in her own parish.

Sean shares his concerns about Artificial Intelligence limiting human intelligence and wisdom, having observed its use by some students at university.

Harry reflects on the life of the Curé d'Ars – St Jean-Marie Vianney, while Conor writes about the life of St Pio, and new Young Writer, Ryan Duffy, of Three Patrons Parish and student at St Brigid's College, writes on the life of St Augustine of Hippo.

And John writes about a series of talks on the theme of Hope organised in his parish, Glendermott and Strathfoyle, for the opening of Advent, and what he got out of them.



Cara-leigh Doherty - Derry City Deanery
Bronagh Doherty, Co Derry Deanery
Nieve Browne, Derry City Deanery
John Augustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery
James Tourish, Derry City Deanery
Erin Whoriskey, Derry City Deanery
Ryan Duffy, Derry City Deanery



Bláthnaid McMenamin - Co Tyrone Deanery
Carragh O'Donnell, Derry City Deanery
Evan Curran, Derry City Deanery
Seán McLaughlin, Co Tyrone Deanery
Niamh Sharkey, Derry City Deanery
Harry Mason, Derry City Deanery
Conor Sharkey, Derry City Deanery

Youth-led ministry can bring new energy and creativity to parish life by Niamh

I had the privilege of attending the Derry Diocese Youth Ministry programme in October. The programme lasted four weeks, and each week we had discussions about the opportunities and options available in the diocese to encourage young people to get involved in their faith.

During the sessions, we began with a scripture reading, including Mark 10:35-45, where we discussed leadership as Disciples of Jesus.

We also looked at John 4:1-44, where we talked about Jesus' radical teachings and how we can be prophets among our friends and peers.

The programme opened with a deep dive into the Church's understanding of youth leadership. Using teachings from 'Christus Vivit', and various pastoral documents, participants reflected on how the Church views young people as essential contributors to its mission.

We explored why leadership is not reserved only for adults, and how youth-led ministry can

bring new energy, creativity, and authenticity to parish life.

One quote that was brought up in a session that really stuck with me was, "You are the now of God", spoken by Pope Francis at World Youth Day in 2019. This is particularly relevant in our youth ministry, as we realise that it is our time to spread the Word of God, not in a couple of years when we are 'older', but today.

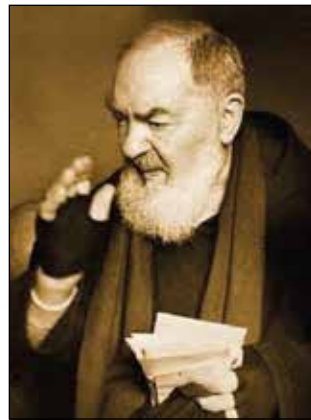
We, the youth of the diocese, are called to do our best to represent the Catholic faith every day.

In the fourth week, the scripture discussed was Matthew 28. We can use this in our ministry by looking at Jesus' directions given to the apostles, "to make disciples of all nations" as we try to make disciples of the youth today in our diocese.

As we evangelise, we must bring the Word of God and the Good News into everything that we do.

I really enjoyed the programme, and the conversations that I had with the group made me more aware of the lack of certain age

Life of St Pio by Conor



FRANCESCO Forgione was born in the southern Italian region known as Campania, in the town of Pietrelcina, on May 25, 1887.

His parents were peasant farmers, and he grew up with a religious background, serving as an altar boy in the same chapel in which he was baptised.

He grew up in a family with an older brother and three younger sisters, one of which later became a Bridgettine nun. His parents had two other children, who both died in infancy.

When he was baptised, he was given the name Francesco and, at age five, he was determined that he was going to dedicate his whole life to God. During his childhood, much of his time was spent herding a small flock of sheep that the family owned.

In his town, Church feast days and saints were celebrated throughout the year, and his family was very religious and dedicated to God. Francesco's parents often narrated bible stories to their children, despite being illiterate, and they attended Mass and said the Rosary daily.

At 17 years old, Francesco began the seven-year study for the priesthood, for which he travelled to the friary of St Francis of Assisi, in Umbria. When he was 17, he also fell ill, complaining of loss of appetite, insomnia, exhaustion,

fainting spells and migraines. It was reported that he vomited frequently and could only digest cheese and milk.

During this time, an unexplainable phenomenon began to occur. He often appeared to others to be in stupor, as if he wasn't even there, and another friar also claimed he was levitating over the ground. In 1905, his condition greatly deteriorated further and he was sent to a mountain convent. This did not work and his health continued to become worse.

In 1910, Archbishop Paolo Schinosi ordained him to the priesthood at the Cathedral of Benevento. Only four days afterwards, he offered his first Mass in the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, in his hometown of Pietrelcina. He was allowed to remain in his hometown due to his frail physical state, and stayed until 1916, helping to look after his family when his father and brother emigrated to the United States.

In 1916, Padre Pio moved to Our Lady of Grace Capuchin Friary, in the mountains of San Giovanni Rotondo, in Foggia. There were only seven friars in the community at that time. He stayed there until his death in 1968, apart from a period of military service.

He successfully converted a large number of people to Catholicism. He placed a lot of emphasis on Rosary meditations and regular confessions, which he compared to dusting a room weekly, highlighting the importance of regular confession for us modern Christians.

Relief of suffering

In 1925, Padre Pio converted an old building into a medical clinic with a few beds, where he cared for people of extreme need. By 1940, a committee was formed to build a larger clinic,

and it began to be constructed in 1947. It was initially given the name Fiorello LaGuardia, but was eventually changed to Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, which translates as 'Home for the Relief of Suffering'. This act of selflessness and goodwill from Padre Pio should inspire us Christians to contribute more to our society, and to act like Jesus in our actions.

In September of 1918, Padre Pio is first recorded as having stigmata; there were holes in his hands and feet in the same spots as Christ during His crucifixion. These stigmata lasted 50 years, until the end of his life. The blood which flowed from the stigmata reportedly smelt of perfume or flowers.

The phenomenon terrified Padre Pio so much that he begged for it to be removed. He later wrote that he did not want the pain to be removed, just the wounds as they humiliated him and were indescribable. Once made public, the wounds were studied by a number of physicians, many of whom claimed that they were impossible and never seemed to get infected, despite seeming to reappear periodically. X-rays conducted in 1954, showed no abnormality in the bone structure of his hands, and many accused him of faking the wounds, using carbolic acid

to create them.

Many of Padre Pio's followers believe that he was bestowed the gift of bi-location; the ability to be at two places at the one time. When the Vatican questioned him about it, he stated, "I don't know how it is or the nature of this phenomenon, and I certainly don't give it much thought, but it did happen to me to be in the presence of this or that person, to be in this or that place. I do not know whether my mind was transported there, or what I saw was some sort of representation of the place or the person. I do not know whether I was there with my body or without it."

Padre Pio also had prophecies which came true, such as when Fr Karol Józef Wojtyła visited him and the Padre stated that he would later ascend to the highest role of the Church, and he later became Pope John Paul II, meaning the prophecy came true.

Overall, as Christians, we can look up to the suffering and dedication of Padre Pio and aim to follow his lead. Whether you believe the strange occurrences which happened to him throughout his lifetime, or not, it is undeniable that he was an extraordinary man who lived a holy and selfless life, serving others and abiding by the teachings of Jesus.



demographics in the church and the potential reasons for this. It has encouraged me to think about how I can contribute in my own parish.

In the final week, we created action plans outlining real changes that we hope to bring to parish youth ministries. Ideas ranged from peer-led faith groups and social media outreach, to new initiatives and youth leadership in pilgrimage.

By the end of the four weeks, we didn't just walk away with new skills, we left with a stronger sense of purpose. We realized that young people don't have to wait to make a difference in the Church, and we are already shaping it by showing up, sharing our ideas, and stepping into leadership roles.



Young Writers share thoughts...

Artificial intelligence is a limitation of human intelligence and wisdom by Seán

ON November 21, Pope Leo XIV addressed the very relevant and controversial issue of artificial intelligence (AI) at the 2025 National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. Artificial intelligence is a dangerously powerful tool, which in recent months and years has become concerningly available to the public, especially the youth.

It is the youthful years of our life in which we drastically develop mentally, becoming emotionally and intellectually advanced to ensure success in adulthood. Artificial intelligence is faster than us, has more resources available than we do and, for many people, is a quick and simple route towards an end-goal they themselves cannot be bothered to achieve with authenticity.

People become reliant on artificial intelligence on account of how much effort it can save them. The consequence is that they lose sight of our God-given human ingenuity, curiosity, and will to strive for reward. In Proverbs 15:14 it is said, “A discerning heart

seeks knowledge, but the mouth of the fool feeds on stupidity.” Those who embrace their wisdom are hungry for real, hard-earned knowledge, while those weaker in motivation will accumulate knowledge that they have no intention to retain, in the quickest manner they can manage.

Pope Leo XIV shared some very important thoughts on the matter. He said: “AI can process information quickly, but it cannot replace human intelligence.” As convenient as the tool can seem, it is just a tool. Even using the term ‘tool’ is an unworthy label. Tools like a hammer, chisel or axe are human-made, and used with effort and intent by humans to forge an end product that came about as the result of raw human will. Artificial intelligence cannot then really be described as a tool, being so automated, requiring little human effort to utilise.

Pope Leo XIV continued to say: “It cannot offer real wisdom. It misses this very important human element. AI will not judge between what is truly right

and wrong, and it won’t stand in wonder, in authentic wonder, before the beauty of God’s creation.” Artificial intelligence is a hollow, soulless mimic of our innate human capabilities. It appears convenient, a pathway of ease and relaxation, but it has a negative effect on the user and the quality of work they produce, considering that they have not produced it themselves, instead relying on the mindless motor of a machine designed to hinder the traditional mindset of mankind, enduring, strong and indomitable of spirit. Over-reliance on artificial intelligence will gradually deplete the quality of youthful minds, as they are not forced to think for themselves.

University

At university, I have observed students around me use artificial intelligence to complete the simplest of tasks – summarizing dozens of pages rather than reading themselves, formulating opinions on their screens rather than calculating their own.

Artificial intelligence tosses out skewered attempts at human greatness but, like Pope Leo XIV said, it cannot appreciate the glory of this world how we can. We can survey the world around us with such appreciation that we are lost for words. Humans have traditionally attempted to capture or recreate those moments of sincere appreciation of our world, through words of philosophy, poetry, scientific studies, even painting or drawing, documenting what we come to love about the universe we live in. Artificial intelligence does not fathom the beauty of the Earth and trillions of stars stretching out in the abyss beyond us; it provides senseless slop, unauthentic and shallow.

Pope Leo XIV finished with a powerful statement, saying, “Remember, AI can never replace that unique gift that you are to the world.” Each of us is an exclusive creation of God, carved carefully for a wonderful purpose, should we choose to pursue that. God did not generate us thoughtlessly



like an AI prompt, but with ultimate love and consideration. In His image, there is no excuse for refusing to embrace our own personal abilities. Why rely solely on artificial intelligence when our own grandly complex minds can construct something much greater?

Artificial intelligence is a limitation of human intelligence and wisdom. It is not a method through which we should attempt to gain knowledge, it is empty and godless, destroying human endeavours in intellect, literature,

art and many other fields. In Proverbs 2:10-15 it is written, “Wisdom will abide in your heart and knowledge will comfort your inner self. Foresight will guide you and understanding will protect you. It will guard you from evil, from people of misleading speech, from those who have abandoned the ways of honesty to walk the roads of darkness; they rejoice in evil doing, they revel in perversions, their paths are crooked and their ways devious.”

The beauty of the O Antiphons by Cara-Leigh

THE O Antiphons appear in vespers (evening prayer) in the seven-day lead up to Christmas. They have their origins in early monastic traditions from the 6-8th century.

Each of the Antiphons highlight a biblical title of the Messiah from the prophets (mainly Isaiah). They are beautiful liturgical treasures which help us prepare our hearts for the coming of our King!

The first O Antiphon is ‘O Sapientia’, meaning O Wisdom. This points to Christ’s Divine wisdom and how He orders all things. It reminds us to trust in God’s plan in uncertainty!

The second is ‘O Adonai’, meaning O Lord. Reminding us that Jesus is the Lord, the Ruler of the House of Israel who gave the law to Moses. It also serves to remind us how Jesus brings us out of slavery to our sins into freedom.

The third is ‘O Radix Jesse’, meaning O Root of Jesse. Showing that Christ is descent from the line of David.

The fourth is ‘O Clavis David’, meaning O Key of David. This illustrates Christ as the key, who opens what no one can shut.

The fifth is ‘O Oriens’, meaning O Dawn. Painting Christ as the rising sun in the morning, which gets rid of all darkness. He is our hope in times of darkness!

The sixth is ‘O Rex Gentium’, meaning O King of The Nations. Christ is the universal King who

unites us all. Reminding us to pray for reconciliation and peace in the world.

The final O Antiphon is ‘O Emmanuel’, meaning O God with us. Bringing our minds to the focus of Christmas, God becoming man to be with us on Earth. It also serves to remind us that God will be with us forever.

Each of the O Antiphons have scripture attached to them from the Old Testament! Something cool about the O Antiphons is that they are like an Acrostic Poem! The first letter of each Antiphon spelled out backwards

spells ‘ERO CRAS’, meaning ‘Tomorrow I will come’!

I encourage everyone to try carve out some time in those days in the lead-up to Christmas to pray with these O Antiphons.

If you are able, try pray vespers in full, if not, just take 10-20 minutes to pray with the O Antiphon for that day. By praying with these Antiphons intentionally, our minds will be more focused on the true meaning of Christmas, and will help us to slow down when the world around us is speeding up.



Advent as a Season of Hope by Erin

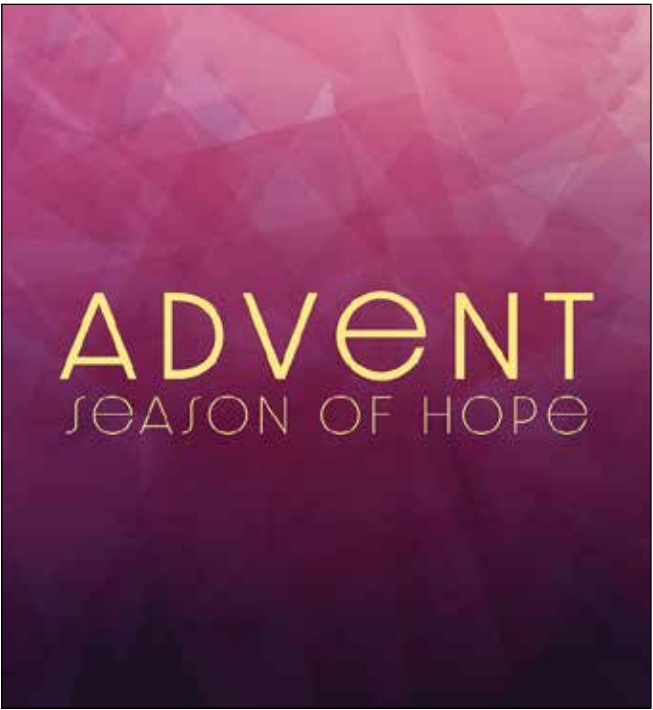
AS we mark the beginning of Advent, we enter a time of reflection and a spiritual journey of preparation. Even the word ‘Advent’ comes from the Latin word ‘adventus’, which means coming or arrival, a translation of the Greek word ‘Parousia’. Not only does this remind us that Christmas is the moment when God’s salvation became reality, but it also invites us to prepare our hearts for Christ’s presence in our lives now and our hope for His return.

It is also a time to celebrate conversion, renewal and our faith. We can see the sense of preparation and anticipation in the readings throughout Advent, encouraging us to “stay awake” (Matthew 24:42) and prepare the way for the Lord.

For some, especially those who don’t feel strong in their faith, Advent can simply feel like a long period of waiting for Christmas to arrive. It is filled with longing, expectation and hope, with busy schedules and bustling crowds. These distractions can drown out God’s voice with life’s demands and excitements.

However, if we look beyond the surface, we can see Advent as an opportunity to prepare our hearts spiritually. Even in moments of distraction, it offers a quiet invitation to pause, reflect and place our trust in God’s love.

Just as Elijah found God when he was at the end of his peril in a small and subtle whisper, we



too should open our hearts to hear His voice. It reminds us that hope comes not only in gifts or celebrations, but in the promise of Christ’s coming. This echoes not only in the manger, but in our daily lives.

Deep down, we all long for something more, no matter how alluring these external distractions may be. As St Augustine said: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God”, which is why Advent is a time to deepen our awareness of God’s goodness and love towards us. This connects with the idea that we all suffer from a God-shaped

hole. Every human heart aches for God, even in dull moments of weakness or pain.

The quiet stretching towards God inside each of us shows our hunger for His love, which is the only thing that can entirely satisfy. This feeling of emptiness is not a void, but rather a space that He can enter and bring hope. This longing simply acts as a reminder to turn our hearts toward Him, our souls remembering that they were made for Him, and all we can do is try to replicate the examples of Mary and the disciples in their attitude of trust, obedience and openness.

Young Writers share thoughts...

The life of St Augustine of Hippo *by Ryan*

ON November 13, of the year 354, in the municipium of Thagaste, a child called Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis was born of a devout Christian mother (who is known as St Monica) and a Pagan father. This child would grow to become one of Christianity's greatest thinkers and he was crowned the Patron Saint of Theologians and Philosophers. He is St Augustine of Hippo, and I wish to tell you of his life.

Augustine was born and raised in a town called Thagaste, in what is now the modern-day city of Souk Ahras, in north-eastern Algeria. Augustine's mother was a devout Christian, however, she was married to a pagan man named Patricius. It is generally agreed that Augustine's family were Berbers, indigenous people to North Africa, however they were extremely Romanised.

His family were what Romans called 'honestiores', which were an upper class of Roman citizen known as honourable men. Through this prosperous position, his father was able to provide Augustine with an education that was classical of the Roman times. While he was at school, he was taught Latin literature, and pagan beliefs and practices. When he was in schooling in his pre-teens, Augustine was exposed to sin when he and a group of friends decided to steal pears.

Later, in his Confession, Augustine writes, "There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its colour or for its flavour." Augustine admits that the tree didn't have anything he didn't and that they did the crime for, in his words: "Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden." This early opening to sin would start a path for

Augustine throughout his life.

Later into Augustine's life, he moved to the city of Carthage in pursuit of his education. There he learned the Roman rhetoric, which is the art of public speaking and a fundamental part of Roman education, adapted from Greek theory to be applied in civic life, legal cases, and politics.

In Carthage, it is believed that Augustine lived a hedonistic lifestyle and, although he was a raised a Christian by his mother, he read Cicero's dialogue 'Hortensius'. This left a lasting impression on Augustine, causing him to take a deep interest in philosophy, and made him want to know the truth of the universe. In this pursuit, he turned to Manichaeism - against his mother's wishes - which is a dualistic religion that promised answers to the problems of evil.

During this same time in Carthage, Augustine met a young woman, with whom he got into a relationship. His mother warned him to avoid fornication, but Augustine persisted in the relationship for over 15 years. This relationship eventually led to the birth of a child, called Adeodatus.

Augustine was, without a shadow of doubt, a brilliant student and a very intelligent man. With his education, Augustine became a master of Latin.

Persistent prayer

Augustine was a Manichean for 10 years, but he started to become disillusioned with the belief and started to experience philosophical difficulties that lead him to break away from Manichaeism. After a brief period of intellectual scepticism, he discovered Neoplatonism. This helped Augustine conceive of God as transcendent and immaterial, however, with his

mother's persistent prayer and his Christian friends exerting a strong moral and spiritual influence, that laid the groundwork for his conversion in his 30s.

In 384, Augustine accepted a position as a Professor of Rhetoric in Milan. He visited Bishop Ambrose of Milan, having heard of his reputation as an orator and being a master of Rhetoric, like Augustine except Ambrose was older and had more experience than Augustine. The two men's friendship grew, with Augustine writing: "Thenceforth I began to love him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth (which I utterly despaired of in Thy Church), but as a person kind towards myself."

Ambrose played a heavy hand in Augustine's conversion to Christianity through the kindness and comradery that Augustine felt with him. In his Confession, Augustine stated, "That man of God received me as a father, and showed me an Episcopal kindness on my coming."

In late August of 386, after a profound internal struggle with sin - particularly sexual temptation - Augustine, in his Confession, explains the moment of his conversion better than I ever could. He writes: "I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read; take up and read.' Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon."

The verse that Augustine had landed on was Romans 13:13-14, which states, "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." With this, Augustine knew that he didn't need to read anymore and converted to Christianity.

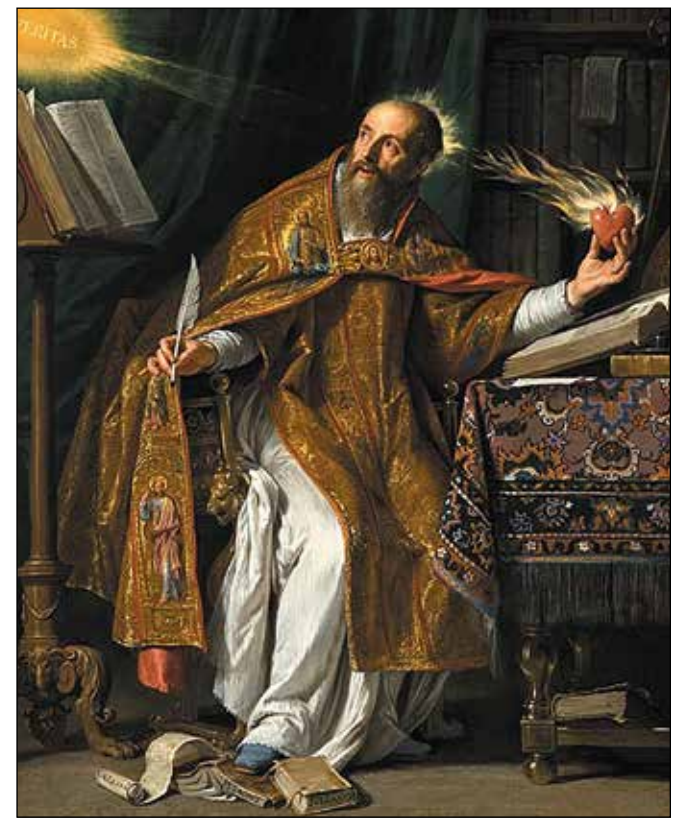
By the Easter of 387, Augustine was baptised by Ambrose in Milan, having abandoned his once hedonistic life and coming to the Lord for forgiveness.

Conversion

Following his conversion, Augustine left his profession as a rhetoric professor so that he could devote himself to preaching the word of God, and, in 391, Augustine was ordained a priest in the city of Hippo Regius (modern day Annaba, Algeria.) He continued to preach and spread the word of God all through the lands. He condemned his former beliefs in Manichaeism and became a quite famous preacher in Hippo Regius.

Only four years into his priesthood, in 395, Augustine was made a Coadjutor Bishop in Hippo and, very shortly after, he became full Bishop inside of Hippo and thus got the name Augustine of Hippo. He stayed a bishop for the rest of his life.

Augustine wrote a library of works, which include over 500 preserved sermons, letters, doctrinal treatises and many philosophical works. His most famous works include Confessions, which is a spiritual autobiography retelling his life and is possibly the best place you can go to read on Augustine, as it



is his own first-hand recount of his own life. He also wrote 'The City of God'. A monumental defence of Christianity in writing from Augustine, this came in response of the Sacking of Rome in 410.

Another of his works is on Christian Doctrine, which was a theological text consisting of four books that describe how to interpret and teach the Scriptures. The first three of these books were published in 397, with the fourth added in 426. These are just some of the many works of Augustine.

In his final years of life, the Western Roman Empire's authority in North Africa was collapsing. The Vandals, an Arian Germanic tribe, had invaded North Africa and had put Augustine's city of Hippo Regius under siege. During this siege, Augustine preached the word of God and kept writing until the

day he died, that being August 28, in 430. This later became his Feast Day.

Augustine was canonised a saint in 1298 by Pope Boniface VII, becoming a Doctor of the Church, and he stands as a pivotal figure in the church to this day, with his works still read and printed in the modern age. His thoughts on theology, philosophy and literature continue to be studied even now, over a thousand years after his death. He was declared the Patron Saint of Theologians, Philosophers and Seekers of Conversion.

Augustine of Hippo was one of the smartest men in Christianity and, through his works on Earth, he earned his place at the table of God. Augustine teaches us that even though we may sin and turn away from God, we can return to Him and be forgiven for our transgressions.

The Curé d'Ars – St Jean-Marie Vianney *by Harry*

IN France, on May 8, 1786, a little baby boy was born who was called Jean-Marie Vianney, and he was baptised that very day. As a young boy, his holiness could already be seen, for example, when he heard the clock strike the hour, he would sign the cross, recite the Hail Mary, and sign the cross again.

On May 8, 1793, little Vianney turned seven years of age. He now had a task to tend to the flock of sheep, and he often prayed when doing so.

He later had a vocation and decided to enter the seminary, where he went through great trials as Latin wasn't easy for him. However, a contemporary said this about him, "He may not be the most gifted among us,

but he will do far more good for souls than us", and so he did. He is now known as the Patron Saint of Parish Priests. and

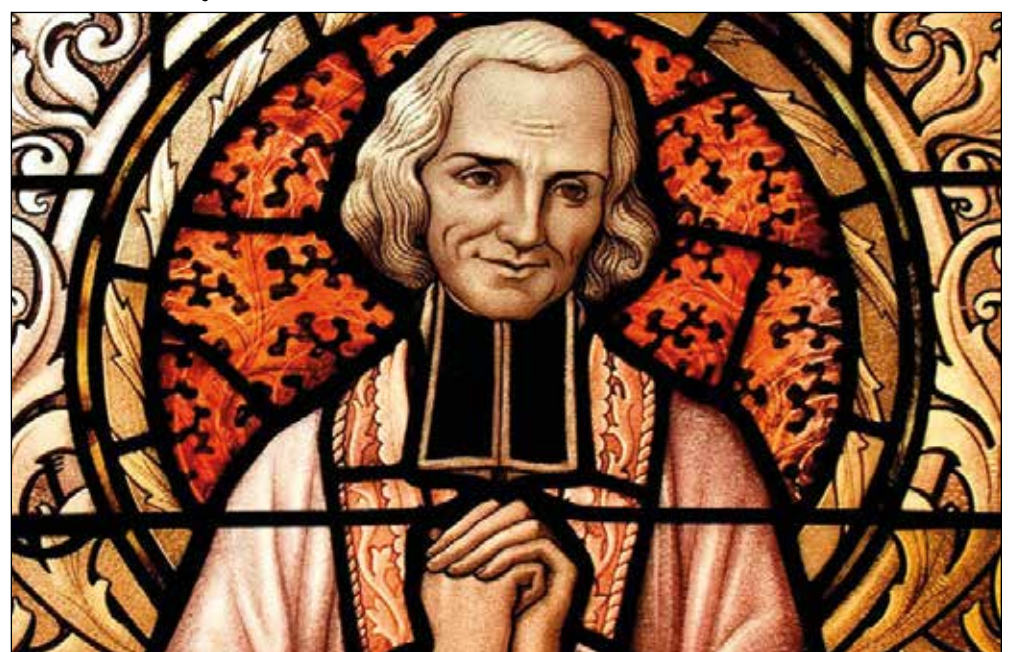
Here are three lessons that we can learn from him:

1, Perseverance in difficulty. While at the grand seminary of Lyons, he was dismissed for being unfit, but didn't give up and later got re-admitted. He also couldn't grasp Latin due to his lack of education, yet he still tried his very best and studied hard. When he was appointed parish priest of Ars, the people there had strayed into committing sin and not practicing their faith. Despite this, he didn't give up and had them all flocking to Mass.

2, Humility. Due to his great success, he had thousands of

pilgrims visit him every day yet he never let it go to his head, thinking himself greater than anyone else. He was also made a canon and given an eloquent rochet, but sold it, using the money for a good cause, saying that it wasn't for him. He had many miracles as well, yet he never took credit, attributing them to St Philomena, not himself.

3, Love of others. He is also known for a profound love of others. He often gave away his good shoes and clothes to those with poor, ragged clothes, and he would wear their clothes. He would also give away his money to other people when they needed it, and he gave generously.



Young Writers share thoughts...

Finding light in the darkness *by John*

AS the season of Advent began, the Parish of Glendermott and Strathfoyle welcomed parishioners and friends to a special three-day series of talks on the theme of Hope.

Organised by the St Columb's Church Liturgy Team, the talks took place from December 1-3, within the celebration of evening Mass at 7.30 pm each night. I had the opportunity to attend these Masses and to reflect on the virtue of Hope.

Each the day, before Mass began, Fr Patrick Lagan gave an introduction about the speaker. The first talk, on Monday, December 1, was given by Bishop Donal McKeown, who spoke on 'Hope in the Church'. On Tuesday, December 2, Fr Declan Boland reflected on 'Hope in the Heart of Each Person'. The series concluded on Wednesday, December 3 with Fr Peter Burns addressing the timely and challenging theme of 'Hope in the World'.

I have compiled a summary of these talks in this article.

Hope in the Church

In his homily, Bishop Donal began by reminding us that the Church exists to bring Jesus to those who need Him the most. He stressed that the Church does not exist to serve political or cultural identities. Instead, the Church belongs to God, and the central question is what God desires for His Church in Ireland today.

Christian hope, he explained, is rooted in the conviction that God is at work in the Church even in times of challenge. The bishop noted that the culture of the 1950s that the Church experienced will not return, and that genuine renewal comes from God's grace rather than from nostalgia.

He invited the parish to reflect on the need for conversion, which begins by asking honestly where we may have gone wrong. From there, he highlighted

three emphases that need to be rediscovered.

First, the Church must reclaim its missionary identity. As the Gospel says, God so loved the world that He sent His Son, and the Church continues that mission, showing and expressing God's love to the world. To paraphrase Pope Francis, the mission of the Church is to bring the "mercy of God" to people who need to know of it the most.

Second, mission requires community. God works through a people who value the common good over individualism. Bishop Donal encouraged the building of a spirituality of communion, inspired by St John Paul II, marked by transparency, accountability, and the willingness to evaluate how faithfully we are serving God.

Third, authentic Christian community needs prayer. Every parish community is called to be a school of prayer. Without spiritual depth, he said, community life becomes cosmetic. Prayer grounds the Church in God's grace and allows hope to flourish.

Hope in the heart of each person

Fr Declan began his homily by saying that "a sermon is about awakening" the congregation from preconceptions about the Church or its life, so that they can see the truth. He then spoke of the love of God that is constantly flowing into our hearts, a love that nothing on earth can take away. This, he explained, is the foundation of Christian hope. Hope does not depend on feelings, but on God's unbreakable covenant and on Jesus' promise to remain with us until the end of time.

He described hope as a strong and resilient virtue that does not give up.

St Paul's words from Romans provided a framework for his

reflection: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Suffering, he explained, is not contrary to Christian hope. Instead, it deepens it. From suffering comes patience, from patience perseverance, and perseverance leads to hope – a hope that does not deceive because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Fr Declan also reflected on prayer. Prayer is not magic and it does not guarantee immunity from hardship. Rather, prayer gives us the capacity to share in the sufferings of Christ and to bear witness to His love in the midst of life's challenges. Christian hope looks to beginnings rather than endings. It listens for the promptings of God and recognises His compassion at work in every moment.

Drawing on the words of the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, he encouraged the congregation to be patient with what remains unresolved in life, to trust even when answers are not given, and to allow hope to grow through the vulnerable places of the heart.

"We are Easter people," he concluded, people who live in the light of the Resurrection, confident that Christ has conquered every form of suffering and darkness.

Hope in the World

Fr Peter Burns began with the fact that it can be difficult to have hope in the world today. Yet hope becomes possible when we learn to see the world as God sees it. He quoted Pope Leo XIV, who stated that "the gravest form of poverty is not to know God". The greatest task facing the Church, Fr Peter suggested, is to awaken within

people the awareness that God is real, that God is alive, and that each person is held and loved by Him.

God sees the world not only as we see it, but also as it is, as it can be, and as it will be. God is the author of history, and His work is not yet finished. Christian hope is built on the unchanging faithfulness of God. To paraphrase what Moses told the people of Israel as they were about to enter the promised land: We cannot know the future, but we can look back and know that God was with us through our journey, from Egypt, through the desert, and now as they were about to enter the promised land. This allows us to trust that He will never abandon us.

Fr Peter reflected on the way Christian hope can become contagious. Christian communities, he said, do not simply preserve hope. They create hope. All it takes is one good person to begin restoring hope, but ultimately it is all of us together who become a beacon of light.

Hope does not ignore reality. Instead, it transforms the way we live within it, helping us to witness that light is stronger than darkness and that God is stronger than anything that opposes His will. With the eyes of faith, we can echo the words of Julian of Norwich: "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well – for there is a force of love moving through the universe that holds us fast and will never let us go".

My thoughts

Hope is not an easy virtue, but knowing and being reassured during the past couple of days of Christ's promise to be always with us, was more than enough assurance for me.

As St Paul says (and also the motto for the talk series), "We wait in hope for the Lord, He is our help and our shield."



Photographs by David Hill



Sessiaghoneill community tea



Jubilee Year of Hope closing ceremony for Diocese

THE Jubilee Year of Hope will come to a close in the Diocese with a special ceremony, followed by Mass, in the Mother Church of the Diocese, St Eugene's Cathedral, on Sunday, December 28, at 12.30 pm.

Reflecting on the year of travelling as pilgrims of hope, Bishop Donal told 'The Net' that the Jubilee Year of Hope has been "an opportunity for all of us to 'give a reason for the hope that is in us.'" (1 Peter 3:15).

He continued: "I know that the theme has been echoed on our diocesan pilgrimages, to Knock, Lourdes, Fatima and Rome, and during many parish novenas and events.

"That message of hope has also run through the many conversations about discerning together the way forward for the diocese and parishes."

Remarking that a "new message of encouragement came through the election of Pope Leo XIV," Bishop Donal added: "In an age of poor role models of leadership on a world stage, the role of the Papacy assumed an even greater teaching and prophetic significance."

He concluded: "I hope that we can give Christ's message of new life - even in the wilderness - to the many young people who cry out for clarity and courage."

On January 6, 2026, Pope Leo

XIV will preside over the Solemn Closing of the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, bringing to an end the Holy Year in the Church.

It is hoped that there will be time to reflect on the fruits of the journey of hope walked in dioceses and parishes, etc, around the world.



Christ the King

After celebrating Mass for Feast of Christ The King and leading Eucharistic Procession through Derry City, Bishop Donal commented that it was...

Moving to see so many wanting to bring Christ to the pain of our city



THE Eucharistic Procession in Derry to mark the 100th anniversary of the Feast of Christ The King attracted thousands of the faithful of all ages, despite the wet and windy day that Sunday, November 23 was.

Leading the way in braving the elements was 75-year-old Bishop Donal, after celebrating 12 noon Mass with a packed congregation in St Columba's Church, Long Tower.

Holding the Monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament high, he blessed the City of Derry and its people as he walked from the Long Tower grounds down through the city centre, via Bishop Street, and onto the walkway along the River Foyle.

While some participating in the procession then made their way across the Peace Bridge to Ebrington Square, where the closing ceremony would be held, others followed the Eucharistic Procession to the jetty, where Bishop Donal and other priests and Religious present boarded boats to travel on the river, blessing the waters and bridges that cross it, while those watching from the riverside walkway prayed the Rosary and sang.

Commenting on the experience afterwards, Bishop Donal said: "It was impressive and moving to see so many people wanting to bring Christ to the pain of our city. The march to honour Christ the King was a missionary church in action. It is a great signal as

we come towards the end of the Jubilee of Hope.

"All age groups were represented, and it was great to see children leading us in the Rosary. I hope it will encourage others to be proud of our faith and to love Jesus who is Emmanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh who dwells among us."

Delivering a powerful homily during the Mass in Long Tower, he told those gathered and watching online: "Today we celebrate 100 years since Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Jesus Christ, Universal King. The early part of the 20th century had seen the fall of empires, and the rise of competing small states, the awful World War and the rise of Marxism in Russia.

"Pius XI explicitly wanted this Feast to be an antidote to communism, atheism and narrow nationalism. Today's feast invites us to recognise abuses of power – for Jesus alone is Lord and Saviour."

Commenting on what the day's readings had to share about how to live as Church, preparing the Kingdom of God, Bishop Donal said: "Firstly, the core message of the early church was that Jesus died and was raised again. He was victorious over the worst that sin and death could do to Him. He is now Lord and Saviour. That is what we preach. He wants to go to the ends of the earth and to every corner of our society bringing healing and mercy. As we heard

in our second reading, in the risen Jesus we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins.

"St Paul will use various terms to describe that role of Jesus as the one in whom our fragmented world finds wholeness and healing. He is the head of the body which is the church. He is the cornerstone on which all of us living stones are aligned to build up the Temple where God lives among us."

Kingship

He added: "The Kingdom of God has already begun to take root among us. But the image of Christ the King is only one of the ways in which we were invited to know and worship Jesus. His lordship over all creation will be visible at the end of time – and that is the solid rock of hope on which we base our faith. In the meantime, in His own words, He is among us as one who serves (Luke 22:27) That is His strange sort of kingship."

Referring to the Gospel passage showing Jesus on the Cross, Bishop Donal remarked: "He reveals Himself as Lord on the cross, crucified with thieves and offering forgiveness until the very end. As He told Pilate, His Kingdom is not of this world. As He told His apostles at the Last Supper, He was prepared to give His body to be broken and his blood to be shed to take away the sins of the world.

"And we are invited each Sunday to the sacramental celebration of that sacrifice. We are invited to stand at the foot of the Cross with Mary and His faithful disciples and partake of the meal in which He is present in all His fullness. Adoration of that Blessed Sacrament is not something clean that is separate from the sacrifice of Calvary in all its horror. Adoration is worshipping the sacrament of Christ's death and Resurrection. That is why our sanctuaries and altars always stand beneath the cross."

He continued: "What we will do

this afternoon is to worship in this city the mystery of Calvary. In the pain and confusion of our world, there can be a temptation to see Adoration as an escape from the messiness of this world. In fact, Jesus wants us to be nailed to the Cross with Him, close to those with whom He spent most of His ministry.

"Jesus in the Eucharist is among us in solidarity with the broken, not merely as some sort of reward for the perfect. He had no time for the arrogance and assumed purity of the Pharisees. We all come to the foot of the cross as sinners in need of forgiveness. If we do not come with the least of His brothers and sisters, if we do not weep today for those who have died in our river and elsewhere, we will not meet Jesus where He is as the Suffering Servant who walks with us.

"In today's procession, we carry to our city the Jesus who on the Cross reached out to someone in agony. Today we offer Jesus to those who are broken like us. We do not claim to possess him for ourselves."

Hope

Saying that the Feast of Christ The King had been established in 1925 to "give hope to a world shattered by conflict and fragmentation", Bishop Donal added: "Despite that, the idea of Christ the King was misinterpreted and even hijacked by those who want to pose as great Christian rulers. They became mirror images of the cruel political forces that they claimed to resist. Today, we see worrying examples of arrogant leadership among the great powers. We see the Gospel being used to support the narrow nationalistisms that Pope Pius XI warned us against.

"Jesus would want us to follow Him as King and not the blinkered fights of people halfway round the world. The challenge for Christ's followers on this island is how we can be witnesses to what the Preface of today's Mass calls 'a



Christ the King



continued from page 12

Kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. Jesus the Suffering Servant King would want us to avoid any arrogant version of the Church and any playing of political games. "As St Paul would write, when we are weak, we are strong - for our strength comes not from our power or our success but from trusting in the foolishness and apparent failure of the Cross. It is only by dying to ourselves and to our trust in manmade securities that we can share in Christ's resurrection, that we can be true to the One who reigned from the Cross on Calvary."

He went on to say: "Jesus invites us today to walk with Him as the King who reigns from the Cross. Today is about bringing the compassion of Jesus to our hurting world, not a hollow self-serving exercise in 'making Catholicism great again.' Today is not about us. It is about the Jesus who became flesh and dwelt among us - so that we might know his divine life."

"The Mass and Adoration of its

sacramental presence among us is a call to bring the love of Jesus to those who feel furthest from God and from His love. We should not walk with Him today if we are not prepared to follow His uncomfortable agenda.

"Today's feast is an encouragement and a challenge to walk with one another and with Jesus. He is Lord and Saviour, and we praise Him. But, even after the Resurrection, the apostles thought that Jesus was going to make them strong when He would restore the Kingdom to Israel. They needed the Holy Spirit to correct their false understanding. We have to accept Him in the dream that He has for the world, not to satisfy any of our narrow priorities."

"Renewal in the Irish Church," concluded Bishop Donal, "will come only from those who come to adore at the foot of the Cross. Our enemy is sin, not some other group. This is a time for great hearts and huge renewal. Are we ready to walk forward with Jesus and avoid any notion that that Promised Land is behind us? That is the question for all of us today and every other day."



Christ the King

Sharing her love for Jesus in the Eucharist on experiencing years of torment seep away in silence of Adoration, Emma Gallagher...

Derry girl 'Down Under' picks up baton of faith in Perth



Emma with her parents at God's Farm, in the south-west of Western Australia.

ONE of the countries that united with Derry, and other areas around Ireland and the world, in celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Feast of Christ The King with public processions of the Blessed Sacrament, was Australia.

Reports have come through of Eucharistic processions in the states of Queensland, Victoria (Melbourne) and Western Australia (Perth), from Derry-born, Emma Gallagher, who was involved with the organising of the procession through the Central Business District of Perth.

This was the third procession that the 43-year-old daughter of Rosemount couple, Thomas and Gretta Gallagher, has been involved with in her adopted Australian City this year; two were Eucharistic and one a Rosary procession.

And how fitting that they should happen during this Year of Hope, bringing the lasting hope that only the Risen Lord can give to a hurting world, as witnessed by Emma in her own journey from turmoil to thanksgiving, and in the veneration expressed by many who made the Sign of the Cross and those who knelt down on seeing the Eucharist in their midst, from young lads outside an Irish pub to drug addicts in an area of the City ravaged by highly addictive hard drugs, such as ICE.

Speaking to 'The Net' about how all of this came about, Emma shared some of her own

conversion story, which she has also recorded in her documentary, 'The Road to the Triumph', which is available to view online.

While she grew up in a family of strong faith, Emma didn't want to know anything about it as a teenager, having suffered severe bullying and being strongly drawn to a materialistic life, desiring to travel, party and make money.

But this life only made her world darker, leading her to attempt suicide on two occasions, such was the desperation she was experiencing. It was in Perth that she made the second attempt to end her life, but the power of the prayer being offered for her by her parents back home was stronger than her desire to die.

On the day that she had planned to end her life, Emma found a Novena to St Jude, the Patron Saint of Hopeless Cases, folded on her desk, with no-one in the office having put it there...and CCTV footage not solving the mystery either.

Stunned by this and the realisation that she needed help, she rang her father thousands of miles away to tell him what had happened, and he told her the best place that he knew of where she could find the help and peace she needed...in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

Clueless as to where she might find a Church in Perth offering Eucharistic Adoration, Emma turned to 'Google' and stumbled upon the only nearby Catholic

parish offering Eucharistic Adoration. Finding the torment going on in her mind disappearing as she sat in deep silence before the tabernacle, Emma recalled: "For the first time in 15 years, there was nothing." The peace of sitting in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ was slowly radiating outwards from her soul to embrace her whole.

Rosary

Emma began to note very interesting happenings in her life, including a complete stranger, a woman named Mary in a remote Australian mining town, gifting her a pair of Rosary beads from Fatima. This prayer of Our Lady and the healing power of the Blessed Sacrament has been sustaining Emma since, giving her the strength to overcome struggles and to believe that God is ever present in her life, even in the darkness.

Having experienced an intense "illumination of conscience" in 2020, she returned to the Sacraments, and found that her life was instantly given a new purpose: to lead others back to the source of light. From this, Emma went on to make the powerful documentary entitled 'The Road to the Triumph'. This film will surely draw souls back to the Eucharist not only through Emma's biography, but also through its focus on the triumph of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart, as promised at Fatima. With a stark warning about the reality of spiritual warfare against the family, 'The Road to the Triumph' highlights the great importance of the Family Rosary as a counter-weapon.

Appreciative now of the prayer example and support of not only her family and faith friends in Perth, but the many great witnesses to the faith that are continually emerging these days in her native city, including the inspiring story of Servant of God, Sr Clare Crockett, whom she knew from their COR youth group days, Emma has been actively following the endeavours of such people as Barry Mallett and Anthony Hogan, founders of Guardians of the Faith.

And, it was through their encouragement that she rose to the challenge this year of getting involved in organising two Eucharistic Processions in unity with her home city, the first being in February and the second in November, for the Feast of Christ The King.

Commenting on this, Emma said: "We planned the February one with about two weeks' notice. It was really supernatural what happened. Four of us, including a priest, had been in chapel on New Year's Eve, and we all saw something. I saw a procession and just knew that it was going to happen, but I didn't know how."

"I prayed about it for two weeks and then knew that it was to go ahead. Within the next two weeks we were ready to go, with permits from the police to go through the Central Business District of Perth. West Perth is where all the nightclubs and bars are, and we walked through a Fringe Festival. It was such a day of grace, with 600 people turning up."

Encouraged by Barry and Anthony to join with Derry in having another Eucharistic Procession in November, for the 100th anniversary of the Feast of Christ The King, she called upon the Lord and her faith friends for the help needed for such a big event, and to overcome the obstacles along the way.

"On the Wednesday before the procession," recalled Emma, "the St John's Ambulance that had been booked cancelled, as they were going to a bigger event, so we had to get a private company."

"The private paramedic turned up and when we had returned to the Cathedral at the end of the procession, I could see him in tears. I ran over to him wondering had something bad happened, but he told me that he was a lapsed Catholic and had been so moved by the experience that he now wanted to explore coming back to the Catholic faith. God wanted that man, called Noah, to be there to help bring him back to the faith."

Trust

Appreciating the lesson in this, she said: "God steps in at the 11th hour. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight' (Proverbs 3:5-6); I live by this now. That is what the Lord is asking us to do – things that are completely impossible, He makes possible, and He will keep you going to the very end."

"As an event manager, there is no way that you would take on something like this. We did it through the faith that everybody had – and each had their own job to do on the day. We all make up the Body of Christ. The beauty in



Emma with Fr Chris Alar, MIC, Provincial Superior of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception in United States, England and Argentina, who hosts online productions to explain the faith and has also written best-selling books.



Emma with Sr Clare Crockett devotee, Fr Tadeusz, who was the young seminarian who used to go kayaking with the late Pope John Paul II, when he was Cardinal in Poland during the communist reign to discern his priesthood. He is now a Jesuit priest in Melbourne.



Archbishop Emeritus Barry Hickey, who consecrated Australia to Christ The King.



Christ the King



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it is the trust. There was no-one in control, as I certainly wasn't. I just said 'yes'. It is a great lesson, but it is not easy."

Thankful for the success that it was, Emma said: "Over 1,000 people turned up, with many young people from the Ordinariate, the Charismatic Movement, Disciples of Jesus, Catholic youth ministry, and others. We had so many different groups, it was just a real act of unity."

"Like in Derry, the river was blessed too. Fr Paul Fox and Fr Doug Harris went on a boat down the Swan River with the Blessed Sacrament. They consecrated the waterways, roads and the land. It is an area that would have big casinos, a concert stadium and horse-racing track, so a lot of gambling, drinking etc, and they went past all of that on the boat with the Blessed Sacrament, to break addiction."

"Archbishop Emeritus Barry Hickey came along at the end and consecrated Australia to Christ The King."

Reflecting on her Irish Catholic roots, Emma remarked: "Everything stems from Derry. Barry speaks of St Patrick's prophecy about a light from the north, and we have Sr Clare Crockett, whose name means 'light'. All that I am seeing is the light that Christ is shining. I was suicidal and my peace came from finally going back in front of the Blessed Sacrament. I really believe in the True Presence."

"With all the craziness in the world, He is all we need to get our peace. We are meant to be in the world but not of the world. We

get freedom from being in front of Our Lord, as we can disconnect from everything. When we keep going back to Him like this, we receive an interior peace that is not of the world. It is Divine and saving people who were lost. The way of the world keeps us busy. Look at the time spent on screens, which could be spent in prayer. When you go to be with the Lord, it is just you and Him."

She added: "We are going into Christmas and a time of celebration and joy for many, followed by January, when it is cold and dark. If people are feeling alone or struggling with mental health, I would highly recommend Eucharistic Adoration. The only way to start getting peace back into my life was in front of the Blessed Sacrament. It is a real journey. Ask Our Lord and Our Lady to help you, and you will never be abandoned."

"Five years ago, I was a feminist and an atheist, and now I am completely in love with the Lord. I have given up my job and am living in Divine Providence. As a result of these Eucharistic processions, I believe that we are going to see greater miracles in our time than there were in Old Testament times. We are seeing it already. Our wee city of Derry and the Sr Clare story is just incredible. In God's time, people will see it with their own eyes. If you keep going before the Blessed Sacrament, the Lord will speak louder and louder to you."

(Emma's documentary 'Road to the Triumph' can be views at <https://roadtothetriumph.com/> or <https://youtu.be/u-UyFf1mh-JE?si=RFQt8prL8mSG0sy4>)



In second world-wide Eucharistic procession...

Thousands in Derry and beyond celebrated Christ The King by Guardians of the Faith

GUARDIANS of the Faith YouTube channel presenters organised the second Worldwide Eucharistic Procession on Sunday, November 23, with Derry again taking the lead.

Under Church approval and the blessing of Archbishop Eamon Martin, the procession was led through the streets of Derry by Bishop Donal, and supported by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and Home of The Mother Servant Sisters and a multitude of devotees from all over Ireland, England, Scotland, Portugal, Hungary, Albania, USA, with local and international YouTubers, flying in to cover the event.

This was truly a phenomenal witness; the procession of

over 6,000 people, started at St Columba's Chapel, Derry, then processed through the walled city, and onwards down the quay towards the jetty, where three boats took the bishop and clergy to the bridges crossing the Foyle River. This was to pray for all those who lost their lives to suicide, and for all the families affected by suicide and mental health.

The celebration came to a close at Ebrington Square, where a stage was set for Benediction led by Bishop Donal, followed by the praying of the Rosary, led by children from Children's Rosary. A short time of music helped finish the day on a high note, despite the falling rain. A final prayer of thanksgiving and blessing were given by Fr Antonio

CFR and Bishop Donal.

It really was a stunning day of Adoration, prayer, joyous celebration and liberation.

The event was organised for the Sunday, November 23, with it being the 100th anniversary of the first Feast Day of Christ The King by Pope Pius XI on December 11, 1925.

The procession really took Christendom by storm, as it not only happened in Derry but also simultaneously in 152 parishes worldwide. Knock Shrine, Fatima Shrine, Medjugorje, Assisi, Cartan Scotland National Shrine to Our Lady, and St Charbel's Monastery in Lebanon, all joined unity to honour Christ the King. Over 43 parishes in Ireland, 40 parishes in USA, 35 parishes in

Nigeria, and about seven parishes in Australia joined in procession, with 30 other parishes from all over the world.

This worldwide Eucharistic Procession was truly a worldwide Eucharistic revival that will continue, as the next one is booked and preparations are underway for its launch.

A special thanks to Foyle Search & Rescue and 'Amazing Grace' Charters, for the use of their boats to enable Bishop Donal, clergy and Servant Sisters to bless the Foyle River.

All footage from the procession taken by Emerald Videos and professional photographer, Ciara McDaid, has been uploaded to the Guardians of the Faith YouTube Channel.



Omagh talk on importance of praying for Holy Souls *by Evelyn Heaney*



OMAGH Pastoral Centre was the venue for a very inspiring talk on the 'Importance of praying for the Holy Souls', by Mons Barney McAleer.

This was held on Thursday, November 6, and was hosted by Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group.

Mons Barney retired to his native Ireland in July 2023, after 59 years of serving the people of God in South Africa. He has been ministering in Portstewart and his native Pomeroy since his return, as well as leading Days of Prayer in Benburb Priory. He celebrated his Diamond Jubilee as a priest last year.

Mons Barney began his talk by quoting from Scripture: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Ph 2:5), emphasising that our attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ, always being charitable and merciful to others.

He outlined the long tradition of

praying for the Holy Souls, which is mentioned in 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 in the Old Testament. Judas Maccabeus, after burying the dead, following a battle that took place in the second century BC where many soldiers died, "prayed to the Lord to completely pardon the sins of their dead companions." He took up a collection among the soldiers and sent it to Jerusalem to be offered as sacrifice for sin.

2 Maccabees 1:46 says: "It is, therefore, a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosened from their sins."

Mons Barney outlined that several Catholic saints reported being contacted by, or having visions of, the Holy Souls in Purgatory, who appeared to ask for prayers and Masses to aid their purification.

St Padre Pio was often visited by souls from Purgatory who sought his prayers and the offering of the Holy Mass for their release. St Faustina, known as the 'Apostle of Divine Mercy', described in her diary being led by her Guardian Angel to Purgatory and seeing the intense suffering of the souls there. They implored her for prayers and sacrifices. St Gertrude the Great, a Benedictine nun and mystic, had a deep compassion for the suffering souls. Our Lord revealed a specific prayer to her, promising that each time it was devoutly recited, a vast number of souls would be released from Purgatory.

St Gertrude's Prayer for the Holy Souls is: "Eternal Father, I offer

You the most Precious Blood of Your Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal Church, those in my own home and within my family. Amen."

These saints' accounts emphasize the reality of Purgatory and the power of prayers, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and sacrifices offered by the living to help the faithful departed in their purification.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that purgatory is a state of 'purification for those who die in God's grace and friendship but are not yet perfectly holy'. This final purification is necessary because nothing unclean can enter Heaven, and it involves the temporal punishment due to sins that have already been forgiven.

In Catholic tradition, Christmas is considered a highly significant time for praying for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, as it is believed that more souls are released into Heaven on this day than any other. This is seen as a time to reflect on the generosity of Jesus' birth by offering prayers and

Masses to help the souls there, who are seen as suffering but able to receive grace through the prayers of the living.

More souls are thought to be released during the consecration of the Mass than at any other time, and having Masses offered for the Holy souls is a great act of mercy, Mons Barney continued. These include month's mind and anniversary Masses, as we are presenting them on the altar before the Father.

Mons Barney explained that any act of mercy, such as almsgiving, visiting the sick, bringing Holy Communion to nursing homes or housebound, or helping our neighbours in any way, offered for the Holy Souls is very efficacious for their redemption, as they cannot help themselves but can pray for us as they are still in grace.

Mons Barney concluded his talk by quoting St Monica, who said to her son, St Augustine: "Only one thing I ask of you is remember me at the altar wherever you may be."

The Monsignor gave everyone his priestly blessing, and ended the evening with a rousing rendition of 'The Hills of Pomeroy' on the accordion.



Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group music ministry members with Mons Barney McAleer.



Omagh Charismatic Group leader, Evelyn Heaney, and Kathleen Winters with Mons Barney McAleer.



Long Tower launch for 'A Light for My Path'

ADVENT got off to a lovely start in the Long Tower with a gathering in the St Columba Heritage Centre for the launch of a book of reflections by the parish administrator, Fr Gerard Mongan, entitled 'A Light for My Path'.

Fr Gerard said that he was honoured to be asked by local

best-selling author, Brendan McKeever to compile a selection of reflections for the seasons and feasts of the new Liturgical Year A.

Moved by the number of people who turned up for the launch, including Bishop Donal taking time to drop in, Fr Gerard thanked Brendan for his encouragement

and support in the venture.

He also thanked Pat and Louise at Cloisters Cafe for providing refreshments, and the Purple Ladies for their support.

All proceeds from sales of the book will go towards the Cause for Sister Clare's Canonisation and to support the people of Gaza through the Papal Charity: Aid to

the Church in Need (ACN).

'A Light for My Path' is priced £10 and available at St Columba's Gift Shop, Long Tower, Parish Office and Top News, George's St, Omagh.

Photographs by Gerry Temple



Eangach

Na Sacraimintí

Mar chaitlicigh, tá ár saol bunaithe thart ar 7 rud, .i. na Sacraimintí. Tá a fhios againn uilig, bealach amháin nó bealach eile, go bhfuil siad tábhachtach inár gcreideamh, nó tá a fhios againn go bhfuil suntas acu don dóigh a mbíonn muid ag déanamh céiliúradh ar rudaí. An príomhrud a dhéanann muid sa seipéal – agus muid i láthair ag Aifreann – tá sé bunaithe go mór ar an rud mór, an tSacraimint atá á cheiliúradh. Is é sin an Eocairist.

Ach an bhfuil a fhios againn cad is bunús leis na cúrsaí seo? Thar aon rud eile, tá eachtra amháin ann atá mar bhonn faoi seo uilig – Íosa ag teacht ar an tsaoil. Nuair a tháinig aingeal an Tiarna chuig Muire le teachtaireacht, mar a deirtear san *Angelus*, “*ghabh sí ón Spiorad Naomh*”. Ag an phointe sin, gineadh Íosa ina broinn. Níos moille, rugadh é, mhair sé beo ar an talamh, thug sé fán mhinistreacht s’aige, céasadh é, fuair sé bás, agus d’aiséirigh sé – rinne sé seo uilig *ina chorp – i gcorp daonna*. Is é seo an fhírinne atá lárnach inár gcreideamh, gur tháinig Dia é fén – Íosa – isteach sa tsaoil ina dhuine, agus corp daonna aige cosúil leis an cheann atá againne.

Tháinig Íosa agus rinne sé an obair shlánaitheach s’aige i gcorp daonna, agus d’fhuascail sé muid. Chomh maith leis sin, thug sé dá dheisceabail bealach le leanstan ar aghaidh leis an obair seo sa domhan. Is iad sin na Sacraimintí. Cad is Sacraimint ann, go hachomair? Is ‘comhartha’ fisiceach Sacraimint ar ghrásta dofheicthe. Tugann Dia grástaí agus beannachtaí dá mhuintir, ach fríd ‘mhodh’ an choirp, mar a rinne Íosa é féin. Leag Íosa lámh ar dhaoine, agus leigheas sé iad. Seo giota fá gach ceann acu:

Baisteadh



Tosaíonn muid uilig ár saol Críostaí leis an Bhaisteadh. Thig le gach duine baisteadh a fháil, beag beann ar aois, ach don chuid is mó againn, tugann ár dtuismitheoirí chuig an seipéal muid don bhaisteadh agus muid an-óg. Doirtear uisce ar ár gcinn

agus déantar muid a bhaisteadh “*in ainm an Athar, agus an Mhí, agus an Spioraid Naomh*”. Ón am sin i leith, bíonn muid mar bhall den Eaglais – .i. pobal nó clann Dé. Maireann an ‘marc’ seo ar ár n-anam i ndiaidh an bháis, agus muid sna Flaithis fiú! Déanann muid an rud a d’iarr Íosa orainn a dhéanamh, le dul agus muintir an domhain iomláin a bhaisteadh.

Faoistin – Sacraimint na hAithrí



Mhaith Íosa do pheacaigh nuair a bhí sé ar talamh. Roimh a Thógáil ar Neamh, dúirt sé dá nAspail amhlaidh a dhéanamh, agus thug sé an t-údarás dóibh peacaí a mhaitheamh. Ó bhlianta luatha na hEaglaise, ó aimsir na nAspal (na chéad Easpaig agus Sagairt), bhí Sacraimint na hAithrí againn le peacaí a mhaitheamh. Insíonn muid ár bpeacaí don tsagart, ach bíonn an sagart ina ionadaí Íosa. Déantar ár bpeacaí a mhaitheamh fríd ghníomh Íosa, fríd an duine. Is seod luachmhar é seo, agus bíonn ‘míorúilt’ i saol an duine fríd an tSacraimint chumhachtach é seo!

An Eocairist



Is é seo an tSacraimint lárnach i saol an Chríostaí. Ag an tSuipéar Deireanach, thóg Íosa arán agus fíon, bheannaigh sé iad, agus thug iad – anois claochlaithe ina chorp agus fuil féin. Bhí an creideamh seo láidir san Eaglais ón fhiorthús. Tarlaíonn míorúilt (ní háibhéal é an focal sin!) ag achan uile Aifreann. Cothaíonn Íosa muid, thugann sé a chorp agus fuil féin dúinn le go mbeadh ár n-anam

cothaithe le tabhairt fán tsaoil Críostaí. Is é Íosa *Arán na Beatha*. Nuair a fhreastalaíonn muid ar an aifreann, bíonn muid ag comhlíonadh an oird a thug Íosa dúinn, lena dhéanamh i gcuimhne air.

An Cóineartú



Don chuid is mó againn, bíonn ár gcóineartú ann nuair a bhaineann muid aois ar leith amach. Nuair a bhíonn muid cóineartaithe, bíonn muid agglacadh le níos mó freagrachta inár saol creidimh – amhail is gur comhartha é go bhfuil muid ag dul in aibíocht. Ar lá na Cincise, i ndiaidh d’Íosa dul ar Neamh, thuirling an Spiorad Naomh ar na hAspail agus Muire, agus iad ag guí. Gheall Íosa go mbeadh an Spiorad leo i gcónaí lena dtreorú. Amharcann an Eaglais ar an lá sin mar ‘bhreithlá’ na hEaglaise. Leagann an Easpaig lámh orainn, agus faigheann muid féin an Spiorad Naomh fosta – a bhíonn linn ina dhiaidh sin le muid a stiúradh. Tugtar dúinn ‘Toirbhirtí’ an Spioraid.

Pósadh



Measann an Eaglais go bhfuil Sacraimint i gceist leis an phósadh fosta. Éagsúil leis na cinn eile, áfach, tuigtear gurb é an pósadh an tSacraimint “bhunaídh”. Bhí an pósadh ann ó thús ama. Tá sé le feiceáil sa chéad chuid den Bhíobla fosta – cruthaíonn Dia fear agus bean, agus tugann sé dóibh an chéad aithne: “*Bígí torthach, agus téigí i líonmhaire agus líonaigí an talamh*” (Gineasas 1:28). D’ardaigh Íosa dínit an phósta agus rinne Sacraimint de. Bíonn fear agus bean aontaithe i rith a saoil – “*fágfaidh duine a athair agus a mháthair chun bheith go dlúth i bpáirt lena bhean, agus aon cholainn amháin a bheidh sa bheirt acu*” (Matha 19) – agus as an aontas seo a thagann beatha nua.

Oird Bheannaithe



Is é atá i gceist le hOird Bheannaithe, ná an rud a tugtar ar aghaidh ó na hAspail ar aghaidh, go dtí an chéad ghlúin eile de Dheochaine, Sagairt agus Easpaig. Sa dóigh seo, tugtar ministreacht Chríost ar aghaidh agus bíonn tréadaithe ag obair go fóill sa domhain ina bhfuil muid, le hobair Chríost a dhéanamh, agus na Sacraimintí a thabhairt dúinn. Tagann na Sacraimintí chugainn uilig fríd na hEaspaig, a fuair iad ó na hEaspaig bhunaídh (na hAspail), agus amach chuig na Sagairt agus na Deochaine. Leagann Easpaig lámh ar fhear, lena oirniú ina Dheochaine, Sagart nó Easpaig.

Ola na nEaslán



Is minic a thugtar “Ungadh na nEaslán” air seo fosta. Is Sacraimint í seo a thugtar, go príomha, dóibh siúd atá iontach tinn nó atá i mbaol bás a fháil. Bíonn orainn uilig bás a fháil – ar uair an bháis, fágann muid an saol seo, agus téann muid ar aghaidh chuig Dia. Ungann Sagart nó Easpaig an duine atá tinn le hola, rud a neartaíonn iad don rud atá rompu, sna bomaití deireanacha ar an tsaoil seo. Uaireanta, ní fhaigheann an té bás, ach tugann an tSacraimint seo dóibh neart, agus leigheas spioradálta. Chuala mé seansagart uair amháin a dúirt gur ghnách leo seo a dhéanamh le haon duine san oispidéal le fadhbanna croí – ní hamháin gur tugadh leigheas spioradálta, ach ba mhinic a tugadh leigheas corpartha don duine fosta. Nach iontach an rud é cumhacht Dé a fheiceáil ag obair inár measc!



Dia do Bheatha Naí Anocht

Dia do bheatha, a Naí anocht,
Do ghabh id’ dhiagacht daonnacht
Dár saoradh, a chnú chroí,
A bhrú mhaoth-ghlan Maighdine.

Íseal ann ár bhFlaith
I gcró cúng an asail
Mo chean le dtáinig dá thoil
Dár fhágaibh Neamh um Nollaig.

Gaol is grá, tróc’re is toil
Le dtug Dia a Mhac dá mhalairt
Dár ndíon ar Chathair na gCiach
A Rí is Athair ’s is Aon-Dia.

Don Oíche Úd i mBeithil

Don oíche úd i mBeithil,
beidh tagairt ar ghrian go brách
Don oíche úd i mBeithil,
go dtáinig an Briathar slán
Tá gríosghrúa ar spéartha,
's an talamh 'na chlúdach bán
Féach íosagán sa chléibhín,
's an Mhaighdean in aoibhneas grá

Ar leacain lom an tsléibhe,
go nglacann na haoirí scáth
Nuair in oscailt gheal na spéire,
tá teachtaire Dé ar fáil
Céad glóir anois don Athair,
i bhFlaitheasa thuas go hard
Is feasta fós ar talamh,
d'fhéara, dea-mhéin síocháin.



After 50 years as a man of the sea relying greatly on God watching over him, Michael Cavanagh, of Greencastle, Co Donegal, is now feeling...

Blessed to be alive to share love of faith and music with grandchildren



AMONGST those gathered on November 16 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Carrickatine tragedy was local retired fisherman and musician, Michael Cavanagh, who led the music during the Sunday morning Mass in St Mary's Church, Ballybrack, within the Parish of Moville.

Having known all those aboard the Carrickatine on that fateful day in 1995, and their families, and having spent many days at sea trying to locate the missing fishing vessel and its crew, the Greencastle man's choice of songs for the anniversary Mass was particularly poignant.

He included two songs that he had written himself – 'Man of the sea' and 'Watching over you'. Music means a lot to Michael and so he puts his whole heart and mind into the songs that he writes, adding to their meaningfulness.

Speaking to 'The Net' afterwards, he explained that he had written 'Man of the sea' in 1999, when the daughter of Killybegs fisherman, Jamsie Boyle asked him to sing at his funeral.

"I was passing Arranmore Island on my way back from Denmark with the boat at the time," recalled Michael: "Jamsie's funeral was two days later. When I reached Rathlin O'Birne, I had the song written, while navigating in the wheel-house."

Reciting some of the words, "Man of the sea, come follow me, come to the land where the winds blow free," he remarked: "It has been sung at a few fishermen's funerals since that, and not always by me. It is a song that has meaning. I like a song to have soul, to have meaning."

Written in 2004 in memory of a family member who had died some years before, 'Watching over you' has also been sung by Michael on other anniversary occasions.

Recalling the story behind it, he said: "I was to sing at the wedding of the daughter of my wife's cousin in America, but she died before it, in 1998, from cardiomyopathy. She was 25 years old. So, when her brother got married in 2004,

I wrote the song for his wedding instead, in honour of her. I wasn't able to go to the wedding, but the song was played at it.

"It felt appropriate to sing it for the anniversary of the Carrickatine, changing a couple of words for the occasion."

Recalling being at home when the news came through about the fishing vessel failing to return to Greencastle, Michael said: "The families of the missing men and the whole community were devastated. I knew all of them who had been on the boat and their families.

"Days were allocated to different fishing vessels to go out and search. We spent many days and nights searching with the sonar for the wreckage. One of my engineers at the time had a camera and, when we found wrecks, we lowered the camera to try and identify if they were the Carrickatine. Sadly, we didn't come across her, but it wasn't from the want of trying."

Having fished at sea for 50 years, Michael is only too aware of the dangers. His father, whom he was named after, had spent time fishing at sea too.

Challenge

"I never went sea fishing with my father," said Michael, "When I was at school, I did salmon fishing for a couple of seasons and I was as sick as a dog. I was told that the first 10 years were the worst, and I remember saying, whatever about 10 days, it would never be 10 years! I had to make myself be a fisherman, it wasn't something that came naturally to me, but I always liked a challenge – and I still challenge myself."

And challenge himself he did, starting with fishing locally on a neighbour's boat, and then, when he was 22, he leased and skippered the Norwegian-built MFV Angela.

Continuing his story, he said: "Then, I took the plunge and got my first boat, the 'Castle Queen'. It was built in Baltimore, West Cork, in 1974, and I had it for about six years. It was blessed by

Fr James McKee, who was curate in Moville at the time. He was, and still is, very special to me, so I got his permission to name my second boat after him.

"The first 'Fr McKee' boat hull was built in Holland and fitted out in Cork, and arrived in Greencastle on April 13, 1990, which I later found out was, coincidentally, Fr McKee's birthday. The second 'Fr McKee' was built in Norway in 1995 and the existing 'Fr McKee' hull was built in Poland and fabricated in Denmark, and we took delivery of it in 2004.

"It hasn't always been easy, but so far successful. Everything we have is a gift from God. I retired seven years ago, when I was 69, and went back last year for six weeks to fill in, but I am fully retired now."

Michael's son, Philip is currently the skipper of the 'Fr McKee', and another son, Thomas is the cook on board. He founded 'Cavankee Fishing Company' in 1991, with the name formed from half his name and half Fr McKee's, such was his respect for the Desertmartin-born priest, who died on January 31, 1999, aged 83, and was buried in Glenullin, where he had spent the last 23 years of his life.

"He had a profound effect on my life and I visited him often. I was at sea when he died, but I flew to City of Derry Airport via Stornoway and Inverness, to be at his funeral," recalled Michael, who feels blessed to have been gifted two of Fr McKee's breviaries.

"I look on them as relics. One is kept on the Fr McKee and the other is often requested to be taken to people who are sick. It travels far and wide, and recently went to Co Down. I also have a pair of his shoes that his housekeeper passed on to me, and I have many stories of people having difficulty conceiving going on to have babies after having these shoes with them."

Prayerful

A man of strong faith himself, Michael recalls growing up in a prayerful home. The second youngest in a family of seven children born to Michael and Susan Cavanagh, he recalled: "Our home was one where everyone went to Mass and prayed the Rosary regularly, as was the case in most homes then. I kept up daily prayer throughout my life and have seldom had a reason for not going to Mass. I think if the world paid more attention to Christ and less to what is going on around them, it might be a better world."

As well as getting great encouragement and peace from practicing his faith through prayer

and receiving the Sacraments, Michael gets wonderful solace from Gospel music, which he was introduced to by a friend during a family bereavement.

"When my younger brother, Patrick, was killed in a car accident in 1982," he recalled, "a friend of mine from Killybegs gave me a cassette tape full of Gospel songs, and it was the one thing that helped me through my brother's death. He was 14 months younger than me, and we had fished together."

He added: "I started writing my own songs after that. I have written lots of songs, including one for my wife, Nell, called 'Where would I be in my life without you and God'; it is a spiritual love song."

He wrote a song for the 2025 Year of Hope too, and during this year he also felt privileged to make the 'Hope Boat' that is located outside Moville Parochial House, near St Pius X Church, as part of the parish's celebration of the Year of Hope.

Woodwork projects like the Hope boat are more part of Michael's life now in retirement, as is looking after the garden at the family home he shares with his wife, Nell, and working in his two poly-tunnels.

The 76-year-old father of three sons and two daughters also loves family time. He has 14 grandchildren, eight girls and six boys, ranging in age from six months to 23 years. One particular delight for him is having more time to focus on his music, and to be able to share his love of music with his grandchildren, with the girls joining him as much as they can in the choir for Mass in St Mary's, Ballybrack, every first and third Sunday of the month.

Musically gifted, his grand-daughters between them play instruments like the piano, concertina, harp, fiddle and guitar, which Michael plays as well. Four of his grand-daughters joined him in the choir for the Carrickatine 30th anniversary Mass, with one playing the harp, one playing the concertina, and another playing the guitar.

They began singing and playing together as a choir for Mass in Ballybrack last Christmas, said Michael: "I asked them if they would join me in the choir for Christmas Day Mass and, after that, I asked if they would like to continue and they said that they would."

"They all get on really well together. Two of them travel from Gortahork every second week, unless they have another commitment. They are all fairly committed as they are into their music. At 76 now, it is great for me to have lived long enough for them to sing with me."



Michael with his son, Philip, the new skipper of the Fr McKee



And with his son, Thomas, cook on board



At the helm



Playing the late Irish singer-songwriter, Rory Gallagher's guitar during a visit to Highland Radio

30th anniversary Mass celebrated for Carrickatine crew and families

THE crew of the Carrickatine fishing vessel, which failed to return to Greencastle after getting into difficulty 30 years ago, and their families were prayed for during the anniversary Mass in St Mary's Church, Ballybrack, on Sunday, November 16.



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Gospel

"Music is very important to me, particularly Gospel, though I like folk and country as well. I like a song to have a bit of soul no matter what genre it is."

And Michael is delighted that his grand-daughters will be joining him for the Highland Radio live show from the Brewery Bar, in Letterkenny, on Monday night, December 15, from 7-10 pm.

Commenting on this, he said: "Highland takes five different acts that they would have had on the show during the year, and each act does three songs. It is mostly Christmas stuff."

This follows Michael and the girls having performed in the Highland Radio Studio back in July.

"I have been on Highland singing a few times over the years," he explained, "and when asked to come along and sing a few songs over the summer, I asked if I could bring the girls with me."

"The first time I was on was with presenter, Packie Keaney, who is retired now, and I was on with him for two hours launching my CD, 'Man of the sea'. That was 15 years ago. Strabane man, Aidan

Members of the families of the six fishermen - Jeremy McKinney, skipper, of Moville; his brother, Conal McKinney, John Kelly of Carndonagh, Derry, and his son, Stephen, Terry Doherty

and Bernard Gormley, both of Greencastle - took part in the liturgy of the Mass celebrated the Fr Colm O'Doherty, PP Moville.

Welcoming all gathered, Fr Colm prayed that God would "send a sense of comfort to the families of the crew".

Referring to the song sung by the choir about being pilgrims of hope, Fr Colm remarked: "Despite the despair of death, there is hope as we know that all souls will rise again."

Recalling the "unfathomable sense of loss" for the families and the local community, he noted that the long search for the

missing fishermen "still goes on in people's hearts."

Having spent many days on holiday in Inishowen, Fr Colm said: "I have always had great admiration for those who go to sea to bring back food for those on shore, as well as earn a living. I am really struck by their courage as they go out in all sorts of weather."

"Don't forget, when you see them sailing out to sea, to say a prayer to guide them safely back to port again. We pray that the Lord will protect all who go to sea and that a tragedy such as this will not happen again."

"At difficult times like this,"

he added, "Christian witness calls us to be people of hope not despair." of tragedy, we turn to God, who



The Inishowen Maritime Memorial in Greencastle, which was unveiled on June, 1997, by then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson.

St Oliver Plunkett Chapel...50 years serving Strathfoyle community by John B Coyle



ON October 19, the parishioners of Strathfoyle celebrated 50 years since the opening of our Parish Church, St Oliver Plunkett's, on October 19, 1975. The Church was designed by F M Corr and Associates, and stands proudly on the highest ground in the area, overlooking the River Foyle and watching over the Parish. It was the first chapel to be named after the Irish Saint following his canonization, just a week earlier, by Pope Paul VI.

The housing estate of Strathfoyle is home to a mixed community and was built in phases, beginning from the late 1950s, to provide better housing for local people as well as the many people coming to work in the nearby Maydown industrial estate.

Up until 1974, the Parish of Strathfoyle and Enagh Lough was part of the Waterside Parish. However, as the village continued to grow, the existing oratory of St Canice's at Enagh Lough was no longer able to cater for the growing population. Under the inspirational leadership of our first Parish priest, Fr John Convery, moves were made to build a new church and primary school. This was no small feat but was achieved within a year of the formation of the parish. The church building cost £90,000 and has the capacity to seat 550 people.

It was a joyous day, when Bishop

Edward Daly arrived to bless and dedicate our chapel. During his homily, the bishop made reference to the mixed community in Strathfoyle and the efforts being made by the community to promote good relations, stating that "Strathfoyle should endeavor to show other communities that a mixed community can be a happy community, a good place to live. We have too many ghettos and these ghettos will survive until everyone in the north of Ireland realizes that Christians should and must and can live together, happily and in safety."

Fifty years later, in 2025, Strathfoyle is still known as a welcoming village and is home to a more diverse and vibrant population than ever before. People of many different ethnicities, including Irish, English, Filipino, Polish, Indian, and many more, as well as members of the Catholic, Protestant, other Christian and non-Christian faiths, live and work together happily and in safety.

Thanksgiving

The 50th anniversary of our Church has been commemorated by Fr Patrick Lagan and parishioners during the celebration of the Eucharist on October 19, and also during Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Prayers have been

offered in thanksgiving for 50 years of worship in our Chapel, for all the intentions that the Lord has heard and answered, and for all the mercies He has shown to us in our chapel. We also continue to pray for the continued growth of our faith community in Strathfoyle, and for all those who have built the community and passed the faith onto us.

A special pilgrimage to visit the relics of St Oliver Plunkett in St Peter's Church, Drogheda, also took place on Saturday, November 8, to mark the occasion. The pilgrims enjoyed an informative and insightful talk from Tommy Burns on the life, trials and canonization of St Oliver Plunkett. Tommy is a native of the Parish of St Peter's in Drogheda, author of 'St Oliver Plunkett - Journey to Sainthood', and long-term member of the 'St Oliver Plunkett for Peace and Reconciliation Committee'. Following the talk, Tommy led a tour of the relics and other items relevant to St Oliver's life and

time spent in prison.

At the end of the pilgrimage, the group was presented with an oak sapling to plant in the grounds of our own Church in Strathfoyle. The sapling was grown from an acorn, from an oak tree in which the Saint would hide when he was on the run from persecution.

The pilgrims would like to extend their thanks to Tommy Burns for this kind gift, and to John McCarron for organising such a grace-filled day.

St Oliver Plunkett Church Weekly Schedule

Monday: 11am Mass followed by Holy Hour.
Tuesday: 11am Mass.
Wednesday: 11am Mass, 7-9pm Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.
Thursday: 11am Mass.
Friday: 11am Mass.
Saturday: 6pm Vigil Mass.
Sunday: 11:15am Mass.
Confession: Every Saturday before the Vigil Mass.



Bishop Daly blessing the Chapel on October 19, 1975.

After a busy life first as a bricklayer and then classical guitarist, Ardmore's Sean Woods is now enjoying the more peaceful pace of creating on canvas, finding...

Painting Caravaggio's 'Doubting Thomas' changed my faith



Sean and Dr James McGrory, Ardmore PP, with his painting of Caravaggio's 'Doubting Thomas' in St Mary's Church.

ON the wall to the side of the sanctuary in St Mary's Church, Ardmore, is an eye-catching copy of the well-known Italian artist, Caravaggio's 'The Incredulity of Saint Thomas' – also known as 'Doubting Thomas'.

Painted by talented local man, Sean Woods, it was gifted to St Mary's when he saw the impact that it had on his parish priest, Dr James McGrory, and, in doing so, the striking image of the disbelieving disciple putting his finger into one of the Resurrected Christ's wounds is capturing the attention of many, drawing them into reflecting perhaps on their own lack of faith at times – "I have faith. Help my lack of faith!" (Mark 9:24)

Unbelievably, Sean, known far and wide for his musical giftedness, only started painting about four years ago, following a particularly dark time in his life. His reason for painting Caravaggio's 'Doubting Thomas', after reading a book on his works, is connected with his research into the story of the Shroud of Turin.

One of the most studied religious artefacts in the world, the shroud is a linen cloth with the image of a man with injuries that match accounts of Christ's Passion. While the Catholic Church has not formally declared it to be authentic, though encourages its veneration, it is believed by many to be the burial shroud of Jesus.

"I was always super interested in the Shroud of Turin," Sean remarked, "I was aware of it growing up and became obsessed by it over the last six or seven years, watching a documentary and reading articles about it.

"When first tested, it was thought that the cloth dated from the 13th century, but I thought that can't be right. However, many scientists have questioned the results, as the previous sample tested had been taken from a part of the Shroud that had been replaced following fire damage.

"Three years ago, pollen found on the cloth was said to be from plants that only grow in Jerusalem. Also, recent tests found that there were almost 1,700 lacerations on the figure. One of the narratives said that no human would have been able to withstand that for two minutes. No man but the Son of God, that is, and that is what did it for me, as I had been thinking am I still a doubting Thomas after all this evidence."

Mesmerized

Commenting on his draw to Caravaggio, Sean recalled a particular memory from an art history class while a pupil at St Patrick's & St Brigid's, in Claudy, saying: "We had looked at Leonardi DaVinci and Michelangelo, etc, but this particular time at school, the art teacher put up a painting on the projector by Caravaggio – 'The Calling of St Matthew'. I remember being mesmerized by it. It went right through me; the mood, the darkness and the light. I always remember being wowed by that.

"About four years ago, I went out and got the book, 'Caravaggio: The Complete Works'. I have been to Rome to see his paintings, and to Malta to see the most impressive painting I have ever seen in my life. I stood two and a half hours before his painting of 'The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist'. It is 14 feet high and 10 feet wide, and what he did in that painting was just remarkable. It was an incredible feat."

He went on to say: "I painted Caravaggio's 'Doubting Thomas' for myself, because I needed to. The fact that it took Thomas to put his finger in the wound to believe that it was actually Jesus risen from the dead, makes him a serious doubter."

This particular painting, created by Caravaggio between 1601 and 1602, is in the Sanssouci Picture Gallery, in the beautiful city of Potsdam, within the German

state of Brandenburg. It is known for its dramatic use of light and shadow.

Commenting on his copy, which is not full-size, Sean said: "There are four heads in the painting and the black space between them is where I started. I finished it within four weeks, after 92 hours of painting. I just got locked into it. It changed my faith.

"Within that year, I painted the four main characters, Jesus, Peter, Matthew and John, from 'The Last Supper'. I took reference points from Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of The Christ'; he used the lighting technique of Caravaggio.

"I have also painted an image of Jesus' head and unclothed shoulders from the Shroud of Turin. It is my own interpretation of what He may have looked like. And I have painted two of the Stations of the Cross, using Mel Gibson's 'Passion' production as reference. I did the fourth Station – Jesus meets His Mother, which I gave to my mother, Bridie, and the sixth Station – when Veronica hands Jesus a cloth to wipe His face.

The Madonna

"The very first painting I did was another of Caravaggio's – 'The Madonna and Child with St Anne'. I only did the top half of the Madonna from that painting, but I completely changed the face.

"And now, I have a full-size canvas – five feet by six-and-a-half feet – for painting Caravaggio's 'The Taking of Christ'."

Saying that he would love to develop as a painter of religious art, Sean explained that he had turned to art during a very difficult period in his life: "I had some mental illness problems regarding my inability to play the guitar. I had contracted a condition called dystonia – a neurological condition that creates involuntarily muscle spasms. They come and go to any part of the body but mine went to my index finger and thumb of my right hand."

A very talented solo classical guitarist for 30 years, Sean had been playing in Budapest when his thumb started to twitch towards the end of the concert.

He recalled: "When the dystonia came, I just soldiered on and repositioned my right-hand playing position to try and compensate for the effects of the dystonia. I went to a clinic outside Barcelona for treatment for the condition, but I battled with no longer being able to play guitar for about nine years. I had a complete nervous breakdown. I was in a very dark place."

Finding painting therapeutic, Sean has turned his once very busy and successful music studio into

an art studio, and is experiencing a wonderful peace in letting his giftedness as an artist flow onto canvas.

As one major chapter of his life story closes and he enters another with great hope, the Lettershandoney native reflected on the amazing time he had after swapping his bricklaying trade for a career in music spanning 30 years, 17 of which he was artistic director of the hugely successful City of Derry Guitar Festival that he had founded.

"After I left school at 16, I became a bricklayer and worked at this for nearly 16 years," he said, adding: "I didn't start playing guitar until I was 21. I was playing the electric guitar first, for myself, but when I happened upon the sound of the classical guitar while trying to tune into a rock concert broadcast on the radio, I was fascinated by it and went out and bought a classical guitar. Finding someone to tutor me wasn't easy, so I taught myself.

Carlos Bonell

"When I was 22, I went to Belfast to see the Ulster Orchestra and international classical guitarist, Carlos Bonell – one of my heroes. He was incredible. I have a photo of him outside the Europa Hotel the next morning. I saw him outside and ran up to him, and he signed a book I had on how to read music. Fifteen years later, there is a photo of the two of us playing in a concert in Italy.

"I ended up being invited back to Italy to teach four summers in a row. Carlos is still one of my best friends. When I started the guitar festival in Derry, I brought him over to it for about nine years. That experience taught me a lot about myself with regards determination."

He continued: "For last two years of my life as a bricklayer, I was working in Berlin on the redevelopment of the Friedrichstrasse. When I came back home for Christmas, my wife, Bernie asked me if there was anything that I could do with my music, as I missed being home with my family, and that just opened up everything.

"I went across the water for auditions at a couple of universities, and ended up going to the University of Leeds to do a three-year performance course in classical guitar. I did a Masters after that at the University of Ulster, Magee Campus, on 18th century performance practices."

He added: "At that time, there was an Italian composer who lived mostly in Spain, called Domenico Scarlatti. He wrote music for the harpsichord. It had only one dynamic but I loved his music harpsichord study, and I



Sean - Such a powerful image, I pondered over this part of my painting for some time. It lends itself well to the term 'seeing is believing', as I now rightly do so. But what is more remarkable about all the doubt that Thomas had, is that he actually became one of the most devoted apostles of them all, and is credited with having brought Christianity to Asia, mainly India around 52 AD.



Fourth Station...Jesus meets His Mother.



Sixth Station...Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.



The Virgin Mary.

continued from page 20

wanted to transcribe some of his music from the harpsichord to the guitar. My love for the guitar was overwhelming.”

Sean also played at different guitar festivals throughout England, and was all set to make his classical debut in Beijing in 2003, by taking part in an international musical festival as featured soloist in a performance of Vivaldi’s ‘Concerto in D Major’, when China went into lockdown!

“The Strabane Chronicle did a big story on me, with the headline ‘Concerto for China,’” he recalled, “I was to play with the Beijing Symphony Orchestra but China locked Beijing down because of a SARS outbreak, so it didn’t happen. I was gutted – everything had been paid for, but the newspaper story helped me to become popular.”

Guitar Festival

Sean went on to become a senior guitar tutor with the University of Ulster at Magee, a HND lecturer at the North West College, teaching

oral awareness, listening skills and world music, as well artistic director of the international City of Derry Classical Guitar Festival.

“This was a huge international festival held every year,” he said, “I brought across some of the world’s greatest artistes for four days of concerts, master classes and ensembles.”

He also started up Birchwoods Recording Studio at his home in 2008, where he recorded, and mixed and mastered for clients. This venture turned out to be very successful too.

With regards to his faith journey, Sean spoke of the great influence of his wife and mother-in-law, saying: “Bernie’s mother was particularly religious and I learnt a lot from her. She would have went to Mass every morning and Saturday nights. I learnt so much compassion through her. She lived with us for the last three years of her life, when she had dementia, and would call out for me during the night, even though I was the one who argued with her the most. I felt privileged to put a pillow behind her head.

“When I met Bernie, the kindest person I have ever known, and she introduced me to her parents and family, the one thing that struck me that I had never experienced before was their closeness. I never saw people respond so warmly to each other like that before, and I thought it was lovely.”

At a time when he wasn’t much of a church-goer, Sean attributes his return to Fr Neil Farren, during his time as parish priest of Ardmore, and his mother-in-law: “Fr Farren was looking for someone to do the music at the chapel for a folk group. With me being a guitar player and composer, my mother-in-law was at me for nearly two years before I gave in. Every Saturday, the folk group sang at Mass and I thoroughly enjoyed being part of that.”

‘I Am’ Band

He also really enjoyed his time with the ‘I Am’ band, which he joined after being asked to help arrange people during rehearsals: “When I heard them singing songs from the Hillsong repertoire, I was

so moved. One of the songs was ‘I Surrender’, written by Hillsong United, and I was nearly in tears. The power of music attached to Our Lord was something else. So, I later asked if they were looking for a guitar player, as the music was incredible.

“I loved being part of that and it was a real turning point in my faith journey. We did a couple of religious festivals and they were brilliant.”

Life at 60 is still busy for Sean, but at a more peaceful pace. Having bonded with Fr Jimmy through their mutual love of art, he feels privileged to have one of his paintings now hanging in St Mary’s Church. The magnificent frame on the painting was also created by him, using scrap-wood from his backyard.

Delighted to have received help with the four cornices on the frame from his young grand-daughters, Aria and Thea, he said: “They sanded them and put on the undercoat, etc. I told them that this was going to be in the chapel, and that when they were old women they would look



Painting of Jesus inspired by image on the Turin Shroud.

over and remember that they had helped papa.”

Sean’s paintings can be viewed on his Facebook page.

(Caravaggio’s actual name was

Michelangelo Merisi. He became known by the name of the place he grew up in to differentiate him from the Michelangelo Buonarroti.)

Placenames in the Derry Diocese by Dr Seán Beattie

SOME years ago, the Royal Mail came up with the bright idea of removing names of townlands from the postal map and replacing them with postcodes. Fortunately, there were loud protests, mostly from the Federation of Ulster Local Studies and other societies; the placenames were retained.

When postcodes were recently introduced in the Republic, there was no attempt made to replace the townlands, and both the placenames and the postcodes now work in harmony.

Names of places, rivers, rocks, hills, and other natural features, hold vital clues to our history, from earliest pagan times. In the case of ecclesiastical history, a number of words provides us with keys with which to unlock some of the secrets of our past, hidden from view in little-known woodlands, rural landscapes, forgotten pathways and isolated fields scattered across the country.

The Oak Woods

One of the most common words is ‘daire’ (oak wood), and is found in many Indo-European languages. It is spelt in its modern form as ‘derry’ or ‘derri’. The ancient pagan name for Derry was Doire-Calgaich (Derry-Calgach), used by Colmcille when he erected his monastery there in the sixth century. Adomnán uses it in some of the earliest texts. According to Joyce, in his ‘Irish Names of Places’ (1910), it was in use until the 10th or 11th century, when the name Derry-Colmcille came into use. In the ‘Annals of the Four Masters’, there is a reference for 1178: A violent wind storm occurred this year; it caused a great destruction of trees. It prostrated many oaks. It felled 120 oaks in Derry-Colmcille.

King James I imposed the name Londonderry, when he granted a charter to the City.

The word ‘doire’ is not exclusive to the Derry Diocese. It is one of the most prolific root names in Ireland,

with over 1,300 places adopting the word in one form or another. This is an indication of the abundance of trees in our landscape in ancient times.

The use of the word ‘Donagh’ in a placename is indicative of a church associated with, or founded by, St Patrick. There are nearly 40 townlands whose names are formed by, or begin with, ‘Donagh’, of which over 20 are also parish names across Ireland. Fourteen of the parishes are called ‘Donaghmore’ (great church). The root of the word is from the Latin ‘Dominicum’, or the Irish ‘Domhnach’. The ‘Tripartite Life of St Patrick’, written in the ninth century, claims that the saint travelled through Barnesmore Gap, in Donegal, and continued his journey through counties Derry and Tyrone, founding churches on the way. In fact, it is possible to map his travels based on the places containing the word ‘Donagh’. He was aware that success or failure depended on his relationship with

the rulers of the Kingdom.

In this Diocese, Grianán Aileach was the seat of power. Consequently, it is said that from there, he blessed the whole of Inishowen from Grianán to Ballagh Fort, in Malin (now partially demolished). It took courage and diplomacy to move across Ireland in his time, as the country was sub-divided into mini-statelets, with princes and chieftains staunchly defending their patch.

Donagh

In their ‘History of the Diocese of Derry’ (2000), Henry Jefferies and Fr Ciarán Devlin list some of the better-known places in the Derry Diocese, bearing the word ‘Donagh’...

Donagh Bile (Moville), the church of the yew tree, marked by a ringed cross and skull house at Cooley. In the ‘Ordnance Survey Letters’, John O’Donovan records that Patrick met his three nephews “in the territory of the Bredach”, now known as Bredagh Glen, outside



Colgan Hall, Carndonagh. It was constructed in memory of the Franciscan friar, John Colgan, who was involved in the ‘Annals of the Four Masters’, which records many ancient placenames.

Moville, as he sought out a place to build a church.

Domhnach Dola (Templemoyle).

Domhnach-Chaeide (Donaghedy, Strabane, Co Tyrone). It was called after St Caeide, a companion of St Columbanus. John Colgan accords October 28 as his Feast Day, but others assign different dates. In the ‘Martyrology of Donegal’, the text mentions relics of his, comprising a bell and crozier. A 17th century manuscript describes him as an abbot.

Domhnach Senliss (Lettershandoney)

Domhnach Dari (The Oaks, near Templemore)

Domhnach Min Cluane (Clooney)

Domhnach Cati (Donagheady)

Both Domhnach (Badoney)

Domhnach Mór Maige Tochair

(Carndonagh), with the magnificent Cross of St Patrick marking the site of the monastery.

Ardailauig (Tamlaghard or Magilligan)

Cill

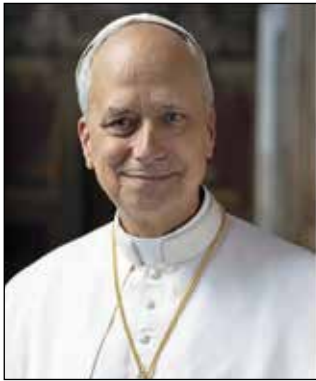
The Irish words ‘eaglais’ and ‘teampall’, are originally Latin and signify a church. Cill (kill) is also written ‘cell’ and ‘ceall’. It is anglicized kill or kil, keel, and cal. Next to ‘baile’, it is the most prolific root in Irish names. Dineen’s ‘Irish Dictionary’ gives ‘cill’ as a church or burial ground; he also refers to ‘cillin’, meaning ‘a little church’. While the words signify a church, it is also noteworthy that places thus named were frequently used as burial grounds for unbaptized

children who were denied the rite of baptism. This root should not be confused with the word ‘coill’, which means ‘a wood’ in Irish. The word was often attached to a saint’s name. Thus, Kilbride in Irish is ‘Cill-Bhríghde’, Brigid’s church. Several minor sites in the Diocese are known as ‘Cill-Bhríghde’.

Other root words that have religious associations are ‘scrín’ (shrine), often an insignificant wayside monument, from the Latin. In the parish of Culdaff, there is a site known as ‘Skreen’, thus linking it to a shrine. It was probably an outstation or penitential post connected to the monasteries at Culdaff village and Cloncha nearby, with its famous 10th century cross. The countryside is littered with such sites that were once part of pilgrimage routes, but are now lost in antiquity.

Reflection

Dozens of placenames in the Diocese have their roots in church associations, both in Latin, Greek and Irish. They are a testimony to the impact of Christianity in Ireland. The full history of the spread of Christianity can be related to the presence of ecclesiastical root words in the vocabulary. The popularity of walking routes is helping to make the public aware of the cultural and spiritual history embedded in our landscape, with hidden treasures entombed in some of the most remote and isolated places.



Pope’s monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during December for:

Christians in areas of conflict:

Let us pray that Christians living in areas of war or conflict, especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope.

Prayer for Priests

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

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

Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the

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

Remember in prayer:

- Fr John McDevitt (Dec 1st)
- Fr Micheal McGavigan (2nd)
- Fr Kevin McElhennon (3rd)
- Fr Daniel McPaul (4th)
- Fr Dermot McGirr (5th)
- Dr James McGrory (6th)
- Fr Brian McGoldrick (7th)
- Fr Neil McGoldrick (8th)
- All Priests (9th)

- Fr James McGonagle (10th)
- Fr Edward McGuinness (11th)
- Bishop Donal McKeown (12th)
- Fr Con McLaughlin (13th)
- Fr Peter McLaughlin (14th)
- Fr Anthony Mailey (15th)
- Fr Peter Madden (16th)
- Fr Gerard Mongan (17th)
- Fr Colm O’Doherty (18th)
- All Priests (19th)
- Fr Patrick O’Hagan (20th)
- All priests (21st)
- Fr Kevin Mulhern (22nd)
- Fr Kieran O’Doherty (23rd)
- Fr Francis O’Hagan (24th)
- Fr David O’Kane (25th)
- Fr Peter O’Kane (26th)
- Fr Arthur O’Reilly (27th)
- Fr Michael Porter (28th)
- Fr Sean O’Donnell (29th)
- Fr Gerard Sweeney (30th)
- Fr John Walsh (31st)

Irish Synodal Pathway

What does God want from the Church in the Derry Diocese at this time? *by Anne Friel*

SYNODALITY means 'walking together'. It is a term that has been used a lot since 2021, when we put up banners about Synod in our churches and started to have listening conversations at Parish and Deanery level across the Diocese from 2022. The fruits of what was heard across our Diocese were fed into the Irish Church's response to the Universal Synod in the Vatican, and I believe we can hear our voices in these documents. So far, it has been all about listening, prayer and discernment, and this will continue but will also include the word 'act'.

The term 'synodality' can be confusing. It challenges us to listen deeply to the needs of our local Church, to recognise our responsibility as baptised people to go out in mission to others and to grow closer to God, in holiness of life. All of that really challenges us. So, it was with excitement and anticipation that I attended two Synodal Gatherings in October (one in Kilkenny and one at the Vatican), with a small number of people from the Diocese, keen to understand more and to find out if Pope Leo would continue to focus on mission through working synodally. I also wanted to input from here and to listen to what is happening on the synodal pathway across Ireland and across the world.

Irish Pre-Synodal Assembly Kilkenny

In 2020, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference decided to embark on a synodal pathway for the Catholic Church in Ireland, leading to the holding of a National Synodal Assembly in October 2026. This has happened alongside, and with close links to, the Universal Synod. The Irish Synodal Pathway's main focus is: 'What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?'

The Synodal Pathway is not about a single event, but about building a culture of listening and walking together, listening for what the Spirit is saying today to us as Church in Ireland.

Bishop McKeown, Tony Brennan, Mark McConnellogue and I attended the Pre-Synodal Assembly in the Convention Centre, in Kilkenny, on Saturday, October 18. This next step along the Irish synodal journey was to move from 'shared reflection to decisions for action and mission, rooted in our baptismal calling and guided by the Spirit.' This was 'preparing the ground' for the National Synodal Assembly in 2026.

There were 230 delegates from across Ireland. We were divided up

across circular tables, facilitating Conversation in the Spirit and giving a chance to hear what is happening across the country. I felt that there were more younger people present than at the gathering in Athlone in June 2022.

Baptised and Sent

Before the Assembly, we were asked to reflect upon a preparatory document, 'Baptised and Sent'. This document had been written by the Irish Synodal Team, and was 'the fruit of prayer, reflection, and communal discernment', drawing on the contributions sent from across the country in the Spring.

Our Spring submission from the Derry Diocese can be read on the Diocesan website at: [submission-for-pre-national-synodal-gathering-in-october-2025-diocese-of-derry.pdf](#)

Baptism

Baptism had emerged, from the responses sent from across Ireland, as a central lens through which we see other priorities as a reminder that 'every member of the Church has a value and role' (Baptised and Sent 10). The document continued that in the responses, 'Baptism was described as the wellspring of Christian life, reminding the Church that all the baptised, lay and ordained alike, are called to contribute their gifts in shared responsibility for its mission. This vocational understanding was linked directly to dignity, equality, and participation for all, regardless of gender or role.' (Baptised and Sent 28).

Seven emerging priorities are listed in 'Baptised and Sent', which the 'Spirit is calling the Church in Ireland to attend to in this time'. These are...

1. Belonging: fostering a Church of welcome, inclusion, and safety, where each person finds a home in community and in Christ.

2. Co-responsibility and Lay Ministry: empowering all the baptised, women and men, to share responsibility for leadership and mission through new models of ministry and decision-making.

3. Family: supporting the domestic Church as the primary place of faith transmission and belonging, and strengthening its connection with parishes and schools.

4. Formation and Catechesis: deepening faith through lifelong formation that is Christ-centred, experiential, and equips the baptised for discipleship in today's world. Rooted not only in learning but also in liturgy and sacramental life, so that prayer and worship become living sources of faith, understanding, and mission.

5. Healing: acknowledging wounds, especially those caused by abuse; committing to accountability, justice, and reconciliation; and ensuring safe spaces for survivors and all who carry pain.

6. Women: recognising and including women's gifts, leadership, and co-responsibility at every level of Church life, as a matter of justice and credibility.

7. Youth: engaging young people with authenticity, offering them meaningful roles in leadership and mission, and listening to their hopes and challenges.

(Baptised and Sent, September 2025)

The Irish Team stated that "these priorities, rooted in baptismal dignity and mission, are not an end but a beginning. They point towards a renewed Church in Ireland; one that is healing and welcoming, participatory and missionary, faithful to Jesus Christ and open to the Spirit's leading."

Diocesan Synodal Team

Not everyone would be in Kilkenny, and so we had met as a Diocesan Synodal Team, with input from Diocesan Youth, to discuss the preparatory document. We had a Conversation in the Spirit on questions around the focus on Baptism, its relevance in the life of the Church in Ireland today, and where we feel the Spirit is calling the Church in Ireland to focus our energies on?

We noted that the seven national priorities explained in 'Baptised and Sent' were very similar to the priorities that we had identified in Derry. We understood the importance of Baptism as a lens through which we see the other priorities. We believed that many of us had not focused on the individual responsibility that Baptism gives each of us to be Priest, Prophet and King. Whilst the role of all the Baptised as Priest, Prophet and King was central to this walking together, we would have liked to have heard more about the importance of our ordained priests.

We felt that there is a need for an in-depth conversation about the meaning, relevance and responsibilities of Baptism. We spoke of a focus on family and schools. We asked how we could incorporate Baptism into Parish life, welcoming a new member into the Church community as well as providing an opportunity for catechesis, as opposed to it being something that often happens privately.

We spoke about a greater conversion to live according to the values of the Gospel. Baptism gives each of us a sense of belief

in ourselves, and a responsibility to use our gifts and talents in our parishes. It should be the enabler in giving each of us a sense of belonging to Church, a groundedness and dignity, permission and confidence for co-responsibility and involvement, including those people who feel marginalised.

The Pre-Synodal Assembly

The day was very thoughtfully designed, with time for prayer, music and reflection on sacred scripture at the start of each session. A small group of musicians from local schools led us in chanting 'Adsumus Sancte Spiritus', a chant that was later echoed at our gathering at the Vatican.

We started with an opening prayer and heard what had emerged from the national synodal process. Our Conversation in the Spirit focused on how we were energised by what we heard, and how can we support further development and shared action on these priorities in the coming year. Our listening was helped by each person holding a St Brigid's Cross as they spoke for their two minutes. Only the person holding the cross could speak. There was holy water from a local holy well and a candle at each table that added to the symbolism, as we prayed for each person at our table, blessing their ears, eyes, hands and heart. Common themes from the Conversation were gathered together on sheets and reviewed by all after lunch.

For me, the Assembly in Kilkenny was a marvellous opportunity to meet with others and listen to what was happening across Ireland. It created a prayerful, listening space that fed us and acted as a further marker along this synodal path that we are all still getting used to. In our group, the word 'courage' came up a lot, and I believe that we all need to have more courage. I was more conscious that there is now a network of Diocesan Synodal Teams, and we are getting to know each other better. There were more younger people under the age of 30 at Kilkenny and they had a strong voice. Even though 'Youth' was listed as one of the seven priorities, it was noted that the theme of younger people was intertwined through each of these, which was thought to be a positive development. Those present seemed to be talking from a place of prayer and deepening personal relationship with Jesus.

Act

Although Kilkenny was a stage along the Irish Synodal journey, we were also moving through our ongoing listening to action. This tension between listening,



Jubilee Pilgrims entering St Peter's through the Holy Door on Saturday morning

Irish Synodal Pathway

discerning and doing seems to have been part of both the Irish and Universal Synodal conversations. A person at my table asked, "So what will we be doing now?"

The following next steps were highlighted towards the end of the day:

1. We will continue the journey together, becoming a Church that listens, learns and acts together.

2. There was a theme of embedding synodality as an ordinary way of being Church, nurturing this across Diocesan, Parish and group structures, with further conversations on deepening our understanding of the role of Diocesan Synodal Teams.

3. How we move towards October 2026 – a year of action. This will include identifying actions around the seven national priorities, forming a working group on each priority, creating spaces for dialogue, co-responsibility and action and producing concrete recommendations on each priority for the Irish Synodal Assembly in October 2026. These working groups may ask us to pilot new things during the year.

Final comments from the delegates included that Synodal working is a way of life, but the goal is mission, eg, what is God asking of the Church in Derry? That is what we need to continue to listen widely and deeply to, to pray about, to discern and to act.

Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies The Vatican

The Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies was one of a number of Jubilees happening in the Vatican during this Holy Year. I had last been in Rome in 1981, and it was wonderful to be there with 2,000 others from all across the world. It was held from October 24-26. There were representatives from the Irish Synodal Team as well as from 10

Irish Dioceses, including ourselves from Derry (Tony Brennan, Fr Peter O'Kane, Dymrna Kelly, Mark McConnellogue and me). I was interested to hear what our new Pope said about synodality, something strongly associated with his predecessor, Pope Francis. There were many highlights during the three days.

We were excited to meet Sr Nathalie Becquart, Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. She is the first woman to hold this role and have voting rights in the Synod of Bishops. The inaugural session on the Friday afternoon included three talks on Synodality in the face of tensions in the Church; Towards a Synodal Church: The Conversion of Relationships and Synodality as Social Prophecy. These really set the scene. We were able to listen to simultaneous translations.

Then we had an Encounter-Dialogue with Pope Leo. The Holy Father listened to seven representatives from across the world speaking about how they were implementing synodality in their area. They each asked a question. Pope Leo listened, took notes and he took time to answer openly and thoughtfully. I felt that he was really listening. This was an example of synodality in action, and I couldn't believe that Pope Leo spent nearly two hours with us all that evening in the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican. (Place Pic 4)

Holy Door

Early Saturday morning, we processed as Pilgrims through the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica. Following a reading from St Paul to the Romans (Rom 5:1-5), Bishop Luis Marín de San Martín, OSA, Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod, told us that "mission means walking together. It is not enough to 'tell' others, nor merely to 'do' for others: it is necessary to 'be' with

others, to go to them, to feel with them. Together we must listen to the voice of God, so as to discern and act as a Christian community. This is our challenge. Dear brothers and sisters, the passage from the Letter to the Romans ends by speaking of patience – that suffering which produces hope. If we are able to embrace difficulties and place our trust in the Spirit, who carries out his work, we will see that the synodal process, despite its limitations, or the unequal involvement, is already producing in the Church evident fruits of great hope. Let us go forward, in the name and with the help of the Lord."

We took part in Conversation in the Spirit in groups of 10. My group was led by a Sister from Boston, with members from Australia, Germany, Austria, America, Denmark and Ireland. I heard that every country was challenged by what the term 'synodality' meant, and one person suggested that we talk about 'communion, participation and mission' instead.

An American Priest in our group said that there needed to be more engagement with our priests. He had just been ordained around the time of the Second Vatican Council and felt that there had been little direct engagement with priests then. He hoped that it would be different this time. There were areas where local Church had not engaged and other areas where there was good engagement. Many were teaching how to have a Conversation in the Spirit, seeing it as a way to give everyone a voice and encourage conversations among people with different views, helping us to walk together.

Two of our group, Mark McConnellogue and Fr Peter O'Kane, had each been asked to lead a Conversation in the Spirit.

We each attended two out of 31 workshops and seminars, with all five of us attending different sessions, hoping to bring back as much learning as we could. We attended sessions such as: Nurturing synodality in the local Church: parish life and synodal teams; Organisms of participation in a synodal Church; Forming for leadership in a synodal Church; For a synodal Church that listens to the cry of the Poor and of the Earth and training in Conversation in the Spirit. These were great opportunities to listen, discuss and ask questions.

On Saturday evening there was a Marian Prayer Vigil in St Peter's Square. The Jubilee ended on Sunday morning with Holy Mass in St Peter's Basilica, presided over by Pope Leo. The Basilica was full, as was St Peter's Square just outside. Fr Peter O'Kane, from our Diocese, was among the many priests who concelebrated, and I was asked to help bring up the offertory gifts.

The Pope spoke on the Gospel of the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, about the Pharisee and the tax

collector. He said, "Dear friends, we must dream of and build a more humble Church; a Church that does not stand upright like the Pharisee, triumphant and inflated with pride, but bends down to wash the feet of humanity; a Church that does not judge as the Pharisee does the tax collector, but becomes a welcoming place for all; a Church that does not close in on itself, but remains attentive to God so that it can similarly listen to everyone. Let us commit ourselves to building a Church that is entirely synodal, ministerial and attracted to Christ and therefore committed to serving the world. No one should impose his or her own ideas; we must all listen to one another. No one is excluded; we are all called to participate. No one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together."

The Holy Father's full Homily can be accessed at <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20251026-giubileo-equipe-sinodali.html>

Holy Spirit

As well as being at the Vatican, listening to Pope Leo and spending time in prayer, I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet with people from across the world; to hear what they were doing and to know that we were walking together with the Holy Spirit, as Church. I exchanged contact details with delegates from Austria, Australia, England and America, and it will be good to keep in touch and hear what is happening elsewhere. My sense is that the Irish Synodal Journey is being followed and its resources are being used by many across the world – well done to Julieann Moran and the Team!

Some of the things that stood out for me were:

- Synodality is a way of life and not just a process. Pope Leo said that it is a style and attitude. It helps us to be a Church that is open to dialogue and has respect for all; a Church in which every person has a voice and has a role to play.

- There is a mutual interdependence between the two types of Priesthood – those who have been ordained Priest and all of us, who through Baptism have a responsibility to be Priest, Prophet and King. One cannot exist without the other.

- There is a spirituality of synodality and we should be looking at spiritual reform and renewal of the Church, not just at structural renewal.

- We should evaluate every decision that we make against the life of Jesus – how did Jesus live, what would Jesus do, how do we live the culture of the Gospel?

The final highlight was to hear a Derry accent as I was leaving St Peter's. I met Martin and Noelle Kelly, from Derry, in the aisle. They were in Rome on holiday and had been on pilgrimage,

walking through the four Holy Doors during this Holy Year. A wonderful ending to a special few days! (Place Pic 5)

Further information on the Universal Synod and Irish Synod can be accessed at:

<https://synod.ie/>
<https://www.derrydiocese.org/>

synod
<https://synod.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Baptised-and-Sent-Preparatory-Document-for-the-Pre-Synodal-Assembly-Being-Held-in-Kilkenny-on-18th-October-2025.pdf>
<https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html>



Derry Diocesan Synodal Team in Rome with Sr Nathalie Becquart, Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.



Anne and Tony with Julieann Moran, General Secretary of the Synodal Pathway in Ireland.



Visiting pilgrims, Martin and Noelle Kelly, from Derry, with Anne Friel outside St Peter's Basilica following Sunday Mass.



Diocesan Synodal Team

The Diocese of Derry has had listening sessions in our parishes and Deaneries since 2021 (<https://www.derrydiocese.org/synod>).

We have submitted syntheses of what we have heard into the Irish Synodal Team and onward to the Vatican.

In April 2025, we were asked to register our Diocesan Synodal Team with the Vatican. We have extended the membership of our Diocesan Synodal Team and will continue to do so.

Bishop Donal's Advent Pastoral Letter for the Diocese of Derry...

Moving forward together in changing times

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

ADVENT is a season of expectation. It invites us to wait in joyful hope for the coming of Christ once again into our lives at Christmas. Isaiah, John the Baptist and Mary each listened, discerned and responded, even when the path ahead was unclear. Their hope was grounded in God's promise, and their witness speaks to us now. Times of change can unsettle us, but they can also purify and strengthen our faith.

We live in a time of great change. Families face pressures unknown a generation ago. Communities carry the wounds of addiction, isolation, anxiety and conflict. Many are unsure about the future of the Church. Yet, Advent reassures us that God is close. God walks with us in the desert and brings new life from barren soil.

A Time of Listening and Prayerful Discernment

Our society and our Church have changed so much that we cannot expect parish life to remain the same. This should not be seen as a failure, but as an invitation from the Holy Spirit to embrace the opportunity that change presents. Now we are called to respond with faith, courage, and renewed imagination.

The Lord is calling us to rediscover the skills of developing our prayer life and to deepen our ability to discern His voice. Without prayerful listening, our decisions risk becoming merely managerial

rather than Spirit-led. True renewal begins when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us - not when we simply repeat or long for the patterns of the past.

The Church needs people who can listen to God, listen to one another, and discern together. This is the work of every parish and of every baptised person.

Pastoral Areas and Parish Collaboration: A Shared Mission

In the years ahead, pastoral areas and parish collaboration will become increasingly important in how we work together and plan sustainably. The goal is not centralisation, but shared responsibility. Each parish is invited to see itself as part of a wider missionary community.

This will involve continuing conversations about what is realistic. Mass schedules, times of community prayer and pastoral activity benefit most when pastoral areas reflect together, avoid unnecessary overlap, and consider what best serves the people as a whole. In these days of easy travel, neighbouring parishes holding Masses at the same time may not meet the needs of the wider community.

Decisions must grow out of discernment - rooted in prayer, listening, consultation, and openness to God's leading. They are not instructions from the bishop but responsibilities entrusted to parishes and pastoral areas, supported by the diocese.

Signs of Hope

Despite challenges, there are real signs of new life across the diocese. People gather quietly for prayer, Eucharistic Adoration and reflection. Families remain committed to supporting their children in preparing for the sacraments. Parish leadership teams/Pastoral Councils have been established in many parishes, developing the various aspects of parish life. Many adults are engaging in parish-led faith development programmes, Scripture reflection, and simple forms of prayer that deepen their relationship with God. In a society that often appears very material and secular, the steady witness of our communities offers a different story. People are touched by authenticity, mercy and hope - and they notice when the Church lives these well.

In moments of tragedy and heartbreak, our parishes and priests have stood beside families with quiet strength. Likewise, in moments of joy there is a shared experience of hope. The faith-filled community presence, prayer and compassion reveal the heart of the Gospel and show our wider community that faith is not an idea but a lived accompaniment.

There is renewed energy around youth and young adult ministry. Young people seek belonging, purpose and hope. They respond generously when they are welcomed, listened to and accompanied. Every parish - or group of parishes - needs to make

pastoral care for young people a priority.

We are also seeing new paid and volunteer roles supporting faith development and sacramental preparation in parishes and schools. These ministries help ensure that our communities are formed in faith and supported pastorally and practically. The diocese is committed to encouraging and resourcing this work.

A Welcoming Church

Our parishes are enriched by people from many countries and backgrounds joining us in our churches for liturgical celebrations. They bring strong faith, joy and energy. We are called to welcome all with warmth, creating space for an intercultural Church that reflects the Church of the nations.

Women and men, young and old, contribute greatly through volunteering, catechesis, Pastoral Councils, music, liturgy, youth ministry, hospitality and care for the vulnerable and our planet. Their gifts are essential. A renewed Church depends on everyone recognising their vocation and offering their gifts generously. We need a new culture of service - simple, joyful, grounded in prayer, with good communication and shared responsibility.

A School of Prayer

St John Paul II said that every parish must become a "school of prayer". Without prayer, renewal collapses. Without listening to the Holy Spirit, decisions lose their heart.



Across the diocese, people are rediscovering forms of prayer that sustain and guide:

- Quiet time before the Blessed Sacrament;
- The Rosary and other devotional prayer;
- Scripture-based prayer;
- The Prayer of the Church in parishes
- Prayer in the home

Prayer gives us courage. Prayer gives us clarity. Prayer protects us from fear and bitterness. Prayer gives us hope. And prayer opens the door to Christ and true renewal.

Hope for What Lies Ahead

The Church in this diocese has weathered many storms throughout history, yet Christ has never abandoned us. He continues to lead, to invite, to encourage, and to strengthen us. This is a time for courage and for listening - a time for shared responsibility and renewed trust in the Holy Spirit.

Today, we begin a new Church Year and we enter the holy season of Advent: a season of expectation and hope. Looking ahead, I wish to share my intention that our ongoing discussions about forming pastoral areas - bringing parishes together in

shared mission - will be concluded before Easter 2026. My prayer is that these deliberations will be guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, so that the decisions we make will serve God's people faithfully for many years to come.

During this liturgical year, our hearts turn to the Gospel of St Matthew. In all that we do together, let us hold fast to the Lord's promise: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b)

These words are our anchor and our assurance as we navigate change with faith and hope.

I thank you sincerely for your patience, encouragement, and prayers. I am deeply grateful to our priests for their generous service, especially as their responsibilities grow heavier. Please join me in praying for an increase in vocations to the diocesan priesthood.

May the Lord bless our shared journey in the year ahead and fill us with renewed faith, hope, peace, and joy.

+ Donal
Donal McKeown
Bishop of Derry

Ruach...Breath of the Spirit

Praying to the Holy Spirit yields regular help by Fr Eamonn Kelly

THE more consideration we give to the Holy Spirit, the more influence the Spirit will have in our lives. As we allow the Holy Spirit to inspire our lives, the more wholesome holiness we will experience. Jesus told His disciples not to do anything until they were "clothed with the power from on high". This is good advice for us too.

We can see quite successful the change that took place in the lives of the disciples and apostles after Pentecost. From hiding to being bold in proclamation of the Gospel, the disciples were willing to go to whatever lengths was necessary to make sure as many people as possible would know Jesus as Lord.

From my own life, I have found many instances when the Holy Spirit worked strongly, with powerful love helping me. I often pray for the guidance of the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity. Words from a popular song, "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me", are often spoken in my internal soul that longs for a more authentic relationship with Jesus and, through Him, with the Almighty God. It is good practice for the Catholic to

have a familiar pattern of prayer to the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit and his work are not strangers. I recount one memory of the Spirit at work.

It was 4.05am on the clock when the phone call came, and five minutes later I was driving out to a crash scene. I was aware of everything that was happening, but the mind was dashing with thoughts. I had driven out this road earlier and it was all so different. Now I was conscious beyond words of everything - my speed, the road conditions, my two hands holding the steering wheel, the other traffic, the weather - and everything was so normal. But it was not normal.

I prayed that the Holy Spirit would guide me in whatever I was to face, and that The Spirit would help me in the prayer that I would pray. For the 'phone call had requested a priest to attend the scene of a fatal accident. Those words changed everything. For all involved, the world was a different place now. Nothing would ever be as they were just hours earlier. The sound of my own voice softly echoed in my car as I drove and prayed, and my mind

flooded with thoughts, questions, doubts, request and demands. For a split second, I wondered if I had understood the words of the 'phone call at all.

Mercy

I had heard. I had understood. The familiar, "For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world" was prayed as the moments and miles ticked away. These familiar words were so massively meaningful and their intimacy helped. But it was so hard to take in the absolute need for the words at this moment, so difficult to realise how real it all was - a fatal crash, a life gone in the blink of an eye. There was no time for all the decades of the Chaplet prayer, for I was approaching flashing blue lights and the Garda directing the traffic to the diversions that were already in place. "For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world." The Christ was somehow present in the awfulness.

I prayed. I blessed the deceased. I asked for mercy for the soul that had gone from this world. In a

shaky voice, I asked God to help all who would hear the news, all whose lives were about to be shattered by a knock on the door. I also prayed for those who were attending the scene, those men and women whom we often take for granted, and I was deeply aware of the power of The Spirit helping them as they worked so professionally under dreadful circumstances. As I prayed, "For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world", I was strangely aware of the savage death of Christ on the unjust Cross, and I found internal consolation.

Driving away from the scene, with all the feelings that go with such a moment - inadequacies, inability, powerlessness, smallness, mortality - I again allowed the words, "For the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world", to bring something of God into the sadness of the road.

The depths of this prayer deepened, but the mystery of life and the whys remained. The consciousness of the presence of the Holy Spirit helped, not taking away my efforts, but taking knowledge



beyond words and even hope in the middle of this tragedy.

There were things that I had to do, people to contact, people to hold, questions to be listened to, and prayers to be prayed. I would have to await another 'phone call to tell me that it was time to assist and make that knock on the door. The Spirit was helping me to stay aware of Christ crucified and resurrected, and not give into desperation.

Now, I had to stand with others as they heard of a tragic death. Somewhere deep within, I was aware that the words that I had in my heart would help: "For the

sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world," and I knew that when I had nothing to give, the Holy Spirit would give, and when I had no consolation to bring, the Holy Spirit would bring consolation, just by my presence.

I often reflect on experiences like this one and am aware of how powerful the Holy Spirit is. Unfortunately, the reality can be that a soul is not used to tuning into the workings of the Holy Spirit and opportunities are missed. So, I encourage us all to ask God's Holy Spirit to work in our lives.

Vocations News



News from Rome as Vocations Director visits seminarians for Derry Diocese



IN his capacity as Vocations Director for the Diocese of Derry, Fr Pat O'Hagan visited Rome towards the end of November to catch up with our three seminarians who are students at the Pontifical Beda College.

They are Deacon Stephen Baxter, David Stott, and Gerry Friel. David will soon leave the Beda to take up a pastoral placement in the Diocese, while Stephen will be completing his studies and preparing for ordination to the priesthood in the summer of 2026. Gerry is currently in the first year of his theological studies.

The Beda is located in the area of Rome which is home to the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, one of four major basilicas in the Eternal City. During a Holy Year - 2025 is the Jubilee Year of Hope - pilgrims to Rome are encouraged to pass through

any or all of the Holy Doors in the basilicas, in order to gain an indulgence. The late Pope Francis opened a Holy Door in one of Rome's prisons to allow the inmates to take part in the Holy Year. For obvious reasons that particular Holy Door cannot be accessed by 'regular' pilgrims.

The Beda is a seminary for the Church in England and Wales, and is currently home to seminarians of the Scots College, while they are searching for a new premises. During his visit, Fr Pat met with the Rector at the Beda, Fr Marcus Holden, a priest of the Archdiocese of Southwark, who was appointed in September of this year. He also visited the Pontifical Irish College to meet with the Rector and staff there, and with some Irish students who are taking part in the Catholic Studies programme. In the very

near future, the PIC hopes to offer a propaedeutic course to men who are preparing to study Philosophy and Theology as part of their formation towards priesthood.

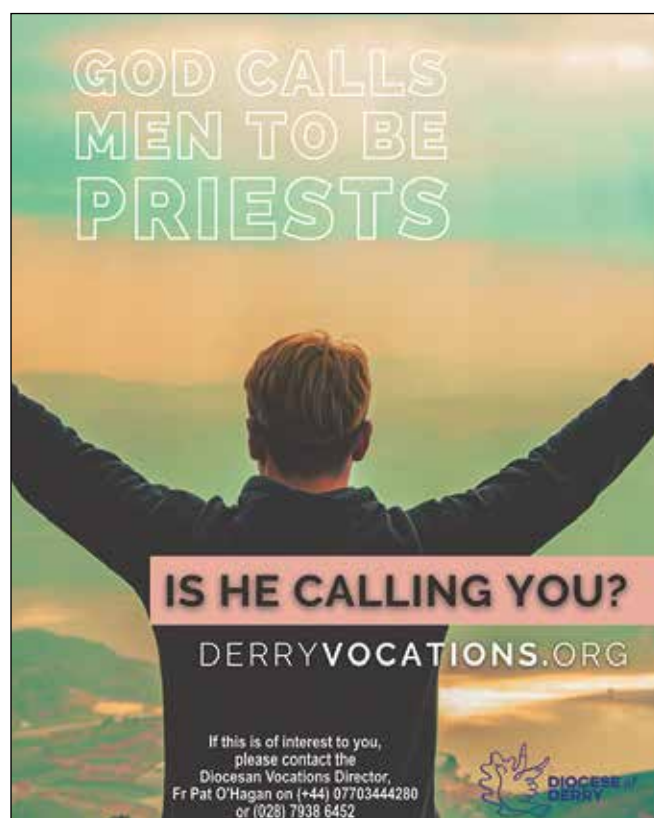
Fr Pat attended the Papal Audience on Wednesday, November 19. That was the day that Pope Leo XIV successfully caught the Tyrone jersey that was thrown to him from the crowd. Great catch, Your Holiness!

Please continue to pray for our seminarians and for all the men who are discerning their vocation.

The Vocations Directors of the northern province are hosting a Vocations Retreat Weekend in Drumalis Retreat Centre, Larne, from March 6-8. Further details and information on how to register will be posted in 'The Net', on Diocesan and parish websites, and social media, in late December/early January.



Gary Duddy (centre), First Year Philosophy student at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, pictured with Francis McDermott (left) and Brian Johnston (right) during the recent Come & See experience at the National Seminary. In all, 24 men from around the country attended. They met with Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan (Waterford & Lismore), Chair of the Bishops' Commission for Vocations, with members of the seminary staff, and with current seminarians. They were shown around the seminary, including a visit to the impressive College Chapel. They attended Evening Prayer, Morning Prayer, and Mass in St Mary's Oratory on the Sunday morning.



Prayer Evenings for Vocations

EVENINGS of Prayer for an increase in Vocations to Priesthood, in the Diocese of Derry, take place each month in St Columba's Church, Chapel Road, Waterside. The evenings begin with Mass at 7.30 pm, followed by a Holy Hour from 8-9 pm, and the first two in the New Year will be on Tuesday, January 13, and then February 17, the night before Ash Wednesday.

Parish Post-its

Aghyaran

Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, and 11 am.

Ardstraw East

(Newtownstewart)

Zoom Catechism: All are welcome to join Catechism by Zoom on Mondays, from 7.30-8.15 pm. Email: ardstraweast@derrydiocese.org to get the link. Learn how to answer hard questions.

Pope John Paul II Award – Sessions for Pope John Paul II Award participants take place on Thursdays at 6.30 pm, in the Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.

Holy Hour: 6.30 pm, Thursdays, Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.

Weekend Mass Times: 11:30 am, St Eugene's Glenock.

Badoney Lower

(Gortin-Rouskey)

Adoration: Adoration takes places in St Patrick's Gortin, after the 12 noon Mass until 5 pm on Tuesdays, and in St Mary's, Rouskey, after 7.30 pm Mass on Wednesdays, with an opportunity for Confession, until 9 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick's, Gortin; 10 am, St Mary's, Rouskey.

Badoney Upper

(Plumbridge-Cranagh)

Christmas Wreathmaking: A Christmas wreath-making workshop, organised by Friends of St Brigid's PS, Cranagh, will take place on Tuesday, December 16, at 7 pm. £20 per person. Each person comes away with their own wreath. If you would like to book a place, please contact Paula Cartin at St Brigid's PS on 028 81648418.

Candlelight Carol Service:

There will be a Candlelight Carol Service on Thursday, December 18, at 7 pm, in Sacred Heart Church, Plumbridge, in preparation for Christmas. All are welcome to this festive event.

Adoration & Confession: Adoration and Confessions take place in St Patrick's Cranagh after the 7.30 pm Wednesday evening Mass, until 9 pm, and after the 12 noon Mass on Saturdays in Plumbridge.

Confessions: Confessions are available after 11 am Mass on Saturdays in Sacred Heart Church, Plumbridge, and after the 7.30 pm Saturday Vigil Mass in St Patrick's Church, Cranagh.

Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick's Cranagh; 10 am, Sacred Heart Plumbridge.

Ballinascreen

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

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in Holy Rosary Church on the First Mondays from 12 noon until 7.30 pm.

Confessions: Holy Rosary Church every Saturday at 5.30 pm, before the Vigil Mass.

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

Ballymagroarty

Search Concert: The Search Christmas Concert,

'Only By Grace', takes place in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, on Sunday, December 21, at 7.30 pm. The suggested donation is £5.

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, every Sunday, from 1.30 - 6 pm.

Padre Pio Prayer: The Holy Family Padre Pio Prayer Group meets on the first Tuesday each month at Holy Family Chapel, Ballymagroarty, Derry. It starts with the Rosary at 6.45 pm, followed by Mass at 7.15pm, and Novena to St Pio directly afterwards. There will be a first-class relic available for veneration.

Confessions: Saturdays from 10.30-11.30 am & 5.15-5.50 pm; Tues & Thurs 6.45-7.10 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil; and 9.30 am, 11 am, and 12.30 pm on Sunday.

Banagher

Adoration & Chaplet: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Divine Mercy Chaplet take place in St Mary's Church, Altinure, Thursdays, 10.30-11.30 am; St Joseph's Church, Fincairn, on Fridays, 10-11 am.

Confessions: St Mary's Church, Altinure, Thursday 10.30 am; St Joseph's Church, Fincairn, Friday 10 am & Saturday 6.30 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil in St Joseph's Church, Fincairn, 10.30 am in St Mary's Church, Altinure, and 12 noon in St Peter's & St Paul's Church, Foreglen.

Bellaghy

Adoration: Fridays from 10 am-8 pm (Rosary at 7.30 pm).

Weekend Mass Times: 5.30 pm Vigil livestreamed to Bellaghy from St Oliver Plunkett's Church, Greenlough; 10.15 am in Ballyscullion, and 11.30 am in Bellaghy.

Buncrana

Christmas Flower Demo: There will be a Christmas Flower Demonstration on Tuesday, December 16, at 8 pm, in St Mary's Hall, Buncrana, by Michael Doherty, John Paul and Sarah McCallion. Admission is 10 Euros, which includes tea and treats. Spot prizes to be won and all arrangements raffled on the night. The proceeds are in aid of St Vincent de Paul.

Open Wide the Doors: The Open Wide the Doors Novena ends on Sunday, December 21. It takes place in St Mary's Church, Cockhill, starting at 7 pm.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Weekend Mass Times: St Mary's Oratory - Vigil 4.30 pm, 8.30 am and 12.30 pm; St Mary's Cockhill - 11am; Star of the Sea, Desertegney - 9.45 am.

Burt, Inch & Fahan

Adoration: Adoration in St Mura's Parish Church, Fahan, takes place each Friday after 10 am Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 10.15 am, St Aengus' Burt; 9 am, Our Lady of Lourdes, Inch; 11.30 am, St Mura's, Fahan.

Cappagh (Killyclogher)

Eucharistic Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesday from 8-9 pm in Christ the King, Strathroy, concluding with Night Prayer, and on Sunday from 6-7 pm, in Christ the King, with Devotions and Benediction.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher, Monday-Saturday at 9.15 am, and in Corpus Christi, Mountfield every Thursday evening at 8 pm.

Legion of Mary: Legion of Mary meets every Monday after 10 am Mass in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher. New members always welcome. Anyone wishing to welcome

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

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

Stations of the Cross: The Stations are prayed on Fridays at 3 pm in St Mary's Killyclogher.

Confessions: Confessions are heard on Saturdays after 10 am Mass in St Mary's Killyclogher, and from 5.45-6.25 pm in Christ The King, Strathroy.

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

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

Carndonagh

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

Castlederg & Ardstraw West

Adoration: Adoration takes place following 10 am Mass in St Patrick's Church on Fridays, until 12 noon.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil and 11 am, Castlederg; 9.30 am Dregish; and 12.30 pm Drumnabey.

Claudy

Living Word: There is a 'Living Word' gathering in the Upper Room in St Patrick's Church on Thursdays, 7-8.30 pm, for a time of reading and reflection on the Mass readings for the following Sunday. All welcome.

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

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

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

Society of St Joseph: The

Vocation Society of St Joseph prayer meeting, in support of religious vocations, takes place on the first Thursday of each month, at 6.30 pm, in the Upper Room, St Patrick's Church.

Children's

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

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

Clonleigh (Lifford)

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 11 am.

Clonmany

Carol Service: All are welcome to St Mary's Church, Clonmany, on Sunday, December 21, at 7 pm, for a service of carols, readings and reflections to prepare for the Christmas season.

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

Confessions: Confession is available from 6 pm on Saturdays, in lead up to 6.30 pm Vigil Mass.

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

Coleraine

Society of St Joseph: The Society of St Joseph for the

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

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

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

Creggan

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

Adoration: Exposition of Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Divine Mercy Chapel on Sundays from 1.30 pm - 6 pm, Mondays from 10.30 am - 7 pm, and Tuesday - Saturday from 10.30 am - 12 pm.

Bereavement Support: Parish Pastoral Bereavement Support. The Parish Pastoral Bereavement Support Group meets on the second Sunday of each month at 3 pm in the Parochial House community room. All are welcome to share a cup of tea, have a chat, remember and talk about their loved one and find support with others experiencing similar feelings. In addition to the group, there is an ongoing

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT SEMINARS ST PIO HOUSE, GALLIAGH, THREE PATRONS PARISH, DERRY

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23

SPEAKERS

FR JOSEPH HANLY FR JOHN KEANE MARGARET FRIEL FR JAMES O'REILLY FR EAMONN KELLY BR THOMAS PAUL FR ANTONIO MARIA

WHAT IS LIFE IN THE SPIRIT? IT IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEEPEN IN YOUR FAITH AND TO ACTIVATE THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT YOU RECEIVED IN THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

PARISH OFFICE NUMBER: 028 71262540 REGISTRATION: ON THE NIGHT FEE: DONATION

Tuesday Evenings 7-9pm Commencing 13 Jan 2026 Ending 24 Feb 2026

7pm Mass available in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, Derry

ST PIO HOUSE HALL 7:30pm - 9:00pm

Life in the Spirit Seminars Programme Jan & Feb 2026 St Pio House, Galliagh, Derry		
Week 1 13th Jan	Fr Joseph Mary	Experiencing God's Love
Week 2 20th Jan	Fr John Keane	Salvation
Week 3 27th Jan	Margaret Friel	New Life in the Spirit
Week 4 3rd Feb	Fr James O'Reilly	Receiving God's Gift
Week 5 10th Feb	Fr Eamonn Kelly	Praying for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit
Week 6 17th Feb	Br Thomas Paul	Growth in the Spirit
Week 7 24th Feb	Fr Antonio Maria	Transformation in Christ

Parish Post-its

opportunity to speak on a one-to-one basis with an experienced grief counsellor . The contact number for more information on the group or to arrange one to one support is 07907085178.

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

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

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

Culdaff

Good as New Shop: St Mary’s Church Bocan Re-decorating Committee has the ‘Good as New Shop’ now open in Carndonagh. All proceeds are for the Re-decorating Fund.

Weekend Mass Times: 8 pm Vigil; 10 am Sunday.

Desertmartin

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

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

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

Donagheady (Aughabrack & Dunamanagh)

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Mary’s, Aughabrack, on First Fridays, after 10 am Mass until 12 noon.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s, and 10.30 am, St Mary’s.

Donaghmore (Killygordon)

Holy Hour: Prayerful reading of the Scriptures & Rosary with the Home of the Mother, Servant Sisters every Tuesday from 6.30-7.30 pm at St Mary’s Church, Sessiaghoneill, Ballybofey, and every Thursday from 7-8 pm at St. Patrick’s.

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Tuesdays, 10.30 am-7.30 pm, St Mary’s Church, Sessiaghoneill; Thursdays, after 9.15 am Mass, St Patrick’s Church, Crossroads. Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Patrick’s; 8 pm Vigil, 9 am & 11 am, St Mary’s Sessiaghoneill.

Drumquin

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

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

Drumragh (Omagh)

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

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

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Sacred Heart Church on Wednesdays following 10 am Mass until 5.30 pm. Rosary of Reparation: On the first Saturday of each month, a Rosary of Reparation will be prayed at 1pm on Main Street, Omagh. All welcome to join.

Stations of Cross: The Stations are prayed after 10 am Mass in Sacred Heart Church.

Confessions: Confession take place on Saturdays after 10 am Mass and after 6 pm Mass in Sacred Heart Church.

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

Dungiven

Legion of Mary: Dungiven Legion of Mary meets every Tuesday at 6 pm in the Parish Committee Room. New members welcome. If anyone would like to have the Legion of Mary Statue, (Our Lady of Peace), please telephone 078 9552 9563. Many blessings have been bestowed upon those who have taken the statue to their home for a week.

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

St Pio Healing Mass: A St Pio Healing Mass is celebrated monthly, on the first Tuesday, in St Patrick’s Church at 7 pm. Society of St Joseph: The Society of St Joseph’s for the support of religious vocations meets on the second

Tuesdays of the month in the Committee Room, after 10 am Mass in St Patrick’s Church.

Children’s Liturgy: Children’s liturgy recommences on Sunday, October 20 and will continue every third Sunday of the month at 11.30 am Mass. Children from P2-P4 are invited to participate.

Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross will be prayed after the 10 am Mass on Fridays, in St Patrick’s Church.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed on Mondays, Tuesday, Wednesdays and Fridays, at 9.35 am, in St Patrick’s Church.

Adoration: Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays, 9 am-6 pm, and Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9 am-8 pm, in Adoration Chapel.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 11.30 am, St Patrick’s; 10.15 am, St Matthew’s; and 4.30 pm, Immaculate Conception.

Confession: Confession is available in St Patrick’s Church at 11 am on Saturdays.

Errigall

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Mondays after 10 am Mass in St Mary’s Church, Ballerin, until 2.30 pm.

Rosary & Chaplet: The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet are prayed in St Joseph’s Church, Glenullin, every Wednesday evening at 6.30 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Joseph’s Church, Glenullin, and St Mary’s Church, 10 am, St Mary’s, Ballerin, and 11.30 am in St Joseph’s, Glenullin.

Faughanvale

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed every Friday at 7 pm in Star of the Sea Church.

Vocations Society of St Joseph: The Faughanvale Branch meets in St Mary’s Church on the second Monday of the month (not Jan July, August) following morning Mass. They pray for and sponsor vocations to the priesthood. New members are needed. The meeting only takes less than an hour.

Rosary for Priests and for Vocations: A Rosary for priests and vocations is recited each Monday before morning Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 5 pm Vigil, 12 noon, Star of the Sea; 6.30 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Mary’s.

Granaghan (Swatragh)

Weekend Mass Times: 12

noon & 7 pm Vigils; 10.30 am.

Greencastle

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

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in St Patrick’s Church on Thursdays, 6-10 pm.

Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are prayed after 7.30 pm Mass on Fridays in St Patrick’s, Greencastle.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Patrick’s, and 11.30 am, Our Lady of Wayside, Broughderg.

Greenlough

Rosary: Tuesday Night Rosary is prayed at 7.30 pm in the Church.

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Oliver Plunkett’s Church from 9 am-5 pm on Thursdays.

Weekend Mass Times: 5.30 pm Vigil, and 9 am (alternates with 11 am Sunday Mass in St Mary’s Bellaghy).

Iskaheen, Drung & Muff

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Tuesdays after 10 am Eucharistic Service, until 2 pm, in St Patrick’s Church, Iskaheen.

Divine Mercy: Divine Mercy Devotions take place on Thursdays after 10 am Mass in Sacred Heart Church, Muff.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed before all weekday Masses.

Confessions: Confessions are available in Iskaheen on Saturdays, 9.45-10 am, and in Muff on Saturdays, 6 pm, and after 6.30 pm Vigil Mass

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 11.30 am, Sacred Heart Church, Muff; 8 pm Vigil, 10.15 am, St Columba’s, Drung; 9 am, St Patrick’s, Iskaheen.

Kilrea

Eucharistic Adoration: Mondays, from 12 noon - 7pm, at St Mary’s Drumagarner. Concludes with Public Prayers.

Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are prayed on Sundays in St Anne’s Oratory at 7 pm, with Confessions beforehand from 6.30-6.50 pm.

SVP: The St Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop is open on Saturdays from 10 am -1pm.

Confession: Confession is available immediately after the 7 pm Vigil Mass

in St Anne’s Oratory each Saturday. Alternatively, feel free to request the sacrament before or after any weekday Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm, Vigil, St Anne’s Oratory; 10am St Mary’s, Drumagarner; 12 noon, St Mary’s, Craigavole.

Lavey

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Fridays from 9.30 am until 5 pm.

Confession: Confessions are heard from 5.15–5.45 pm on Saturdays.

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 11 am.

Leckpatrick

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays from 8.30 am Mass until 5.30 pm.

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

Lifford (Murlog)

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays from 8.30 am Mass until 5.30 pm.

Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are recited publicly each Friday after 9.30 am Mass in St Patrick’s Church, Murlog.

Adoration: 9.30 am-12.30 pm.

Confessions: Saturday, 6-6.15 pm

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil; 11 am.

Limavady

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Sundays in Christ the King (with Confessions) from 3-5 pm.

Children’s Prayer: A Children’s Prayer Group is held in the Drummond Hotel, Ballykelly, on the First Saturday of every month, from 2.30-3.30 pm. All welcome. Contact: Kathy on 07538749627.

Weekend Mass Times: 4.30 pm Vigil, 9 am, 12 noon, Christ the King Church; 6 pm Vigil, St Finlough’s Church; 10.30 am, St Mary’s Church.

Maghera

Untier of Knots Novena: The Our Lady Untier of Knots Novena comes to a close in St Mary’s Church on Wednesday, December 17. After the Mass, the Church will remain open until 10 pm, with Adoration and Confessions.

Holy Face of Jesus: The Holy Face of Jesus prayers take place every Tuesday after the

9.30 am Mass and Divine Mercy.

Pray & Play: The Maghera Parish Pray and Play for Parents, Grandparents & Tots (three years old and younger) meets every Friday, in the Fairhill Youth Centre, after the 10 am Mass. It runs from 10.30 am until 12 noon.

Confession: Daily after morning Mass (except Sunday and Holydays), and St Mary’s at 7 pm on Wednesdays (before evening Mass) and Saturdays at 11am/12noon and 5.30pm/6.15pm

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil and 11.30 am, St Mary’s; 9.30 am, St Patrick’s.

Magilligan

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Aidan’s Church on Wednesdays, from 3-7 pm, and on the First Sundays from 3-6 pm.

Malin

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

Melmount

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the church on Mondays after 10.30 am – 6.30 pm (Benediction at 6.30 pm if priest available).

Confessions: Second and fourth Saturdays at 11.30 am in St Mary’s; for First Fridays – after Mass Thursday & Friday mornings (if no funeral) and after First Friday evening Mass.

Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil, 11.30 am.

Moville

Nativity: Ceolan School of Music present the story of the Nativity in St Pius X Church on Tuesday, December 16, at 7.30 pm. No Rosary this evening

Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are prayed after 10 am Mass on Fridays.

Prayer: The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet will be recited in St Pius X Church, Moville, at 7.30 pm every day, from Sunday – Friday.

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Mondays, from 2-9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6-9 pm, in St Pius X Church.

Confessions: Confessions will be heard in St Pius X Church on Saturdays from 5.45-6.15 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Pius X Church. 11.30 am on alternate Sundays in St Mary’s Ballybrack, and St Columba’s

Ballinacrae.

Sion Mills

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Fridays, from 10.30 am – 6.30 pm (ending with Benediction if priest available). The Blessed Sacrament can also be adored in the Adoration Room in St Theresa’s anytime while the Church is open.

Legion of Mary: The Legion of Mary meets in the Green Room, behind the church, each Monday evening at 7.30 pm. This is open not only to members of the Legion but to anyone interested in joining. Anyone can come along to the start of the meeting for the Rosary.

Confessions: First, third and fifth Saturdays at 10.30 am in St Theresa’s.

Weekend Mass Times: 5.30 pm Vigil; 9.30 am.

Steelstown & Culmore

Lectio Divina: Lectio Divina is a way of praying the Scriptures together and takes place every Wednesday after 10 am Mass, in the Parish Conference Room. All welcome.

Adoration: Mondays after 10 am Mass until 6.50 pm.

Stations of the Cross: Come along to reflect on the Way of the Cross on Fridays at 7.30 pm.

Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil; 9 am, 11 am, and 12.15 pm.

Strabane (Camus)

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays from 8.30 am Mass until 5.30 pm.

Stations of Cross: Stations of the Cross are recited publicly each Friday after 10 am Mass in Immaculate Conception Church.

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place every day, from 10.30 am-1 pm, in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis of Peace), which is situated at the back of the Church.

Prayer Group: The Contemplative Prayer Group meets on Mondays at 8 pm in the Prayer Room in the Parochial House. All welcome. Entry by Parish Priest’s front door.

Society of St Joseph: The St John Vianney branch of the Society of St Joseph (the three combined Strabane parishes) meets on the first Tuesday of the month, excluding January, July and August, with Rosary in the church after 10 am Mass and continues in St Patrick’s Hall. More people are encouraged to join in this prayer for new students

Parish Post-its

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to join the priesthood. The Society assists Irish and overseas student. Please contact Margaret Harte on 028 71 883159.
Padre Pio Mass: The Padre Pio Mass takes place in the Church on the first Wednesday of the month at 7 pm, with Rosary beforehand at 6.40 pm.
Grotto Rosary: The Rosary is recited at the Grotto on the last Sunday of each month. Everyone is welcome.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9.45 am & 12.15 pm.

Templemore – St Eugene’s
Christmas Confession & Adoration: In preparation for Christmas, there will be an opportunity for Confession and Adoration on Monday, December 22, from 5-7 pm.
Carol Service: St Eugene’s Cathedral Carol Service will take place on Sunday, December 21, at 4 pm, with the Cathedral Choir leading in the singing. Children are invited to bring presents of new unwrapped toys and adults to donate sweets, biscuits, vouchers or cash. St Vincent de Paul Society will distribute the gifts.
Eucharistic Adoration: Every Sunday, there is Eucharistic Adoration from 3-6 pm and every Tuesday from 10.30 am until 7.20 pm.
Matt Talbot Mass: The Matt Talbot, Freedom from addiction Mass takes place on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm in St Eugene’s Cathedral.
St Dymphna Mass: The St Dymphna Mass with Anointing of the Sick takes place on the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm. This Mass is to give thanks to God for positive mental health and to pray for those who are struggling with mental health issues and those who care for them.

Cathedral Club: The Cathedral Club meets after the 10 am Mass each Thursday in the Cathedral Hall. Everyone is welcome to this parish social group. Refreshments will be served.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.15 pm & 7.30 pm Vigils; 9.30 am, 11 am, 12.30 pm & 7 pm.

Templemore – Long Tower
Novena: The annual Solemn Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help ends on Sunday, December 21, at 6 pm, with the annual Carol Service, followed by refreshments in the Long Tower PS, within grounds

of the Church. Everyone welcome. This year’s theme was ‘Finding Hope and Healing in this Hurting World’, to mark the close of the Jubilee Year of Hope.
‘From St Columba to Sister Clare’: Evening of Prayer in St Columba’s Church, Long Tower on the first Thursday of each month, at 7 pm for Rosary (Confessions available), then 7.30pm Mass, followed by mini vigil to midnight for healing and intercession. At this Mass, we will pray for the cause of Sr Clare in the Monastic site where St Columba knelt and prayed. Everyone is welcome to attend.
Mental Health Mass: A monthly Mass for Mental Health, and a mini-Vigil to midnight, takes place on the first Thursdays at 7.30 pm. This Mass is to give thanks to God for positive mental health, and to pray for those struggling with mental health issues and those who care for them. After Mass, Adoration will follow until midnight.
Purple Hearts: The Purple Hearts group gathers every Tuesday in Aras Cholmcille after 10 am Mass in Long Tower, for a cuppa, conversation, and some activities such as dancing, knitting, bingo and organising day trips. All welcome.
Long Tower & Brandywell Memories: A collection of old cine film transferred to DVD, taken from 1950’s onward. The pack contains a double DVD with many clips of Derry in the 50s up to 80s. Much of the footage was filmed in the Brandywell area and the Long Tower School. Cost £10, available from Parish Office and Aras Cholmcille.
Children’s Rosary: Children’s Rosary takes place in the Long Tower on the First Friday of every month, at 3.30 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10 am & 12 noon.
Siopa Cholmcille: St Columba’s Gift Shop in Aras Cholmcille has a variety of Confirmation/First Holy Communion gifts & cards, candles, Rosary beads, books, occasion cards and other gifts & mementos available. The shop is open after 10am for enquiries, please contact Sheila Doyle/Jim Doherty via (parish office 028-7126230 or Sacristy 028-71261946) who will be happy to help.
Cloisters Café: Cloisters Café in Aras Cholmcille (Wee Nuns building), in the grounds of Long Tower Church, is a cosy place to

relax and have a bite to eat or a cuppa and a cake! The café is open Tuesday – Saturday, from 10 am to 3 pm.
Christmas Masses & Confession Times: Wednesday, December 24 – Christmas Eve - Family Vigil at 6 pm with Long Tower Folk Group, Evening Vigil at 8 pm with Michelle McDaid & Friends, and Candlelight Christmas Mass at 10 pm with Margaret Keys, Soprano. Thursday, December 25 - Christmas Day - 8 am, 10 am with The Gateway Singers & 12 Noon with Long Tower Senior Choir.
The last Confessions for Christmas will be Tuesday, December 23, from 10.30 am to 12 noon and from 5.30-7.15 pm. There will be no Confessions after this date until the evening of Monday, January 5 at 7 pm, when Confessions will resume as normal.
Three Patrons
Galliagh Novena: The Annual Novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help is underway in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, on Tuesdays at 7 pm, finishing on December 16. This nine-week programme offers the opportunity to take some personal time for prayer and reflection. All are welcome to join in on this journey of prayer, comfort and healing in preparation for Christmas. Ample parking available.
New Course: The Parish is running a course entitled, “Genesis (1–11) and Church Teaching” on Thursdays in the Kildare Room, St Brigid’s, Carnhill, from 7–8 pm. All are welcome; bring along a Bible and come discover how these ancient stories speak powerfully to our faith today.
Children’s Rosary: Children’s Rosary takes place in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, on the second Saturday of the month, at 2 pm.
Legion of Mary: The Legion of Mary meets on Mondays, from 1-3 pm in the Meeting Room at St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh.
Folk Group: The Carnhill Folk Group meets on Mondays from 7-8.30 pm in St Brigid’s Church.
St Brigid’s Choir: The 10.30 am St Brigid’s Choir meets on Thursdays from 5-5.30 pm in St Brigid’s Church.
Bible Study: Bible Study takes place on Tuesdays after 11 am Mass in the Meeting Room, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh.
Men’s Bible Study: Men’s Bible Study takes place in the Upper Room in St Brigid’s Chapel, Carnhill, on

Tuesdays from 7.30-8.30 pm.
Women’s Bible Study: Women’s Bible Study takes place on Wednesdays from 7-8 pm, in the Upper Room, St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill.
God Club: God Club is an opportunity for teenagers to learn together about their faith. It takes place in the Kildare Room, Carnhill, on Saturdays from 11.30 am until 12.30 pm.
Family/Youth Mass: A Family/Youth Mass is celebrated every Sunday at 6.30 pm in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. Everyone is welcome.
Be Still: Be Still is a Men’s Prayer and Friendship Group that meets every Thursday night from 8.15-10 pm in Our Lady’s Chapel, within St Joseph’s Church building, Galliagh. Its mission as a group is to provide a safe place where men can pray and share in a confidential and supportive setting. All men are welcome.
Holy Hour: A Holy Hour for the Unborn & Expectant Mothers takes place on Thursdays at 7 pm in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. All welcome.
Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, on Tuesdays from 11 am until 7 pm. It also takes place seven days a week in the Adoration Room in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, from 8 am until 8 pm, and in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, on Wednesdays from 10.30 am – 7 pm.
Youth Prayer Group: A Youth Prayer Group takes place on Thursdays, from 7.30-8.30 pm, in St Pio Centre, Galliagh.
First Saturday: On the First Saturday of each month, after 11 am Mass in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, there is Adoration and Rosary, ending with Divine Mercy and Benediction at 3 pm.
Living Disciples: Living Disciples meet on Tuesdays at 7.30-8.30 pm in St Pio House, St Joseph’s Church grounds, for Praise & Worship, friendship and a cup of tea. All welcome.
Holy Face Devotions: Devotions to the Holy Face of Jesus takes place every Tuesday after 11 am Mass in Our Lady’s Chapel, St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. All welcome
St Pio Mass: A monthly Mass in honour of St Pio takes place on the first Monday at 7 pm in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn.
Healing Night: A Healing Night with the Franciscan

Friars of the Renewal takes place monthly on the first Friday, from 7-10 pm, in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh. Everyone welcome.
Holy Souls Prayer: Under The Gaze of Our Lady of Montligeon, the Holy Souls of Purgatory Prayer Meeting takes place on Mondays after 11 am Mass in Our Lady’s Chapel, within St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The Group also meet in Termonbacca on the last Wednesday of every month, from 12.30-1.30 pm.
Vocations Society: The Vocations Society of St Joseph hold monthly meetings on First Fridays after 10 am Mass, in the Emmaus Room, Pennyburn. New members welcome.
Women’s Laugh & Craft: The Women’s Laugh & Craft Group meets every Monday from 7-9 pm in the Kildare Room, St Brigid’s, Carnhill. £3 per class. Spaces limited.
St Pio Café: St Pio’s Café, in the St Pio Centre, Galliagh, is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11.30 am-2.30 pm.
Confessions: Confessions takes place in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, on Tuesdays from 6.15-6.45 pm and Sundays from 5.30-6 pm; in St Patrick’s Church, Pennyburn, on Wednesdays from 6.15-6.45 pm, and Saturdays from 5.15-5.45 pm; and in St Brigid’s Church, Carnhill, on Thursdays from 6.15-6.45 pm, and Saturdays after 11 am Mass and from 4-4.30 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.15 pm Vigil & 9.45 am, St Patrick’s, Pennyburn; 5 pm Vigil, 10.30 am & 12.30 pm St Brigid’s, Carnhill; 11 am, 12.30 pm (An tAifreann Naofa), and 6.30 pm Youth Mass, St Joseph’s Galliagh.

Urney & Castlefinn
First Saturdays: The First Saturday Devotion and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will take place in St Columba’s Church, Doneyloop, from 12 noon until 1 pm on the First Saturday of each month.
Adoration: Weekly Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Anthony’s Chapel every Tuesday, from 12 noon until 8 pm.
Cenacle: The Cenacle for Priests takes place every Tuesday in St Anthony’s Chapel immediately after the 7 pm Mass.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Columba’s, Doneyloop; 10.30 am, St Mary’s Castlefinn.

Waterside &

Strathfoyle
Lectio Divina: Reflect on the Scriptures with Lectio Divina in the side chapel in St Columb’s Church, Chapel Road, on Thursday nights, starting at 8.15 pm – after evening Mass.
Eucharistic Adoration: There is Eucharistic Adoration in St Oliver Plunkett Church, Strathfoyle, on Mondays, 11.30 am-12.30 pm and Wednesdays from 7-9 pm; in Immaculate Conception Church on Thursdays, 1-6 pm; and in St Columb’s Church on Fridays,

1-6 pm.
Confessions: St Columb’s – Saturday after 10 am Mass, Monday–Friday at 7 pm, before evening Mass; Immaculate Conception, after 11 am Mass every Saturday and at 5.30 pm before evening Mass on a Saturday; St Oliver Plunkett, Every Saturday 5.30 pm, before the Vigil Mass.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil, St Columb’s; 6 pm Vigil, 10.15 am & 12.15 pm, Immaculate Conception; 6 pm Vigil and 11.15 am, St Oliver Plunkett.

St. Eugene's Cathedral Carol Service



SVP Sunday 21 December 2025 4.00pm SVP

Christmas Confessions

Wednesday 17th– Sunday 21st 3pm-5pm

Monday 22nd– Wednesday 24th 10am-12pm and 3pm-5pm

Wednesday 31st 3pm-5pm

Saturday 3rd January 3pm-5pm

Diocesan Diary

Jubilee Year Closing Ceremony: The Jubilee Year of Hope will come to a close in the Diocese with a special ceremony, followed by Mass, celebrated by Bishop Donal in the Mother Church of the Diocese, St Eugene’s Cathedral, on Sunday, December 28, at 12.30 pm.
Diocesan Vocations Prayer: Prayer Evenings for Vocations to Priesthood are held each month in St Columb’s Church, Waterside, beginning with Mass at 7.30 pm and followed by a Holy Hour, from 8-9 pm. The next will be on Tuesday, January 13, and then on February 17, 2026.
Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage: The Derry Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2026 will take place from Monday, June 29, to Friday, July 3 (4 nights), ex City of Derry Airport. Cost of £895 is inclusive of local taxes, but exclusive of single supplements and insurance. The Pilgrimage office will open for bookings on Saturday, January 17 at 11 am. However, Gift Vouchers to any value are now available (Monday to Thursday) from the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, 164 Bishop Street, Derry BT48 6UJ.
ACCORD Inishowen: On-line Marriage Preparation Programmes will be hosted on Mondays, December 1, 8, 15, at 6.30 pm. All materials posted to address on booking form. Book online at accord.ie or for further details contact 0749374103/ inishowen@accord.ie

...other Diary Dates

Divine Child Novena: The Discalced Carmelite walk with the infant Jesus figurine around City parishes, for the annual Divine Child Novena in the lead-up to Christmas, comes to a close on Tuesday, December 16, when a team of pilgrim walkers carry it from St Columba’s Church, Long Tower, to the Termonbacca Monastery. They will leave from Long Tower at 6 pm, with the closing Mass starting at 7 pm, followed by the Novena prayers. All welcome to join in.

Men’s Rosary: The Irish Men’s First Saturday Rosary will take place on January 3 at 1 pm in The Square, Castlederg.

Sr Clare Prayer: ‘From St Columba to Sister Clare’- Evening of Prayer in St Columba’s Church, Long Tower on the first Thursday of each month, at 7 pm for Rosary (Confessions available), then 7.30pm Mass, followed by mini vigil to midnight for healing and intercession. At this Mass, we will pray for the cause of Sr Clare in the

Monastic site where St Columba knelt and prayed. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Derry Search Youth Group: The monthly Search prayer meeting takes place on the first Sunday of each month, at 7 pm Everyone is welcome whether you have been before or not. It will start with a cup of tea, then open the prayer meeting with a theme to reflect on. The meeting is in the Search centre at Iona Business Park, Southway.

Anam Óg: This faith-based youth group, for those aged 8-14 years, meets on Sundays in Termonbacca, Derry, to explore the faith through fun and friendship, from 6-7.15 pm. We are always open to new members or anyone who wants to give it a try. If anyone wishes to sign their child up, you can do so at this link: <https://forms.gle/RFFF9kffzE5yBtq8A>

St Therese Prayer Hour: This year, it is 100 years since St Therese of Lisieux was declared a Saint.

In order to mark this wonderful occasion, the Carmelites at Termonbacca Retreat Centre, in Derry, have built a new chapel which holds a first-class relic of St Therese. There is now a weekly prayer hour in the new chapel on Mondays, praying for the intercession of St Therese, particularly praying for world peace. The prayer will be from 7.30-8.30 pm and everyone is welcome to come along and join in.

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

Servant Sisters: The Sisters of the

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

Holy Souls Prayer: Under The Gaze of Our Lady of Montligeon, the Holy Souls of Purgatory Prayer Meeting takes place on Mondays after 11 am Mass in Our Lady’s Chapel, within St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The Group will also meet in Termonbacca on the last Wednesday of every month, from 12.30-1.30 pm.

Polish Mass: Mass for the Polish community is celebrated in the Church of Christ The King, Strathroy, Omagh, on the first and third Sundays of each month at 10 am, and at 9.30 am every second and fourth Sunday in the Divine Mercy Chapel, at St Mary’s Church, Creggan, in Derry City.

Stations of Cross: On the First Friday of each month, after 10 am Mass in St Eugene’s, there is a silent procession from the Cathedral to

St Columba’s Church, Long Tower, meditating on the Stations of the Cross.

Coastal Rosary: Rosary on the Coast for world peace and the protection of unborn babies takes place at Lisfannon Beach, Buncrana, on the first Sunday of every month at 3 pm, and at Benone Strand on the third Sunday of every month, at 3 pm.

Men’s Rosary: The Men’s Rosary takes place on the first Saturday of every month at Market Street, Omagh (opposite Primark) and at the side of O’Neill’s Sports Store, near Guildhall Square, at 1 pm. All Welcome!

Sr Clare Mass: Mass in honour of Sr Clare Crockett is celebrated on the second Sunday of each month, at 7 pm, in Termonbacca. All welcome. The Mass is streamed live via Termonbacca YouTube channel.

Reading with the Carmelites: The Carmelite Fathers at Termonbacca hold a monthly session of ‘Reading with the Carmelite Saints’, to explore learning friendship with Christ through the example of the Carmelite Saints. It takes place on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30 pm.

Healing Night: The monthly Healing Night with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in St Joseph’s Church, Galliagh, in Derry, takes place on the First Friday of each month, at 7 pm.

Sr Clare Rosary: The Sr Clare Rosary continues every Monday night, at 8.30 pm, in St Joseph’s Room, at the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca.

Matt Talbot Society: The Matt Talbot Society Mass, praying for those suffering from addiction, is offered for those enrolled on the first Monday of every month in St Eugene’s Cathedral, at 7.30 pm.

DDS Daily Masses 2025-2026

St Eugene's 17 Jan, 9 Mar, 29 Apr, 19 Jun, 9 Aug, 29 Sep, 19 Nov	Donaghmore 12 Dec 2025, 1 Feb, 24 Mar, 14 May, 4 Jul, 24 Aug, 14 Oct	Claudy 27 Dec 2025, 16 Feb, 8 Apr, 29 May 19 Jul, 8 Sep, 29 Oct	Fahan 11 Jan, 3 Mar, 23 Apr, 13 Jun, 3 Aug, 23 Sep, 13 Nov
St Columba's 18 Jan, 10 Mar, 30 Apr 20 Jun, 10 Aug, 30 Sep, 20 Nov	Termonamongan 13 Dec 2025, 2 Feb, 25 Mar, 15 May, 5 Jul, 25 Aug, 15 Oct,	Banagher 28 Dec 2025, 17 Feb, 9 Apr, 30 May 20 Jul, 9 Sep, 30 Oct	Clonmany 12 Jan, 4 Mar, 24 Apr, 14 Jun, 4 Aug, 24 Sep, 14 Nov
The Three Patrons 19 Jan, 11 Mar, 1 May, 21 Jun, 11 Aug, 1 Oct, 21 Nov	Langfield 14 Dec 2025, 3 Feb, 26 Mar, 16 May, 6 Jul, 26 Aug, 16 Oct,	Ballinascreen 29 Dec 2025, 18 Feb 10 Apr, 31 May 21 Jul, 10 Sep, 31 Oct	Carndonagh 13 Jan, 5 Mar, 25 Apr, 15 Jun, 5 Aug, 25 Sep, 15 Nov
St Mary's, Creggan 30 Nov 2025, 20 Jan, 12 Mar, 2 May, 22 Jun, 12 Aug, 2 Oct, 22 Nov	Sion Mills 15 Dec 2025, 4 Feb, 27 Mar, 17 May, 7 Jul, 27 Aug, 17 Oct,	Dungiven 30 Dec 2025, 19 Feb, 11 Apr, 1 Jun, 22 Jul, 11 Sep, 1 Nov	Malin 14 Jan, 6 Mar, 26 Apr, 16 Jun, 6 Aug, 26 Sep, 16 Nov
Our Lady of Lourdes 1 Dec 2025, 21 Jan, 13 Mar, 3 May, 23 Jun, 13 Aug, 3 Oct, 23 Nov	Ardstraw East 16 Dec 2025, 5 Feb, 28 Mar, 18 May, 8 Jul, 28 Aug, 18 Oct,	Limavady 31 Dec 2025, 20 Feb, 12 Apr, 2 Jun, 23 Jul, 12 Sep, 2 Nov	Iskaheen 15 Jan, 7 Mar, 27 Apr, 17 Jun, 7 Aug, 27 Sep, 17 Nov
Holy Family 2 Dec, 2025, 22 Jan, 14 Mar, 4 May, 24 Jun, 14 Aug, 4 Oct, 24 Nov	Ardstraw W & C'derg 17 Dec 2025, 6 Feb, 29 Mar, 19 May, 9 Jul, 29 Aug, 19 Oct	Magilligan 1 Jan, 21 Feb, 13 Apr, 3 Jun, 24 Jul, 13 Sep, 3 Nov	Culdaff 16 Jan, 8 Mar, 28 Apr 18 Jun, 8 Aug, 28 Sep, 18 Nov
Culmore 3 Dec 2025, 23 Jan, 15 Mar, 5 May, 25 Jun, 15 Aug, 5 Oct, 25 Nov	Clonleigh 18 Dec 2025, 7 Feb, 30 Mar, 20 May, 10 Jul, 30 Aug, 20 Oct	Coleraine 2 Jan, 22 Feb, 14 Apr, 4 Jun, 25 Jul, 14 Sep, 4 Nov	1ST FRIDAY MASS FOR LIVING MEMBERS
Glendermott 4 Dec 2025, 24 Jan, 16 Mar, 6 May, 26 Jun, 16 Aug, 6 Oct, 26 Nov	Drumragh 19 Dec 2025, 8 Feb, 31 Mar, 21 May, 11 Jul, 31 Aug, 21 Oct	Garvagh 3 Jan, 23 Feb, 15 Apr, 5 Jun, 26 Jul, 15 Sep, 5 Nov	2025 / 2025
Donagheady 5 Dec 2025, 25 Jan, 17 Mar, 7 May, 27 Jun, 17 Aug, 7 Oct, 27 Nov	Cappagh 20 Dec 2025, 9 Feb, 1 Apr, 22 May, 12 Jul, 1 Sep, 22 Oct	Kilrea 4 Jan, 24 Feb, 16 Apr, 6 Jun, 27 Jul, 16 Sep, 6 Nov	Magilligan 12/5/25
Leckpatrick 6 Dec 2025, 26 Jan, 18 Mar, 8 May, 28 Jun, 18 Aug, 8 Oct, 28 Nov	Greencastle 21 Dec 2025, 10 Feb, 23 May, 13 Jul, 2 Sep, 23 Oct	Greenlough 5 Jan, 25 Feb, 17 Apr, 7 Jun, 28 Jul, 17 Sep, 7 Nov	Granaghan 1/2/26
Ardmore 7 Dec 2025, 27 Jan, 19 Mar, 9 May, 29 Jun, 19 Aug, 9 Oct	Badoney Lower 22 Dec 2025, 11 Feb, 24 May, 14 Jul, 3 Sep, 24 Oct	Bellaghy 6 Jan, 26 Feb, 18 Apr, 8 Jun, 29 Jul, 18 Sep, 8 Nov	Termonamongan 2/6/26
Strathfoyle 8 Dec 2025, 28 Jan, 20 Mar, 10 May, 30 Jun, 20 Aug, 10 Oct	Badoney Upper 23 Dec 2025, 12 Feb, 25 May, 15 Jul, 4 Sep, 25 Oct	Lavey 7 Jan, 27 Feb, 19 Apr, 9 Jun, 30 Jul, 19 Sep, 9 Nov	Ardstraw W /Castlederg 3/6/26
Camus 9 Dec 2025, 29 Jan, 21 Mar, 11 May, 1 Jul, 21 Aug, 11 Oct	Maghera 24 Dec 2025, 13 Feb, 5 Apr, 26 May, 16 Jul, 5 Sep, 26 Oct	Moville 8 Jan, 28 Feb, 20 Apr, 10 Jun, 31 Jul, 20 Sep, 10 Nov	Cappagh 4/10/26
Urney & Castlefin 10 Dec 2025, 30 Jan, 22 Mar, 12 May, 2 Jul, 22 Aug, 12 Oct	Desertmartin 25 Dec 2025, 14 Feb, 6 Apr, 27 May, 17 Jul ,6 Sep, 27 Oct	Granaghan 9 Jan, 1 Mar, 21 Apr, 11 Jun, 1 Aug, 21 Sep, 11 Nov	Donagheady 5/1/26
Mourne 11 Dec 2025, 31 Jan, 23 Mar, 13 May, 3 Jul, 23 Aug, 13 Oct	Faughanvale 26 Dec 2025, 15 Feb, 7 Apr, 28 May, 18 Jul, 7 Sep, 28 Oct	Buncrana 10 Jan, 2 Mar, 22 Apr, 12 Jun, 2 Aug, 22 Sep, 12 Nov	Donaghmore 6/5/26

Irish Mens Rosary

Sat Jan 3rd @ 1PM

The Square, Castlederg

OWEN 7525 166090

For reparation, repentance, and conversion for our Nation

www.CatholicismRocks.com

ONLY BY GRACE

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

SUNDAY 21ST DECEMBER

HOLY FAMILY CHURCH BALLYMAGROARTY

7.30 PM

Performance by Derry Search Youth Group

Hosted by Mickey Doherty

Suggested Donation £5

Busy doing nothing *Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR*



Fr. Johnny Doherty CSsR

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to a couple of young people whom I regularly meet here in Clonard Monastery. When we met, they immediately asked me if I was busy. I said to them that I was very busy. When they asked me what I was doing, I told them that I was very busy doing nothing! We had a bit of fun then discussing what this might mean.

At that particular time, I had taken time out of a busy schedule to begin working on this article for 'The Net'. It had to be a quiet time in which I could think about what I would like to say about the month of December; how I would write it, to think about anyone who may read what I had written and what I would want them to think about, and so on. It was a time of prayer and contemplation and, as such, could well be seen as a time of doing nothing.

As I explained this to my young friends it began to make sense to them, and helped them to see how this would be important in their lives as well. Their lives are often under pressure to do things that are not necessarily important, but need to be done because of peer pressure. Every time we meet now,

we talk about the nothings we have been doing since the last time we met!

Advent

On the weekend of November 29/30, the Church celebrated the First Sunday in Advent and, with it, the beginning of the Christian New Year. As we set out on another year of following Christ and living with His presence, the theme was given to us for that first week, and for all of Advent, and indeed for all of our Christian living: Stay awake; be alert; stand ready.

These phrases all imply the vital importance of taking time to do nothing except to reflect on the meaning of Christ's coming, at Christmas certainly, but also now in the present through the Eucharist; the Sacrament of Reconciliation; and taking part, during this Season of Advent, in whatever is possible in our parishes, or in places like Clonard Monastery, that will help us to treasure the wonderful gift of Christ as our Saviour and Redeemer. We are also, and maybe primarily, preparing for the Second Coming of Christ at our death and at the end of the world, when all of creation and all of humanity will be gathered into the glorious Kingdom of God.

Advent - a choice

We all have a choice to make at this time, and within that choice many decisions. We can let ourselves get caught up in the frantic behaviour of those who will spend the four weeks of December in shopping, in putting up the lights and Christmas trees, in partying etc. All of these things are good. But they have nothing really to say about Christ coming into our world to set us free.

Or, we can consciously set out to make these weeks of Advent a time to bring goodness and balance into

our lives, in our family life, in our faith life, and in our personal life.

One of the best ways of doing this is to follow the lead that is given to us in the Liturgy by setting up an Advent wreath in your home. This is made up of five candles. Four of these are in a circle, each one being lit at the beginning of each week of Advent until all are alight, and then we can light the fifth one, at the centre of the circle, on Christmas Day symbolising Christ born in Bethlehem.

In this way, we can honour the journey towards Christ and the journey then with Him beyond Christmas, for the rest of the year, as we grow in faith in Him and in love for Him and for one another.

Back to basics

The four weeks of Advent are a call to all of us to go back to basics, and to renew for ourselves our commitments to Christ and to one another in marriage and family life; in our life with one another in our faith communities; in our care for one another in society as we keep an eye out for those who are going through a hard time during these weeks of winter.

These weeks of December will, of necessity, be weeks of busy activity as everyone prepares for Christmas. We cannot do away with all of that. But what we can all do is take charge of the most important things in our lives and make time for those during this time. And, it is a matter of making time for doing what may seem to many people like doing nothing.

Setting agenda for year ahead

The four weeks of Advent, as the start of a new year, is a time to set the agenda for ourselves for what the year ahead is going to be like in our homes and in our faith community.

There are many relationships

in every family as there are also in every faith community. These relationships are always the strength, and also the weakness, of how we live our lives.

Marriage

One of the most important relationships for family life, and for the life of the Church and society, is that of marriage. I know, only too well, that marriage is not part of every family. But where marriage does exist in a home, it is the primary relationship that needs to be worked on and strengthened for the sake of the couple themselves and for their children, and also for the Church and society.

What makes marriage stand out from other relationships is that it is a very public commitment of love, made in the presence of the community. For us, as a Catholic people, this relationship between a woman and man is made in the Church and is confirmed as a Sacrament of the Church, a part of Christ's salvation for the world.

So that the couple's relationship does not get taken over by the busyness of preparing for Christmas, it is very important that each couple organise themselves properly.

1. Commit 20 minutes each day of this month to each other – 10 of these when apart and 10 when together. This means that, even when you are not present to each other, you are aware of one another and the importance of your love for one another.

2. Commit one evening each week to each other in a romantic evening or as a time to relax together.

3. Pray with one another each day of the month for God's grace to build up your love. I send out a prayer programme every week to couples. If you would like to be included in this please contact me

on dohertyjohnny@gmail.com

Family

If you are living in a family, especially of young children, these weeks of Advent are going to be busy with getting ready for Christmas – presents, decorations, food, etc. It is so important that you take time for the people of your family by making time to be together to enjoy each other.

I suggest:

1. Make sure to have Family Prayer each day of this month so that the spiritual side of Christmas is highlighted. This prayer should be around the Advent wreath rather than the Crib until Christmas itself.

2. Have a family day each week in which you have a meal together and have time to enjoy the company of each other.

3. Develop a family project for helping those in need at this time, either locally or further afield.

If on your own

This can be a time of loneliness for many people who live on their own. All the hype is about families and parties, etc, and they may not be included in these. I suggest for you:

1. Dedicate five minutes each morning and each evening to quiet prayer using the Advent wreath as a focus. Contemplate the truth of the presence of God with you; the love of God for you; and the power of God in you for bringing life to others.

2. Identify one person or family each week of Advent that you could contact to bring warmth into their lives.

3. How could you contribute to charities that are caring for the poor and needy coming up to Christmas?

Faith Community

For most people, the Faith Community that they belong to

is their parish. During these four weeks of Advent, while society is busy advertising Christmas, all our parishes and other communities are busy preparing for Christmas and beyond. For society, Christmas will end on Christmas Day. For us, as the Church, Christmas will begin on Christmas Day and go on until the Baptism of Christ in January.

There is always a great tension of interest here. While all of us will get caught up in the flurry of activity of the society around us, we have a real responsibility to deliberately involve ourselves in making this great feast what it is: the celebration of Christ's birth for the salvation of the world.

So, I suggest for everyone:

1. Be faithful to, and take an active part in, the Sunday Mass during these four weeks – maybe even spend a bit of extra time to meet with others before or after.

2. If possible, celebrate the Mass sometimes during the week so as to catch the spirit of Advent.

3. Celebrate the Sacrament of reconciliation/Confession as making a fresh start in your life of faith.

4. Take part in any programme for caring for the poor that the parish may be involved in, either through the St Vincent de Paul Society or any other organisation.

Conclusion

One of the things that I dislike about these weeks of Advent is people wishing me a Happy Christmas weeks before Christmas Day! Our task is to build up a happy Advent in our homes and communities so that we can all have a happy Christmas when it comes, and can enjoy it all the way through to the end of the Christmas season. That takes each one making time during these weeks to do nothing but bring joy and peace and life to one another.

Happy Advent.

Advent...A season of hope and preparation *by Sinéad Strong*



AS the November winds nip at our windows and darkness stretches across the evenings, I feel a special anticipation rise in our home. For me, Advent isn't just about counting down the days to Christmas - it's a sacred invitation to slow down and prepare, not just our to-do lists, but our hearts for the coming of Christ. As a Catholic mother, Advent has become a time I truly treasure - a chance to nurture faith, hope, and love in my family, and to blend cherished old traditions with new ones that make sense for us.

Advent is the Church's new year, and I love how it offers a fresh

start - an opportunity for renewal, expectation, and quietly waiting. In the rush of modern life, it is all too easy to let Advent slip by in a flurry of shopping and school events. But I have learned, often the hard way, that Advent really invites us to slow down, even if just a little, and to rediscover the beauty in waiting - not anxiously, but hopefully.

For us, Advent's beginning is always marked by lighting the first candle on our family wreath. I see my children's eyes shine in the candlelight as we gather and say a simple prayer, asking God to help us welcome Him into our hearts. These moments, repeated each week, ground us. They remind me that, just as Mary waited with hope for the birth of Jesus, we are also called to wait, trust, and hope.

One of my favourite parts of being a parent is creating meaningful traditions; those little rituals that help my children feel anchored in our faith. We have an Advent calendar, but instead

of chocolates, I slip in small acts of kindness, a Bible quote or prayer intentions. We also pick items to give away, such as food or toys, to a family in need.

Our nativity scene has its own journey: Mary and Joseph start far from the stable and, each night, the children move them a little closer, reminding us of the long road to Bethlehem. On Christmas Eve, baby Jesus finally arrives and we sing together, sometimes off-key, but always joyfully.

Our world is all about instant gratification, so Advent gives me the chance to teach my children, and remind myself, about the value of waiting and preparing. I see these lessons take root in sweet, simple ways: the excitement of lighting each new candle; the curiosity about what the next calendar door will reveal; and the patience as the nativity scene slowly comes together. Alongside these, we make it a point to read a chapter from our Christmas book every evening, letting the

story unfold slowly as we journey through Advent together.

This waiting isn't just about holding off on treats; it's about making space for wonder and gratitude. We talk a lot about how to prepare our hearts for Jesus - not just by tidying up or hanging decorations, but by letting in forgiveness, kindness, and prayer.

People sometimes call Advent a 'mini-Lent' - a time for reflection and prayer. With young children, quiet is a rare treasure! But I make the time for my own reflection through taking part in the Nativity Fast. Amid the noise and busyness, I find myself looking to Mary - her trust, her courage, her willingness to say 'yes' to God. I often pray for the grace to follow her example; to hold onto hope, even when the path ahead is unclear, and to guide my children toward Christ's light.

As Christmas draws near, I hope my children remember not just the excitement and gifts, but also the quiet, gentle waiting of Advent - the candles, the prayers, and the



kindnesses shared. I want them to know that waiting can be holy, that hope is real even in darkness, and that God's love is always close.

For me, and I think for many Catholic mothers, Advent is a true gift - a time to begin again, to prepare our hearts, and to welcome joy. And, perhaps most importantly, it is a reminder that faith is built not just in churches, but in the beautiful, messy, love-filled life we live together at home.

Loving God, as we light the candles and gather in anticipation, fill our hearts with hope and peace. Help us to prepare a place for Your Son through kindness, patience, and prayer. May we welcome the joy of Christ's coming and share His light with those around us. Amen.

If you are interested in finding out more about Catholic Mothers Ireland, please visit www.catholicmothers.ie.

Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

HELLO children. C3 welcomes you to the month of December. This is a very exciting time of year as we prepare during Advent for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, which is celebrated on December 8.



Immaculate Conception

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we celebrate and honour the holiness and innocence of Mary. Our Catholic faith teaches us that God kept Mary free from original sin. She was conceived immaculately, which means that from the moment of Her conception She was free from original sin and in a state of grace, pure enough to be the Mother of Jesus (CCC 490-493). She was a fitting tabernacle to hold within Her the body the flesh and blood of Jesus, our Saviour. When we receive Holy Communion, we also hold within us the Body and Blood of Jesus, so we should try not to sin and to be pure and holy like Mary.



The Advent Wreath

The use of the Advent wreath, with the five candles, has been a tradition for hundreds of years. The wreath is a symbol of the four weeks in which we prepare for the birth of Jesus, with a candle being lit each week; three purple candles and one rose candle. The green branches remind us of the new life we have in Jesus, the circle signifies the eternity of God's love for us (with no beginning or end), and the candles represent the hope and light which Jesus brings into a dark world. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Day, as a symbol of Christ, born as the Light of the world.

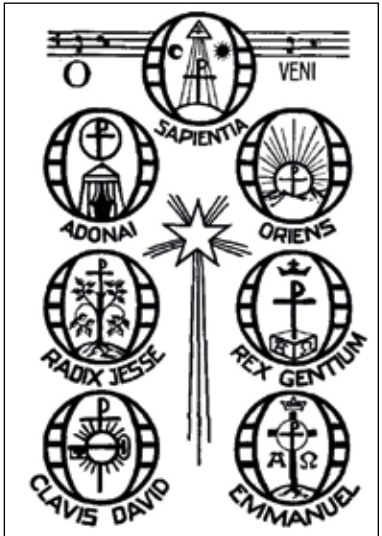
Traditions - O Antiphons

During the season of Advent and Christmas, there are many traditions which we carry out in our homes: lighting the Advent wreath; putting up the Christmas Tree; and decorating our home with holly or tinsel. The most important tradition is giving our family crib a special place in our home, so that we can welcome the baby Jesus on Christmas Day. Since Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas Day, it is also important to pray, read the Word of God from our bibles, and praise God by singing. Our faith has a beautiful tradition which begins on December 17 every year and ends on December 24, this tradition is known as the O Antiphons. This special time in Advent is known as the 'second part of Advent', or the 'Golden nights'.

Every night, eight days before Christmas, we ask Christ to come and we call Him by a different name. Each of these names begin with 'O' for example, 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel'. They are called O Antiphons, which mean that they are prayers which are sung or chanted. They are seven jewels of liturgical song which sum up all our Advent longing for our Saviour.

The O Antiphons tell us the different names which speak of Christ (listed below) and also highlight the prophesy of the Prophet Isaiah, who foretold the coming of the Messiah. If you take the first letter of each name and write them backwards, you get 'ERO CRAS', which means 'Tomorrow, I will Come' in Latin.

Dec 17: O Sapientia (Wisdom)
Dec 18: O Adonai (Lord and Ruler)
Dec 19: O Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse)
Dec 20: O Clavis David (Key of David)
Dec 21: O Oriens (Dawn of the East)
Dec 22: O Rex Gentium (King of the Gentiles)
Dec 23: O Emmanuel (God With Us)



Christmas Day

Christmas Day is celebrated every year on December 25. The word 'Christmas' comes from the combination of Christ and Mass; it is the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ (CCC 525). This was the day Jesus was brought into our world to reveal God to us. Christmas is a very special feast, and it is one of only three feast days on which the Catholic Church celebrates birthdays. The other two are the births of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. All three of these birthdays have one thing in common - John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus were all born without Original Sin.

Christmas is a special time when we gather to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. We exchange gifts in our homes and give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of His Son to us.

Twelve Days of Christmas

The 'Twelve Days of Christmas' is a Christmas carol which everyone is quite familiar with during the Christmas season. This song appears to have a repeating, catchy melody, which announces a list of strange gifts. However, this song carries with it a more profound and serious message. It was written during the period of 1558- 1829, when Catholics were forbidden to practice their faith. It was composed as one of the 'Catechism songs' which helped young Catholics to memorise the teachings of their faith.

The gifts in the song are actually hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The 'true love' in the song refers to God Himself, and the 'me' who receives the gifts represents every baptised person.

The 'One Partridge' in the pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of

God who comes to us on the first day of Christmas. Here, Jesus is symbolically represented as a mother partridge, a bird which will pretend to be injured in order to draw predators to herself away from her young. Jesus did this for us by offering Himself on the Cross; the pear tree is the Cross itself.

He has delivered me from the snare of the hunters. He will over shadow you with his shoulders: and under His wings you shall trust (Psalm 91:4)

The others symbols are as follows:
Two Turtle doves - The two turtle doves represent the Old and New Testaments, which look to each other with admiration, and complement one another.

Three French hens - These symbolise the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

Four calling birds - These birds are the four Evangelists - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - because they spread everywhere the good news of the Gospel.

Five golden rings - The Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, is represented by five golden rings. These books tell the history of man from the Creation to the time of Moses, and the expectation of the Messiah that was accomplished in the birth of Our Lord,

Six geese a laying - These represent the six days of creation. The eggs of the geese hold the promise of life to come.

Seven swans a swimming - Seven swans a swimming represent the seven sacraments. Swimming on the seas of grace of which they are the guardians, custodians, and dispensers of these living waters

Eight maids a milking - The eight maids a milking symbolise the eight beatitudes. The good that we can draw from the attitudes praised in the Sermon on the Mount are as rich and wholesome as our mother's milk.

Nine ladies dancing - Nine ladies



dancing stand for the nine choirs of angels. As a dancer is swift and elegant, so do the Angels of God execute His orders, moving to the music of Heaven.

Ten lords a leaping - Ten lords a leaping are the Ten Commandments. If we keep these Commandments, we can leap from this Earth even to the heights of Heaven.

Eleven pipers piping - Eleven pipers piping are the first 11 faithful Apostles. Like players in an orchestra, we must do our part in the great symphony of God's plan for us. We each play the song that we are given and it becomes a part of a greater harmony, taking care not to strike a false note.,

Twelve drummers drumming - This represents the 12 points of belief in the Apostle's Creed, which binds the Catholic Faith together. It is the foundation upon which the Church is built. When we look at the explanation behind this song, we can see that it is not just a nonsense carol but a summary of our faith, a true treasure for us to understand and enjoy.

Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. What type of fruit has a variety called 'Winter Banana'?
2. With what popular Christmas song did Jose Feliciano have a 1970 hit?
3. In which country does cricket's 'Boxing Day Test Match' take place every year?
4. What character did actor Jimmy Stewart famously play in the classic Christmas movie, 'It's a Wonderful Life'?
5. In what country are decorated Christmas trees said to have originated?
6. December 24 is the Feast Day of which two Saints?
7. In the song 'Winter Wonderland', what type of character is Parson Brown?
8. What family features in the festive film 'National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation'?
9. Where in the UK are the first two 'working days' of the year awarded 'Bank Holiday' status?
10. At which UK racecourse is the iconic Boxing Day steeplechase, 'The King George VI' staged each year?
11. How many sides has a snowflake?
12. Name the lead singer, himself born on Christmas Day, whose festive classic has been in the Top 20 singles chart every Christmas since 2005?
13. At which New York landmark is the city's iconic

Quiz Answers: 1, Apple; 2, Feliz Navidad; 3, Australia; 4, George Bailey; 5, Germany; 6, Adam and Eve; 7, A Snowman; 8, The Griswolds; 9, Scotland; 10, Kempton Park; 11, Six; 12, Shane MacGowan; 13, Rockefeller Centre; 14, Horse; 15, The Spice Girls; 16, Trading Places; 17, Dresden; 18, An Armadillo; 19, Irving Berlin; 20, John Lewis; 21, Capricorn; 22, Paul Young; 23, Japan; 24, Boney M; 25, Tom Hanks.

- Christmas skating rink located?
14. What animal is set to feature in the Chinese New Year of 2026?
 15. What UK pop group had three consecutive Christmas Number 1 singles in 1996, '97 and '98?
 16. In what 1983 Christmas movie did Eddie Murphy star with Don Ameche, Dan Ackroyd and Jamie Lee Curtis?
 17. Which German city hosts Europe's oldest annual Christmas market - the 'Striezelmarkt'?
 18. In the US sitcom 'Friends', what animal did Ross dress up as instead of the usual Santa Claus in the Christmas Special episode?
 19. What iconic American composer wrote the song 'White Christmas'?
 20. What UK Department Store produced the famous 'Man on the Moon' Christmas TV advert?
 21. What star sign is associated with a birthday on Jan 1?
 22. What singer provides the first voice heard on the original 'Do They Know It's Christmas' hit record?
 23. In what country is 'KFC' considered to be a traditional Christmas Day lunch?
 24. What band had a 1978 hit with their version of 'Mary's Boy Child'?
 25. What actor voiced seven different roles in the 2004 movie 'Polar Express'?

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

Let Your Light Shine!



Young Aghyaran families warmly welcome travelling cribs during Advent

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamaghy, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,